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BY

SI 657 Week 9 Reading Notes
Kathleen Ludewig
Joyojeet Pal, Meera Lakshmanan and Kentaro Toyama, "My Child Will Be Respected: Parental Perspectives on Computers and Education in Rural India," Information Systems Frontiers 11(2009), pp 129-144.

Key Points

Pal et al. examine the culture around technology education in four rural schools in India, specifically parental perspectives on the value of technology education for their children.

The authors begin by **identifying the structure of technology education in Karnataka.** Pal et al. focus on four districts in rural Karnataka in South India. In 2002, the Indian government and a local NGO set up computer-assisted learning centers in selected primary schools in Karnataka (129-130). The government funded the physical infrastructure, the first three years of maintenance, and a technology teacher for the first year of the program. After the first year, the schools must fund the salary of the tech teacher and any equipment maintenance. Typically classes have 3 – 5 students around a machine at once with approximately 3 -5 machines in a school of 200 – 400 children (129-130). By 2007, 10% of the primary schools in Karnataka have CALs, with approximately 25 added each year (130).

In the second section, the authors identify the **rationale for this study**: "… there is practically no research on the demand-side, or what makes the people who are clients of these [ICT4D] projects enthusiastic about them. To approach these issues, we look at how rural parents with no first-hand experience using computers understand their uses in their children's lives" (131).

The **survey design** included questions on both lifestyle and computer education questions. The **results** reveal several themes:

1. Shift from agriculture - most parents preferred their children to migrate away from the rural areas (table 3, 135). This preference was even higher among agricultural workers. Computers were seen as improving occupational opportunities. Government positions were most ideal b/c of stability and income. They did note, however, "More parents mentioned, 'computers will get my child respect' than said 'computers will get my child jobs." (136)
2. Responsibility for schooling – Ownership for schooling split between students, government, and teachers, but there was little sense of ownership of the CALs (table 4, 137)
3. Conceptions of computers (table 5)
4. Perceived impacts of computers on the schools (table 6)
5. Computers vs. teachers, meals, English (table 7, 140; table 8, 141)
6. Computers and power in the village – computers leads to higher education and higher perceived social value which can cause gender gaps (e.g. more expensive dowries) and generational gaps (illiterate parents with educated, IT literate children (142)

Connection to Other Readings/Discussions

We have had several class discussions about whether technology is the answer to various social problems and whether development projects adequately meet local demand and context. Pal et. al, rather than looking at a device or computer application, tries to uncover the perceived value of technology in rural areas. This survey may inform later technology programs – e.g. parents think it's important for their children to learn how to use computers, but what skills should they learn? – and demonstrate whether parents would offer financial and moral support for such a program.

I had the opportunity to meet with Joyojeet during his faculty candidate talk last fall. He presented on this paper as well as some other research. I was quite struck by the role that Indian media plays in glamorizing technology occupations. He mentioned for example, that many jobs are not considered admirable for women except technology and that has to do in large part due to the fact that protagonists in films are usually computer engineers. The media has certainly played a significant role in promoting technology in India and many developed countries outsource IT services to India due to the large labor supply. I don't know how transferable that is to other countries though. Clearly culture and creating a demand for ICTs is vital to the success of an ICT project, but incorporating that in popular media may be particular to India only.