

Chapter 9

University Teachers' Use of Digital Technologies: The Realities from Mongolia and Chile

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is set in the context of two developing countries, Mongolia and Chile, where digital technology is seen as a powerful icon of the knowledge economy. The predominant and common discourses surrounding the uses of digital technologies in education in these developing countries usually assume rather celebratory stances of the roles digital technologies may perform in education in the digital age. Thus, the research reported here explores the realities, opportunities, and challenges that academic staff face when using digital technologies through the perspectives offered by the field of digital literacy studies. The findings illustrate the close and complex relationships between sociocultural contexts, beliefs, values, and digital literacy practices. The study suggests that more attention needs to be paid to the wider contexts affecting the digital practices around teaching and learning rather than to technologies per se.

INTRODUCTION

The last decades have witnessed a massification of higher education in both Chile and Mongolia due to the value embedded in higher education and the prestige it represents to people in both countries (Marav & Espinoza, 2014). According to statistics on higher education in Mongolia by its Ministry of Education and Science (2014), in the 2012-2013 academic year there were 99 higher

education institutions, consisting of 15 public, 79 private and 5 branches of foreign institutions. There are 3 types of higher education institutions in Mongolia: university, institute and college. Since 1990, after socialism collapsed, a rapid expansion of the higher education system of Mongolia was triggered by the liberalisation of the economy and the legalisation of private higher education in the 1991 Education Law of Mongolia (World Bank, 2010). The number of students in higher

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education institutions doubled between 2000 and 2013, 84,985 to 175,591 (Ministry of Education and Science, 2014), supported by the expansion of private universities and colleges that began in the 1990s.

Meanwhile, Chile has also experienced an increase in the number of students who pursue tertiary studies mainly due to private institutions which cater for 65 per cent of higher education students. After the 1981 educational reform, the Chilean higher education system was transformed from a system of eight state-financed universities to a system which includes four types of higher education institutions: universities, traditional and private; professional institutes; technical training centres and the institutions in charge of training the armed forces and police (Espinoza & Gonzalez, 2013).

Chile's economic success, mainly through the exploitation of its mining resources, has been placed as an example for Mongolia to follow, framed by the mining boom they are currently experiencing. Also, even though Chile is located to the global opposite of Mongolia, collaboration between both countries has been constant in the last decade and co-operation has strengthened. In the context of higher education in these two countries, even though, historically, the higher education system in Chile outperforms that of Mongolia over the past hundred years, the current tendencies and directions for higher education are going on the same track in both countries (Marav & Espinoza, 2014). For example, they each have adopted a neoliberal agenda for the development and improvement of their higher education systems to position their countries within the knowledge economy and technology integration has become of paramount importance for both countries to increase their economic and educational competitiveness. Although national policies to integrate digital technologies in education in both countries have been enacted since the late 20th century, there has not been a policy which specifically promotes

the inclusion of digital technologies in higher education in either country.

As digital technologies and social media have become integral parts of people's everyday life, currently, there is a global trend for integrating them in education effectively. However, much of the digital and new media research takes place in predominantly Anglo-American contexts (Prinsloo & Rowsell, 2012) and not much is known about what shapes university teachers' use of digital technologies. Thus, the study reported in this chapter aims to examine the 'messy realities' of digital technology use of university teachers from two developing countries, Chile and Mongolia. In addition, as there is a need for systematic studies to explore technology use in teaching and learning in higher education (Lai, 2011), the chapter aims to compare how wider sociopolitical factors are represented in techno-biographies of university teachers from these developing countries and to discuss opportunities and challenges that they encounter in using digital technologies in their everyday lives. To achieve these aims, first, we will discuss the existing literature in relation to teachers' use of digital technologies in higher education. Then, we will critically review the social and political factors shaping university teachers' use of digital technologies.

TEACHERS' USE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Digital technologies have been infiltrating every sphere of our societies, including higher education. For example, using PowerPoint to support their lectures and using the internet as a resource for their teaching and learning are typical examples of teachers' technology use in higher education. In fact, digital technologies have become an icon of higher education provision not only in developed but also in developing countries in the 21st century (Selwyn, 2007). Some studies of

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