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The role and benefits of using technology in Afghanistan schools and universities

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Abstract

This article explores and discusses the role and benefits of using technology in Afghanistan schools and universities. It means that teachers are using technology in their classes as an important way of interacting and communicating with students, technology has the great ability to build the relationship between teacher and students. Through use of technology students' role is changed from passive to active and they change from receiver of information and knowledge produced by teacher or other teaching sources to producer and sender of knowledge and information. Teacher plays the role of guide or facilitator of learning process by giving instruction, setting learning and project goals and providing guidelines. It is worth mentioning that students are going to reach to self-autonomy and teacher would not be the center of all activities and attention as the source of information anymore. Students will be self-directed and will take the responsibility of their own learning and they would be able to set goals, make decision and evaluate their improvement in learning process. Beside that students' willingness and interest would be increased.

Keywords: Technology, education, schools, universities, teachers, students

Introduction

The word technology itself is taken from Greek word Tekhnologia that conveys the meaning of orderly or systematic way of dealing managing and using of an art, craft or technique. By other words technology is a set of materials which are formed based on application of mental and physical efforts for featuring to reach some values. In this use, technology is the current state of our knowledge. The art of living itself can be defined as a technological method of survival. In other words, one cannot live without technology. Technology deals with human as an important tool for teaching classes' for using, skill and knowledge of tools and crafts, and the way how it affects a teacher's skill for controlling and adjusting to its natural setting. Much value of technology stems from content and context that it brings to the learning experience. In Afghanistan's educational system using technology is not very common as other countries based on different reasons such as 30 years wars that back warded the system of education in Afghanistan schools. This article explores the benefits of using technology in Afghanistan schools and universities. It is a library research I have collected all the necessary information from reliable resources such as rich libraries, internet sites and teachers' experiences including my own experiences toward using technology in teaching.

When students are using technology as an important outfit or a facilitator for communication they would have an active role in classroom rather than a passive role of listener and receiver of knowledge and information produced and conveyed by teacher or other teaching materials. Technology helps students to take active part in making decision about producing, acquiring, manipulating or presenting knowledge and information. Using technology allows students to think actively and deeply regarding gained knowledge, information, skills and the way they are making choice and trying to implement skills than teacher-lead and teacher-centered lessons which students have passive role in classroom and are mostly common in Afghanistan's schools and universities. In addition, using technology as a supportive tool in learning process lets students to have the ability of setting their learning goals, doing authentic tasks, making decision and evaluating their progress and improvement.

Use of technology changes the role of teacher from center of attention as source of knowledge and information to facilitator of learning who sets project goals, provide instruction and guidelines, introducing sources, mentoring and assessing students' participation during group work and pair work, providing suggestions and assistance for students. For example, in Kabul University where I am teaching, the final project in all

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courses expects students to make a presentation regarding related topics to the course and present it through a power point which improves students' technology skills. When students are working on their projects that should be based on support of technology, teacher is mentoring their work, suggesting different sources for their presentation, providing constructive feedback and gives instruction for them in order to complete their project successfully. I want to find the answer for the following question.

How can technology as a tool enhance students' learning?

Technology facilitates teaching and learning process

Adam (2000) ^[1] nowadays one of the soliciting matters in education is mixing of information technology tools with teaching. Technology can facilitate teaching and learning process in schools as a supplementary material. Besides that it motivates students for better learning, it helps teachers to have effective teaching to meet individual students need.

Thomas (2000) the context and positive changes which has been brought by technology in learning process shows its value and importance. I agree with the author because when I was a student of grade eight one of our science teachers took us to a room in school and showed us a movie about Cleaning the School Environment that was really interesting and every one in our class remembered that day as a learning day of our age. There was not a projector; they showed us the movie by a machine. Therefore, it is clear that using the movies in elementary and secondary schools can awake students and bring them in the class with interest and willingness of learning. It means that in Afghanistan we also had technology about many years ago. Today teachers can use their mobiles as a good source of using technology for improving students' listening skill, even they can record their own voice for pronouncing the new words or phrases in the class to make the lesson more interesting. Technology can also upgrade the chance of communication within education. For example in the TESOL program of KEU for Afghan students using E-mail is a great way of communication also it is an ideal and interesting alternative to office hours and phone calls or messages. Communicating through text message, voice message and online conversing groups can motivate shy and discouraged Afghan students who are taking less part in class discussions. It is worth mentioning, that the Internet provides the opportunity for students and teachers generate an academic community for being in contact with each other. Students can use E-mail as a mean of communication for sharing their thoughts, opinions, problems, questions and assignments to their teachers. For example, in University I ask my students to send me their final projects and their assignments and receive their feedback through track change that is very easy for checking students' assignments. Moreover, faculty can use technology to create an academic community to increase and build their professional relationship and be in contact with their colleagues all over the country or even all over the world. In provinces most of the students have these connections through their mobiles. To finalize, it is worth mentioning that use of technology can give the chance of new learning experiences for students. Technology can enhance students' interest toward learning and gives them the opportunity to take the responsibility of their own learning process and change from passive or depended student to active and independent learners.

The evidence which shows information technology tools enhance learning

Fiser (2004) ^[2] says there is a gap between learning and teaching goals in different context and that is true and we should be honest about it and accept it. And being honest needs accepting that we do not have clear and convincing evidences about effect of information technology on students' learning and educational outcomes. But there is viable evidences about the impact of technology as it relates to many of the process and experiential aspects of teaching, learning, and instruction. For example, teachers from 30 years ago was facing with lack of using technology and we can not compare them with the new generation in Afghanistan and it is a big gap between teaching and learning because nowadays students are a head from their teachers. Perhaps the best review of these issues is by Robert "The Technology Revolution Comes to the Classroom." His work is a well-designed assessment which focuses on use of instructional technology in different colleges and universities in different types of campuses.

However, we do not have hard evidence in Afghanistan schools to show that use of technology has enhanced students' learning outcomes in 20 last years' but why should educational organizations devote so much of their resources for funding more hardware, software and professional development activities? Even as hard evidence about learning outcomes continues to avoid us, we retain great hopes and we should! Because one standard part of professional development activity in Afghan organization is conducting workshops and seminars through technology use in the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. The evidence shows that other types of important assistances like, adapted and individualized instruction, asynchronous learning, enhanced content and information-rich resources that are not limited to one physical copy that exist in only one location. Somehow it has extended in all over of Afghanistan provinces. Given the role of information technology in the global economy, we in academia would not reduce all investment in IT-based learning resources and the IT infrastructure, besides we try to increase more opportunities for Afghan students to improve their skills of technology. Today, all students in different level and different ages need to acquire knowledge and skill of information technology in order to increase the opportunity for new learning experiences in Afghanistan school and universities.

Lastly, new products of technology give exciting and useful opportunities for higher education. For example, if computer science faculties make a strategic plan for IT in the university level the plan will be implemented by few coming years' and it will increase the skill of teachers as well as students in using information technology to build up future generations' skills because of the arrival of new technological gadgets. So, new products and technologies pose interesting challenges in World Wide gadgets especially in backward countries toward development such as Afghanistan. For example, new gadgets for using knowledge and information is coming day by day and using old textbooks and sources of information have no place in today's world. Teachers and students should be enough skillful for using new technologies like e-books and electronic libraries. Teachers should be updated and should not be depended to only a small pack of information like book. However, in a back-warded country like Afghanistan

traditional textbooks are still the only source of knowledge and information which teachers are using it.

Technology can change Teacher and Students' Role

Koral (2000) ^[5] technology can increase students' participation in classroom when it is used as a mean of communication or a facilitator or support for learning process. It means that students are taking active part in process of making decision to make choices about how to create, acquire, operate, or present gained knowledge, skills and information. Also using technology helps students to think more actively and deeply regarding gained knowledge, making choice, and implementing skills rather than repeated teacher-led and teacher centered lessons. Evidence shows that lecture based teaching in Afghanistan's high schools and universities does not have positive outcome by the end of a session, a semester or an educational year because the teacher plays the role of explainer and explain all parts of lesson and students are only receiving the knowledge and information which is transformed by teacher. Lecture is for long hours and students do not take active part in the lesson and it makes the lesson boring for them so, the outcome is negative. If there be some supplementary teaching materials to let students to take part in lesson and practice the lesson it would be better. For instance, instead of listening to the long hours of teacher lecture students watch a short movie related to the lesson, listen or watch a real conversation, do some activities and exercises, listen to a song or a poem and a speech based on specific aim of each lesson they will be more interested. Also, they will have high level of participation in different activities of the lesson. In this case, students' role changes from passive learners to active learners who are learning by their own.

Additionally, when technology is used as an assistant to help students in doing and completing lesson activities, students will be in the position of determining their own learning goals, making choice, making decision and assessing their progress. In Afghan context many students are interested to do and perform different parts of the task by using technology which is given by teacher. For instance, when we put students in different groups to complete a learning task while they are going to gather information, decide who should compile the information, who should computerize and finally how they should present their product to the whole class? It is time for identifying their goal and it depends on students how do they achieve the goal of their learning through using technology.

The teacher's role changes as well. The teacher is not the center of activities and attention as source of knowledge anymore. Teacher acts as facilitator of learning process rather than sender of all knowledge and information by setting project goals, creating learning opportunities, creating guidelines suggesting resources, mentoring and checking students' participation in class and group works, giving suggestions and guiding students to achieve their learning goals. When students are working on their technology-based projects, teacher observes and monitors their work and suggests some resources to help them in order to complete their projects successfully.

According to my own teaching experience, technology-based projects can change teacher and students' role. Use of technology is highly compatible with new role of teacher also asks students to have much active mental activity. Likewise, when technology is used in classroom, teacher

would have the support and assistance of a group of students who are well-experienced in technology and interested to share their knowledge and experience toward technology to others.

Increasing Motivation and Self-esteem by Technology

Ur (2003) ^[7] increasing motivation can be one of important and nearly universal teacher reported effect on students. Teachers and students are mostly amazed by great effect of technology on increasing motivation of those students who are mostly not motivated and not taking part in class activities especially in conversational academic tasks. To be honest in Afghanistan literacy means English and technology, when teachers use technology in teaching students become so excited that they have never observed such a useful lesson and they never get bored and they are highly motivated for learning the new lesson, it really changes students' and teachers' role. When technology is used in teaching lesson becomes very interesting and this sense of interest motivates students to be active in class. When students take active part in class and try to complete different tasks, the tasks would be done successfully and this success increase students' self-esteem as well. Students would realize that they have the ability to complete different tasks successfully and they have the ability to be successful this will really help them to feel motivated and it increases their self-confidence.

Technology can play the role of an empowering tool in learning process that can help learners to be self-directed and autonomous learners who can take the responsibility of their own learning. For instance, in my course students are supposed to work on their final projects individually. I am selecting a title for each student and let them to gather information and make a PowerPoint presentation. I only select the title of their presentation and observe their work and let them to do the rest of work by their own. They are responsible to read different sources use different internet sites in order to gain needed information. They analyze the gathered information and make a PowerPoint presentation by their own. They have all the responsibilities to complete their task successfully also they are not dependent to anyone else so they are trying their best. Given all responsibility to them motivates them and it increase their self-confidence. At the end of their work I observe how successfully and confidently they present their work to the class by use of technology. Technology empowers, motivates and increases their self-esteem to take the responsibility of their own learning and complete the tasks successfully.

In Afghanistan schools and universities, students clearly feel proud to be able to use technological tools for learning new knowledge and information. As one teacher expressed it, "Students gain a sense of empowerment from learning to control the computer and to use it in ways they associate with the real world. By giving students technology tools, we are implicitly giving weight to their school activities and their learning (Tomson, 2000).

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that in Afghan context teaching with technology enhance students' interest and makes the lesson more interesting in schools and university level. A quick Internet search may help you identify ways to supplement your lessons with interesting new material. Make a habit of searching before you begin each new unit.

You may find photographs, sound clips, video clips, and more that can bring your lessons to life. In many classes, students choose to work on their technology-based projects during recess or lunch periods. Teachers also frequently cite technology's motivational advantages in providing a venue in which a wider range of students can excel. Compared to conventional classrooms with their stress on verbal knowledge and multiple-choice test performance, technology provides a very different set of challenges and different ways in which students can demonstrate. A related technology effect stressed by many teachers was enhancement of student self-esteem. Both the increased competence they feel after mastering technology-based tasks and their awareness of the value placed upon technology within our culture and I hope that by reading this article draw teachers' interest in using technology in their teaching to Afghan students for better teaching.

Suggestions

Since technology in today's world is the language of literacy, it is very significant to suggest the following ideas to the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education teachers:

To make a strategic plan in Afghanistan universities and schools to teach technical skills for students with a broad range of computer software to acquire a basic understanding of how various classes of computer tools behave and a confidence about being able to learn to use new tools that will support their learning of new software applications.

To accomplish more tasks, it is for teachers to report class activities and grading by computer and give more assignments that students be able to handle more assignments and do more with technology.

Ask students to work cooperatively and to provide peer feedback based on a rubric through computer and internet. While many of the classrooms we observed assigned technology-based projects to small groups of students and provide them a guideline.

To use wiki, a wiki is a website that uses software which allows many different students to edit it. Your students work together to create a wiki on a topic they are studying. They will need to correct each other's work and collaborate in order to make it a success.

If possible print out your students' work, as we know tools exist today to allow your students to create really professional looking work using a desktop computer. Let students create a short film, run an ongoing class website that features student work and opinions. No matter in which level your students are, integrating technology in the classroom offers the chance to increase student interest and teach valuable professional skills. It makes the lesson really enjoyable for students.

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