Perceived Ease in Using Technology Predicts Teacher Candidates’ Preferences for Online Resources

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ABSTRACT

This study provides a preliminary analysis of teacher candidates’ attitudes toward information technology as they predict receptivity to an online resource-based learning. The participants of the current questionnaire-based study were randomly selected teacher candidates (N = 101) at an American Pacific island university. The questionnaire focused on the relationship between the candidates’ levels of comfort with technology and the degrees to which they consider the Internet useful in doing coursework. Results from this study may guide teacher education programs, as they seek to optimize teacher candidates’ receptivity to course-appropriate online resources. This is because these teachers will shape their own students’ attitudes toward online learning environments, promoting their students’ tendencies to access resources maintaining lifelong learning perspectives.

KEYWORDS

Information Literacy, Information Technology, Lifelong Learning, Online Resource-Based Learning, Preservice Teacher, Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge

INTRODUCTION

Education is becoming a global commodity, having a definite practical application, such as information technology as utilized on the Internet. In part because of information technology and distance education, the number of people of practicing lifelong learning is indeed growing. Today information literacy is a skill for life along with good reading and mathematical skills.

Certainly “learning throughout life is a common sensical principle nobody will argue about. What is presently being contested and interrogated is lifelong learning as an educational principle that has to be contextualized in the age of globalisation in the 21st century” (Medel–Àñonuevo, 2002, p. 14). Because of the increasingly rapid pace of technological advancement, “higher education institutions face a strategic imperative to broaden access to lifelong learning opportunities and to move from an elite to a mass system, ensuring that education and learning are available to a diverse student population” (Yang, Schneller, & Roche, 2015, p. 8).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Business processes now require the acquisition of information literacy skills to maintain a high quality of productivity and efficiency, and people need to learn for enhancing their own qualifications and bringing their skills up to date for a new line of work. In reality, “almost every facet of human life demands knowledge and skills of information and communication technology (ICT) … In this time and age, students cannot claim to be ignorant of the benefits of ICT competences and knowledge to their future prospects” (Osman & Alfred, 2014, p. 12).

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Information Literacy

People more than ever need to learn information literacy skills, because of the rapidity and constancy of changes in the society, and because of lifelong learning dealing with changes chiefly in their lifestyles and value systems. The concept of lifelong learning refers to the activities people perform throughout their lives to improve professionally and personally their knowledge, skills, and competencies to be acquired. “The late 20th century, a period of major social, economic, and political changes, was known as the beginning of the knowledge age—to distinguish it from the industrial age” (NZCER, 2015). NZCER continues as follows:

Knowledge age worker–citizens need to be able to locate, assess, and represent new information quickly. They need to be able to communicate this to others, and to be able to work productively in collaborations with others … Most importantly, they need to be able to think and learn for themselves, sometimes with the help of external authorities and/or systems of rules, but, more often, without this help. (par. 8)

Thoughtful Learning Newsletter (2015), recognizes the 21st century skills as a set of abilities that people need to develop in order to succeed in the above stated knowledge age, and such skills are divided into the following categories: learning skills (critical thinking, creative thinking, and communicating); literacy skills (information literacy, media literacy, and technology literacy); and life skills (flexibility, productivity, social skills, and leadership).

People also need the following sets of skills so that they can successfully negotiate the 21st century (McGrath, 2004): digital-age literacy (visual and information literacies, and multicultural literacy); inventive thinking (adaptability, creativity, and high-order thinking); effective communication (teaming and interactive communication); and high productivity (effective use of real-world tools and ability to produce high-quality products).

In relation to the teaching and learning process, in particular, information literacies (identify what information is needed, locate resources, and evaluate the resources critically for a given need) are essentially similar to research techniques (thus find, retrieve, analyze, and use information). Hence, in addition to the traditional basic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, information literacy skills are absolutely necessary for lifelong learning.

Teacher as a Facilitator

The challenges of the knowledge society include restructuring the teaching and learning process to reflect the use of information in the real world, changing the role of the teacher from a presenter of prefabricated facts to a facilitator of active learning as a collaborator in curriculum planning and course design for the effective use of information (Hancock, 2003).

In the past, students very much depended on their teachers and textbooks they used to access knowledge. Concerning the fundamental shift in the role of teachers (from an expert dispensing knowledge to a guide), Janicki, Schell, and Weinroth (2002) have described as follows: while the traditional 20th century learning (teachers as experts, textbooks as primary resources, facts as primary, information is packaged, emphasis on product, and assessment is quantitative), the “resource-based” 21st century learning (teachers as facilitators, verity of resources or media, questions as primary, information is discovered, emphasis on process, and assessment is qualitative/quantitative). Higher education teachers are now expected to provide “technology-based” 21st century teaching. The shift from traditional teacher-centered methods to learner-centered methods is a tremendous change particularly in teaching college students.
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