Role of Technology in Enhancing the Quality of Higher Business Management Education – A Description

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Abstract- Today technology is having its impact on every direction mankind takes and higher management education cannot be an exception. In fact technology is confirming that it precipitates change in management education by providing and accessing information, learning approaches and methods of teaching and learning. Technology helps by providing learning resources, individualized learning, making the task of teaching-learning interesting, decisive and fruitful. Thus, students learn more and without any burden with the help of technology. It is only with the help of technology that distance higher management education has come to stand on its feet. Higher management education is provided by traditional universities in their campuses and in the colleges affiliated with these universities, institutions for profit and by independent institutions. Some well known business management institutions, as well some universities, also run executive development programmers, training programmers et cetera where the students are working executives. The maximum number of business management graduates and post graduates come from colleges affiliated to universities. Students, coming from different institutions, entering the market, are paid differently by recruiters. This paper makes an attempt to review the role of technology in enhancing the quality of higher management education. In early days of the use of technology in higher business management education was limited to automating but now-a-days technology is being used to transform the management education. For example, use of information technology in higher business management education improves communication, efficiency and decision making. Interactive computer applications and simulation exercises are used for ‘visiting’ and ‘meeting’ the key players before entering the class. Instructor’s console, computer assisted instructions facilitate information and knowledge sharing. To transit knowledge is the ultimate goal of teaching.

Keywords- Technology; higher management education; enhancing the quality of education; Information technology

1. INTRODUCTION

We start by defining higher education, its importance, explain the concept of higher business management education and then discuss the role of technology in enhancing the quality of higher business management education. Broadly defined, higher education is post secondary education, is voluntary, and is provided by universities, colleges and most professional institutions that award academic degrees. The subjects taught in various higher education courses are studied at an advance level. Besides providing more opportunity and promoting intellectual growth, it contributes to “greater economic stability and security, more prestigious employment and greater job satisfaction…. Self confidence” (Allen, December 21, 2012). Higher education is a sound investment for future and helps the receiver to think and explore new ideas. It also improves a person’s quality of life as he gets larger life span, better access to health care (ibid). Higher education is a “prerequisite for a financially secure middle class” (Sullivan, June 7, 2012) as “individual earnings are strongly related to educational attainment” (Hill, Hoffman and Rex, October 2005). Society also gains from higher education because of “enhanced worker productivity” (ibid) as these “productivity gains translate into higher output and incomes for the economy” (ibid). Higher business management education is the process of educating students the task of organizing different aspects of business so that the business is run profitably. The various activities associated with higher business management education include controlling, leading, monitoring its progress and planning.

Role of Technology in Enhancing the Quality of Higher Business Management Education

Modern higher education has made technology an essential component of “not only for supporting administrative activities, but also for core activities of teaching and learning” (Bates and Sangra, 2011). The blending of technology and “its use to transform teaching and learning are key strategies for such change” (ibid) and advances in
technology are revealing an “unprecedented opportunity to improve learning and teaching within the higher education system” (Turney, Robinson, Lee and Souter, March 2009). In other words, technology is being used to strengthen education by “making students more effective, more engaged learners…” (Lohar, October 10, 2010). Extensive use of technology is changing our working styles, communicating methods, our living styles and learning methods. Teaching and learning, related to higher education, have been impacted by technology.

In this globalized world, students have an opportunity to learn from many new sources. Under the circumstances competition and cost considerations make identifying and exploiting new technologies important. It is not only the skyrocketing costs or intense competition which the institutions of higher learning are facing but there are also problems of paucity of grants from the public authorities and less enrolment as the institutions are being established at far away places. These problems can be solved, at least partially, with the help of technology which can reduce costs, provide innovative services and help in retaining good students and teaching faculty. A well-designed technology can “tailor the learning experience to individual students, facilitate student-teacher collaboration” (Lohar, October 10, 2010) and facilitate teachers in “monitoring student performance each day and in quickly fine tuning lessons” (ibid). Besides this, technology has “broadened access to many new student clientele and in such a way contributed greatly to social equity in higher education” (Guri-Rosenblit, 2012).

It is also true that some business schools are using “technology-mediated educational programs as a means of differentiation and of gaining competitive advantage” (Alavi and Gallupe, June 2003). For example, some universities offer automated on line courses through mobile platforms. Here is no denying the fact that these courses are not very popular and “might not appeal to everyone” (Draycott, 21 March, 2012), but may be of fascination to those “struggling with the rising cost of higher education” (ibid). Competition in direct learning is another factor which makes use of technology important for universities as students can be taught en mass. In other words, if the institutions are to remain competitive they have no choice but to adopt technology. With the use of technology, students and faculty members of one institution or university can easily share resources with other institutions or universities. Students of a university may find it convenient to study Marketing by video from a university which has specialization in that field.

Indeed, technology has been so well positioned, as never before, to “profoundly impact the future of teaching, learning and organizational sustainability” (Laster, May 9, 2012) by bringing changes in curricula and delivery system of management education and prepare the budding managers to face “challenges in globally competitive setting” (Sharma, August 24, 2010) besides allowing two way flow of information, individualized, cost saving and approachable. Business management schools know it well that they are providing education to those students who are to work in an economy where information technology has a significant role to play.

Management education, especially for facilitating new features and improved learning know how, is affected by advanced information and communication learning. As the nature of business education changes, to keep abreast with changes and progress in business environment, universities and administrators of higher management education institutes are “making key decisions concerning applications of technology in education” (Alavi and Gallupe, June 2003). The technologies used by business schools, to deliver knowledge and information by efficacious means, consist of slide and overhead projector, audio-visual tapes, teleconferencing, floppy diskettes, CD-ROMS, ERNET, INTERNET, cell phones, smart phones, communication applications, software applications etcetera. These means, also called information technologies, “provide tools for manipulating and presenting instructional material in a classroom” (Leidner and Jarvenpaa, September 1955) and consist of

1) instructor console with presentation and display controls,
2) instructor console and computers to be used by students,
3) computer assisted instruction (drill and practice programs), and
4) distance learning (ibid).

The above mentioned various means of information have altered the way work is performed leading to higher productivity and efficiency levels of management students. A study by Sweeny and Oram (1992) finds that IT has benefited business management students by improving their skill and enhanced learning through the assistance of others and students have also gained “from the exchange of ideas and experiences communicated through the electronic mail facilities”.

As mentioned above as well, higher management education faces the challenge of containing costs and increasing productivity. Information technology has the capacity to alter the business education by improving performance and at the same time reducing costs. It is a well established fact that the present business education colleges and universities servicing the field of business education are “defined in time, in space and in the form of organization” (Kolderie and Mcdonald, July 2009) and are
ordinarily possessed by larger organizations. These larger organizations set the curriculum, employ the faculty and decide what is to be taught to students in the management classes. Presently, teaching process is neither customized nor personalized. The new technologies make “mass customization (and personalization) possible” (ibid). In other words, “modern IT – enables this new form of pedagogy to be applied cost effectively” (ibid) and there comes into existence the means to accommodate proliferating number of students who have dissimilar needs and knowledge interests. It may be added here that when technology is being used for teaching the subject of business management, the instructor acts as a facilitator and does not dictate as in conventional teaching. Students are empowered to handle their own investigations depending upon their curiosities, requirements, tenacities and imperfections. In other words, information technology empowers students of business management to follow their own interests, is interactive, flexible, accessible and students do not have to attend a certain fixed time.

There is no doubt that the general notion of remoteness and time have changed due to the coming up of virtual communication with the help of World Wide Web and other technological innovations. There is no barrier to communication and the business management institutions help their students, the future workforce, to get ready for these quick communications and also in changes connected with it in future. Crackers are also being used in enhancing the quality of higher management education. Crackers are the student response system. Crackers are held in hands and used by students to answer the multiple-choice questions during the teaching periods. When the students answer a question, they are instantly informed about the correctness or wrongness of their answers. It is of great use to the teacher to know whether there is any need to revise the topic or not. Implementation of technology in enhancing higher business management education is not an option but a requirement.

“I want it all and I Want it now”

Recently technology has made big inroads, which was not expected in the recent past, in higher education. And this has raised enormous assurances and vast opportunities for enhancing the higher business management education including that of being a crucial source of personal productivity and accomplishing of life and professional aspirations. Technology is making life easier for teachers as well as students as students do not have to listen to the monologues by teachers but classrooms are participatory. The students of higher business management or many other types of higher education are regular in use of and are capable users of technology. “Their expectations are high for ubiquitous access to the internet. They want speed, and they do want it now” (Artman, 2010). They want to download the applications for their requirements and “want to be sure that wherever they go on campus they connect and stay connected” (ibid) so as to resolve a question at the earliest. Technology can transfer the role of a teacher to a learning facilitator and “want personal contact with their faculty; they want high tech and high touch” (ibid).

Schwartz (28 March, 2012) has rightly put that when technology is being used in higher education institutions, students are put at “front and centre of all they do”. Technology will be adopted for the requirements of students and students “only study what they want to study not what academics wish to teach” (ibid) and this releases time for other responsibilities. Business education is being shaped by computer technology in a variety of ways.

Besides bringing in changes in course scheme and transmission system, technology creates knowledge and skill which students use throughout their careers. Moreover, as distance education, disseminated knowledge, virtual campuses, and digital libraries become more crucial for students, academic institutions can no longer rely on traditional methods to survive and prosper (Katz, November 1998). Students need not to be bogged down with the expensive and slow moving lecture in the management school but can download talks of experts on YouTube.

Discarding Notes

As to the role of technology in higher business management education there are conflicting claims. While some supporters of use of technologies say that these changes have “produced an era of ‘digital tsunami’ and are driving the restructuring of academe” (Guri- Rosenblit, 2012) while some others have opined that the “use of technology has remained, and will remain, on the margins of the academic activities” (ibid). Though technology is considered a major factor in meeting the challenge of higher costs and a source of mass management education, “but the results thus far have been disappointing” (Sheets, Crawford and Soares, March 28, 2012). Introduction of technology in the conventional universities and institutions faces certain problems “linked with student numbers in each group, student motivation”, (Gallego and Casanueva, 2000) the necessary technical and infrastructural resources.

Generally there is a “lack of imagination on the part of both instructors and administrators about the potential of technology for teaching and learning” (Bates and Sangra, 2011) which is due to the fact that they “rarely have any formal training in the management issues around technology decision making” (ibid). It is true the technology provides many new opportunities but the universities have neither realized its potential contribution
nor the teaching staff has the vision of possibilities of using it. Thus the teaching personnel find it exhausting to visualize the probability technology can offer and as a result, “the transfer of these technologies into a learning setting in higher education has not followed” (Attwood, 23 June 2009). Unless the teachers make use of technology, in providing education, in an effective manner, it will be difficult to use it in higher education.

The advantage of technology in providing distance education has been lauded everywhere by many experts. But it looks doubtful whether students entering distance education courses are getting the best due to deficient operational equipment, and scarcity of high grade courses. The explosion of on line courses has not kept correlation with high instructional quality and some of the institutions are working as certificate providing mills.

CONCLUSION

Technology can be used to enhance the quality of higher business management education if it is blended with educational decisions like content, method of delivering the program besides the training of instructors and by making facilities available. There is also a need to develop the ability of students to use the technology available, and enhance capacity to use technology to analyze and solve business problems.

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