

ICT Use in Elementary Schools and the Future-Teachers' Perception

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to explore the student teachers' perception of ICT use in elementary schools in Shkodra city. This research presents the perception that students have on ICT use in several elementary grades during their practice in four different schools. The paper presents an interpretative analyzes of the perception of Shkodra's university future - teachers at teaching programmes. In this study, the students were asked to analyze the situation in some elementary classes in Shkodra's schools, about the use of ICT tools during different classes they have attended during their teaching practices. The students reflected also on the association between the use of ICTs in the elementary classes and the reshape of class teaching and learning, as well on the modification on learning and teaching process itself. This paper finishes by identifying some of the perceptions and needs the students will face and would like to change in their future teaching.

Keywords: ICT, learning, perception, school, student, teaching.

1. Introduction

ICTs have the potential to innovate, accelerate, enrich, and deepen skills, to motivate and engage students, to help relate school experience to work practices, create economic viability for tomorrow's workers, as well as strengthening teaching and helping schools change (Davis and Tearle, 1999; Lemke and Coughlin, 1998; cited by Yusuf, 2005). As Jhurree (2005) states, much has been said and reported about the impact of technology, especially computers, in education. (Noor-UI-Amin)

Students using ICTs for learning purposes become immersed in the process of learning and as more and more students use computers as information sources and cognitive tools (Reeves & Jonassen, 1996: 693-719.), the influence of the technology on supporting how students learn will continue to increase. (Noor-UI-Amin)

The use of technologies in teaching and learning process is very important in our schools in Albania. Even though it is in a progressive process, it is not at the level the students and teachers need or the context of the ICT development in general. Except this, the educational system is trying to improve the teaching and learning process through the educational system. The universities are supporters of this progress especially for future teachers through subjects or the teaching models they offer using ICT tools.

The perceptual process is a sequence of processes that work together to determine our experience of and reaction to stimuli in the environment. The perception does not just happen, but is the end of the result of the complex behind the scenes processes, many of which are not available to your awareness. The process is divided into four categories: stimulus (all the elements in our environment, that can we potentially perceived), electricity, experience and knowledge (which intend all the information that a person brings to a situation). (Goldstein, 2009: 5).

In Shkodra University the curricula of future teachers' has changed during the years. These changes reflected the way the technologies of education seen by the context and the needs. The implementation of the new concepts on

technology started during the years 1998-2003. The subject was firstly named "Computer", because this is the period of time the computers begun to be part of the Albanians lifestyle. So, the first need for the students was to learn how to use a computer for themselves in the future or to prepare their class works. During this period the people in general learnt to use the computer and they became part of their everyday life at home and at work. Through the years 2003- 2008 there was no subject which had to do with computers or other technologies for the future teacher programmes. In 2008 the subject was changed at the curricula of future teachers as "The use of the new technologies" and now it is renamed "Learning through new technologies" which has been programmed in a term per year. The students attended this subject 4 hours per week in 15 weeks of a term (semester), 2 hours of lectures and 2 seminars. During these classes the students have some theoretical information combined with practical lessons of elementary school teachers about the way of ICT use in the classes. So, this course is not only to know how to use computers or other ICT items, but also to gain a sense of technology integration and a new pedagogical thinking with ICTs. The students also prepare some lesson plans in group and individually using ICT tools. At the same time the students are at the last semester of the last semester of university. They have the active practice at the elementary school of the city to observe and to teach practically before they graduate as teachers of Elementary schools. This study is done exactly based on their practice during this period of time.

2. Methodology

This is a qualitative study, in a focus group of 30 students on the third year of "Luigj Gurakuqi" university. They attend the third year (Bachelor) at the Faculty of Education, at the programme for teachers of Elementary Schools. These students follow the active practice and passive practice in 4 schools of the Shkodra city ("Branko Kadia", "Skënderbeu", "Mati Logoreci" and "Pashko Vasa"). They attend this practice for one year, in two different terms (15 weeks + 14 weeks). In the first term they do the passive practice (they follow the normal lessons of a teacher in a class) and in the second term the active one (they teach in the elementary classes). The questions asked to the students consisted on what they have really seen in these classes, the ICT tools used by the teachers, the teachers needs on ICT support and on the other hand their perception on their ability to use ICT's in the future and how do they see the ICT use by them in the future. According to their opinion the students see the lack of the ICT tools in our schools even though they feel almost ready to prepare different classes using ICT in their future classes.

3. Results and Discussions

The focus group of 30 students, third year, in Bachelor level in the education programme follows the active practice (they teach in the elementary classes) and passive practice (they follow the normal lessons of a teacher in a class) in 4 schools of the city: "Branko Kadia", "Skënderbeu", "Mati Logoreci" and "Pashko Vasa". The focus group answered 5 open-ending questions to reflect the situation of schools and their points of view about their perspective in front of the context and their future teaching.

Q1. "How do you assess the context (school and grade) where you achieve professional practice related to ICT tools and their use?" About this question, the students gave different answers depending on the schools they followed the practice.

In *Branko Kadia* school the students mostly admit: No tools to be applied; Only a tape recorder for the music lessons; There are no tools; There are no audio-visual tools in the classes I have done the practice; There are no tools; No tools in this school; No conditions and no tools; Two teachers used the English room with overhead projector and computers during all the lessons; All the teachers use a tape recorder during the music lessons; Only in the English classroom use computers and an overhead projector.

In *Mati Logoreci* school they often admit: Never seen to apply ICT tools; Never seen neither in the passive, nor in the active practice a tool to be used; There are no tools; There are no labs or ICT tools.

The students who followed the practice in *Pashko Vasa* School mostly confirm that: There are no tools; No lessons with an ICT tool; No tools at all, There is only a tape recorder during the music lessons and the personal cell phone of the teacher to show pictures or to listen to the songs; It is a very disappointing situation the absence of tools; There is only a tape recorder for all the elementary classes and the computers' lab for the secondary school.

And the students who had the practice in *Skënderbeu* school mostly stated: There are no ICT tools, and no lessons using ICT tools; There are no other tools, only a tape recorder used every Monday morning for the Anthem; There are no tools, only a tape recorder in the corner of the class, never used during the practice; No ICT tools in the

classes I have had practice during this year in this school; No tools, only a computer lab, but never used by the elementary school teachers; Only the teacher we had the active practice has her own computer and uses it, but in general there is no electricity, so it is impossible to use it according to the lessons.

Based on the students perception we can highlight that in schools in general there are computer labs only for the secondary classes, not for the elementary school. But, on the other hand the elementary school teachers do not try to challenge themselves by using the computers in their lessons. We can admit the fact that there are efforts by the teachers in a sporadic way to use the ICT tools, but they do not have the right conditions to use them in their classes or do not have the right softwares in mother tongue which makes teaching difficult also the way of finding resources to use in their lessons.

Q2. *"What are the current needs of an elementary teacher associated with the use of technology?"* there were different points of view (opinions). The most frequent answers they gave about the needs the students said: To have tools and the necessary environments; To have the ability to use computers and other ICT tools; There are no tools and not a try by the teachers to use the ICT tools; The teachers need trainings; The teachers need courses and the right conditions to use these tools; The teachers are never been asked to use the ICT tools; They have no computers or overhead projectors; The teachers need tools (Tape recorders, PC or Overhead Projectors) and also to have software in Albanian Language and the trainings about the use during their lessons; Knowledge and trainings on computer use; Training and softwares available for subjects and ages of the pupils; The right conditions and tools according to the subjects and themes of the lessons.

The students see the lack of ICT tools and the right environment, and less the need for trainings, because they think the teachers know how to use some tools, specially the basic programmes of computers.

Their answers about the question (Q.3): *"How do you assess your level of knowledge about the use of technological tools in the future with regard to the learning process? How prepared do you feel about your lessons of applied learning technologies?"*, were almost the same: Have a good knowledge, but need more practice to use them; Have good abilities to use computers, but need more tools than those to try before my future teaching; Are ready; Have a fair knowledge; Have good knowledge on computers, but need more practice before my real class; Not very good knowledge, but with a specific training and the right conditions to do their best; Feel able because have had the chance to practice their use; Need a frequent use of these tools.

In general the students are able to use the main ICT tools, but they need a real time in real classes to use and to practice their ideas through these tools. This is understandable because they do not have the chance to practice their knowledge in our classes and they are in the first year of the experience as teachers.

Q4. *"Are the pupils or children of a primary level willing to engage in ICT use during their lessons?"*, the students admitted almost the same statements. In general they think that the pupils are prepared to use the ICT tools; others think that the pupils are prepared, because they use different tools at home (computers, cameras, and cell phones) and only one of them admits that they need more preparations.

The students see their future problem on using ICTs bigger than that of their pupils, because they see that the pupils are interested and found of ICT tools as an entertainment way and a kind part of their free time.

Q5. *"Do you see the introduction of learning technologies as an obstacle or a relief in your work in the future?"* was the last question in our focus group. In general the students see the introduction of the technologies as a facilitator for the teachers and for the pupils too; Others think that it is a relief for the pupils, but their use should be well programmed; A small group thinks that the use of these tools may be an obstacle or a relief depending on the subject, so in some subjects they are a relief and in other they think are obstacles; Others think that it is a relief specially to reduce the time of understanding and learning, raises the concentration, attention and a small group thinks that is an important relief, but this process needs a good management, because otherwise it will be an obstacle.

We can highlight the fact that the ICT introduction in the future classes is more a relief than an obstacle, but related to activities and several practices during their lesson ICT is a necessity for a better and future teaching.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on their perception, the students admit that they:

- Have a low level of computer skills for specific programmes, due to the impracticable skills and the theoretic computer knowledge, not practiced.
- Are optimistic about their possibility and ability to use the ICT tools during their classes in the future, but they need different trainings, not as a necessity.

- See a big problem on interaction of the ICT tools and the conditions of the classrooms.
- Need help and support to change the conditions in schools with the aim to improve the quality of teaching with their future pupils.(tools, environment, trainings, the right software etc.)
- Need to practice not only the computers, but also over head projectors etc. before going in real classrooms.
- The introduction of ICTs in teaching and learning process is seen more as a relief and the pupils as good collaborators.

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