

## **Annual Refresher Program in Teaching (ARPIT) through SWAYAM MOOCs Platform: Benefits and Challenges**

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### **Abstract**

*Learning is a never-ending process. Modern society wants teachers to learn and teach high quality. The refresher courses were started by UGC to update the subject knowledge and teaching skills according to the changing situations. Annual Refresher Program in Teaching (ARPIT) has been initiated by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, a massive and special digital professional development program for 1.5 million higher education teachers using the SWAYAM MOOC system. Massive Open Online Course (MOOCs), which are massive in terms of content and its reach, they are open as anyone can attend these courses online. ARPIT is the first major attempt at e-learning in the country for teachers of Higher education through digital internet, video courses and online assessment.*

*The Chapter provides an insight into the ARPIT initiative and reflects on the benefits and challenges in its implementation of the Indian context.*

**Keywords:** ARPIT, SWAYAM MOOCs, Benefits, Challenges

### **Introduction:**

Modern society wants teachers to teach and learn high quality. Teachers must have a great deal of knowledge and expertise concerning teaching and evaluation practices to satisfy these requirements and expectations for quality education.

Learning is a never-ending process. , it doesn't end even after getting a job. Continuing education allows career-minded people to constantly improve their skills and become more professional in their work. In the field of higher education, it is particularly important for teachers of higher education to seek professional development, not only to ensure the best learning results for their students but also to be more successful and more fulfilled in the many other facets of their education and teaching. Teacher learning is a continuous process

that promotes teachers' teaching skills, master new knowledge, develop new proficiency, which in turn, help improve students' learning.

India's education sector has experienced a widening skill gap, and the country's education system needs to be changed urgently. In addition to improving infrastructure, the government needs to invest in teacher training that can resolve these deficiencies and work towards enhancing educational quality. ARPIT is one such program. ARPIT is a Special program for professional development delivered through SWAYAM MOOCs.

### **Objectives of refresher courses:**

According to the University Grants Commission website, in 1986, the University Grants Commission laid down the scheme to set up Academic Staff Colleges (ASCs), the U.G.C. set up 66 Orientation' and' Refresher Courses' for ASCs (UGC, 2020). The refresher courses are unique to the discipline to update the subject knowledge and teaching skills according to the evolving scenario. UGC conceived refresher courses to provide teachers in the same field with the opportunity to exchange their experiences with their peers and to keep the participants fully aware of the latest developments in their topic.

Since people from diverse regions used to come to attend certain courses, such thing will promote a culture of mutual learning and empowerment of oneself. In these courses, participants were informed about new methods and techniques for knowledge transfer and to motivate them to pursue research studies.

According to the National Testing Agency website, 2019, On November 13, 2018, the MHRD launched an online ARPIT, Annual Refresher Program in Teaching (ARPIT) a major and unique online professional development initiative of 15 lakhs of higher education using the SWAYAM MOOCs platform. In the first phase, MHRD identified 66 discipline-specific National Resource Centers (NRCs), in which course co-coordinators prepared online training materials focusing on the latest development in each subject. ARPIT will be an ongoing exercise so that each year NRCs will constantly develop new refresher modules in their assigned discipline and upload and make the training material available through SWAYAM. (NTA, 2019)

For the Career Advancement Program, UGC has already given equivalence for ARPIT courses similar to Refresher Courses. The UGC has asked all universities to take part in the newly launched ARPIT courses and to enable their faculty members to take part in the ARPIT courses available on the SWAYAM MOOCs platform. (NTA, 2019)

### **MOOCs: A new way of learning**

MOOCs are an abbreviated form of the massive open online course. In recent years, there have been growing numbers of millions of registered MOOCs users offering hundreds of

courses worldwide. MOOCs are often published by online platforms of third parties and developed by academics independently. MOOCs history is not far away.

According to Kunjral and Kaul, Stephen Downes and George Siemens first published the concept in 2008 and focused on a collaborative peer learning model based on 'connectivist.' Subsequently, a few more educational videos were produced by Stanford University professors in 2011 and released with free web resources via open online platforms. MOOCs have exploded around the world this was the year; the number of them is still rising every day. 'Coursera' was later established in early 2012 as an independent for-profit technology.

Other autonomous non-profit projects such as 'Udacity' (establishment of Sebastian Thrum) and 'Udemy' were founded in the same year. MIT and Harvard eventually integrated their MITx platform into 'EdX.' They were followed by the other platforms' 'Future learn' and 'Iversity', which are not American platforms but European platforms. They deliver their courses throughout Europe. (Kunjral & Kaul, 2016).

SWAYAM is a Native IT Platform to host Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) with the capacity to revolutionize the education system in India. Ministry of Human Resources Development, Government of India has launched a major initiative called 'Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds ' (SWAYAM) to provide an interactive online course platform and portal, Includes all courses in the higher education, secondary school, and skillsets sector.

SWAYAM's journey can be traced back to 2003 with the launch of a joint program of IITs and IISc, the NPTEL (National Program on Technology Enhanced Learning). This was the first major attempt at e-learning in the country through digital internet and video courses in engineering, science, and humanities. (ETTLIS, 2019)

In February 2009, the launch of the National Mission on Education through ICT (NMEICT) further extended the scope of catering to all higher education disciplines. As in the NMEICT date, a huge amount of e-content is available. All content developed under NMEICT is being repurposed and made compliant with MOOCs under the SWAYAM initiative. The Beta version of SWAYAM was made live on August 15, 2016 Under the 'Digital India' initiative of Government of India, one of the thrust areas is 'Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs)'. (PMMMNTT, 2019)

### **Course Structure of ARPIT**

Annual Refresher Program in Teaching (ARPIT) has been initiated by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, a massive and special digital professional development program for 1.5 million higher education teachers using the SWAYAM MOOC system. In the first phase, 75 discipline-specific National Resource Centers (NRCs) were identified for the implementation of ARPIT, which are tasked with preparing online training material focusing

on the latest discipline developments, new and emerging trends, pedagogical improvements and methodologies for the transaction of revised curricula. Annual Refresher Programme In Teaching (ARPIT) is running Under Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya National Mission on Teachers and Teaching (PMMMNTT). Via ARPIT, all in-service teachers are given an encouraging opportunity to keep up with the latest innovations in their disciplines via online refresher courses based on technology, irrespective of their subject and seniority.

SWAYAM offers refresher courses through ARPIT which are generally of 16 weeks, 40 hours course, delivered through the SWAYAM portal of MHRD. It includes 20 hours of Video Lectures, 20 hours of E-Content, Discussion Forum and Evaluation and the candidate has to undergo an exam on the same course conducted by NTA. (New Indian Xpress, 2019)The National Testing Agency (NTA) has been set up as a leading, autonomous and self-sustaining testing organization to conduct admission/fellowship entrance examinations in higher education institutions. The National Testing Agency is responsible for tackling all these issues with the best possible use in each field, from test preparation, delivery testing and marking testing.

### **Benefits:**

ARPIT allows connecting openly on a national scale, with global leaders of academics. Course structure with lectures always presents on-website help in the flipped classroom scenario. It gives you more flexibility to study online. You can work and fit your college lecture and other academic responsibility more easily. In an online class of ARPIT, you don't have to log in for a live session at a specific time, but you can study and interact at your own pace with your mentor.

A UGC-Human Resource Development Center (HRDC) is responsible for planning, coordinating, executing, tracking and reviewing orientation courses, refresher courses, and other workshops, with the increasing number of applications received for courses, it was getting tough for HRDC to accommodate all. With the online mode of ARPIT, thousands of participants can join a single course.

By studying online, you choose your learning environment that works best for your needs: whether it's your bedroom, your study, in free periods in colleges. Listening and watching videos of your instructor's lecture gives us flexibility. Having an online course also means we don't have to plan a month out of our city for doing the course. (Benefits-of-studying-online-(vs.-face-to-face-classroom, 2017)

Courses and exams are free for faculty students. By taking an ARPIT course online, we can concentrate on the topic we are interested in and choose from the variety of online courses and programs, we don't just register for the course available in nearby HRDC.

With the vast majority of benefits, this course offers there are certain challenges also which are to be met.

### **Challenges:**

Despite getting older with the Internet and other technologies, most college teachers nationwide lack the basic literacy skills of information and communication technology (ICT) — finding, analyzing, and communicating information — required to access and use ARPIT overabundance of information. Many people undergoing the ARPIT course lack a basic knowledge of locating video and assignment in the SWAYAM application. All assistant professors undergoing online refresher courses are not young. Some of them have joined the job in later years of life; their exposure to ICT is limited. Research is needed in this arena.

At the end of the course, participants have to undergo an online test conducted by NTA. Execution of such a test is not as desired and the government has to think of over alternate models of evaluation as teachers nationwide lack the basic literacy skills of information and communication technology (ICT). Only 0.5% of teachers attempted online exams under the ARPIT scheme in 2019. (Banchariya, 2019).

For the Career Advancement Program, UGC has already given equivalence for ARPIT courses similar to Refresher Courses, but the candidates have to still undergo trouble with college and university IQAC cells judging their points. The government needs far better communication, that such things are not encountered by candidates who have successfully pursued such courses.

Another difficulty lies in the usage of English as a Medium of Instruction in most ARPIT courses, but it's a major problem for teachers especially of languages, who are not that familiar with the English language. Besides, for them, joining any other multidisciplinary course if their subject is not there for a refresher course online, is out of preview. Registration in ARPIT will be very restrictive unless and until courses are made available in regional languages. It is proposed to have at least bilingual content in English and Hindi in the first release stage. Plans should be made shortly to translate them into other regional languages.

Assessment in ARPIT is by submitting Assignments weekly and undergoing online test after course. The assessment consists of multiple-choice questions (MCQ). In the MCQ pattern of assessment, the correct answer can be found by a careful reading of some questions, and participants well versed with English will use this to their advantage. It may be the grammatical structure that matches only one answer choice or the correct response's longer length. What happens here is that the questions end up testing knowledge of literature rather than knowledge of content. Moreover, ARPIT should encourage assessment of the descriptive pattern of the answer rather than the MCQ pattern.

Access to the Internet and required infrastructure for teachers undergoing such courses is still limited. Dedicated facilities of a fully equipped computer system with dedicated internet speed are the need of an hour. Unless facilities are not provided the ARPIT courses may have restrictive reach. Delivery based on the Mobile App is seen as an alternative to extending the reach. In support of SWAYAM, reduced data charges from the budget will go a long way.

On the psychological front, Participants before these ARPIT online courses use to undergo a course in which they had a real professor in front of them and Participants look up to teachers who present themselves in the classroom as real people. (Freiberg, Stein & Huang, 1995). This authenticity can be transmitted through sharing personal anecdotes, talking about professional interests, and telling students about learning the content from their own experiences. Professors are regarded as open when they talk to students informally, before and after lectures. Informal talks always create a bond in the field of academics. Such a bond is missing from these online courses.

### **Conclusion:**

According to the evolving scenario, ARPIT has a great potential to revolutionize and update the subject knowledge and teaching skills and make them reach remote corners of the country. It will go a long way in ensuring education for all the government's slogan with tactful management of the issues and challenges envisaged by the initiative.

ARPIT can play a pivotal role in the Government of India's Digital India and Skill India missions with appropriate planning and implementation.

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