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REFORMING THE TERTIARY EDUCATION : A MULTIMEDIA APPROACH

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Abstract

There is a growing dissatisfaction about the general standards of college education in Kerala. The fresh graduates are perceived to be wanting in higher order thinking and communication skills. Their knowledge of the content subjects does not come to the operational level. To make matters worse the demands of the world of work is going sky high. One of the primary causes of this limitation lies with the method of teaching followed in colleges. Currently, a lot of teaching time is used to teach basic concepts in college classrooms while activities that really need assistance are done at home as assignments. This pedagogical issue can be solved with remarkable degree of success by skillful application of ICT. One instructional application of ICT is the selective use of multimedia in classrooms.

Application of ICT at the college level sill remains hesitant at the entry level. Power point presentations and videos are used sparingly but they are not revolutionary enough to make desirable changes. The PPT is a more efficient replacement for conventional blackboard and videos eat up a considerable part of the teaching time. Application of these technology based tools does not alter the conventional process of teaching and learning in college classrooms. They can make the lessons more interesting but not effective or efficient.

The paper investigates the innovative and effective ways in which the multimedia tools can be used so that If the learners can come to the classroom prepared for debates and discussions. In such a situation the teacher can devote his/her valuable teaching time to develop higher order thinking and debating skills of the learners.

Introduction

The department of collegiate education, Kerala launched a massive upskilling programme for the college students in 2012. The programme was entitled "Additional Skill Acquisition Programme" which intended to select gifted final year degree students who have the aptitude, skills and commitment to become soft skill trainers. SNM College Maliankara had a roll strength of 325 final year students in 2012. Out of these 325 students only fifty (50) were confident enough to participate in the selection programme. Eventually, only twelve out of the initial fifty came out successful. This result was an eye opener to the teaching faculty of the college. The employability of the graduating students of the college even after the sincere didactic efforts of the teachers was below four percentage (4%).

Though there has not been any statistical evidence to establish the very low level of the employability standards of the college students especially of the ones in rurally placed colleges in Kerala, it is a generally agreed fact beyond any dispute that the quality of output is disturbingly poor. In the national perspective the situation appears to be slightly better but still far from satisfactory. NASCOM, an organization for promoting IT and IT-enabled industries in India conducted a survey with the aid of an internationally famed consultancy firm based in America McKinsy. The findings published way back in 1985 displayed the miserable condition of Indian graduates in terms of quality.

> India also confronts a potential shortage of skilled workers in the next decade or so, particularly in the BPO industry. Currently only 25% of technical graduates and 10 – 15 % of general college graduates are suitable for employment in the offshore IT and BPO industries respectively. (16)

The decline of quality in education in general and higher education in particular is not a regional phenomenon. It has got national and even global dimensions. Even in America, which enjoys a worldwide reputation as the center of quality education, about 45% of the students in the sector of tertiary education are reported to be 'academically adrift'(Arun and Roksa,2001). Ever since the educational designs all over the world set equity and access as the guiding principles the quality has started to decline. The greatest challenge of the modern democratic systems of education is to make the three ends meet and it is too tough an acrobatic exercise to perform. When the access increases its quality goes down. When deliberate attempts are made to increase the quality, it becomes impossible without increasing the cost. The ideal situation is where the access rate and the quality of education go up together while there is no inflation of the educational expenses. The Indian system of education is far off from this ideal condition.

New challenges

In this era of globalization the system of education in any nation should be efficient enough to meet two emergencies. One is the demand for a wide exposure to information and the second is the basic necessity of excellent skills of thinking and communication.

Around 2000 the world brisk- walked into a whole new era. The unique feature of this third phase of globalization is the growing power and freedom of individuals. Sitting with a lap top computer or a smart phone, the access potential of the modern man is enormous irrespective of where he lives. Living in USA is not an advantage and living in a remote village in India is not a disadvantage either. The world has become flat (Friedman 2006). This was not the condition of the learners in Kerala a decade ago. Not long ago they heard English only in the classroom and teacher's English was the only spoken variety they could listen to. It is perfectly

reasonable to presume that this limitation of exposure to good English could be one of the major reasons for their low exposure to information. In the latest phase of globalization that began in twenty first century, however, Indian learners have the best opportunity for excellent exposure they ever had. The number of English TV channels available in India has shoot up to eighty. The Wikipedia enumerates the number of English dailies in India as thirty nine. Six major dailies among them are widely subscribed in Kerala too. Moreover, the You Tube is full of informative and entertaining videos. The OER (Open Educational Resources) is another fast expanding educational support system, which offers a large number of lectures and teaching videos from the leading universities around the world. The catching motto of OER is to give education for every one everywhere for free'. Khan Academy, the most popular teaching web site in the world, is a store of thousands of short teaching videos on an immensely wide range of subjects from History to Calculus. Time is not far away when the whole world start working like a single industry in shifts. The job opportunities will be offered globally and sought globally. The outsourcing facility has opened up a world of vocational opportunities for the youth of Asia. But it also brought in sheer competition at global level. The graduates in India have to compete with their counterparts in Europe and USA. Globalization has flattened the world with equal opportunities to learn and develop. However, these opportunities are not utilized fully, the gap between the students of the developing and developed nations in terms of employability will widen further. To avoid such a disturbing situation in the era of global promises the learners are to be encouraged to learn from all the resources offered by the ICT. Unfortunately, only a few undergraduate learners of Kerala make use of these resources. The primary limitation of the learners in the state is their self imposed lack of exposure to English while English is excessively present in the social environment. Only five percentage of the undergraduate students of SNM College Maliankara, which is a rural educational institution, browse internet regularly for reference. The situation in institutions based in similar rural settings cannot be very much different. If highly invasive methodological interference is not attempted our graduates may wander about ignorant in a knowledge based world.

Communication challenges of the current century are not just confined to inter personal communication needs alone. They are rather related to the discourses based on higher order thinking skills. The contexts and the content of communication are being redefined according to the new cognitive demands of the time. The modern world is described as the 'knowledge based world'. Knowledge has always been very important ever since the true history of human civilization began. But now a lot more people are involved in knowledge creation and innovation and creativity has become the watch word of every vocation. The rapid and luxurious development of knowledge is logically explained by Johnson (2014). He argues that knowledge creation is no longer the exclusive cognitive business of a single individual. Great ideas do not come from a sudden stroke of inspiration. On the contrary, they take a long time to evolve and a lot of intellectual communication and sharing of ideas are involved in it. The greatest discovery of our time the World Wide Web, for example, was first conceived by Arther C Clark. Later in 1980 a British engineer Tim Berner-lee gave it a feasible description. It took a few more years till Berner-Lee worked collaboratively with Robert Cailliau, a Swedish computer scientist, that the network of computers with a search engine to look for specific information came into a practical reality. The best creative ideas, thus, evolve through sharing and collaboration. A lot of people may be thinking about the same idea. But their ideas may not be complete. They remain as incomplete hunches. One person may have an incomplete hunch and needs a particular turn of thought to make the breakthrough. The missing link of his thought may be with someone else.

When they communicate the hunches collide and unite to become original creative ideas which are much bigger than their parts. During the period of enlightenment in Europe creative people like writers, painters, thinkers, sculptors and business men came to coffee shops in the evening to talk. The exchange of ideas in these coffee shop conversations, argues Johnson (2014), generated great creative energy which made the literature, art and commerce of the time immensely rich and enormously varied. Internet and search engines with all the communication channels and social and professional networks give unlimited opportunities for the likeminded people to communicate and exchange ideas. So, the excellent skills of thinking and communicating have become essential abilities for individual success and social development.

Limitations of the present teaching / learning process at college level

No system of education has ever been truly satisfactory to its stake holders. The Indian education is not truly Indian in its cultural core. It was given to the people of India by the British about one hundred and fifty years back and has been maintained without any fundamental change to its skeletal structure till the present. When the adventurers like Columbus and Vasco Da Gama set sail for exploring the eastern part of the globe, industrialization was in its cradle in Europe. Industrialization reshaped the western society from toe to tip and its education was no exception. As Robinson (2015) has put it, the system of public education that emerged in the west was conceived, designed and structured by the intellectual culture of the enlightenment and the economic circumstances of the industrialization. Schools were very much organized in factory lines. The students were educated in batches, different subjects were taught in subsequent periods. The curriculum was standardized and standardized testing procedures were followed. This system of education that spread during colonialism and got consolidated during different phases of globalization remained by and large unchanged all over the world. In India conservative forces have kept this industrial model of education almost intact in spite of the repeated far cry for reforms. However, the information communication revolution has now posed new challenges to the current system. Our students are now live in the most intensive and stimulating period in the human history. The fascinating learning tools around them like computers, mobile phones, tablets, I phones and a big bunch of TV channels captivate their attention. The richness of experience the learners are exposed to in the world outside is in stark contrast with the boring stuff of 'chalk and talk 'of college classes. In our classrooms the students are not permitted to share ideas. Sharing is generally perceived as copying and cheating. But in the real world outside the classroom most of the learning happens in groups letting everyone to work on the idea of others. Thirdly, the learning in undergraduate classes in general and the learning of arts in particular is at the best an aesthetic experience. The learners have to remain fully alive and alert during the lesson. Their senses operate at their peak and the brains resonate with the experience they receive. The lecture method, the method of teaching followed in colleges in India ever since the first universities were found in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta in 1857, where the teacher demonstrates all the cognitive activities like explaining, analyzing and synthesizing, keeping the learners as passive listeners creates an anesthetic atmosphere. "The anesthetic is just the opposite experience of the aesthetic where one puts his senses off" (Robinson 2015).

The instruction at the college level is confined by other limitations too that are practical in nature. The student community in colleges is perceived as having very shallow knowledge of their content subjects and poor language skills. So a lot of teaching time is spent in imparting basic knowledge and skills needed in every discipline. The application of higher order thinking

skills like analysis, synthesis and problem solving are done at home without the help of the teacher as assignments. This is the current paradox of college education in Kerala. The basic things that the learners can learn by themselves are taught in detail in the classrooms and the phase of learning that necessarily need the guidance of an expert if often done as homework.

New ICT based approach

Information Communication Technology has emerged as the great problem solver of the current century. Education is not the only system that has been unresponsive to its customer needs. Banking was another system that retained for a long time its conservative resistance towards change. Ever since the first commercial bank came to existence in Italy in fourteenth century, the banking sector worked from ten to five. This made it difficult for its customers, who would be working at the same time, to approach the banks for daily business. However, this system continued for centuries until the ICT intervened with IT solutions. In the same way ICT can change the world of education too.

The UGC and its assessment and accreditation wing NAAC have tried to make blended learning or integration of ICT into college education the new pedagogical practice of colleges. The guidance and invasive efforts of such agencies notwithstanding, the classroom interaction in colleges remains more or less the same till now. The world is constantly inventing and reinventing the ways to improve education at all levels and there have been creative suggestions to achieve it through the use of multimedia materials for learning. The current application of ICT in college classrooms is not revolutionary in the true sense of the term. This does not make the process any different. The power point presentations and interactive whiteboards replace conventional black boards but can do very little beyond that. The use of videos in the classrooms can make teaching interesting to the learners but it consumes a lot of teaching time. Likewise, the classroom climate will remain emphatically teacher centered. What is currently suggested is the flipping of the classroom activities (Khan 2014). Conventionally the basic things are taught in the classroom and the application is done as home work. In the new concept of reinventing education through videos the learners learn the necessary concepts at home through simple videos and come to the classroom for the exercise of higher order thinking skills like application and problem solving under the guidance of the teacher. Unlike a live lecture a video can be played again and again until the learners completely comprehend the content. That will also give the learners an immersion like exposure to good variety of English which can be an added advantage. The interaction or negotiation element may be lacking in such learning situations. But a carefully prepared audio-visual material anticipating the learner difficulties could overcome that limitation. Additionally, the negotiation or discussion element is more desirable at the application level of the lesson that will be carried out in the classroom in the presence of the teacher. The learning from videos can have other developmental advantages too. Their consistent use can, in course of time, encourage the learners to refer to other sources of information available in the web for learning. If this habit of independent learning continues for some time they will slowly develop the confidence and necessary skills to grow into autonomous learners, which is the ultimate aim of higher education.

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