
E-Learning, A Ladder To Raise The National Literacy Rate In Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

To endeavor the status of e-learning in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the factors that are helpful for the development of quick rise of e-learning. According to an e-Learning survey in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (2007) revealed there were 70% people with internet connection, at the same time it naked that 96.5% of students have their own personal systems, where 10% students are without email IDs. Many students use the system mostly for entertainment like others use around the world. The country's IT sector is growing rapidly and it is emerging as biggest e-learning market by expanding its technological horizons. Per Distance and Blended Learning in Asia by Colin Latchem, Insung Jung (2009) King Abdullah has called for a national plan to adopt ICT across the country and recommended the implementation of e-learning. In 2007 the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education established a National Centre of E-learning and Distance Learning. According to ESCWA countries-2005 Report of Maturity levels of ICT applications in education Saudi Arabia stood at Level 2. So, it's an effort to give a perceptible picture of e-learning in Saudi Universities to develop the Higher education.

Key words: Conferences, e-Learning, LMS, education, Universities

Introduction

Ministry of education is responsible for the Education system in Saudi Arabia. According to a survey, it is trying its level maximum to build up the unsurpassed future generations. The Kingdom is encouraging the people to join the universities by furnishing several facilities and support like legitimate scholarships, provision of institutional buildings with labs and outstanding infrastructure, prepares the students for international standards by providing free education abroad, etc. The other way of imparting education into masses is through e-learning, where it shows the country is using all the ways to develop a literate country. King Abdullah

Project for General education is a proof of educational vision in preparing teachers for the better teaching and learning processes.

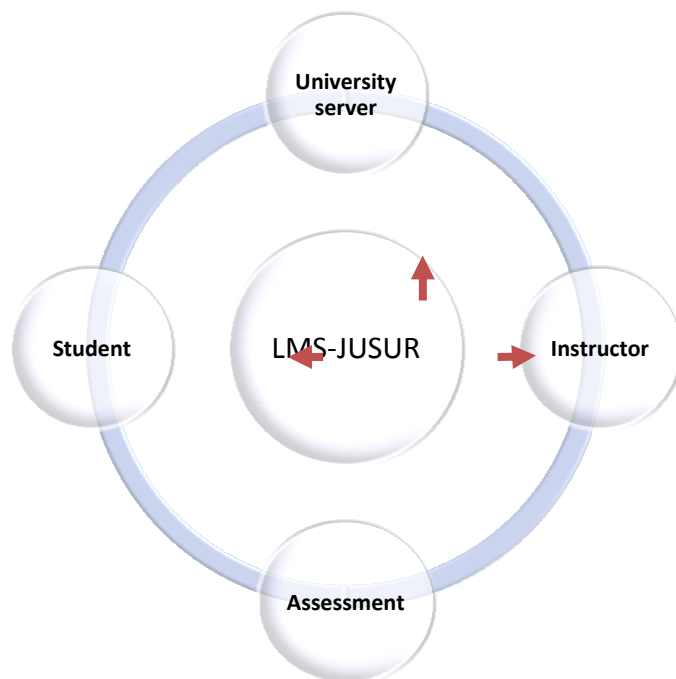
E-Learning in Various Universities

E-learning is a web based online learning by using visual platform via Jusur system in the country. The World Wide Web is an excellent resource for teachers for reference and teaching learning materials. This needs basic technical skills both for the teacher and the taught to operate. So it may not be suitable for Primary Education where as it matches with Higher Education. It can be used either in the Classroom or for Distance mode, where the students are away from traditional Classroom. In Saudi Arabia the universities are using Blended Method of using E-learning 2.0 and Classroom 2.0 modes of e-learning where the students got benefit at a time in multiple numbers. The reasons are many for the use of e-learning in universities; one of the important reasons is to develop the literacy in a way of technical attention. The possible ways to teach are by means of Internet based education are Asynchronous and Synchronous methods of e-learning.

In a survey conducted by King Abdul Aziz City of Science and Technology, “Implications of Internet Technology” is one of the sub-topics of the survey. Effective promising Technology paved the way for e-learning through universities. Though educational material is teacher-oriented, e-learning maintains quality and equity in organizing the courses. WATANI is a WAN (Wide Area Network) Network Project that connects all the schools and its educational directories, with a design of LAN (Local Area Network). It provided technological training to 3000.000 teachers. Distance courses by the use of E-learning are increasing past few years. Degrees can be earned from home without going to college by signing up into interested major, of course, the structure is constructed on firm rules and regulations. It’s a variety of experience with, fun to learn online with more interaction. The school dropout students, disabled persons, employed people, computer literate people, the people who are unable to attend the educational asylums because of personal circumstances can also continue their education, can learn online by choosing e-Learning.

Figure.1

Universities LMS Mode:



In 2006 King Khalid University of Abha started Deanship in e-learning. In 2007 the King Saud University instituted distance programs through collaborative e-learning process. In 2008 the Imam University launched E-learning programs. King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals is the first university to connect with internet. As per the recommendations of the National plan (2008) nearly more than 10 universities in Saudi Arabia connected with internet and offered e-books to the students in the majors of Computer science, Engineering and Medicine and Languages by encouraging teaching through e-Learning classes. In 2009, Umm Al-Qura University started the program of e-learning using JUSUR system. Arab Open University started an e-learning in blended mode through Arab Campus E-learning System (ACES). In 2010, King Saud University has launched several new projects as part of its e-Learning and distance learning programs like E-learning Private University and Smart city projects and the like. Al-Faisal University is ongoing with a private university with open course ware consortium. Al-Jazan University is continuing e-learning classes as part of the university agenda using Black board collaborative application. King Abdul Aziz University set up Distance learning of Deanship, which provides an asynchronous method of e-learning.

The catalyst factors of e-learning

- ***Goal of Educational Development***

Khalid Al-Angari, Minister of Higher education voiced in a conference, “ One of our goals is to open doors to Saudi Universities, even with all of its oil riches, Saudi Arabia is still trying to figure out how to build a national university system from scratch.” Under the UNDP (United Nations Development Program), the country has a mission to develop Millennium Development Goals (MDG) as per its Millennium Declaration. The ratio of girls to boys is raised to 99% as regardless of age many women joined the academies. Now the enrollment of girls is more in schools and universities than boys.

- ***Environment***

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a desert region with more humidity, especially in coastal regions. The atmospheric conditions do not allow the masses to move freely in the streets during the daytime. Hence, the people move only in cars and taxis to avoid themselves from the effect of solar heat. 8th National Development plan (2008-2009) emphasizes the protection of the environment against contamination and safeguard the wildlife and save the natural resources.

- ***In a developed country***

Oils, gas wells, transmission units, processing plants, Macca, the pilgrimage center and solar energy are the natural assets given by The Allah, to this country. In development tenure, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was a donor country to the developing countries in terms of ratio of aid to GDP. As part of the UND Program the country has to be benefiting from new technology, especially Information and Communication systems, Development of good Governance and Reduction of poverty. Electronic services have been provided, including Arabic language alongside the provision of Digital libraries. A few years ago the campuses are only 8 but now they are 24, still country is ready to send students to study abroad on jam-packed erudition along with dependent scholarships.

- ***Population growth***

High birth rate and 50% of the population are in 20s, there is a colossal demand of enrollment in institutions. Reduction of infant mortality rate from 34 to 16.9 per thousand, Reduction of Maternal Mortality rate of women from 48 to 14 per 100,000 live births developed population in numbers. In case of Malaria, there was a decreased sustainability from 125 to 0.20, nevertheless by the end of 2015 Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is going to be free from Malaria. The country is taking serious steps to stop and reverse the spread of HIV and AIDS. Per Phipps (1999) many higher educational institutions in Saudi Arabia is now considering distance education programs, especially E-learning, as one means of solving problems stemming from the increased student enrollment.

- ***Students opportunities***

Previously the government used to send students only to the U.S. and U.K., but the choice is everywhere to have different experiences with different societies and the Ministry is trying to concentrate on keeping the students in World class universities. Students who speak barely any English are now growing with fluency. Al-Augab (2007)'s quantitative study of attitudes of female faculty and students towards online learning provided they hold positive attitudes towards e-learning by applying technology in education.

- ***Gender***

The number of women in the country, graduating from university has been growing at an average rate of 2.5 times that of men graduates during the last couple of decades. (Johnson 2000). Promoting the Gender Equity and Empowering the women is one of the main targets of MDG (Millennium Development Goals) of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Apropos, there must not be any disparity in inequality in all the levels by the end of 2015. Girls from remote areas are encouraged to attend the far located colleges if not they can obtain the use of e-learning to continue their education through distance mode by using a net connection to the computer.

• ***Culture***

Saudi Arabia’s most powerful cultural symbols are related to Islam. The women always remain out of public sight. The education itself segregated since primary level. ‘Mehram’ is compulsory for women, where they are permitted to travel abroad with a male companion from a family like a father, husband or brother. The women are not allowed to drive, but they can own property and hold the money in business and investments. Use of veil (Abhaya&Yashmak) is a requisite while they are in public. In Osama Tayeb, President of King Abdul-Aziz University words “Exposure to other countries and cultures is something that is very beneficial to students.

• ***Intellectual Development***

In Saudi Arabia (Al-Dosary and Masiur Rahman 2005), talent development is desperately needed among Saudi nationals. The goal of Saudization is for combat Government that has been investing in infrastructure to create an advanced technology learning environment. (Investment & Business Guide-KSA: Pg 196). Learning in a modern way by using the e-learning system doesn’t make any difference from face-to-face (F2f) learning as it competes with traditional learning practices. It would be clear with the following Table of comparison.

<i>Sl.No.</i>	<i>Types of learning</i>	<i>F2f classrooms</i>	<i>Virtual Classrooms</i>
1	Self taught and continually learning	Text Books, Reference books, Notes taken.	Text Books, Reference books, Notes taken,
2	Instructive learning	Classroom conversations, Handouts, Homework.	Chats, Texts, Mails, HTML Documents etc....
3	Computer supported collaborative learning	Conferences, Team activities, Project work ethic...	Forums, Discussions, Blogs, etc....

The English Language Centers all over the country have committed to work across all universities and educational institutions, nationally and internationally to solve e-learning issues and to maintain strategic partnerships to develop complete e-learning solutions. This develops rules and e-Learning programs with SCORM.

E-Learning conferences

Digital learning tools such as e-textbooks and online learning systems are becoming more and more common in universities throughout the country and it led to organize the national and international conferences in the area with thousands of attendees. The international conference on e-learning and Distance learning was started in 2009 and been continuing for every alternate year. So there were conferences of the same in 2011 and 2013 also. A conference has been conducted, named 'e-Learning and Distance Learning conference' in 2011 Feb (21-23) in Riyadh. There will be an e-Learning MENA Summit. The National Center for e-Learning and Distance learning organized 24 workshops an exhibition alongside the conference with 70 papers including 33 universities displayed their latest products.

Conclusion

Online distance learning became possible in Saudi Arabia but only 25% are showing readiness towards e-learning. Emphatically to say, computer literates are interested towards e-learning. Computer lovers usually love to work with computers so they could attend classes as part of their everyday routine. Resulted demand for enrollment in colleges and overcrowded classrooms reduces the quality of instruction. Awareness of Technology, cultural barriers, remote areas, family situations, early marriages, Educational lovers, etc. might be some of the reasons to continue studying through e-Learning. Whatever the reason may be it can be extolled. The Ministry of Higher education works to implement a law regarding Higher education system in the nation.

John Chambers, Chairman and CEO, Cisco systems expressed that Saudi Arabia has the opportunity to move beyond the concept of a digital economy and instead place interactions and collaboration center stage. Hopefully the infrastructure and resources and the e-learning process helps to mainstream the education in the Kingdom by rising above the diverse challenges, where the formation of the National Center for e-Learning was the evidence of it, and provides the best e-learning practices and instruction to the learners. Curtis Bonk, a professor from Indiana University expressed that the efforts of Saudi Arabia are significant in implementing e-Learning applications because of its mature field and blended skills. A number of universities in Saudi Arabia already set off moving towards e-learning application by using LMS (Learning

Management Systems) and Virtual environment. If the online courses are accredited in Saudi Arabia, there would be a rapid rise in e-learning.

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