

ONLINE EDUCATION: A UNIQUE & SUSTAINABLE MODEL FOR A WORLD-CLASS EDUCATION

Diala T. Gammoh, Nitin Arora, Warren Altounian
Talal Abu Ghazaleh University (TAGIUNI)
Amman, Jordan
+962-65100250

dgammoh@tagiuni.com, narora@tagiuni.com, waltounian@tagiuni.com

Abstract

This case study demonstrates a new and sustainable partnership model between a global corporation and global online universities to make accredited online education accessible anytime, anywhere. Talal Abu Ghazaleh University (TAGI-UNI) is aiming to provide affordable and accredited online education, along with the technology infrastructure necessary to make it a great experience. TAGIUNI partners with universities that offer accredited online programs, provides on-ground students support and uses its 80 worldwide offices to serve licensed examination centers.

Under the umbrella of the mother corporate, Talal Abu Ghazaleh organization (TAG Org.), TAGI-UNI and the Arab States Research and Educational Network (ASREN), the first research and educational network in the Arab region, are connected to allow members and students to have a wide access to various educational resources and learning materials that follow international quality standards.

Currently, as part of its ongoing efforts, TAGI-UNI has partnered with almost twenty universities and educational institutions around the world, and recruited more than one thousand students in the past two years. We also realized the need to integrate the online high school education with the concept of the online higher education which is included in this case study.

Keywords (up to ten words): online education, distance learning, elearning, proctored examinations, Jordan, Talal Abu Ghazaleh, smart school

Organizational Background

Talal Abu-Ghazaleh Organization (TAG Org.) is a well-known and highly reputable pioneer of business and professional services in the Arab world. With 80 offices worldwide, the physical presence lends to the efficacy in conducting business. Globally, TAG Org. has partnerships with organizations like Cambridge University, UNESCO, the WTO, the British Council, and Hanban – the Chinese government’s initiative to teach Chinese as a foreign language. Regionally, TAG Org. is connected to government ministries, large corporations, NGOs, and many other regional actors.

TAG Org. has always had a vested interest in education. TAG Knowledge Society and TAG Academies have existed to promote the educational initiatives of the Organization. Moving from selected trainings and certifications to academics, TAG Graduate School of Business was established in 2006. In 2009, the Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (FIBAA) granted TAG Graduate School of Business a five-year renewable accreditation to its MBA program. This accreditation bestows TAGSB with FIBAA’s quality seal and international recognition, making it the only MBA program accredited by FIBAA in the Arab world. In 2011, TAGSB was named “Best Educational Institute in Management in Asia” by the World Education Congress, Asia Awards.

Following the success of TAG Graduate School of Business, Talal Abu-Ghazaleh University College of Business was established in Bahrain and will begin admitting students in September 2012. Talal Abu-Ghazaleh University (TAGI-UNI) is one of the latest efforts to bring world class education to anyone, anywhere in the world. TAGI-UNI enters into strategic alliances with educational institutions aiming to provide a litany of added value to the experience of its students.

TAG Org. realizes the very dynamic, and rapidly changing environment of today’s world. Thus, by embracing developments in technology, TAG Org. adapts to the highly competitive environment and responds promptly to the needs of its clients and students. TAG Org. also attracts the most talented professionals in the region for employment opportunities to withstand and embrace any challenges posed by emerging fields.

TAGI-UNI is a corporate university, fully supported by TAG Org.’s resources. TAG Org. provides TAGI-UNI with its business knowledge in its day to day operations. However, like TAGSB and TAGUCB, it will be managed entirely by academics.

Problem Statement

The world of education is currently undergoing a massive transformation as a result of the digital revolution. This transformation is similar to the transition that occurred in the 19th century as a result of the industrial revolution. All around us people are learning

with the aid of new technologies: children are playing complex video games, workers are interacting with simulations that put them in challenging situations, students are taking courses online in high schools and colleges, and adults are consulting Wikipedia. (Collins, 2009)

It is still valid that schools have served the world very well. Teachers who have dedicated themselves to helping children from different backgrounds to learn and thrive in a changing world are greatly admired. Schools have made invaluable contributions to the world's development.

However, new technologies create new learning opportunities that challenge traditional schools and colleges. These new learning niches enable people of all ages to pursue learning on their own terms. People around the world are taking their education out of school into homes, libraries, Internet cafes, and workplaces, where they can decide what they want to learn, when they want to learn it, and how to do that. (Collins, 2009)

In 2011, the United Nations proclaimed that access to the Internet is a basic human right. TAGI-UNI vision is very similar to that with higher education. The capacity to make it accessible to every person on this planet exists and the human will must match its potential. (CBC News, 2012)

The Harvard University Financial Report for 2011-2012 states: "investing in the promise of online education through our edX collaboration with MIT. Harvard has neither the desire nor the luxury to postpone its pursuit of critical priorities despite the prospect of challenging, economic circumstances." edX, the \$60 million joint venture between Harvard and MIT, shows that two of the best universities in the world are taking a massive stake in the belief that the future of education lies online. (Harvard University Financial Report, 2012)

Moreover, according to recent studies, figures from Ambient Insight state that by 2018, there will be more students taking classes exclusively online than in a physical setting (Ambient Insight, 2013).

In the Arab world alone, online education is projected to take massive precedent, according to the World Bank: "With an estimated 41,939,200 Internet users and the number of people online growing at a rate of 1,176.8% over the past eight years, the Arab world is soon to be one of the most wired regions in the world. Given these statistics, the Arab world has embraced the Internet and all it has to offer, including online education." (The Tripoli Post, 2008).

In a critical 2009 study, UNESCO reported that higher education in the Arab world continually fails to meet the needs of students, employers, and society at large. Institutions in our region are overcrowded, understaffed, underfunded, and they produce too many graduates with qualifications that are not in sync with today's labor market (UNESCO, 2009).

Moreover, the UNESCO Institute of Statistics predicts that by 2015, the Arab world will be short 300,000 teachers; second only to Sub-Saharan Africa, which will be short 1.2 million (UNSECO, 2009).

The demand and capacity for elite education institutions to reach around the globe is on the rise. Thus, it is time that educators and policy makers start to rethink education apart from the conventional schooling system. Technology has transformed our larger society, and has become central to people’s reading, writing, calculating, and thinking, which are the major concerns of schooling.

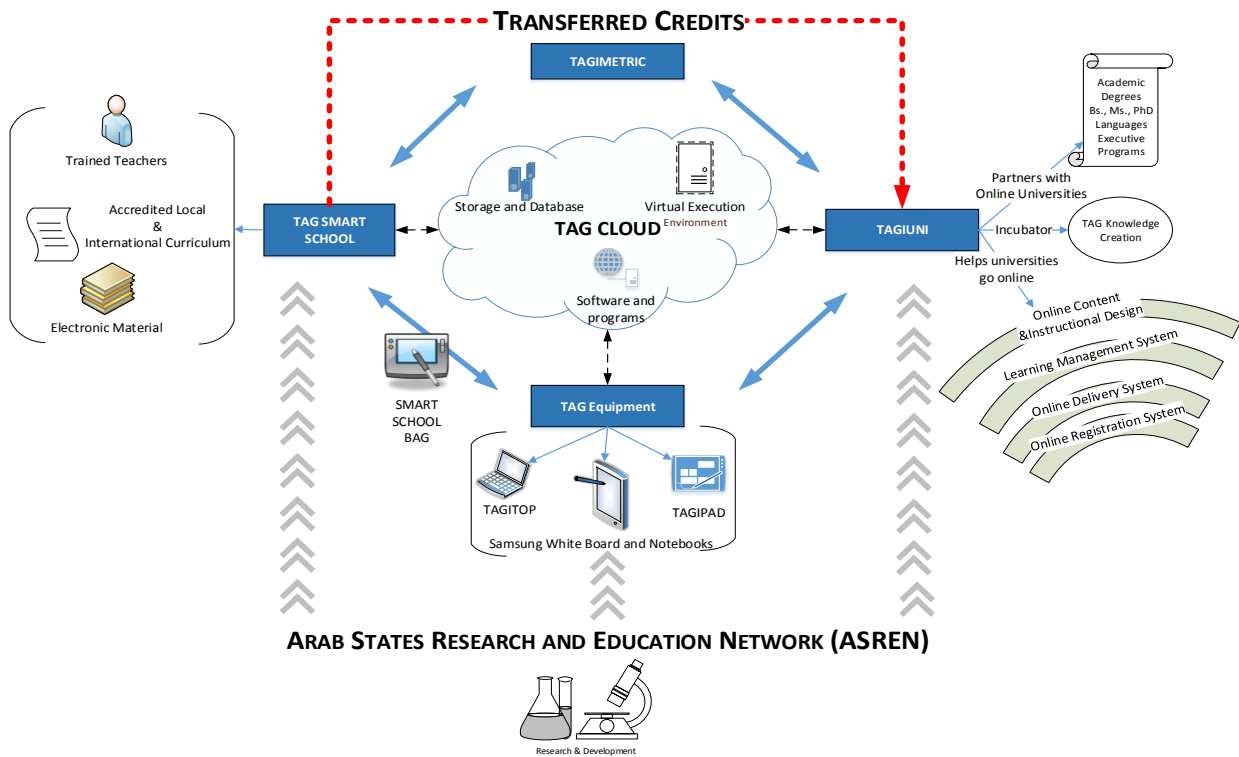
Furthermore, the current online education system running will not be able to fulfill the demands of the rising population and authenticating students unless it joins hands with the corporations and educational companies to expand its outreach and make the distribution feasible and sustainable.

TAGI-UNI Model

Nearly a century ago, famed educator John Dewey said that "if we teach today’s students as we taught yesterday’s, we rob them of tomorrow" (John, 1944). That wisdom resonates more strongly than ever today, and that maxim motivates the necessity of an insightful look at the present and future of education in the digital age.

TAGI-UNI, the cloud-based gateway to the world’s best education, proposes a new sustainable partnership model between a global corporation and global online universities to make accredited online education accessible anytime, anywhere. Figure 1 represents a comprehensive overview of the proposed educational model for TAGI-UNI.

Figure 1: TAGI-UNI. Comprehensive Educational Model



TAGI-UNI meant to propose this model to provide people around the world with a fully integrated solution that can cooperate with the digital education age. The model is an integration between different components: TAG Org., TAGI-UNI, TAG smart school, TAG cloud, TAG equipment, TAGIMetric (testing centers) and ASREN.

TAG Smart School will enable students to take online and credit-based courses that can be transferred toward a high school curriculum credit and lead to a university degree. TAG Smart School equips its teachers and students with top notch hardware & software solutions to stay aligned with the course and curriculum learning outcomes.

Besides that, TAGI-UNI enters into partnerships with world-class universities and institutions to offer accredited online degrees and certificates. It also offers consulting services in helping universities go online by providing an in house developed Learning Management System (LMS). In addition, TAGI-UNI aims to set the standard for recognizing online education through its licensed examination centers, TAGIMetric. TAGIMetric offers a series of accredited international exams in coordination with the professional bodies. TAGI-UNI utilizes the latest teaching methods, helping its students acquire the knowledge needed to sit for their professional examinations.

Further, through ASREN, TAGI-UNI enables its students to access a plethora of world educational research papers and journals through a high-speed network which in return contributes to the growth of scientific research in the Arab and MENA region.

The proposed TAGI-UNI virtual campus allows its students to interact and learn based on their mutual interests. TAGI-UNI provides its students and alumni with a long life access to a community of educators, experts and professionals.

Needless to say, this model helps the new educational model (the Massive Open Online Courses [MOOCs]) researched by some elite universities such as Harvard and MIT to overcome some of its challenges. To date, there have been many studies on the efficacy of this model; however, the reaction to MOOCs has been varied with more criticism than praise. Since all of its courses are offered for free, the issue of sustainability arises when looking at the MOOCs model in its present form. This free framework also leads to the issues of low completion rates, questionable validity of courses completion certificates, and the lack of student authentication in general (Educause, 2012).

The TAGI-UNI framework proposes a comprehensive educational model that is self-sustained through credit based courses against set fees. The co-branded certification between TAGI-UNI and the partner university minimizes the dropout rate to a great extent as the students become motivated to fulfill the degree/certificate requirements. Furthermore, the student authentication issue is mitigated by TAGIMetric, which uses TAG-UNI licensed examination centers, and automated biometric identification technology (fingerprints, facial and signature recognition) to check students' identity.

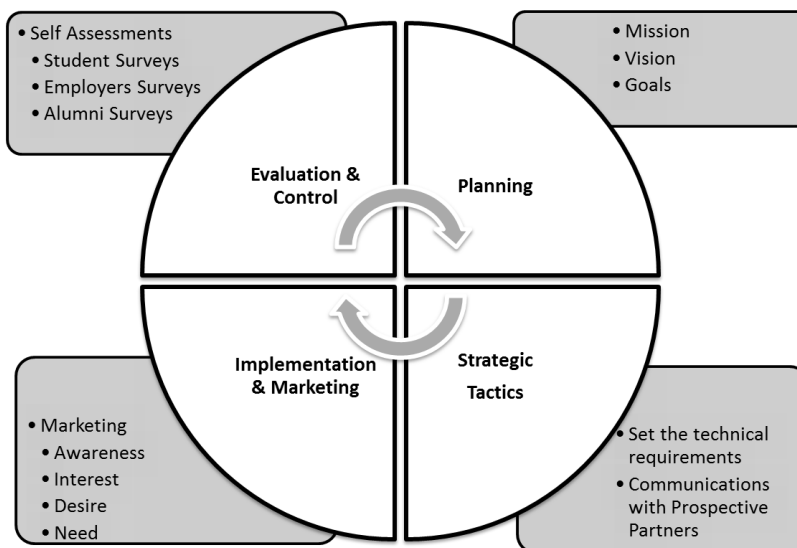
Implementation & Outcomes

TAGI-UNI believes in its vision and mission that “*access to a world-class education is a human right*” and “*to make accredited education accessible to everyone, everywhere.*”

Accordingly, TAGI-UNI established a detailed strategic plan including short and long term goals, as well as strategies for the monitoring and evaluation of its efforts to ensure the alignment among its objectives, processes and services. TAGI-UNI ensures quality effectiveness by setting key performance indicators on all of its services, making all of its outcomes measurable, attainable and quantifiable. These are all continuously assessed and monitored which allows continuous improvement to occur at all stages with all of the outcomes having direct and indirect measures. For example; indirect measures include student surveys, employers and alumni surveys, all designed at TAGI-UNI quality assurance team, while one of the direct measures is the number of inquiries versus the number of actual enrollment.

Figure 2 represents a high-level strategic planning approach that TAGI-UNI follows for implementation.

Figure 2: Talal Abu Ghazaleh Strategic Planning Approach



One of TAGI-UNI’s most fruitful corporate partnerships has been with Samsung. To bring affordable customized laptop computers to the Arab world, TAGI-UNI partnered with Samsung to develop the TAGITOP; a laptop specifically designed for Arab users and especially for educational purposes. The popularity of the TAGITOP initiative has been widespread; with over 10,000 TAGITOPs shipped since 2011, its success led to the development of the TAGITOP II.

As part of this partnership, TAGI-UNI is now in the developmental phase of creating a tablet and mobile applications with Samsung. Pictures of TAGITOPII are shown in Figure 3. The specifications for the 10 and the 14- inch TAGITOP are in Table 1.

Figure 2: TAGITOP; co-branded laptop with Samsung



Table 1: TAGITOP Specifications	
TAGITOP II	Specifications
10-Inch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processor: Intel® ATOM N570 Dual Core • CHIPSET : Intel® NM10 • HDD: 320GB (5.4KR SATA, Slim) • Memory: 2GB (DDR3) • LED: 10.1 WSVGA • Webcam: 1.3M pixel • Bluetooth: 3.0 High Speed • Battery: Li Ion 8Cell Upto 8 hrs • LAN. WLAN
14-Inch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screen: 14.0" LED HD (16:9, Gloss) • V RAM: Shared • Memory: 2GB (DDR3) • HDD: 320GB (5.4KR SATA) • ODD: Super Multi Dual Layer (SATA) • Communic:802.11bgn • Communic:802.11bgn • CD drive • 3 USB ports • 1 HD port.

TAGI-UNI has almost twenty partners such as the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), Thunderbird School of Global Management, Laureate International Universities (University of Liverpool , Walden University), Amity University Online, Canisius College, University of Northampton and many others are in the pipeline. More than one thousand students are currently enrolled in a wide variety of academic and professional programs.

TAGIMetric testing center has already conducted several tests for Cambridge IT Skills and the British Council's Aptis; with plans for more in the near future. The learning management system, developed by TAGI-UNI is currently running at Talal Abu Ghazaleh School of Business (TAG-SB), Jordan and Talal Abu Ghazaleh University College of Business (TAG-UCB).

In order to continuously assess the student's feedback, TAGI-UNI evaluates its students experience through its online surveying system. On a survey distributed for almost 300 students, TAGI-UNI got a response rate of 30%. Fifty-two percent of TAGI-UNI students

agreed that the TAGI-UNI website provides accurate and up-to-date information in general. This triggered the need to update the first version of TAGI-UNI website and put more emphasis on its content and design. Only 19% of TAGI-UNI students reported technical issues related to internet connectivity or live video streaming. Fifty-five percent of those students were able to fix the problem through TAGI-UNI technical support, and the other 45% of students said it was a problem with their internet service providers.

Sixty three percent of the students said that through TAGI-UNI, they got timely response and feedback on their questions and reported issues. Overall, 75% said that their experience at TAGI-UNI and online learning was an excellent experience and they talked about their experience to families and friends. In an open ended question asking about their feedback and experience at TAGI-UNI, the answers were as follows:

Student 1: *“The advanced Global Marketing Strategy course I took with Thunderbird through TAGI-UNI, gave me up-to-date advanced information that adds to my experience in International marketing, I learned many important and beneficial information that will help me in my work more”.*

Student 2: *“I have recently completed the ITAD online course in Business. I enjoyed every bit of it, learnt at my own convenience, and gained essential knowledge that relates to a workplace in particular and life in general. I would recommend this course to everyone especially those interested in business enhancement or even basic accounting.”*

Student 3: *“The layout of the learning material was very simple and user friendly the duration was enough to understand and study the material. It was a great experience that added value to my CV. “*

Challenges

The central challenge is whether our current educational landscape will be able to adapt and incorporate the new power of technology-driven learning by integrating new technologies for the next generation. The implementation of the proposed case study has several challenges related to the following:

1. Technology infrastructure.
2. Human resource training.
3. Willingness to adapt with the online learning trend.
4. Local accreditation for online learning.
5. Credibility of online learning.

References

Collins, A., & Halverson, R. (2009). Rethinking education in the age of technology: The Digital Revolution and the Schools. *New York: Teachers College*, 1-11.

CBC News, 2012 United Nations , *U.N. declares internet freedom a basic human right*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.cbc.ca>>

Harvard University Financial Report, 2012. *Harvard University Financial Report*. [online] Available at <<http://vpf-web.harvard.edu/annualfinancial/pdfs/2012fullreport.pdf> >

Ambient Insight, 2013. *The US Market for Self-paced eLearning Products and Services: 2010-2015 Forecast and Analysis*. [online] Available at <<http://www.ambientinsight.com/AIStore/SearchResult.aspx?CategoryID=6>>

The Tripoli Post, 2008. *Rapid population growth in the MENA region calls for education revolution*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.tripolipost.com/articledetail.asp?c=11&i=2599>>

UNESCO, 2009. *Trends in Global Higher Education: Tracking an Academic Revolution*. [online] Available at: <<http://www.uis.unesco.org/Library/Documents/trends-global-higher-education-2009-world-conference-en.pdf>>

UNESCO, 2009. *Projecting the Global Demand for Teachers: Meeting the Goal of Universal Primary Education by 2015*. [online] Available at: <<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001863/186397e.pdf>>

John, Dewey, 1944. *Democracy and Education*, New York: Macmillan Company.

Phil, Hill, 2012. *Online Educational Delivery Models: A Descriptive View*: Educause Review Online. [online] Available at: <http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ERM1263.pdf>