



ICT for education reading event

Summary report

Event facilitated by:

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Summary of a professional development event for DFID education advisors
16 January 2014

Context

This professional development event for DFID education advisors focused on the topic of education and ICT. The aim was to raise awareness of current issues and discuss evidence. The event was facilitated by Dr David Hollow from Jigsaw Consult and took place on 16 January 2014.

Session summary

The session was introduced by Chris Berry and Rosalind Gater from DFID. David began by providing an overview of the topic. Each of the advisors then gave a summary of ICT in education in their context and provided a question, topic or challenge that they would like to have addressed. David then reviewed each of the circulated papers before facilitating a discussion on the key questions arising from the papers and advisor questions. The session concluded by considering the practical implications of the issues raised.

Reading

1. **Severin et al. (2011), Evaluation of the ‘Una Laptop Por Nino’ Program in Peru: Results and Perspectives, New York: Inter-American Development Bank.**

The evaluation was conducted by the IDB and was the first major independent evaluation of the OLPC initiative. The evaluation is critical of the OLPC approach and the authors highlight the slow pace of change within schools, the need to prioritise thorough training throughout, and the challenge of limited connectivity.

2. **Gater, R and Trucano, M (2013), Integrating ICT into education programs: Evidence and Guidance, London: Department for International Development (internal).**

This internal paper produced for DFID includes a series of ten lessons from Mike Trucano reviewing common mistakes made when engaging in ICT for education, such as ‘think about educational content only after you have rolled out your hardware’ and ‘dump hardware in schools, hope for magic to happen’.

3. **Walsh C, Power, T et al. (2013), The ‘trainer in your pocket’: mobile phones within a continuing professional development program in Bangladesh, Milton Keynes: Professional Development in Education Vol 39 (2) pp. 186-200**

The article explains how the DFID funded English in Action (EIA) program in Bangladesh uses technology as part of a school based professional development program.

Key themes

The wide ranging discussion covered many different themes. The following five topics provide a non-exhaustive summary of the pertinent issues that were explored.

Critical engagement with ‘evidence’

There is a growing body of research regarding ICT for education but it is still not well established and many of the research papers are relatively weak from an evidence

perspective (with a notable lack of reliable control groups). Many things that are cited as evidence for ICT use in education need to be thoroughly assessed, by investigating the underlying methodology and assumptions in the research design.

Total cost of ownership (TCO)

While TCO databases are available, there is a lack of reliable information, especially in regard to future trends in cost effectiveness. It was noted that new low-cost tablets (such as those being produced in India) could significantly alter affordability. As illustrated by the example of OLPC in Ethiopia, rigorous and transparent assessment of TCO provides a valuable tool for decision making, enabling comparison of alternative options that can be achieved with comparable resources.

Influencing decision makers

There is an important role for advisors in ensuring that evidence-based policy informs decision making. This involves promoting the evidence and good-practice guidelines that are available and ensure that ministers are confident in using this evidence to procure the most appropriate technologies (and to confidently refute grand claims from private sector suppliers).

Mobile phones

Mobile devices are already employed extensively for a wide range of educational purposes. It is particularly noteworthy how teachers in low-resource environments are being proactive and choosing to use their own personal devices and credit (often on relatively cheap smart phones) to access learning resources to enhance their lessons. There is potential for donors to support teachers in their pre-existing use of technologies rather than defaulting into beginning by providing new devices.

EMIS

There are many low-resource schools in developing countries expressing demand for EMIS. Various providers are springing up with different models, often attempting to sell directly to schools at prohibitive prices. While there is research underway, there are not currently any well-established contextualised, open source systems at present. Appropriate EMIS, with sufficient training, provides potential for a relatively low cost transformative impact.

Ideas and issues to consider

- There is need for long term investment in building the evidence base for ICT in education, with monitoring and evaluation as an integrated component within new initiatives.
- In the most marginalised contexts, ICT is normally more effective at secondary rather than primary levels.
- A detailed assessment of TCO should be demanded from the outset with any new initiative.
- With any ICT for education programme, work to gain buy-in from MoEs and integrate with the pre-existing demands of the curriculum.
- Reliable power and connectivity for devices will remain a big challenge.

- A donor priority should be working to build capacity in partner governments for sensible, strategic decision making in ICT procurements.
 - Aim for incremental improvements through technology and be suspicious of promises of transformation from private sector providers.
 - Alongside direct classroom use, consider the potential of ICT as a tool for management, teacher training, learning outside of school.
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