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EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY IN THE ARAB WORLD

Introduction

In the past two decades, the Arab world has witnessed unprecedented progress in almost all areas of life. Far-reaching changes have occurred, and the prospect of further developments taking place is great. The technological revolution has succeeded in transforming the very structure and course of Arab society, confronting the individual with new realities with which he must come to terms. So intensive has the impact of change been in some sectors of society, that great efforts on the part of Arab education are needed to meet the new demands that are being made.

Education in the Arab world is beset with a number of major problems which must be understood in order that the question of educational technology be seen within its proper context. At the primary level, Arab countries are still a long way from achieving a 100 per cent level of school enrolment despite the fact that they have virtually doubled their efforts to provide more educational opportunities. It is estimated that the number of children in 1985 not undergoing formal schooling was in the region of 10 million. At the secondary level, Arab governments have already adopted the comprehensive school system in order to gear education to the 'real' needs of the Arab people. However, one particular problem which remains to be overcome is the growing demand for scientifically-oriented personnel to meet the requirements of development plans in many Arab countries. In the field of higher education the problems are essentially twofold: firstly, the expansion of university provision has not yet brought about a substantial increase in the number of students following university courses (at the time of writing roughly three-quarters of a million students out of a total Arab population of 151 million are enrolled at universities); secondly, it can be maintained that, in general, university education meets neither the demands of modern society nor the needs of comprehensive development.

To the problems outlined above must be added three further areas of educational concern: the imbalance which can be said to exist between input, output and outcome of the educational systems; the uneven distribution of educational provision in terms of sex, age and geography; and finally the inability of educational administration to move quickly enough to meet the challenge of developments that are taking place. In order to counter the many problems outlined here, the Arab Organization for Science, Education and Culture has devised an educational strategy for all Arab countries. If implemented, it is certain that this strategy will contribute substantially to the making of a better educational system in the Arab world.
Educational Technology in the Arab World: the Present Situation

Awareness of the Concept 'Educational Technology'

'Educational Technology' is a relatively new term which has come to be used over the past twenty years to refer to the application of the methods and tools of modern science and technology in research, teaching and learning. Despite its currency over the past two decades, however, the term 'educational technology' continues to be synonymous in the minds of most Arab educationists with 'teaching aids'. This general lack of awareness of the meaning of the term, which remains unused in the sections and departments of ministries of education, in universities and specialized educational centres throughout the Arab world, fails therefore to appreciate the basic function of educational technology which can be conceived of as inducing a climate for creativity, better organization and administration, rational decision-making and disciplined manpower working cohesively and purposefully.

Provision of Educational Equipment and Materials in Schools

Studies that have been conducted in respect of educational technology in the Arab countries paint a generally negative picture of provision of educational equipment and materials in schools. Most schools are not in possession of equipment such as overhead and film projectors. Where they are found, they are often insufficient in number, or there are major organizational problems such as storage, access and inadequate classroom space which hamper their use. The use of equipment is often further hampered by the unavailability of films and slides and in many cases by a lack of skilled operators.

Traditional teaching materials such as maps, charts and posters continue to be used extensively in Arab schools, but the use of radios and cassette recorders is generally on a small scale. Television broadcasting has begun to be adopted by a growing number of countries— at the time of writing, however, the number of pupils and students benefiting from specially prepared radio and television educational broadcasts amounts to no more than 5 per cent of the total student population in any one Arab country.

Production of Educational Programmes, Materials and Software

The present author has studied the ability of educational centres throughout the Arab world to produce educational materials. Some countries, as these studies reveal, are in a position to produce slides, programmed materials or learning packages in large quantities. However, in many countries production of materials is conducted on a very limited scale, sometimes restricted to the printing of maps and charts using the silk-screen method.

Provision of Trained Manpower in the Field of Educational Technology

Most operators of educational aids, according to studies conducted by the present author, have a background in art education or are unskilled photographers or technicians trained for the maintenance of the equipment.