



More than 72% of the Indian population live in rural areas. Only 5.63% of the population has access to telephone and less than one percent to a computer. Hemant Sethi, president, School Learning Solutions & HiWEL, NIIT Limited, does a reality check

CONNECTING SCHOOLS

In the 21st century, a period being described as the knowledge era, education is undergoing a paradigm shift. Nowhere is this change more marked or visible than in India, a country with a deep and enduring heritage of learning, which is now quickly embracing technology to make education more meaningful and accessible to the far reaches of its rural population.

The fact is that education is still limited in its footprint and coverage, with millions, especially at the bottom of the pyramid, remaining beyond the magic circle of learning. Relevant education, that focuses on the early development of employability skills needs to reach the hinterland, especially far-flung areas, so that eventually, social and economic growth is inclusive, and brings into the mainstream the underprivileged. For this to happen, technology needs to assume an even wider, more holistic role, where it touches citizens across the country.

India has around six lakh villages with more than 72% of the Indian population living in rural areas, earning its livelihood from agriculture. Most of the villages are lacking proper ICT infrastructure, only 5.63% of the population has access to telephone and less than one percent to a

PC. The rural tele-density is also very low as compared to the urban areas. A wide rural-urban disparity exists, which has created an acute chasm in a variety of social and economic activities, including education.

This is one of the important reasons why India is increasingly harnessing the power of ICT to transform the learning landscape. From

new-age technologies, the existing idea of classroom teaching and education is getting dismantled. Technology is increasingly helping to meet the needs of all stakeholders in India's rural learning eco-system — students, teachers and institutions.

Apart from technology enabling reach, a quiet revolution in the realm of educational content is

STUDENT VOICE

Feel of a book

I would prefer a 'real' book over an eBook. Books give you the feel, the experience. A set of printed papers, bound together, can transport you to a magical world. eBooks are more or less like real books, just on a screen. Its not that I don't enjoy eBooks, but I prefer to hold a

book. Besides, there is the issue of accessibility. If eBooks were easily accessible, they would be used more often as they are virtual and would require less maintenance. But, in a country like India, everyone does not have smartphones or tablets. Though tougher to maintain, paper books are more easily available. The future could be eBooks, but not a replacement for 'real' books.

— **Kartik Rajan**
Class IX, Mother's International

high-tech classrooms that are gaining popularity across the country's government schools, to 'self-paced' education delivered through the cloud (an emerging IT-delivery model), technology has come to play a key role in making available learning on an 'anytime, anywhere' basis. Knowledge is now being delivered to the 'doorsteps of students,' including those in the deep, remote interiors of the country, where schools, and the vital resource — teachers — are conspicuous by their absence.

Innovative solutions such as the 'Hole-in-the-Wall, by NIIT — that use information kiosks in semi-urban segments and villages to provide learners online access — have proved that it is possible for children and adults to browse the Net and 'self-learn' without the intervention of instructors. Through such 'minimally invasive learning' and other

also greatly altering the learning experience of students. A vast library of digital content, developed by some of the pioneers in the domain of learning, is now available to schools and colleges across India. This content, which encompasses the use of animation, videos and other technology tools, is making subject matter more interesting for children. They are able to visualise abstract concepts, resulting in more effective learning.

Take the instance of the Khan Academy, a portal that delivers online learning thorough videos, for free. Learners can watch over 3100 videos, from Khan Academy's extensive library, on everything from arithmetic to physics, finance and history, and hundreds of skills to practice. Such remote tutoring using YouTube video tutorials, is being used by learners in different parts of the country, especially those in areas with few schools.



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