The Islamic Studies Teachers’ Perception of Integrating ICT Into the Teaching and Learning in the UAE Public Schools: Challenges, Opportunities and Practices

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates Islamic Studies teachers’ perceptions in integrating ICT, and the anticipated challenges faced when using ICT. Data was collected through a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. A total of 62 teachers participated in an online questionnaire consisted of 48 questions. In addition, eight teachers participated in the interviews. The findings of this study revealed positive perceptions of both male and female teachers in the integration of technology in their classrooms. The results showed that there were no significant differences between male and female teachers in all parts of the questionnaire. It also indicated that there was a number of challenges hindered the teachers’ use of technology in teaching. Based on the research findings, it was recommended that stakeholders and decision makers in the MOE implement relevant training programs for Islamic studies teachers, to upgrade integrating ICT in classrooms. In addition, this article gives insights into future research studies on the effective use of ICT by Islamic studies teachers.

KEYWORDS

ICT, Integration, Islamic Studies, Perception, Public Schools, Teachers, UAE

INTRODUCTION

Education is considered an important national agenda in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), due to its pivotal role in the success of economic development and social growth of countries today (Alturise & Alojaiman, 2013). The UAE policy and decision makers have been working to develop an educational system in order for graduates to gain the necessary 21st century skills and competencies for their future. To this end, billions of Dirhams were spent on education (Alabd, 2014). As a result, the educational system has been reformed multiple times, since the declaration of the UAE in 1971 (Almarzouqi, 2015; Abdelfattah, 2008). Hence, the Ministry of Education (MOE) introduced its vision and set of values, which emphasized the impact of technology on teaching and learning (MOE, 2017; Alabd, 2014).
The literature on the integration of technology in K-12 public schools is centered on specific subjects such as English Language, Science subjects, and Mathematics. Few studies, if any, were singularly conducted to examine the perceptions and attitudes of Islamic Studies teachers on the integration of technology. Distinctively, this study investigates the perceptions of Islamic Studies teachers towards the integration of ICT in K-12 classrooms in the UAE government schools. The present study will also contribute to current research on integrating technology in Islamic classrooms in the UAE. Five questions drove this study to achieve its goal.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of Terms of Technology in Education

In the context of education and technology, there are several terms used in diverse contexts. These terms are: information and communication technology (ICT), educational technology (ET), and instructional technology (IT). In some cases, they are used interchangeably (Dugger, DTE, & Naik, 2001). Curtain (2001) used the term ICT as “encompassing the production of both computer hardware and software as well as the means of transferring the information in digital form” (p. 1). For this study, the term ICT refers to the hardware and software which are used in the classroom to effectively facilitate and improve the teaching and learning processes. There is a difference between educational technology and technology education. However, Petrina (2013) argued that there is no difference between educational technology and technology education and pointed out that we cannot continue to accept the idea of deception of difference. The term technology integration, which is used in this paper, refers to “using the Internet computers effectively and efficiently in the general content areas to allow students to learn how to apply computer skills in meaningful ways” (Dockstader, 1999, p. 73).

The New Roles of Teachers in the Technology Era

For 21st century careers, teachers must abandon the approach that they are expert content bearers and that their responsibility is just transferring knowledge (Stronge, Grant & Xu, 2015). In contrast, teachers in the 21st century must create a learning environment that evokes the abilities and talents of digital natives and strives to provide meaningful learning opportunities for students (Lee & Spires, 2009). Technology and the knowledge economy have created a new type of learner. Students’ outcomes should be aligned with the higher education standards and the job market. Teachers must be trained and retrained to facilitate the new pedagogy with emphasis on the role of learners and creating a student-centered learning environment. In this context, the teacher plays numerous roles depending on the situation. Harden and Crosby (2000) identified twelve roles for the teacher which were categorized into six areas: the information provider, the role model, the facilitator, the assessor, the planner and the resource developer (p. 5). Alrowais (2015) believes that some of the teachers play most of those roles while others play less and not all the teachers understand all these roles.

Integrating Technology in Education

Integrating technology in schools and institutions has become an inevitable choice because of its impact on the educational change and reform (Fu, 2013). Since 1994, integrating technology in the educational sector has gathered momentum and continued to do so. It is now rare to find a classroom without a computer connected to a projector or a high-speed network specifically in the UAE. Integrating technology in schools is not a new phenomenon; it started when computers were introduced in education since the 1990s (Kafyulilo, 2010). However, after the evolution of the internet, smart mobiles and the emergence of social media networks, the use of technology in the educational field has increased rapidly. Due to the importance of technology in the field of education, it should be applied as a process, not as a single and isolated activity (Satish & Priya, 2012). It also should be an integral part of instructional delivery not as a separate entity. Dockstader (1999) indicated that
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