E-learning Saudi Arabia –
A brief outlook planning academic programs

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Abstract:
E-learning is increasingly being recognized as an important tool in the field of education in most of the academic universities of Saudi Arabia. The use of e-learning is now gaining common and popular approval as on-line learning besides reducing classroom time, also creates its own impact on the stakeholders. The present Paper attempts to discuss some of the methods and tools of e-learning with a focus on its benefits and drawbacks. The concept of e-learning supported by Information and Communication Technology is, of late, acquiring greater dimensions in the process of teaching and learning in the present educational scenario. This paper takes an overview of the developments and changes which are taking place in some of the Saudi Arabian universities and colleges as far as e-learning is concerned.

Keywords: E-learning, Information Technology.

Introduction:
E-learning is commonly referred to the specific use of networked Information1 and Communication Technology in teaching and learning. E-learning is becoming one of the most widely used concepts in the realm of education which is a paradigm shift from its traditional practice. It is a great technological development such as the Internet and camera enabled mobile telephones. E-learning is a revolutionary development that cannot be ignored or rejected.

Adoption of e-learning in many Saudi universities has reduced classroom time along with other expenses that are incurred by the students on account of their travels to university campuses spending for gasoline, food and beverages, and other things. E-learning is in a way the logical extension of distance education program. Though e-learning has its own advantages, it also has constraints2 and limitations. The main barrier to the development of e-learning is the lack of access to the necessary technology infrastructure, without which e-learning cannot be implemented. Poor or insufficient technology infrastructure can cause more harm than good to teachers, students
and the learning experience. While the costs of the hardware and software are falling, often there
are other costs that have not been factored into the deployment of e-learning ventures. The most
important of these include the costs of infrastructure support, its maintenance and the appropriate
training of staff to enable them to make the most of the technology. Education is indis-pensable
to all in the society. Moreover, those who seek Higher Education should not have to make great
sacrifices in their natural way of earning a living, and should not have to greatly disrupt their social
and family obligations. E-learning will be a great boon to the students and especially for those
living in remote places, it is greatly useful. Students living in a small town without universities
offering their choice of specialization may pursue their degree of interest through a far-away uni-
versity. Others who are interested in a degree from top universities but who do not live in the same
areas may still earn the degree of their choice and interest from one of those universities located
at long distance through e-learning.

**Benefits of e-learning**

The enlisted reasons and benefits are of utmost importance that prompts in considering the use
of e-learning in Higher Educatio-nal institutions.

Student-Centered Learning: In an online environment, self-learning by students is an
important factor and they can even teach one another.

Improved Writing Skills: On an average, online courses are far more writing-(more) more
intensive than tradi-tional classes have ever been, since in an online course, general discussions,
requests for elaboration or assis-tance, answers to direct questions, group projects, most assignments,
and many tests and quizzes are in written form. With all these types of exercises for prac-tice there
will be a marked improvement in writing skills of the students.

Highly Interactive Discussions: In the online environment, when an ins-tructor posts a
question on the discussion board, every student in the class is ex-pected to respond, as many times
as possible. Many on-line students have indicated that this is the first time they have ever “spoken
up” in class and that they enjoy the opportunity. Introverted staff benefits significantly from this.

Enriched Course Material: A high quality, well-cons-tructed, creative online course can
expose students to experiences that simulate real-life situations, thus preparing them better than
with only theory.

On-demand Interaction and Support Services: Instructors can offer many types of in-teractive
learning aids on their course sites, and interaction with instructors and classmates through e-mail
can take place any time.

Flexibility: Corporate students are generally unable to commit to a traditional course because
of family or work responsibilities. Online learning, however, includes ample opportunities for
students to pursue coursework at their own convenience.

The above merits advocate towards implementation of e-learning in Higher Education institutions for the benefit of the student community.

**Drawbacks of e-learning**

In e-learning the learner might suffer from introversion, isolation, and lack of social interaction, therefore the learner needs a strong motivation and skills with regard to time management to reduce this effect.

- **E-learning might have** (a) negative impact on the development of communication skills of learners. In other words, although a learner might have acquired an excellent academic knowledge, and he might not have the skills to deliver this knowledge to others.

- E-learning might be less effective than traditional learning in terms of clarification and explanation as the learning process becomes easier through face to face encounter.

- In e-learning cheating cannot be regulated as assessment tests could possibly be done by proxy. The negative aspects of e-learning could make it less appropriate initiating the need for alternative methods such as blended learning or hybrid courses.

**Different modes of e-learning**

There are different ways to present e-learning. The following are the different modes which can be adopted in e-learning for attaining the best result.

1. Traditional e-learning - highly produced web courses
2. Rapid e-learning - quickly produced web courses

**Traditional e-learning**

**Highly produced web courses:**

Traditional e-learning comes in different variations and often in a combination of the following:

- Purely online - no face-to-face meetings
- Blended Learning - combination of online and face-to-face
- Instructor-led group
- Self-study
- Self-study with subject matter expert
- Web-based
- Computer-based (CD-ROM)
- Video/audio tape
Delivery Methods

E-learning is done over the WORLD WIDE WEB or by CD-ROM. Here are some common delivery methods used in traditional e-learning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Print</th>
<th>Video</th>
<th>Audio</th>
<th>Review and Exams</th>
<th>Electronic</th>
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</table>

Rapid e-learning (quickly produced web courses)

There are two types of Rapid e-learning:

1. Asynchronous
2. Synchronous

Sometimes, there are two types of Rapid e-learning:

Asynchronous

Synchronous

Current e-learning developments in Saudi universities

Some of the Saudi universities in the Kingdom such as King Saud University has launched several new projects as part of its e-learning and distance learning program in the year 2010. Among these are the e-learn private university the fourth stage of the Smart City project, the university’s electronic learning homepage and virtual television studio of its production and documentation center.

ACES is not just a place where the student can find materials related to the courses, it’s an environment where the user can communicate with any part of the university through “My Communication Zone”, and he can share knowledge in Forums (collaborative learning) by sharing his portfolio with others and using the chat room for instant replies.

In the year 2009 Umm Al-Qura University, started using e-learning system called “Jusur”

Umm Al-Qura University co-operates with the National Center for E-Learning and Distance Learning in order to use “Jusur” system for managing e-learning at the new website of Umm Al-Qura University, which has been launched at the Hijri new year 1430 H.
Conclusion:

Though a large number of Saudi universities and colleges have already started moving towards the application of e-learning, most of them are mainly using learning management systems to support their students. The Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) works to create, regulate, and enforce law pertaining to the higher education system in KSA. Policies also need to be changed to allow students to take virtual online degrees, no matter where the university around the world may be. This paper has made a sincere effort to show the development of e-learning in the Saudi Arabian universitie-s and the different methods that could be followed in delivering Higher Education through e-learning and the different modes of e-learning that could be implemented at the institutions of Higher Learning.

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