

# NAVIGATING TRANSFORMATION OF INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS USING UNLEARNING MECHANISM

Shubham Sharma, Usha Lenka

Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee, India

## Research Domains

Academic practice, work, careers and cultures (AP)

## Abstract

Many articles and reports are impressing the immediate need for transforming the higher education landscape. Triggers like the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the ever-widening skill gap between the current curriculum and industrial requirements, changing needs of the learner, and the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic strengthen this assertion. Therefore, institutions will have to undergo a system-wide transformation, rather than weathering the storm. However, how such a transformation will happen is often unaddressed. In this paper, we offer unlearning mechanism consisting of three phases—destabilization, discarding existing practices, and experimenting with new practices—as an intervention that may help higher education institutions discard obsolete practices that serve as a roadblock to its adaptation. Consequently, this suggestion will help materialize the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship

## Full paper

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

Globally, the higher education landscape is challenged to retain its

erstwhile relevance. Numerous articles and surveys are showing that higher education institutions (HEIs) are not preparing their learners with the necessary skills for taking up future jobs due to Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), changing learner demographics, and most recently, Covid-19 (Deloitte, 2018; Gleason, 2018; Pricewaterhouse Coopers, 2020; UNESCO, 2015). For instance, due to 4IR, many jobs will be automated and many new jobs will be created which will require a departure from the existing tutelage imparted by HEIs. It will require imparting new skills like problem-solving, critical thinking, interpersonal communication, and emotional balance (World Economic Forum, 2020).

Moving from the global to the Indian context, a similar situation prevails (FICCI-EY[1], 2021). This suggests that certain obsolete practices (like outdated curriculum, assessment system, and transmissive pedagogy or lecture-based instructions) need to be identified, questioned, and discarded from higher education institutions to foster a radical transformation. No doubt, the changes brought about by Covid-19 seem to be transient, and there is a possibility of reverting to old practices and hampering students' learning capabilities (Sun et al., 2020). So, how can Indian HEIs undergo a system-wide transformation?

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES &**

### **METHODOLOGY**

To address the research problem, we recommend unlearning mechanism which is defined as an intentional process whereby organizations question, identify and discard obsolete education practices in order to acquire new knowledge and behaviors (Akgün et al., 2007; Becker, 2019; Hedberg, 1981). Unlearning also ensures that outdated practices are discarded and precluded from being reinforced in the future.

In this conceptual article, I apply the unlearning process model developed by Fiol and O'Connor (2017) consisting of three phases—destabilizing trigger, displacement or discarding existing practice, and experimentation with new practice—in the Indian HEIs context. An overview of the entire process is presented in Figure 1.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

All three phases align with the unlearning process model. For the first phase, i.e., destabilizing trigger, we recognized three triggers that have challenged the current Indian higher education landscape: (i.) changing requirements of the labor market due to the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), (ii.) changing needs and aspirations of learners, and (iii.) emergence of the Covid-19. In the second phase, i.e., discarding obsolete practices, we identified three practices that have been displaced: existing curriculum design, pedagogy, and evaluation methods. Lastly, in the third phase (experimenting with new practices), we show that HEIs must adopt relevant and state-of-the-art curricula and courses that align to industry requirements. Moreover, project-based assessment, internship training, and experiential learning opportunities should be provided to the students (Gleason, 2018).

## **CONCLUSION**

Therefore, a system-wide transformation of Indian HEIs requires the development of critical unlearning skills among students so that they can question, discard, and remain always open to novel learning opportunities.

# TRANSFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE USING UNLEARNING MECHANISM

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

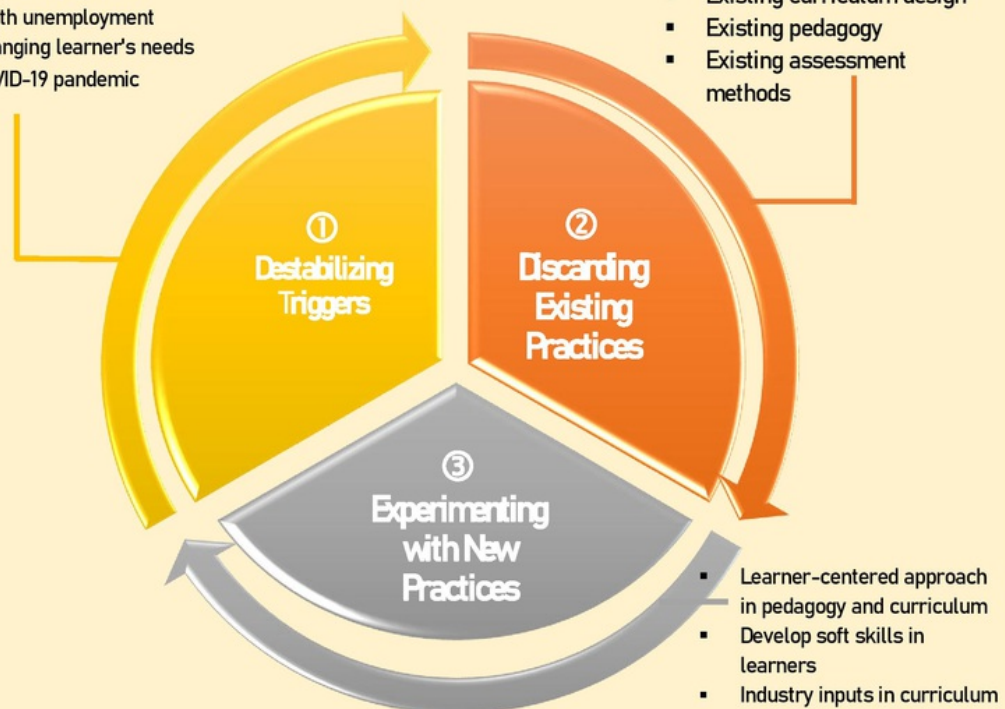
Social, economic, political, environmental, and technological changes are increasing the pressure on education to transform. Educational landscape is awaiting a much-needed transformation—especially higher education system.

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT NOW?

The advent of Fourth Industrial Revolution will create future jobs which do not even exist today. Today's universities are not imparting the relevant skills that will be required to succeed in future workplace; one of the main targets of UNO's 2030 Agenda (SDG 4.4).

## HOW WILL IT HAPPEN?

- Fourth Industrial Revolution
- Youth unemployment
- Changing learner's needs
- COVID-19 pandemic



**Figure 1.** Unlearning mechanism to transform Indian higher educational institutions

[1] Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry and Ernst & Young.

## References

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