



digital LEARNING

Title: DE Program in Orissa –Retrospect & Prospect

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Abstract:

Computer and information technology arising from it has created a revolution of sorts as far as classroom teaching is concerned. Use of Internet and multimedia tools has engendered a newfound quest for knowledge both among the students as well as the teachers. Use of information communication technology in classroom teaching has given a cutting edge advantage to teachers who have understood and internalized the benefits of supplementing traditional teaching methods with computers, especially Internet and curriculum softwares, rich in multimedia content. In some instances it has revolutionalized conceptual understanding, propelling teachers and students to explore new frontiers.

American India Foundation, through its flagship “Digital Equalizer (DE)” program has been working in the underprivileged government schools of Orissa, in association with the School and Mass Education (SME) and Orissa Primary Education Programme Authority. Our aim is to create an enabling environment by empowering teachers through internalization and use of technology as a pedagogical tool into the classrooms.

Orissa being one of the most backward states of India in terms of resources and availability of basic infrastructure, posed peculiar challenges as far as the implementation of the Digital Equalizer program is concerned, which started in November, 2004. From extreme poverty, remote inaccessible areas, damaged school buildings ravaged by the devastating Super cyclone to tackling traditional mindsets, we have faced it all in implementing the Digital Equalizer Programme.

The paper starts with an introduction, which focuses on the vision, mission and objectives of the Digital Equalizer Program. Apart from examining the rationale behind having a pilot phase as a testing ground before going in for large scale implementation it looks into the justification and motivation behind this program and brief description of the same. We then move into the section on “DE in Orissa,” which takes a cursory glance at the DE program touching important milestones in the preparatory phase leading to the launch of the Digital Equalizer Program. Orissa has followed a textbook method in transitioning from a pilot to the large-scale phase of the DE program.

The paper provides an in-depth analysis of the implementation challenges in the pilot phase with a description of the implementation structure both at the level of the government and the AIF. If computer aided learning (CAL) can be compared with a pyramid, the base representing introduction to basics, the middle, representing limited use of curriculum softwares and the top representing development of content, the pilot phase has meticulously followed each of this steps as far as orienting the teachers in using information communication technology in classroom teaching is concerned. This is followed by an analysis of the implementation structures for the large-scale program spread over 11 districts, some of which are remote and the least developed.

The fifth and the most important part of the paper focuses on the "Learnings and Innovations," which revolves around issues such as financial sustainability in defraying the running costs of the DE lab at the school level to hardware maintenance, facilitator management and ownership by the Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) and Village Education Committees (VEC) in the urban and rural areas respectively.

This is followed by a discussion of the future road map for the DE program in Orissa covering the remaining 19 districts and a total of 400 schools which have been provided with computers by the School and Mass Education Department through the Orissa Computer Application Centre under a special grant provided by the central government, in the section – Road Ahead and a Conclusion part which sums up, while gleaning out the learning experiences in addressing the challenges faced so far thereby buttressing our strength for meeting the implementation challenges ahead.

Bio-Data:

Subrat Sarkar- holds a masters degree in Political Science with a specialization in Political Sociology. He has an additional specialization in International Relations including Defense and Strategic studies apart from holding a bachelor's degree in Law. His area of doctoral research is Child Labour with specific focus on its Socio-Economic aspects. He has presented papers at a number of seminars and conferences and has a number of publications to his credit both at the national and international level. He has authored a book " Environment Reader", published by Commonwealth, U.K. His current research interests focuses on the area of Corporate Social Responsibility and his recent work on the report "Indian Laws and Corporate Social Responsibility", for Partners in Change is a marker in this direction. He is an Associate Member of the Institute of defense Studies and Analysis, New Delhi and also an Associate Member of the Orissa Cricket Association.