Teaching the Posthuman: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract

The visible impact of Posthumanism by means of scientific advancements and technological progress has ushered in every walks of human life. Through redefining and negotiating, the basic aspects of teaching and learning theories, curriculum modifications and pedagogical interventions, technology brings in lively and effective teaching-learning experiences. The new revolutionary trends in information and communication technology offers unprecedented leap in knowledge dissemination and interdisciplinary researches, catering to the needs of a techno-savvy generation. By rejecting anthropocentrism, and considering the ever changing technology, Posthuman pedagogy aims at a true and realistic social transformation amidst all the socio- cultural differences. Basically, Posthumanism rejects the preconceived notions regarding the supremacy of man and accepts the inevitable hybridity of human, non-human or animal and machine. The present study aims at defining the current roles of the teacher, student and learning materials with respect to the futuristic technological developments and interconnectedness of the different parts of the world as a 'global village' and the role of the learner as a 'global citizen' and ultimately, the aim of education widens to accept the socio-cultural, linguistic, ethnic and all other pluralities of the world.

Keywords: Posthumanism, plurality, technology based learning, ICT and teaching.

The scientific and technological innovations so far brought about fast and fabulous changes in the culture and mindset of the present generation The impact of ultra-modern technology is far-reaching that the modern amenities like genetically modified high yielding food crops, robotics and mechanized factories and other institutions, modern health-care techniques like prosthetics, cloning and reproductive technologies – all brought forth man-kind far from being the customary humans but, a new era of 'post-humans'. Such an intrinsic transformation is visible in every sphere of life. The current technologically enhanced digital world offers a future full of aspirations as well as challenges. The future belongs to those who can cope with these shifting trends and keep informed sporadically.

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Knowledge, irrespective of the fields of study goes on expanding. There was an age in which knowledge was carried over by oral and written means alone. However, the far-reaching influence of the multimedia has gifted numerous opportunities both for learning and teaching. The support of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can enhance and optimize teaching and learning alike. ICT involves "diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store, and manage information" based on computers, the Internet, mobile phones and broadcasting technologies such as radio and television. Worldwide researches underscore the positive impact of integrating technology with education. Owing to ICT based learning, students can have better knowledge, understanding and memorizing. Moreover, it augments wider possibilities like comparisons, applications, skilled-presentations as well as unique innovations. ICT based teaching learning is well-regarded because; it is learner-centred, interesting, lively, memorable, comprehensive, cheap and easily accessible to distant learners. Mobile learning and e-learning platforms can outlive the physical constraints of the traditional institutionalized learning and bids ultimate freedom and flexibility to study according to learner autonomy.

In tune with the spirit of the times, the teaching-learning mechanism should also adapt and modify itself for catering the needs of the present society. ICT tools provide various opportunities in the form of Webinars, online courses, online collaborative projects, online tutorials, social networking, and so on. Precisely, the teacher as well as the learners being assisted by technology and living in the modern world is several steps forward than their precursors and hence become post-humans in every respect.

Teaching in this way offers innumerable advantages with respect to the earlier modes of teaching-learning mechanics. With the best use of technology, both the teacher and the student can access the relatively modern developments in distinct realms of knowledge. Pertaining to the possibilities regarding higher studies, researches and career opportunities, the assistance of the Information and Communication Technology as well as the Internet are real blessings.

Posthumanism redefines the real aim and value of human beings and focuses on the interdependence between human, animal and machine. Posthuman approach to education challenges some of the most fundamental concepts in educational research, curriculum design and pedagogical interactions and practice. Owing connections to philosophy, animal studies, environmental protection, feminism, psychology, biotechnology and gender studies, Posthumanism ensures a prospective education attempt far beyond the traditional theoretical, methodological and functional aspects.

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The humanity undergoes constant flux with regard to the changes in technology and the environment at large. The role of the teacher and the learner also changes. The teacher as the centre of education altered and the learner got prominence. In addition to textbooks, notebooks or laptops, PowerPoint presentations rather than chalkboards and whiteboards, hand-outs and other means are used for teaching. Whatever technological changes may happen, the teacher's humane consideration to each and every student's well-being and positive behavioural change is also worthy to be considered. Assessment of students based on their academic performance and co-curricular activities also became precise and convenient with the implication of technology.

However, the teacher as an essential component of education has lost its importance. The technologically augmented learning process is distinctly learner-oriented so that the involvement of the teacher is not necessary to disseminate knowledge. The motivated learner can imbibe knowledge through virtual classrooms and even without the direct interference of the teacher. The learners are today much more technologically empowered and endowed with many options to learn in their own way, according to their own interest, without any time or distance constraints.

No wonder, education in this Posthuman era is full of advantages. At the same time, it brings in multiple questions regarding the fast disappearance of humane quality from our day-to-day lives. Moreover, schools and colleges had a place in human lives to build up the student's lives, their career and ultimately make them good human beings with quality relationships, and better citizens to their country good and caring people to their families and relatives concerned. In short, knowledge dissemination alone is not the sole end and aim of education. In order to build up a value based education using the ultra-modern facilities is the need of the hour.

For more than a decade now, Posthuman theory got critical acclaim regarding the effectiveness and usefulness in the education sector. Several scientific disciplines like sociology, philosophy, biotechnology, animal studies, gender studies, eco-critical studies – have contributed to Posthuman pedagogy. Departing from the humanist theoretical perspectives, contemporary posthuman theory features different strands of approaches: assemblage theory (Manuel DeLanda 2006), socio-material learning (Estrid Sørensen 2009), actor-network theory (Bruno Latour 1996), non-representational theory (Nigel Thrift 2008), and the production of space (Henri Lefebvre 1991) and a wide range of such theories. Theoretical approaches to speculations point to the de-centering of humans from the social landscape.

Online educational platforms offer multiple possibilities to learn as well as teach irrespective of age, gender, nationality, educational background, occupation, motivating factors and so on. For the question, "Does technology improve teaching/learning" definitely we have an answer in affirmation. Through the worldwide e-learning facilities, in addition to the influence of

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media, persistently bring about a digital monoculture. The far-reaching influence of digital culture has some drawbacks. It wipes away the local colour and plurality. But in a more influential and acceptable way, we can showcase the rich cultural heritage of the much-forsaken cultures and people and can try to bring them towards the mainstream.

To conclude, there are a few prospects and challenges regarding education in this Posthuman world. Judicial and ethical use of technology is essential. Otherwise, the future generations will surely taste the bitter fruits of the glorious and well-regarded technology and will end in dehumanizing tendencies and mechanized culture. An inclusive strategy to understand and realize the possibilities and regard of the society in this globalized world is essential.

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