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# The Role of Foreign Languages in Online Education and the Problems of Online Education at the University

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**ANNOTATION:** This article provides an overview of the shortcomings in Online education in today's pandemic conditions and the possible solutions to them. Indeed today, the quality of online education is at a very above level and not everyone is aware of it. If this article is little, foreign experiments have come to eliminate these shortcomings.

**KEYWORDS:** innovation , ecology , pedtechnology, environmental education.

## I.INTRODUCTION

The British Council in the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) has begun to work more extensively with online systems of learning in the last few years. Examples of this include the 'Learn English Connect' programmer and the LASER programmer (Language and Academic Skills and E-Learning Resources) in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria which provide accredited and non-accredited online opportunities for Syrian refugees. While online learning holds increasing potential for high quality learning opportunities in a region that faces challenges in serving an increasingly large youth population, there are a number of limitations; most compellingly, legal frameworks which do not allow for the recognition of online degrees, even those offered by experienced and well-regarded overseas providers such as The Open University. Although this is beginning to change – for example in Jordan, where universities can offer a small percentage of course-learning time online – full-time online learning courses are not accepted and are often regarded as being of low quality and unable to develop either the 'hard' or subject-related knowledge required by students, or the 'soft skills' required by business and employers. While online, flexible and blended models of learning are increasingly shaping new and innovative approaches to education in the UK and internationally, they are far less well-regarded in the MENA region. Even with rapid increases in the use of technology and especially smartphones across the Middle East and North Africa, e-learning remains largely unrecognised and unaccredited by governments in particular. Ministries and quality agencies across the MENA region require students to learn face-to-face if their degrees are to be of value to students, their parents, employers and the government. The reasons given for this are many, though the most common concerns given are around quality and, to some extent, security. Furthermore, students who have not experienced online education and have no good examples to work from, may assume that online education is essentially traditional education that makes use of computers as a delivery mechanism. This is very important for advocacy work in this region, particularly because a variety of organisations are starting to promote online education in MENA and learners need to be better informed about their choices. Increasingly, institutions need to provide flexible access to tertiary education for people who may be working, have family commitments or be mobile such as refugees. Online learning is an obvious solution to some of the challenges of education and training, and as programmes and courses become more sophisticated and internet access improves, the need for flexibility and scalability may ultimately outweigh other concerns. There is also an opportunity for online education to draw on what young people enjoy most about media, social media and the internet, enabling them to use it to obtain a good education.

The above mentioned 'alternative models' of open courses are ones that promote learning through social interaction and collaboration. Students on these courses can work with other students, with alumni (past students) and with open participants (anyone who is invited to join in) to learn together and to produce collaborative content such as joint writing, presentations or productions. The course can also reach out to professionals who can engage the students

in authentic problem-solving and real-life interactions. Students may find it challenging to learn in this way, and their institution will have to ensure that they understand the benefits of these approaches and are supported to develop the technical and communication skills needed to get the most out of collaborative, social learning. The Higher Education Academy is another important reference point for HE-relevant research and practice, including ‘flexible’ teaching and learning in the UK. Keenan (2014) offers an overview of student-led peer learning, with some reference to online learning, and whilst there are various challenges for new adopters of peer learning, Keenan notes that “peer-learning schemes now exist on all continents and hold relevance for students of all cultures” (p.5). Bayne and Ross (2013) have investigated the pedagogy of UK MOOCs and one of their key conclusions is that “MOOC teaching is high visibility, high risk and dependent on significant intellectual, emotional and time commitment from academics and the professionals who work alongside them” (p.8). Researchers agree that online teaching and learning deliver many benefits but require addressing barriers to adoption, development of new skills and pedagogical approaches, and strong commitments from those involved.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Online and distance learning courses are usually presented via virtual learning environments (VLEs) that require the learner to be online to access the server-based learning resources and communication via a web browser. Similarly, MOOCs require access to an online learning platform. Generally, this access is via a desktop or laptop computer, although the use of browsers on mobile devices such as tablet computers and smartphones are increasing. To ensure equality of access, assistive technologies can enable learners with disabilities or special needs to access online learning. Note that technology alone is unlikely to resolve all of the relevant issues, so provision needs to be considered in the context of wider institutional processes and support services. A variety of innovations can be incorporated into browser-based systems, such as presentation and multimedia techniques, simulations, gaming, and social networking tools – although these may also be accessed via apps. Increasingly, learning analytics (collection, analysis and reporting of data about learners and their contexts) gathered from VLEs are used to inform institutional strategies, improve the learning experience and alert tutors to issues arising within their cohort (see also Ferrell, Smith and Knight, 2018a). Personalised learning environments use data to give feedback to individual learners and suggest next steps based upon their progress, strengths and weaknesses. Interactive textbooks use web-based interactivity to provide a richer experience, with audio, video, activities and quizzes. These tend to be offered on a subscription basis as a replacement for print textbooks and are created by publishing companies moving beyond their traditional print offer. Looking beyond browser-based technologies there is increasing use of mobile apps, virtual reality, sensors and ebooks, although these innovations tend to occur within specific subject areas, organisations or curriculum offers. The online learning ecosystem is diverse, complex and constantly evolving, although for many learners, browser-based systems will be their main experience. From a pedagogical perspective, innovation in online learning can be supported by an in-depth understanding of pedagogical practices, some of which may have been around a long time but require re-thinking for a digital learning environment. To assist with this process, the annual Innovating Pedagogy series offers explanations of new forms of teaching, learning and assessment for an interactive world (Open University, 2017), with each report covering a different set of pedagogies, e.g. learning from the crowd, open textbooks, intergroup empathy, student led-analytics, etc.

## III. CONCLUSION

The research suggests that across the MENA region online learning is steadily increasing. While the educational culture across MENA has been towards face-to-face learning, the rise in blended learning suggests that online learning is becoming more acceptable. This move, combined with the growth in technological availability, is likely to see a continued shift of balance towards online learning. Yet, despite very broad-based generalisations around cultural predispositions to teaching and learning the research reinforces the basic point that context matters. The three countries may share some characteristics around relatively centralised political systems and preferences for transmissive forms of education, but equally they are at very different places as regards adopting online learning across educational levels. Interventions designed to meet these needs must be attentive to the complexities of local circumstances and needs. The growing awareness and use of online learning is set alongside youthful populations who are increasingly tech-savvy and for whom digital interaction is commonplace. So, while demand from students, or potential students, for digitally-mediated learning may exist, it is teacher readiness that remains a major barrier to wider and further adoption. Models of pedagogy are often transmissive and organisational cultures do not encourage innovation, which militates against new forms of teaching and learning.



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