

**INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION
TECHNOLOGY IN HIGHER EDUCATION –
HELP AND CHALLENGE**

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to highlight the role of ICT in higher education for the 21st century and its benefits and challenges. In particular the paper has argued that ICTs have impacted on educational practice in education to date in quite small ways but that the impact will grow considerably in years to come and that ICT will become a strong agent for change among many educational practices. It is evident from the study that use of ICT in education is increasing very rapidly in various states of India. One of the most common problems of using Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in education is to base choices on technological possibilities rather than educational needs. In developing countries where higher education is fraught with serious challenges at multiple levels, there is increasing pressure to ensure that technological possibilities are viewed in the context of educational needs. The use of ICT in education lends itself to more student-centred learning settings and often this creates some tensions for some teachers and students. But with the world moving rapidly into digital media and information, the role of ICT in education is becoming more and more important and this importance will continue to grow and develop in the 21st century. With these advantages also it has been observed that teachers are still hesitant in adapting technology for education as well as professional development.

KEYWORDS: ICT, Higher Education, Socio-Economic Development, teacher

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INTRODUCTION

Ensuring universal service and access to information and communication technology is a top national objective in many countries, often enshrined in laws that govern the sector. One of the distinctive features of human beings is their ability to acquire knowledge, and what makes this knowledge an ever-thriving entity is man's ability to 'impact' this knowledge to others. Transfer of knowledge, which is one of the foundations of learning, is among the most fundamental social achievements of human beings. Building strong relationships with students is something that frequently explains why faculty takes pleasure in the challenge of working at a small university. The concept of moving the traditional classroom of desks, notebooks, pencils, and blackboard to an online forum of computers, software, and the Internet intimidates many teachers who are accustomed to the face-to-face interaction of the traditional classroom. In the past 10 years, online instruction has become extremely popular as is evident in the rise of online universities, such as University of Phoenix Online and Athabasca University (Canada), and on-campus universities offering online courses and degrees, such as Harvard University and University of Toronto. For many students who find it difficult to come to campus due to employment, family responsibilities, health issues, and other time constraints, online education is the only option. Advancements, standards, specifications and subsequent adoptions have led to major growth in the extensibility, interoperability and scalability of e-learning technologies. E-learning is fast becoming a major form of learning.

Computer multimedia offers ideal opportunities for creating and presenting visually enriched learning environments. The latest technologies associated with virtual reality will also play an important role in not too distant future.

ICT AND HIGHER EDUCATION

The major teaching and learning challenges facing higher education revolve around student diversity, which includes, amongst others, diversity in students' academic preparedness, language and schooling background.

Education is perhaps the most strategic area of intervention for the empowerment of girls and women in any society and the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) as an educational tool in the promotion of women's advancement has immense potential. The application of ICTs as a tool for effective enhancement of learning, teaching and education

management covers the entire spectrum of education from early childhood development, primary, secondary, tertiary, basic education and further education and training.

Integrating ICT in teaching and learning is high on the educational reform agenda. Often ICT is seen as indispensable tool to fully participate in the knowledge society. ICTs need to be seen as “an essential aspect of teaching’s cultural toolkit in the twenty-first century, affording new and transformative models of development that extend the nature and reach of teacher learning wherever it takes place” (Leach, 2005). For developing countries like Vietnam, ICT can moreover be seen as a way to merge into a globalizing world. It is assumed that ICT brings revolutionary change in teaching methodologies. The innovation lies not per se in the introduction and use of ICT, but in its role as a contributor towards a student-centered form of teaching and learning.

The Information and Communication Technology (ICT) curriculum provides a broad perspective on the nature of technology, how to use and apply a variety of technologies, and the impact of ICT on self and society. Technology is about the ways things are done; the processes, tools and techniques that alter human activity. ICT is about the new ways in which people can communicate, inquire, make decisions and solve problems. It is the processes, tools and techniques for:

1. gathering and identifying information
2. classifying and organizing
3. summarizing and synthesizing
4. analyzing and evaluating
5. speculating and predicting

Enhancing and upgrading the quality of education and instruction is a vital concern, predominantly at the time of the spreading out and development of education. ICTs can improve the quality of education in a number of ways: By augmenting student enthusiasm and commitment, by making possible the acquirement of fundamental skills and by improving teacher training. ICTs are also tools which enable and bring about transformation which, when used properly, can encourage the shift an environment which is learner- centered.

Today ICTs – including laptops wirelessly connected to the Internet, personal digital assistants, low cost video cameras, and cell phones have become affordable, accessible and integrated in large sections of the society throughout the world. It can restructure organizations, promote

collaboration, increase democratic participation of citizens, improve the transparency and responsiveness of governmental agencies, make education and health care more widely available, foster cultural creativity, and enhance the development in social integration. It is only through education and the integration of ICT in education that one teaches students to be participants in the growth process in this era of rapid change. ICT also allows for the creation of digital resources like digital libraries where students, teachers and professionals can access research material and course material from any place at any time (Bhattacharya and Sharma, 2007). Such facilities allow the networking of academics and researchers and hence sharing of scholarly material. This avoids duplication of work. In view of ICT, education can be classified in three main categories:

- E-learning
- Blended Learning, and
- Distance Learning

E-Learning or Electronic learning is a general term used to refer to computer-enhanced learning. It is commonly associated with the field of advanced learning technology (ALT), which deals with both the technologies and associated methodologies in learning using networked and/or multimedia technologies. It is also known as online learning. Distance education provided the base for e-learning's development. E-learning can be 'on demand'. It overcomes timing, attendance and travel difficulties. E-learning allows delivery, dialogue and feedback over the internet. It allows mass customization in terms of content and exams. E-education can provide access to the best gurus and the best practices or knowledge available (UNESCO, 2002). It is possible to leverage the online environment to facilitate teaching techniques like role-play across time and distance. It can also facilitate the development of scenarios, which can be rarely witnessed in practice. ICT can play a valuable role to monitor and log the progress of the students across time, place and varied activities.

E-learning allows higher participation and greater interaction. It challenges the concept that face-to-face traditional education is superior to it (Bhattacharya and Sharma, 2007). The web and the internet is the core ICTs to spread education through e-learning. The components include e-portfolios, cyber infrastructures, digital libraries and online learning object repositories. All the

above components create a digital identity of the student and connect all the stakeholders in the education.

E-learning has the following advantages:

- Eliminating time and geographical barriers in education for learners as well as teachers.
- Enhanced group collaboration made possible via ICT.
- New educational approaches can be used.
- It can provide speedy dissemination of education to target disadvantaged groups.
- It offers the combination of education while balancing family and work life.
- It enhances the international dimension of educational services.

Blended Learning is the combination of multiple approaches to learning. It is usually used to define a situation where different delivery methods are combined together to deliver a particular course. These methods may include a mixture of face-to-face learning, self-paced learning and online classrooms.

Face to face Learning refers to learning that occurs in a traditional classroom setting where a faculty member delivers instruction to a group of learners. This could include lectures, workshops, presentation, tutoring, conference and much more.

Self paced Learning provides the flexibility to learn according to the availability of learners' own time and pace, it occurs in a variety of ways such as : reading specific chapters from text book, studying course material presented through web-based or CD based course, attending pre-recorded classes or sessions, reading articles referred by faculty member, working on assignments & projects, and searching & browsing the internet.

Online Collaborative Learning involves interaction between learners and faculty members through the web; this interaction can occur in one of the following modes:

- Synchronous interaction.
- Asynchronous interaction.

Synchronous, means 'at the same time', it involves interacting with a faculty member and other learners via the web in real time using technologies such as virtual classrooms and / or chat rooms. On the other hand, Asynchronous means 'not at the same time'; it enables learners to

interact with their colleagues and faculty member at their own convenience, such as interacting through email.

Distance Learning

It is a type of education, where students work on their own at home or at the office and communicate with faculty and other students via e-mail, electronic forums, videoconferencing, chat rooms, instant messaging and other forms of computer-based communication. It is also known as open learning. Most distance learning programs include a computer based training (CBT) system and communications tools to produce a virtual classroom. Because the Internet and World Wide Web are accessible from virtually all computer platforms, they serve as the foundation for many distance learning systems.

ICTs also allow for the creation of digital resources like digital libraries where the students, teachers and professionals can access research material and course material from any place at any time. Such facilities allow the networking of academics and researchers and hence sharing of scholarly material and leads to quality enhancement in teaching and learning.

Benefits of ICT in education to the main stakeholders

Stakeholder	Benefits
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased access, • Flexibility of content and delivery, • Combination of work and education, • Learner-centred approach, • Higher-quality of education and new-ways of interaction. • High quality, cost effective professional development in the workplace, • Upgrading of employee skills, increased productivity, • Developing of a new learning culture,
Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing of costs and of training time with the employees, • Increased portability of training.

Stakeholder**Benefits**

Governments

- Increase the capacity and cost effectiveness of education and training systems,
- To reach target groups with limited access to conventional education and training,
- To support and enhance the quality and relevance of existing educational structures,
- To ensure the connection of educational institutions and curricula to the emerging networks and information resources,
- To promote innovation and opportunities for lifelong learning.

Source: UNESCO, 2002

Tools are now available on the Internet to assist both teachers and students to manage writing assignments to detect and avoid the pitfalls of plagiarism and copyright violations. One of the great benefits of ICTs in teaching is that they can improve the quality and the quantity of educational provision. For this to happen however, they must be used appropriately.

While using ICTs in teaching has some obvious benefits, ICTs also bring challenges. First is the high cost of acquiring, installing, operating, maintaining and replacing ICTs. While potentially of great importance, the integration of ICTs into teaching is still in its infancy. Introducing ICT systems for teaching in developing countries has a particularly high opportunity cost because installing them is usually more expensive in absolute terms than in industrialized countries whereas, in contrast, alternative investments (e.g., buildings) are relatively less costly.

Using unlicensed software can be very problematic, not only legally but in the costs of maintenance, particularly if the pirated software varies in standard formats. Even though students can benefit immensely from well-produced learning resources, online teaching has its own unique challenges as not all faculties are ICT literate and can teach using ICT tools.

The four most common mistakes in introducing ICTs into teaching are: i) installing learning technology without reviewing student needs and content availability; (ii) imposing technological systems from the top down without involving faculty and students; (iii) using inappropriate content from other regions of the world without customizing it appropriately; and (iv) producing low quality content that has poor instructional design and is not adapted to the technology in use.

Although ICT offers a whole lot of benefits there are some risks of using ICT in education which have to be mitigated proper mechanisms. They are:

- It may create a digital divide within class as students who are more familiar with ICT will reap more benefits and learn faster than those who are not as technology savvy.
- It may shift the attention from the primary goal of the learning process to developing ICT skills, which is the secondary goal.
- It can affect the bonding process between the teacher and the student as ICT becomes a communication tool rather than face to face conversation and thus the transactional distance is increased.
- Also since not all teachers are experts with ICT they may be lax in updating the course content online which can slow down the learning among students.
- The potential of plagiarism is high as student can copy information rather than learning and developing their own skills.
- There is a need for training all stakeholders in ICT.
- The cost of hardware and software can be very high.

The other challenge faced is that in many developing nations the basic requirement of electricity and telephone networks is not available. Also many colleges do not have proper rooms or buildings so as to accommodate the technology. Another challenge is that the teachers need to develop their own capacity so as to efficiently make use of the different ICTs in different situations. They should not be scared that ICTs would replace teachers English being the dominant language most of the online content is in English. This causes problems as in many nations the people are not conversant or comfortable with English.

Skills development is another important area in which ICT could be used effectively. Attempts are being made to strengthen the ICT framework for Technical and Vocational Education (TVET). The emerging discourse on the role of skill development in addressing poverty and developmental issues indicates the potential role of ICT4D. ICT can play a major role in integrating skill development as a component of a poverty alleviation strategy.

Teachers' and Administrators' Hesitation to adapt technology for Higher Education

The Hospitals, Industries, Offices and many other areas are being upgraded continuously as per the technological changes. But educational system in many countries hasn't undergone significant changes yet. Once upon a time, we had a classroom with rows of students, black board, text books and a teacher. Many schools and districts are still continuing the same old traditional methods. This results in student dropouts, lack of communication, creativity and problem solving skills. Technology helps students learn in their comfortable learning style, reduces teachers' efforts and provides them sufficient time and tools to work on what really matters. There is a necessity to rephrase our educational model by combining the traditional approaches with technology. Technology alone can't help institutions drive student achievement unless it is in the hands of a powerful teacher. A powerful teacher is the one who has great expertise and experience in assessing students' performance and at the same time he should be capable of using the 21st century technology effectively to engage students of today.

Major factors that restrict administrators to integrate technology in their educational institutions are especially budgetary problems, lack of vision, lack of leaders, hesitant teachers, etc. But many educational institutes have teachers who are hesitant and resistant to adopt new technologies. They are mostly well qualified and efficient teachers so administrators can't dare to replace such experienced faculties with new ones. Replacing such teachers may not always be beneficial, so gradually administrators need to make them use technology as it plays an essential role in both educators' and students' performance. Let's learn about how can we make hesitant teachers use technology.

Make them know why it is necessary:

Traditional methods are no longer effective as different students learn differently at a different pace. So what administrators need to do is to create awareness for educators on how important technology is in education right now. If you show them some real-life examples of how students get the benefit of technology, how it reduces their efforts and how effectively it engages students with lessons. They'll gradually know the benefits and once they consider it useful, administrators are free to implement educational technologies in the classroom.

Ask them where they get stuck:

Some teachers don't adopt technology because they don't like it, some don't go for it because they feel difficulty in using it while many others resist it, thinking that they're comfortable with traditional methods. The way administrators approach these teachers should be different for different categories of them.

For Teachers who don't like technology:

These teachers believe that technology spoils students and make them addicted to it. What educators need to know is that for the students, it is simply a part of their life and daily routine (specially for anyone under the age of 30), technology gives solutions to many of their problems and there are many useful, safe and secured technological approaches we can use in the classroom.

For Teachers who feel difficulty in using technology:

What administrators need to do for these teachers is to provide them with sufficient time as well as proper training. To add on to the top of that, technology itself helps these educators learn about its usage. There are numerous edtech startups working hard to help educators and students be aware of technologies in education.

For Teachers who feel they're comfortable with traditional methods:

As we know traditional classroom methods can't engage 21st century students with their studies, there is a must need of implementing educational technologies with a set vision and purpose. Teachers who feel comfortable with traditional methods need to be aware that they can perform even better by using technology. Their existing practices can be enhanced further if they are willing to be learners, which is one of the important skills for 21st century teachers. An experienced teacher can be good at traditional classroom methods, and but he can be great if he adopts 21st century technologies.

Select easy-to-use technologies instead of complex software and hardware:

Most of the teachers haven't used today's technologies in their studies, so, probably it's difficult for them to adopt them and they take time to perfect themselves in using such technologies. Administrators need to help educators by choosing easy-to-use software and hardware in the classroom.

Invest in teachers' professional development:

Rather than just spending money on training programs for the technology usage, invest in teachers' professional development programs and provide them with numerous opportunities to enhance their abilities. They'll automatically know how important technology is in the 21st century. Professional development programs include various technological approaches and collaboration among many educators. This helps educators to explore and exchange new effective ideas of edtech implementations.

Above are the few methods administrators can adopt to make hesitant teachers use technology. Modern education is now trending and educational technologies are a great option to enhance student learning so, educators need to realize the necessity of upgrading our old traditional education system with effective use of technology, like many other fields which do it. We'd like to know few more ways to make hesitant teachers use technology in their classroom. Please feel free to share with us in the comment box.

Conclusion

The increasing use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has brought changes to teaching and learning at all levels of higher education systems (HES) leading to quality enhancements. Traditional forms of teaching and learning are increasingly being converted to online and virtual environments. There are endless possibilities with the integration of ICT in the education system. The use of ICT in education not only improves classroom teaching learning process, but also provides the facility of e-learning. ICT has enhanced distance learning. The teaching community is able to reach remote areas and learners are able to access qualitative learning environment from anywhere and at anytime. It is important that teachers or trainers should be made to adopt technology in their teaching styles to provide pedagogical and educational gains to the learners. Successful implementation of ICT to lead change is more about influencing and empowering teachers and supporting them in their engagement with students in learning rather than acquiring computer skills and obtaining software and equipment. ICT enabled education will ultimately lead to the democratization of education.

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Bhatter College Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies, (ISSN 2249-3301), Vol. II, 2012. Ed. Pabitra Kumar Mishra. Available online at: <http://bcjms.bhattercollege.ac.in>, published by Bhatter College, Dantan, Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal, India. www.bhattercollege.ac.in. © Bhatter College, Dantan

