

Chapter 5

ERP Systems in Arab Education Sector: Towards Improved Implementation and Utilization

Bashaer Al Kilani

Institute of Applied Technology, UAE

Sara Al Ahabbi

Abu Dhabi Education Council, UAE

Souha Adlouni

Al Rowdah Academy, UAE

Zainab Al Yahyaei

Abu Dhabi Education Council, UAE

ABSTRACT

Education leaders are challenged with maintaining high level information systems that are capable of generating real time complex reports which help in planning an institute's resources and take the risk of decision making. To meet this challenge, an effective ERP system could help schools manage their resources and time. The main goal of this chapter is to develop a better understanding of the best practices and effective methodologies associated with the implementation and utilization of Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems in the Arab Education sector. The chapter is also intended to familiarize Arab educational leaders with the key challenges and issues that could be encountered while implementing ERP systems in their educational institutions, and how to adequately cope with such challenges and issues to ascertain the acceptance and satisfaction of end users and stakeholders. It also tries to potentially contribute to enhancing the institutions' performance and quality of education and learning as well as promoting organizational efficiency, institutional transparency, flexibility and mobility for students and staff access to services, and data anytime and anywhere.

INTRODUCTION

The majority of educational institutions of different levels and sizes, both public and private are increasingly in need of new information technology applications and systems to cope with a

new complex and competitive environment. The need to acquire such technology solutions arises from the inadequacy of the conventional way of managing institutions' data, operations and resources, which resembles isolated islands as a result of using separate software and applications

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to support different functions such as finance and accounting, human resources and administration. The lack of integration of applications supporting these functions leads to asynchronies in the databases, work duplications, ineffective management of resources, and excessive loss of time and cost on searching for relevant information to produce meaningful reports to support forward planning and decision making. Nowadays, the rapid development of information and communication technologies (ICT) that are affordable and easy-to-use encourage educational institutions to consider replacing their disparate function-supporting software by an integrated system that uses a single data repository accessible by end users from all areas and automates processes across different functions connecting and all concerned parties as well as providing the tools for standard and analytical reporting that can help educational institutions develop and improve their performance and attain the satisfaction of all stakeholders.

In their search for a suitable integrated system, educational institutions are prompted to consider the acquisition and implementation of ERP systems which have been proven popular and widely accepted by business organizations.

ERP systems are the front runners among other systems and they appeal to educational institutions as a suitable technology solution due to their integrated modular nature, embedding best practices, their configurability to match specific requirements of different organizations, their workflow process-automation and the capabilities of their searching and reporting tools. So what is ERP system? And what are the main impacts of ERP systems on the institution's performance?

(ERP) Enterprise Resource Planning is a category of information systems that enables business organization and educational institutions to manage and control all of their functions and processes through deployment of ERP software. ERP systems support different functions and processes including but not limited to those pertinent

to financials, human resources and operating functions.

For example, if we consider the ERP Human Resources (HR) module that is used by ADEC (Abu Dhabi Education Council, UAE), we find that it comprises the following functions / processes; the personal information, leave management, payroll information, HR letter request (To whom it may Concern), creating and updating bank account number, duty resumption and alerts, education and professional qualification details, emergency contact details, and employee resume upload (Balooshi, 2010).

Even though, that part of the ERP system focused on and intended for ADEC's staff, ADEC also uses another set of applications of the ERP system (eSIS) for student's data. eSIS system is planned in the first stage to allow schools to manage their students' data that is related to registration, daily attendance, students' marks and grades and generating students result reports. Moreover it helps in transferring students between schools. However, the second stage will include more functions such as allowing the parent to communicate effectively with their children's schools and teachers (ADEC, 2011).

The experience of implementing ERP systems in different organizations have indicated that the rosy picture drawn by vendors prior to the implementation about the anticipated benefits of integration and the realization of the organizational improvements is not that rosy. In fact many ERP implementation projects have ended in complete or partial failures with huge losses incurred by the implementing organization. This supports the notion that ERP success in educational institutions is not only a function of selecting a suitable ERP system but also of adopting a suitable approach (methodology) to guide the implementation.

The following are some steps that are viewed as important to help plan and implement ERP system successfully and which can be considered as components in a proven ERP methodology: (Cornelius, 2007)

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