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ICT In Education: Role Played So Far And The Challenges Ahead

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Abstract : Digitalization has revolutionized every walk of life and education is no exception. ICT started playing role in teaching-learning process at the turn of the century. COVID times accelerated the process, more substantially in the developing countries like India. It has reached a point now where it can no longer be avoided. Fast development in the field of AI in the recent years has offered diverse possibilities to the teachers and learners, guides and researchers. An obvious enthusiasm can be seen equally in learners, academicians and policy makers in this matter. It's high time to assess the progress made in the matter as well challenges ahead. Present study is a humble attempt in the matter and the observations made here are based on the real-life observations in the academic circles.

Key-words : Information communication technology, COVID, Gen Z, AI, guidance, training

It has already been almost a quarter of a century, since we started using ICT (Information Communication Technology) for the purpose of teaching and learning. Contrary to the general misconception that ICT is only related to computers and computer based activities, it covers a vast array of other technologies and systems including mobiles, internet, social networking, online workshops, meetings and conferences. In it, information is efficiently managed through a variety of technical tools and resources. Now this technology is providing processed information through all kinds of means and has reached a level where it can influence almost every walk of life, from kitchen to classroom. With the growing accessibility to World Wide Web services, the key to the access to a vast pool of information has been handed over to the common man. The appearance of smart phones on stage changed the scene drastically. Even before the citizens of developing countries like India could fully adapt themselves to these new developments, AI took them by surprise.

This digital shift in the outside world was sure to enter the academia. The last century witnessed the conversion of the world into a vast global village. The age old methods of imparting education in isolated *ashrams* could no longer cater to the needs of this fast- growing, technologically advanced globalized world. The researchers, academicians and students across the world needed the opportunity to learn and share their knowledge beyond boundaries without going through the arduous task of physically traversing

across the same. There ICT started offering its assistance. But the shift was not so welcome one. Apprehensions were there all around and still are. Will it replace our roles as teachers? As compared to the digital box, our memory and capacity seemed limited. This fear generated certain reluctance to adopt the new technology. There were certain other factors also, like those who themselves received education through traditional methods were not acquainted with the new digital style. Even if they somehow managed to do so, they could still find themselves embarrassed any time before their students who seemed to know better in the field. First step of delay was on these psychological grounds. The second one was the lack of resources—of tools, time and training. Not everywhere, the costly equipment and services could be provided for. The teachers needed to put extra efforts; they needed time and proper training to merge the new technology with their old methods. Because of these reasons the change was too slow to produce any substantial results in the beginning. No serious efforts were put into the process. Teachers were already swinging between the approaches, when all of a sudden the traditional rope was snapped by CORONA and they found themselves fallen to the side of technology alone. Left with no choice, they struggled through the period. They sighed and crawled, but had to keep moving as no other option was available there. With a certain number of exceptions, most of them finally reached a point of smooth sailing. Help reached them in the form of various online training programs. The COVID times let them experience the extreme use of technology. This turned out to be the point of no return. Even after the period was over, there was a lurking fear of repeated occurrence of such situations. Teaching came to a blended mode. Policy makers turned quite enthusiastic towards online modes. The number of courses offered in online modes increased everywhere. Discussions were there about equipping the teachers for the so-called Gen Z through training and workshops. But this enthusiasm towards switching onto the maximum online modes actually needs a check. It's high time that we re-evaluated the pros and cons of the same. One important point to note here is that as is the case with all great inventions or systems developed by the human race, ICT too has entered a vicious circle of misuse. From communication it reached the level of over-communication and now it has entered the phase of miscommunication. We find ourselves overloaded with information, that too of all sorts without any check. If we, as teachers, find ourselves in a mess while exploring and using these technologies, what can be said of our students, who possess less maturity and discretion but far greater enthusiasm towards the new technologies? No doubt, the use of ICT has psychological advantages in the process of learning for the students. The monotonous traditional lecture method is not able to retain the attention of the students for long hours. Materials like online videos, images and 3D models have transformed the way students understand and engage with concepts. It efficiently breaks the monotony of the classes. The online modes of teaching provide the teachers and students with the flexibility of time and place. But the negative psychological aspects involved in the matter are too much to be neglected. Overemphasis on digitalization is going to be dangerous for the mental health of the young generation. The coming generation is already facing the problem of lack of social interaction and suffers from alienation even with its own family. Time and again, the academicians of the past used to advocate students' coming out of the classrooms to have real-life observations and experiences as the closed walls of the classrooms could not ignite their creative fires. Now the situation is

even worse— leaving aside their peer-groups, the students are now confined to their virtual worlds. The flexibility of hours provided in online mode gradually results in complacency in the learners. The kind of adjusting, accommodating, co-operating personality that a student develops during interaction with other students in the real classrooms helps him to grow into a responsible citizen. The overall character of such a student imbibes various aspects of those surrounding him. A teacher needs to connect himself, emotionally as well as psychologically, with his learners. The problem that we are going to face after this sway of digitalization is over is the emotional and psychological instability of the generation. This alpha generation, which is in the habit of scrolling down or playing fast to reach the final conclusion, most of the time misses the most important points of the lectures in online modes. Face-to-face teaching gives an opportunity to the teacher also to explore the varied aspects of the topic, to provide analysis and synthesis of the cumulative observations, to improvise his lecture according to the slightest change in the expression of his learners. Online, offline or blended mode—the choice is based on the subject as well as the students. A vast variety of new apps have been developed to provide personalized learning platforms to the teachers and an equal variety of new softwares and apps are there to assist the teachers in teaching, covering every aspect of teaching-learning process— be it lectures incorporating videos and audios, assignments or evaluating rubrics. Recently, AI has revolutionized the whole area like all other aspects of life. Then again, it has become a challenge for the teachers to cope up with these new tools and technologies. The blind enthusiasm in the matter can work havoc. We need to properly assess the risks involved in such practices. The shift, though necessary to cope up with the fast changing and highly technologically advanced generation, should be the mindful one instead of blind following. We need to identify the actual needs of the learners. Let's take example of teaching of literature. The educational videos generated by the AI tools are quite remarkable and handy, but it has been observed that in most of the cases the imagination of the student is nipped in the very bud because of the over-ready materials provided. It will produce only mechanical learning and the very essence of the process will be lost. What the learner is supposed to learn is to think, imagine and explore. Various learning styles can be tried to accommodate diverse learners, the prerequisite is that the learner's mental health should not be affected. There is a great possibility that the over use of digital devices will alienate the learner from his peer group as well as the society. This will result in maladjustments everywhere— be it family, friends or professional circle. Already the number of cases of depression, stress and mental disorders are increasing with every passing day and the surprising thing is that these are being found even in the students of junior classes, where the life is supposed to be the most carefree one. Like every other invention of science, the dictum stands true for AI also— it is a good servant but if made a master, it's certainly going to be bad. While using AI in the teaching-learning process, it should also be kept in mind that it should not interfere with the creative and imaginative process of both the teacher and the student. As far as the research in the academic fields is concerned, AI can certainly play a role in processing the data and applying various statistical tools but assigning it the role of creator will rot the process. If we take the case of language and literature which is my field of first-hand experience, they provide very good assistance for the mechanical learning of a language, to understand the technicalities of the terms, to provide us with the a summary of a wide range of available

primary and secondary sources but beyond that we need to be quite cautious. Proper check and guidance from the side of teachers can make it a fruitful exercise. There are certain steps that can be followed to reach the desired goals in education. Attempts should be made to cover the digital divide, to fill the huge gap in the availability of digital resources to the various learners across the globe. The next step should be to provide the necessary guidance and training in the use of such resources. The final and most important step is to develop a proper system of checks and evaluation to ensure effective use of technology for educational purposes.

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