



ICT a Tool to Promoting Literacy

Farida Mokhtari¹

Abstract

Literacy is a dynamic concept that extends beyond the basic acquisition of reading and writing skills. Nowadays, in this globalised world, Literacy in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is fundamental to life in our modern technological society. To equip students to be literate life-long learners and global citizens of the 21st century we must successfully integrate ICT into both the teaching and learning development of the Educational curriculum and Educational pedagogical practice. Indeed, the rapid changes in information, communication and automation technologies have become linked and interrelated to literacy. The ICT tool has become more of a necessity in our daily life now rather than a facility. Through ICT, learning can occur anytime and anywhere. Online course materials, for example, can be accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week. These advances in information technology have revolutionised how people communicate and learn in nearly every aspect of this modern life.

The aim of this paper is twofold. First, it's an attempt to provide an overview of literacy as a basic skill along with the potential use of (ICT) in promoting that area. Second, it deals with the role of (ICT) in redefining literacy to meet the needs of a modern society and the beneficial impact and the learning outcome and effectiveness of (ICT) on literacy development and its expanding access to education.

Introduction

Obviously, we have seen no time in history when technology has moved so fast than today, and ICTs advancements are affecting people's life in all its aspects; the way they live, work, communicate, and even the way they spend their leisure time. For this purpose, educators, teachers, and learners are aware of the importance digital literacy can bring about, and the role that it can play in preparing students for a digital age. Actually, we are living in a digital world, a technological driven society; where the integration of ICT and technology-based resources in education is fully beneficial for the learning and teaching process. In the last few decades, ICT has gained a groundswell that changed the whole old ways of the "horse and buggy" system of education, where the kids were very bored by the archaic methods of learning/teaching to the point that many chose to drop out of schools. In fact, the introduction of ICT in schools has transformed the teaching and learning process and improved strategies for better educational attainment in quicker and better ways. Nowadays, to become a digital literate means to be able to communicate, create, disseminate, store and manage information whatever time and space.

Overview Of Literacy

Literacy is a complex and diverse concept. With the aim of providing education for all, UNESCO in the year 2000 revised the definition of literacy and put it as "the ability to read and write with understanding a simple statement related to one's daily life". Upon this reflection, we can separate between two categories of people; literate and illiterate. Based on the UNESCO statistics, there are 771 million illiterate adults over the globe; which means 18% of the world's adult population, and two-thirds of these adults without literacy skills are women. The lowest literacy rates are found in the 3rd world of course, notably in Africa, Asia, and the Arab world. Since 2002, one of the primary goals of the United Nations was to make literacy universal and accessible to all by reaching the remotest, the poorest and the most marginalised groups of people all over the world. Indeed, to achieve global literacy seems an enormous task and a big concern. For this effect, the decade 2003-2012 was declared by the UN as "The United Nation's Literacy". The aim, of course, was to bring literacy to all and increase its rates by 50%. With the pervasiveness of ICTs now, even the definition of literacy has evolved and got new uses that have become common terms such as; Computer Literacy, Information

¹ School of Arts and Humanities , Morocco

Literacy, Critical Literacy, Media Literacy, Visual Literacy, Cultural Literacy, etc... Numerous changes and innovations have been made to facilitate and make literacy universal. Thus, individuals, communities, and nations around the globe can benefit from the easy access to literacy, or multi-literacies. For, ICT applications now can use new learning pedagogies that outline and move forward education from standard literacy to multi-literacies. Currently, to cope with the digital world, a basic understanding of ICT and how to use it adequately and productively has become a real necessity. Because literacy in the 21st century means "being able to read critically, to be able to use persuasive writing, to have logical thinking and complex problem solving" (Lenham, 1995).

ICT a Necessary Skill

It is strongly believed that higher levels of ICT Literacy have the potential to transform not only the lives of individuals who develop the literacy requisite skills and knowledge but society as a whole. ICTs are often associated with high-tech devices, like computers and software, but ICT also encompasses more "conventional" technologies such as radio, television and telephone technology. Indeed, the ability to communicate with the latest technologies in different areas of life has become essential to support both literacy, and to promote development and success. In other words, Digital Literacy is widely considered to be an essential attribute and a must for both academic performance and professional success. For this attempt, ICT applications and digital literacy is a basic skill to be taught to and assessed for all students and accessible in all schools and universities. Because we are living in a competent workplace, the need to develop and understand specialised sectors such as; business, industry, environment, etc... is crucial in today's world. In fact, it is strategically important to prepare the students, the workers and the citizens of this digital world to compete and operate efficiently in the understanding of the science and technologies underlying ICT.

The Effectiveness of ICTs on Literacy

It's widely proved that ICTs are a potentially powerful tool holder for increasing education opportunities. Using ICT applications in schools can help in a formal and non formal way to give instruction to all, even the remotest districts and rural areas where groups of the population are prevented from literacy due to either social, economic, or environmental reasons, remain unable to enroll in education. Effectively, students come across a completely different way to learn different subjects. The digital ways of learning motivate the students in their work and foster their personal development. Additionally, this creates a real communication between the teacher and the students in a real context and with a specific purpose. Last but not least, the students become aware of their progress through conscious reflection on their own Learning process. On the other hand, ICT in schools prepares the student for the demands of the real world. Many teachers use ICT to support traditional learning methods, for ICT can change the lessons' pace. Teachers are no longer the only source of information and knowledge but they have become the guide that monitors the cooperation learning of students. New technologies not only help to access information but also to motivate Learners.

Advantages of ICT on Literacy

This young generation is very captivated with novelty, Prensky called them "the digital natives". He defines digital natives as those born into "new culture" while the immigrants are old-world settlers. In order to be updated and flourish in ever more digital cultures, "the digital generation" should be able to participate in a wide range of creative practices evolving around technology and communication in education. For this reason, most European countries have already opted and adopted the use of ICT in schools and made it a priority task in the whole educational curriculum. Teaching through ICT tools can easily explain complex instructions and ensure students comprehension. Furthermore, using images in class can facilitate the teaching of different subjects and improve the retentive memory of the students. Teachers now are able to create interactive classes and make the lessons more enjoyable, which could improve students attendance and concentration. It has been proved by experts that games and computer programs can enhance the teaching objectives and maintain the students' interests more. ICT has proved beneficial also in helping those students who have deficiencies and are delayed in their literacy of reading or writing. On the other hand, we cannot say that all modern societies have achieved progress in the education curriculum, and many are still in the process of the

adoption of these technologies of ICT.

Disadvantages of ICT on Literacy

Apparently, the use of ICT in many countries suffers relatively from low and feeble technical efficiency. This lack of efficiency is particularly resolved in the highly developed countries. But, in the underdeveloped countries, using ICT in schools and institutions is still very slow; because financially the budget of the equipment remains costly for the majority. The "Digital divide" which means the division that exists between the fortunate students and the unfortunate ones creates a kind of disparity between some students and their mates. Actually, the socio-economic background of the disadvantaged students can have a negative impact on their learning when they do not have the necessary material to make progress in a digital-oriented world; whereas, students from a high social background, have access to various technological devices like (laptop, mobile, tablet, iPod, iPad etc.) which facilitate their digital learning and their ability to make the necessary progress. Technical deficiencies can discourage both teachers and students to use a material that may affect the smooth flow of the activity, and may create problems instead of solving them. "Technical barriers impeded the smooth delivery of the lesson or the natural flow of the classroom activity" (Sicilia, 2005, p. 43). Though, ICT generally enhances literacy and has a positive impact on the teaching-learning processes, still compared with the ideal expectations; there is much to be improved at the level of efficiency. (Ramboll, 2006).

Conclusion

All in all, The adoption and use of ICTs in education have a positive impact on teaching, learning, and research. ICT remains a promoter of conducive literacy, and the teaching and learning environments. learners can access the education regardless of time and geographical barriers. Students now use ICT devices to learn interactively and work on class projects. They do research, communicate, and work collaboratively. "On the part of the professors, ICT has proven a very useful tool appearing in various forms such as simulations and education networks". Hence, an improvement of the efficiency of ICT, which could significantly contribute to a country's stronger development and growth should, therefore, be a top priority in the near future for most countries, particularly those in the third and fourth quartiles.

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