

Challenges for Teachers in the Era of E-learning in India

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©Scholedge International Journal of Multidisciplinary & Allied Studies (2394-336X), Vol.03, Issue 02 (2016) pg14-18.
Published by: Scholedge R&D Center [www.theSCHOLEDGE.org] [Email: sijmas@scholedge.org]

Abstract

Technology driven world has touched almost all the fields and all the aspects of life. There has been a technological transformation in the field of education as well. E-learning has become a crucial aspect of the educational system. It is gaining momentum day by day. In such a technology-driven scenario, it has become a challenge for the teachers to accommodate e-learning in their teaching-learning processes. To keep up with the demands of information explosion, information and communication technology has become crucial issue of academia. It is high time to equip teachers with advanced ICT and train them to avail maximum benefit from it. ICT is integral part of our day to day life but it is still in process to get a better place in schools as a generation of teachers is not well acquainted with it but they are willing to adapt it.

The paper aims to describe the role of a teacher and significance of e-learning in the present context. It emphasizes on the challenges faced by teachers in India to implement e-learning and makes an attempt to suggest varied solutions to the awareness, implementation and comfortability with regard to the e-learning solutions by the teachers in their teaching-learning processes.

Keywords: E-learning, Information and Communication Technology

Introduction

Education has undergone a transformation in the era of Information and Communication Technology. The information bloom and the subsequent knowledge explosion have led to tremendous changes in the life of the individuals today and its effect is also witnessed in the field of education. With global connectivity facilitated by ICT, searching for any information today has become a child's play. In this digital era, the coming generations are quite adept at handling, managing and working with technology. Even the younger kids and toddlers, probably by way of their genetic inheritance are able to operate the smartphones and other modern gadgets. Thus, these gadgets have been embedded with the daily routine of the modern lives.

Due to this transformation, there is a contention among some intellectuals that whether teachers can replace the computers. Nevertheless, proponents of the teachers' importance are considerably high than the proponents of the technology in itself. This is agreed to a large extent that teachers can supplement their teaching methodologies with the use of Information and Communication Technology. The role of the teacher in the entire teaching-learning process cannot be undermined. The crucial role played by teachers has time and again been emphasized by various commissions and committees. Very popular remark by Kothari Commission in India was made way back in 1964 stating that 'no people can rise above the level of its teachers'.

The answer to the question of teacher substituting classrooms was given by Kothari in 1988, "The "message" of the teacher to the students is not merely to impart knowledge content of books which is largely information fast getting out of date but more than that it should be inspiration, by his/her example, towards the process of character building and the use of knowledge for welfare of the community. The total message to the students, and to the community, is the total life of the teacher." Thus, a teacher plays a much more crucial role rather than just imparting the knowledge content of the curricula.

The older generation of teachers are still a part of the present education system that needs sufficient orientation and adaptation to meet the ICT demands of the complex day to day life today. With the technological changes, teacher is adapting to the needs of technological world.

Significance of E-learning

E-learning is a combination of contents and instructional methods delivered by media elements such as words or graphics on computer intended to build knowledge and skills linked to individual learning goals and organizational performance. Technology has the ability to transform education. Since today's generation is so tech-savvy, students get engaged with what they are doing to improve learning outcomes with technology. Besides this, it provides digital literacy to the learner which is very essential to survive in the competitive world. It also broadens the horizons of many learners by making them connect to the entire world with e-learning. It also contributes to collaborative learning. It makes learning accessible easily. Research evidence indicates that proper implementation of e-learning in education improves the efficiency of the educational processes. ICT can also be used to promote group problem solving activities and articulated projects. Therefore ICT improves learning outcomes.

Moreover e-learning caters to the modern age technological demands of the young generation. Since the young learners are so adept with using technology via various mediums, it facilitates their learning and makes learning an interesting and practical exercise connected to their modern age life-styles. E-learning also facilitates information and knowledge by way of global connectivity. It can be used as an effective resource for implementing constructivist pedagogy among the learners. In other words it is in the lines of constructivism as proposed by National Curriculum Framework in 2005 by NCERT, India. E-learning makes the learners learn 'how to learn' rather than 'what to learn'. If the learners are taught 'how to learn' and they are engaged in the learning processes, learning would become an interesting exercise for them and they would themselves develop capability to become lifelong learners.

Role of teachers in technological world

In the present scenario, there is very easy access to information with technology. The teacher here takes on the role of facilitator and guide so as to facilitate students with the right approach of managing abundant information to their optimum benefit and in taking right decisions in this technologically complex world. In the tech-savvy society, teachers' role becomes very essential as they make students learn how to evaluate the abundant information available critically, to identify facts from propaganda, to understand the real ethical, legal and moral issues with respect to the access and use of information, to create meaning from data. All these questions view education in the larger context of today's society and thus, it makes students capable of solving the real world current problems and prepare for a future of unknowns.

It is more vital to enable students know how to learn than what to learn. Teacher in this e-learning era takes an entirely different role as of a facilitator and a guide facilitating them to choose between right and wrong information, to enable them choose the best and the most appropriate content amongst the abundant information available with technology.

“With the onset and proliferation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), there is a growing demand that it be included in school education. It has become more of a fashion statement to have computers or multimedia in schools, the result being that in spite of its potential to make learning liberating, its implementation is often not more than cosmetic. It is also often touted as a panacea for shortage of teachers. These are detrimental to the learning of the child. Teacher education needs to orient and sensitize the teacher to distinguish between critically useful, developmentally appropriate and the detrimental use of ICT. In a way, ICT can be imaginatively drawn upon for professional development and academic support of the pre-service and in-service teachers.” (National Curriculum Framework on Teacher Education,2010). Thus teachers need to build the critical thinking ability of the learners in the choice of information available by electronic medium so

that they can discriminate between right and wrong. They need to develop their decision making ability and ability to think rationally as well.

As learning becomes more personalized, onus lies on teachers for orchestrating the mastery of 21st century skills in which students need to be successful. In the changed phenomenon of ICT, teachers would be required to guide learners to apply these critical skills through maintaining reflective journals, portfolio development, etc. "There is an urgent need to develop and deploy a large variety of applications, software tools, media and interactive devices in order to promote creative, aesthetic, analytical and problem solving abilities and sensitivities in students and teachers". (National Policy on ICT in School Education, 2012).

Teachers may need to rethink their basic tenets of education, redesign the methodology used in the teaching-learning processes in a creative way with the use of technology. Use of e-learning instils confidence among learners and teachers and also it empowers them to learn in an efficient and effective manner.

Challenges faced by teachers in handling ICT

Most of the teachers still are digital migrants, that are born after 19th century whereas the young learners are the digital natives who are born after 19th century when the technological revolution came. That is why, using technology comes so naturally and easily to them.

There are numerous challenges faced by teachers in using ICT. Society demands a higher level and different set of skills than schools were ever designed to teach. ICT brings with it various challenges that teachers need to face. First of all, there is need for adequate availability of technology in the schools which includes huge costs incurred on acquiring, installing, operating, maintaining and replacing ICT's. The basic infrastructural requirements suited for making adequate provision of ICT are required. Secondly, it is imperative to make all teachers ICT literate and effective in handling ICT tools for teaching-learning processes. 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 need not be apprehensive that ICTs would replace teachers. Another challenge faced by teachers is that English being the prominent language associated with modern technology. This causes problems as in many states people are not comfortable with English. The very electronic devices that have become an extension of our children are an enigma to many of us in the older generation. Technology has brought some sort of alleviation for the teachers from one another which we call as 'Digital Divide'. Teachers are not comfortable in handling these modern gadgets and technological devices. Rather than having students use computers, say, to better understand a math equation through a virtual hands-on activity, teachers may limit the use of that tool to word processing, in the similar manner as the typewriter was used a generation ago. The challenge for educators is not to dismiss or keep up with students' latest technological know-how, but to create meaningful learning experiences in which students are taught how to apply their knowledge to solve real-world problems.

In this scenario, teachers need to prepare students for a technology-driven world that is nothing like the place they graduated into. Students of the 21st century need a technology-based education to survive in a technological world for which the pre-service and in-service teachers need to overcome the technological challenges.

Suggestions

Since technology has become a part and parcel of lives of individuals, it becomes imperative for the teachers to be comfortable in its handling in education system as well. The teachers may utilise them in the instructional materials as per individual differences.

Teachers may begin using e-learning with the help of their colleagues collectively on a topic with mentoring and sharing experiences practices so that they remove their apprehensions in handling with it. Later they can extend this practice for small topics in their teaching-learning processes. Organizational and problem solving

skills can be developed through the use of technology and honed for use in the work world. Teachers may use internet resources to incorporate online tutorials for students who need extra help, and connect graphic calculators to TV monitors. Teachers may practice to become techno-friendly and be quite comfortable in using it. They should be able to use it as an enhanced instructional resource in the similar manner as a pencil or chalkboard did in past generations. For eg : - they might use short video clips to provide students with visuals to help clarify concepts and bring relevancy to a lesson, turn to Internet to teach students how to raise social consciousness for a particular cause and learn about personal responsibility by starting a blog. Video games, typically seen as distractions to academic study, also can be used effectively as a learning resource by the teachers. Video games in the classroom are an ambitious, interactive approach to education. They provide a way to incorporate 21st century skills and allow students to be active participants in the learning process.

Refresher programmes need to be organized from time to time so that they become comfortable with using technology. As per National Policy on ICT in School Education, teachers need to participate in selection and critical evaluation of digital content and resources. They need to be encouraged to develop their own digital resources, sharing them with colleagues through the digital repositories. All these technical resources can be used in the classrooms if the teachers are at ease with them. For this, it is required to provide sufficient orientation to the teachers for using them. After that, it is important to organize refresher courses from time to time in which greater emphasis is given on the hands on experience for the teachers.

Teachers should develop a positive attitude towards ICT and be interested themselves in its learning. They should not take it as a hindrance to their career rather thinks it as an innovative teaching resource in their classrooms.

The digital divide or the alienation that the older generation of teachers, sometimes feel need to be broken and it can be done by teachers themselves by having a positive approach towards the technological development. Also, teacher discussion forums could be created for discussing the kind of usage of ICT in their respective classes and learn from each other in the process. Mentoring may also be helpful in gaining digital skills. Teacher may form one of the teachers themselves as mentor who is proficient in computers or if that is not possible, mentor from outside school as expert in digital literacy may be appointed in schools who can provide regular guidance to the teachers for being ICT-friendly.

Programmes like International Pedagogical ICT Certification Training Programme by NIIT may be made mandatory for all the school teachers so they not only equip digital skills but also become proficient in its capable handling while transacting in their classrooms. They may themselves train themselves for computer programmes and make a habit of searching relevant information from internet and provide references of the sites so that students also feel better connected to them and the gap between student and teacher due to technology lessens.

Teachers may also use Learning Management System with MOODLE that is modular object oriented dynamic learning environment that would engage the learners with learning via e-learning. Workshops and training programmes focussing on MOODLE Learning Management System be provided to the teachers. Moodle Learning Management System can be incorporated in the teaching-learning process which is an effective strategy to impart meaningful and long-lasting learning in an interesting and enjoyable manner to the learners.

Teachers may be also trained to discriminate the authenticity of information available on the websites so that they can enable their learners as well to discriminate between reliable and unreliable information.

Teachers initially may begin with introducing blended learning in their classrooms, that is, a combination of both online and offline learning. This would help in removing their apprehensions towards using the modern technology gradually and would make them comfortable in the process. Completely online learning as compared to the blended learning needs infrastructural requirements, online access round the clock, expertise and comfortability of the individuals using it etc., that might take a long time for implementation in the Indian

context. Many researches have proved the successful implementation of the blended learning in India. Blended learning in the classrooms is a good alternative to facilitate e-learning.

Many popular thinkers have asserted that if learners do not understand the way you teach, make them understand the way they learn. Thus when the learning is provided to the tech-savvy learners by their own way, learning would become an interesting, engaging and fun-filled experience for them.

Conclusion

It is imperative to fill the void that is being created between teacher and the students considering the fact that technology cannot replace teachers and teachers' role still holds relevance, though the teachers' role needs a number of transitions with the advent of ICT. In ICT-enabled society, there is great onus on the teachers to facilitate and guide students to manage abundant information, to develop discriminatory power between right and wrong, to prepare them for the world of work and to make them capable so as to deal effectively with the real-life challenges.

All this can be done if teachers have the will power, determination and the positive approach towards becoming techno-friendly themselves first of all and then when they see that its implementation actually has made the learning process more interesting, varied, richer and also suitable to individual differences in the classroom, they will make this as their enhanced instructional material in their classroom. Thus, teachers need to be prepared themselves for the changing role that the technological development has brought. Fair use of ICT would lead to effective transition to the knowledge society in the globalized world and would also create better teaching and learning environment in society.

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