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Impact of ICT on the Livelihoods of Students in Tamil Nadu: Some Reflections

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Abstract

In today's digital world, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and its impact on every walks of life has been experienced by all over the world. It has influenced positively every aspect of human life and changed the way of both personal and social lives. It has undoubtedly become the vital factor of progress of nations, communities and individuals. In this background, to uplift the living conditions of poor students especially the rural poor, the Tamil Nadu Government has introduced an ICT based educational development scheme for promoting and protecting their livelihood opportunities. To know the length and breadth of the scheme, an evaluative study has been conducted to assess the impact of the scheme in the livelihoods of the rural students. The present study tries to make evidences on how ICT tools are enhancing the livelihoods of rural students.

Key Words: 1 ICT, 2 Development, 3 Education, 4 Stakeholder, 5 Computing Skill, 6 Livelihoods, 7 Empowerment

Introduction

In the recent past, the society has changed virtually by some technological innovation. These innovations have dramatically impacted to communicate, manage information, use time and complete tasks in day-to-day life. The technology is reforming the information is accessed and processed. No doubt that technology has an undeniable impact on social and developmental processes.

Technological devices are an integral part of the development strategy of both developed and developing countries. It is highly capable in bringing about social transformation by providing easy access to people, services, information and other desired technologies. Also it can empower the stakeholders by expanding the use of government services. It is highly useful for economic development, job creation, connectivity with other people and empowering them. It opens a new ways of communication and to

improve their level of confidence. ICT for Development are potentially helpful in creating new livelihood avenues for many young people especially students.

The education sector has in the recent past been seen to embrace ICT adoption from government level policies to institutional and individual levels. A remarkable percentage of schools and higher learning institutions in some countries have embedded ICT into the curriculum and demonstrated high levels of effective and appropriate ICT use to support and transform teaching and learning across a wide range of subjects. Besides, ICTs have revitalized the skills of the individual and enhancing the livelihood levels. The changing ICT scenario brought a positive impact on the process of development and socio economic status of deprived communities. It promotes the overall quality of life of weaker sections of the community.

Tamil Nadu Experience

Understanding the tremendous potentiality of ICT in furthering the cause of traditional knowledge and grassroots innovations, Tamil Nadu Government has initiated a number of activities to government agencies, stakeholders and entrepreneurs and facilitates the dissemination of knowledge and information pertaining to technology.

Since Tamil Nadu is considered as a pioneer state in implementing IT initiatives it is important to identify and manage the stakeholder's involvement and their attitude, level of empowerment, administrative setup, public participation and social acceptance. It is in this context, this study strives to provide a few success stories to understand the impact of learning through ICT.

The Government of Tamil Nadu, through a wide range of initiatives has already provided laptop to the students who are studying in government and government aided institutions is considered as unique and important. It gives a new insight to the students those who are from lower rungs of the society and also need to be technologically equipped to compete the emerging global market. The ambitious free laptop scheme of the Tamil Nadu Government was launched on September 15, 2011, under which 68 lakh laptops entail a cost of Rs. 10,200 crores are to be distributed to government, government aided higher secondary schools and college students.

Statement of the problem

Since the above scheme is individual oriented, there is a real need to evaluate the level of employability, computing skills, connectivity with the society and their empowerment. Further it tries to analyse the socio-economic background of the families and what extent positive changes could be made? How for it will help to improve the livelihoods of the beneficiary? This core group discussion had been undertaken among the Government and Government aided Arts and Science College students in Tiruvallur District of Tamil Nadu.

Methodology

It was decided to conduct case studies among the beneficiaries in the Tiruvallur District of Tamil Nadu. The reason for choosing this district is that has a mixture of urban and rural characteristics. The eastern part of the district lie within the Metropolitan limit and is dominated by urban characters while southern and northern parts are dominated by rural characters. Majority of the students belong to marginalized and weaker sections. Six students have been drawn from different discipline for the study. They were identified and informed that the study would be on the impact of the laptops supplied by the Government of Tamil Nadu through a scheme. More specifically the changes it created in the mindset of the beneficiaries. To understand the impact of the scheme, the following case studies were undertaken.

Socio - economic Background

All the students are from the economically very poor background ranging monthly income of their parents from minimum of Rs. 9000 to Rs.16000. Their educational background was not sound and they went up to only schooling. Every one stated that they pursued their studies from first standard to the post graduation only in government institution with minimum of payment. Even to pay the minimum their parents are struggling. Many of the respondents family are in struggle for their livelihood. This understanding and realization has made them to pursue their education and work hard.

Case Study – I

Removing the Knowledge Inequality

Praveena, who is pursuing her Under Graduation in the Government Arts & Science College, perceived that the use of laptop provided many positive impacts in my life. I hail from a poor family and my father is working as a Plumber. I am from a remote village near Tiruvallur i.e., Ayathur. As far as my family background and economic status is concerned, I cannot afford to purchase the laptop on my own. So distribution of laptops to the students, which was introduced by the then Chief Minister J. Jayalalitha strives to fulfil the needs of the weaker sections and marginalized, particularly those who are in the low economic category in the society. Since I am coming from the village, I don't have English knowledge and Communication skills. My classmates and friends who are having the communication skills look at me differently and treated me badly, and they formed a separate group of friends in the college. In such situation, the free laptop given by the Tamil Nadu Government provided positive thinking and self confidence to me. I used the laptop as a tool for improve the English language vocabulary and develop confidence with the help of my teacher. It also motivated me to learn more on technical, computing and communication skills. After some time, the skilled group automatically accepted me. Laptop has almost removed the knowledge inequality.

- Participant Observation

Case Study – II

Employment Opportunity

Mahalakshmi, who is pursuing her Under Graduation in the Government Arts & Science College, agreed that the laptop is very useful to improve her personality in many ways. Her father is working as a Mason (contract labour) and his monthly income is around Rs. 15, 000. Since my residence is in a village near Tiruvallur and most of the people did not aware of the computer or laptop. Since her family economic status is very low, she was unable to spend Rs. 30, 000 or Rs. 40,000 to purchase a laptop on her own. In this situation, she was much thankful to Madam Jayalalitha for giving the opportunity to access the instrument like laptop which enhanced her technical knowledge and skill of the poor students like her. Before this scheme, she did not get any chance to use the laptop. After she received the free laptop from the Government she did not know how to operate the laptop? With the support of her friends and teachers, she learnt much about the operation of laptop. Then, she had the chance to learn the typing in English. Simultaneously, she practised to improve her English Communication skills also. Due to her family economic conditions, she was forced to search the job. Now she joined the part time Data Entry work with a salary of Rs. 7,500. Because of the laptop provided by the Government at free of cost, she concentrated to improve her language and technical skill (i.e., typing) and she got the employment opportunity which is very useful to continue her study and also to support her family economic conditions to some extent.

- Participant Observation

Case Study – III

Employment Opportunity

Sultana Begum, who is pursuing her Under Graduation in the Government Arts & Science College, told that “the laptop is very useful to improve my future career”. My father is a Foreman and his monthly income is around Rs. 11, 000 only. Since my residence is in a rural area near Tiruvallur and most of the people did not aware of the computer or laptop. Since my family had three female children, it is very difficult to run the family because; my father is the only earning member. As our family economic condition is very low, I cannot spend some huge amount to purchase the laptop or computer on my own. Once I received the laptop from the government, I may be forced to do something as far as my family situation is concerned. I concentrated more to gain the technical knowledge and typing skill which is very useful to facilitate my employment opportunity. After I gained experience in typing, I joined the part time job in billing section of the wholesale agency with a salary of Rs. 8,000 which is very useful to my sister’s studies. Because of the free laptop provided by the Tamil Nadu Government, I got the employment opportunity while I am studying. I always remember and thank Madam Jayalalitha for giving this wonderful opportunity to the poor students, particularly minority like me and loyal to her.

- Participant Observation

Case Study – IV

Platform for Learning

Ganesh, who is studying his second year Under Graduation in the Government Arts & Science College, said that the laptop is very useful to enhance my skills. My father is a Call Taxi driver and his monthly income is around Rs. 16, 000. I am residing in a village near Tiruvallur and the village people did not aware of the computer or laptop. Since my father is the only earning member, our family economic condition is very low, I don't have money to purchase the laptop or computer on my own. In this situation I got the free laptop from the Tamil Nadu government. The laptop is connecting me with the different world. It brings lot of information to me. It provides a platform for learning many things like current affairs, general news, etc. particularly to improve my English knowledge. Because of the English language, I have been motivated to gain the self confidence through this instrument. Now I have the confidence that I will get a job. I was looked differently by the class friends while I joined in the college when I was not having the laptop, as they are having the laptops and gained some technical knowledge. At that time, the free laptop was given by the Government which enabled me to reach the status of my friends and influenced me to be in the knowledge circle of the college. It was possible only because of the effort of Tamil Nadu Government.

- Participant Observation

Case Study – V

Gaining of Knowledge

Vignesh, who is studying his second year Under Graduation in the Government Arts & Science College, opined that the laptop is very useful to improve my knowledge on various fields. My father is working as a security guard in a private company and his monthly income is around Rs. 9, 000. I have two sisters and I am the elder in the family. I belong to a poor family (particularly Below Poverty Line) and my relatives and other family members are not educated they did not aware of the computer or laptop. Since my father is the only earning member, our family economic condition is very low, even I don't think in dream to purchase a laptop or computer on my own. In this situation I got the free laptop from the government. I feel very proud and happy in that moment I received the laptop from the Tamil Nadu government. It brought a lot of information to me. It also provides a platform for learning many things like current affairs, general news, etc. particularly to improve my English knowledge. Because of the English language, I have been motivated to gain the self confidence through laptop. Now I have the confidence that I can get a job. I am preparing for competitive exams. At that time the free laptop was given by the Government has enabled me to reach the equal social status with my friends and influenced me to be in the knowledge circle of the college. It tries to remove the difference between rich and poor. It was possible because of Madam J. Jayalalitha. I will be always grateful to her.

- Participant Observation

Case Study – VI

Employment Opportunity

Sathish, who is studying his second year Under Graduation in the Government Arts & Science College, opined that the laptop is very useful to improve my knowledge on various fields. My father's occupation is washing clothes (washer man) and his monthly income is around Rs. 10, 000. I have three sisters and I am the elder in the family. I belong to a poor family (particularly Below Poverty Line) and my relatives and other family members are not educated they did not aware of the computer or laptop. Since my father is the only earning member, our family economic condition is very low, even I don't think in dream to purchase a laptop or computer on my own. In this situation I got the free laptop from the government. I feel very proud and happy in that moment I received the laptop from the Tamil Nadu government. It brought a lot of information to me. It also provides a platform for learning many things like current affairs, general news, etc. particularly to improve my English knowledge. Because of the English language, I have been motivated to gain the self confidence through laptop. Besides, I have learned to operate the Tally packages with the help of my friends. Now I joined the part time job in the Chartered Accountant office with a salary of Rs. 8,500 which is very much helpful to run the family. Because of the laptop given by the Government, I got the opportunity to learn the technical skill and to improve the economic status of the family. It was possible because of Madam J. Jayalalitha. I thank her for introducing this scheme in Tamil Nadu and provide opportunity to improve the livelihoods of the weaker sections of the community like me.

- Participant Observation

Conclusion

Tamil Nadu has been a pioneer in implementing the welfare programmes and schemes. Hence, every scheme and its impact must be evaluated. Giving laptop to students of the government and government aided educational institutions by the Government of Tamil Nadu has been viewed with the various perspectives. From the above case studies, the following observations have been drawn.

- The scheme has bridged the communication skill facilities to those who are deprived of the above skill.
- The students, who have obtained the laptop, have been using the laptop very effectively to gain knowledge.
- The students are totally connected with the world and developed self confidence through the use of laptop and get the employment opportunities.
- Because of this scheme, they got hope in their life and it made them to work hard to meet the future challenges. After attending the classes they used the laptop to see the mails, browse the materials needed to facilitate their studies.
- The scheme demonstrated that this scheme is best instrument to make the students coming from the poor economic background joining the social science programmes more employable.

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