



[Home](#)   [Articles](#)   [Resources](#)

Thursday | 19 Nov 2009

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**News**

**Comments**

**Resources**

**Archive**

## 'Integrate e-governance in education sector'

16 September 2009

**Implementing e-governance in educational systems will enable effective monitoring of academic standards, says N.N. Sachitanand, a technology writer. He cites the example of M-Star education expert system which has overhauled the infrastructure in schools and colleges across India, making the learning system more accountable.**

The application of IT is fairly widespread by now in India in the private sector. However, when it comes to public governance, India has been a laggard in the utilisation of IT.

There are several reasons for this. One is the monopolistic nature of public governance. It is the customer, in this case the "aam aadmi", who has to like or lump whatever is offered by the public institution. He has no alternative.

A second important reason for the slow start off the block, particularly of e-governance, is that it enables transparency and cuts down avenues of corruption.

The common man has benefited from the e-governance measures implemented so far.

Perhaps the best example in India of how e-governance can lead to order out of chaos and put paid to the machinations of the ungodly is the replacement of the old ballot system by electronic voting in elections.

Despite these advantages, e-governance has not yet made much headway in government in India. Government spending on IT accounts for only about 15% of India's \$12 billion domestic IT market. Out of 30 "Mission Mode e-governance projects" totalling \$6 billion in IT spends that were drawn up by the centre back in 2006, only three have been awarded so far.

### Education and technology

Education as a sector has remained relatively untouched by e-governance. This is most distressing, considering that education is the cornerstone of our efforts to build up the future generation.

"e-governance system deployed will have to go beyond mere computerisation of records or processes"

Even in the Right to Education Act there is little mention of implementing e-governance in our education system.



Image credits: ADB/ Indian officials learning best practices on e-governance

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New Delhi, India, December 18-19, 2009
- » **BETT 2010**  
Educational technology event, Olympia, London, January 13-16, 2010
- » **Sustainability Virtual Summits**  
Virtual event, conference and exhibition, February 9-11, 2010



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As it stands today, our education system is chaotic, to say the least. It is characterised by a high dropout rate, teacher truancy, obsolete syllabi, inadequate infrastructure, unemployable graduates and the lot.

The tiny proportion of quality output that emerges from it is more a case of serendipity and the determination of the students belonging to this micro-minority.

This is because the present system lacks means of continuous monitoring, meaningful evaluation of the teacher and the taught, constant feedback to the players concerned (administrators, faculty, parents and students) and appropriate timely control and correction mechanisms.

### **Improving education system**

If the quantity and quality of output from our education system have to be substantially improved, then there is no alternative to introducing e-governance in this sphere.

However, to be really effective, the e-governance system deployed will have to go beyond mere computerisation of records or processes.

It has to be able to provide the management of the educational institution information about the Why of a happening or a trend besides the What, When and Where, so that adequate prophylactic action can be taken. It should be able to provide answers to queries like:

Why is the performance of a class dropping in a particular subject? Why is a particularly bright student lagging in performance in the last two terms? Which teacher has produced the best consistent results for her class?

"If the Education Expert System gets linked to other national e-governance systems then the possibilities are endless"

Then again, considering the paucity of funds in our state-aided educational institutions, an e-governance system which is inexpensive to install, simple to use, easy to maintain and can be conveniently expanded will be much more acceptable.

### **Monitoring academic performance**

One such e-governance system for educational institutions — the M-Star Education Expert System — has been piloted in scores of schools in India. This system currently runs in a variety of schools and colleges in the country.

M-Star has been developed by MGRM NET after a deep study of educational systems. It is highly flexible in that it can apply to any educational system and yet be customised to a very high degree to fit in with all the required parameters and diverse needs of an institution.

It takes the life cycle approach and works all the way up the education chain — from kindergarten right up to the university level — for all kinds of curriculum and structures. The system bridges the gap between different stakeholders in a school, such as students, parents, teachers, principal and education administrators.

For administrators like school boards and education directorates, which have to keep tabs on the functioning of many schools, M-Star offers immense value to monitor academic performance of individual schools as well as impact of schemes like mid-day meal or Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for All Campaign).

The application runs on proprietary OmVcard or an Online Multi-domain Value Card, costing just a few hundred rupees. Every child and staff member are given the OmVcard which they can insert into

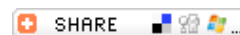
any computer where the application is loaded.

Incidentally, the card can be used to check the oft-quoted issue of teacher truancy. Teacher performance in a 'single teacher' school can be monitored by his supervisor remotely, not merely by looking at his or her attendance records, but by gauging the effectiveness of teaching as borne out by the academic performance of the pupils.

Ultimately, if the Education Expert System gets linked to other national e-governance systems, such as the national ID project headed by Nandan Nilekani, then the possibilities are endless.

It could analyse the reasons of dropping out from the system and the teachers become more accountable. The Right to Education could thus become a reality through technology.

Source : **Sindh Today**



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