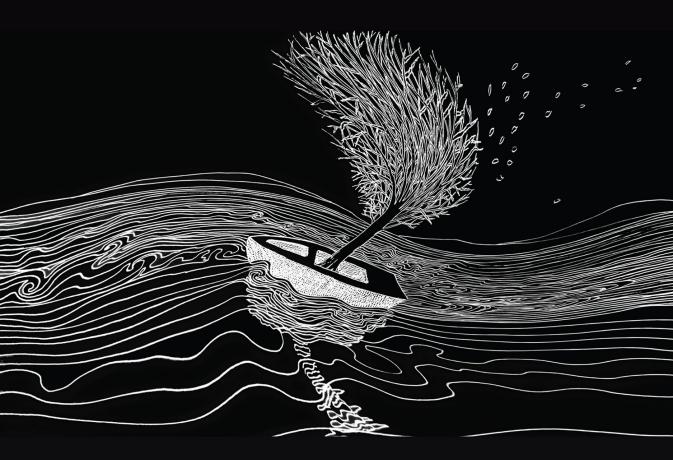# Higher Education for Good

Teaching and Learning Futures

Edited by

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25. Making higher education institutions as open knowledge institutions

Pradeep Kumar Misra and Sanjaya Mishra

> The Open Courseware concept is based on the philosophical view of knowledge as a collective social product and so it is also desirable to make it a social property. (V. S. Prasad, quoted in UNESCO, 2002)

Higher education institutions (HEIs) and societies have a symbiotic relationship. Societies mould and shape HEIs as per their orientations and expectations, and in return, HEIs contribute to the societies' philosophical, social, political, cultural, and economic upliftment. By extending this relationship, it is obvious to ask, are HEIs a reflection of our society in terms of openness, specifically, openness in teaching and research? Here the word "open" denotes that one's policies, practices, resources, and achievements are visible to or immediately known to others. Openness in the context of HEIs is about freedom, flexibility, and fairness (Commonwealth of Learning, 2017), where the information and knowledge created by public funds are freely available to everyone and promote social justice. In a recent report, UNESCO (2022) suggests that HEIs become open institutions and aim for a more substantial social presence through proactive engagement and partnering with other societal actors.

In this chapter, we argue for transforming traditional face-to-face HEIs into Open Knowledge Institutions (OKIs). This chapter envisions OKIs as such institutions which aim to emerge as social welfare institutions by opening their policies, practices, and processes to welcome and support all those who aspire to enter and benefit from higher education. In this chapter, the arguments behind making HEIs as OKIs are guided by the authors' observations and experiences of the Indian higher

education system, the second largest in the world, consisting of 1,113 universities, 43,796 colleges, 11,296 stand-alone institutions, 41.3 million students, and 1.5 million teachers (Government of India, 2021). Here, it must be mentioned that arguments and strategies emancipating in the background of Indian higher education may not be relevant to all, but may well be adaptable for many HEIs across the globe. The chapter presents in its first section sociological and developmental perspectives of HEIs as OKIs. The following sections outline the potential benefit of making HEIs as OKIs and the common issues and challenges. The final section provides the strategies for using technology as an enabler for transforming HEIs as OKIs.

Sociological and developmental perspectives on making HEIs as OKIs

Before discussing HEIs as OKIs, it is necessary to understand what HEIs do to benefit societies. Institutions approved by competent state authorities and imparting different types of studies, training, or training for research at the post-secondary level are referred to as institutions of higher education (UNESCO, 2019). HEIs mainly include universities, colleges, professional and technical institutions, and further education institutions. HEIs typically admit students after assessing them on various criteria, provide instruction for them in person for a specified time, and grant them degrees, diplomas, or certificates after the completion of their studies. The education imparted by such institutions is referred to as higher education. However, higher education is about the higherness in education and "is connected with not only the transmission of knowledge, but also its advancement through research, higher education has the task of legitimating society's cognitive structures" (Barnett, 1990, p. 8).

In the 21st century, HEIs have gained particular importance, carrying out three fundamental functions: instruction, research, and extension (Quitoras & Abuso, 2021). Higher education institutions are considered knowledge producers and providers in today's "knowledge economy" and "learning society" (Naidoo, 2008; Ozga, 2008; Scott, 2016; Snellman, 2015; Soysal & Baltaru, 2021). Higher education institutions contribute knowledge through research output and knowledge transfer, usually

measured by research and development activities and output (Chen, 2012). HEIs are expected to fulfil a broad range of responsibilities. As noted by UNESCO (2022): "Higher education institutions are uniquely positioned to contribute to the social, economic and environmental transformations that are required to tackle the world's most pressing issues" (p. 3). Higher education also provides many personal benefits to individuals. A decennial review based on 1,120 estimates in 139 countries noted that private returns to higher education have increased over time, estimating a personal return on investment at 15.8% (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2018).

The needs and realities of the 21st century require a shift in the purpose of education from developing human capital and bringing advances in science and technology for economic prosperity and development, to ensuring the wellbeing of individuals and societies. Wellbeing is not equated to material resources such as income, wealth, jobs, earnings and housing. The OECD (2018) explicates that:

> Education has a vital role to play in developing the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that enable people to contribute to and benefit from an inclusive and sustainable future. Learning to form clear and purposeful goals, work with others with different perspectives, find untapped opportunities and identify multiple solutions to big problems will be essential in the coming years. Education needs to aim to do more than prepare young people for the world of work; it needs to equip students with the skills they need to become active, responsible and engaged citizens. (pp. 3–4)

The role of HEIs has become more critical considering the shift in the purpose of education. Now, HEIs have broader social and moral responsibilities to facilitate youths in forming such ideas and ideals that, in the future, will shape the fate and destiny of societies, as noted by Chankseliani et al. (2021):

> With the expansion of university participation beyond the elite, higher education has acquired a greater potential for contributing to societal development. Universities can educate citizens, statespersons, teachers, doctors, engineers, philosophers, lawyers, artists, and activists to support the development of peaceful, inclusive, and just societies. Universities can undertake basic and applied research to improve our understanding of life and to develop practical applications of scientific knowledge. (p. 110)

However, this is not yet reflected in reality. HEIs increasingly tend to adopt the characteristics of corporate entities (Jarvis, 2001; Ramos-Monge et al., 2017) due to a range of pressures, including the demands of technological developments and the need for jobs. As such, the focus on research, serving society as a change agent, and empowering people across different sections of society has taken a back seat. Kromydas (2017) noted that:

> the current policy focus on labor market-driven policies in higher education has led to an ever-growing competition transforming this social institution to an ordinary market-place, where attainment and degrees are seen as a currency that can be converted to a labour market value. Education has become an instrument for economic progress moving away from its original role to provide context for human development. As a result, higher education becomes very expensive and even if policies are directed towards openness, in practice, just a few have the money to afford it. (p. 1)

Over the past fifty years, HEIs have changed substantially. The changes have emerged in programmes, facilities, research priorities, teaching-learning methodologies, course content, resources, and approaches. In our knowledge society, the commodification of knowledge has given rise to the intellectual property regime and the race for ranking and power. Lyotard's (1984) claim has been borne out: "Knowledge in the form of an informational commodity indispensable to productive power is already, and will continue to be, a major — or perhaps *the* major — stake in the world-wide competition for power" (p. 5).

Some HEIs have also moved from offering education to the elite to massification (see Luke, Chapter 6, this volume). Nevertheless, the core nature and functions of HEIs have remained largely static. The unchanged aspect is that many HEIs are working independently focusing mainly on teaching and facilitating their students, working within protected boundaries, and not collaborating continuously with societies. Since HEIs have a mandate to nurture future leaders, it becomes prudent for them to take the lead to innovate and make efforts to further open their boundaries.

Usually, HEIs have a mandate to facilitate and nurture learners, conduct research for producing and disseminating knowledge, and carry out extension activities. These three prime activities of HEIs are

directly related to the socioeconomic welfare of society and humanity and are aligned to the idea of the "ecological university" — focusing on its total environment and striving to work for global good in an ethical way (Barnett, 2011). However, there is a caveat. Despite advancements in the open education and open research movements in recent years, HEIs, generally, selectively share their research outcomes, techniques, products, knowledge, and resources with the wider world. These outcomes, often labelled in terms of proprietary items and patents, are only available to those willing to pay a fee or agree to share revenue of their profits.

In the Indian context, HEIs remain hesitant to collaborate with other institutions or sections of the society to share resources, conduct joint research, and produce common knowledge. Despite advances like the open access, open educational resources, and open research movements emerging in the past 20 years, the actions and activities of most HEIs in India are strictly guarded and protected, as there are increased expectations for patent filing and resource generation. Most surprisingly, those HEIs which run and thrive on public money (taxpayers' money) and those who run on their own money (but take different benefits and privileges from governments) have similar tendencies and patterns on this issue.

Possible benefits from making HEIs as OKIs

The world is currently facing unprecedented challenges such as climate change, rising inequalities, lack of adequate health services, exacerbating social fragmentation, increasing resource depletion, and widening economic crises (OECD, 2018). HEIs cannot remain isolated from these challenges and must focus on supporting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDSN Australia/Pacific, 2017). HEIs must take more responsibility, open their doors, and welcome anybody who wants their help or resources to find meaningful solutions for individual and societal benefits. A UNESCO (2022) report calls on higher education leaders and actors across the globe to push for transformations within their institutions and look for new alliances, incentives and propose viable solutions as a priority, considering the complexity of the issues at stake:

> Given this new reality in which the future of humans, along with
> other species, is at stake, it is time for HEIs and their stakeholders to
> systematically rethink their role in society and their key missions, and
> reflect on how they can serve as catalysts for a rapid, urgently needed
> and fair transition towards sustainability. (p. 18)

HEIs as OKIs give much hope to meet such demands and contribute to
making this world a better place to live for all. The argument behind this
proposition is that, as OKIs, the research and knowledge generated in
HEIs will immediately be available to the public. In addition, as OKIs,
HEIs would be more accessible for guidance, help, and consultancy to
a broader range of people, diverse groups, and other institutions. As
in many open universities globally, HEIs as OKIs can be places where
senior citizens and working people can come at any time to improve
and enhance their learning. This learning will ultimately help greater
numbers of people to be happy, healthy, and employment-ready. The
transformation of HEIs to OKIs, a timely and much-needed intervention,
could bring socioeconomic benefits and sustainable development
opportunities for societies. Following are some potential benefits of
making HEIs as OKIs:

- There are HEIs (globally recognised, highly ranked, resource-
  rich, and credible among employers) where many students
  aspire to get admission, but only a few are selected to study.
  Making such HEIs as OKIs may offer possibilities, even to those
  who cannot enrol, to gain benefits of courses and programmes
  offered by those institutions.

- Research reveals that employability is a major concern in HEIs
  (Cheng et al., 2021) and what students learn in HEIs must
  continually be updated to remain relevant for employment
  (Alpaydın & Kültür, 2022). Students often look for different
  means to update their knowledge and skills to stay relevant
  and productive in their professions or engagements. HEIs
  as OKIs could offer students opportunities to return to their
  campuses (physically or virtually) to update their knowledge
  and skills.

- The world is moving towards an ageing society. The ageing
  population needs lifelong learning to remain mentally fit and

active. Unfortunately, many elderly people lack opportunities for this purpose, as noted by a report from UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning that focused on the elderly in Europe, but also applicable globally (Ogg, 2021):

> although some practical and effective measures to include lifelong learning activities that address the needs of ageing societies have been put in place, there is growing need throughout Europe to focus on promoting lifelong learning in local and community settings and for all age groups. (p. 1)

- HEIs as OKIs can provide options to senior citizens to engage in needs-based lifelong learning programmes and activities, as well as suggest specific programmes and activities. Such initiatives are already in place in University of the Third Age (U3A, 2022) and similar programmes globally.

- HEIs are often involved in path-breaking and cutting-edge research. However, they often only share their results or findings with a specific community or for commercial gains. Some attempts, like open sharing of research, remain confined to a limited number of HEIs. HEIs as OKIs can commit to publicly sharing these results. Greater public sharing of research outputs may change the perception of higher education research and, most importantly, offer numerous opportunities for policymakers, practitioners, and citizens.

- HEIs carry out research on different issues and produce new knowledge but mainly from their perspectives. It is not a common practice in HEIs to survey or listen to society first, and conduct research accordingly. HEIs as OKIs could broaden their research circles by collaborating with and conducting research in consultation with society. Such a society-driven and socially-demanded research by HEIs would help to make this world a safer, better, and more sustainable place to live, for all.

Expected issues and challenges regarding making HEIs as OKIs

We contend that converting HEIs to OKIs is a much needed step. Nevertheless, doing it will not be easy as there are many challenges in the path of this noble venture. Besides policy shifts and attitudinal change in leadership, the ways and means to do it will be vital. We consider three main challenges in making HEIs as OKIs.

- **Changing mindset of faculty and leadership:** HEIs work, function, and carry out different roles and responsibilities according to their specified acts, ordinances, and policies within the regulatory framework in India. Several people in several capacities manage the functioning of HEIs. Those governing and running HEIs have a specific mindset and attitude to see the developmental needs and act upon them. Reimagining HEIs as OKIs would require a shift in thinking about the role and purpose of HEIs and would require a long-term engagement process with all faculty, staff, and students (including senior level staff) and, vitally, funding support.

- **Organisational changes regarding rules, regulations, and work culture:** Conversion of HEIs as OKIs is a novel concept, and HEIs would need to make several changes and adjustments to realise this vision. There will be many issues ranging from infrastructure to policies, plans, and guidelines to make HEIs as OKIs, and many HEIs do not have enough facilities and workforce to bring about this change. More than anything else, this shift will demand a substantial change in the working culture of the institutions. As per our experience in India, HEIs tend to deal with a largely homogeneous set of learners with similar profiles and expectations, but as OKIs, they would have to deal with varied groups of learners and focus on their needs to support them in pursuit of excellence in their chosen field.

- **Financial arrangements to accommodate more on campuses:** Another significant challenge would be ensuring financial resources for this change. The conversion of HEIs into OKIs would require additional financial support from government and other funding agencies. This conversion would also

reduce the revenues generated and increase spending as HEIs would have to accommodate a greater number and diversity of students. HEIs may also be required to offer some educational programmes in a subsidised mode and share their educational and research resources with others, which would also cost additional maintenance.

It is clear that transforming HEIs into OKIs nationally would require bold steps and a clear policy framework. HEIs would need to change and adjust at cognitive, structural, and financial levels to embrace openness and perform their role as higher education institutions for the good of society, and for the future. Technology can be an enabler to help fulfil this promise. The following section details how HEIs may use technology to evolve as OKIs.

Technology as an enabler for making HEIs as OKIs

As OKIs, HEIs would offer various programmes to a broader range of people in society and share their resources and facilities, and would require appropriate technology to do so. Our advocacy for using technology to reimagine HEIs into OKIs is based on the argument that it can cater to people on a real time basis with affordable financial investment. Technology can increase access to quality higher education and promote inclusion and equitable opportunities for all by helping HEIs to identify and reach those in need of their services. Adopting relevant open tools and applications can promote the openness required for OKI. The development and acceptance of open educational resources in the higher education landscape is an innovative practice that could help educators in higher education to contribute to openness and make collective and collaborative contributions.

HEIs could consider using existing technology tools, i.e. web portals, learning management systems, MOOCs, and online databases, to make this mammoth task doable and manageable. The availability of a national government-supported MOOC platform, SWAYAM, as experienced in India could be leveraged to increase openness in teaching and learning. HEIs must combine intent with innovative ways to open HEIs to society. HEIs may devise specific strategies suiting their context, objectives, resources, and organisational priorities. In addition, any institution in

any place, locality, or region in India could adopt and use the following technology-enabled strategies for evolving as OKIs.

- **Issuing a return to study pass to all registered students:** Students are the backbone of any education system. With the unprecedented explosion of knowledge and demand of emerging economies, today's higher education students will need to update their knowledge and skills regularly. As pointed out by O'Farrell (2017), preparing our students to cope with and succeed in an unpredictable world is arguably one of the most significant challenges universities face worldwide. However, HEIs are lacking in offering such support to those students who have graduated from their campuses. There tend to be few opportunities for students to return for further study or guidance. Of course, they can stay associated with these institutions as alumni, but there is a need to bring a change in this relationship. HEIs could provide a pass for students to return to their institutions for a specified time to update their knowledge and skills. This liberty and assurance for outgoing graduates to come back for study would make HEIs more open, caring, and inclusive. This would also foster belonging amongst students. Research shows that higher education students with a greater sense of belonging tend to have higher motivation, more academic self-confidence, higher levels of academic engagement, and higher achievement (Pedler et al., 2022). Technology could help, for example, in learning who would like to come back, and for what purposes, and supporting them accordingly. Existing models of this practice in global open universities and lifelong learning units can be drawn on as examples that may be adapted for local contexts.

- **Having a policy to offer lifelong learning programmes for senior citizens:** Surprisingly, most HEIs in India have no specific policy for welcoming senior citizens to their campuses for study and research. HEIs could implement policy in this area and create a dedicated portal to meet the lifelong learning needs of senior citizens. On this portal, HEIs could display the types of lectures, activities, and programmes that may interest senior citizens and record their preferences and

preferred programmes. This open welcome of senior citizens, helping them to live a more engaged life, would undoubtedly contribute to making HEIs as OKIs. As above, existing models of this practice in global open universities and lifelong learning units can be drawn on as examples that may be adapted.

- **Reporting activities and functions of the institution to the public:** HEIs often report their achievements through their websites. However, most HEIs remain selective, usually publishing and advertising those activities and accomplishments that may help them to recruit students, obtain funding, and achieve higher rankings. There is a widespread perception that HEIs only show their better sides to the public, like businesses. HEIs could think about using their websites to report their activities, achievements, and even shortcomings in a fair, transparent, and easy-to-grasp manner. This approach could help to change society's perception of HEIs.

- **Identifying and inviting practitioners from different walks of life to conduct joint research:** HEIs may identify and invite practitioners not working in academic or research institutions to conduct collaborative research on chosen projects. HEIs could extend such invitations to those who are well versed in practices but do not have sufficient expertise and experience or lack the facilities to conduct research. A joint research effort between academic experts of HEIs and real life experiences and expertise of practitioners could bring highly fruitful results. HEIs can use technologies to identify such practitioners who are working silently in the fields or in remote areas to bring positive change to society. It is ironic that such people may not have academic degrees but have the potential to contribute substantially to joint research. The invitation for research to people at the grassroots would help HEIs to work in tandem with people across society to offer sustainable solutions to emerging problems of this complex world. Existing models of this practice in university-based community knowledge units, globally, can be drawn on as examples that may be adapted.

- **Releasing all institutional publications through an open repository:** As OKIs, HEIs could share their course content, publications, and research findings for free for broader dissemination and use. For this purpose, they could develop an institutional policy mandating the release of publications under an open licence. An open licence is a licence that respects the intellectual property rights of the copyright owner and provides permissions granting the public the right to access, reuse, repurpose, adapt and redistribute educational materials (UNESCO, 2018). Teaching and learning resources released under open licenses are known as open educational resources (OER). A commitment and a specific policy for releasing institutional resources as OER would be a welcome move for HEIs to emerge as OKIs. Existing institutional examples can be explored and adapted, e.g. University of Cape Town (2011) and University of Edinburgh (2021).

- **Offering different programmes in the form of MOOCs:** Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are typically free, online courses designed for large numbers of geographically dispersed students. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, many undergraduate degree programs have implemented MOOCs as the new standard (Chai & Wigmore, 2022). MOOCs provide an affordable and flexible way for learners to learn new skills and for HEIs to deliver quality educational experiences at scale. Millions of people worldwide use MOOCs to learn for various reasons, including career development, changing jobs, college preparation, supplemental learning, lifelong learning, corporate training, and more (MOOC.org, 2021). HEIs may offer their popular programmes and courses as MOOCs, as many do already. As per the provisions of each country's higher education regulatory authority, HEIs can provide credit or non-credit MOOCs. If these courses are offered as credit-based courses, learners can use them for formal education purposes. In the case of non-credit courses, these can be used for lifelong learning and professional development purposes. MOOC provision could make HEIs accessible to all who aspire to study at any point in their life. The University Grants

Commission, India, has already made regulations to allow up to 40% of credits to be earned from MOOCs offered on the national MOOC platform (UGC, 2021). This is already an enabling environment to move towards becoming OKIs.

- **Developing an online portal to showcase and share facilities and resources:** In the present context, it is difficult to know the available facilities and resources in Indian HEIs. Publicising this information would help outside individuals and other institutions to approach those HEIs to access and use their resources and facilities for academic and research support. To make this happen, HEIs having excess or underutilised resources and facilities may think of developing an online portal to enlist their available facilities and resources. Such a portal would help individuals, community organisations and other institutions know the availability of facilities and request to use these services as per agreed terms and conditions. This simple use of technology could be effective in moving from closed to open educational institutions. This practice would bring institutions closer to society and help ensure the optimum utilisation of resources and staffing for the betterment of society.

Conclusion

This chapter advocates higher education for good and proposes that HEIs must evolve as OKIs. The authors consider higher education to be a public good that needs to be available for individual, social and economic gains. They argue that HEIs, especially in India, have to open their boundaries, become more accessible, and support individuals, societies, and industries. The chapter acknowledges that achieving this goal will be challenging, and HEIs will require structural and cultural change, organisational revisioning, and financial investments to evolve as OKIs. On a positive note, the chapter advocates that technology can be an enabler in materialising this vision and discusses the use of technology in this regard. The chapter finally suggests seven strategies to help HEIs emerge as OKIs, with hope that HEIs from India and other countries may use these strategies to emerge as mass welfare institutions, i.e. open knowledge institutions promoting inclusion, equity, social justice, and sustainable development.

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