

Living in the digital age

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By Nooruddin B Merchant

Media, Information and Communication Technologies provide a diverse range of opportunities for learning. The potential to engage learners at their own pace, interactivity, creative expression, updated information, hypermedia, audiovisual stimulation through digital media, and simulations are seen as effective means of learning about any topic or theme. Developments in the field of technology have created more inviting and open learning spaces than within classroom walls. If applied carefully, online learning, working on collaborative classroom projects, internet based research dramatically impact and improve the learning processes. A combination of digital tools and the readiness of the people ensure that learning takes place anywhere, everywhere and anytime along with updated information.



Computers:

The infusion of computers in schools through computer labs, especially in the private schools, has become a normal phenomenon. Similarly, the number of computers at home is increasing dramatically as technology is getting cheaper and more accessible. The young generation of the 21st century is seen as the 'NET' and 'DIG' generation, where technologies are embraced for reducing boredom and getting relaxed. Talking about DIG age, a majority of students stated:

- It is a part of our life
- It is so embedded in our society that it would be hard not to know how to use it
- Computer literacy is essential for survival
- We can communicate in an efficient and fast way
- It provides information quickly, through which we can complete our projects in time

Just like television, computers are fast becoming a part of the family. Parents' belief about computers and internet as the tools for communication, language development and learning has also been strengthened in the past couple of years. Children are early adopters of new technologies. In fact, in the world of technology, children are known as natives and the real citizens while the previous generation i.e. the parents and elders are considered as immigrants in the new land! These innovations have influenced the way we work, interact and live.

Current technologies' challenges:

Although fascinating and encouraging the advent of current technologies also creates many challenges, especially for the youth who are vulnerable in the absence of ethical and moral guidance. Some of the key challenges are:

1. Appropriateness: Refers to finding the most appropriate technologies and putting them to use for creativity and expression. It is the biggest challenge because children, parents and teachers equally struggle to find and apply technologies that will accelerate the learning. Despite a large pool of tools available for a variety of tasks, we end up using printouts when multimedia approach would be the best.

2. Meaningfulness: Refers to selection, utilisation and internalisation of information. Since youth are exposed to new technologies and information very quickly, it is important to engage them in thinking about how the information should be put in the right perspective with greater level of consciousness.

3. Selectivity and relevance: Due to the information explosion, day by day it is becoming more difficult to select the most relevant and useful information. Developing skills to understand, comprehend, analyse and synthesise selected information is also a huge concern because it is thought that accessing or collecting information is enough to improve learning quality.

4. Social interaction: Instant messengers, blogs, mobile phones and other tools claim to provide efficient ways of virtual interaction. But there is also a dire need to transform the mindset of youth to participate in meaningful learning processes which include team work, collaboration, reflection and action and help them in knowing how technology can be used as a tool. Technology can never substitute human relations, love, richness and diversity of social interactions!

There is a dire need to engage all stakeholders associated with the design, development and implementation of learning programmes in exploring the deeper meaning and manifestations of all the opportunities and challenges. The question each one of us should ask is: "How can these innovations contribute to the creation of a better, happy, creative, just and self-sustainable society?"

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