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Teaching Innovations to Support Equity in Higher Education

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Abstract

Higher education is under increasing pressure to align with the demands of the knowledge economy while promoting equity and inclusion in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). Traditional lecture-based pedagogies, focused on rote memorization and passive learning, have proven inadequate and often reinforce inequities for non-traditional learners. This essay looks at 21 related studies that look at new ways to teach, like flipped classrooms, active learning, and making learning more like a game. There is evidence that these methods consistently raise student interest, motivation, and higher-order skills by making students feel like they are active participants. Flipped and blended models make it easier for students to talk to each other, active learning encourages teamwork and creativity, and game-based learning makes it easier to stay motivated and solve problems. However, these methods aren't fully achieving their potential for equity because of structural problems like digital divides, inadequate infrastructure, and teachers who aren't fully prepared. These problems hurt working students, first-generation learners, people from rural areas, and women more than they hurt others. The review makes the case for using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to guide an equity-by-design approach to make sure that pedagogical innovations improve both quality and access in higher education.

Keywords: Innovative teaching methods; Higher education; Flipped classroom; Active learning; Gamification; Student engagement; Educational equity; Universal Design for Learning (UDL); Digital divide; Pedagogical innovation.

1.0 Introduction

Quality, accessibility, and relevance are all putting a lot of pressure on higher education to change quickly. Global initiatives like SDG 4 stress inclusive and fair education, while the massification of higher education has made it easier for more people to go, which has made student bodies more diverse. In the same way, the knowledge economy needs college

graduates who can always learn new things, think critically, and be creative. We need new ways to teach to help everyone learn and make sure that everyone has the same chances.

An important part of this change is now going digital. Schools are able to do more than just hold lectures thanks to online platforms, interactive tools, and virtual learning environments. This lets students learn in the way that works best for them. To get students more interested, motivated, and to help them understand more, new ideas are being looked into in both developed and developing settings. These ideas include flipped classrooms, active learning, and gamification. Traditional teacher-centered teaching doesn't give students the skills they need for the workplace in the 21st century. These methods directly address that problem.

This is especially true in diverse classrooms where students have a wide range of prior knowledge, socioeconomic status, and digital literacy.

Traditional pedagogy characterized by long lectures, rote memorization, and passive learning remains widespread but is increasingly inadequate. While effective at transmitting content, it fails to cultivate higher-order skills and often reproduces inequities, privileging students with more resources and preparation.

1.1 Problem Statement

Traditional ways of teaching hurt non-traditional and marginalized students more than they help them. Working students, first-generation students, students from rural areas, and women often find it hard to focus on lectures or self-directed tests. There is evidence from both developed and developing countries that passive instruction leads to fewer students participating, more stress, and achievement gaps. Large class sizes and little interaction make it hard for students in India, Nigeria, and Kazakhstan who don't have a lot of resources to be engaged. Studies in the US and Europe also show that traditional methods make students less motivated and less likely to stay in school, especially those who already have a lot of other things to do.

Both the way the problem is taught and the way it is built are to blame. Inequalities in access to technology, infrastructure, and learning resources that support students make them worse. This means that new ideas may unintentionally help students with more social and economic capital while leaving behind students who are less fortunate. So, not only new ideas are needed to improve learning outcomes, but also careful attention to fairness.

1.2 Scope and Objectives

This essay is mainly about three new ways of teaching: the Flipped Classroom (FC), Active Learning (AL), and Gamification. These approaches show how innovation, excellence, and fairness can work together. Innovation means using technology in ways that focus on the learner; excellence means getting better at higher-order skills like critical thinking and problem-solving; and equity means making sure that all learners can access, participate, and get help.

The main point is that these new ideas improve student engagement and performance, but they haven't fully realised their potential to improve equity yet. Working students, first-generation learners, students from rural areas, and women often face barriers that keep them

from fully participating. If new approaches aren't carefully thought out, they may reinforce existing privileges.

2.1 Pedagogical Innovation : From Teacher-Centered to Student-Centered Learning

Higher education teaching methods are changing in the 21st century. They are moving away from traditional teacher-centered models like long lectures and memorisation by heart and towards student-centered learning (SCL) approaches that encourage participation, critical thinking, and building knowledge together. Some people think of education as a two-way conversation and activity, not just a one-way flow of data (Freire, 1970; Bransford et al., 2000). This change isn't just about how things are done; it's also about how we think about education. SCL is based on the idea that students actively build their understanding by interacting with concepts, using them in real-life situations, and talking to teachers and peers (Vygotsky, 1978).

Studies show that SCL strategies work much better than traditional lectures at getting students to learn, keeping them interested, and helping them remember what they've learnt. McCarthy and Anderson (2000), for example, found that role play and case-based activities got students more involved and helped them understand more than lecture-based formats. Gauci et al. (2009) showed that using interactive technologies like clickers not only made students pay more attention in large classes, but it also made formative assessment better, which let teachers change how they teach in real time. Additionally, Fayombo (2012) found that working together in groups led to better problem-solving skills and academic performance, especially among students who had trouble in regular classrooms. High-level thinking skills like analysing, synthesis, and evaluation are taught well at SCL, as shown by these results. These skills are very important for the goal of innovation and excellence in higher education.

SCL has been shown to improve motivation, self-control, and acceptance, as well as academic performance. Puranik (2020) said that having places where students can participate makes them feel like they belong, boosts their confidence, and gives them the tools to see themselves as active creators of knowledge. These effects are especially important for students who don't usually learn in this way, like first-generation students, students who work, and students from poor backgrounds, who find it hard to participate in passive lecture formats. Hornbuckle et al. (2025) say that SCL makes classrooms more democratic by giving students more power and getting them to talk to each other.

This is in line with calls for inclusive and fair education.

Still, there are still big problems with putting SCL approaches into practice. Several studies show that institutional resistance and faculty readiness are two problems that keep coming up. Biagi (2023) says that teachers who were trained in traditional ways of teaching might not have the confidence or the tools to change their classes so that students are more involved. Systemic problems like not enough ICT infrastructure, too many students in the classrooms, and unreliable electricity supply make it harder to use student-centered strategies in places like Nigeria and India (Mengesha et al., 202<). Even in places with lots of resources, students may not want to use SCL methods. Mengesha et al. (2024) say that one reason group work is sometimes seen as stressful or unproductive is because some peers don't participate as much

as they should, which takes away from the collaborative benefits of the work. It's important not to romanticise SCL as a model that works for everyone. Instead, these results stress how important it is to have careful lesson planning, clear scaffolding, and supportive institutional ecosystems.

2.2 Flipped and Blended Learning

The flipped classroom (FC) and its close cousin, blended learning (BL), have become two of the most important new ideas in higher education that are changing the way students learn. At their core, these models change the way teaching and learning are done by moving direct instruction from in-class lectures to activities that students do before class, which are usually videos, podcasts, or digital readings. After that, there is time in class for projects, debates, and other ways to actively participate. It's not just a matter of logistics to switch from a teacher-centered to a student-centered learning model (Zhou et al., 20251); it's a big change. To understand how the FC/BL framework works, we need to look at the ideas behind constructivism. These say that people don't get knowledge; they make it through being involved and interacting with others (Vygotsky, 1978; Bransford et al., 2000). In real life, this means that students don't just sit there and take it all in. Instead, they know some basics before class and are encouraged to help each other learn more during discussions. In FC/BL, technology is used to make an environment that helps students learn. There is more high-level thinking in class, and students can go over core material at their own pace. This is good for students who learn in different ways.

They help students do better in school, think more critically, and be more involved, as they have been shown over and over again. In 2023, Baig showed that adding interactive tools to flipped classrooms, such as platforms for making videos and digital forums where students could work together, helped students understand the material better and got them more involved. Mengesha et al. (2024) also did a study that was like an experiment but compared a blended learning model to traditional lectures. The students in the BL group did better on final exams and were also better at solving problems and thinking critically. These results show that FC/BL is in line with the school's main goals, which are to encourage new ideas and high standards in higher education.

FC/BL methods change more than just how well students do on tests. They also change their motivation, their ability to control themselves, and their sense of ownership over their learning. Shalgimbekova et al. (2024) say that collaborative and blended settings helped students become more self-motivated and gave them a better sense of being in charge of their own learning.

Students who had to balance schoolwork with part-time jobs or family duties really liked how flexible the resources they could use before class were. This is an aspect of access that isn't talked about much but is very important. The flipped and blended models are not only new ways to improve things, but they are also ways to make things more open to everyone, even though many studies don't put them in terms of equity.

But there are big problems with putting FC/BL into action that make people less optimistic. A common problem is that teachers aren't always ready or good at their jobs. Mengesha et al. (2024) found that teachers who weren't familiar with active learning methods often used too-

simplified multiple-choice activities, which kept students from being fully involved in the class. In the same way, Baig (2023) talked about how faculty members didn't use flipped models as much as they could because their institutions didn't provide enough training and infrastructure. This made implementation uneven across departments. These problems make it clear that FC/BL is not a simple plug-and-play idea. Instead, it needs a lot of money to be spent on professional development and help with instructional design.

The success of FC/BL models is also strongly affected by the circumstances in which they are used. In places with few resources, like Nigeria and India, frequent power outages, a lack of ICT infrastructure, and spotty internet access are big problems for fair participation (Baig, 2023). Inequalities still exist, even in places with a lot of technology: students from lower-income families may not have access to reliable devices or private study spaces where they can work on materials before class. Because of these structural inequalities, the flipped model might make the digital divide worse without being designed to do so. This would make things worse instead of better that it could help fix.

Things are made even more difficult by the things that students have been through. (Hornbuckle et al., 2025) Some students don't like the extra work or stress that comes with preparing for class on their own, while others say they are more interested and happy in their classes. What Mengesha et al. (2024) found was that students were unhappy with how long group work and other collaborative activities, which are common in flipped classes, took or how they weren't shared equally among team members. This shows how important it is to carefully plan out how to grade group work and make sure that the design takes culture into account so that it doesn't make some groups of students more stressed or less interested.

2.3 Gamification and Simulations

Two new ideas in higher education that are becoming more popular are gamification and simulations. These are meant to get students more involved, keep them motivated, and help them use what they already know in real life. These methods use the psychological benefits of play, competition, and hands-on learning to change the classroom from a place where people just sit and learn to one where people can actively participate and learn. Adding game elements to non-game situations, like quests, points, badges, and leaderboards, is called gamification. Simulations, on the other hand, create immersive, scenario-based environments where students can apply what they've learnt in the classroom to real or nearly real problems. They show how pedagogy can change to meet the needs of 21st-century education, which values creativity, adaptability, and problem-solving along with mastering content.

Both constructivist and motivational learning theories are used to explain how gamification and simulations work. Constructivism says that people learn best when they are actively involved and interacting with others (Vygotsky, 1978; Bransford et al., 2000). Self-determination theory (SDT), on the other hand, says that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are important for developing intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Gamification directly meets these psychological needs by adding game elements that reward effort, give immediate feedback, and encourage collaboration. This makes learning both meaningful and fun. Simulations, on the other hand, fit with Kolb's (1984) theory of

experiential learning because they let students "learn by doing" in safe but real settings that are like professional settings in the real world.

There is a lot of evidence that shows that gamification and simulations can help with motivation, engagement, and skill development. McCarthy and Anderson (2000) showed that role-playing activities made it much easier for students to participate and understand difficult ideas, especially in social science classes. Fayombo (2012) also found that activities that were like games helped students get better at solving problems and were creative. Subramani and Iyappan (2018) found that simulations helped students use theoretical ideas in real-life situations, which bridged the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-life use. Recently, Zhou et al. (2025) discovered that gamified assessments made students more persistent and better at self-regulating their learning. This suggests that these methods help students develop skills that are important for learning throughout their lives. Collectively, these studies show that gamification and simulations are more than just fun; they are structured, evidence-based ways to improve the quality of higher education.

Not only do gamification and simulations help students do better in school, but they also help them develop professional and soft skills that are becoming more important in the knowledge economy. Classmates in business and management learn how to work together, talk to each other, and make quick decisions through role plays and simulations (Joshi, 2018). Much the same way, STEM simulations are safe places to try things out. It's safe for students to make mistakes because they don't have to worry about what will happen if they do something wrong (Sauphayana, 2021). With these uses, gamification and simulations can help close the gap between college and job readiness. They are great new ways to make sure that education meets the needs of the workforce.

However, the study also finds that simulations and making things more like games have some issues and should not always be used. Hornbuckle et al. (2025) give the example of how technical issues like slow setup times, broken software, or bad connections can be annoying and make learning harder instead of easier. A big problem is that teachers don't always know how to turn games into activities that are useful. People often use simple apps like quizzes and repetitive tasks that don't teach them as much as they could (Mengesha et al., 202). Another thing is that not all students like the idea of gamification. Some learners express resistance, perceiving game elements as trivialising serious academic content, while others report stress or disengagement when competitive features such as leaderboards exacerbate anxiety or highlight disparities in performance (Baig, 2023). These criticisms show that gamification and simulations need to be carefully planned and adjusted to fit different situations so that they are as inclusive as possible and have as few unintended effects as possible.

3.1 The Opportunity Gap: Underrepresented Equity Lens

The research on innovative teaching methods like the Flipped Classroom, active learning strategies, and gamification shows that students do better in school, are more engaged, and are more motivated. However, there is a noticeable lack of research that looks at these methods through the lens of equity. Most studies focus on performance outcomes like critical thinking, knowledge retention, or student satisfaction, but they don't look at how these new

ideas meet the needs of different learners, especially those from disadvantaged, under-represented, or non-traditional backgrounds (Mengesha et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2025). This lack of research fills in a big hole in higher education, where the game-changing potential of new teaching methods to break down systemic barriers is still not fully explored.

The benefits of methods like blended learning and flipped classrooms for equity are mentioned briefly. For example, by enabling students to access course material asynchronously, the flipped model supports learners with competing responsibilities such as employment or caregiving (Baig, 2023). Similarly, gamification has been shown to get everyone involved by giving them a lot of different ways to do so (Fayombo, 2012). This makes it appealing to students who learn in different ways.

Yet, very few studies make these connections explicit or use equity-focused terminology such as “inclusion,” “access,” “Universal Design for Learning (UDL),” or “diverse learners” in their framing (Hornbuckle et al., 2025). So, the bigger conversation might make innovation and excellence seem like separate goals that have nothing to do with the much more important goal of fairness in higher education.

There are important effects of this omission. If changes to the way we teach are made without taking equity into account, they could make inequality worse or stay the same, even if the people who make them mean well. For instance, flipped and blended learning approaches presume reliable access to digital devices and stable internet connectivity resources that may be unevenly distributed across socio-economic groups (Mengesha et al., 2024). Finally, platforms that are more like games often require students to be good with technology, which turns off students who haven't used it much before (Sauphayana, 2021). Because of these kinds of problems, it's even more important to do research that directly looks into the conditions of access and comes up with ways to help students who are on the outside.

Pedagogies that are sensitive to different cultures and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) aren't talked about a lot in books and articles about new ways to teach. Frameworks like these help us make sure that learning activities are open to all types of students and have meaning for them. This is how we can make our ways of teaching more fair.

Their absence from the studies we looked at suggests that innovation is usually thought of in narrow terms, focussing on new technologies or performance results, rather than in a more general way that sees equity, innovation, and excellence as goals that are all connected.

Researchers can see how new ways of teaching affect students of all classes, cultures, languages, genders, and abilities by putting them firmly in the context of equity frameworks. In the end, closing this gap is necessary to rethink higher education in a way that is not only great and new, but also fair and open to all students.

3.2 Structural Barriers

Innovative ways of teaching like flipped classrooms, blended learning, gamification, and other student-centered methods often don't work out as planned because of structural barriers that make it hard for everyone to get the help they need, especially students who are already at a disadvantage. These methods might make students more interested, help them think critically, and do well in school, but not everyone benefits from them. Infrastructure

problems, social and economic inequality, linguistic and cultural differences, and the systematic exclusion of disadvantaged groups all make it harder for them to be used and effective. There are two things we need to change: technology and institutions. UDL and other frameworks that include everyone need to be used to make classrooms and other learning spaces more fair for everyone.

3.2.1 Infrastructure and ICT Access

The biggest issue that stops everyone from using new ways to teach is the digital divide. Students need to be able to use their own devices, like laptops and smartphones, and have a stable internet connection for blended and flipped classrooms to work. In many low- and middle-income countries, these are still just goals and not fact. High internet costs, frequent power outages, and limited access to digital devices make it harder for students in rural and remote areas to use flipped or technology-mediated learning (Baig, 2023; Mengesha et al., 2024) the way they should. Inequalities in personal access still exist even when institutional infrastructure is in place. For example, students from low-income families may not have access to private study spaces, affordable data, or up-to-date devices, which makes the achievement gap even bigger.

The COVID-19 pandemic made these differences very clear. Students who had good access to ICT infrastructure were able to make the switch to online or blended models more easily than their peers who didn't have those resources. This shows that pedagogical innovations might make inequality worse instead of better if they don't include systematic investments in digital infrastructure and policies that make education more affordable.

3.2.2 Socio-Economic and Cultural Divides

Socioeconomic differences affect students' learning in more ways than just their access to ICT. Learners from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds often have to balance work, caring for others, or financial obligations that make it hard for them to fully participate in active learning strategies that take a lot of time. For example, flipped classrooms assume that students can spend a lot of time before class doing work. Yet, students from working-class or first-generation families may find these expectations too much, which can cause differences in their participation and outcomes (Hornbuckle et al., 2025).

Barriers also come from differences in culture and language. Students from linguistic minorities are at a disadvantage because a lot of the content in flipped classrooms and online platforms is written in English or regional languages that are spoken by most people. When teaching using digital materials that haven't been changed, it's important to remember that processing information in a second language can be hard, which can make it harder to understand and be interested. Also, cultural norms about how to participate in class, like not questioning authority figures, might make interactive, discussion-based strategies less useful (Fayombo, 2012). New ways of teaching could give more power to dominant groups while putting others on the outside if they don't pay careful attention to cultural and linguistic inclusion.

3.2.3 Gendered Inequities

Gender remains a structural barrier in higher education, especially when it comes to teaching methods that use technology. In many places, women don't have as much access to digital devices and don't know as much about how to use them. Also, society's expectations of them make it hard for them to use technology on their own. South Asian and Sub-Saharan African studies show that female students are disproportionately kept from online and blended learning because of patriarchal norms, housework, and limited mobility (Mengesha et al., 2024)[^]. There are still small biases against women when it comes to using and participating in technology, even in more developed settings. For example, gamification and competitive learning environments can sometimes make spaces more male-dominated if they aren't carefully made with principles of inclusion in mind. Without planning that takes gender into account, new ideas could make educational inequality worse instead of better.

3.2.4 Disability and Accessibility Gaps

Students with disabilities have to deal with some of the biggest problems in the school system. Screen readers, captioning, and adaptive technologies can help make digital tools more accessible. However, many platforms used in flipped classrooms or gamified learning are still not accessible by design. Students who have trouble hearing aren't able to watch videos without captions, and students who have trouble seeing or thinking can be harmed by poorly designed interfaces. New technologies in the classroom, like clickers or simulation labs, might not work for students who have trouble moving around.

This lack of accessibility is a sign of a bigger problem in the system: Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is not being used when new teaching methods are planned or put into action. UDL stresses that the curriculum and learning spaces should be made accessible and flexible for all students from the start, rather than adding accommodations after the fact. Using UDL principles would mean making sure that there are many ways to represent information (like text, audio, and pictures), many ways to get involved (like group and one-on-one activities), and many ways to express ideas (like different ways to give tests). Without these kinds of frameworks, new ways of teaching might leave out the very students who would benefit most from more adaptable and flexible ways of learning.

3.2.5 Institutional and Policy Barrier

Aside from individual access, institutional structures and policy frameworks don't always make it easy for everyone to use new teaching methods. Many college and university systems still use rigid courses, old-fashioned tests, and learning styles that are focused on exams, which don't work well with student-centered and technology-mediated approaches (Zhou et al., 2021). Training for faculty isn't always consistent, and it's often only about how to use tools technically instead of how to teach in a way that includes everyone. If an institution has a small budget, it may put infrastructure for elite or urban campuses at the top of the list, leaving rural and under-represented institutions even further behind.

At the policy level, national quality assurance frameworks often don't have ways to check whether new ideas are fair and include everyone. People often think of digital adoption as "innovation," but they don't think about whether these actions close opportunity gaps.

Without accountability that is based on fairness, structural reforms run the risk of giving more weight to innovation for excellence and not enough to innovation for inclusion.

3.2.6 Towards Inclusive Frameworks: The Role of UDL

To get around these built-in problems, equity frameworks like UDL and inclusive design need to be built into new ways of teaching. UDL gives teachers a way to make flexible lessons that take into account the different types of students they have instead of treating them as an exception. For instance, flipped classrooms can include captioned videos, materials in multiple languages, and transcripts to help students who speak a language other than English and students with disabilities. Gamification strategies can be changed to put more emphasis on working together than competing, making sure that people of all genders and cultures can participate. To help students from different backgrounds, blended learning platforms can offer low-bandwidth options, resources that can be downloaded, and ways to participate at different times. An inclusive design approach goes beyond the classroom and includes planning for the whole system. Fair investments must be made in ICT infrastructure by institutions, more professional development programs on inclusive pedagogy must be added, and policy incentives must be made that put both innovation and equity first. As part of the global call for "Education for All" and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), these changes are made to make sure that everyone has access to a good education.

3.3 Student Experiences and Hidden Inequities

Many people say that new ways of teaching and learning, such as flipped classrooms, blended learning, gamification, and collaborative learning models, get students more involved and help them do better in school. If we look more closely at how these new ideas affect students, we see that they can have bad effects that are harder to see. Stress, not wanting to try new things, worrying about tests, and unequal group work are some of the problems that non-traditional learners, like working students, first-generation learners, rural students, and women, face the most. These unfair situations show how important it is to have a deeper understanding of how new ideas affect different student situations.

3.3.1 Stress and Cognitive Overload

Many new ideas assume that students already know how to use technology well and can control themselves when they use it. Non-traditional learners, on the other hand, often have trouble managing their time, learning how to use technology, and juggling multiple responsibilities. This can turn helpful methods into sources of stress. For example, flipped classrooms need a lot of preparation time outside of class. As Hornbuckle et al. (2025) say, it can be hard for students who work or live in rural areas with limited access to technology to watch lectures or do online activities before class. In the same way, gamified environments can be fun for some people but can put too much pressure on students who aren't used to competing and make them think too much. This kind of stress not only makes people less motivated, but it may also make the performance gap bigger between students with more resources and those who are struggling because of their finances.

3.3.2 Resistance and Adaptation Challenges

One theme that comes up a lot in the research is how students don't like new ways of teaching. This resistance is usually not because students don't want to learn, but because new ideas don't fit with what they already know how to learn. People who are used to passive, lecture-based teaching may think that active learning methods are hard to understand, take too much time, or aren't needed. Shalgimbekova et al. (2024) say that the move towards self-directed or collaborative learning can be especially scary for first-generation students, who often don't have role models who have been to college. This means that resistance points to a problem with adaptation, one that affects disadvantaged students more than others because they have to deal with new teaching methods and systemic barriers to getting into college.

3.3.3 Assessment Anxieties

In addition to active learning, new ways of grading, like reflective journals, peer evaluations, or project-based grading, are often used. These methods are meant to get students to use their higher-order thinking skills, but they can cause stress and doubt, especially in students who don't have a lot of academic capital. First-generation students may have trouble with unstructured assessment formats because they aren't used to them, and students from rural areas who haven't had as much schooling may find them scary. When grades directly affect a person's ability to get a job, these worries get worse, which is why students still prefer traditional exams even though they have some problems (Baig, 202). If they aren't carefully built upon, new assessment methods could make inequality worse instead of better.

3.3.4 Group Work Inequalities

Inequalities also show up in group work, which is often an important part of student-centered learning. Collaboration is supposed to help people learn from each other and get along with others, but students often say that more confident peers dominate, free-ride, or don't let others participate as much as they do. For students who are already on the outside, like women working in fields dominated by men or students from rural areas trying to find their way around urban schools, group dynamics can make exclusion worse and reinforce social hierarchies. According to Fayombo (2012), some students thought that working in groups was bad for their intelligence because it caused them stress and made them feel like they weren't contributing fairly. Working students who don't have a lot of time find it harder to coordinate groups, which can put them in roles that don't help them learn.

Innovative teaching methods have hidden unfairness that hurts non-traditional students more than others. This makes problems that are harder to solve and goes against the goals of excellence and engagement. Students who are working often feel even more stressed because they have to balance their work responsibilities with the time-consuming needs of flipped and blended learning models.

First-generation learners who aren't used to self-regulated or non-traditional assessments are more likely to resist learner-centred approaches and feel more anxious when they have to use them. Students in rural areas, on the other hand, have trouble with infrastructure like unreliable internet access and cultural barriers that make it hard for them to fully participate in classrooms that use technology. Women also face barriers to digital access because of their

gender, and they are more likely to be left out in competitive or group settings where social hierarchies still exist. All of these problems could make innovation an exclusive activity that benefits students with more social and economic capital while hurting groups that are already on the outside.

4.0 Way Forward

Higher education in India is changing because more and more governing and ranking bodies are making sure that institutions work in a way that is flexible, good, and fair. This fits with the goals of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The University Grants Commission's (UGC) Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) is at the centre of this change. It opened in 2021 and gives students a digital place to store their credits. The ABC makes sure that learning paths are flexible by letting students transfer credits and giving them more than one way to start or end a course. It also meets the need for personalised learning and learning throughout life (UGC, 2021). The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) from the Ministry of Education is also very important. It was put in place in 2015 and has made schools more competitive and responsible. NIRF ranks universities based on how well they teach, do research, and help students learn (MoE, 2015), which pushes them to get better. Finally, SWAYAM was made by the government in 2017 to make things more fair. SWAYAM is a large MOOC platform that offers free, high-quality courses from top universities. This makes it easier for people who can't go to school or don't have enough money to learn (MoE, 2017). These projects together show a way to make higher education more open to new ideas and fair that can be used throughout the whole system. But they need to be well used at the local level for them to work in the long run. This means improving ICT infrastructure, making sure teachers are ready, and encouraging inclusive design in the classroom. To make sure that all students get good results, it is important to train teachers in digital and learner-centred methods and use frameworks like Universal Design for Learning (UDL). This will also help with making sure that flexibility, quality, and fairness are taken into account. So, in the future, reforms must include these programs in a complete ecosystem that puts innovation by design and equity in practice first. This will allow Indian higher education to set the standard for inclusive transformation around the world.

5.0 Conclusion

New teaching methods like flipped classrooms, active learning, and game-based learning can make college students much more interested and help them develop important skills, but they are still not fair to everyone. As part of NEP 2020, India is making changes like the Academic Bank of Credits, NIRF, and SWAYAM that will make things more flexible, better, and open to everyone. To really achieve excellence while being fair, schools need to build better infrastructure, train teachers better, and make designs that everyone can use.

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