RELEVANCE OF ICTs FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION IN INDIAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

In the 21st century emerging technologies are sprinkling at extraordinary speed, and these innovations have turned this world into a global village. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can be utilized for the education sector. Education includes online, distance and part-time courses. There are unlimited applications of ICT in the real world. There is an emerging broad consensus around the world about the benefits that can be brought to the educational system through the appropriate use of evolving information and communication technologies. The range of possible benefits pervaded practically all areas of activity in which knowledge and communication play a vital role. It is involved from improved teaching, and learning processes to better student outcome increased student engagement and seamless communication with teachers and parents. Today there is a significant gap between knowledge and skills students learn in school and the knowledge and skills that workers need in workplaces and communities. In the field of education distance learning is a growing trend where there is the distance between teacher and student bridged with media, and in this age of science, innovative technologies are the best media to cover this gap. Employers report that they need those candidates who are professional, having good moral and work ethics, can collaboratively work in a team, have critical thinking and problem-solving ability, can lead a group of people and are skilled in verbal and written communication. In this paper, an attempt has been made to study the relevance of ICT and Distance education in the Indian context.

Keywords: *ICT, Distance education, Education Technology*

Introduction

ICTs stands for information and communication technologies and are defined, for this primer, as a "diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store, and manage information."(Victoria, 2000) Actually, Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) is an umbrella term that includes any communication deceive or application, encompassing: radio, television, cellular phones, computers, and network hardware and software, satellite systems and so on, as the various services and applications associated with them, such as video conferencing and distance learning. When such technologies are used for educational purpose, to support and improve the learning of students and to develop learning environment. ICTs can be considered as a subfield of Educational technology (Kumar, 2008). Since ICT is used for communication and for the creation, dissemination, storage, and management of information, both of which are central to education, ICT is making a huge impact on education (Blurton, 1999). It supports synchronous and asynchronous communication and thus, a range of educational applications such as video broadcast, video conferencing, audio conferencing, computer conferencing, text chat, audio graphics, discussion boards and email. In the case of distance education, ICT enables teaching, learning and administration of courses. It enables distance learners to participate in class in real time, accesses remote information, and interact with their instructor and peers at their own time, place and pace.

Education is the basic need of every human being and today's technology has a big part in every sphere of life. In fact, Education is the most important investment by countries, societies, families, and individuals for the future. A communication network has become an essential tool in today's educational environment than ever before (Singh, 2012). Today's society is said to have entered into the age of a new social revolution, i.e. 'information revolution.' the 21st century has witnessed the explosion of information technologies. By digital revolution, technologies in computers, audio-visual devices, and communications are integrated into a powerful technology-information technology. The global era is characterized by rapid advances in technology and expansion of knowledge. Technology is nothing but a tool used in implementing our ideas and methodology in education (Coble, 1996). ICTs are a potentially powerful tool for extending educational opportunities, both formal and non-formal, to previously underserved constituencies—scattered and rural populations, groups traditionally excluded from education due to cultural or social reasons such as ethnic minorities, girls and women, persons with disabilities, and the elderly, as well as all others who for reasons of cost or because of time constraints are unable to enrol on campus. The application of new technologies in the distance education context provides an appropriate starting point for delineating the knowledge base required of expert teachers in today's global society (Rahman, 2014). Teaching the distance learners requires different skills to prepare relevant learning materials to facilitate the construction of knowledge and learning.

The effective integration of ICT into the educational system is a complex, multifaceted process that involves not just technology- indeed given enough initial capital, getting the technology is the easiest part- but also curriculum and pedagogy, institutional readiness, teacher competencies and long-term financing, among others. Every country as they search for ways of using modern technology for educational purposes and development (Soh 2001). Open and distance education providers in both developed and developing countries, have been quick to realize the potential applications of the new information and communication technology. It is well documented in the published literature and on Internet sites that on a worldwide basis the ICT an increasingly important role in education and training. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that the use of ICT can improve the quality of the student learning experiences and make education and training opportunities available to a broader spectrum of the population in developing countries (Gupta 2017). At present educators are excited by the success of information technologies and want to implant them into instruction. They extol information technologies as the solution to break the barriers of time and space and fulfill the dream of life long education. In today's competitive world, the success of the distance education system depends upon innovations, which would increase the efficiency and quality of the system. (Noreen, 2012). Technology-based distance education is termed as the delivery of courses/programmes through different means of technology. In distance education, technology is used to communicate with the learner instead of depending mainly on the teacher lecturing. Every means of technology that is used in distance education will work towards effective communication of information. Technology-based distance education will yield more benefits to the learner who can access it at their own pace, time and geographical location (Kalsoom, 2012).

Benefits of ICT in Distance Education

Use of ICT in education presents a unique opportunity to solve a multitude of challenges quickly as well as at low rate. Here is an overview of advantages of ICT in Distance Education.

Improve Quality of Education

ICTs Support collaboration among students, teachers, and institutions.it provides us reliable grading system to measure and assign a rank to Students, Teachers, Schools and Universities. ICTs helps in all-round development of students and promote educational ideas.it helps us in Continuous improvement by feedback.

Improve Accessibility

We can accesses anytime from anywhere to everyone. ICTs help us in bring the books & another resource within reach of students and teachers. Beside this, it helps us to promote education in rural areas and provide online courses to students. With the help of ICTs 24×7 schooling system has been developed for those students who cannot attend regular schools during the daytime.

Reduce the cost of education

ICTs provide services at lower cost through online solutions. It promotes self -learning and community learning via the online system, etc. ICTs assist teachers, examiners, and administrators for conducting the exam and offer courses material. It opens the doors for girls to get an education from home e.g. online learning if social & cultural reasons are preventing them. ICT promote vocational courses as well as self-paced learning for the adults. ICT bring culturally diverse India on a common learning platform which is offered in all languages.

In a developing country like India, universities are increasing ICTs based learning programs to satisfy the needs of the students searching for online courses. This is expected to receive a boost from government Digital India initiative. The existing educational infrastructure is inadequate to meet the current needs of the country (UNESCO). The Digital India initiative has increased ICT access that will help to give quality education to a large population. India's ICTs sector is expected to grow twice as fast as the global average. Although ICTs based learning is considered an essential method in higher education, its implementation in universities is one of the important dimensions of university policies (Rahman, 2014). It is important to make students aware of the importance and utility of ICTs so that their performance in learning will improve and while using ICTs they feel comfortable.

The National Policy on Education 1986, as modified in 1992, stressed the need to employ Educational technology to improve the quality of education. The policy statement led to two major centrally sponsored schemes, namely, "Educational Technology" (ET) and "Computer Literacy and Studies in Schools" (CLASS) paving the way for a more comprehensive centrally sponsored scheme – "Information and Communication Technology @ Schools" in 2004. Educational technology also found a significant place in another scheme on up gradation of science education. The significant role of ICT in school education has also been highlighted in the National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF) 2005. Use of ICT for quality improvement also figures in Government of India's flagship programme on education, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). Again, ICT has figured.

Comprehensively in the norm of schooling recommended by the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), in its report on Universal Secondary Education, in 2005.

The use of technology in education is a necessity as a result of technological evolution. Various international organizations like UNESCO, International council for Open education and Common wealth of learning advocates for the implementation of ICT in distance learning. UNESCO in its one of the publications titled "Information and Communication Technologies in Distance Education (2002)"

advocates that the distance education cannot survive without ICTs. Similarly, in Indian context National Mission in Education through ICT was launched by MHRD in the year 2000 for the promotion of ICT in education.

Conclusion

Education is the elementary right of a human being for the development of a person both professionally and personally. With the emergence of technology especially in the field of open and distance education has opened a new horizon for distance learners. Application of technology in education is not the ultimate goal; instead, we should use it to pursue quality. Information and communication technologies (ICT) are potentially powerful enabling tools for educational change and reform. ICT has bridged the gaps between the teacher and pupil. Rapid advances in information and communication technology pose new opportunities as well as challenges for every society. In the educational sector, ICT has enormous potential to help the issues of access to learning, quality of the teaching-learning process and management of education systems.

ICTs made it possible to have learning materials 24×7 available, from which a candidate can avail and explore the knowledge anytime and anywhere. Nowadays learning methods have been changed due to the prevailing systems of ICT. Candidates can access from anywhere anytime from any technological innovation to learn. Besides that self- pace learning is also an important advantage of ICTs. The pressure which was suppressing the candidates in conventional methods was also reduced by the help of ICTs. Frequent interaction, easy accessibility, low cost, Ensure data compatibility, and Support services are the other services which are served by the ICT to flourish. To ensure the quality of education, the distance education institutions must be careful about the use of proper technologies and media. We have to think the uses of media and technology regarding appropriateness and acceptability in the society as well as on the ability of the institution offering the program. The socio-economic and cultural background of a person influences their ability to learn from different media technology. An effective combination of media and technology is necessary for assuring the effectiveness of the open and distance learning system.

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