

Chapter XXIII

ICT Based Learning: A Basic Ingredient for Socio-Economic Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

ICT mediated learning provides utilities for achieving the goal of education for all, and in turn acts as an enabler in reducing the digital divide, reducing poverty, and promoting social inclusion. However, the integration of ICTs in education deserves considerable investment in time and resources. Consequently, during planning to integrate ICTs in evidence-based information for making sound decisions by the end users incorporate extensive research and sharing of critical information along different phases of planning. Furthermore, implementation of ICT

based learning demands in depth analysis and intelligent feedback of the processes. Technology does not improve learning in a straight way and the fundamental question remains always unanswered, in assessing the effectiveness of ICTs or assessing the effectiveness of instructional treatments that were initially (and effectively) less than perfect. This chapter has tried to critically analyze the effective role of ICT methods in learning and put forwards several success cases of learning mechanisms that assisted in socioeconomic empowerment and at the same time, provided a few futuristic recommendations in establishing similar endeavors in promising economies.

INTRODUCTION

ICTs can increase access to information and this information helps communities to work more productively as well as in new opportunities. Increasing common people's access to ICTs should involve increasing availability of ICT infrastructure where most of them live. The infrastructure should be highly subsidized for at least a number of years so that the investment costs are not passed on to the end users (Mijumbi, 2002).

ICT can improve the learning process by making it faster, cheaper, and wider reaching that were not possible before. This form of learning can be treated as an interactive process among many entities and supporting the improvement of this process is expected to produce better results. However, innovative processes have to be incorporated both in terms of pedagogy and technology. Pedagogy should be universal and technology should give ubiquitous access with ambient intelligence.

In the area of education and training several hundred projects with thousands of participants around the globe have produced acceptable results in the areas of general education, specialized skill development training, and life long learning and have contributed positively to horizontal issues such as standards, metadata, interoperability, and sustainability.

Among them in 2001, an ambitious project, Prometheus, was built to establish a forum for expert opinions where participants from a wide range of countries, activities, professions, cultures, and languages productively interact towards the establishment of a community of cooperation in the field of educational technology and applications. All those contributions were taken into consideration and the contributors referenced in a position paper. Its aim was to bridge the gap between research and actual use of learning technologies, content and services, through direct contribution in a open consultation process (Bottino, 2001).

In 2002, Appeal launched a project on ICT Application for Non-Formal Education Programs with the support of the Japanese Funds-in-Trust. During its first phase, five countries (Indonesia, Lao PDR, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Uzbekistan) implemented programs and activities to empower communities through the effective use of ICT.

However, in 2003 a study in this area entitled "Quality and e-learning in Europe training" was conducted and found that through a survey among 433 teachers and trainers from public and private sectors, about 61% felt that the quality of e-learning was fair or poor (Attwell, 2005). So, investment in this sector will remain a fair trade for many investors, including the development partners.

Therefore, the shift to the information society throws new challenges for learning processes and acquisition of knowledge through learning. In a society where information is becoming a strategic raw material and knowledge a value added product, how this resource is used is critical to the performance potential of each entrepreneur. The information and communication media provide necessary technologies to make knowledge available worldwide and transform the information society into a knowledge society. However, in response to individual needs, it is becoming increasingly important to harness appropriate information and systematize knowledge. A falling "half-life" of knowledge formulates life-long learning and up-to-date information becomes critical. Hence, in times of increasing globalization and networking, flexible access to information must be guaranteed at any place and at any time (Massey, 2003).

In this context, economic freedom plays an important role, in addition to technology update and information management. The 2006 Index of Economic Freedom measures 161 countries against a list of 50 independent variables divided into 10 broad factors in terms of economic freedom. The higher the score on a factor, the greater the level of government interference in the economy

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