

# Technology in education: Balancing Benefits, Challenges

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## TTUTA

THE NEW millennium brought new hopes for technology in education with the advent of the new-sector schools that were all designed to support teaching and learning in the 21st century. Twenty years later, one can surmise that even as tools, technologies and context change rapidly, child development remains constant and it's not simply the technology but what the educators do with it that matters.

Arguments may appear polarised for and against the use of technology, but one thing is for certain – the technology alone does not support learning but it can certainly support and empower better teaching and learning in order to unlock the learning potential of all students.

Amidst mind-boggling technological advances, how can the 21st century teacher deliver quality education in the absence of a clearly delineated long-term or even a short-term plan for the infusion of technology in a seamless education system? The education system needs game changers as the 1962 dictum can no longer swim against the tidal changes that continue to engulf and cripple educational demands in 2020.

Millennials are not excited about a long and dreary learning process. They are enthralled with the excitement of a game quest where making progress is incentivised and feedback is immediate. Teachers need to be rewired and re-equipped to approach this fast-paced learning with vigour and purpose. Notwithstanding, teaching and learning must remain purposeful with some theoretical foundation: Piaget, Bruner, Vygotsky and Gardner remain relevant to this day.

Equipping teachers with hardware and software brings related challenges of privacy, cybersecurity threats and device addiction. The ICT Division, Education Ministry, has covered five cohorts of training with the objective of equipping teachers with skills and competencies in ICT.

Upon completion, teachers have returned to their respective schools enthused with the hope of remodelling their lessons to infuse the technology and engage their students with 21st century teaching strategies.

Disdainfully, their hopes are overwhelmingly smothered as they return to the school building where computers are now obsolete, there is no Wi-Fi or smartboards, and tablets, iPads, smartphones are not within the reach of parents' pockets.

There is evidence of startling inequalities in the school system which have evolved from a dual system of secular and board schools. Past pupils from denominational schools garner handsome profits from their annual Carnival fetes which have, through the years, sustained the adaptation to these technological changes.

The schools that continue to occupy the forefront of educational successes are well equipped to deliver curriculum via interactive educational sites such as Edmodo. Sites such as these enable students to prepare in advance for a lesson, complete assignments via a synchronous platform, submit assignments soft copy, download and produce educational videos and thereby lessen the paper load on the environment and promote sensitivity towards climate change.

These schools generally possess the requisite resources and support to enact changes and to embrace the ubiquitous technology.

CXC has mandated the submission of e-SBA and there remains a hue and cry over the implementation of e-exams as the concerns raised in various fora continue to fall on deaf ears.

The smaller islands with all their meagre resources are moving leaps and bounds towards e-service inclusive of e-exams. TT needs more

time, more resources and more forward thinking game changers as we continue to play catch up. “Change is the law of life and those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future” (John F Kennedy).

Decision makers in education must be critical thinkers with a sincere passion for the common good of all staff, students and stakeholders; therefore, technology in education should have been addressed from a more cohesive, collaborative, comprehensive and conscientious agenda.

Teachers can no longer deliver curriculum via the conventional mode of chalk and talk, where the classrooms resemble a graveyard and the teacher is the sage on stage filling the empty vessels. Classrooms need to come alive! If teachers cannot engage students, then the students will certainly discover creative diversions from the pervasive boredom which have contributed to cases of violence and indiscipline in the classrooms.

The attraction of responding to friends on Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, What’s App and keeping abreast of the daily gossip and fake news consumes the thoughts of the new millennials. That world was created by and for them and moreover teachers are presenting themselves as ill-equipped to deliver curriculum in a “changed” environment.

Students no longer respond to a lesson, a lesson needs to respond to the students; lessons must be student-centred which justifies the call to reimagine what defines a classroom, instructions and professional learning.