

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY USAGE IN SRI LANKAN PIRIVENA EDUCATION

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Introduction

Today technological advancement is sweeping the world and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is spawning as a powerful communication network and learning environment. The main objective of this research is to find out how ICT is used by 'Piriven' Education (PE) in Sri Lanka to meet its educational purposes. Specific objectives of the study are: (i) identify behavior of ICT usage in Bikkhu Education (BE) throughout the world, (ii) discover the capabilities of ICT towards enhancing BE and Buddhism in Sri Lanka (iii) Give suggestions to improve ICT level in PE. Sample for the study was made up of 30 students from three pirivenas nearby. Major findings of study revealed that though Sri Lankan PE is using ICT in to some extent for their regular teaching and learning activities, it seems to be not in the required standard. Issues particular to the pirivens in its use of ICT, were further discussed. The overall findings of the study gave observant insights into the bikkhu's use of ICT and their attitudes towards it. Finally this suggests new innovative methods for the improvement of ICT usage among piriven students and inculcates them in a paradigm shift.

The 'Piriven' education formation plays a vital role in the Education System in Sri Lanka. There are 'pirivenas' within the country including 448 primary (Mulika) Pirivenas, 189 major (Maha) Pirivenas and 54 Vidyayathanas. There are 56,170 bikkhu and ordinary students in pirivenas studying Buddhism and general subjects. The purpose of this research is to add to the body of knowledge on how ICT is being used by PE in Sri Lanka. While there is a massive community in PE, if we can change the learning

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environment in there using ICT, initially it will be more practical and beneficiary for the whole society, especially for the enrichment of bikkhu's education with innovative modern technologies such as e-learning, e-books and e-conferences. Secondly, it can be used as a tool for the dissemination of the Buddhism throughout the world. Dertouzos (1998) implied that there is a need for change in learning institutions to prepare students with the knowledge and skills now demanded in the society.

Buasri (2000) noted today Buddhist websites are proliferating covering almost every known school of Buddhism ranging from Theravada to Mahayana to Tantric. Meditation techniques, for example, it can be clearly explained and illustrated on the internet, with an online teacher guiding the student. The *buddhanet* web site claims to be an original Buddhist education and information network. It contains electronic books, audio, teaching, multimedia, photos, and lot more. The *buddhistchannel* is one of the popular websites covering Buddhist news, events and personalities.

Pannyavaro (2002) observes "the world wide web, a very powerful communications network and learning environment," suggesting that it is appropriate for an e-learning environment to propagate Buddha's teachings. But economically deprived Buddhist countries like Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Myanmar are facing difficulties even in get access to computers and Internet. The status of computer laboratories is not in acceptable level. In order to enhance the ICT level in pirivenas, first we have to improve the infrastructure facilities. Even though Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka and many NGO parties are enrolled with this effort, still it is in sobering state.

Methodology

Thirty (30) participants were selected for the study from three pirivenas in Ratnapura district. The basic data collection instrument was a questionnaire. The instrument began with specific eight (8) closed questions that would be easy for the participants to answer and ended with two (2) open-ended questions. The results were categorized and studied to find any patterns or interpretations that could be drawn.

Results and Discussion

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to select the ICT equipment they are using at pirivena. Responses to these questions have been tabulated as follows.

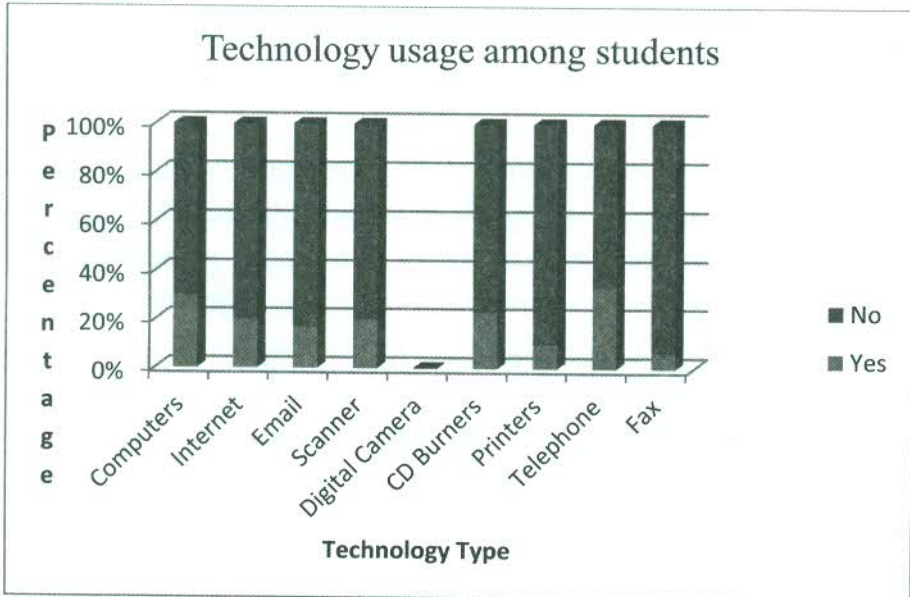


Figure 1.0: Technologies used by thirty students

The responses to technology used, suggested that the level of proficiency of participants is in pathetic situation. Over 80% of respondents haven't access to Internet, email, printer, fax and scanner. Any of the pirivena is not using digital camera. Mulika pirivena has not got a single computer. About twenty respondents later expressed their desire to learn more about the technology if they have enough facilities.

A summary of aimed benefits with using ICT is presented as below.

Table 2.0: Defined benefits of using ICT

1	can be used at anytime and anywhere
2	aids global communication
3	information - storage, dissemination, receiving, searching
4	Easy to publishing/writing
5	for education/study/research/e-learning
6	faster/ immediate/efficient /easier

While majority is keen on the benefits which can be obtained from the use of ICT in PE, the minority noted some restrictions related to it. The perceived limitations are presented below.

Table 2.0: Defined restrictions of using ICT

1	cost/funding
2	the use is based on English language
3	system breakdown/maintenance/viruses
4	lack of computer literacy
5	Not as good as having a face-to-face teacher

Conclusions

This study has documented how three Pirivenas in Ratnapura district is using ICT and the issues correlated with it. It should note that the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all pirivenas owing to the limited size of the sample chosen. The overall observations are limited in terms of time and methodology since this study was conducted in September, 2014 using a selected instrument.

All respondents agreed that there are many advantages in using ICT for the teaching and learning process, which they could not still achieve. Accordingly, we have to derive that ICT education in Sri Lankan pirivenas are not adequate to the current world. For a technology assisted piriven education, adequate infrastructure facilities have become crucial.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technology, Piriven Education, Buddhism, Sri Lanka

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