

Chapter 4

ICT in the UAE Educational Setting: The Case in the Schools of Abu Dhabi Emirate

Ahmed Ibrahim
Al Ain Model School, UAE

ABSTRACT

Compared to the other Arab countries, the United Arab Emirates is in an advanced position regarding ICT in the educational setting. Yet, more efforts are still needed to put the UAE in a global competitive status. This chapter is meant to investigate the current educational situation in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates to: a) discuss the impact of technology integration and the precise roles ICT plays in fostering learning, b) explore the most various problems and challenges teachers face in implementing ICT in teaching, and c) shed light on the role of educational leaders in enhancing teaching and learning through integrating ICT. This research-based chapter tackles the above-mentioned issues relying on the previous studies in the same field (literature review) and conducting a qualitative and a quantitative study- using surveys and interviews-to gather authentic data to assess the current situation of ICT in Abu Dhabi Emirate.

INTRODUCTION

ADEC's ICT efforts are endless. On one hand, at the hardware level, schools are provided with well-equipped computer labs, over head projectors, plasma LCDs, Internet, and other technological devices that enhance communication among students. On the other hand, ADEC provides schools with all the needed software programs to facilitate

teaching and learning at schools. Furthermore, at the educational programs and curriculum level, IT, as subject matter, has replaced ICT. Being an English teacher/coordinator and witnessing two eras of education in the United Arab Emirates-the previous era of time when the chalkboard was used, and the current era when ICT is part of the teaching and learning process-I can strongly value the impact of ICT on the students' achievements.

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Perhaps the biggest the challenge for any education organization in the 21st century is to prepare generations who are able to play their part in the present day knowledge-based economy and yet, at the same time, remain imbued with strong state values. To meet this challenge, Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) was formed in 2005 with the aim to produce citizens who are able to participate fully in the knowledge-based economy of the twenty-first century, who are also technologically literate; there is a need for paradigm shift in education. ICT, primarily computers, is one of the major tools that can be used to achieve this goal. In this respect, Abu Dhabi Education Council has a very important role to play such as providing the ICT infrastructure and training needed in schools.

In fact, ADEC's ICT efforts are endless. On one hand, at the hardware level, schools are provided with well-equipped computer labs, overhead projectors, plasma LCDs, Internet, and other technological devices that enhance communication among students. On the other hand ADEC provides schools with all the needed software programs to facilitate teaching and learning. Furthermore, at the educational programs and curriculum level, IT, as subject matter, has replaced ICT. Being an English teacher/coordinator and witnessing two eras of education in the United Arab Emirates—the previous era when the chalkboard was used, and the current era where ICT is part of the teaching and learning process—I can strongly value the impact of ICT on the students' achievements.

BACKGROUND

To start with, let's begin with looking at the word ICT. ICT (information and communications technology) is a common term that includes any communication device or application, including: radios, televisions, cell phones, computers and networks hardware and software, satellite

systems and so on, as well as the various services and applications associated with them, such as videoconferences and distance learning. ICT is also defined as the study or business of developing and using technology to process information and help communications. With these in mind, ICT integration should neither be restricted to computers only nor should it be confronted to certain subject matter. It should include all other communication devices and it can be used in teaching any subject matter.

According to Pisapia, (1993) integrating technology with teaching means the use of learning technologies to introduce, reinforce, supplement, and extend skills. For example, if students are being instructed to read reading comprehension passage and they are provided with a computer follow up activities, this is integration. If they are just provided with computers to watch or play games or surf the Internet without any follow-up activities that leads to mastering certain skills, there is no ICT integration.

Breuleux, (2001) states that providing ICT facilities and related programs is not enough to enable students to master the skills and proficiencies. He argues that ICT can, in fact, support more powerful and complete knowledge-building experiences for learners “if we integrate well-designed technologies in the context of meaningful, mindful inquiry projects, non-presentational pedagogies, access to resources and tools, and adequate support for technological maintenance and pedagogical renewal” (Breuleux, 2001, p. 3).

Also, Roblyer (1997) states that the most important and the most difficult challenge in ICT is how teachers can help to improve existing conditions or to create important educational opportunities that did not exist without ICT. As part of this process, teachers decide what they need to make these changes occur. This process of determining where and how technology fits is known among educators of educational technology as integration.

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