Technology and Schools
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Not only are we in the 21st century, but it is now universally accepted that we are deep into the Information and Communication Age. For us in Trinidad and Tobago, this reality is further heightened with our thrust towards Vision 2020. The question now for us as citizens to ask is: How can we prepare ourselves to participate in a globalised world in the present century and beyond?

The Ministry of Education (MOE), in its 2005 Draft Policy for Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in Education, argues that to survive in an increasingly competitive world, Trinidad and Tobago will have to view the use of ICT in schools as critical to the transformation of the society. This argument convinces me that our Vision 2020 agenda depends heavily on education for its success. This means that our schools, inevitably, will have to be involved. It also means that our primary and secondary schools will all have to adapt to the rapid advances and changes in technology. Our teachers will also have to accept that technology is just a tool and not an end in itself; that it will never replace good teaching.

Technology hardware available to the classroom comes in different forms. These include computers, printers, digital and document cameras, projectors, CD and DVD players, VCRs, interactive whiteboards, and digital data projectors. Indeed, virtually on a daily basis new inventions are coming to the fore.

According to the Ministry of Education's thinking as highlighted in the Draft ICT document, the ICT Training for all Teachers proposals, and recent policy statements, the use of such technology in education can first of all create an environment that encourages creativity, innovation, critical thinking, and decision making. Secondly, it can promote the kind of collaboration that is required in a knowledge-based society. Thirdly, it can enhance teacher skills and abilities. It can also facilitate the development of partnerships between schools, communities, and other public and private sector organizations; and, lastly, it can optimise the operations and the management of the Ministry of Education in providing the highest quality service to the nation. All laudable goals, but are these goals really attainable—given our culture, capacity, and track record in implementation?

While we in Trinidad and Tobago continue to wonder whether we should take the technology leap, there are others, including the MOE, who are convinced that this is the way to go. These advocates submit that technology in schools tends to: 1) accelerate, enrich, and deepen basic skills; 2) motivate and engage students in learning; 3) help relate academic school work to the practices of today's work force; 4) increase economic viability of tomorrow's workers; 5) strengthen teaching; 6) contribute to change in schools; and 7) connect schools to the world. New information from the USA, nonetheless, points to technology's contribution to declining teacher morale.

I am a believer when it comes to introducing technology to our schools, but I am also a realist. As a result, the challenges that emerge with the introduction of technology in

schools will always interest me. Unfortunately, as with any educational change, there are many challenges. These have been identified in the literature as a lack of time, access, resources, expertise, and support. Reliability with respect to hardware failures, incompatible software between home and school, poor or slow Internet access, and obsolete software have also been found to be critical issues.

In Trinidad and Tobago, given the structure and type of school buildings we have—particularly among our primary schools—challenges will abound in the physical limitations of our classrooms in terms of space and size and the location of desks, which combine to limit how rooms can be arranged. As a result, this does not make it possible to provide the space necessary to place additional equipment in the school. Some writers accept that placing computers in centralised laboratories can provide students with equitable and efficient exposure to technology. They, however, insist that such a strategy severely limits the technology's accessibility for classroom instruction.

Another challenge is overcoming the fears many teachers have for technology. Writers who point to this challenge argue that teachers need assistance in order to overcome their fears, concerns, and anxiety. They believe that technology cannot be efficiently introduced to schools if this is not addressed.

Yet another challenge lies in ensuring that the technology used enhances student thinking, decision making, and problem solving. Teachers will have to be trained to achieve this goal. Indeed, they may have to change their whole approach to teaching.

Yes! For hegemony, technology in our schools is unavoidable.

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