

HAMID RASHIDI, ABBAS MADANDAR ARANI, LIDA KAKIA

E-LEARNING, STATE AND EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN MIDDLE EAST COUNTRIES

Abstract

E-learning has provided men with new opportunities in teaching-learning procedures. A historical review of educational systems literature reveals that e-learning has spread out among people much faster than any other learning methods. E-learning as a state-of-the-art technology, has caused great innovations in materials development in those societies in which new methods and procedures could hardly ever been accepted. Technological innovations and the development of tele-communications such as Television Stations and Channels, Satellites, Mobile, and Internet have made it possible for the children and teenagers in the Middle East to access to the latest news and information. Of course, these developments have endangered both political and educational systems in some aspects. The present paper while pointing to some of the recent development in the field of e-learning in the Middle East, tries to examine the political and educational systems reactions to this phenomenon.

Introduction

E-learning has not only affected youth's methods of learning but also has modified the relations between social structures and young generation. The application and genesis of mass communication and its outcome which is Electronic Learning has made some sorts of information accessible to the young people (Wilson, 2001). For centuries, being grown up and experienced was a basic and needed factor in the Middle East to gain access to such kind of information. Nowadays, this modification in an ancient area is to such an extent fundamental that everybody should give priority to that.

During the last century, emergence of Radio, Newspaper and TV had a kind of tremendous effect on the connections between grown up young generations of society. The history of 50 years of social transformation in the Middle East distinctly shows how each one of these new medium has increased anxiousness and tension in parents, teachers, politicians, and clergymen. It has also widened the extent of misunderstanding among generations. Today, we are confronting with a new phenomenon called the genesis of Internet and E-learning. These new technologies have affected security of traditional societies in the Middle East. As a result, the act of learning has turned into a national - security issue (DSES International Forum, 2007). It has been turned into a security issue because the sense of equilibrium which has been prevailing in the relation between last and new generation, has been lost.

Parents do not feel secure any more because their kids, quickly and before the appointed time become familiar with the relationship between different sexes. They believe that their children communicate with strangers and play a number of games which are not only time-killers but bothersome and annoying. Politicians do not feel secure because they are not able to exercise their influence on young generation as

the only eternal political source. They have to fight with their political opponents both in the field of practice and the virtual world. To the politicians, in this critical region, nothing is more perilous than the minds of the young people crammed with opponents' ideas. Finally, these are the teachers and educationalists that will not be considered as the only right sources and criteria for gaining knowledge. They can surpass their teachers in acquiring new information.

E-Learning

In the Middle East, none of the current ways of teaching and learning is considered more fascinating than E-learning. The reason is poor economical condition, cultural and social impediments and lack of an able and fascinating method of learning. Historical experience in developing countries such as Middle East countries shows that lack of financial sources in procuring costly installations is the main reason (Coombs, 1985) but the increase in the oil price in 1970s, made some of the countries in this part of the world enabled to solve this problem to some extent. These countries compare to other developing countries have been empowered to build new schools and equip them with new technologies (Mideast Youth, 2007). The second impediment for the acceptance of these new technologies is the social and cultural prevention of these societies.

Opposing to new technologies, overestimation of negative aspects of their application, and disinclination of families are some inextricable specifications of the societies in the Middle East. Surprisingly, it should be acknowledged that internet has created an ideal ambiance for all children, juveniles, girls and women of all classes of society. It has given this chance to young generation to not only observe traditional limitations of their societies but also make contact with others easily. They believe Internet has been able to present a new view and meaning for some of Islamic concepts such as Hijab (Veil), Meraj (Ascension), Hijrat (Migration), global brotherhood, equality of women. Consequently, it should be said that E-learning has overthrown cultural and social obstacles to some extent. It has been accepted quickly among families and instructional settings.

As a matter of fact, in compare to other educational technologies, there are two reasons for young generation's enthusiasm towards learning through Internet. These are: little cost and lots of attraction. In spite of some shifting views among adults about children and the Internet in the Middle East, the overall responses continue to supply a broad range of strongly positive views about the benefits of Internet use -- especially about its value as an information source, and its growing use for involvement in online communities (Center for the Digital Future, 2008). Because of social, cultural and economical restrictions in traditional societies such as Middle East, old information methods could not provide people with appropriate learning opportunities. This problem has been resolved by e-learning. During a period of 7 years (2000-2007) Middle East countries have got a considerable growth in usage of internet. Their growth is equal to four times global growth at the same period (Da-Wei, 2007). In fact, the Middle East is an upcoming market as experts suggest today, even though major western e-learning and IT suppliers expanded their boundaries into the Middle East years ago.

State

We do believe that the politicians and statesmen in the Middle East more than any other social groups may understand McLuhan (1964) who says “We make our instruments and then these instruments will make us”. This quotation shows the role of new information and communication technologies and their impacts on citizen from the view point of politicians (look at Arabic Spring). This issue originates from the fact that since 1870 to the early 1970s, technology has tended to facilitate centralization. Railroads, mass production, the telegraph and telephone all helped those at the center draw in and control the periphery.

Today, ICT is having the opposite affect, facilitating the decentralization of power. The rise of the service economy, the development of the Internet, satellite television, and growing mass literacy are all strengthening the periphery at the expense of the center (Dahan, 2002). In fact, e-learning creates an atmosphere to gain information which politicians are not interested in. This show that politicians, statesmen and political structures are very concerned about youth’s access to the websites which are in stark contrast with their own objectives and entity. Consequently, they have tried to use filtration to impede youths from access to those websites. Of course, some of new statesmen on their way to gain power have benefited from using technological revolution. So, we conclude that both who are in charge of states and their opponents benefited from using internet website and satellite TV channels to do impact on next generation of society.

Educational System

Amalgamation of citizens in this part of the world shows that children and young people form a considerable part of age pyramid of population. Educational system is one of the first among social structures which is under the impact of this constitution. During the last two decades, educational systems have seen the increase of registration in all academic levels. For example, girls form more than 60% of all university students in Iran and more than 90% of graduate students in high schools of UAE register at colleges and universities (Arani & Abbasi, 2008). Anyway, increase in usage of e-learning is not limited to the universities only. We can see the access to e-learning even in people with lower levels of age. Available citations show that educational systems of Iran, Kuwait, UAE, Israel and Turkey are under the influence of global privatization and therefore the number of kindergartens, elementary and secondary schools connected to the Internet are increasing (Internet World Stats, 2007).

Today, teachers in the Middle East are observing that Internet has been gaining popularity among young people, though at a much slower pace than television and radio. In addition, experimental evidence shows that in the Middle East there are so many more computer-literate young people than adults indicates the younger generation’s greater interest in and aptitude for technological advances. Educational system should make an attempt for not being retarded from children and young people.

Conclusion

We could not forget this reality that many children and youths in the Middle East appreciate Internet contents that deal credibly with topics they may find difficult to discuss with parents or adults, such as personal relationships, sexuality, AIDS, drugs, self esteem, etc. In addition, the youth in countries with widespread poverty, corruption and political turmoil also seek realistic, relevant and meaningful content to help them understand and cope with hardships they face in their daily lives (Gigli, 2004). This fact demonstrates that youths do not bother more about parents, political or religious leaders' confirmation. Also, through avoiding any exaggeration – either positive or negative – on the effects of Internet, regional differences should be taken into account. As a matter of fact, family income has a major effect on the level of literacy of the people to information technology and also to their access to Internet. Use of Internet requires a fairly complex set of skills and technology which is not always available for many youth people. Therefore, we should avoid of exaggerating about Internet affects on youths in the Middle East.

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Hamid Rashidi (M.A. at Educational Administration)
Pars Andish Institute, Lorestan Province
Iran
Hamid.Rashidi@yahoo.com

Assist. Prof. Abbas Madandar Arani
Lorestan University
Iran
Rie2000@gmail.com

Lida Kakia
Ministry of Education
Iran
Lida.kakia@gmail.com