Chapter 14
The Inconvenient Truth About Digital Transformation in Higher Education

Roslind Xaviour Thambusamy
Future Academy, Malaysia

Parmjit Singh
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

Mohd Adlan Ramly
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

The proliferation of technology into the teaching and learning process has drawn ire in certain quarters of education. This chapter takes up this train of thought to elucidate on certain aspects of the digital transformation of higher education processes which threaten to suffocate the humanistic aspects of the educative process. Special focuses are placed on the pervasive and invasive encroachment of technology into all aspects of teaching, learning, and assessment in terms of its actual value to the end users—the students. The authors highlight how universities are now reflecting Giroux's neoliberalism and Ritzer's McDonaldization in their management and, consequently, depriving instructors and students of the opportunity to true quality education that should pivot on humanistic values and not the accumulation of grades. Apart from these theoretical bases, the authors present arguments drawn from empirical evidence and their own experience as long-serving academics.

INTRODUCTION

We are the hollow men

We are the stuffed men

Leaning together

Headpiece filled with straw

The above lines from T. S. Eliot's famous poem, "The Hollow Men," is a depressing albeit poignant and useful departure point for this chapter. The discussion in this chapter is based on some questions that need to be asked and answered about the state of higher education (henceforth HE) today. The stance adopted in this chapter will be primarily philosophical in nature primed by pithy perturbations of the "digitise or die" (as with "publish or perish" dictum) status quo in HE. The philosophical stance will be buttressed by pertinent theoretical foundations as well as empirical and anecdotal evidence gleaned from the authors' own experiences as HE instructors with a combined teaching experience of close to eighty years and whose experience straddle the divide of pre-digitalization era and the current digitalized teaching learning scenario in higher education. The philosophical ruminations in the chapter are grounded in Giroux's (2010) neoliberalism and Ritzer's (1983) McDonaldization of society and particularly of HE. The authors also acknowledge the contributions of Holmes and Lindsay's (2018) brilliantly astute paper, titled "Do you want fries with that?: The McDonaldization of university education—some critical reflections on nursing higher education."

The authors draw from the literature on digital transformations of learning in universities, and on insights from their own careers as academics, to shed light on the actual pros and cons in Aladdin's cave of technological wonders. Because the authors seek to balance—not negate—arguments promoting online learning, a disclaimer is in order. At no time, do the authors dismiss the beneficial applications of technology in the educational process. The fact is that technology, in all its manifest wondrous transformative applications, is welcomed and lauded by the authors. Needless to say, it would be self-defeating for any educator to dismiss any tool that can enhance teaching and learning. Technology is indeed most welcomed in terms of its myriad offerings of multiple devices and platforms through which the teaching and learning process can be developed and enhanced. To this effect, there is, of course, overwhelming empirical evidence from a bulk of studies, too many to state here, of the perceived benefits of e-Learning (also known as online learning) from blended to flipped classrooms, not to mention the accessibility, flexibility, and affordability that e-Learning provides.

Like sticks used to draw pictures in the sand, followed by chalkboards, whiteboards, projectors, and now mobile devices and learning systems, the tools that best promote the teaching and learning of their time must be embraced: not because they are new, but because they provide for positive change.

The authors concede that with the democratization and resulting massification of HE, there was no choice but to find ways to accommodate the academic needs of the burgeoning numbers of learners. The constraints of finite physical spaces and resources invariably led to exploring options other than traditional forms of disseminating knowledge. This is where educational technology stepped in: to provide alternatives to learners to amass knowledge. However, this is where the authors rant commences, from starting out as education's "little helpers," the encroachment of technology into the inner sanctum of educative processes became more firmly entrenched when the ante was upped by the neoliberal battle cry to render HE an "industry" that was required to churn out "marketable" graduates who were considered "human

14 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-inconvenient-truth-about-digital-transformation-in-higher-education/221575

Related Content

Blended Learning Strategies for Engaging Diverse Student Cohorts in Higher Education
Josh McCarthy (2018). *International Journal of Teacher Education and Professional Development (pp. 29-45).*
www.irma-international.org/article/blended-learning-strategies-for-engaging-diverse-student-cohorts-in-higher-education/204532

Promotion of Research Culture in Sur University: A Case Approach
A. M. Sakkthiveland Ahmad Sharieh (2018). *Teacher Training and Professional Development: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 1320-1345).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/promotion-of-research-culture-in-sur-university/203231

Learning From and With: An Interdisciplinary Service Learning Course on Autism
Jordan M. Lukins, Harriet Ableand Leslie Fanning (2024). *Autism, Neurodiversity, and Equity in Professional Preparation Programs (pp. 226-241).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/learning-from-and-with/335219

Reflect and Recommit
(2022). *Implementing a Virtual Coaching Model for Teacher Professional Development (pp. 150-166).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/reflect-and-recommit/294620

Assessment and Evaluation in Transnational Staff Development
Janet Mary Coates, K. Santhanalakshmi, N. Dinesh, S. Gandhimathi, Pankaj Singh Chandel, Mohitand P. Selvakumar (2025). *Training and Development in Transnational Higher Education (pp. 387-406).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/assessment-and-evaluation-in-transnational-staff-development/376674