

Chapter 1: e-governance in education

Participation by all stakeholders in such a process will result in an efficient system and a bright future for students



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When forecasting future growth rates of emerging giants India and China, economists project a slightly upper hand for India. Among the factors often cited in support of this forecast is the demographic dividend. However, as is often cautioned, given the state of the country's education sector, the advantage accruing from the demographic dividend should not be taken for granted. This article focuses on how to revitalise the important education sector.

Since a country's social and economic progress hinges largely on its people having access to the vast area of knowledge gained through modern channels of learning, it is important to ensure that education sector keeps up with the times, in other words, it is evolving. However, the country's education sector, particularly higher education, is often accused of being overly regulated and undergoverned. With science and technology evolving at such a rapid rate, the conventional classroom education we offer can hardly be described as sufficient.

Although the concept of effective school governance is not new, it needs to be thoroughly innovated to be able to effectively deal with the new challenges confronting us. In this context, e-governance can facilitate in improving transparency, providing speedy information, dissemination, improving administrative efficiency and public services in all the aspects of education. It is beyond doubt that for the quantity and quality of output of our education system to substantially improve, there is no option but to introduce e-governance in this sphere. Although the application of ICT is fairly widespread in the private sector, the education sector, one of the key pillars of the country, has remained relatively untouched by e-governance.

Before delving into e-governance, the first step should be to define governance and lay down its scope and objectives. The age-old concept of governance has been reintroduced into modern discourse, focusing on how to achieve good governance. I believe good governance is the ability to differentiate between right and wrong, just and unjust, fair and foul, and moral and immoral. In the *Arthashastra*, Kautilya says that the person who governs should realise that his achievement or success is a measure of the happiness of his subjects and that what is good for the subjects should be

undertaken. Governance standards should be improved not only at the government level but in all areas of society.

As a concept, it is important that governance should include all stakeholders such as school authorities, teachers, parents, children and even government bodies such as CBSE. Instead of merely being consultants, they should be part of the active decision-making process. But this simply is not enough. It is important to ensure that governance is not only participatory but also accountable and transparent. For the smooth functioning of the system, it is imperative that responsibilities and accountabilities be clearly laid down for all stakeholders. This is crucial as we need to have not only procedural accountability but also performance accountability.

In addition, there should be an effective grievance redress mechanism in place. It also goes without saying that this structure would work only if it were allowed to be flexible, implying that school boards should not impose rigid regulations on school and teachers.

In this respect, technology can act as a great enabler by making it easier for all parties concerned to be able to have access to meaningful information. Implementing e-governance will help us to monitor academic standards. It can help in continuous monitoring, assessment

and meaningful evaluation of the teacher and the pupil. Constant feedback to the persons concerned — be it administrators, faculty, parents and students—and appropriate timely control and correction mechanisms can be easily undertaken. It may also be possible to analyse the reasons of dropping out of the system while, at the same time, it can make teachers more accountable.

Add-on features such as online testing tools can help appraise the performance level of students and that of teachers. It can send SMS or e-mail message to parents if their children are absent at school, enhancing parents' involvement in their children's schooling activities.

Such a comprehensive and integrated system can also enable authorities to analyse the performance of one of the best performing institutes and compare it with other schools and colleges to identify the gaps. Also, the system can obtain feedback from students to modify course curriculum if deemed appropriate by the authorities. This will allow all the low-performing schools and colleges to reduce the gap with better-performing institutes. It will be help in the betterment of the higher education in the country and increase the number of employable students.

The mobile phone and the Internet have succeeded in transforming our lives in ways that

could hardly be envisioned a decade ago. Not only has the Internet revolutionised information dissemination, it has also exposed us to new ways of thinking and ideas. Coupled with changing social structures, conditioned mindsets of a new generation of parents makes it important for all stakeholders to have a more interactive relationship. It is, thus, important to take into account different views and opinions of all, be it teachers, parents or children. Additionally, given the new avenues that have opened up and, given the highly-competitive environment, ensuring that students are exposed to a variety of careers will only help expand their horizon. It is important to establish links with community, by which I mean business and industry, to ensure a healthy participation of the general community and provide a platform to share ideas.

I would like to conclude by saying that for us to ensure that the education system can fully equip our children to meet the ever-evolving demands in today's highly-competitive environment, the education system needs to be made more efficient and effective by implementing e-governance. It is high time our educators think in terms of imparting what is known as life-long education, or, more aptly, life-long self-education.

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