

# Planning and implementing educational technology projects in South Asia

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The readings that we have been through so far in the course and from my overall experience in the IDD&E program, a common theme does seem to appear in implementing Information Communication Technology (ICT) in education. ICT is a tool with a great potential for use in education all over the world. However, it is essential to have instruction conceptualized and structured for use in a technology setting for it to be effective in education.

The instructional methods and procedures implemented with the help of technology as a tool has the potential to transform education all over the world and make it more effective. Realizing this potential will require solutions that are varied across countries and cultures. We have witnessed some of the challenges of technology as we lived through its evolution and seen the disruptions and perils that it has brought. It is thus important to overcome certain challenges, especially while trying to use it in education.

There are many barriers that exist in implementation of ICT in education like access to technology, training in its use and institutional support. Also, there are more intrinsic barriers such as people's perception of the use of technology and their willingness to change. Overcoming such barriers and creating learning materials and activities for use in technology, while also adapting the instructional needs for different contexts or different groups of learners would be the best way to go about using technology in education (Tsai, C.C., 2012).

There is an almost universal recognition of the need to integrate technology into education in today's world. There needs to be an evolution from the thought that technology is a cure for all and realization that it is just another tool, albeit one with great potential. Governments have used ICT as a policy instrument while planning in education to bring about positive change in that sector (Zhao, Y., Lei, J., Conway, P.F., 2006). Policy is the driving force for a larger scale change over time in a country. However, there are always within country variations that might not be covered by national level analysis. Private sector is a powerful force where I come from, and this is usually way ahead of government level efforts. In the end, the goal of education should be to use technology as a tool in a smart manner, with buy-in from important stakeholders, and also by having experts to provide guidance.

The country that I choose to go with is Nepal, my home country. I have lived there most my life and worked there professionally for about four years. I have been fortunate to have the opportunity to experience other countries and cultures from a small age. I did part of my primary schooling in Madison, Wisconsin in America and part of High School in Dhaka, Bangladesh. This experience not only allowed me to be

a part of education in different countries, but also got the opportunity step back and compare them as a part of my experience growing up. I have also had the opportunity to explore beyond my hometown of Kathmandu within Nepal, and there is quite a stark urban-rural gap, which quite often mirrors private public sector educational gap, in the country.

I experienced many learning situations across South Asia in my previous role in a regional non-governmental knowledge based (research) organization. The main obstacles in these situations were of language, if any, as they mainly involved people from the same professional field. They had the same ideas, and were aware of learning objectives, had adequate exposure to using technology and were able to do with bare minimum English language, and hence were able to participate well in the learning situations. Having said all this, most of these instructions were designed for the traditional face to face method with only the aid of technology on the side.

Access to technology in urban Kathmandu city of Nepal with the upper middle class is cutting-edge. This population would be going to private schools equipped with sophisticated technology. However, for the poorer sections of the residents in Kathmandu, access to technology is an obstacle and they usually go to public educational institutions, which don't have technology infrastructure. This would also be the same case for most of rural Nepal.

Even with access to technological resources in Kathmandu for upper class residents, there is still the issue of having institutions that have instructions actually designed for use with technology. This I believe is a rarity up till now. The instruction is broadly designed for the traditional brick and mortar classes and any technology they use is mostly an add on to that. Hybrid approach of using some technology for part of the instruction is coming into use in some rare cases. In my experience in South Asia, this is more or less the situation throughout the whole region.

In implementation of educational projects or interventions in places of South Asia like Nepal, the main obstacle might be to be able to design instructions for the use with technology. This is due to the fact that education system policy in most of these nations is more traditional in nature, and getting approval for technology-based instruction would be the primary challenge. I would say even without the use of technology, the education system is based on approaches adopted by British India (before world war 2), and thus quite outdated. Access to technology issues in the urban rural divide and between upper-class lower-class segments also exists. The good thing about telecommunication and mobile technology is that it has to a large extent bridged these gaps. Penetration of mobile phones and high-speed Internet technology is almost universal in the region.

As instructional designers, there is a huge potential for planning and implementing modern education technology projects or interventions if we have policies that favor this shift. Access to technology is an issue in rural areas, however, for mobile-based instructions, this might not be such a big barrier. Culturally, at least in the case of Nepal, there is not much of resistance to use of technology in education. ICT can be used as an effective tool in creating better educational systems throughout South Asia.

Tsai, C. C., & Chai, C. S. (2012). The “third”–order barrier for technology-integration instruction: Implications for teacher education. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*.

Zhao, Y., Lei, J., & Conway, P. F. (2006). Global perspective on political definitions of e-learning: commonalities and differences in national educational technology strategy discourses. In *The international handbook of virtual learning environments* (pp. 673-697). Springer, Dordrecht.