

Disciplinary Discourses in Use of Technology



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Greetings from the Commonwealth of Learning. It is a privilege to be virtually present at this International Conference on 'Disciplinary Discourses in the use of Technology' and I thank Prof J Prabhakar and the organisers for the invitation. Technologies have a major role to play in helping us to make our universities relevant to the needs of the twenty first century. University education must lead to successful learning outcomes for the students resulting in personal, national and international development.

India has a young population with a median age of 27. Youth unemployment in India is 10 %, which may be lower than the global average of 12%, but is still substantial. Governments are looking for ways in which these young people can be skilled for employment and entrepreneurship. In fact Prime Minister Mr. Modi has called for skills to be developed at speed and at scale.

A McKinsey report points out that 'employers, education providers and youth live in parallel universes' and very often these worlds do not meet. Over 50% of the youth surveyed did not believe that their secondary education would lead to employment. Similarly about 50% of the employers did not think that the new graduates had the skills to be hired even at the entry level. There seems to be a dis-connect between what we teach in our schools and universities and what is required by the job market.

Geoff Colvin's recent book *Humans are Underrated* says that the high achievers in the C21 will be 'relationship workers' as opposed to the 'knowledge workers' of the C20. Robots will perform most tasks better than human beings but it is humans who have social skills and empathy, can solve complex problems and are creative. How do we nurture such skills among our learners? Medical colleges are beginning to introduce literature as required reading so that the students would develop a better understanding of other human beings.

Our curriculum should not only provide knowledge and technical expertise but also instil the skills of being better human beings with values including respect and understanding. How can technology help?

Let us not think that technology is a silver bullet for all the challenges in higher education. Technology can only be effective if it is appropriately placed in its proper context.

How can we, as institutions, harness the potential of technology to address the challenge of skills development, gainful employment and livelihoods? One, transform the curriculum to integrate cognitive and non-cognitive skills. Two, harness appropriate technologies and emerging developments such as MOOCs and OER. Three, ensure there is a convergence between the needs of the labour market and the education provided to youth.

With that, let me wish the conference every success.