Chapter 12
Arab Youth and the Internet:
Educational Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the levels and patterns of use of the Internet among secondary school students in Al Ain City, United Arab Emirates, and attempts to assess the levels of parental supervision at home. The prime aim of the study is to determine how widespread the Internet use is among UAE secondary students, and to examine the activities that the students adopt the Internet for. In conclusion, the study explores possible effects that the Internet use may have on the students' social relations and other activities. A survey was designed and adapted to support the investigation, and a questionnaire was distributed to 100 secondary school students (50 boys and 50 girls) in six secondary schools in Al Ain city. The investigation findings revealed that the majority of the respondents use the Internet for communication and leisure rather than for educational purposes, while some respondents affirmed improved general knowledge and academic performances as a result of using the Internet. Whilst acknowledging the Internet potential positive impact on students' educational performance, the study recommends that the use of the Internet should be monitored and guided by school authorities and parents, so as to prevent the misuse of this facility and to direct it towards teaching and learning improvement.

INTRODUCTION

Education and learning are among the most significant of all human activities, and they have always been considered the major capital in generating innovative, productive and sustainable societies. With globalization and the rapidly increasing governing role that information and knowledge occupy in all economies, providing quality educa-

tion is becoming ever more important. Integrating technology, especially computer-based, in education is considered as a key element to the quality of teaching and learning among most of the education systems around the world. In terms of technology utilization to support education, it has gone through an important shift from using primarily as an instructional delivery medium to an integral part of the learning environment. Informa-

tion and Communication Technology (ICT) serves different purposes in schools and educational organizations benefiting from access to a wealth of information and knowledge and enhanced communications through the Internet and other related information technologies (Noeth, Volkov, 2004). Bajcsy (2002) views technology in teaching and learning as an enabler and highlights its role of facilitating and assisting in the authentication and prioritization of Internet material.

Education in most of the Arab countries has witnessed a great advancement in the past few years. Extensive efforts were made to reform Educational systems to overcome the internationally recognized failure. Although Arab governments have generally allocated significant portions of their national income to education, yet, there has been very low return on investment in terms of meaningful educational outcomes. Education systems throughout the region are thought to be hindered by low quality, irrelevancy and inequity (Anda Adams, 2011). In terms of integrating technology in education there has been a great rush to equip schools with proper technology in most of the Arab countries, but the best way of how it should be utilized has not received the adequate attention. Cassidy, Thomas (2004) in a paper titled 'Education in the Arab States: preparing to compete in the Global Economy' concluded "generally, the results of reform have been less dramatic than hoped, and more taxing on the capacitance of education professionals than anticipated. It is one thing to redefine standards, curriculums, and rehab facilities and install computers and computer networks in schools, but it can be quite a matter to change what people do and how they do it. Experience and research tell us that changing people's behavior takes time, sustained effort, and lots of support."

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the shortcomings identified in the Education system in 2005, highlighted the poor utilizing of ICT as one of the eleven major problems that contributed to education failure. Later on, the public was notified that AED 46 billion (USD 13 billion) would be spent in the next 10 years on rectifying the problems (Macherson et al, 2007). Although, the educational reform movement in the (UAE) is a relatively recent phenomenon, there was an agreement on the need for large-scale change. The establishment of a reliable technology infrastructure in schools was one of the targets of education directors in the country. Along with the rapid advancement in telecommunication networks in UAE, Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC), the director of education in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, managed to help schools solve issues of the Internet connection to encourage the use of information and communication technology in education, and make the Internet available to teachers as well as students at public schools. This stage of educational reform requires concerted efforts by educators and the students' families to use this resource in the proper way. As the implementation is in its early stages, many questions need to be answered to so as to make it effective and fruitful: How can the internet access in schools help in teaching and learning? What are the possible risks? How can schools minimize misuse? What might be the features of an effective implementation?

Advantages of Internet Use in Teaching and Learning

It is well known that the Internet has broken down barriers of communication and information access all over the world. It is fast, reliable and has a limitless range of facilities, which assist users to access almost infinite amounts of information. It offers the opportunity for access to up- to- date research reports and knowledge databases. Thus, it has become an important component in academic institutions. Globally, the Internet has opened countless new opportunities for students. Actually, it has given a very open approach to education, where students are no longer highly dependent on their teachers, textbooks or school libraries as their only sources of information (Olatokun, 2008).

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