

Does the Internet Improve our Lives?

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A number of researchers have pointed the reasons why the Internet has potential as an educational technology, stressing that the World Wide Web has significantly improved our lives. Internet is of course already in use in a great range of courses and in a variety of roles. In this paper we will look at the current situation, arguing that Internet brings many positive changes into the field of education by enabling learners to have access to the great variety of resources and improving the educational process itself.

The adoption of the Internet in teaching follows many of the traditional models of technology usage. Early on there was a relatively small group of people who recognized the potential of new ideas, adopted new technology, and were not afraid to implement it. Such individuals are often optimistic about a technology (Internet in our case) beyond its current status. For example, when CMC (computer mediated communication) was still relatively new, and the software often unreliable and difficult to use, there was a strong community of people in education who supported it (Robinson and Weller, 2002).

It should be noted that use of CMC in learning dates back to 1988. The conferencing software employed then relied on a text-based interface (as opposed to a graphical one driven by a mouse) (Cooper, 2004). It had a number of good features, but was not particularly easy to use. It required a certain level of effort on the part of the user, which meant it attracted students and academics who were optimistic about this technology. In an evaluation of early CMC implementation, Robin Mason and Paul Bacsich (1998, p. 250) state, "the level of input from tutors with successful conferences usually far exceeds the number of hours for which they are paid. Many tutors have been prepared to put in "unpaid" hours because the medium is novel and they are curious and enthusiastic". This is still an issue with

online tutoring today. They also report on a central academic who spent 10 hours a week in maintaining a small-population online course.

Then, Internet became easy enough to use and offered significant gains to both researchers and practitioners. When the mobile phone became cheap enough, easy to use, and truly mobile, then it became a popular technology for most people. The same can be seen with the adoption of PCs and the Internet. Internet gained widespread attention when it became more reliable and easier to use. Both students and academics could incorporate it easily into their courses (Cooper, 2004). Internet popularity grew instantly as thousands of individuals discovered the benefits of e-mail use and online chats. One of the implications of Internet in the modern world is that the number of users increases rapidly, growing by thousands every day.

At the same time, there are individuals who are resistant to change. When that change is brought on by Internet technology, some people will be a strong group in this resistance. Although often presented as concerns about the quality of education, what lies behind resistance to Internet-enabled education is a fear about the potential of the technology to change one's personal situation (Cooper, 2004). Will it ultimately mean one's status, or even job, is threatened? Is the technology in conflict with some deeply held value? The difficulty in such cases is identifying what it is you are disagreeing over in the first place.

At this stage of Internet use in education, many of the researchers who have used it for years are very optimistic about this technology and are willing to devote extra time and energy to its use. The current developments illustrate that the number of online courses is going to increase even more during the next few years. For example, many campus based universities use the Internet not to replace their traditional face to face teaching, but rather as a means of supplementing it. This can

take different forms: for example, Web pages can be used to provide additional information, or e-mail can be used as a means of contacting tutors of large courses.

This paper shows that the Internet is a powerful technology, which offers a number of benefits. Students on campus can use it to access recommended reading or as a means of contacting lecturers, bulletin boards can be used to communicate with students on the same course, and administrative information can be made readily available (Robinson and Weller, 2002). Some universities take the notion of providing support material a little further, by using the Web as a means of allowing students to revisit lectures, so they can view a streaming video of the lecture and look at lecture notes. Internet allows individuals to take advantage of the great number of resources, while having the privilege of accessing materials from anywhere in the world.

References

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