Chapter 5

ICT in Education:
Culture, Practice and Involvement

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is based on work carried out as part of the scope of the ICT in Education project jointly sponsored by Jordan's Ministry of Education and the British Council, with the participation of four other Middle Eastern countries (Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories). The author's main empirical findings and comments relate to the duration of the project (viz. between 2003 and 2008), showing how ICT in education brought positive impact on the delivery of teaching in class, and also how online forums can be utilized as opportunities to exchange invaluable information and knowledge in this sector. Current status, challenges, solutions and recommendations are based on the author's findings and experience whilst managing and working on the project.

INTRODUCTION

Introduced in 2003 by the British Council, the *ICT in Education* project had rolled out by March 2004 a regional British Council pilot project in Near East and North Africa (NENA). Running in parallel in five regional countries, the project aimed at developing a range of strategies for improving school-level ICT, to support national initiatives of introducing IT throughout the schooling systems in Jordan and the regional countries involved. Training activities and workshops for all teachers, supervisors and principals were core elements of this project.

This case study looks at both the early stages of the project, and how it evolved to include strategic leadership in ICT, together with the technicalities and infrastructures, culture, outcomes and challenges.

Lessons learned from Jordan's experience and the author's recommendations for ICT in Near East and North Africa (NENA) are all based on her personal experience in the field on this project.

Though this study focuses mainly on Jordan, certain issues may also reflect the region as a whole.

BACKGROUND

The first issues realised of the literature review is the positive results around introducing ICT in the education system, and how it enables distant learners to benefit from education, with the technologies available. A study by Shirazi et al (2009) reflected on the expectations of ICT to bring to the economic freedom in several countries in the Middle East, with comparison in technology users, digital divide, regulations and economic growth. On the other hand, the effects of introducing ICT in primary education in the 'midst of uncertainty' as Kiridis et al (2006) described, states as a fact that, though the use of technology is becoming a familiar scene in many countries around the world, ministries need to consider perceptions and attitudes of teachers towards the use of ICT. Kiridis continues to argue that there is a need to convince teachers in the opportunities of embedding ICT in primary education approaches and tools.

Organization Background

The British Council is the United Kingdom's principal agency for cultural relations with other countries. A charity organisation registered in the UK, its purpose is to enhance the reputation of the UK in the world as a valued partner. It promotes the UK in its entirety, reflecting and celebrating its cultural, ethnic and political diversity.

Working with ordinary people as well as with governments and decision-makers in 110 countries, the British Council builds relationships and creates opportunities. It targets specific groups of people through programmes in education, English language teaching, libraries and information, the arts, science and technology, and governance and human rights.

Project Background

Jordan is one of the leading countries in the region in terms of its investment in educational systems reform, led by HM King Abdullah II, which all started when Jordan's *Education Initiative* was launched in 2003. Amongst many issues of concern mentioned in the *Education Initiative* were:

*   Teacher training
*   Curriculum reform
*   Adopting of ICT as a tool for learning
*   Improving ICT infrastructures

This initiative in fact supported a larger, five-year *Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy* project (ERfKE), which came in two phases, the first phase focusing on the above-mentioned areas, with a government investment of approximately US$400m. Introducing ICT in schools was a high priority on the government's agenda, and the British Council's *ICT in Education* training was included in the ministry's Professional Development Plan, reflecting the degree to which the ministry gave this British Council sponsored project high importance.

The British Council has engaged in this project since 2004, working with its stakeholders (ministries of education) to develop the Knowledge Economy in Jordan (and regional countries) through ICT and its usage in education, policies and visions.

The project background is referred to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Arab Human Development Report 2003, which underlined the importance of knowledge to Arab countries as a powerful driver of economic growth, and how effective participation in the knowledge economy required creating knowledge societies in the Arab countries, with the dissemination of high quality education to all, thus suggesting that the need for reform of the Arab educational systems, with new educational methods should be given a high priority in the region.

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