



Online Learning in the Arab World

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Introduction

The emergence of Information Technology drove to the reality that the traditional knowledge delivery systems for higher education in the Arab world no longer fit this era. The advent of the ‘global electronic revolution’ in the twenty-first century has heated efforts towards shifting pedagogy from its conventional classroom setting into a dynamic electronic web-based interactive learning environment. ¹

In correlation with this fact, it’s been estimated that revenues from the sales of e-Learning tools will reach \$560 million in 2016 in the Middle East region. At that time, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, and Jordan will be scoring the highest percentages of private schools in the world at 65%, 46%, and 42% respectively bearing in mind that private schools are highly attracted towards buying e-Learning materials, platforms, and equipment. ²

Vivid Examples from the Arab World

E-Learning is an umbrella concept to the online, virtual, electronic, distance, or digital education or in other words the internet-based training. Nowadays, these words are being used interchangeably.

Major part of barriers challenging adoption and usage of the Internet lies in the political and regulatory environment, individual awareness of and access to new technology in the business and governmental sectors. “Although the digital divide between the Middle East and developed nations still exists, Arab governments are rapidly converging through education, awareness, technical infrastructure and above all, change of management”. ³

Jordan’s first concrete distance learning attempt was made in 2002. The Ministry of Education of Jordan and the ministries of planning and information technology and telecommunications coordinated towards fulfilling national e-learning through the creation of national knowledge networks, where the use of ICT is a base for the transition to the e-learning system. This e-learning system relies on the development of self-learning and critical thinking instead of the traditional educational methods, which heavily depend on indoctrination by the teacher or lecturer. ⁴

Such an initiative required supplying all e-learning means and equipment for more than 3,000 schools throughout the Kingdom of Jordan, so that the role of the teacher is more likely a coordinator and a mediator rather than an instructor cueing the students. The teacher’s new function is to help the students access random information and collect knowledge on their own. ⁴

Furthermore, Al Zaytoonah University has given tolerable attention in regards to online learning. The university has developed a series of course categories to be taught online concerned with the departments of computer science, software engineering, Mathematics, multimedia systems, computer information systems, and computer networks. ⁵

In 2012, the Talal Abu Ghazaleh Organization brought the Talal Abu Ghazaleh University Company (TAGI-UNI) to life. This ONLINE University was created to facilitate the process of enrollment, registration, and study without the need to travel to the university country. On one hand, TAGI-UNI offers a bouquet of academic programs in common fields of interest like business, marketing, information technology, accounting, communication, educational studies, healthcare, human services, and non-profit management and leadership and in unique areas such as nursing, forensic psychology, criminal justice, public policy, software engineering, and many more. Moreover, TAGI-UNI conveniently and carefully chose the universities that offer the three dimensions; Bachelors, Masters, and Doctoral or Ph. D. On the other hand, TAGI-UNI has a commodious roster of courses and certificates that link education to the needs of the market. Such courses and executive certificates include colorful tracks like administration, auditing, banking, business, customer service, front-line management, human resources, intellectual property, law, oil and gas, nursing, supply chain, learning and assessment, modern languages, music, test preparation courses (IELTS, TOEFL, GMAT, and TOEIC), etc...

In brief, TAGI-UNI is the people's gateway to the world's best education as it promotes global citizenship and individual responsibility .⁶

Additionally, the expansion in the use of technology led **Egypt's** Ministry of Education to administer the project of e-learning in Egyptian schools within the national project of the state establishment of e-government in 2002-2003. This project was introduced in most Egyptian schools to add distinct educational sites on the Internet and Intranet via video and audio, in addition to the components of educational multimedia (methodology - Enrichment - corrective - recreational) that is managed through e-learning systems.⁷

The e-learning Unit (ELU) at the Mansoura University (MU) in Egypt was established in 2005. ELU is a division of the University Development Center (UDC) which supports e-learning activities at the University, including training, instructional development support, 24/7 technical support and hosting of MU's Web-based and Web-enhanced courses. Other activities represent e-laboratories, e-studio, e-magazine, and e-services.⁸

Not far afterwards, the Egyptian e-Learning University (EELU), a non-profit organization for higher education that provides educational services, training and research programs, started its educational activities in 2009. EELU offers the masters of int'l business administration in three different areas and provides a virtual educational environment that reduces dependence on the concept of physical and geographical proximities between the student and the teacher.⁹

In line with **Saudi Arabia's** mission to move towards a more knowledge-based economy and produce an information society, the country had shaped the national ICT Strategic

Plan outlined by the Ministry of Education's Computer and Information Center .Some of the universities that endorsed this model are Saudi Electronic University, Arab Open University, and the Knowledge International University.¹⁰

Arab countries like Bahrain, Tunisia, UAE, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon are developing the educational systems in terms of employment information and communication technology ICT. They all ran pilot projects to investigate the efficiency of e-Learning starting with schools and universities at different levels. Each country has built one or more online universities as shown in table 1 below. Those universities are taking into account the online learning principles or core values that are displayed in figure 1 in order to fulfill the power of learning remotely.

University Name	Country
University of Bahrain ¹¹	Bahrain
Virtual University of Tunisia, Islamic Online University ^{12, 13}	Tunisia
University of Creative Sciences, Hamdan Bin Mohammad e-University ^{14, 15}	UAE
Syrian Virtual University ¹⁶	Syria
American University of Iraq-Sulaimani (AUI-S), Lebanese French University (BMU) in Erbil ¹⁷	Iraq
Lebanese German University ¹⁸	Lebanon

Table 1: Online University vs. Country of Production

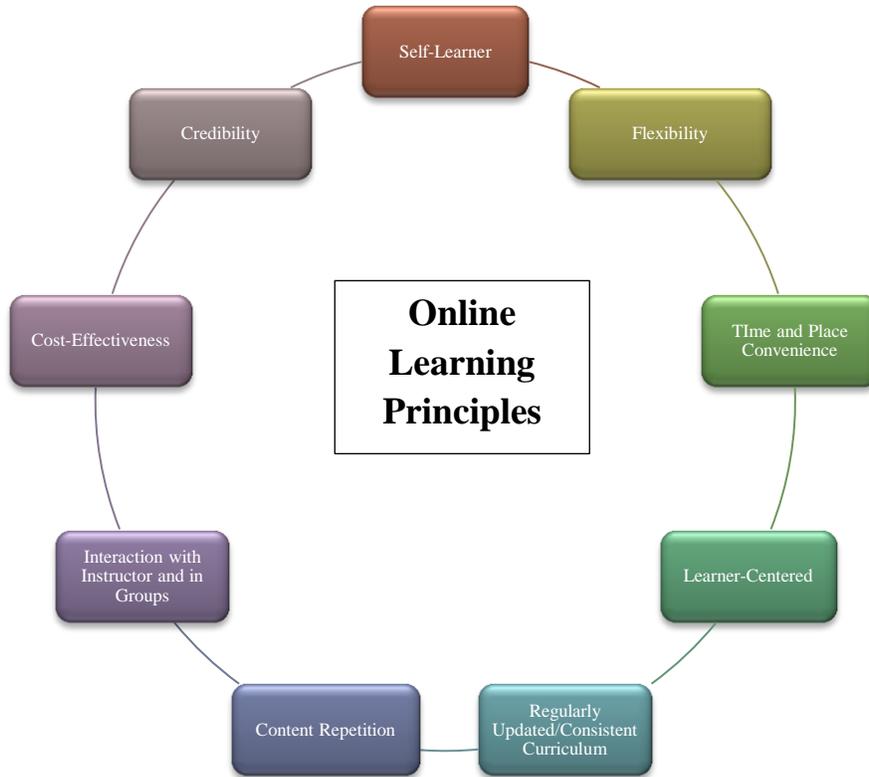


Figure1: Online Learning Principles

Conclusion

Learners are in line for an education that prepares them and their nation's economy to adapt to a world of swift change and widespread globalization.

Friedman argued that in order to be competitive in the global economy, individuals, organizations, and countries must be able to adapt quickly to change. One way to do this is to acclimate e-learning and modern learning and teaching concepts to the culture and educational systems of the region.¹⁹

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