

The Future of Distance Learning: Challenging and Trends

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Abstract

This paper presents the positive and negative impact of distance learning education (DLE) in the Arab League Region (ALR). The online searching was the method applied to investigate the experience of per-university and university level institutions. The finding shows that there was less significant impacted of an online access of DLE which was available for the students at multiple level of education (schools and universities) in the region in comparison to the normal learning education (NLE). In conclusion and for the time being the traditional methods of learning NLE seems to be effective more than the DLE in different disciplines however, the future is for DLE in the case of solid management.

Keywords: Arab league region; distance learning; traditional learning; online access; education.





الملخص

هذة الورقة تستعرض الأثار الإيجابية والسلبية للتعليم عن بعد في بعض الدول العربية. وبأستخدام طريقة البحث والتحري بالأنترنت عن آراء ذوي الأهتهام بالموضوع عن خبرة قطاعي التعليم لمرحلتي ما قبل الجامعة والجامعية، أظهرت النتائج أن هنالك تأثير طفيف ومحدود للتعليم عن بعد على الطلاب ذوي المستويات المختلفة بالمنطقة العربية بالمقارنة مع التعليم التقليدي. يمكن القول كخاتمة لهذا الموضوع أنه بالوقت الحالي طريقة التعليم التقليدي هي الأفضل بالمقارنة مع التعليم عن بعد ولكن في المستقبل القريب ستكون الريادة لطرق التعليم عن بعد اذا وجدت إرادة وأدارة صلبة وفعالة. الكلهات الدالة: الدول العربية، التعليم عن بعد، التعليم التقليدي، الأنترنت، التعليم.



Introduction

Education is a key for nation development including the Arab nation. There is proportional relationship between the level of nation development and the level of education management. Education in ALR almost follows the traditional method however, in the few years back; all windows open for distance learning (Brey, 1991 and Hyatt, 1998) owing to some reasons. These reasons include: (1) technology development (internet and media), (2) cost effective and saving times, (3) public awareness and (4) business demand. It is necessary to differentiate between two concepts 'e-learning' and 'distance education'. E-learning is the variety of knowledge can be reached by using the internet access. It is for the public to increase their own knowledge and it is not necessary to have certificates. The distance learning education is an alternative way of the traditional education, attending classroom, to delivering certain knowledge (curriculums certified by government body such as Ministry of Education) for certain group of people (students regardless their age and knowledge level). It is ended by certificates (such as professional training, diploma, degree, master, PhD, etc.) as a reward and confirmation of the enrollment of the student for certain period (few weeks up to few years). Distance education may be considered as a significant method for the field of theoretical and social education such as Islamic studies, public admin-istration, economics, linguistic, literature, management, etc. that are falls under humanities and social sciences (Gunawardena et al., 2004 and Hyatt, 1992). As a definition of DE is 'a field of education that focuses on new teaching methods using the development of telecom technology with the aim of delivering teaching to students who are not physically present in a traditional educational



setting such as a classroom (Honeyman and Miller, 1993). The history of DE is back to the 1728 in Boston, U.S.A. when the traditional mail utilized to send the taught materials to students in school, before university, level.

There are some universities have been started providing distance learning education center as a part of their education policy. For instance, Table 1 shows some institutions provide the distance education center in four selected Arab countries i.e. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordon and Lebanon. For sure there are other countries have DE plans and experience however, it is not include in this study. In the case of Cairo University, there are seven local universities sharing the center of open education system. There are some non Arab university bases also providing DE center, either Arabic or English, in their own website such as University of Dayton. There are some universities established completely to provide the DE program as shown in Table 2.

Table 1 Selected Distance Education Center in ALR

| Country | School or University's Name | Field of Studies |
|--------------|--|------------------|
| | King Abdulaziz University | Social studies |
| | King Khalid University | All fields |
| Saudi Arabia | Al-Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University | Islamic studies |
| | National Center for Distance Education | All fields |
| | EBT (international online school) | School level |
| | www.etbcenter.com (Riyadh Branch) | courses |
| Egypt | | |
| | Open Education Center, Cairo University | |
| | http://www.ou.cu.edu.eg/ | |
| | Shams University | |
| | http://www.olc.shams.edu.eg/ | |
| | EBT (international online school) | School level |
| | www.etbcenter.com (Mansoura, HQ*) | courses |
| Jordon | | |

| | Alberta Distance Learning Center http://www.adlc.ca/content/view/116/85/ | All fields |
|---------|--|----------------|
| Lebanon | | |
| | International council (I.C.) http://www.liec-edu.com/aboutus_Ar.asp | All fields |
| | Beirut University BUonline http://www.buonline.edu.lb/ | Business Admin |

* Head Quarter

Table 2 Selected Universities Providing DE

| | | Supported by | Website address |
|---|---|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 | Knowledge International University (KIU) | Saudi Arabia | http://kiu.org/website/ |
| 2 | Islamic Online University (IOU) | Qatar | http://islamiconlineuniversity.com |
| 3 | Arab Open University (AOU) | Some countries*6 | http://www.arabou.edu.*/ |
| 4 | City University | A branch in Egypt | www.cityu.edu |

^{*}Kuwait, Jordon, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon and Sultanate of Oman (Elearnmag, 2012).

The launch of Knowledge International University (KIU), as first virtual university, in Saudi Arabia is one of the very interesting development. KIU is a non-profit, Islamic university offering bachelor degrees programs in the field of Islamic studies such as Sharee'ah and Qur'anic generally for students who use Arabic as a second language (Elearnmag, 2012). However, KIU is seeking for Saudi Ministry of Higher Education accreditation. Another example is the Regional Information Technology and Software Engineering Center (RITSEC) nonprofit body, established in January 1992, as a result of joint project of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD). RITSEC is hosted by the Government of Egypt through the Cabinet Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC) which is located



in Cairo. RITSEC provides technical, professional and developmental support services to some agencies, institutions and governmental organizations in the Arab Region (Ritsec, 2012).

Distance Education Facility

The facility provided by the particular university includes the online learning management system (LMS), where students can access the components of the system, participants, and listen to the tutors online. This facility strongly depends on well established tele-communication utility such as fax, phone, internet, video conference, CDs, emails and of course, steady electricity power line. For example, EMES is a complete blackboard online system provided by King Abdulaziz University (KAU), in Jeddah for students who registered and involve in social studies via DE. The blackboard is an online course management system used to deliver web-based distance learning courses and as a technology supplement for face-to-face taught courses. Instructors can easily post course syllabi and other documents to their course website. Blackboard offers a number of online tools including discussion board, chat, announc-ements, quizzes, grade-book, calendars, file's exchange & group collaboration (Fitchburgstate, 2012). The access of Black-board course sites is a web browser and internet connection. The e-learning has two main methods in delivering the subjects by the lecturer to the students using blackboard system: (1) synchronous and (2) asynchronous (Khayma, 2012). Synchronous is all subjects delivered in real time and there is real discussion and interaction while in asynchronous is record video and the student may listen in late-time based on his convenience time. EMES, AUDUS and CENTRA (Honeyman and Miller, 1993) are the main feature in e-learning system center. 'AUDUS' window is used form student to know about course outline, timetable and add/drop course, etc. 'EMES' window is used for receiving, open and solve student's exercise and includes forum and email. In addition, to attend exam for certain time (1-1:30 hours) automatically after that time the system closed. 'CENTERA' is a window for students those who attending class online and practice full interaction with the lecture such as listening, asking and answering questions (Fitchburgstate, 2012).

Difficulties Facing Distance Education

It is clearly here to discuss three main components of DE: (1) the management center roles (Forrester et al., 2004), (2) interaction dialogue between the higher motivated learner (students) and the good web teacher (tutors/lecturers) (Fisher, 2000) and (3) supportive system. The management centre establishes the required rules of the program; monitoring and forcing the students to follow the system. Otherwise, there is no learning progress would achieved, no completion, no graduation and for sure no certificate at the end of the course will be issued. Student desire, ability and responsibility to learn are very important elements. The following up of the online courses continuously is a significant to reach the DE aims and success within the society. For example,

internet is open access and it can be use either wisely for achievement student's goals or not wisely for entertainment which leads to waste a lot of times daily. The online environment based learning is integration of tutorial (as module, study guide, tests, etc.) with three other components i.e. management (as class management, course schedule, announcement board, etc.), support (as online library, personal page, tracking, etc.) and interaction (as emails, discussion board, etc.)(Sadik,2004). Figure 1 shows the integration diagram of DE components and Figure 2 shows the circled process of DE starting from sender (tutor/lecturer) to the receiver (student).

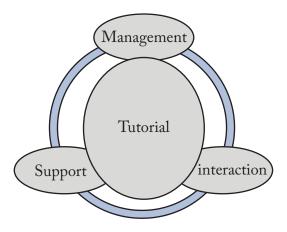


Figure 1: The Online Learning Environment Integration (Sadik, 2004)

Distance Education Impact on Students

The student's background those who joining the DE is very important. There are two types of certificates should be given to the students at end of their study (1) Training Certificate and (2) Degree Certificate. Training certificates includes Certificate of Prof-essional Training for those who finished six years of basic education. Diploma certificate of Technician for those who managed to finished basic and secondary education but not passed the national baccalaureate exam. However, Degree Certificate is provided for six semesters for students those who pass and have the national baccalaureate exam results. Continuous course development for six semesters will yield a model to be use in any universities (Weinman, 2001).



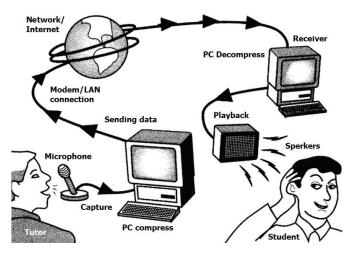


Fig 2 Illustrate the Circled Process of Bridge DE (Alaa-Sadik, 2012)

Methods

Most of the data collected from internet such as Arab forum is the source of this work beside some portable document format (PDF) files. Appendices (A to F) are shown some online Arab forum windows, as example, reveal the present challenges in the study area.

Results and Discussion

From the general overview, the distance learning education (DLE) disadvantages can be summarized as follow: (Ejabat, 2012) (1) very higher cost effective especially in the beginning of the student enrolment to the course. This is because student needs to establish the circle equipments shown in Figure 2 including the maintenance cost, (2) the ability to accept weak knowledge student's background, (3) at the time being most of DLE courses, in Arab region, fall under the social and humanities studies categories (4) DLE have less relationship between teachers and the students, school level, who want to establish their personality and discover their creativities, (5) school level students missed the real content role of the teacher and (6) sometimes, the registration cost per year is higher and costly. Most of the Arab region governments have less DE awareness and have no solid management (Abjade-learing, 2012) see Appendix B, less technology facilities such as internet, computers lab and lose of the database due to heavy rain, flood and or electricity cut off/ shortage. The three levels, higher schools, university and postgraduate, are discussed in this section. In schools level, the respondents (students) were unfamiliar with DE idea and concept due to lack of sustenance and their applicability for DE was least likely to taint a futuristic project (Nasser and Abouchedid, 2000). Teachers are not qualified and their objective is to obtain some money by any mean. Students are not interested on knowledge and they want to play using their mobiles and cars rather than to learn. There is not government control, monitoring and management the system and people not fair Allah S.W.T. (Helow-Ejabat 2012) (see Appendix C) and takes learning process

as a part of religion duty 'Ebdah'. (Hady-Ejabat 2012) (18b) agreed with Helow's opinion and he added parent should encourage their sons to study hard for their own benefit and government may spend more money to invest on education (see Appendix A).

In the university level where the students expected to be enough mature and have some awareness. A web based investigation (SKAAU, 2012)(see Appendix D), student from KAU, shows the management gap between the students and the staff. Here, are some examples of what students were suffered: (1) the previous notes deleted automatically from the CENTERA database when new upload and update for the system occurs. Accordingly, students who want later on to access and utilize the data were suffering to find the data, (2) the downloading of the data is impassible in particular when the file is big size. Another case (3) is the tutor/lecture asks the students to listen full time of the real life lesson to the recorded lecture from the EMES database instead of, the lecture, delivering it himself and at the end of the time (40-60 minutes) the lecturer ask: Is the any question? This way of teaching is not preferable by the students. Sometimes, (4) the lecture asks the students to re-going the previous exercise and homework of the whole semester before the final exam. This is because, the lecture, forgot to put the marks on time and work of the students missed by him. On the hand, some staff keep the exercise till the end of course, end of the semester, (5) Some of the lectures not responding to the emails which sent by the students. Therefore, the students confuse, the lecturer, received the emails or not. (6) There is no earlier notification from some staff in particular the local so, the student waiting online for long time. (7) The student's carry marks 40 out of 100 kept and hidden far away from the students by some staff till the end of the semester. (8) Some of the staff deliver the lecture from his home there the conductivity is slow. All the above are complains come from the student's KAU forum. Similarly, there are some complain form the staff. It is observed most of the above problems are from the management side. The solution to avoid these management problems is to provide FM radio for the audience to be use when there is emergency disconnection occurs.

International council Inc (I.C.) in Lebanon (Liec, 2012) (see Appendix E) is an example of institution or center provides DLE access for Arab students and corporate with some international universities. IC has gained a prosperous reputation in academic as well as market place around the World and in most Arab countries. I.C is registered in the United States, and has a head quarter to provide these services for Arabs in Lebanon. The problem is some Arab countries are not accredited the International council DLE certificate however this certificate can be used for those who want to work in the private sector in Lebanon (Ejabat 2012).

Case study from WATA online Forum

WATA in brief is an acronym for World Association of Arab Translator and Linguists. The forum participants are group of educated people from different disciplinary background sharing



their society problem and discussion via online forum. It is non profit and registered under Indian State nonprofit rules for origination, U.S.A (Liec, 2012). Viewing their opinion is very important for this study because they are one the importance body that we can listen to them.

The question: Do you recognize/accept the DE certif-icate?

Answers: In Fig 3 there were around 44 participates 35 (79.55%) said 'Yes' and 9 (20.45%) said 'No'. However, twelve answers are reviewed below as follow:



Figure 3 WATA Online Questionnaire Results (Wata, 2012)

For more info kindly see appendix F. Table 3 shows summary of the Wata forum comments.

Table 3 Summary of the WATA Discussion (Wata, 2012)

| | Participant's Name | Comments |
|---|--|--|
| 1 | عبد النبي الشراط الحسيني Abdulnabi Al-husini | Yes, I accept it because I have experience in Institute of Islamic studies in London and it is recognized in UK however, most Arab count- ries are not! Knowledge distribution is more important. |
| 2 | د. حسان النجار Dr. Hasan Al-ngar Head of Arab Physician Union in Europe | Yes, I accept DE only for theoretical and social studies however, for practical studies I cannot. |
| 3 | د. ولهاصي عزيز Dr. Wlahas Aziz | No, for those who study in my country although in the present times IMD certificate in Switzerland has been recognized. |
| 4 | مصط <i>فی عو</i> دة Mustafa Auda | Yes, if the there are restricted rules to be followed. There are many people has long experience qualified to achieve a certificate via DE because there are many lectures in the UK universities have no certificate! |
| 5 | د. كاظم عبدالحسين عباس Dr. Kazim Abas | Same answer as in No. 4. Yes, for DE for social studies only with rest-ricted rules to be followed and recognized curriculum from international body. |

| (| 6 | د. محمد أسحاق الريفي Dr. Mohamed Al-rifi | Yes, for DE if it use only to share knowledge howev-er, to give certificate at the end of the course I cannot agree because our Arab society haven's enough responsibility awareness of DE yet. |
|---|----|---|---|
| | 7 | عبد القادربو مديونة Abdulkadir Bumaduna | Yes, I agree for DE and the certificate should be accepted or not based on the university issue the particular certificate. |
| { | 8 | رملي خيرة Ramla Khira | Yes, for DE and I got my DE B.Sc. certificate however, there is pract-ical UFC certificate in low field has no meaning and not recognized. |
| Ç | 9 | عبدالمالك المؤذن Abdulmaik Almuazn | Yes, for DE for post-graduate studies only. I got so many advantages from DE and I am looking for doctoral certificate in Islamic studies. |
| 1 | .0 | د. مثيم علي Dr. Mithm Ali | Yes, I agree with DE to be for social studies only especially for postgrad -uate studies. |
| 1 | .1 | غازية منصور Kaziah Mansour | DE it is not easy but it can be achieved! |
| 1 | .2 | سمر محمود حرب Samr Harb | Yes, for DE and I got my B.Sc. certificate in the field of Business Admin however, it is not easy and unfortunate it was not recognized. |

Conclusion

The selected four Arab countries are just to have some overview for the reader of the whole ALR countries. Despite the challenges of distance education at the presents comparing to the traditional method of education, trend of DLE is increasing at the Arab community. However, the success of the Arab's DLE is completely depends on the basic traditional education as a foundation for the degree and postgraduate levels. DLE dramatically increases the public awareness within the community. Is it clearly mentioned DLE may be useful for postgraduate studies and for the field of social and Islamic studies that might not need for particularly practical training and laboratory work. It can be concludes that parents at home, the respective government leaders and the public understanding of the importance of distance learning education would strongly support the new generation to take care of their future having the facilities provided by the new technology tools.







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Appendix A (General)



http://ejabat.google.com/ejabat/thread?tid=15d7a69eb5ed7bb4. Retrieved Aug 10, 2012. (15)



Appendix B (General)

ABJADE LEARNING

الأحد، 31 يناير، 2010

مشكلة التعلم عن بعد في العالم العربي

المشكلة في العالم العربي، هو عدم وجود استراكيجية واضحة لتعامل مع تقنيات التعليم وقلة الوعي بغوائد تقنيات التعليم. الفرق بين التعليم التقليدي والتعليم الاليكتروني هو فرق بسيط جدا. يتعلق الفرق باختلاف الادوات المستخدمة في التعليم فيدلا من الصبورة التي تعمل بطبشور! يكون هناك ساسة عرض وبدلا من البريد الاليكتروني وبدلا من الورق والقلم يكون هناك الحاسوب ...وهكذا... المهم وضع الضوابط والاساليب الادارية التي تضمن ضبط العملية التعليمية وتنظيمها ضمن هذه الوسائل. فلا يوجد مانع من أن يقوم الطالب متلا بحل فروضه المنزلية على جهازه الجوال أو عير الانترنت؟؟ فهو يقوم بحل فرائضه بجميع الحالات خارج المدرسة...المقصود أن هذه الأدوات التعليمية تدعم العملية التدريسية ولا تشكل شهادة بحد ذاتها!!! في الساذج التفكير بذلك!! فمت باستخدام القلم والورقة؟! هل وجود الاداة هو الاساس في الاعتماد لمصداقية الشهادة! من الساذج التفكير بذلك!! مرسلة بواسطة ammar في 11:36

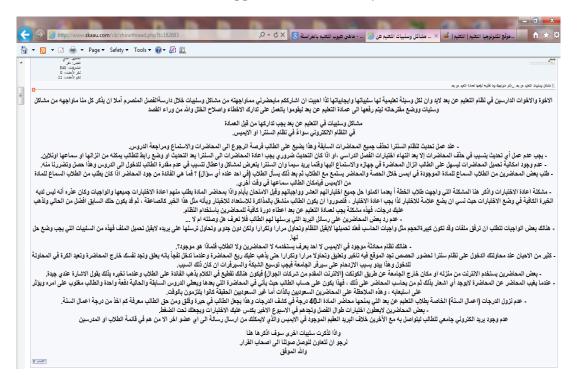
http://abjadelearning.blogspot.com/2010/01/blog-post_1356.html (16). Retrieved July 02, 2012.

Appendix C (School)

| التُصنيف بحسب التصويت | الإجابات |
|--|----------|
| mhelo6 (Mohammed Helow) 3 mhelo6 (Mohammed Helow) م الإبلاغ عن إساءة الاستخدام ينقصنا مرسل و مستقبل | 0 |
| يعني لا يوجد معلمين كفأ الا مارحم ربي بل يريدون المال باي وسيلة خلف شعار انا معلم السبب غياب دور الحكومة بتكريم المعلم وغياب مخافة الله ولا يوجد طلاب يريدون العلم بل يريدون اللعب والجوالات والسياراتالخ السبب غياب الرقابة الاهلية وعدم تذكير ابنائهم بان العلم عبادة | |
| mody-7 (Mody Hady) [| 0 |

http://ejabat.google.com/ejabat/thread?tid=44e9ae09e105d13a&clk=wttpcts (18a/b) (Retrieved July 02, 2012 02/07/2012)

Appendix D (University)



http://www.skaau.com/vb/showthread.php?t=162683. Retrieved Aug 22, 2012. (19)

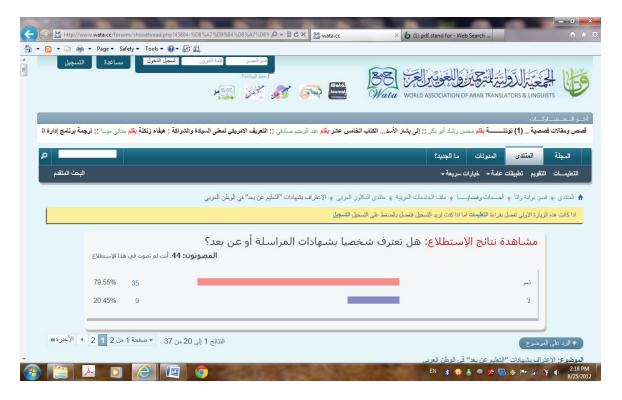
Appendix E (University)



http://ejabat.google.com/ejabat/thread?tid=4b992293d0617e11. Retrieved Aug 24, 2012.(20)



Appendix F (Postgraduate)



http://www.wata.cc/forums/showthread.php. (WATA forum) Retrieved Aug 12, 2012. (21)

