

Key Note Address

Address by Dr. Kamal kishore Singh, IPS, ADG in a seminar on online mode of education

Dear Sirs/Madame and all participants,

“Real knowledge is to know the extent of one’s ignorance” so said Confucius, the first teacher in China who wanted to make education broadly available and who was instrumental in establishing the art of teaching as a vocation.

It’s heartening to learn and be part of today’s “Digital Learning Workshop” being organized by Private Schools and Children Welfare Association in Patna. I take this opportunity to applaud the president of the association Sri Shamael Ahmad and his team to have thought and organize such a practicum which has become enormously relevant today in its zest for making education broadly available and the ethos of teaching evolving not only as a vocation but passion of inquisitive minds. For teachers are learners from birth to their voyage of eternity.

I would seek your kind attention to some facts based on research in various parts of the world:-

- Nearly 1/3rd of higher education students are enrolled in at least some online courses
- Over 95% of educators surveyed believe digital learning has a positive impact on both student achievement and instructor effectiveness
- 1 in 6 students enrolled in higher education courses exclusively takes online courses to obtain their degree
- Online learning accounts for more than 22% of annual higher education revenue
- Enrollment in “distance” learning as outpaced total higher ed enrollment growth
- 45% of online learners are working toward their bachelor’s degree

Ladies and Gentlemen, these are not post pandemic statements but the reality of digital learning today in an enormous virtual world which exists beyond the

realms of the real, in space, out of time zones, existing impersonally but attracting all and sundry and affecting our physical being by infringing on our subconscious without abstract comprehension.

Major world events are often an inflection point for rapid innovation – a clear example is the rise of e-commerce post-SARS. While we have yet to see whether this will apply to e-learning post-COVID-19, it is one of the few sectors where investment has not dried up. What has been made clear through this pandemic is the importance of disseminating knowledge across borders and all parts of society. If online learning technology can play a role here, it is incumbent upon all of us to explore its full potential.

It is clear that this pandemic has utterly disrupted an education system that many assert was already losing its relevance. In his book, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, scholar Yuval Noah Harari (Israeli Historian) outlines how schools continue to focus on traditional academic skills and rote learning, rather than on skills such as critical thinking and adaptability, which will be more important for success in the future.

Could the move to online learning be the catalyst to create a new, more effective method of educating students?

While some worry that the hasty nature of the transition online may have hindered this goal, others plan to make e-learning part of their 'new normal' after experiencing the benefits first-hand. Even before COVID-19, there was already high growth and adoption in education technology, post covid usage has seen a very noteworthy surge whether it is language apps, virtual tutoring, video conferencing tools, or online learning software.

In response to significant demand, many online learning platforms are offering free access to their services, including platforms like BYJU'S, Tencent classroom etc. Some companies are bolstering capabilities to provide a one-stop shop for teachers and students, for example, Lark, a Singapore-based collaboration suite is offering teachers and students unlimited video conferencing time, auto-translation capabilities, real-time co-editing of project work, and smart calendar

scheduling, amongst other features. To do so quickly and in a time of crisis, Lark ramped up its global server infrastructure and engineering capabilities to ensure reliable connectivity. Similarly Alibaba's distance learning solution, DingTalk is offering a host of digital learning tools on a single platform. Some school districts are forming unique partnerships, like the one between The Los Angeles Unified School District and PBS SoCal/KCET, to offer local educational broadcasts, with separate channels focused on different ages, and a range of digital options. Media organizations such as the BBC are also powering virtual learning like the Bitesize Daily.

While some believe that the unplanned and rapid move to online learning – with no training, insufficient bandwidth, and little preparation – will result in a poor user experience that is un-conducive to sustained growth, others believe that a new hybrid model of education will emerge, with significant benefits. There are, however, challenges to overcome. Some students without reliable internet access and/or technology, struggle to participate in digital learning; this gap is seen across countries and between income brackets within countries. In India too there is a significant gap between those from privileged and disadvantaged backgrounds. Also there is gap between schools too with bigger schools providing the digital platform for e-learning while others simply lacking infrastructure, competence and cost-effective capability. This in essence has led to a unique digital inequality or digital divide which may have a bearing on the final learning outcome of students across the horizon homogeneously which may not have been the case in physical offline classes.

I am personally filled with certainty that today's workshop would explore deeper into these issues and focus on modalities of digital learning, particularly evolving mechanisms and tools to overcome the digital disparity as every student's right to education has to be ensured.

R. Buckminster Fuller, American author, inventor, architect, futurist has said **“If you want to teach people a new way of thinking, don't bother trying to teach them. Instead, give them a tool, the use of which will lead to new ways of thinking.”**

Thankyou.