



## A GLOBALIZED ERA: ICT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN A PANDEMIC PERIOD (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MIZORAM)

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### ABSTRACT

*Globalization and global interdependence from a multi-dimensional perspective have generated a web of connectivity and integration across all areas of the globe. Events or outbreaks are no longer confined to any particular region but have widespread repercussions and long-lasting impacts around the world. The revolution of ICT has further intensified the nature of dependence and the commonalities in terms of practises and policies located across the globe. Education and its various connotations is a powerful tool and a process where ICT dependence and reliance are closely intertwined. This study aims to highlight the nature of changes and development brought about in the field of higher education during the Covid-19 pandemic period and the role played by ICT in the context of Mizoram.*

**Keywords:** Technology, Globalization, Higher Education, Covid-19.

### Introduction

The world in which we live; the contemporary world is plagued with uncertainties in terms of manmade developments, political upheavals, economic conditions, and societal reforms or instances. Each occurrence, even when the bud of such occurrences is of small scale (local level) has the propensity to stake its claims at a global level i.e. across different

parts of the world. No nation, no society, no institution can claim absolute independence from the tides of changes making its waves across the globe. And the global level reality is now becoming increasingly proximate to every human being in one manner or another, and therefore “globality” or “globalization” is something everyone has to deal with (Barry, 2006). The markets are no longer able to abide by protectionist,

isolation-based policies. “Internal matters” of many times are no longer able to escape the eyes and ears of the “external forces” i.e. other nations, international institutions and societies across the globe. The demand and quest made by societies within or across their physical geographical locations are no longer localized or confined within their respective geographical territories but have transcended across physical divisions. Such is the nature of changes that the world is witnessing; unscripted yet far-reaching changes and events whose repercussions are no longer made redundant by the age-old factors of time, location, connectivity.

Modern-day, modern society and the modern world is commonly referred to as “the globalized world”; a world where economic, social, political, cultural domains no longer enjoy the privilege of being demarcated from one another. Globalization has instead led to the generation of a web of connectivity between these domains, with each depending on the other in some form or the other.

The hallmarks that govern the global system entail concepts of borderless nations; freedom in the mobility of goods, services, people, ideas, culture; a conceptualization of societies where commodification and commercialization have taken a single lane or route (choices, tastes, culturestaking the form of homogeneity over heterogeneity). What is the cause for such fluidity and rapidity in terms of multi-dimensional concurrences from a local to a global level? The answer lies in the key factor that has redefined and reshaped the dominance and longevity of the notions of Globalization i.e.

the dawn and rapid development and flow of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) across the globe. No nation can remain aloof from the livid advents that have been witnessed in the domains of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

Amongst the defining stand points of Globalization, rapidity and intensification of developments in the gambit of ICT has been the major catalyst responsible for the high fluidity of movement in terms of goods, services, people, market economies and knowledge across the globe. Many writers define the globalized world as one which is “ICT induced” across all dimensions. Whether one is focused on the economical, social, cultural or political front, no collective unit or individual can remain completely aloof from the modes and methods; techniques and systems which has been ushered in by the ICT era.

### **The ICT era: A Globalized World**

The influence of globalization on technologies has many impingements in our day-to-day life. The coming of globalization along with Information Technology (IT) has created an efficient channel in terms of exchange information; no doubt, it is the catalyst for global integration. They are the services, platforms, and devices that have eroded the barriers of time and space, making swift and efficient international communication flow possible (Campbell *et al.*, 2010). The period in which we are living today is sometimes referred to as the information age. It is indeed a time characterized by the proliferation of information and the ability to transfer, share

and instantly access information that previously would have been difficult, if not impossible, to find. One of the most significant developments in our contemporary world has been the explosive invention and adoption of new technologies and their impact on all aspects of humans. The use of new technologies that permit students to enrol in foreign educational programmes while sitting at home and learning 'online' is also a novel approach (Binay, 2012). The world we live in has now become an expression of faith about technologies - the ability to solve all our problems. And there is no such thing as science without technology. The past 20 years have experienced the widespread adoption of technologies i.e. the personal computer, the cell phone/mobile phone, and perhaps the internet. The internet has appeared seemingly out of nowhere, and become firmly embedded in everyday life, even for those who are not fond of the internet (Modelski *et al.*, 2007). And in fact, the internet is now a household word everywhere.

During the 1980s, if anyone asked a Mizo walking on the streets about his conceptualization on the terminology of 'technology', his rational outlook would be linked with heavy equipment and machinery; the supercomputers and early computing systems; gadgets which commanded enormity in terms of size and physical appearance. The idea or imagination of a virtual world dominated by objects/technology where one could access another part of the world at our fingertips was a highly Utopian thought. The arousal of fear or apprehension amongst the

mindsets of various categories of workers due to the birth of a new category of the labour force; a category monopolized by those who had the skill sets needed to operate the ICT induced technologies was never witnessed.

The emergence of new technologies and their constant development led to a series of repercussions. These repercussions generated waves across the globe. The work style and skill sets of people; their day-to-day lifestyle; their choices and preferences; their preferences in terms of modes of connectivity are amongst certain key areas where the multi-dimensional repercussions stood visible from a local to a global level. It also changed the way people around the world communicate with each other, do business, collect information and impart education (Dhirendra, 2008). Individuals from across the globe were on a path of convergence in terms of the above mentioned key areas. This convergence at the societal level was a catalyst that sparked another series of convergences across borders in terms of social welfare, economic planning and development. The underlying factor for attaining an amalgamation of varied entities (societal, political, economic entities of nation and regions) was located in the areas and domains of education.

### **ICT and Education: The Linkage**

Education, in its rare form as a necessity of the society and as an essential commodity for the progressive development of nations was propelled and redrafted to an extent where it became the power rearing outlet upon which the globalized world enjoyed sustainability and relevance. ICT

and education were slowly but progressively encapsulated as a whole, one is regarded as synonymous with the other. Citing instances, the courses on basic computer knowledge at the schooling level which emerged from the developed nations had a trickle-down effect, as seen in the context of India. Technologically induced modes of education have been promoted through various policies and programmes. Educational Technology (ET) and Computer Literacy and Studies in Schools (CLASS) were two centrally sponsored schemes highlighted in the 1992 modification of the National Policy on Education, 1986. Under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) programme and National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF) 2005, the use of ICT in education has been given a significant place (Department of School Education and Literacy Ministry of Human Resource Development Government of India, 2012). In the gambit of higher education, the Twelfth Year Plan and National Mission on Use of Higher Education included certain programs and provisions for smart classrooms; development of virtual labs; single content portal access point for educational related purposes; availability of computer laboratories in educational institutions, capacity building initiatives focused on technology-mediated pedagogy etc. (Mahashevta, 2017).

The emergence of modern technologies challenges the traditional teaching methods of the past few decades. As the world is now in the era of Information Technology, the footsteps and rapidity of teaching and imparting knowledge is speedy and quick. One can

easily be a recipient of different forms of education through the various channels present in the domain of ICT. Students of all age groups including academicians and research scholars can easily gain access to his/her material needs (information, documents, videos) through the various ICT platforms (the internet being the major outlet) which also offers a multitude of advantages in terms of flexibility, time and cost factors. Besides seeking information, students and academicians are also able to act as contributors as they can freely communicate and share ideas; projects and contribute towards the existing information made available in the virtual world.

ICT has generated a network of connectivity transcending notions of border and time in terms of quantity and quality. Clusters or groups of people located across different parts of the world can use online modes as Google meet, Zoom and other platforms to attend learning session for both academic and non-academic purposes and tasks completion. The age-old necessities of classrooms/lecture halls i.e. physical space and physical domains in the context of education and their significance have been diluted with the advent of e-learning, e-teaching, and e-education (including distance mode of education).

### **Covid-19 and Mizoram: Scripting a New Chapter**

Under the broad framework of *Covid-19* in the globalized context, the globe witnessed the birth of new events, occurrences, inventions, developments from a societal to technological angle. Covid-19 as a virus and as a new form of health scare

revamped and redrafted “education” and its entailments especially in developing nations. IT/ICT and education which was not converged with extreme rapidity in many developing nations became a basic necessity.

Mizoram is one of the many Indian states which stood to lose immensely from an economic and social standpoint with the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Located in the far-flung NER and lack of self-sufficiency from an economic front, the state also lacked a feasible health care system during the initial stages when Covid-19 was making its rounds across India. The state observed a total lockdown in March 2020. Under the conditions of total lockdown, educational institutions were shut down. Teachers and students could no longer avail of the traditional modes of learning and teaching (physical classroom teaching, use of notebooks and whiteboards; use of textbooks and direct contact with each other). While physicality was no longer possible, learning had to proceed. The only pathway towards moving forward in the gambit of education lay in the adoption of ICT in education from a multi-modal dimension. ICT was no longer a mere complementary alternative but became the lone outlet for the continuance of education in the Covid-19 era.

The majority of Mizo people were not familiar and nor were they aware of many modern technologies that were already being utilized in the day-to-day life of modern nations. Tools under ICT entailing video conferencing and virtual meeting platforms (Google meet, Zoom, Jio Meet), online

modes of conducting tests and surveys (Google forms, survey monkey etc.); sharing and dissemination of information (Gmail, WhatsApp, Telegram, Instagram, Facebook, Youtube); online/virtual modes of payment (Gpay, BHIM, online banking) found an increased number of users from the business, organized and unorganized sectors of Mizo society. Teachers and students from educational institutions also began to use and rely on such tools facilitated by ICT technology. Taking advantage of the different tools of IT, Mizoram was able to run and manage educational institutions.

### ***Purpose of Study***

Globalization and its intensification became highly visible in the pandemic prevailing worlds (C-19 era). With the repercussions set forth by Covid-19, higher education institutions across the state scripted new chapters in terms of adoption and reshaping of their modes of operation and administration. The nature of transitions occurring in higher educational institutions was greatly dictated by the ICT necessity and culture as laid down under the preview of Globalization. This study highlights the nature of changes witnessed from the lens of higher education in Mizoram. The study also highlights the continuity, chain of actions, and commonality in terms of ICT dependence and reliance located in the avenue of higher education in a pandemic dictated society (in the context of Mizoram).

### ***Methodology***

For the study, secondary data was obtained through books, journals, and other electronic sources while primary data was

obtained through the following tools and methods were used. Due to the restrictions set forth by Covid-19, a wider scale in terms of quantity could not be attained.

- a. Observation method in a participatory structure was conducted in one college located in Aizawl city i.e. Govt. Johnson College, Aizawl (April 2020-January 2021).
- b. Observation method in a non-participatory structure was conducted for various colleges by keeping records on the level of activities and initiatives generated by ICT through online media platforms, college internet-based platforms (websites, e-information published by colleges and internet-based events (webinars, online conferences, and workshops, online training sessions) organized by the various colleges (April 2020-January 2021).
- c. Unstructured interviews: the technique for the selection of the sample size is not well defined. The respondents were deduced through the purposive method (teachers and students engaged in the higher education sector) from which random samples were drawn based on availability. The nature of interviews \ were guided by the principle of randomness as interviews were conducted through informal discussions at random periods under the broad framework of perceived challenges and changes that were being witnessed in the Covid-19 phase of higher education.

The data collected and obtained was qualitative and analyzed descriptively.

### **Findings: The Online Domain of Higher Education in Mizoram**

The key findings / highlights are as follows:

- 1) The online platform: The barriers of skill sets related to technology in terms of skill sets and knowledge were broken down. Geographical locations (rural to urban, border proximities); age gaps lose their relevance as the need of the hour was the ability to handle ICT-induced learnings. The majority of the colleges started conduction refresher courses, faculty training schemes specifically for ICT modes of teaching to equip teachers with the knowledge and skill sets needed to conduct “online teaching”. E-teaching and E-learning became prevailing realities dominating the educational sector. The modes and tools used by each college varied, depending on their chosen platforms. LMS (Learning Management System) became a necessity for all colleges. Sharing content via text, videos, slides, files; tracking of progress (attendance, assignment performance, student enrollment); updation on details and performances of students and teachers were core areas under which colleges embarked on the LMS modes. While certain colleges utilized ready-made/available tools (Gmeet, Youtube, Zoom, Google forms, Microsoft packages) and created an amalgamation of tools needed to serve their purposes; some colleges utilized LMS custom-designed

packages from private developers or institutions like NIELT for the operation of e-learning and e-teaching. Citing an example, NIELIT, Aizawl developed an LMS package, Moodle based on the specifications and requirements of Aizawl colleges. One college, Government Hrangbana College in Aizawl was amongst the subscribers of the LMS package from where the dissemination of all academic-related purposes was executed. Govt. Johnson College and Govt. Aizawl College was a subscriber to the LMS package developed as per their requirements by a private developer.

- 2) Newly acquired skill sets to cater to ICT: Training courses conducted by various institutions and bodies were supplemented by self-taught skills obtained from online tutorials, hit and trial sessions. Teachers and students alike had no choice but to acquire the basic skills needed in the domain of ICT. From the handling of video conferencing tools; generating outcomes from online tools; understanding and operating with basic ICT induced words such as ‘upload’, ‘download’, ‘share’, ‘view’ towards making one’s presence in the gambit of social media; new skills were continuously developed and new thought processes streamlined towards ICT reliance was inculcated.
- 3) New modus operandi for higher educational institutions: E-learning and E-teaching were not the only new

avenues that were making waves in the higher education sector. E-administration was also highly visible across the institution. The colleges themselves from an administrative gambit were under a transitive stage. Application procedures, fee payments, information for new aspirants and current students, important notices related to examination, and other college-related matters could not be seized or halted but had to be implemented. The only alternative was through ICT tools and modes. Colleges, especially those located in Aizawl city embarked on the e-administration and re-operation path. Many colleges revamped their college websites to cater to the needs of the institution in terms of administration information outlets and e-educational necessities. Admission-related procedures and related forms were now conducted, made available, and operated using e-platforms. Many colleges utilized the services of Lailen Pvt. (a software development firm) which was successful in developing an online platform that catered to the requirements of admission-related procedures from the initial to the final stages. State Bank of India offered an E-payment (E-collect) platform for fee payment-related purposes. Higher educational institutions in their transition towards ICT mode began establishing relations with new players (private and non-private entities engaged in the ICT domain).

## **Conclusion: IT and Globalization Era in Mizoram**

ICT and IT encapsulate the services, platforms, and devices that have eroded the barriers of time and space, making swift and efficient international communication lows possible. The growth and development of ICT and IT have dramatically accelerated the changes related to the shift from the Industrial Age to the Information Age. In addition to these, Mizoram which is one of the smallest states in India is slowly and gradually familiarizing itself with the various modes of technology. Although there are snags and disadvantages regarding IT in Mizoram, without a doubt it has brought drastic changes in the state in several ways. The state has benefitted with IT particularly during the lockdown phase in the state. Through IT, schools and various institutions can function and operate through online mode. In this way, Mizoram has benefitted greatly with the coming up of globalization along with Information Technology in many avenues and will continue to do so in the years to come.

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