
THE INTEGRATION OF EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY IN GIRLS' CLASSROOMS IN SAUDI ARABIA

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ABSTRACT :*The Saudi Arabian context presents a difficult situation for integration of information technology, especially in girls' classrooms. Saudi Arabia is a country characterized by Islamic culture and beliefs, and the educational concepts are deeply rooted in Islamic teachings and beliefs. Alenezi (2014) alleges that the challenge of integrating ICT in education for girls, while at the same time, considering Islamic values is a leading hurdle to the implementation of ICT policies in girls' classrooms. Besides the culture, other factors are in play, in hindering the implementation of ICT in girls' classrooms in the region. Alharbi (2013) observes that, although the government and other stakeholders have tried their best to incorporate and enhance ICT in Saudi Arabian classrooms, teacher attitudes and low levels of teacher training in ICT remain nagging challenges. Alshehri (2014) emphasizes that, weak preparation training for teachers in the field of ICT is a big hindrance to the incorporation of technology in classrooms. Since technology is transforming every aspect of human life, there is a need to integrate it effectively in the Saudi Arabian classrooms for girls, in order to enable them to keep at par with the global demands. For successful integration of ICT in girls' classrooms, there is need to review and understand the challenges facing the integration, in order to devise the best action plan for dealing with the challenges. As observed by Alenezi (2014), the Saudi state agencies have been in the forefront to integrate technologies in classrooms, but with few gains. This current research paper will delve into the integration of technology in education for girls in Saudi Arabia, including the challenges and benefits of implementing the system.*

KEYWORDS: educational system, Saudi Arabian context, information technology.

INTRODUCTION

Any country that has economic development as its prime goal must have an efficient educational system. Education is the first step in the improvement of any governmental department through acquisition of necessary knowledge and skills. Technology has been incorporated into the learning system in several countries. For instance, the developing nations began implementing the use of technology in their classrooms in the year 1999 (UNDP, 2010). The integration of technology in schools is meant to improve the standards of education and experience in class. Research has revealed that the use of technology in classrooms improves learning because it enables active participation of the students and their tutors rather than the passive participation encouraged by the conventional system of learning.

History of Education System and Technology in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is an Islamic nation in the Middle East. Like any other country, its educational system is developed to instill knowledge and skills to its populace. Its educational system began in early 1900 using the Egyptian system. It has developed through the years to become one of the developed systems in the world. The system has been designed such that as much as it provides knowledge and skills to the learners, it also instills and teaches the Islamic beliefs into the learners (Saxena, 2009). Boys and girls in the Arabian educational system study separately according to Islam laws. Despite this fact, boys and girls are given equal rights of getting an education in line with the Islamic stipulation that each member of the society is entitled to an education.

The girl child has been sidelined about many activities including education in some societies. A woman is viewed as a wife meant to serve her husband only. However, this notion is slowly fading away due to globalization. Although the Saudi government encouraged girls' education, the citizens criticized it completely. In the past, the kingdom was forced to deploy soldiers to guard school going girls from disappointed citizens who did not agree with the government's decision (Smith, 2013). However, like any other country, Saudi has changed considerably to a stage where the girls are allowed the use of educational technology in their classrooms.

Just like any developing country, Saudi Arabia has had difficulties in implementing the use of technology in classrooms due to lack of adequate resources. The implementation began as a single subject in schools rather than being integrated into the whole learning system. Computer labs were built in schools such that the students would be trained on the use of computers. The subject would then be examined just like other subjects. It had no connection with the general learning because it was just a unit rather than being a tool for learning (Roblyer & Doering, 2013). However, through the years, the government has been working towards full integration of technology into learning. Programs related to educational technology has been initiated to train the teachers and the girls on their use. Twenty-seven technical centers have been established by the ministry of education to provide methodological services to teachers in ICT thus improving their performance in class.

Since the country is not yet equipped with the infrastructure to provide full implementation of technology in schools, most schools use technology as an aid in conventional learning. The system combines the two to provide the required standards of education. Due to cultural beliefs, application of technology in girls' classrooms is more challenging than in boys' classrooms. The Islamic law is more accommodating to the boy child than the girl child is. There are regulations that govern the behavior of women that includes dressing and all the factors that are exposed to the women. The technology involves the use of the internet and other resources that may be prohibited in Saudi Arabia. This factor made the implementation of technology in girls' classrooms harder and slower (Smith, 2013).

The acceptance and speed of implementation of educational technology depend on the areas of the country. Its implementation is faster in the urban centers because of a change in mentality brought about by globalization. The urban population has a different perception and understanding of the Quran such that the women have more freedom in their activities. They also have women who fight for their rights with factors concerning morality and education. These factors confirm reports

that several girl educational institutions in the urban centers have integrated the technology in classrooms (Zuhur, 2011).

The problem occurs when it comes to rural areas of Saudi Arabia. The citizens in these parts of the country have a backward way of thinking. Their interpretation of the Quran and its stipulation is traditional and hence very strict. Their actions relate to those that happened in the past when the education of girls began in the country. The girls in this society are subject to many outdated rules. They believe that a girl is supposed to behave well waiting for her marriage. Any technology is not allowed as it is seen as a form of western civilization loathed and prohibited by the populace. At first, this population did not accept girl education, but later they accepted it subject to forceful implementation by the government. However, the acceptance came reluctantly (Jiffry, 2013). Lack of knowledge on the use of the technology is the main reason behind their reluctance. Many believe that the technology will give rise to immoral behavior believed by the locals to be the forte of the western culture. The situation is worsened when those citizens who go to study abroad come back with “weird behaviors” such as marriages to western men and women. Nonetheless, the government is working hard to allay these fears and mental models so that the whole country is provided with quality education.

Challenges Faced during Implementation of the Technology

Integration of the technology is subject to the availability of funds and infrastructure to implement the cause. One analyst suggests that problems experienced in the implementation of any plan are not directly related to the availability of the resources but to the intention and passion of the implementers on the project. However, much this notion may be true, and the first requirement for any project is the program followed by the funds to kick-start the process. The Saudi Arabian government had a plan to integrate technology into the educational system. They knew that quality human capital is a product of good educational system. In a bid to achieve this system, all the stops had to be pulled to ensure that all the resources and desired were geared towards the success of the project (ABEGS, 2010).

There is no doubt in the desire of the Saudi government in the provision of quality education to its citizens. However, their plan failed to recognize the opposition that would occur in relation to girl education. The Dakar declaration stipulates that all the citizens in the country were entitled to education not minding their gender. Moreover, the government’s desire to produce a working population through education meant that the girl child could not be left out. The discrepancy of the government’s plan was underestimating the impact of their culture on education (Vallance et al., 2009). Had the government begun educating its citizenship on the importance of technology on education before its implementation, the community would have gotten rid of the mental picture they have on technology. The education would have helped the citizens understand everything about technology and enable them to embrace it fully, therefore, enabling smooth and faster implementation in classes especially in girls’ institutions. The administration has identified this setback and were working out a plan to sort it out through educational forums organized for the locals. Moreover, some of the locals have started embracing the situation owing to good results realized from the use of technology (Roblyer & Doering, 2013).

The unavailability of resources means that the integration would take longer than it was anticipated. In a society that values boys more than girls, the integration started in boys' schools to the detriment of the girls' schools. The main reason behind this line of thought is the cultural factors thinking that a woman was meant to be just a wife. However, through the years the girl child has claimed her spot in the society. The technology is now in use in many of their institutions owing to devolvement of more funds of the government to the sector.

Positive Influence of the Integration

Integration of educational technology in girls' schools has proven to be fruitful in the short time of its implementation. Significant strides have been realized in learning through improvement of grades and knowledge of globally related terms and ideas. Some of the female teachers are not happy with the introduction of the technology because they have to go for training on the subject. The training crowds their schedules because they claim that they have to look after their children. However, the introduction of the system has emerged as good news for the girls. According to studies done female students in the country have enjoyed their learning since the introduction and integration of ICT in their learning processes. Studies also show that the level of acquisition of knowledge when these technological devices are used is fast (Jiffry, 2013).

The teachers report that teaching the students has been made easy because what one needs to do is know how to use the technology provided. On their part, the girls have access to the crucial information that is considered unnecessary for them. For instance, the internet has several informative sites that are beneficial to educational development. The technology makes a class environment lively. It allows for participation of students and the teachers. For instance, instead of a teacher giving an example and explaining, all he/she has to do is play a video related to that scenario and ask the students to explain it the way they have understood. Learning becomes fun, and the student/pupils achieve more in terms of grades and skills.

With the development and use of ICT, schools are rated using the international standards. For instance, schools in Riyadh examine their students using international standards. The technology enables them to gather all the information concerning their students and compare them. The comparison is easy since they use the technological devices in their disposal (ABEGS, 2010).

Negative Influence of the Integration

Despite the fact that technology has improved the learning process for the female students, there have been negative connotations in its use. The students misuse the devices and the technological expertise, especially when they are left alone. The internet is the most vulnerable technological item abused is the internet. As much as it is useful in educational stuff, the internet is filled with several evils that these girls fall prey to when they are allowed to surf the net. Indeed, the girls develop a liking for these items because they are very inviting. The items on the internet change their behavior and some end up developing as immoral women (Roblyer & Doering, 2013).

Use of technology is now widespread in the country. Most parts of the country have witnessed its implementation, although the urban centers and the private schools are more developed than rural areas (UNDP, 2010). Despite these considerable steps in the use of technology in classrooms, neither the government's target nor the requirements of the community have been met. Citizens

are still calling for the departments concerned to implement the plan fully. In some other areas, parents are still crying foul because they claim that the project is not available in their schools. Considering the steps this project has taken since its inception in the country, the government has done well.

CONCLUSION

Education is the backbone of every nation on earth since it is the basis of the creation of quality human capital. In today's world, women have become an important part of the working population because of their expertise. The reason being women are more dedicated than men are when it comes to their work. The women also become emotionally attached to their jobs making them more productive than their male counterparts are. Indeed, the Saudi Arabian government was right in making education in the country necessary for all genders. A larger percentage of students in higher education institutions are female (Khan et al., 2012). This goes to prove that the learning system in the country interest the female population now than it did some years back.

The perception of the value of women in many societies is changing rapidly. The Saudi Arabian educational system has proved that the preset opinions about women can be gotten rid of even in a nation that has a strong Islamic background. Moreover, the achievements realized by the integration of technology into girls' classrooms proof that an escape from the norm is necessary if improvement on a particular field is to be achieved (Rana et al., 2011). Although the road for the integration has been hard, the government's strong desire to achieve its goal made it possible for girls to access the required infrastructure and tools for their studies. These achievements give one the mandate and encouragement to say that the Saudi Arabia educational system is headed for glory in the near future. The emphasis on girl child education is also crucial, and it will go a long way in improving the academic performance of the country and hence its economy.

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