



ROLE OF ICT IN TRANSFORMING SRI LANKAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract - ICT has brought about unimaginable changes in every sphere of life, especially in the spectrum of education. The use of ICT has become inevitable and essential in Education, because it has offered a number of revolutionary benefits for the refinement of present and future education system. However, it also poses certain challenges that need to be addressed effectively to keep pace with the rest of the world.

At present, higher education in the world is experiencing a major transformation in terms of access, equity and quality. This transition is highly influenced by the swift developments in information and communication technologies (ICTs) all over the world. ICTs in the higher education have profound implications for the whole education process in Sri Lanka, especially in dealing with key issues of access, equity, management, efficiency, pedagogy and quality. At the same time the optimal utilization of opportunities arising due to diffusion of ICTs in higher education system in Sri Lanka presents a profound challenge for higher educational institutions. In this backdrop, the paper addresses the role and issues of ICTs in various aspects of higher education in Sri Lanka in the present scenario.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Higher Education.

I. INTRODUCTION

The systems of Higher education have grown exponentially in the last five decades to meet the demands of quality education for all. This aspect has further gained momentum due to advancements in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Demand for skilled and competent labor is ever increasing in the contemporary global society. Against this backdrop, access to quality in higher education has emerged as determining factor of economic growth and development. For increasing the access to higher education and improving its reach to the remotest parts of the

country, the contribution of open and distance learning facilities is praiseworthy. In addition, it suffices the aspirations of lifelong learning at affordable cost. The last two decades have witnessed the inclusion of developments in ICTs in higher education systems around the world.

II. ENRICHMENT OF TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATION

Education is a powerful instrument for social transformation and nation building. It is seen as tool for the alleviation of poverty, removing inequalities in education, and for promotion of social harmony and strengthening of national unity. It is also seen imperative for increasing productivity, consolidating democracy, modernizing the country and developing scientific, moral and spiritual values.

Technology- based learning and assessment systems will be pivotal in improving student learning and generating data that can be used to improve the education system at all levels. Technology will help us to execute collaborative teaching strategies combined with professional learning that better prepare and enhance educators' competencies and expertise over the course of their careers.

The introduction of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in education reflects and responds to present and future needs of people functioning in an intensely changing and challenging intellectual environment. Since the advent of the computer, the internet and the web numerous changes have occurred. The presence of IT has actually transformed the teaching, learning and administrative environment in higher education worldwide to keep pace with the rapidly changing landscapes and it has become inevitable to implement technology integration. 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).

III. IMPLICATIONS OF ICT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The rapid development of ICTs is taking place all over the world. They have emerged as powerful tools for diffusion of knowledge and information. Their introduction and unprecedented use in the higher education has generated varied response. The opportunities can be categorized as the aspects relating to role of ICT for access and equity in education, their role in pedagogy for quality learning and teaching at higher education level and in introducing innovations in approaches and programmes.

Another most important dimension of higher education sector influenced by ICT integration is improving quality of teaching-learning. The changes taking place due to globalization and internationalization attach premium to knowledge and information. Therefore, the integration of ICTs would not only help in promoting personal growth but also in developing "knowledge societies". The call of the hour is the need to provide education for everyone, anywhere, and anytime. Life-long learning has become the driving force to sustain in the contemporary competitive environment. Therefore to strengthen and / or advance this knowledge-driven growth, new technologies, skills and capabilities are needed.

IV. IMPLICATIONS OF ICT IN PEDAGOGY.

ICTs have the potential to drive innovative and effective ways of teaching-learning and research. The inclusion of learning tools, easier use of multimedia or simulation tools, easy and almost instant access to data and information in a digital form which allows for computations and data processing generates possibilities which were otherwise not feasible. The possibility to diffuse these innovations and complement the learning content to improve quality in higher education through innovative pedagogic methods is high. The focus on ICTs to back quality research through utilization of rigorous research methodology and in-depth analysis is the need of the hour.

V. ICT AND ITS CHALLENGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education is under enormous pressure to meet the social transformation and skills needs of the new world order. It faces immense external and internal pressure to improve on its policy and delivery performance. One of the indicators of social transformation in education is increasing the demographic representation among graduates and reducing the demographic difference between student intake and graduate throughput.

Furthermore, the recent government policy has added pressure on higher education institutions by linking funding to throughput. In other words, unlike in the past when institutions were funded on the number of registered first year students, funding is now linked to graduate throughput (Jazeel, 2015). Improving efficiency and addressing the equity needs of the country raises conflicting challenges for higher education institutions. These challenges are exacerbated by the fact that most students enter university under-prepared and therefore require more support to bridge the gaps in the required knowledge and skills.

The challenge for higher education institutions is therefore not only about increasing throughput in terms of numbers and the diversity of its student population but also involves ensuring quality educational provision. The Sri Lankan government has identified the use of ICTs for teaching and learning as an important priority.

VI. CONCLUSION

The use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has brought about a series of shifts in the sector of education. Teaching and learning at all levels of higher education systems have undergone a significant



change and led to quality enhancements. Traditional forms of teaching and learning have been increasingly being converted to online and virtual environments. There are endless possibilities with the integration of ICT in the education system. 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. Our argument is that technology alone is not a solution to the higher educational challenges faced in Sri Lanka. The challenges lie in identifying and conceptualizing ways that educational technology can usefully contribute to student learning experiences, curriculum and pedagogical designs.

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