A Contextual Framework to Guide the Introduction and Use of e-learning

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In Sri Lanka, under the government's vision of higher education, Information Management (IM) education is seen as important for fostering the development of a high quality market-oriented and knowledge-based society. However, a number of barriers currently restrict access to IM education by Sri Lankan information workers: the provision of education is limited to face-to-face teaching at three institutions in the Colombo (capital city) area, and the country's physical infrastructure makes it difficult for full-time workers to attend classes without missing substantial work time. This results in IM employer reluctance to support education. Hence there is a growing need to provide equity of access to IM education.

In response to World Bank reports, the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council (QAAC) of Sri Lanka aims to foster transformative change in IM education with the goal of increasing equality of access to IM education through the use of e-learning.

This research was guided by two questions: (i) what are the contextual factors and (ii) how do these factors affect the introduction and use of e-learning in tertiary-level IM education in Sri Lanka? An interpretive case study research was conducted. Thirty semistructured interviews were conducted with information management education providers, existing e-learning providers and relevant stakeholders, and three focus group discussions were conducted with information workers and academics. Relevant documents were also analysed: (i) official government documents (ii) official documents from private sources and other internal records; and (iii) relevant internet resources. Fullan's educational change theory and Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov's cultural dimensions provided a basis for a conceptual model to guide the process of data collection and analysis in this study to gain an understanding of factors affecting the introduction and use of e-learning. A key outcome of this study is the development of a contextual framework to guide the introduction and use of e-learning in IM education in developing country context like Sri Lanka. Factors that are perceived to have an impact on the introduction and use of elearning were found at different levels. Macro-level factors included social and cultural factors, governmental factors, and technological factors. Meso-level factors included resistance to pedagogical change, lack of human and other resources, lack of collaboration/partnership among stakeholders and collective perception of e-learning acceptance. The findings of this study have implications for IM educators and practice in the forms of development of policies, implementation of e-learning, and prioritization and allocation of resources.

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