

Can technology reshape the future of education?

The cloud is emerging as a new delivery model and a platform of choice for a number of educational institutions



UDAI SINGH

This is the age of technology disruption, where digital is the way to go. The world, as we have known, has transformed in just under a decade, growing and evolving on the wings of revolutionary digital innovations that are now visible everywhere.

The extreme connectedness, ease-of-technology access and availability of all we need and want at the press of a few keys have made new technology—including mobility, cloud, analytics and social—a ‘must have’ in virtually every area of life. From healthcare to governance to manufacturing to education, there is no domain that is not being powered by technology. Education is one area where new technology will have the greatest transformational impact.

For a country such as India that is facing gargantuan problems in the educational sphere, technology can certainly serve as a panacea.

India’s schools and higher education system are under great pressure. Lack of infrastructure, poor quality of teaching, teacher absenteeism, high dropout rates of students and a host of other challenges have prevented the country from achieving its goal of 100% literacy.

Technology can reverse this situation and play an important role in making education a key pillar of national development. Education can serve as the tool that will help India convert its currently uneducated youth into employable, job-ready resources that can help the country leverage its much talked about demographic dividend.

India, which will have 47 million people in the working age group by 2025, will only be able to put this high potential manpower to use if the country can educate and train it in the right manner.

Here’s where technology can step in. Our education system, especially private sector institutions, has already embraced state-of-the-art methodologies to deliver premier education that conforms to highest global standards. In such schools, whiteboards have replaced blackboards, and tablet computers, projectors, digital cameras and online games have made an appearance.

This trend, of course, has to become widespread. In 2016, therefore, we can expect to see a significant churn in the



education vertical—a change that is led by technology innovation.

We are sure to see technology, especially e-learning, making a real difference to the school education system sooner rather than later. This will allow high quality education material to reach remote locations, thereby enabling teachers to expand their reach. As a result, the overall efficiency of the education system is expected to improve. With the introduction of technology in the classroom, students are likely to take more interest in the curriculum and unleash their creativity. Technology will also bring the fun back into learning. The new academic year will certainly be a showcase of many out-of-the-box ideas that deliver ‘student delight’.

We also expect to see greater deployment of the cloud to deliver learning flexibly and conveniently to users. As it has become more secure, the cloud has emerged as a new delivery model and a platform of choice for institutions including colleges, schools and universities. These citadels of learning are expanding their footprint across India (some even across the world), and reaching the unreached without making heavy financial investments. They are leveraging the infrastructure provided by service providers to host their programmes and make available online courses ‘off-the-cloud’.

Others, meanwhile, are setting up their own campuses in the cloud, as a

Research has shown that social media platforms, when integrated with student programmes, can boost student participation and reduce dropout rates. Also, collaborative learning will soon go mainstream. It will be fuelled by portals such as Moodle, which enables students to share notes and course content, upload assignments, and chat with peers and teachers

pathway to higher growth. Over the course of the year, we are likely to see more cloud campuses appearing on the landscape and high-quality education being accessed by a large number of learners, on a ‘pay-per-use’ basis.

Another trend that is expected to gain momentum is the delivery of video over the cloud—a model that several countries in Africa are successfully deploying to train teachers and make faculty world-class cost-effectively.

With mobility proliferating in India, another platform for providing learning, going forward, will be the smart-

phone/tablet. Educational institutions will be looking to link their teachers and learners over the mobile platform and use it to offer content, tools, data and services.

Finally, social media will be the other big game-changer in the emerging educational landscape. Increasingly, educational institutions are using their social media sites to communicate with their learners, connect them to faculty, create discussion and feedback platforms, share content, and scale their learning experience. Recent research has shown that social media platforms, when integrated with student programmes, can boost student participation and reduce dropout rates (source: BBC Active).

Further, we can expect collaborative learning to go mainstream. This trend, fuelled by portals such as Moodle—which enables students to share notes and course content, upload assignments, and chat with peers and teachers—will become more visible.

We can also expect to see more and more educational institutions integrate with and leverage social media apps such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn to offer content to learners.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that technology will be the tool that will draw India’s educational system into the 21st century, making it a powerful driver of the country’s economy.

The author is chief strategy officer, NIIT Ltd