Chapter 5.18
E–Mail as a Teaching Supplement in Tunisia

Mohamed El Louadi
University of Tunis, Tunisia

INTRODUCTION

Learning and knowledge dissemination using Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) is becoming increasingly prevalent in schools and universities around the world. Most institutions of higher learning now invest heavily in technologies such as the web and e-mail for students, staff, and faculty. ICT use is set to rise in emerging countries eager to move towards an "information society" where learning and knowledge are accessible to all.

Using ICT as a teaching supplement has become such a phenomenon that there are presently more than 10 millions online courses worldwide. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology is considered a pioneer in making available course material not only to its students but also to the world at large and aims to offer free nearly all of its 2000 courses online by 2010.

Several teachers have made judicious use of e-mail as a teaching supplement (Carlton et al., 1998; Richards & Keppell, 1997; Scarce, 1997). Scarce (1997) observed that most students had a positive attitude towards the use of e-mail in a classroom setting even at the beginning of the course and thought that e-mail should enhance their learning experience. Carlton et al. (1998) also described an experiment in which they placed online versions of their course slide presentations on the Internet. They noticed that the added convenience of having courses available day and night was an incentive for students to use the Internet.

This article reports on an experiment conducted at the Higher Institute of Management[1] over three consecutive years and involved the use of e-mail for communicating with and distributing lecture notes to students enrolled in an elective course.

THE SITUATION IN TUNISIA

Shortly after its independence in 1956, Tunisia, the smallest country in North Africa with less than 10 million people, knew that it had little choice but to open up to the global market.

In 1995, Tunisia was one of the few Arab and African nations to become a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the first country along the Southern Mediterranean coast to sign an association agreement with the European Union. The Tunisian government is well aware that globalization and modernity are intertwined and that modernity is linked to education and ICT. Like other Arab countries, Tunisia needs to close a "growing knowledge gap" by investing heavily in education and promoting open intellectual inquiry (UNDP, 2003). Actions to popularize ICT as a tool for knowledge acquisition should focus on boosting computer and Internet literacy and using ICT as a tool for life-long learning.

Education

According to the World Bank, Tunisia's investment in education is one of the highest in the world; it spends 25% of its annual budget on education and training–a critical factor in its economic growth and progress. Essentially in Tunisia, education is free to all and mandatory for girls and boys until age 15. School enrollment (6 to 12 years) is 91%. The literacy rate is presently equal to 68.3%.

English is mandatory from seventh grade to university. Internet access is available in all universities and secondary schools. As a consequence of the rapid development of the education agenda, the number of students has nearly quadrupled over the last thirteen years from 68,000 in 1990 to more than 262,000 in 2003; the growing number of new students is expected to exceed 400,000 by 2006 (see Figure 1).

Education is strategically important as it has a role to play in preparing future knowledge workers to think globally, to acquire the skills necessary to use ICT, but also to acquire the culture that this entails, especially in a region where people are believed to prefer the spoken over the written and the written over the electronic[2].

Unfortunately, the current space and infrastructure are no longer sufficient to accommodate these increasing numbers of students[3]. The incorporation of computer technology in education has become a necessity in teaching and has subsequently been a growing trend in elementary, secondary, and higher education for the past few years. As a result, 10% of primary schools and all secondary schools and universities have access to the Internet[4]. Faculty and students represent

Figure 1. The evolution of the numbers of teachers and registered students in Tunisia and corresponding student/teacher ratio between 1990 and 2009 (Source: Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Technology, www.mes.tn)
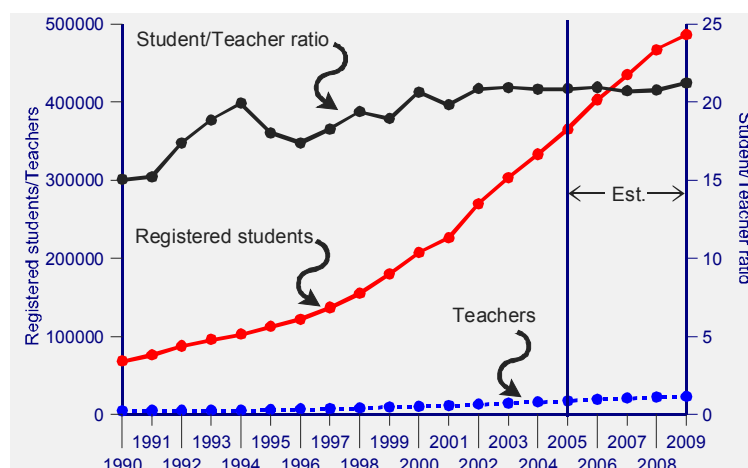
Related Content

Mobile Phone Communication Innovation in Multiple Time and Space Zones: The Case of Hong Kong Culture

Shirley Chan, Douglas Vogeland Louis C.K. Ma (2007). *Journal of Global Information Management (pp. 79-85).*

www.irma-international.org/article/mobile-phone-communication-innovation-multiple/3662

Twenty-First Century Immersion Technologies in Health Professions Pedagogy

Catherine Hayes (2025). *Encyclopedia of Information Science and Technology, Sixth Edition (pp. 1-19).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/twenty-first-century-immersion-technologies-in-health-professions-pedagogy/320493

IT Industry Success in Small Countries: The Cases of Finland and New Zealand

Rebecca Watsonand Michael D. Myers (2002). *Cases on Global IT Applications and Management: Successes and Pitfalls (pp. 226-251).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/industry-success-small-countries/6274

The IS/IT Outsourcing Phenomenon in the Public Sector of a Developing Country: An Exploration of Critical Issues

Abdulwahed Moh. Khalfanand Tom G. Gough (2003). *Advanced Topics in Global Information Management, Volume 2 (pp. 173-206).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/outsourcing-phenomenon-public-sector-developing/4517

Why People in Kuwait Do Not Prefer Online Learning Systems: The Role of Burnout and Poor System Quality Support

Hasan A. Abbas, Kamel Rouibahand Ahmad M. Baqer (2023). *Journal of Global Information Management (pp. 1-17).*

www.irma-international.org/article/why-people-in-kuwait-do-not-prefer-online-learning-systems/332782