



## Engaging with History in the Digital Age: A Study of Technology-Based Distance Learning in History

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### Abstract

In recent years, technological advancements have revolutionised nearly every aspect of our lives, including education. Technology has had a profound impact, particularly in distance learning and teaching of history. With the rise of the internet, interactive software, and various digital tools, historical education has become more accessible and engaging. The article investigates technology-based distance learning and teaching of history, examining its effectiveness and the transformative effects it has on educators, students, and the overall learning experience. It analyses the teaching of history through traditional classroom-based methods, such as chalkboards and face-to-face teaching, to modern technology-driven platforms like online courses, virtual classrooms, and digital tools through Learning Management Systems, MS Teams, and Google Classrooms. Focusing on the teaching of history, the research investigates how technological innovations have redefined instructional approaches, engagement, and accessibility in distance learning systems. By analysing progress in educational technologies, including the use of multimedia, digital archives, interactive modules, and video conferencing, this study assesses how these tools enhance students' understanding of historical content. It also evaluates the challenges educators face in adapting to these technologies and the efficacy of online platforms in fostering critical thinking, contextual analysis, and historical inquiry. The study examines the potential of digital tools to democratize history education, making it more inclusive and accessible, while addressing the potential drawbacks such as digital literacy gaps and the limitations of student-teacher interaction in virtual settings. To sum up, this study emphasizes the growing role of technology in shaping the future of history teaching and its implications for both instructors and learners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Keywords:** History, Distance Learning, Technology-based Learning, Virtual Classroom, Learning Management System, Digital Literacy, Digital Tools.

### 1. Introduction

Emphasising how essential history discipline is for the teaching and learning process in both developed and developing countries cannot be overemphasized (Matasci et al., 2020). With growing globalization, a comprehensive understanding of historical events and their lasting impact is crucial for fostering universal collaboration and development. Especially in developed nations, history serves important functions of promoting nationhood, and inculcating citizenship consciousness, civic responsibility a sense of and an ability for critical analysis of the polity (Wagoner & Cremin, 1978). With primary and secondary sources students are sensitized to diverse perspectives and are trained to critically understand historical narratives produced under certain circumstances, hence a balanced approach to study their past is developed (Meo, 2000).

Historical consciousness helps in the preservation of ideological and cultural heritage and prepares to steer complex sociopolitical conditions progress of their societies. While in developing countries, history as a discipline can serve as an effective means for nation-building, social cohesion, and the preservation of cultural identity. Inculcation of pride through sensitization with their past helps in devotion and passion to contribute to one's country's progress. Therefore, the significance of teaching history in both developed and developing countries lies in its ability to cultivate informed and engaged citizens, promote cross-cultural understanding, and contribute to the overall progress and development of societies around the world. The incorporation of primary sources and interactive learning strategies, as exemplified in the sources, can be particularly transformative in the context of history education. By encouraging students to actively engage with historical documents, artifacts, and narratives, educators can foster critical thinking, analytical skills, and a deeper appreciation for the complexities of the past.

With the help of distance learning, a new educational model has appeared in the world that removes space-time barriers and opens education to all. Distance learning indeed has its origin in the socio-political initiatives and the concept of lifelong learning came into practice from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Aretio, 2013). The field has since expanded from correspondence courses in distance education to incorporating telecommunication and telematics technologies. The creation of the UK Open University in the 1960s opened a new perspective as a philosophy of distance learning was accepted based on the principles of open access and flexibility (Prewitt, 1998). The advancement of information and communication technologies in the years that followed blurred the basic distinction between traditional and distance learning and laid the foundation for developing virtual classrooms and libraries (Prewitt, 1998). The implication of distance learning cannot be overemphasized on account of the following factors: population, institution, and lifelong learning. For instance, in Botswana, distance learning has made education strike because students can study from their different regions thus eliminating barriers of distance (Oladokun & Aina, 2011). In the same way, thanks to digital resources and networking technologies in the Philippines distance learning mode of education has recorded a new high, where a whole new world of open and shared learning is a reality (Marcial et al., 2015).

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## 2. Literature Review

The paper titled 'Digital Tools & Inquiry-based Learning in History Education' examines the significance of digital tools for history education for a deeper comprehension. The author suggests that online databases, interactive maps, virtual tours and access to all such content enable a student to learn about various aspects and construct their historical consciousness and interpretation of any specific event. It also investigates the potential of revolutionizing education by suggesting that the digital tools enhance the creativity, promotes collaboration, fosters curiosity and are essential for impactful learning. The paper titled E-learning on History Learning: Aspect of Material, Teacher, Learning Environment, and Student investigates various aspects of e-learning with special reference to teaching History. The researcher suggests an intricate relation between learner and teacher discernments of e-learning, stressing preferences for traditional learning environments the issues confronted in online teaching, and the practices used to collect data on these observations.

The paper titled 'Combining Innovative History Learning Technology' deals with the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) in history education by focusing on its positive impact on learners' motivation, comprehension, engagement and flexibility in learning practices. The book titled Technology and the Historian: Transformations in the Digital Age persuades historians to engage in digital transformations to meet the challenges of this age. Crymble focuses on the evolution and impact of technology with special reference to research methodologies, archival practices and learning environments. The case studies in this book reveal the use of technology in self-learning and the transformation of scholarly interaction. The author has focused on the Western world and made room to conduct more studies in other parts of the world. The book titled Teaching History in the Digital Age imparts ample synopsis of the essential transformations in teaching history due to digital progress, urging novel instructional methods to upgrade learner's knowledge.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

The present research employs thematic analysis. Through the digital literacy framework, it investigates technology-enabled learning and teaching of history focusing on the practices, strengths and limitations. It also investigates the transformation the technology can bring forward in history education for a holistic understanding of the past and shaping the future.

## 4. Analysis and Discussion

Distance learning has been most warmly welcomed in Asia and it has assumed significant importance in the promotion of education. In Pakistan, it was Allama Iqbal Open University which started this system in 1974 to help fulfil the educational requirements of a vast population of the country. Education through technology has been made available by Allama Iqbal Open University, hence improving access to quality education for people in remote areas and less developed areas of Pakistan. Distance learning has without doubt revolutionized education but issues of the digital divide regarding the availability of information resources have also been of concern. Meeting the challenges of this century, the development of potentially effective distance learning requires additional efforts aimed at levelling technological and digital equipment as well as literacy.

Teaching history in both formal education and distance education is an important part of the comprehensive educational module (Amalia et al., 2021). As much as with other subjects in the formal education system the history lessons are presented in such a way that students get to embrace historical values and knowledge, as well as learn skills through proper learning activities which are arranged in a sequential activities pattern. It assists in the direction of improving the recognition of history in the past and in the current times. This also applies to the delivery of history teaching in the distance education system, which has developed strategies given the increasingly technologically enhanced environment. Instructional tools and materials, multimedia content, radio-TV programs, and online learning become part of an integrated list to present student experiences to deal with history in an immersive manner (Wright-Maley et al., 2018) This is designed so that students can assimilate historical values, information, and skills within a sequence of learning activities. This approach is supposed to help people get better acquainted with what has happened in the past and how it can influence the present. In the distance education system, the delivery of history education has also transformed to fully exploit the gains made available by the ever-improving technological development. From day-to-day lessons to history, digital tools, multi-media content, radio-TV programs and the use of online learning have become pervasive offering 'windows' through which students can interact with history or past events 'in a virtual realm'. It is structured to help students internalize historical values, knowledge, and skills through a series of carefully designed and sequenced learning activities.

Considering this, it can be argued that central to any country's technological, economic, political and social history education is imperative (Cetin et al., 2023), and this is why it cannot be overemphasized that both the formal education system and the distance education model indeed offer good prospects for quality history education bringing on different merits and limitations (Amalia & Sutimin, 2021). While the formal education system may provide a structured and well-established framework for teaching history, the distance education system offers flexibility and accessibility that can reach a wider audience, particularly in regions where access to traditional educational resources may be limited.

This education in Pakistan has experienced a phenomenal change that can be attributed to the pioneering role of Allama Iqbal Open University and technology-based education. Allama Iqbal Open University was founded in 1974 and is among the biggest and most popular universities offering distance education for a multitude of learners who cannot attend conventional classes across the nation (Zaheer & Munir, 2020). The instructional design, delivery mechanism and student support have been initiated in achieving its aims and objectives, especially in extending education where physical facilities have not been put up. Being the country's first university to initiate distance learning, Allama Iqbal Open University has set precedence for other universities and educational institutions to start distance learning in general, and technology-enabled distance learning in particular (Iqbal et al., 2016). These aims include offering opportunities to facilitate learning and the provision of equal opportunities for learning for learners regardless of their status, location, and physical conditions. Nevertheless, due to numerous barriers, the potential of using information and communication technology in education has not been fully realized, some of which are low literacy levels, poor infrastructure and a lack of effective use of technology particularly by teachers and learners.

Nonetheless, technology-based learning has played a significant role in overcoming the geographic, cultural, social and economic barriers to education and providing sustainable solutions to educational disparities in Pakistan. This mode of learning and student services has enhanced education, especially for working professionals and those living in far-flung areas who are denied traditional learning opportunities, hence promoting the capacity both personally as well as professionally. In addition, distance learning and online education facilitated the increased outreach of education resources, and the learning methods have been increasingly diversified so that different kinds of learners could meet their learning needs. As Pakistan is still struggling with the diverse challenges in its education system, the efforts of Allama Iqbal Open University with its technology-enhanced distance learning became more essential. These groundbreaking initiatives have the potential to bridge the educational divide, empower marginalized communities, and contribute to the establishment of an inclusive society for learners.

Concerning History as a discipline in Pakistan, the challenges and possibilities of technology-based teaching present complex and multifaceted challenges. One of the main issues of incorporating technology in history teaching in Pakistan is that there is minimal technological competency among the tutors and the learners. Research conducted amongst secondary school teachers in Pakistan revealed that most of them are technologically illiterate and have little technological and presentation knowledge. This is further exacerbated by a scarcity of digital resources and infrastructure and limited training opportunities for teachers on ways to enhance the effectiveness of their teaching through integrated use of the internet and communication technologies. Furthermore, the educational system in Pakistan has been the conventional classroom-style learning system that does not incorporate the use of technology and is more of teacher talking and students listening. Another challenge is cultural lag within local cultures where even teachers and students may oppose the shift to the use of technology in teaching.

Another challenge is that information provided on the Internet may be accurate or not, and the quality and credibility of educational materials accessible to students may also differ considerably. It is equally possible to find vast accurate information about history on the internet, but many false reports and biased narratives also exist. Teachers must be very selective with the resources that they gather, and the students must be taught how to assess the information they receive from the World Wide Web. Such consequences as limited face-to-face communication experienced in distance learning environments can also be an issue. Although group discussions, debates, and even general discussions take place in the online mode of learning interpersonal communication at a certain level is compromised. They are, however, only able to partially replace face-to-face communication richness as online rescue forums and videoconferencing do. One of the other concerns is a problem with screen-related exhaustion or burnout. Long hours on the device often cause physical discomfort and reduced concentration, traits that slow down learning processes. Although there are some difficulties in using the technology in education of history, there are a lot of advantages in its use. Incorporation of technology can complement learning environments that are creative and effective since they offer students opportunities to acquire an optimal learning experience, help them gain access to countless learning resources, and the capability to master arguably the most important skill set in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, technological literacy. In addition, integration of technology can support students' collaborative learning to genesis and dissemination of knowledge (Joseph & Khan, 2020). The use of technology in teaching history in Pakistan has the potential to revolutionize the concept of learning and enhance student thinking capabilities to meet the challenges of the technological era. However, to realize this potential much more is required to be done, which entails transformational solutions both in terms of knowledge and infrastructure as well as mindset.

This has been done by digitizing historical archives and documents to act as key reference points. For example, the British Library has converted millions of pages of history manuscripts, and these can be accessed at any time by students and academicians. The mentioned resources offer information that is wider and deeper in comparison with those provided by textbooks only. Moreover, some tools help students expand historic sites and have a more engaging learning experience, too distance learning, and online courses, including Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Some of the giant universities like Harvard and Yale Universities have taken to offering online history courses, where learners usually do not have to physically attend any class with distinguished historians. These courses often incorporate multimedia elements like videos, interactive timelines, and digital maps, which make learning more dynamic and engaging. Progress in education technology has thus turned history from an area that was fixed and set in past into a dynamic subject through which students can learn and interact in many ways. Useful learning aids also

include interactive timelines and quizzes. Some of the applications are Timeline JS where teachers can develop timelines that students use online and Kahoot which offers quizzes. In addition to making learning exciting, these tools enable students to get more involved in learning and access the best results since they understand more due to engagement. Thus, the interactive elements adopted in technology-based distance learning enhance the delivery of history education.

Technology in distance learning has influenced various aspects related to teaching and learning history. The influence of enhanced technology specifically increases alternative ways of providing instruction, communicating and improving the learning experience for student. The most recognizable capability of technology-based distance learning in history is sustaining the geographical barriers (Gilakjani, 2017). Traditionally, the study of history was often limited by the accessibility of physical resources, such as textbooks, documents and archives. Nevertheless, the use of Web technologies has created a rich opportunity for the usage of electronic information resources which might be in the form of digitized documents, multimedia and interactive simulations from any place in the world. With its help, it is possible to create even more interesting and effective learning experiences for students. For example, the incorporation of a learning management system has brought various forms of learning delivery such as electronic learning, a form of learning which is delivered through computer-aided technologies, fused with blended learning which is a form of learning that embraces electronic learning and face to face learning (Bervell et al., 2021).

It has been evident that the use of a Learning Management System (LMS) has enhanced the flow of communication between the instructors and students as well as created more group interaction in the learning process. Some of the online learning platforms are Learning Management Systems, MS Teams, Google Classroom, etc. Some of the interactive tools include Video conferencing, Discussion forums, Collaborative projects, etc. all these have revolutionized the learning experience and learner engagement for Distance Education students. Furthermore, the opportunities to use multimedia in the transmission of history content are considered important, such as video clips, podcasts, and history content. Dependence on information and communication technologies in learning has impacted instructional designs in a way that provides educators with rich resources for improving online learning processes (Bahja et al., 2021) (Raymond, 2000)

Thus, multimedia content, still images, videos, podcasts, and other types of digital archives improve understanding of history much better compared to written text. For instance, in documentaries and films, human-interest stories are enacted and presented to the audience in dramatic ways by experts. These are clear examples of situations where documentary movies of Ken Burns, such as the Civil War and World War II, can add sides and contexts that even the books cannot provide.

Podcasts too are useful in gaining knowledge about history. These podcasts generally contain interviews of scholars and primary source material which offers a balanced view of history. Thirdly, in the form of digital archives and virtual museums, a lot of primary historical documents are reserved. Educational institutions and libraries have maintained digital documents, photographs, and artifacts online through the website; students therefore have an opportunity to learn history in an exceptional mode. Higher Education Commission Pakistan's website also has URLs to different sources available in the online world across the world.

In addition, innovation in technology-related teaching methodologies, including the use of virtual learning tools and classrooms, may greatly add value to the transfer of historical content especially in developing countries where the availability of learning resources is still a dream (Amalia & Sutimin, 2021). When using technology in education, educationalists can develop effective learning processes that can work irrespective of geographical or socioeconomic differences, so that learners can explore their past and embrace the opportunities of the future.

One of the key benefits of technology-based distance learning is the increased flexibility it provides for both learners and instructors. As noted in the literature, "Technology has removed the distance obstacles and has made it possible for higher education to effectively teach anyone" (Gilakjani, 2017). This openness permits students to utilize course materials at their convenience, surpassing geographical limitations and developing prospects for a more diversified population to learn history.

However, the effective application of technology-based distance education in history is not without its challenges. Instructors must thoroughly deliberate on the instructional designs and modules of technological integration, ensuring that the selected tools and platforms efficiently support the learning objectives and foster evocative involvement with history content (Reyes, 2023). To embrace current and future students and teachers, the incorporation of technology must be done to fit exclusive needs and demands (Raymond, 2000) (Reyes, 2023) (Bervell et al., 2021) (Aliazas et al., 2021). The training of instructors in the use of modern approaches to student training as well as further education on optimal usage of technology tools for distance learning is also essential. By analysing the challenges and utilizing the rewards of the technology-based distance learning educationalists can construct a more suitable and diverse learning environment for the history students (Ashfaq et al., 2016).

These future-focused histories for the 21<sup>st</sup> century must be based on using digital teaching aids and the construction of a creative learning environment (Amalia & Sutimin, 2021). The employment of technology and digital media has made history more interesting and easier to grasp and enabled students to understand history better than before (Wright-Maley et al., 2018). Most of these creative methods have the potential to raise the standards of accessibility, interactivity and level of engagement when it comes to distance learning of history. Remote education systems and other teaching-learning processes must make these teaching and learning resources and strategies to be adopted to fit

the growing world scenario. There is potential in the internet years for the history discipline that will help to diversify and make it more meaningful in terms of the learners of this age.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be said that technologically enabled remote learning and history instruction have the potential to transform historical learning. In as much as technology is a help towards enhancing students' perception of history as a subject through widespread and more interesting material. Different types of multimedia, enforcement of interactive devices and new technology comprise new ideas for enhancing the educational process. However, the following are the challenges and limitations of technology-supported learning which should not be overlooked; Participating in the digital divide; the variability in the quality of content; and screen fatigue. Teachers may adopt a dynamic and fruitful learning environment that prepares scholars for the challenges that come with improved technological global society by leveraging the benefits of the same technology while at the same time eliminating all vices obtained from the same. Overall, any attempt to integrate technology into historical education is a giant leap.

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