Digital Education: A Barrier or A Bridge?

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Received: February 02, 2022, Manuscript No. jflet-22-57718; Editor assigned: February 04, 2022, PreQC No. jflet-22-57718 (PQ); Reviewed: February 18, 2022, QC No jflet-22-57718; Revised: February 23, 2022, Manuscript No. jflet-22-57718 (R); Published: March 02, 2022

Introduction

Optimists have long associated digitization with improved quality of life and social progress, with the Internet democratising and decentralising information, allowing more people to participate in the knowledge society. The same can be stated about educational technology (edtech), notably in the discourse fuelled by edtech providers, which has long lauded learning tools as a way to improve educational access and outcomes. The scientific debate on edtech effectiveness, on the other hand, has been more cautious, warning of uncritical digitalization trends. Although there is some consensus among academics that technology can improve access to information, providers promises are frequently unfulfilled. Furthermore, studies on learning efficacy have been inconsistent, with the conclusion that investing in technology alone will not improve learning. Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and the rapid shift to online learning have increased scrutiny of edtech promises and research. Prior to COVID-19, fully digitised teaching programmes with educational technology integrated throughout the curriculum were uncommon, with only a few institutions, such as open universities, having built fully digital teaching and learning models. Many people believe that the epidemic has expedited the digitalization of higher education and will result in significant and long-term changes.

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throughout the curriculum were uncommon, with only a few institutions, such as open universities, having built fully digital teaching and learning models. Many people believe that the epidemic has expedited the digitalization of higher education and will result in significant and long-term changes. The nature of information technology use is examined in a new digital divide that assumes physical access. It encapsulates so-called digital abilities (also known as digital literacy or digital competency) that aid learners in achieving positive learning outcomes in digital environments, but which vary depending on education level, culture, and English proficiency. HEIs and their faculty may still be unprepared to appropriately cultivate and develop digital information literacy abilities among students due to the gap between students and teaching personnel. As a result, a teaching digitalization process must be accompanied by a thorough learning environment culture change and investment in stakeholders' digital literacy.

In addition to providing access, edtech proponents say that technology enhances learning experiences and outcomes. Learner's value digital learning because it allows for flexibility, involvement, and self-pacing, according to the literature. Indeed, studies suggest that edtech can improve learning motivation and engagement, as well as self-regulated learning and information transfer. Edtech has showed potential in terms of improving critical thinking abilities, sociocultural learning, student engagement, and learner creativity, in addition to learner enjoyment and cognitive skills. Even so, the researchers discovered that various factors mediate educational technology's good learning impacts. The benefits of digital teaching and learning, for example, are highly dependent on the learning mode, curriculum design, and teacher quality and style. Furthermore, in order for digital learning to be successfully deployed, educators must be well-versed in digital learning methodology. Finally, learning is enhanced when students have the option of selecting from a variety of learning modalities, as long as these options are appropriate for the learners' requirements, the instructional

purpose, and the nature of the learning task. To do so, a bigger institutional culture shift in terms of policy is required, one that embraces the transformational components of digitization and includes careful planning, digital pedagogy, and appropriate technologies.

Conclusion

We also advocate a scholarly and practical focus on digital education leadership, or e-leadership, to facilitate policies and initiatives around digital learning and collaboration on an institutional, national, and worldwide level. Higher education leaders, particularly those in well-funded institutions, are uniquely positioned to spearhead digital collaborations and build bridges across inequalities by sharing their resources with other individuals and institutions, promoting the rhetoric of collaboration over individual gain, and raising awareness of hidden inequalities that can be addressed using digital technologies both internally and externally.

Acknowledgement

None

Conflict of Interest

The author has declared no conflict of interest.