Role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in Promotion of Religious Education (RE)

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Abstract

The 21st century, no doubt, witnessed a rapid transformation generally and particularly in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This has resulted in the emancipation of globalization in the entire world. The primitive ways of disseminating Information and Communication attitudes have been enhanced to a greater extent. Acquiring information has gone electronic whereby one can reach every part of the world to source information from his local point. Teachers and books are no longer the only sources of information. Educational accessibility is now vast the most students are seemingly more informed than their teachers. Currently, education or learnedness has no boundary and as such no apex, all for in the impact of ICT. The present study is meant to deal with the concept of information and communication Technologies (ITC) and sought to examine the important role of it in promotion of religious education. It will also analyze the advantages and disadvantages of ICT and provide some suggestive measures to make better use of ICT for the promotion of Religious Education (RE).

Key Words: Information and Communication Technology, Religious Education, Global Village

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Introduction

Truly speaking, modern world assumes shape of a global village more due to the advancement of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). It aptly affected more or less every developed and under-developed nation of the world.

Contemporary world echoes voices of digitization. Use of ICT is increasing day by day everywhere on the planet. Super-markets—through ICTs, made easy access to buy any product online at their residual place. ICT has a significant role to play in disseminating education. People interact, share ideas, discuss things, Store and retrieve data, all became possible with due intervention of ICT in education system.

In practice, ICT shaped enormous virtual universities[1] that are operative in the world, provides diploma and degree courses through e-learning or distance learning mode. Educational materials are now in our doorsteps and even cheaper unlike when libraries are found in government agencies, its accessibility restricted (Leonard Chidi & Rose; 2014).

One can access the world libraries from his local point through ICTs. In this virtual world, many traditional religious organisations and academic institutions, however, come forward and began to introduce religious education through ICT.

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1. Virtual Education refers to instruction in a learning environment where teacher and student are separated by time or space, or both and the teacher provides course content through management applications, multimedia resources, the internet, videoconferencing, etc.

From there, the significance, nature and scope of ICT in religious education system, its advantages, flaws and prospects, turn academicians, IT experts and religious leaders to debate for enumerating the role of ICT in promotion of religious education.

Infact, in the contemporary global world, ICT is considered as an emerging tool for the dissemination of religious education without meeting anyone and travelling to anywhere. The present study focuses on the concept of ICT and its role, advantages and disadvantages in the promotion of religious education.

Concept of ICT

The term ICT might still be strange to some, confusing to many and also misunderstood by great number of people. However ICT is taken to be the highest breakthrough in educational technology since the invention of the blackboard.

It is an acronym for Information Communication Technology. According to Prof G. B. Harrison, technology is the process of using scientific materials and human resources in order to meet human need or purpose. Information on its own side is that which can be communicated and understood.

Therefore information Technology (IT) which is the same with Information Communication Technology can be defined as the use of Information in order to meet human need or purpose with reference to the use of contemporary devices such as the internet, etc (Harrison, 2000).

Besides this, ICT—the extension of IT, is defined as a "diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate and to create, disseminate, store and manage information (Cutan, 2002).

These technologies include computers, the internet, broadcasting technologies (radio and television) and telephones. However, the phrase information and communication technology has been used by academic researchers since the 1980s (William, 1986; Roger et al., 1991).

The abbreviation ICT became popular after it was used in a report to the UK government by Dennis Stevenson in 1997 (The Independent ICT in Schools Commission, 1997) and in the revised National Curriculum for England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 2000. The concepts, methods and applications involved in ICT are constantly evolving on an almost daily basis (ICT, 2015), hence lacks universal definition.

Incredible Use of ICT

The incredible use of ICT being indexed and measured by organisations, provide reports that exhibits constant growing usage of it in both developed and developing countries.

The ICT Development Index (IDI) ranks and compares the level of ICT use and access across the various countries around the world (Measuring the information Society, 2011).

In 2014 International Telecommunication Union (ITU) released the latest rankings of the IDI, with Denmark attaining the top spot, followed by South Korea. The top 40 countries in the rankings include most high-income countries where quality of life is higher than average, which includes countries from Europe and other regions such as "Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Japan, Macao (China), New Zealand, Singapore and the United States; almost all countries surveyed improved their IDI ranking this year. (ITU)"

In modern society ICT is ever-present, with over three billion people having access to the Internet (ITU). With approximately 8 out of 10 Internet users owning a smartphone, information and data are increasing by leaps and bounds (Survey, 2015).

This rapid growth, especially in developing countries, has led ICT to become a keystone of everyday life, in which life without some facet of technology renders most of clerical, work and routine tasks dysfunctional. The most recent authoritative data, released in 2014, shows "that Internet use continues to grow steadily, at 6.6% globally in 2014 (3.3% in developed countries, 8.7% in the developing world); the number of Internet users in developing countries has doubled in five years (2009-2014), with two thirds of all people online now living in the developing world (ITU)".

Concept of Religious Education (RE)

Religious education (RE) is the academic field of multi-disciplinary, secular study of religious beliefs, behaviours and institutions.

It describes, compares, interprets and explains religion, emphasizing systematic, historically based and cross-cultural perspectives (Chidi et al, 2014).

With the scholarly and historical analyses of the Bible during 19th century, however, the concept of religious education got emerged. First it was known as "Comparative Religion" or the "Science of Religion" but now came to be known as "History of Religion".

Role of ICT in Promotion of Religious Education (RE)

Undoubtedly, Information and communication technology (ICT) is an indispensable part of the modern world. "If one is not informed, the person will be deformed"—general aphorism recognizes immense significance of ICT today, because man cannot (necessarily) do without information which is got through communication and enhanced with the scientific technologies available. The field of education (Including Religious Education) has not been unaffected by the penetrating influence of information and communication technology (ICT).

Through the use of ICTs, the whole experiences of teaching and learning have been given a fresh and appreciable dimension.

Education now knows no limitations. Undoubtedly, ICT has impacted on the quality and quantity of teaching, learning and research in traditional and distance education institutions. Teaching and learning tools are now easier and readily available to both teachers and students all over the globe.

Teachers are no more the only sources of information and knowledge. People can now teach themselves through the use of ICTs. In concrete terms, ICT can enhance teaching and learning through its dynamic, interactive and engaging content; and it can provide real opportunities for individualized instruction.

Infact, information and communication technology (ICT) has the potential to accelerate, enrich and deepen skills; motivate and engage students in learning; helps to relate school experiences to work practices; helps to create economic viability for tomorrow's workers; contributes to radical changes in school; strengthens teaching and provides opportunities for connection between the school and the world (Davis and Tearle, 1999; Lamke and Coughlin, 1998).

Advantages

In the span of just a decade, ICT has established remarkable velocity. The advantages of ICT are great in number but mentioned below are just few of them. It equally benefits everyone to get acquaintance with religious education as per his/her needs and requirements, goes beyond limits of teacher and classroom.

It acquaints one with the information that is otherwise inaccessible and consumer of time and money. The proper usage of ICT is essentially an important tool in promoting religious education to the world.

1. Learning Achievements

ICT is an important tool to enhance learning process and understand abstract concepts more easily as it brings to life using images, sounds, movement, animations and simulations. Besides learning, the teachers can attract the students' interest in learning process and they more understand if they learn by using something that will attract their interest (Maimun et al, 2009).

Therefore, by implementing ICT technologies in religious instruction process, it can improve the students' interest and also creativity thinking. There are those who contend that computers and other ICTs have properties or affordances that directly change the nature of teaching and learning (Kozma, 1994; Dede, 1996).

2. Easy Accessible

indeed, learning through ICT is easy, comfortable and accessible to everyone in everywhere without limitations. It is obviously different from the traditional procedure of gaining information by sitting in the classroom—not now possible for everyone. It comes closer to religious education; one can easily access to information about religious matters through the intercession of ICT that is otherwise difficult to access.

3. Information Store

it is more suitable to store up different kinds of information in some of the ICT materials in order to get rid of losing students' records, lecturers of expert scholars delivered time being on religious education.

This is simply because storing those records or information in print is vulnerable and prone to loss. The CD Rom, Tape/Video recorders, etc are known for storing information and students' data in religious education. It helps us to protect our records safely through email etc.

4. Less Expensive

Besides, easy access and interesting, virtual education (Education through ICT) is better and less expensive in terms of money and time than the traditional way of learning. It goes online through internet that does not require high investments and it is an advantage to students with fewer privileges who are unable to attend well known campuses. The cost involved in this kind of education via internet is less than the face-to-face method of instruction.

5. Environmental conservation

Besides other advantages, virtual education is a great boon to the environment conservation. It had reduced the constant usage of paper i-e brought from trees. The amount of paper we need while attending a classroom lecture is huge and most of the paper used always end up in the dustbin. While virtual education helps to save the environment and keep data safe in ICTs store materials.

Disadvantages

Besides many advantages, there are certin disadvantages of ICT in education particularly in Religious Education (R.E.). Among these, following are some of them:

1. Absence of Teacher

ICT has, no-doubt eliminated the limitations caused by place and time as well as the hierarchical authority of teacher in information transfer in the process of religious education. Teachers and books are no longer the sources of information as getting information got electronic.

Therefore, the essential component of education-Teacher lost value in teaching-learning process, which is not less harmful. Books also lost value as the whole process of instruction goes through digitized method with the help of ICTs. But both books and teachers are necessarily the essential components of education that in any way cannot be undermined.

Taking the necessary presence of these components into consideration, perhaps some argue that ICTs are merely a delivery mechanism for teaching and learning, while it is the foundational pedagogy that matters (Clark; 1983). ICTs by their very nature are tools that encourage and support independent learning.

2. Virtual Presence

Another drawback of ICT is that it lacks actual presence of taught in the classroom while learning. Since in the virtual education there is no complete bodily presence and sensational experience, the development of such aspects like internal motivation, belief, internal experience, internal commitment and action faces some shortcomings. People learning through ICTs could not succeed to get such training as they must get from religious education.

3. Create Laziness

ICT has made information readymade, stored and accessible faraway from the shackles of time, energy and memory. All is available in just clicking on internet via Computer. Hence no need of memorizing and struggling to find necessary subject matter in books that in turn leads to laziness.

4. Lack of Proper Training

undoubtedly, ICT is more beneficial in promotion of religious education if used in a proper way. Most teachers and students find it very difficult to make use of some ICT materials like computer, internet etc.

They lack the technical know-how of the adequate use of the computer and of internet. Many people also have phobia for technologies that they may often be referred as timid. Some, of their religiosity, considered modern technologies as prohibited.

5. Leads to cyber-crimes

while surfing on internet, some anti-religious advertisements appear on the computer screen that leads its users towards watching hedonistic/immoral clips. Besides this, immature users unconsciously serf unethical and restricted area that leads them sometimes to cyber-crimes.

However, the advantages and disadvantages of ICTs are in a polarity and this may bring to note whether to continue or not the usage of ICT in religious education.

Definitely every activity of man has a polar concept but what we should consider as rational beings we are, is which one suppresses the other (i.e the advantages and disadvantages).

To a greater extent considering the productivity of ICT in religious education, the advantages suppress the disadvantages so much.

We can always work against the disadvantages drawn from the use of ICT materials but we cannot avoid or prevent the advantages coming forth. They speak for themselves anytime anywhere. So we should not and never think about not applying ICT in religious education because nothing can stand in for their purposeful good results.

Future Suggestive Measures

It is therefore evident that Information and Communication Technology (ITC) contributes to universal access to education, equity in education, the delivery of quality learning and teaching, teachers' professional development and more efficient education management, governance and administration, in order to make better use of ICT in promotion of religious education, the following points must be taken into practice:

1. Internet and computer literacy should be made compulsory in the religious institutions to keep the students and teachers in the right and proper pedestrian.
2. ICT training must be inculcated in the curriculum at all levels as a general study that will be compulsory throughout the period of study.

3. Teachers Training programmes should be held to make them aware regarding the proper operationalization of ICT materials in religious institutions.
4. Government should include in the budgets funds that will boost the procurement of ICT materials in the education sector in general and religious education is not precluded.
5. Institutional authorities, people in the ministry should not siphon funds that are meant for the procurement of these ICT materials.
6. An effort must be taken to exposit the scriptural endorsement of using modern technological tools to create curiosity and remove disinterestedness among the students to the use of ICT materials for a result oriented end.
7. ICT institutions should necessarily take religious matters very seriously and must have a check on the authenticity of subject matter available.

Conclusion

Information and communication technology is a powerful tool for the development of quality teaching and learning; it is a catalyst for radical change in existing school practices and a veritable vehicle for preparing the students for the future. It has a dynamic role to play in the dissemination of religious education globally without any hurdle.

The question, "what is the role of ICT in religious education?" is a rhetoric question because the relevance of ICT in religious education is evident. We should not be talking of applying ICT in religious education but the enhancement of ICT application in religious education.

The indexing and measuring organisations like ICT Development Index (IDI) and International Telecommunication Union (ITU) reports evidently, increasing use of ICT in modern world. Religious education-not exception in global use of ICTs, had enhanced learning process but succeed to replace traditional ways of imparting religious education, to a very great extent.

ICTs-the most advantageous tool in education systems of both (Secular as well as Religious) has its negative impacts too that can't be undermined But are less than benefits. Hence, it is more appropriate to use ICTs in promotion of Religious Education and take some necessary efforts that will bear better consequences particularly in promotion of religious education.

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