

## **The Attitudes of Female Primary Teachers in Qatar Towards the Introduction of Computers In the Classrooms\***

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### **Statement of the Problem:**

Not so very long ago there were no computers in Qatari schools and no computing skills were taught on teacher education courses. This changed with the introduction of the first microcomputers in the academic year 1989/1990.

The Ministry of Education responded to parental and community pressures and began including computers in educational programmes at secondary school level.

There can be no question about the necessity of introducing computers into schools. Ornstein (1990) stated that when integrating computers into their instructional methods, teachers should consider the following questions: What are the objectives of using computers in schools? Should they be restricted to students who have particular abilities? To [a] particular grade level [s]? To particular subjects? should they be used to teach about computing and programming or to teach other subjects ? Who will train teachers in computer use? Should the classroom be reorganized to have computers at every desk or should a computer centre or laboratory be set up? Donhardt (1994) pointed out that "A technological revolution is taking place in education that holds the promise of greatly affecting the way in which we learn. But, if this promise is not to be turned into a threat, educators must maintain a healthy perspective of [how] microcomputer technology will be used to accomplish pedagogical goals.

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\* A dissertation submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of M.Ed in the Faculty of Education.

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These observations throw up essential questions about using computers in the classroom. By examining appropriate answers to these dilemmas the curriculum designer will be able to determine the exact needs of the schools and how computers can meet them. Unfortunately, primary schools were omitted from the plans used to implement computer use in Qatar's schools.

If used in an appropriate manner, computers have many applications that may help in developing classroom teaching and learning styles. Computer based education encompasses the use of the computer in education, including its use in the classroom for such purposes as word processing, record keeping and improving a teacher's organization. Computers in instruction are used for computer-managed instruction, computer-assisted instruction and computer-based instruction. Schools also use computers as support resources (Nelson, 1992).

There are some general arguments for more extensive school use of computers based learning, for example the idea that learning word processing skills increases students' performance levels in writing, something which is required in daily life. In addition. Beginning to learn about computers in elementary grades facilitates learning in advanced grades. Finally, computers provide a direct link to the "real world" of the employment marketplace. Currently, computer use in schools is expanding. All the signs point to a continuation of this trend. As educators gain more computer experience, more thoughtful attention will be devoted to the question of how technological benefits can be maximized in the classroom.

It may reasonably be argued that all students must have the opportunity to master the use of computers in a manner that is appropriate to their developmental levels. Matching instructional needs to student motivation. Furthermore, computers must be part of a school's curriculum not only in response to parental or community pressures, but also because they help teachers achieve educational and curricular goals.

Therefore, the integration of computers should not be confined only to high schools but should extend to primary schools as well.

### **The Purpose of the Study:**

The purpose of the present study is to examine teachers' attitudes and views towards the introduction of computers into the primary school curriculum in Qatar. It will also investigate primary teachers' experience of using computers and the current use of computers in primary schools.

### **Limitations of the Study:**

The present research is limited in the following ways. The conclusions of the research apply only to primary schools and may not be applicable to other stages of education. In addition, only female teachers were included in this study because of cultural barriers and Ministry regulations, which restrict direct contact between female researchers and male teachers.

### **Significance of the Study:**

There have been no previous comprehensive studies conducted in the area of the use of computers in education in primary schools in Qatar. This study should be of value to those who are directly charged with the responsibility of planning and formulating a computer curriculum in Qatar's schools. Also, the study will provide guidelines and data which teachers and educators must consider when integrating computers into primary classrooms.

### **Organization of the Study:**

The study is organized as follows:

Chapter 2 provides general background information about the State of Qatar and discusses general education with respect to its development stages and current quantitative aspects of achievements.

Chapter 3 introduces the subject of computer education in Qatar, including the development of computer curricula for secondary schools in Qatar, the contents of the current curriculum, and issues emerging from, using computers in secondary classrooms.

Chapter 4 provides a comprehensive review of the literature concerning modes of computer use in primary classrooms. These are using the computer as a tutor, as a tool for learning and as a subject of study. Some of the benefits and drawbacks which have become evident through these different modes of use in primary schools are also discussed.

Chapter 5 is divided into two parts. Part one provides information about the research design and methodology employed in this work. Part two is concerned with the analysis of the teachers' questionnaire, which can be divided into eight sections is outlined.

Chapter 6 presents conclusions of the study and suggestions for further work.

### **The Instrument:**

A questionnaire consisting of 30 statements divided into eight sections as outlined previously was the instrument used, after receiving permission from the schools to do so. The instrument (questionnaire), initially written in English, was translated into Arabic and used in Arabic; the responses were translated into English when returned.

### **The Sample:**

The target population of this study was 60 female elementary teachers selected at random from four different primary schools in Doha City. The questionnaire was posted to teachers through each school's principle who distributed fifteen questionnaires among the teachers in her school with a cover letter explaining the aims of the study and their role in its successful completion. Teachers taking part in the study remained anonymous and their opinions were dealt with as confidential material. In addition, any misunderstandings relating to the questionnaire were clarified by the researcher whose contact address and numbers were stated clearly on the questionnaire. The data gathered from the questionnaire was used to provide descriptive

statistics mainly frequency tables and the results are expressed both as numbers and as percentages. The response rate of the teachers was 67% as only forty of the sixty responded. However, this is a high response rate for postal questionnaires.

### **Research Procedures:**

The following steps were employed in conducting this research:

- The questionnaire was designed by the researcher.
- The questionnaire was reviewed in conjunction with Mis. Ivy Brember, the research adviser, who helped to locate items which needed revision or clarification.
- Changes were, made, including the rewriting and removal of items, taking into consideration the suggestions of the supervisor. The questionnaire was then translated into Arabic.
- The instrument was accompanied by a covering letter.
- The instrument was sent to 60 elementary teachers working in four different schools located in various areas of Doha City after permission from the schools' principals having been received.

### **Limitations of the Research Design:**

It must be recognized that being a female researcher in a Muslim society has restricted direct contact with male teachers, which, in turn, limited the population that could be drawn on for the present study. Another problem which faced the researcher was the barrier of language since the bulk of the study was done in English while the author's mother language is Arabic. Finally, the relatively small number of teachers involved in the study makes it difficult to generalize the results.

## Conclusions:

- Examining the data gathered in this study, it is surprising that teachers felt so positive about the use of computers in the primary classrooms when they do not use them for this purpose. This is a good indication of the possible successful implementation of computers. Educators who are responsible for planning and developing computer curricular in Qatar's schools should be concerned with elementary school teachers attitudes since the teacher's role in computer use is the key factor to the project's level of success or failure.
- The Data showed that there is a significant relationship between knowledge of computers and attitudes towards them. The opinions of the teachers in Qatar were in general agreement with general findings from the literature in evaluating applications of which they had previous knowledge about them. This result may have implications concerning elementary teacher's preparation. A teacher-training program should accompany the process of facilitating computer use in classroom because teachers need to acquire more knowledge of methods for integrating computers with regular classroom instruction.
- The integration of computers into all subjects within the curriculum is regarded by teachers to be the best method to be adopted for elementary pupils. This means that computers become an integral part of the curriculum rather than a substitute for hand-on experience. This agrees well with the global trend towards using computers as a tool for developing higher-order skills through open-ended software packages such as word-processors, spreadsheets, graphics, databases and desktop publishing, which are available in Arabic.