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RETHINKING OF USING ICT TOOLS IN A 21ST-CENTURY INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

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Abstract

The COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on the education system in and around the world, affecting billions of students in every part of the world. The education system failed everywhere and the biggest challenge for everyone in the world was how to continue studies with such conditions. So, every country tried to come up with different ideas and strategies to overcome this hurdle. This brought major changes in our lives and the education system. The traditional education system has been disrupted. Many of the researchers shared their work on teaching and learning in various ways. The concept of face-to-face learning has been phased out. The biggest concern was the education of the upcoming generation would be lost. New innovative teaching-learning methods and their implementation was the need of the time. The use of ICT which was earlier limited to just smart boards and PowerPoint presentations was now more than that. ICT became the most crucial part and with the help of ICT, we made it possible for everything to make the best out of the situation. Yes, there are a lot of challenges with India due to poverty and increasing population but we as a strong country believe in the fact that "where there is a will there's the way". So, like every other time we will overcome every hurdle that comes our way. We are taking steps and efforts are being made by everyone to have a successful inclusion study for everyone.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technology, Education, Inclusive Classroom, Innovative Teaching Methods.

Introduction

In recent years it has been seen that there are continuous efforts being made to make education more effective and interesting and ICT plays a major role in this. But now thought arises in our minds that what exactly is ICT? If I talk about the scenario that was a few years back then ICT was limited to use of presentations and smart boards but if I talk about today ICT is much more than usage of PowerPoint and smart boards. Today we are exploring new boundaries of ICT.

UNESCO defined ICT as:

Diverse set of technological tools and resources used to transmit, store, create, create, share or exchange information. These technological tools and resources include computers, the internet, live broadcasting technologies, recorded broadcasting technologies and telephony.

Information and communication technology (ICT) can complement, enrich and transform education for the better. UNESCO shares knowledge about the many ways technology can facilitate universal access to education, bridge learning divides, support the development of teachers, enhance the quality and relevance of learning, strengthen inclusion, and improve education administration and governance.

The Organization scans the world for evidence of successful ICT in education practices – whether in low-resource primary schools, universities in high-income countries, or vocational centers – to formulate policy guidance. When pandemic hit the world there was a huge change in our lives. Everything changed, be it our lifestyle or education everything had disruption. Now if we talk about education there was a huge challenge standing in our way i.e How to continue studies in this life-threatening situation. Are we really ready to face such a challenge? So slowly and steadily everyone tried to come up with their own ideas for continuing education and how to bring the best out of the situation. In such a situation ICT became our biggest weapon to fight against the situation. With the help of ICT, it became possible to overcome the hurdle. ICT made it possible to sit in our homes and carry out our studies. Not only this with time teachers tried to make learning fun and interesting. ICT helps teachers to break the traditional mode of learning and bring in some new and effective way of learning but with ICT came challenges also. Not everyone is good with technology. But with will power, effort and time everyone started learning new things. So, we can take this in a positive way that with the pandemic it gave us the opportunity to learn new and different things which otherwise we would not have even tried. Just like any other technology, ICT too comes with certain limitations.

1. Misleading and misleading information
2. Risk of cyber-attacks and hacks
3. A risk to the traditional book and handwriting methods
4. Implementing computers and the internet for ICT replace the conventional education curriculums
5. Managing courses online is difficult



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6. Misuse of technology
7. Not accessible everywhere
8. Teachers require experience to handle ICT
9. implementing computers and the internet is expensive
10. Few believe that computers can limit imagination

So, in this paper we are going to explore how and why there is a need to rethink the usage of ICT with time.

COVID-19

COVID-19 is a disease caused by SARS-CoV-2 that can trigger what doctors call a respiratory tract infection. It can affect your upper respiratory tract (sinuses, nose, and throat) or lower respiratory tract (windpipe and lungs). It spreads the same way other corona viruses do, mainly through person-to-person contact. Infections range from mild to deadly.

The diseases spread all over the world which resulted in the lockdown. Each and every field got affected. And one of the majorly affected fields is education. It was a challenge for everyone to suddenly change the teaching learning process from a traditional approach to a new online mode. There was a hunt going on to bring out the ways to make education effective in such a situation. There was a huge change in the teaching learning process. Due to this outbreak, there was a complete lockdown. It was such a deadliest situation that we cannot even think of carrying out physical education as social distance was one of the major factors which needed to be taken care of. And in a country like India where there is a huge population and number of students in one class is not less than 50. So, this was a huge issue. But at this time technology became our friend and it came in handy to both teachers as well as students. Online classes started and again there was an uplift in the teaching learning process. Different platforms are used to carry out online classes. Not only this, different platforms were used for different purposes i.e delivering of content, note taking, submitting assignments, evaluation etc.

Effects of COVID-19

Effect of COVID-19 on teaching learning process:

India has been trying to digitize the teaching learning process for the past few years. Pandemic acted as a spark to it. It helped to make things digitalize and accelerate the use of digital platform for the process. Digital learning became a lifeline for education during the pandemic, but the opportunities that digital technologies provide goes far beyond a crisis-relief solution.

Impact of COVID-19 on the teaching learning process:

• Use of different platform to carry our distance learning

Due to pandemic, schools were shut down and the teaching learning process was carried out digitally. Now in order to do that different platform such as Google meet, zoom, Microsoft teams, skype were used. There was a paradigm shift from the traditional way of teaching to a modern digital way of teaching.

• Use of different techniques for different purposes

To make the teaching learning process unique and more effective. Teachers came up with new ideas to give different assignments. Not only this medium of instruction changed. Teachers came up with platforms such as Google classroom, jam board etc in order to submit assignments and share reference material. This way it was made easier for the teacher to keep track of record for the task she has allotted to her students and evaluate them accordingly.

Drawbacks of COVID-19 and technology

• Interrupted learning:

Schooling provides essential learning and when schools close, children and youth are deprived of opportunities for growth and development. The disadvantages are disproportionate for under-privileged learners who tend to have fewer educational opportunities beyond school.

• Increased Isolation

During the outbreak, remote learning allowed youngsters to continue their education despite school closures. For many young people, however, the importance of school extends beyond education to include social connection, which no amount of distance learning can replace. School also provides structure and a built-in support system of friends and educators that assist youngsters in coping with issues ranging from homework to emotional concerns. Struggling children may feel more alienated and overwhelmed without that support structure, especially if their parents are dealing with personal challenges.



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• Lack of interpersonal skills

Humans thrive on interpersonal skill and relationship building through behavior and body language observation but due to limited interaction and more presence on video screen while connecting on video calls or learning subjects on e-content the impact of human relationship or interpersonal skills have diminished.

• Impact on reading

There has been an impact on reading content due to more accessibility of e-content therefore student’s reading capacity or concentration/attention span has greatly decreased. The need for interactive content has increased due to which the concepts which may not have interactive content which may need more practice and more theoretical aspect often will now get left behind due to lack of content.

• Stress and Anxiety

Students' focus levels in online learning declined when their gaze wandered elsewhere on the screen. As a result, most pupils found it difficult to keep up with the lessons. The pressure to concentrate and deliver the desired outcomes has caused a tremendous deal of tension and stress. Tasks, assignments, and homework slipped between the cracks. The majority of the children appeared to be falling behind and succumbing to the pressure. The children's minds had been tampered with and were in a delicate state.

• Zoom Fatigue

Zoom weariness is a feeling of exhaustion that occurs after participating in zoom classes or video conferences. With the amount of time spent in front of a screen increasing dramatically, the mind is being bombarded with information, making it harder for the brain to process it all.

• Lack Of Classroom Ethics

The classroom ethics have been compromised to great lengths. The posture, regularity, lack of routine, attentiveness has all resulted in health hazards. Constant sitting has caused weight concerns as well.

No physical activity has made the students restless and frustrated. This too took a toll on the eating habits, thus resulting in damages to physical health.

• Hidden Hurdles to access of ICT for remote learning

Due to the accessibility of resources during assessment the impact of learning cannot be measured. Rather in comparison the seriousness of students towards academic learning and skill enhancement the interest has even further decreased.

Effect of online learning in special education

The difficulty of online education has been a mixed bag, but being a special education student adds an extra wrinkle. “When you’re a special education student, you have an extra hill you must rise to if you want to have the same opportunities and chances as a typical mainstream kid. It’s harder to deliver services to help those students when you’re remote,” said Richard Weigelt, a special education teacher at Carlmont. So, in a country like India where around 80 million people lie below the poverty line (MDG data) then it becomes more difficult to deliver services to them. The sudden and sustained switch to online learning is straining and becomes even more so when we see the challenges that are faced during our day-to-day life.

Research has been done on the topic “Online learning effects on students with learning disabilities: Parents’ perspectives” by Ayed H. Ziadat in the year 2021. The study aimed to investigate the parents' perspectives toward the effect of online learning on their child’s learning, particularly, the ones with learning disabilities. Result in this study concluded that, First, the main effects of online learning on the learning of students with learning disabilities that are related to students:

- 1) The increase of students’ dependency on smart devices,
- 2) The increase of social isolations and reduction of peers-engagement,
- 3) The lessening of students’ academic achievements.

Second, the main effects of online learning on the learning of students with learning disabilities that are related to online learning platforms:

- 1) The lack of supportive learning services that student with learning disability need,
- 2) The lack of appropriate designs, management, and delivery,
- 3) The lack of diversity in the educational content.



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Third, the main effects of online learning on the learning of students with learning disabilities that are related to difficulties facing parents:

- 1) Parents cannot afford supportive devices needed in online learning environments.
- 2) The Increased burden on parents
- 3) The lack of knowledge and experiences of appropriate teaching strategies for students with learning disabilities,
- 4) The Increase of parents' anger toward their children.

Another research done on the topic “Impact Of COVID-19 pandemic on education of students with disabilities in pre university education” by Zamira Hyseni Duraku and Mirjeta Nagavei in June2020. It aimed to investigate the factors influencing the level of inclusion of children with disabilities in education, before and during the COVID-19 pandemic period and to explore the impact of related circumstances with the pandemic (e.g., social distance, online learning) in the well-being and daily activities of children with disabilities and their parents. The study concluded that the pandemic period, home isolation, lack of socialization, change of daily routine and lack of services have negatively impacted the emotional state of children with disabilities, contributing to parental load and stress. The low level of inclusiveness and benefits has been influenced by many factors from the school learning process to distance/online learning during the pandemic.

Conclusion

There are many challenges faced by the education sector due to global crises faced due to COVID-19. But like any other time, we are the one who come stronger every time we face a challenge like this. We eventually found our way back by finding a solution to our problem. There was a huge obstacle that so many children are getting affected by. But innovation of technology has made it a reality to sit at home and carry on with our studies. Else it would have been our biggest problem. Digitalization has made it possible to make learning virtual. Importance of technology has been realized during this period. But at the same time in a country like India which has a huge population and a lot of them fall under the poverty line, who cannot even afford their basic necessities, how is it possible that education is reaching everyone in the country. Not only this, the kids with special needs have also been affected. These children are already facing difficulties and this has only added to their plate. We teach children with special needs by using different strategies such as multisensory approach. It becomes really difficult to fulfill their requirement in online mode. This brings in the role of government to provide the provision to students who fall under this category. After the pandemic is over many of it will remain the same. Teachers and students will need to follow a blended learning approach. Alone one strategy won't help. So, by this I would like to end my paper by saying that by combined efforts, will power and a weapon like technology sky's the limit. We can make our teaching learning process better.

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