

Chapter 9

ICT for Educational Excellence in Jordan: An Elusive Objective

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the Jordanian Ministry of Education's reliance on both the local private sector (public-private partnership) and foreign aids in order to accelerate its integration of ICT to meet the needs and demands of the knowledge-based economy. The discussion sheds light on strings attached to the role played by the Ministry of Education, as the central educational authority, in the diffusion of ICT across the education system. Understandably, in the Jordanian context, likewise other countries in the Middle East and North Africa region, the education system has to deal with a great deal of complexities in which, internal and external issues can impede reform efforts. Partnership with local and international partners might be needed in the Jordanian context in order to initiate reform especially the large-scale and costly ones. ICT-related reform initiatives are expensive and require expertise in various areas which might justify seeking external assistance by the educational system. However, external involvement can impact the integrity of the educational reform when it is left with inadequate coordination and efforts in order to keep them in line with national interests and agendas. Furthermore, the impact of these issues can be severer when they are not taken into account during the planning stage of the reform. Thus, this chapter discusses major issues arose when international partners and the local private sector were involved in ICT-based education initiatives in Jordan.

COMPLEXITY: EDUCATION REFORM

In development, education can be viewed in two perspectives: education as a main standard for development on one hand, and as leverage for prosperity and development in society at large on

the other. The former can be linked to the definition of economic development which is, according to Devlin (2010), the sustainable increase in living standards including education, health, environmental protection, and material consumption. Therefore, although the relationship between

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education and prosperity is not necessarily a cause-and-effect; there are indications that the 77 Million children who do not have education are poor (Devlin, 2010). Regarding the latter, education as leverage for prosperity, investing in education is often perceived as investment in the future with countries having large proportions of their citizens as students at some stage or another. Fullan (2005) argued that a strong public school system is the key to social, political and economic renewal in society making education, according to Leithwood et al., (2002), a key for large social and economic transformations. Thus, Fullan (1993) stressed that among all other societal organizations, education is the only “one that *potentially* has the promise of fundamentally contributing to this goal [large social and economic transformations]” (p.4, *italic in source*). In addition, societies rely extensively on education to maintain its values and to prepare its citizens to be part of flexible, dynamic, and skilled workforce.

Governments and education authorities as well as the public are concerned with effective education reforms that hold the promise of improving education outcomes in order to meet the demands and expectations of the 21st century for which there is no more promising initiative to improve education than information and communication technology initiatives.

ICT IN EDUCATION

There is a strong consensus around the central role of information and communication technology (ICT) in education. Previous studies have identified several rationales for integrating ICT into education including social, vocational, and pedagogical (Castells, 1999a; Hawkrigde, 1989; Logan, 1995; MacDonald, 2008; Maddux et al., 2001; Means, 1994; Reeves, 1998; Subhi, 1999). Fullan (1993) also asserted the “moral purpose” of education as its potential for making a difference in the lives of students and for helping to produce

citizens who can “live and work productively in increasingly dynamically complex societies” (Fullan, 1993, p.4). The pervasive role of ICT in all aspects of life makes students’ ICT proficiency a necessity for them to compete in increasingly competitive era. Thus, in order to prepare students for the future education systems have little choice but to adopt ICT (Abuhmaid, 2010).

The pedagogical rationale is a key driver for the education systems to adopt ICT, as it emphasizes the ICT role in enhancing the contemporary students’ learning and skills they will be developed during their schooling (Hawkrigde, 1989; Subhi, 1999). This stems from the work of scholars such as Vygotsky and Dewey, whose works have motivated a range of educational theorists who wish to make the education environment more effective, and change schooling from a place where ‘knowledge’ is ‘transmitted’ to a place where students become active and dynamic participants in learning (Cuban, 1993). Certainly, ICT, with the more sophisticated visual and processing power of today’s personal computers, has the power to do just that. Moreover, it is widely believed that ICT can scaffold learning and teaching in addition to providing interactivity for teachers and students (Kozma, 2003).

However, despite the growing recognition of the key role of ICT in improving the quality of education, its integration within the educational sector is still shadowy in developing countries. Fullan (1993) also warned that rationales for ICT integration into education have become clichés used by policy-makers, which might explain why ICT plans in developing countries are generally detached from national educational strategies (Kozma & Wagner, 2006). Additionally, education is increasingly more attractive to the private sector as countries worldwide are becoming more willing to invest in e-learning, hardware, software, networks and training. Thus, education itself has become part of a huge global market with increasing competitiveness between international businesses (Hawkrigde, 1989).

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