
A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES (ICT) TO FACILITATE WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

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Gajraula, Amroha (U.P.)**ABSTRACT:**

A profound integration of new technologies into education as a central means to teaching and learning processes will inevitably require from teachers, changes in attitude and teaching paradigms, such changes will oblige them to adapt to new methodological approaches, educational concepts and management aspects all of which will have to be set in technology-rich environments. Thus, open and flexible teaching and learning processes, emergence of alternative spaces aimed at promoting communication generate new needs and expectative to be achieved by educators. This paper explores need and importance of ICT in Teachers training programme and giving few suggestions for Teacher educators and Teacher training institutes to train future teachers for successfully using ICT in their own classroom:

INTRODUCTION:

The illiterate of the 21st century," according to futurist Alvin Toffler, "will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn."

Information and communication technologies (ICT) which include radio and television, as well as newer digital technologies such as computers and the Internet have been termed texrually powerful enabling tools for educational change and reform. When used appropriately, different ICT are said to help expand access to education, strengthen the relevance of education to the increasingly digital workplace, and raise educational quality by, among others, helping make teaching and learning into an engaging, active process connected to real life.

ICTs stand for information and communication technologies and are defined, for the purposes of this discussion as a "diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store, and manage information. "(Blurton 2002) These technologies include computers, the Internet, broadcasting technologies (radio and television), and telephony. For developing countries ICT have the potential for increasing access to and improving the relevance and quality of education. It thus represents a potentially equalizing strategy for developing countries. ICT greatly facilitate the acquisition and absorption of knowledge, offering developing countries unprecedented opportunities to enhance educational systems, improve policy formulation and execution, and widen the range of opportunities for business.

CONCEPT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT & ICT:

Empowerment may be defined as the process of removing the factors which cause the powerlessness. Empowerment has been used to represent a wide range of concepts and to describe a proliferation of outcomes. The term has been used more often to advocate for certain types of policies and intervention strategies than to analyse them, as demonstrated by a number of documents from United Nations (UND AW 2001; UNICEF 1999). Kabeer (2001), whose definition is the most widely accepted, defines empowerment as "the expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them."

Bennett (2002) described empowerment as "the enhancement of assets and capabilities of diverse individuals and groups to engage, influence and hold accountable the institutions which affect them" Keller and Mbwewe (1991) described women empowerment as "a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination." The core of the meaning of women empowerment lies in the ability of a woman to

control her own destiny. Almost all definitions of women empowerment include some reference to an expansion of choice and freedom to make decisions and take the actions necessary to shape life-outcomes (Malhotra and Schuler, 2005).

INFORMATION COMMUNICATION AND TECHNOLOGY:

The explosion of ownership and ever-increasing performance capabilities of personal computers, mobile phones and other Information Communication Technology (ICT) devices, the development of satellite, cable and other networks, as well as increased bandwidth, have spawned new forms of distribution through which media and entertainment product and services are made available. The restructuring of the media and entertainment industries and their inclusion in a trend towards an integrated information industry is driven to a large extent by these major developments in technology, for which the term convergence is widely used. (Media Perspective, 1999) This convergence is based on technological innovations in microelectronics, computers and telecommunications.

As one observed, "The streaming technology has already started a revolution in the way we hear and buy recorded music. It has shaken the foundations of the recording and music industry, and it may well promote new developments in digital television and holography." (Walter Durling, 1999) In a more general sense, multimedia convergence could be leading towards turning the home in many industrialized countries into a much more direct centre of consumption of goods and services than before through e-commerce, telebanking, interactive television, the internet, and so on. This trend towards business based on multimedia convergence lies behind many of the mergers and acquisitions now taking place in the media and entertainment industries.

The impact of information communication technologies and the related synergy effects and increased efficiency "have influenced the numbers and structure of the workforce and significantly changed working conditions and occupational patterns. They have also increasingly and this is a relatively new development affected the status of workers, especially in recent years. In the medium term, hardly any jobs will remain unaffected by it." (Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs: 1999)

WOMEN AND ICT:

It is a commonly held view that women are less engaged with Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) than men. Information & Communication Technologies are for everyone and women have to be an equal beneficiary to the advantages offered by the technology, and the product and processes, which emerge from their use. The benefits accrued from the synergy of knowledge and ICT need not be restricted to the upper strata of the society but have to freely flow to all segments of the female population.

KNOWLEDGE:

The one resource that liberates people from poverty and empowers them is knowledge. Possessing knowledge is empowering, while the lack of knowledge is debilitating. The World Bank organized a forum called "Voices of Poor", which got feedback from 60,000 people in 60 countries, which concluded that people wanted access to knowledge and opportunities instead of charity to fight conditions leading to poverty. (World Bank, 2000) And Knowledge is not a scarce resource - it is infinitely expandable and proliferates with its use... "the capacity to acquire and generate knowledge in all its forms, including the recovery and upgrading of traditional knowledge, is perhaps the most important factor in the improvement of human conditions." (Benzason and Sagasti, 1995)

WOMEN AND TECHNOLOGY:

The inevitable course of action is to convene a gender perspective on technology. "Any technology that is not appropriate for women is not truly appropriate technology." The concern raised in this expression is applicable to all walks of life where technology is an eminent and powerful tool that can bring about a change. The gender and technology concept comprises many dimensions, (Goonawardena Chandra (ed) 1995):

* Familiarity of women in handling technology

- * Decision-making capacity of women in technology-related issues
- * Technology to empower women
- * Technology to remove hurdles to women's growth
- * Technology to reduce women's drudgery
- * Role of women in technological fields
- * Technology to facilitate women's productivity.

ROLE OF COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY:

Information technology is the common denominator that links people, irrespective of caste, class, sex, religion, race of political alignments. This is why it becomes even more important to evaluate and assess the role of communication technology in empowering women, particularly from the point of view of access and utilisation. Gender equality presupposes elimination of all kinds of bias against women, and communication technology intervention can accelerate the pace of equality through gender sensitisation. Communication technology can be used to impart information, and that in turn will lead to motivation, mobilisation and action. Communication technology can encompass different approaches-welfare, participatory and catalyst approaches with women as change agents. Information, reinforced with success stories, can motivate women to adopt healthy lifestyles. For instance, information on immunisation, child mortality, maternal mortality, sanitation, nutritional awareness and causes, prevention and treatment of disease can be disseminated far and wide via communication technology.

ROLE OF TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTES:

Teachers being the key to effective use of web based tools and opportunities in schooling, they must become skilled at using them. It is the teacher after all who guide instructions and shape the instructional context in which internet and other techniques are used. It is their skill at this stage more than any other factor that determines the degree to which students learn from their internet experiences. Therefore teachers must be comfortable with ICT, able to apply it appropriately and converse easily with the help of new technological tools, researches and approaches. It is however a ground reality that most of the teachers in India are not at all prepared to use technology in classrooms. Mostly those who have basic knowledge of IT do not know how to apply these skills in classroom instruction. Therefore professional development of university and college educators in respect to use of ICT is essential. Unless teacher educators make effective use of ICT in their own classes it will not be possible to prepare a new generation of teachers who would effectively use the new tools of learning. (Tahira Khaton, 2006).

THE NEED ICT FOR WOMEN:

- * Health and child care facilities which includes sexual and reproduction activity
- * Information
- * Matrimonials
- * Fashion and market values
- * Career advancement facilities
- * Job/ employment prospects in India and abroad
- * Research
- * Educational opportunities including prospects abroad

WOMEN AND ICT EMPLOYMENT:

ICT makes the role of time and distance less significant in organizing business and production related activities. As a result of the technology, a high proportion of jobs outsourced by big firms are going to women. Women therefore can work from anywhere and at anytime and raise that extra income to become more financially independent and empowered. Recently, companies like Ford and General Electric have come to Asia and employ a large Tumber of women workers having basic information technology and data management skills. New areas of employment such as telemarketing, medical transcriptions etc. have also opened up tremendous job opportunities for women.

CONCLUSION:

"There is growing recognition of role played by ICT industry in women empowerment. Industry norms are undergoing metamorphosis to attract and retain talented women employees. The need to balance work family balance is creating a talent crunch in the middle and top management. These talented women can utilize their experience and talent to become entrepreneurs. Women at the top of ICT industry are setting a role model for the young generation. Women have to maintain a balance between professional and personal life to capitalize on the opportunities provided by Information and Communication Technology. Family members should support the -women to utilize their talent and skills to establish their unique identity and for the economic welfare of the family.

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