

Chapter 3

Computer Assisted School Administration in the United Arab Emirates

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ABSTRACT

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a country in which the governance of education has been centralized. The use of computers for administrative applications in education reflects the approach of centralization. As an evolution, most development work is done in a centrally located computer center at the Ministry of Education. School administration in the UAE educational system has experienced a rapid computerization process. The chapter presents the ways in which the Emirates educational system is coping with this issue. A brief overview of the structure of the educational system in UAE will be presented. Subsequently, the chapter will study how Information Technology in Educational Management (ITEM) use has developed over a decade. Recently, there have been various modifications within the educational system in the UAE, specifically towards modernization and decentralization. Nonetheless, a certain maturity has been reached in using ITEM. Therefore, the chapter will attempt to monitor the significance of this alternation on the system's implementation and use of technology.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives an outline of the developments in School Information system (SIS) in UAE over the last twelve years and gives a more detailed description of the current Enterprise School Information System (eSIS). After a general overview of the historical context of Information Technology in Educational Management (ITEM) in UAE, the

details of the educational system innovation and the eSIS development will be described.

The Context and History of ITEM in the UAE

The UAE is considered to be a young state compared to other countries in the region and worldwide. The United Arab Emirates, as a political

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union came to life in the year 1971, between the seven Emirates (Abu-Dhabi, Dubai, Al-Sharjah, Ajman, Ras-Al-Khaima, Al-Fujira and Um- Al-Quwain)

The Educational System as a structure is not complex; it consists of basic schools and secondary schools. The basic public schools start at 6 years of age and the student spends five years at the first unit (level 1-5), four years at the second unit of the basic school (level 6-9) and three years at secondary school (level 10-12). Schools are funded, staffed and facilitated by the government of the UAE. Basic public education in the UAE is free and compulsory at the first unit between the ages of 6 and 12.

The basic public schools' structure and characteristics in the seven Emirates are similar. The UAE, as a young nation having adequate resources, is willing to invest in this area in order to improve its educational infrastructure. The Ministry of Education (MOE) intends to devolve some of its authorities to the nine educational zones (Abu Dhabi educational zone, Al-Ain educational zone, Al-Gharbia educational zone, Dubai educational zone, Sharjah educational zone, Ajman educational zone, Ras Al-khaimah educational zone, Al-Fujira educational zone and Um Al-Quwain educational zone) in line with its centralization of decision making and kind of decentralized managements. Under the proposed Act of Authorisation, schools, both public and private, will report directly to their own educational zones. (MOE, 1998)

The United Arab Emirates is a country in which the governance of education has been centralized since the early attempts to computerize school management in 1999. The Ministry of Education strategy for ITEM reflects centralizing school management in certain areas and de-centralizing school management in other areas. The centralization strategy of the Ministry aims to install a countrywide network of computers and servers to connect all schools (basic and secondary) in each

educational zone to the Ministry of Education by the year 2020.

The decentralized strategy in school management which starts at the primary and secondary school level gave school management the opportunity to use commercial companies to develop computer based finance packages due to the business-oriented nature and the size of such schools.

In order to achieve the strategic aims and operational targets of the Ministry of Education's 2020 vision; a number of investments in Information Technology and Information Systems were started in the year 1998. These investments targeted the automation of the Ministry's activities relating to school management. These investments in Technology and Systems came as an integral part of the UAE's government strategy to automate all ministerial activities, banks, hospitals and many other organisations to create the region's first electronic government (e-Government). Three major investments can be identified so far in the UAE's educational sector:

1. High School Certificate Control System and Infrastructure
2. Student and Staff Registration Systems
3. e-learning (Curricula delivered via technology)

As an early experiment, the MOE commissioned a High School Certificate Control System (HSCCS) to be developed by a third party system provider in 1998. This system mainly provided high school students' enrolment, exams and results for the Science and Art streams and was enhanced two years later to include the technical stream of the high school certificate. The system facilitates the use of data related to student registration, examination timetables, examination scores and certificate printouts. In the year 2000, the Ministry of Education added three more systems to the existing HSCCS; Student Registration, Staff Registra-

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