Digitalization of Education; a Positive Disruptor or a Panacea?

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Abstract: -

This paper argues that present ICT implementation in the educational field has to be analyzed in the right way. With all the potential and glamour attached to it, the way digitization treated is going to create unforeseen problems in future. As it stands now, implementation of ICT upsets and negates some of our long held views on education. Learning is fundamentally cognitive, interactive and organic in nature. Certainly, Information technology is a positive disruptor in every walk of modern life. As education is a major area of human endeavor, it cannot and need not keep away from such a generational shift. At the same time, it should not take away all the incremental wisdom we have gained till now. The educational personnel should attempt to design pedagogically sound and psychologically appropriate strategies of digital interventions in education. Its implementation should not negate synthetic and organic nature of learning and knowledge making. The tendency to look up on ICT as an all time solution to multitudes of issues in education will prove wrong. We should not lose sight of the legitimate but realistic potentials of digitization as well as its shortcomings.

Key words: -

Digitization of education, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), constructivism, cognitive psychology, behaviorism, screen time.

Introduction

Implementation of ICT is the major development happening in education sector in almost all state as well as central board in the country. CBSE, UGC, various central and state universities and state school education boards have taken many important steps in this direction. We are living in a time when there is not even a single area of human life the ripple effect of computer and internet has not affected. Moreover, digitization has almost become a synonym for modernization. It has immensely affected both the content and delivery of aspects of the human civilization. It has, in fact, revolutionized our civilizations as much as invention of vehicle shaped and reshaped human life. But it has not only upset the present system, but also enriched and diversified to a level which was unimaginable in the past. A vehicle is only a tool however

powerful it is. Similarly, computers should be seen just as a tool which can complement and supplement to human culture. The fundamental nature and the content of human interaction remain intact.

Present state of implementation

We have made big changes in the field of education in alliance to the developments in Information Technology. Recently Kerala state which is a pioneer in the field of education, has up graded as many as 45000 classrooms as smart classrooms by installing laptops, video projectors, sound systems and internet connectivity. For the coming years, the state is pursuing an ambitious plan of turning all of its classrooms to smart classrooms beginning from first standard to plus two. The IT cell of education department has developed an entirely dedicated website for e-content management and networking among teachers, students and parents. UGC has given a big push to IT by actively promoting MOOC platform by incentivizing the students and promoting the teachers to join the platform. All other state education boards also are in different stages of IT implementation.

Since this is a major shift in the field, a stock taking and an impartial appraisal seem necessary. Though such a major change has happened in educational scenario, a due consideration and serious deliberation on various aspects of its implementation has not yet taken place. It was rather a wholesome welcome to ICT into the classrooms. The reasons for such an unquestioned acceptance are manifold. Lack of proper understanding coupled with glorification and romanticizing are some of the reasons.

Society and education

Academic deliberation on what constitutes education and how knowledge is attained by individuals has been a matter of debate for a long time. There seems to be no consensus on this matter among the various schools of thoughts. Skinnerian behavioral pattern has been in practice but it is completely rejected by the humanistic psychologist who emerged in the last century. Of late, cognitive psychologists were able to give a convincing explanation on the act of learning. According to constructivists, education is individually created and socially mediated. It is fundamentally cognitive, interactive and organic in nature. It is responsive to the human as well as physical environment where the learner grows. The immediate society in all its complexities has an ecological relationship with the learner. Society feeds the organic growth of the individual. So it can be seen that there is a reciprocal and responsive relationship between the society and the education. The society designs the kind of education it needs for its individual members at the same individuals shapes and is shaped by the society.

Issues of present implementation

The kind of digitalization being proposed and practiced negates the very basic premises of education which we have been following. It seeks to take a shortcut to the complex learning processes under the

presumption that knowledge is all about imparting of neatly arranged, serialized and incrementally ordered modules of information. Apparently, it doesn't offer a chance to individuals for construction of knowledge with the help of a vibrant societal intervention. It doesn't even provide a chance to bring the previously held personal perceptions in contact with that of others.

 It also seeks to cater centrally designed and mechanically transmitted materials to the 'uniform' learners. Learner difference and learner preferences have been overlooked.

The present ICT model removes all the chances for meeting of various individuals among themselves and individuals with the society. Schools and other educational institutions become mere centers which just provide accommodation for education. Its synthetic affinity with the society has been reduced and they are seen as mere building clusters where individual learners gather and get education.

 Internet culture on the creativity of its users is another matter of concern. Top down reservoir model of knowledge delivery at the very outset cancel chances for emergence of a conducive environment for creative thoughts. Freedom and divergence are essential ingredients for creativity. A massive up gradation of educational set up to digital mode will seriously hinder the very life blood of creative environment in education.

Any tool is primarily understood to have made to serve the interests of its makers. It is clear that the digital tools have many covert and overt mechanisms inbuilt in it that fulfill the ulterior motives of its developers. Therefore, its sweeping implementation would jeopardize the political control on education. In case that happens, it will result in far reaching consequences.

IT undercuts the societal control on education. Education and nature of the society it provides have an umbilical relationship. The nature of power structure among various constituencies has a direct kinship with nature of education society provides to its citizens. Education has always been a thread of control on society in history. For this very reason, various power centers of different times have tried to take hold of this control. As it reveals itself, Information Technology and its allied technologies allow external control and operator maneuverings. Large scale inroad of ICT will take the entire learner society at doorsteps of corporate conglomerates. External control of the customers through internet has already proven dangerous in societies in front of our own eyes. As it stands now, whether serious thoughts have been given in these areas of danger is doubtful. The feeble criticism that one hears against ICT is technical and that too very limited in scope in the wider interest of the society.

Entertainment world that internet opens up in front of the learner community largely of teenage children is deceitful. Concern about increasing 'screen time' among the young internet users in the western countries has to be understood together with this. While limitless virtual world is considered as a heaven of

opportunity, for of the very same reasons, it can be a vicious trap as well. This is the flip side of the innocent notion that ICT will help present learning materials in an attractive way. If learning is not attractive in its own merit then how can it hope to ride on the back of ICT? This notion in fact emanates from the naive belief that pedagogy has nothing to do beyond attractive presentation of the materials. Where are our super ideas on pedagogical intervention in education in this context?

Suggestions

We should place the ICT in its rightful place with reality in mind. Not only that romanticizing and mystifying of the digitalization don't solve the problems but also that it would take us away from the possible solutions. Other educational issues should be tackled on their own behalf. ICT is not a panacea for all the issues related to our education.

From the above discussed matters, I think we can reach the following recommendations.

1) First of all areas of syllabus suitable for ICT intervention have to be identified. All areas and topics would not lend itself to an ICT intervention.
2) Issues related to other areas of education have to be sorted out within the larger context of administrative, systemic and pedagogic factors.
3) ICT should not eat into the space of learner to learner and learner to teacher interaction. Syllabus and classes should be organized in such a way that these areas get its due importance. Make the classes properly integrated allocating relative priorities to each component.
4) Improve the confidence and the competence of the teachers in information technology because misconception has a big role in the abuse of IT.
5) ICT as in the case of any other aspect of education is not immune to criticism. It should be subjected to constructive and realistic deliberations and criticisms from time to time.

Conclusion

From the above held discussions we can reach the following conclusions. ICT is a positive disruptor in the manner that literal culture or invention of vehicles had proven to be in the past. Computer technology is certainly going to take us a long way in the direction of human progress. Invention of the vehicle has widened and deepened the scope of civilizations though, it has not changed the basic content and character of civilization altogether. Likewise, information technology also cannot offer solutions to problems which are outside its preview. ICT is just a tool however powerful it might seems to be. It need not and cannot take the position of human interaction or cognition. As a tool it can only supplement and complement human endeavors and not substitute it. The educational personnel and decision makers should not be overawed by the glitter and glamour ICT. It is only out there to be exploited and utilized to the maximum confining

within the larger framework of education. Also important is, as in the case of all other components of education, ICT also should be subjected to thorough scrutiny from time to time as per the requirements of the day.

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