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20 PAGES PLUS 8 PAGES TABLOID WINNER | PRICE TK 10



■ PAGE NO 9

RESET IN RUSSIA-US RELATIONS 'IMPOSSIBLE': MEDVEDEV



■ PAGE NO 11

FLANAGAN WINS MAN BOOKER PRIZE



■ WINNER-5

GERMANY HELD AS RONALDO RESCUES PORTUGAL

Multimedia Classroom: Just the equipment or more than that?

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"I heard of it (Multimedia Classroom) and saw multimedia projector, but never used...", opined a teacher of a secondary school which received ICT equipment in order to implement Multimedia Classroom (MMC) initiative. If 'ICT in Education' means having ICT equipment in the school, then the understanding of the term is far away from the actual meaning. Indeed, the way MMC initiative is being implemented in the schools can be termed as 'ICT in School'.

Undoubtedly, ICT is making dynamic changes in our society. The potentials of ICTs in increasing access and improving relevance and quality of education in developing countries are noteworthy and proven in many ways. Like other countries, Bangladesh has already understood the importance of incorporating ICT in education. As a positive gesture for transforming the teaching-learning process from traditional to digital, the government of Bangladesh introduced MMC in 7 schools and with 23 trained teachers in 2010 under Access to Information (a2i) programme. On the 20th of May, 2012, Honourable Prime Minister formally inaugurated the MMC initiative by setting up 1000 MMCs. At present, the number of schools having MMC is approximately 16,500 and it is expected that all primary and secondary educational institutions will be equipped with MMC by 2016.

As the part of the MMC, a package of ICT devices (a laptop, a multimedia projector, sound system, a pendrive

and an internet dongle) is provided to each school. Two/three teachers of the respective schools receive a 12-day training, in which they learn how to develop and present digital contents for their classrooms and use materials found on the internet. Along with the textbooks, teachers can use those contents in the MMC to explain difficult concepts to the students with the help of texts, images and animations on presentation slides.

The deep-seated aim of the MMC initiative is to ensure such teaching-learning process which would be motioned by proper application of ICT. The learning of difficult and abstract concepts on the varieties of subjects turns into an easily comprehensible and concrete learning experience to students while leveraging ICT as an effective teaching assistant and thus, allows the learners to perceive an enjoyable learning environment in classrooms. Hence, schools require utilizing the most of their ICT teaching learning supplies.

However, the real scenario is quite opposite to what should have been. Most of the schools rarely unpack the ICT equipment to conduct lessons, though availing these resources for long. Almost all of the teachers not only suffer from lack of confidence and awareness regarding how to deliver lessons through ICT using the resources, but also are concerned if the expensive and limited materials, which most of the times fail to meet the quality standard (i.e. DOEL Laptop) and require sensitive maintenance (i.e. projector bulbs having a short life span of maximum a year), are not become out of

order or damaged. In addition to bearing the repairing expenses for the damaged material, a school solely has to face issues like identifying the technical collapse, sending the material to a proper place for repairing and finally, managing fund source without arising further budget crisis. Whatever the reasons are, as long as these materials are left unutilized the objective of achieving effective and sustainable classroom teaching-learning process through ICT remains unattained.



On the other hand, the MMC model requires developing digital contents, for which, teachers were provided with a 12-day training as mentioned earlier. According to the number of researches, most of the school level teachers of Bangladesh, in general, have no or minimum skills of ICT. In fact, many of the teachers touch the computer for the first time in the training. Therefore, a ques-

tion arises, whether a 12-day training is enough for gaining the skills of developing digital contents and conducting lessons through ICT.

Furthermore, it has been an issue for years that Bangladesh has a shortage of teachers at both primary and secondary levels, and they are already burdened with heavy workload. Some of the institutions have already introduced two shifts, without increasing the number of teachers. In these circumstances, teachers don't have adequate time to design,

develop and incorporate technology into the teaching learning situation. Some, on the other hand, raise questions regarding teachers' dedication to crafting the students' learning more effective and enjoyable. Indeed, some teachers somehow manage time to prepare digital contents, however, the number is very few. Due to the low frequency of practicing gained ICT skills, they forget

the skills necessary for developing digital contents.

Now, what can be the possible steps to minimize the aforementioned impediments? Let's try to find out some.

(1) According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, around 30.6 thousand teachers need to be recruited by 2015 to manage the current teacher shortage at primary level in Bangladesh. The secondary level is also crying for more teachers. First and foremost task may be materializing this need in a proper way. In this situation, at least 50-60 hour computer training or course can be compulsory as requirement for recruiting any teachers (now it is applicable for computer teachers only). On the other hand, for existing teachers, government can make receiving computer training compulsory for every teachers (those who have not) from any computer training institute (like B.Ed.) within a given timeframe.

(2) Besides, present one year B.Ed. curriculum can be redesigned through including ICT in a blended way in all subjects. The trainers should also be concerned about keeping the trainees in touch of ICT throughout the B.Ed. degree by using technology in different ways and purposes. Moreover, trainees should demonstrate lessons using ICT according to the lesson demand during the training and practical period.

(3) In addition, a strong monitoring system should be established to ensure the use of multimedia and effective learning environment in the classrooms. The means of monitoring should be online primarily Education officials can

easily monitor the status of the schools, teachers, classes and most importantly the ICT equipment through online software, Skype and other sophisticated technologies. However, mentoring system is simultaneously important to motivate, nurture and build confident teachers in take classes using multimedia.

(4) What is more, a regional solution hub can be established to solve any sort of technical problems of the ICT equipment provided in the schools of the respective locality. It can be established in upazila-wise or district-wise and the government can engage different non-government organizations to establish and manage the hubs. Teachers can inform any problems regarding ICT materials to the nearest hub and get the solution within the shortest time. Alternatively, the hubs also can monitor the ICT materials electronically using the online technical support system.

It can be said in a nutshell, what technologies are being used is not as important as how we are using them. Therefore, delivering the necessary ICT materials along with a 12-day digital content development training alone cannot be considered as sufficient to achieve the expected learning outcome. In addition to equipping the schools with ICT materials, the constraints have to be managed to ensure the well-planned, maintained and regular utilization of the ICT devices in classrooms to allow the students to experience the most from the innovation.

The writers are educationist and researcher