

Status and prospects of Information Technology education in Sri Lankan schools

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Having realized the need and importance to integrate Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into general education, the relevant authorities in Sri Lanka have taken several initiatives such as providing computers to schools, introducing Information Technology (IT) as a subject in the school curriculum and providing IT training for teachers. This paper focuses on a study that explored the current status of IT education in schools where fully equipped ICT centres were set up. The objectives of the investigation were, to find out the current status of IT learning and IT-based education in schools, to identify issues and constraints faced by students and teachers, to identify the potential of school-based ICT centres for community-wide IT education, and to examine the capability of the ICT centres for income-generation, as a means for self-reliance.

The study adopted survey method, and the sample consisted of 80 schools island-wide. Data collection was primarily done through a mail questionnaire survey. Data was also collected through observation of selected ICT centres, and conducting interviews with principals, teachers and students.

The ICT centres were mainly being used to teach General Information Technology (GIT), for Grade 12 students and in some schools for secondary classes as well. Centre facilities were primarily used for learning IT skills by students, but rarely for IT-based education. Using the Internet and e-mail was minimal. Issues such as inadequate number of teachers, insufficient training of teachers, and limited numbers of computers, hindered the effective functioning of the centres. The study also revealed successful attempts by certain schools, to implement programmes for income generation as well as the conditions that need to be fulfilled in future, to ensure the success of ICT centres, to self-sustain.

Findings indicate that establishing ICT centres in schools was a timely, and a very desirable initiative that provided the opportunity for both students as well as teachers to develop competencies in using IT in the teaching learning process. However due to various constraints, the optimum advantages of the centres and their facilities were not being obtained. To improve the current situation, it is suggested that adequate measures need to be taken through providing appropriate training of teachers, proper guidance and support for utilizing the facilities of the centres, managing the centres and ensuring the sustainability of the ICT centres.

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