

AN IMPROVED APPROACH OF TEACHING ISLAMIC ARCHEOLOGY IN THE FACULTIES OF TOURISM

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ABSTRACT: As a developing country that depends greatly on tourism, Egypt needs to upgrade the knowledge and skills of its workforce in the field of Tourism. The tour guide is one of the main jobs in that field and thus; the preparation of a tour guide is increasingly important.

The study of archeology plays a central role in the preparation of a successful tour guide. Therefore, the study aims to present an improved approach of teaching archeology in the faculties of tourism. The adopted approach focuses on two main aspects; implementing technology as a tool for a better teaching and learning experience and developing students' skills not just to gain knowledge but to be engaged in the construction of knowledge. The adopted approach was implemented on one of the courses of Islamic archeology taught in the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Alex. University, Egypt and was evaluated to determine its advantages and disadvantages and its efficiency to be applied on other courses of archeology in the faculties of tourism.

Keywords: Islamic archeology, technology, Internet, teaching and learning tools.

INTRODUCTION

The study of archeology plays a central role in the preparation of a successful tour guide. He is expected to be knowledgeable with all the important archeological sites of Egypt throughout its history; which means during the Pharaonic period, the Greco-Roman period and the Islamic Period.

It has always been a challenge to teach the archeology of Egypt which owns an impressive number of monuments and sites. The Islamic monuments alone are 774 monuments distributed in 25 governorates and Cairo, the capital, owns 537 of them. Therefore, the study of these sites, even if throughout two or three courses, is not an easy mission. The difficulty arises from the impossibility of covering all the monuments and more of visiting them especially with the large numbers of students in classes nowadays. Moreover, requiring students to memorize information about each and every site seems impossible, but it's more practical to give them basic information and guide them to search for more whenever they need.

From that situation came the idea of the research which is to use an improved approach of teaching Islamic archeology that is focused on two main aspects; implementing technology as a tool for better teaching and learning and developing students' skills not just to gain knowledge but to be engaged in the construction of knowledge. The suggested use of technology can facilitate the study and create a better teaching and learning experience in which both the teacher and learner have a positive interactive role.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is technology and why is it important in higher education?

Technology has been defined by the UNESCO as "...the know-how and creative processes that may assist people to utilize tools, resources and systems to solve

problems and to enhance control over the natural and made environment in an endeavour to improve the human condition." (UNESCO,1985). Thus, technology in this statement involves the purposeful application of knowledge, experience and resources to create processes and products that meet human needs. The needs and wants of people in particular communities determine the technology that is developed and how it is applied. However, most people think of technology in terms of its artifacts such as computers and software.

In nowadays world, globalization has had a strong impact on higher education in terms of quality, access and diversity of educational provision. Therefore, the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in higher education has proven to be a need to develop higher education. Many countries introduced ICTs in higher education and created a positive revolution by the innovative use of audio, video, computer and the Internet for both face-to-face and distance learning (UNESCO report, 2007).

The report of the Economist Intelligence Unit (2009) states that technology is changing today's classrooms and shaping a different learning environment. The report indicates that integrating technology in higher education will improve educational quality and expand access to educational and reference resources. Moreover, it will change the way courses are taught as teaching will become more outcome-based and student-centered.

The use of technology in higher education

Classrooms nowadays are equipped with the basic equipments necessary to display electronic presentations such as a computer, a projection device, dimmable lights and a screen. The computer should be capable of producing various effects needed such as sound, video or Internet access. Some classes are also equipped with white electronic boards or other equipments. These equipments vary according to the needs of the courses taught in class (Brinkley et al., 1999).

The present generation of students is convenient with using technology. They have never known a world without computers, the World Wide Web and cellular phones (Roberts, 2005). They were even called "the Net Generation", referring to

the crucial role of the Internet in their lives (Oblinger, 2005). Therefore, integrating technology in classrooms is suitable for the present generation of students.

The Internet in particular could be used as an effective teaching and learning tool in higher education. The Internet could be used as a tool for inquiry, communication and construction of knowledge (Kumar, 2004). It can also provide an efficient way to collaborate with others: teachers can collaborate with other teachers and students with other students (Brege, 1998). The use of the Internet in higher education is the core of e-learning and some researchers define e-learning as "Internet-enabled learning" (Gunasekaran et al., 2002). But the broad sense of e-learning is the use of ICT to support students in achieving their learning outcomes (Usoro and Abid, 2007). Therefore, ICT in general and Internet in particular are used by universities all over the world to enhance and develop higher education and ensure quality of education. These technologies were used separately in the form of Distance Education (online courses with no face-to-face interaction) or combined with the traditional approach of teaching.

Thus we conclude that the issue nowadays is not to use information and communication technologies in higher education. Rather, the issue is how to effectively employ such technologies and harness fully the new opportunities created by them to promote positive student learning experience.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the research is to present an improved approach of teaching archeology- Islamic archeology in particular- in which technology is effectively used to create a better educational environment for both the teacher and the learner. The adopted approach also employed various strategies to enhance students' positive role to acquire knowledge and improve practical.

The objectives of the research are:

- To present ideas about how technology could be used as a teaching tool in the field of Islamic archeology
- To present ideas about how technology could be used as a learning tool.

- To present strategies used to develop the students' skills required in the field of tour guiding.
- To assess the suggested approach and evaluate its effectiveness in the field of archeology study.

METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

The suggested improved approach was implemented on one of the Islamic archeology courses taught in the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Alexandria University, Egypt. The course's title is "Islamic Architecture during the Ottoman period and dynasty of Mohammad Ali". 162 students are registered in this course.

The methodology used by the researcher is based on two aspects: The first aims to develop the face-to-face interaction in lectures by using various types of technologies. The second aims to use the advantages of e-learning to create and enhance an additional environment parallel to lectures that could be used as an additional teaching and learning tool. The whole experience was evaluated by the researcher –also the teacher of the course-, the students and an exterior evaluator. The descriptive analytical approach was used in the research.

Implementing the suggested approach:

1- Preparing the course and curriculum design

The course focuses on the Ottoman architecture of Egypt in addition to the architecture of the Dynasty of Mohammad Ali. The studied era is relatively long (from 1517 to 1952) and the monuments attributed to that era are 228 in Cairo, 40 in Al-Behira governorate and 4 in Alexandria governorate. All the monuments were surveyed to determine their status, architectural and decorative importance, location and accessibility (Dictionary of Islamic monuments, 2000). A total of 48 monuments were chosen from Cairo in addition to the 4 monuments of Alexandria and 10 of al-Behira to be photographed by the researcher and 20 of the Cairene monuments were video recorded. Each of the selected monuments has a certain architectural, historical or decorative importance or has a unique feature that deserves to be highlighted.

Various studies about curricula designing and implementing technology in higher education were reviewed by the researcher before designing the course (Brinkley et al., 1999; Trow, 2000; Cayton-Pedersen and O'Neil, 2005; Usoro and Abid, 2007). The course itself was designed to cover the studied era by focusing on the major important monuments that could best represent the century or the district to which they belong, and to present the various types of monuments built during that era. The lectures were prepared to be delivered by using power point presentations, in which most of the digital photos of the monuments were used (512 photos) and also the videos. The presentations were designed to present the selected monuments by showing a plan of each monument, photos of the facades, exterior and interior parts.

The researcher also made sure that the adequate equipments were available in the classroom. Moreover, a survey was distributed among students to establish an initial baseline of students' prior use of technology and the context in which they have used technology. The survey revealed that 63% of the students use computers to finish their assignments and tasks and they use word software very frequent. They also use the Internet to search for information and communicate with others. And 29% of the students stated that they use the Internet at least once a week. Based on these results the researcher concluded that integrating technology as a learning tool will be generally accepted by the students.

2- The lectures in classroom

The first lecture was intended to give an overview of the studied era and its architectural characteristic features. A movie about the Ottoman Empire was played to give the students an introduction about the era, its architectural style and the great architects that shaped that style (Islam: Empire of Faith, part 3, 2001). The researcher also discussed the outline of the course and the students' participation required.

The following lectures used power point presentations as a teaching tool, not only to deliver data and give description of monuments but also to improve students' skills of guiding. Students were asked to simulate the guiding situation and give short presentations of the monuments. Moreover, Google

earth was used to indicate the area in which the monument is located, how it could be accessible, and what the neighboring monuments and buildings are.

In addition to technology, other strategies were used to improve the face-to-face interaction in classroom. A tour guide was invited to one of the lectures to share with the students his experience in the field and to guide them about the skills they need to improve to lead a successful career.

3- The online classroom

The researcher intended to benefit from the advantages of e-learning that has spread all over the world but not yet on a wide scale in Egypt. Various studies about e-learning were reviewed by the researcher to determine how it could be implemented (Berge, 1998, 2006; AFT, 2000; Singh et al, 2003; Mendenhall, 2005). Since the traditional way of teaching; lectures, can't be replaced for the time being in the faculties of Tourism in Egypt, the internet was used to create an additional classroom together with lectures. It isn't in the form of an online course but rather an additional learning environment for both the teacher and the student.

To achieve that; a group was established by the researcher on: www.facebook.com. It was a closed group only for the students registered for the above-mentioned course and the teacher (the researcher) was the admin of the group who confirms their joining it. This precaution was intended to protect the teacher's intellectual property of any material shared on the group only with the targeted students (Storm, 2002). The administration of the group was handled by the researcher. After each lecture, the photos of the discussed monuments were posted in addition to presentations and videos. Students were asked to participate by uploading more photos of the monuments, commenting on the photos and sharing any additional information they have with all the members of the group.

The group was used as a teaching tool by the researcher and a learning tool for the students; therefore, it was intended to fulfill three functions:

a- It was used for inquiry and search:

- Students were given simple tasks such as searching for photos of the studied monuments (before and after restorations, details of the decorations on the

monuments or the neighboring monuments in the site). They were also asked to search for websites that could be used in the field of study and they were given examples of good sites and authorized ones in the field of Islamic architecture.

- Students were encouraged to send their inquiries and questions to the teachers and all the students were encouraged to participate in the discussion or give answers to their colleagues.

b- It was used for communication

- The group was used as a communication tool between the teacher and the students and between the students. Moreover, it was used to communicate with other colleagues in the field of Islamic architecture. An associate professor was invited twice to participate in discussion with the teacher of the course and the students.

- All the important events and announcements that were mentioned during lectures were also posted on the wall of the group. Moreover, the students were informed weekly with the required reading by means of messages on the group.

c- It was used for constructing knowledge

The course was designed to guide students to lead a positive role in constructing their knowledge. The tasks given to them throughout the course were gradual in difficulty. Students were given guidance to select the useful resources and websites that they can rely on. Then they were asked to construct their own knowledge about the monuments that were not discussed during lectures. By the end of the course, students were able to write about a large number of monuments and sites, give presentations about them and also publish their knowledge on the internet.

4- The practical skills of the students

Since the course is one of the major courses that prepare the tour guide for work, the practical aspect of the course was paid attention. As mentioned before, the presentations were used to improve students' skills in guiding. A part of each lecture was devoted for that; students were trained to describe

the monument, control the group and contact with them. The students were also given the chance to describe the monuments in site as a trip was organized to visit 10 monuments in Cairo and the students themselves handled the guiding in turn. The same was made in Alexandria and its sites were visited and the students were tour guiding.

Also an experienced tour guide was invited to be a guest speaker during one of the lectures. His speech focused on the skills of the tour guide in general and how to improve them. He also focused on Islamic architecture in particular; explaining the frequently-visited sites, the interesting aspects of Islamic architecture that attracts tourists, the frequently asked questions of tourists related to Islamic architecture and the role of a tour guide to present the Islamic Civilization through his work.

Evaluation of the adopted approach

Evaluation is the means by which we try to identify which aspects of our teaching are good and which need to change (Fink, 1999). It was important, therefore, to evaluate the adopted approach to determine its efficiency in teaching Islamic archeology, students' acceptance to such approaches and possibility to apply it on similar courses. Four techniques of evaluations were adopted: the teacher's evaluation, outside observer's evaluation, students' evaluation and students' test results.

1- The teacher's (researcher's) evaluation: Part of the evaluation is self-monitoring of the teacher himself which is a mental activity that happens whenever we teach or communicate with the students. It's immediate and frequent and evaluates the interaction of the students. Self-monitoring and teacher's evaluation of the discussed course revealed the following:

- The adopted approach made the lectures more organized starting with an overall view of the site (using: www.googleearth.com) and distributing a map of the whole area and plans of the studied monuments, then a power point presentation was used to explain the monuments in the site. At the end of the lecture, an open discussion with the students was held and they gave simple presentations of similar monuments.

- The students were more engaged with lectures because their interaction with the content was closer through the photos and mini videos. Moreover, their interpersonal interaction during lectures was improved; they participated in discussions and presentation. But still, many of the students were shy to deliver presentations or probably preferred to watch others than being watched and criticized.

- To avoid that lectures being dull because they were planned in the same way, three events were organized to interrupt the ordinary sequence of lectures: a visit to Cairo in the beginning of the course, a meeting with a tour guide in the middle of the course and another visit to the sites of Alexandria near the end of the course. In addition to refreshing the students and taking them away from the ordinary course of lectures, the three events provided more practical interaction with the course content and enhanced students' practical skills. The visits helped the students to apply the theoretical study in the field.

- The students welcomed the idea of creating an online group to be used as an additional teaching and learning tool. In two weeks 139 students out of 162 participated and became members of the group. 101 of them were active members of the group who participated in most of the discussions and completed all the tasks.

- Students had access to a great quantity of information related to the course content; since they were provided with digital photos and resources of the studied monuments and important authorized websites about Islamic architecture in general and Ottoman architecture in particular. The teacher, whose role as the source of knowledge during the face-to-face lectures, had a different role in the online class. The teacher was more like a facilitator who helped the students to select useful resources and navigate different sites about Ottoman architecture. The teacher also organized discussions and led them to the correct path. Moreover, the social role of the teacher was equally important; by encouraging students to participate, praising the good work and correcting the negative participations, in addition to giving students individual care.

- The online class was a perfect environment for shy students who never participated in lectures; they were noticeably active members of the group and encouragement helped them to continue their positive role.
- On the other hand, the online class was very much time-consuming for the teacher. It required increased time commitment to prepare the course, post presentations and photos of each lecture online and to follow up students' participations and achievements.
- Some students were not ready to use technology as a learning tool and that hindered their full benefit of the course.

2- The outside observer's evaluation

A Colleague in the same field of specialization (Islamic archeology) was invited to be an outside observer of the course. The course content, syllabus and adapted teaching strategy were discussed with him. He agreed that the course was well-designed and the teaching techniques were adequate to achieve the intended learning outcomes especially in terms of the practical skills of the tour guide. But he expressed his concern about the online group and stated that he was not sure how the students would receive the idea. He himself depends mainly on the traditional way of teaching with the help of power point presentations.

Also the tour guide was invited to one of the lectures to be an outside observer. He expressed that the power point presentations, videos and Internet are teaching tools that were not available for his generation of students and they make the study of archeology way much easier and help maintain students' interest and motivation to learn.

3- Students' evaluation

A survey was designed to evaluate the teaching and learning methods adopted in the course. The survey consist of two parts; the first about the teaching methods used during lectures (in class) and the second part about the online class and the teaching and learning methods adopted in the group.

The survey was distributed among all the students registered in the course (162 students) and 158 complete surveys were used for analysis.

The analysis of the survey revealed that the power point presentations were evaluated by the students as the most useful teaching method. 82 % of the students considered the power point presentations “very useful” and 18% considered them “useful”. While the use of Google earth and distributing a map of the site together with a plan of the studied monument was considered the second most useful teaching method for the students. Students commented that those two teaching methods together helped them to form a complete image of the site and its monuments as if they were there.

The mini videos of the monuments were considered “very useful” by 55% of the students, “useful” by 41% and not useful” by 4% of them. It was ranked in the third place of the useful teaching methods. The simulation of guiding situations in class was ranked in the fourth place and considered “very useful” by 52% and “useful” by 42% of them. Moreover, the lecture of the guest speaker who was an experienced tour guide was considered important for the students’ practical skills and therefore, evaluated as “very useful” by 43% and “useful” by 41% of the students. At the end of the teaching methods’ list came the introductory video about the Ottoman Empire that was evaluated as “useful” by 64% of the students.

The second part of the survey contained questions concerning the online group . 139 students were members of the group and 80% of them indicated that this group was a successful teaching and learning method. 62% of the members of the group were active members who participated in discussions, submitted all required tasks, uploaded photos..etc. While 17% of the members checked the group only to see the presentations and photos and 8% of them were members but never used the group.

Students mentioned many advantages of the group and those advantages according to their importance for the students were:

- Providing lectures’ presentations and photos made studying easier (82% of the students)

- Encouraged students to be active learners; to search for data, photos and participate in discussions (80% of the students)
- Provided easy access to recourses (63% of the students)
- Easier to work with tasks at home and submit them online (56% of the students)
- Keeps students updated with the latest news and be connected with each others (44% of the students)
- Keep students connected with the teacher and post questions and inquiries at anytime (34% of the students)
- Benefit from the experience of other professors in the field of study (27% of the students)
- Benefit from each others experiences (25% of the students).

Students also mentioned some disadvantages of that learning tool; since 19% of the students stated that they were not used to use the Internet as a learning too and 3% of them said that it's time-consuming.

On the other hand, the students who did not join the group (14% of the students) or those who joined it but never used it (8% of the students) mentioned that their reasons were: the lack of computer, the lack of Internet access where they stay or the lack of time due to a part-time job. Only two students mentioned that they didn't know how to use it and were embarrassed to ask for help.

A concluding question at the end of the survey revealed that 94% students believe that the adopted approach of teaching in this course had a positive impact on their overall understanding of the course content.

5- Students' test results

Previous studies provide substantial evidence that technology can play a positive role in academic achievement (Foltos, 2002). This was partly proven in the present study; since the final test was not yet held and graded. Therefore, the researcher depended on the results of the mid-term exam. It

revealed that the grades of the students were generally higher than their grades of the mid-term exam of the previous course of Islamic archeology. The latter course was taught by the same teacher but using the traditional way of teaching.

Of course, the accumulating experience of the students in the field of Islamic archeology could have its impact on their achievement. Therefore, the relation between the adopted approach of teaching and students' achievement could be examined after grading the final test and comparing students' results to their results in a previous course of Islamic archeology taught by the traditional way.

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Many results were concluded from the present study which are:

1-The study provided evidence of the importance of using technology in the field of Islamic archeology in particular and archeology in general. The power point presentations, mini videos of the monuments and the use of Google earth could all coordinate to help the teacher give a closer image of the monument in relation with the whole site. These technologies could facilitate the study of a large number of archeological sites, even inaccessible ones.

2-The study revealed that the present generation of students is using the Internet in their daily life but that doesn't mean they are all ready to use it as a learning tool. In fact this culture should be spread among both the teachers and the students and they should all know the potentials of using the Internet as a teaching and learning tool. They should also be trained to use it either to improve the traditional lectures or in distance learning.

3-The Internet could be successfully used as a teaching and learning tool. It could provide an additional environment to enhance the traditional lectures. It could be used to encourage students to be positive learners, to facilitate the students learning experience and to create an interactive educational process. It could also be used as a communication tool to keep students connected with the teacher and with each others and moreover, the Internet could facilitate team work.

4-The practical aspect of the study of archeology is essential for the preparation of a tour guide. Therefore, courses of archeology in the faculties of tourism should be designed to meet the needs of the tour guide. The courses should focus on developing the practical skills of the students and create strategies to enhance them. Site visits of the studied monuments are very important and surely useful. The power point presentations with photos or videos of monuments can also overcome the difficulty of regularity of visits and could be used to develop practical skills.

5- The extended access to information altered the role of the teacher as the only source of information. His role nowadays, in addition to provide knowledge, is to help the students to search for additional information and guide them to evaluate the resources and use the useful ones. He also has a social role to create a friendly environment in which learning is promoted.

6- Adopting an interactive approach of teaching, whether in the form of an online group or online course requires increased time commitment of the teacher. Therefore, it should be part of the teaching strategy of the institution and some sort of support, incentives or rewards should be offered to the teachers who adopt that approach. Moreover, equipments and technological support and training should be available for teachers and students. That means, faculties' understanding of the teaching and learning power of technology needs to be increased.

7- Students learn by doing, therefore, adopting an interactive approach of teaching where the learner is positive could develop students learning experience and have a positive impact on their understanding of the course content.

8- Using technology and innovating teaching can maintain students' interest and concentration, encourage them to be more open to change and creates a positive learning experience for them.

To sum up, it's clear that we need to prepare students to an era of change, information and knowledge explosion. Thus, we need to draw on a variety of technologies to deepen students' learning. Such technologies could be very useful and very efficient in the field of archeology.

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