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The Amalgamation of Conventional Universities and Open/ Distance Learning and their Effects on Students' Performances

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Abstract. Conventional and Open and Distance Learning (ODL) are areas that have had major contradictions in relation to addressing the major issues of ensuring that quality of higher education has been retained and at the same time guaranteeing the improvement of human capabilities aimed at achieving an economy that is knowledge-based. Various researches have shown that ODL programs success is due to coordinated efforts among skilled and knowledgeable practitioners, committed learners and organizational systems (Owen and Demb, 2004; Yooon, 2003). The heightened setting up of conventional institutions across the Arab World and in various demographic regions has not fulfilled nor served the main objective of high education of ensuring quality over youths in different economic and social backgrounds. In addition, the high cost of expanding works in conventional higher education has been a major constraint. In such circumstances, the task of expanding quality higher education opportunities becomes the responsibility of conventional universities that are in existence, as well as those offering ODL. The increased number of conventional learning institutions around the Arab world has meant that there is a need to deviate out attention and embrace Open Distance Learning.

Keywords: open learning, virtual knowledge, incubator, hub, conventional institutions

Introduction

In order to gain a proper comprehension of this new concept, this paper will lay emphasis on the identification of new strategies that will help in the strengthening and creation of space in higher education, which is in line with Arab World universities. The paper provides solutions and recommendations of the challenges present in this process. In a bid to ensure cost effectiveness in quality education,

documentation of collective interviews will be done. This will help in documenting unique lessons how ODL will look like in the future. This will be carried out in a bid to examine the attitude that executive students have towards new methods in ODL and establish the relationship between attitude (the dependent variable) and behavior intention (the outcome).

In today's workplace, the main pillar for learner advancement is the changing learning methods. A quality teaching-learning process begins with smooth governance. This process begins with friendly processes and structures from the students that result in improvement in participation, quality, retention, and accessibility. To link ODL's structural features, there is a need to examine the conventional high education institutions and incorporate new learning processes for individuals that are not in close proximity to cities. In addition, irrespective of the income of an individual, technology has become part of his/her life. It is both an important communication tool and survival instrument.

It is important to note that one of the major ways of implementing education and knowledge is through ODL. This is a viable method, which supports the attainment of economic, social and academic development across the globe. It can help to enhance access to education since it is inelastic and expandable (Siddiqui, 2007). This method represents an approach where access to education is improved by reducing place and time constraints on the students, it ensures, at the same time, that learning opportunities among individuals and group learners are flexible. With the advancement of Information Communications Technology (ICT), distant learning has been made possible and easy. This study bases its foundations on the developments that have taken place in conventional learning and Open and Distant Learning (ODL) in Saudi Arabia, as well as the effects and outcomes of the amalgamation of these institutions. The contribution of ICT is also among the key concepts that will be discussed.

Literature Review

Various factors have led to the development and growth of ODL. These include major economic changes across the globe, technological innovations as well as increase in pressure to get hold of education opportunities (Brindley, 1995). Ultimately, innovations in microprocessors and telecommunication technology have been credited for ODL growth. This has made it easy to achieve educational needs of people across the divide (Keagan, 1994). McLoyd (1998) reports that persistent poverty has more detrimental effects on IQ, school achievement, and socio-emotional functioning than transitory poverty, with children experiencing both types of poverty generally doing less well than never-poor children. A research conducted by Stecher, McCaffrey, Hamilton and Klein (2000) on the relationship between participation of students in reduced or free lunch programs and school test score showed that the number of students engaging in these school programs was a predictor of the mean school in the institution irrespective of the test type. Sirin (2005) made use of a three sections questionnaire survey to carry out a knowledge

audit. It had three sections. The first section focused on the examination of knowledge management as a strategy availability and identification of organization's knowledge management in a public institution in Libya. The second involved an identification knowledge gap, key experts and knowledge assets. The third involved an examination of information and communication technology (ICT) tools that were in use. The case study was a public construction company. The research ascertained that the organization lacked a knowledge management strategy and had a poor ICT strategy.

In the recent past, educational institutions have increased their interest in the development in their global space (Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley 2009). This has been accompanied by changes in the technological front as well as the demand of the students. In order to fulfill learning services and techniques as a business, it is important for institutions to understand the needs of the students as well as the quality that can help to achieve these needs (*Ibid.*) For this reason, in coming up with a framework proposal, the base for choosing method will be referred to as Choosing Technique (CT) design while implementation from universities administration and facilities will be referred to as Facility Team (FT) with proposals for multimedia for reasoning and data. This will help in identifying priorities and realize the demand for students in qualification levels.

The time individuals spend in academic activities has been noted as an important factor with a strong effect on face-to-face instruction (Rocha, 2007), online education (Cavanaugh, 2007) as well as blended programs (Cavanaugh, 2009). Newlin and Wang (2000) are of the opinion that activities engaged in by students in the process of online learning can have an effect on their final scores. Students participating in academic activities on high levels have better performance than those who do not. The frequency at which a student logs on into LMS is considered a major predictor of how the student will perform in online learning (Dietz, 2002; Dickson, 2005). In the current study, the frequency in which the students were logged into LMS as well as the period they spent was documented in the log file of the student in the entire semester as they took their course. To some extent, the above information could be taken as the period that a student spends in online academic front (Fry, H., Ketteridge, S., and Marshall, S., 2009). However, no data is present on the activities of the student while logged into LMS.

The failure to properly invest in ODL skilled practitioners is a major problem since it puts into jeopardy the ODL product quality in the Middle East. However, there are countries such as Egypt and Lebanon where skilled practitioners look for jobs outside their countries. In these countries, ODL system development can help in enhancing meta-economics and job placement. New institutions offering ODL can offer certificates, diplomas and degrees in fields that do not require laboratory activities.

Institutions that promote ODL take pride of reflecting the essence of quality in their normal practices and learning outcomes. Irrespective of the successful record of accomplishment of ODL, it is important for it to prove that the quality of education is similar to face-to-face teaching (Kirkpatrick, 2005). Walsh is of the opinion that established ODL institutions such as Penn State, Maryland University College, Phoenix and to some extent nimble publishers have a better chance of utilizing online provision, coming up with better business models, as well as structures and cultures. If the institutions examined in Walsh study could make online education more fundamental in their instructional models by expanding or better serving the existing students, the attitude towards distance and online education would change (rf. Ross, 2014). While it may not be in black and white the use and own provision of e-learning for these institutions, there have been significant changes in higher education front. With the increased favor by government agencies and private foundations for open education schemes due to their scalability and access, these providers will need to wake up and act.

Various studies have concluded that variables such as anxiety, beliefs and motivation have a major impact on foreign or second learning and performance (William and Burden, 1999; Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986; Ehrman, Leaver and Oxford, 2003; Dornyei, 2003). These interrelated variables have an effect on learning. For example, beliefs and motivation are two elements that are closely linked. Motivation is regarded as a fragment of self-system of a learner (Dornyei, 2009, p.29). Other researchers have established that the beliefs of a learner may influence his strategy use and motivational maintenance (Higgins, 1987; Graham, 2006; Bown, 2006). The beliefs of a learner are also said to have an effect on anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1987; Bandura, 1993). Anxiety, beliefs and motivation are clearly associated with the autonomy of the learner (Victori and Lockhart, 1995, Cotterall, 1995). Among these three variables, the element that has the greatest effect on learning is motivation (Rubin, 1975; Coterall, 1995; Ehrman et al., 2003, Doryei, 2003). In this case, motivation refers to the choice is taken for an action, its persistence, as well as the efforts, portrayed (Dornyei, 2005, p.8). Cheng and Dornyei (2007, p.153), hold that the lack of proper motivation even among the best learners may make them not to persist until the period they can achieve proper proficiency. Motivation is especially more important in distance learning. Here, more self-management is required for the learner to meet the demands present among conventional learners (Hurd, 2006; Andrade and Bunker, 2009). Curtis, Duchastel and Radic, (1999) and Bown, (2006) finally holds that drop in motivation in learning is one of the major challenges that distance learners have to face.

According to Cavanaugh (2007, p. 6) is a major concept in online learning. In the current study, the frequency of teachers' feedback and comment is a part indication of interaction between the student and the teacher. Teacher-student interaction in the form of open and frequent communication helps in establishing a virtual learning environment which is supportive (Murphy, Mahoney and Harvell, 2000; Lin, 2001). This, in turn assists student to improve their performance in virtual

learning environment (Ronsisvalle and Watkins, 2005; Wang and Newlin, 2000; Lin, 2001) through the provision of social support and at the same time promote their interest and involvement in academic activities on the online front (Wang and Newlin, 2000).

O'Dwyer, Carey, and Kleiman, (2007) are of the opinion that online students hold teacher-student interaction with great regard. Phillips and Merisotis (2000) holds that constructive and timely feedback and comments from the teachers are the pillars of quality online education. Lowes, Lin and Wang (2007) believe that quality and frequency of feedback and comments from the teachers have an effect on the satisfaction of the student. In the current study, the frequency of teachers' comments on the projects and assignments of teachers was ascertained by the virtual institution as well as the effect in had on the final score of the student in the online course was examined (rf. Orey, 2010).

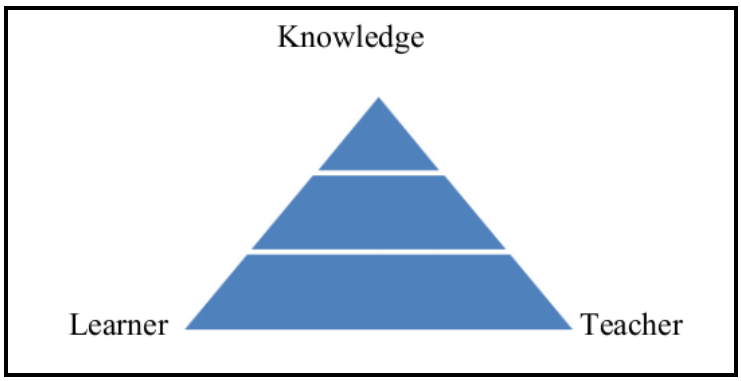
Methodology

One of the most important things to note is that the virtual body of university students comprises of individuals with different learning deformities (Ferdig, et al., 2005, Dickson, 2005). These institutions support or offer personal education plans for these individuals in the learning process. For this reason the learning abilities level can be determined by whether the student possesses an education plan. In this study, there was no student in the education plan would be referred as gifted (*Ibid*). However, they had the necessity and capacity to be promoted and excelled in the workplace. The virtual university learning environment can help to bridge the gaps in these factors in relation to online learning success opportunities. The use of technologies among individuals with different learning levels can be useful in reducing their disadvantage. This is as compared to those who are illiterate in the technology front in relation to access to course materials in the process of online learning. According to O'Conner (2000), online students with illiterate computer usage (ICU) can adopt technology-infused education, which can be essential in online learning. However, Kinash and Crichton (2007) believe that ICU online students have not been fully represented in online education.

It is, therefore, safe to say that ODL has helped in transforming learning and has enabled better interaction as well as effective learning results for the workplace.

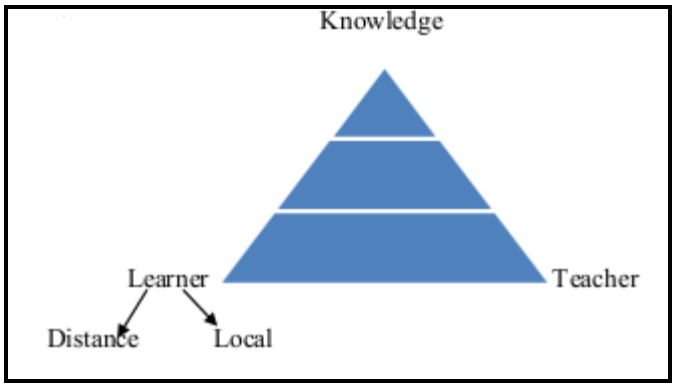
Method 1

The conventional method of delivery of tacit knowledge involves interaction between the teacher and local learner. This is due to limited and confined technology access.



The required correspondence between conventional learning and ODL has been achieved through internally prepared rules.

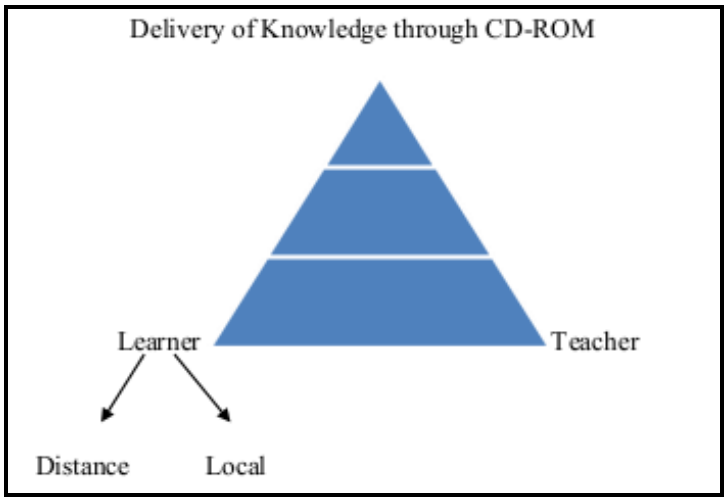
Method 2



Under this method, new concepts of learning and teaching tools through video and mail knowledge transfer are adopted to improve access to individuals in rural areas and outside the country.

This method shows innovativeness is capturing prospective candidates and being in line with the need of accessing higher education irrespective of their location

Method 3

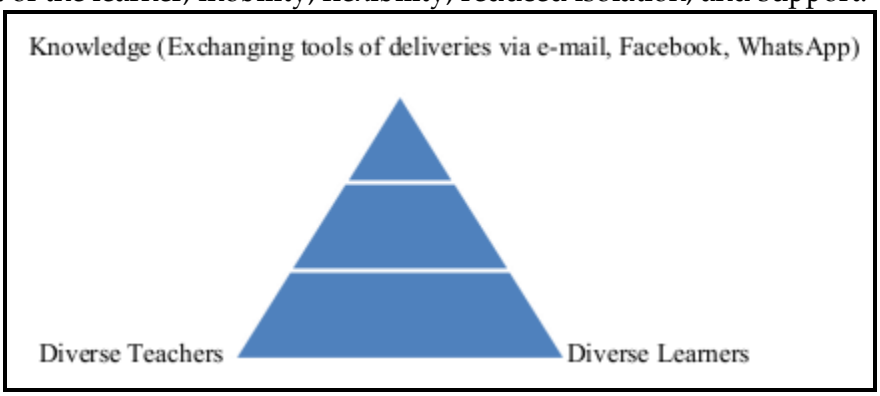


The introduction of CD Rom has been critical in the delivery of high education. However, it has not been very successful due to lack of interaction between the concerned parties.

The use of this ODL method provides a solution for education democratization in the end. Such a method provides the possible in developing countries that education systems can be improved and expanded.

Method 4

Under this method, new concepts are provided in learning technology innovation, which have a positive impact on delivery and design of programs of distance learning. This method measures costs are well as the impact in relation to enhancement of learner experience especially in terms of improvement of engagement of the learner, mobility, flexibility, reduced isolation, and support.



One of the main positives of this technology is that it leads to the creation of efficient social interactive. Under these initiatives, developmental possibilities are activated in open education resources. Under them, developing nations can improve and expand the systems of education and hence help in the creation of sociological concepts through a background that is both uncommon and diverse.

Under this experience, one gets to realize that automation does not only involve technology, but involves mindsets and attitudes of stakeholders, both primary and secondary, together with leadership that helps in the facilitation of this process. This approach can be referred to as 'e-educational governance'. However, its greatest weakness is its failure to make use of resources such as manpower that exists in conventional institutions. On many occasions, due to this failure, schools of open learning (SOL) students do not get to use infrastructure that has been funded by the state in conventional institutions. Due to this, fewer students participate in interactive learning. Individuals who have been registered with SOL are regarded as individuals collaborating with the government in its policy of inclusive growth. For this reason, these individual ought to be allowed a chance to make educational choices in the teaching-learning process, as well as activities that are creative and productive inside the conventional institutions. The lack of policy guidelines for

concerned parties in relation to convergence is also another reason why this may happen. Apex bodies that are in control of grants, as well as central ministries, issue these guidelines (Apex, 2006).

Another issue that is observed relates to cross subsidy. SOL students tend to provide a considerable portion of financial resources. Through them, institution requirements such as examination are fulfilled for students in both open and conventional learning systems. Moreover, agencies from the government provide conventional systems with funding for better resources, an activity that is not present in SOL. Therefore, electronic governance as well as better convergence in conventional and open systems is key quality indicators. These systems complement each other in the utilization of inherited potentialities. In ODL, students may make use of manpower, library, and infrastructure present in conventional system and hence take advantage of opportunities in the conventional system through engaging in problem-solving sitting. On the other hand, conventional students may make use of e-learning materials and resources that ODL students have prepared. Interactive sessions between students in both systems can also be planned. The desire to follow and design guidelines that central authorities have issued aimed at breaking the periphery-enclave relationship and convergence is self-evident. It is, therefore, important to increase face-to-face interaction between the two sets of students through the identification of learning resources, infrastructure and resource persons. There are also efforts to ensure that there is employment opportunities for students at SOL during admission, in an approach referred to as "earn while you learn.

Examining the Arab region exposes the mistrust that exists between competent teachers claiming to possess the skills and tools that are adaptable in ODL. To be in line with ODL, it is important to become aware of the new trends in the provision of minimum opportunities for those in rural areas and those who may not be able to travel long distances to acquire education. In addition, socio-economics have an important role to play while a person's venture is surprised by per capital income. To become accessible to everyone, higher learning institution, and the government need to become more involved in ODL. A good example is the Saudi Electronic University, which recognizes the importance of creation of new opportunities especially for the female gender irrespective of cultural constraints. The institution was open to the public on 20 June 2012 and became a major front for women to access education.

Arab News, a Saudi newspaper, states that the University provides rigorous programs aimed at preparing Saudi students to venture into business and industry, and research and development. Various courses are offered in electronics and non-electronic fields, and at the same time providing bachelors and masters degrees. According to King Abdallah (2011), the country depends on electronic systems largely. Saudi is considered one of the nations that is increasingly relying on electronic applications. He claimed that by 2015, the consumer electronic market in

the country, including audio and gaming, video and mobile handsets and computer devices would reach $5.5 billion.

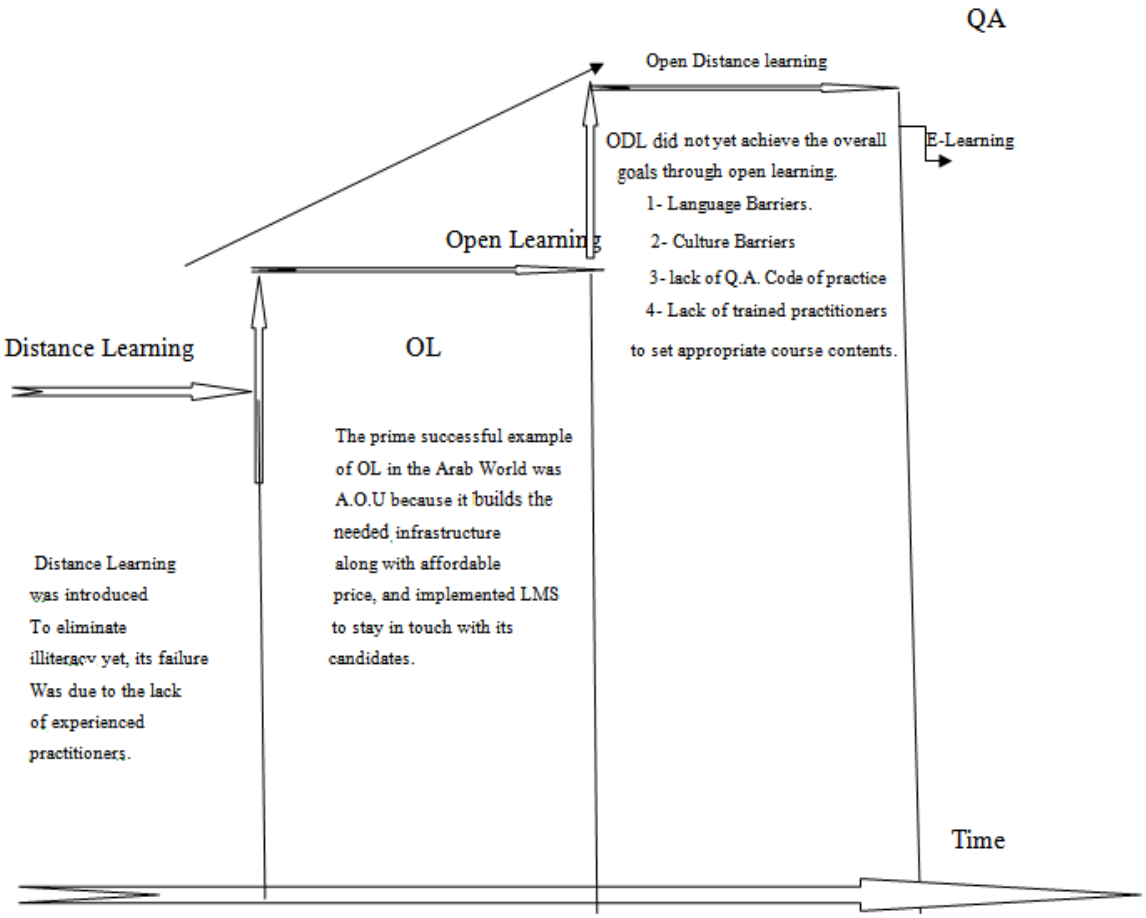
In addition, a new cohort of process-driven technology-enhanced education (TEE) is quietly surfacing with transformative education for junior level institutional empowerment and learning. Through ensuring learners are more involved in their learning process, ODL has become the vehicle of choice for social conception of learning. It answers the question of what we are becoming (mixing identity), where we belong (community), what our culture and experience is (meaning) and what we do (practice) It also raises questions of how educators and institutions in developing countries perceive the new education environment. Therefore, contextualization and proper use of ODL is dependent on social practices and educational practices that are in existence where a team ad share, collaborate and build a new process, which one cannot take for granted.

Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) are of the opinion that activities that encompass ongoing learning and common interest through shared knowledge and practice are the main elements that build trust. This is followed by a joint enterprise as renegotiated and understood my members as well as sustainability established through mutual engagement that binds members together into one group. Therefore, ODL tends to foster the appearance of knowledge-creating and innovative communities, putting into consideration innovation, learning and working as harmonizing forces that ensure sustainability of these efforts on a long term. In these communities, the systems are self-organizing since they structure learning through knowledge development and boundaries interaction. Expansion through learning, growth and development happens through understanding concepts together. This same thing happens in ODL.

However, extensive designing should be carried out to expand such initiatives. Integration of virtual environment through radio, video and ICT and at the same time providing students with a chance to interact with individuals in the resource front through coming up with counseling and problem solving sessions are important initiatives that can be incorporated into dual model system. Together with improving, quality, retention and accessibility of education, it is important to ensure the participation in the whole process of the student and community at large. It is important to convert open learning into a mission that empowers students using face-to-face and virtual counseling together with reorienting attitudes and mindsets at the top. Big pushes are required to change the imbalances present together with democratization of quality higher education through facilitation in order to achieve a vision of a society with knowledge that is equity-based.

In addition, the concept can no longer be regarded as a hypothesis or theory. It is, however, a pre-condition for economic development and society progression. Through ODL, students can reflect how diverse learning has become. Through it,

underrepresented groups can come up with higher education's social dimensions, and provide proper support services for students while reducing inequalities. In reflecting upon the history of ODL, the chart below can show our testimonial test on this concept.



DL: Distance Learning, OL: Open Leaning, DL: Open Distance Leaning QA: Quality Assurance, A.O.U. Arab Open University

Examining the diagram above, it is important to note that ODL should be in line with the UK Open University strategy alongside the A.O.U infrastructure adaptation. In addition, quality assurance should be a major priority in the creation of trusted, competent and valuable educational venture.

From ODL perspective, the use of technology in scaling up provision and ensuring more focus on learning and teaching is an old concept. However, according to Walsh reports, universities can benefit from it in the online platform. For example, capturing of repeated lectures can help individuals to allocate more time for tutorial activities. On important thing to note is that despite some institutions in the case study having been in the forefront in coming up with courseware for public, they have not been able to transform their pedagogical activities. However, one familiar concept is the resistance of staff to incorporate change in pedagogy. Redundancy,

loss of autonomy and cost cutting are some of the major resistances. Migrating to full online provision may prove to be a challenging concept especially on the high-touch model present in elite institutions that have enabled them to give high-quality services and maintain their top ranks. On the other hand, Walsh note major financial needs as well as an urge to provide services to in-state students had led to emerging undertones to develop an online course in University of California (rf. Ross, 2014). This leads to the question of whether these developments can put into jeopardy the appeal that this and other universities has on conventional students. Questions that have been asked are whether these individuals can favor online learning in place of conventional means, its cost, whether it would be more flexible, and how quality can be maintained.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Arab World governments have a mandate to reorganize their rules and regulations in their ministries of higher education to ensure investment in ODL as also ensure the degrees are recognized. ODL 2 (recognized graduate degrees) will not only provide motivation to graduates to continue learning, but will also improve the learning process, and enable them to acquire new knowledge through interconnectivity and reflection with tutors and other students. Lastly, in adopting this method, it will include entering into new technology and improving the quality of education. It will also encourage further research on this front.

Recommendations

Countries in Middle East and North Africa should consider the following.
An Accessible education:

A. Ensure proper access to university courses not matter an individual's location.
B. Eliminate official requirements of entry.

Flexibility:

A. It can be adjusted to fit into the schedule of an individual
B. One can balance personal commitments and university commitments

Innovativeness

A. Innovative technologies and learning designs such as multimedia and computer conferencing can be integrated
B. In adopting this method, one is incorporated into a 'learning community.' In line with one's needs

Irrespective of whether the course is for professional development of personal enrichment, the use of ODL should assist one come up with a program that is in line with his personal needs.

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