The Management of eLearning at University of KKU, Abha

Abstract—e-Learning, of late, has been witnessing an unprecedented expansion as an opportunity for higher education. This expanding alternative mode calls for ensuring and imparting a sound and qualitative education. So the present case study made an attempt to discuss key aspects of a quality management model for eLearning currently operating at the University of KKU and illustrates the issues related to the quality dimensions of e-learning. Some of these dimensions are: learning process, administrative processes, teaching materials, resources and SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats) analysis etc. This study reiterates the relevance of imparting qualitative education through e-learning for quality improvement in ways that facilitate how staff are empowered and supported to develop meaningful e-learning resources for students, how quality improvement is managed, and how organizational learning takes place. The findings of the study further demonstrate that if the concept of e-learning is imparted with a better approach and perspective, the reach will be phenomenal.

Index Terms—e-learning, e-knowledge, On-Line higher education, Quality improvement.

I. INTRODUCTION

Online learning model has emerged as a major higher education option before the global student community in general and Arab student population in particular. Higher education institutions operating in Middle East countries are making efforts to re-adjust in the light of the contemporary challenges. While advanced countries responded to these pressures of Globalization rather more successfully with their vast resources, the Arab nations are still in the process of designing strategies to re-adjust to the dynamic phase of global reforms in the higher education sector.

The last two decades have witnessed a revolution caused by rapid development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). ICT has changed the dynamics of various industries as well as influenced the way people interact and work in the society [21, 3, 6]. Quality of education includes infrastructure, teachers, students and the processes. Quality is the main challenge for education system in KKU.

II. THE CONCEPT OF QUALITY

The word quality itself stems from the Latin qua litas which means—of what kind. The concept of quality in education is multidimensional and embraces all functions and activities in the academic sphere. It involves quality of students, instructors/facilitators, instruction, facilities and equipment, academic programmes, curricula and assessment of students' performance. The concept of quality is relative, subjective and variable [2, 13, 18] defines quality as fitness of purpose, while [10] views quality as appropriateness of resources available to education. [1] maintain that the concept of quality varies from that of providing special services to conforming to standards or fitness for purpose. Quality is the baseline standard in education which can be measured on a scale of reference. It is an expression of standard or the means by which a certain set standard in education can be achieved [15].

The quality according to [5] may include quantitative elements such as completion rates, student performance, and student evaluations of the learning experience.

Viewed from this perspective, quality in learning involves quality of educational inputs, processes and outputs in its totality. Quality outputs could be viewed in terms of achievement i.e. what the students learn in terms of skills, knowledge, attitude and behaviour; standard i.e. the official learning and what the society expects; attainment i.e. number of students who have completed prescribed academic programmes and quality of degrees or certificates awarded.

III. THE CONCEPT OF E-LEARNING

E-learning is the process to learn anytime anywhere by using computer. E-learning is a general term for education, training and information delivered by computers. It puts the emphasis on the gathering of skills and knowledge. Taking e-learning as a tool to teach and learn [9] explains the concept of e-learning in the following words; “e-learning is using the Internet to teach and learn, it includes communication, student submission of work, teacher to student and student to student communication, content delivery and enrichment, using the Internet as a research tool, and using the Internet as a publishing tool. E-Learning is a tool, like writing and speaking, that is used to teach and learn. The Internet provides a huge array of evolving tools that can enhance the teaching process, selecting and using these tools is E-learning”.

Significance of E-Learning in Education

- Because of its wider accepted concept, e-learning has a positive and developmental role in education. E-learning can be used as informative, situating, constructive and communicative tool in the process of education [11]. E-learning also allows the creation of digital resources like digital libraries where the students, teachers and professionals can access research material and course material from any place at any time [3, 7, 14].

- E-learning in education develops higher order skills such as collaborating across time and space and solving complex real world problems [4, 3, 16, 12].

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Goals for eLearning

Goal #1: Establish “eLearning for everyone” at KKU.

Goal #2: Enable KKU faculty members to develop, share, reuse, and modify reusable learning resources and knowledge resources.

Goal #3: Leverage the tools of eLearning to “mitigate” institutional pain points.

Goal #4: Achieve sector-leading rates of improvement in KKU’s impact and capabilities in areas relating to eLearning. Example:

Build the organizational capacity that enables every authorized student, faculty, and staff to participate in and benefit from eLearning.

Goal #2: Enable KKU faculty members to develop, share, reuse, and modify reusable learning resources and knowledge resources.

Goal #3: Leverage the tools of eLearning to “mitigate” institutional pain points.

Goal #4: Achieve sector-leading rates of improvement in KKU’s impact and capabilities in areas relating to eLearning. Example:

Build the organizational capacity that enables every authorized student, faculty, and staff to participate in and benefit from eLearning.

Goal #2: Enable KKU faculty members to develop, share, reuse, and modify reusable learning resources and knowledge resources.
- Action 1.1: Develop and deploy an integrated environment to enable KKU faculty and students to integrate technology into their teaching and learning activities.

- Action 1.2: Furnish continuous support, training, incentives, rewards, and encouragement for faculty in the valuable integration of technology into the teaching and learning activities.

- Action 1.3: Engage KKU faculty and students in eLearning activities and develop their capacity to benefit from them. For students, enable them to develop more independence in learning and routinely create and share learning resources and knowledge resources.

These actions will require the synchronization of eLearning training and system introduction, to benefit everyone maximally. In terms of concurrent actions for particular groups:

- Provide Deans and Colleges with a range of ways to engage KKU faculty in eLearning activities and develop their capacity to benefit from them.

- Provide faculty with a range of ways to engage students in eLearning.

- Provide students with a range of ways to develop more independence in learning and routinely create and share learning resources and knowledge resources.

- Evaluate the engagement of KKU faculty and students in eLearning activities.

- Provide KKU management with per-course information on levels of eLearning usage by their faculty and students.

Goal #2: Enable KKU faculty members to develop, share, reuse, and modify reusable learning resources and knowledge resources (including resources from other institutions).

- Action 2.1: Develop a policy on the processes to be followed for all of these; align with legal requirements (copyright); train faculty in following the policy as part of training them to develop courseware and use the tools.

- Action 2.2: Obtain and validate (quality-assure) external resources that meet the needs of faculties, then document each step that faculty must take to adapt resources for KKU use.

- Action 2.3: Provide rewards (incentives, recognition), resources (tools, grants, release time, just-in-time support with graphics) for faculty to modify materials (localize into Arabic), to develop new materials, to work with others (collaboration, group work).

Goal #3: Leverage the tools of eLearning to “mitigate” institutional pain points.

- Action 3.1: (Faculty shortages) Create e-versions of face-to-face courses, also components of courses (learning objects), and train faculty and students to re-use them in other locations and to work through with local mentors/Teaching Assistants, partnerships and external materials.

- Action 3.2: (Girls’ Education) Create mechanism for sharing courses across KKU campuses.

- Action 3.3: (Student engagement and performance) Provide tools for peer-to-peer engagement (collaborate in creating joint work); to enable students to create their personal ePortfolio; to publish their best work; to benchmark their work against A/B/C students, so that they know where to put more effort in, what standard to aim for, and how to reach that standard.

- Action 3.4 (Evolving from a dispersed university to a distributed university). To a large extent, many of the problems addressed in Actions 3.1 and 3.2 result from KKU being a collection of dispersed campuses that have been merged together. Lacking seamless technologies and systems, students at the different campuses do not have the same experiences and level of service. The action here is to create lightweight (meaning easy to implement) interim solutions, as steps towards a fully distributed university. An example to be explored is to use the eLearning architecture to capture e-versions of the desired experiences, and to then deliver those e-versions remotely using that day’s best-available combination of KKU services at particular locations.

Goal #4: Achieve sector-leading rates of improvement in KKU’s impact and capabilities in areas relating to eLearning.

- Action 4.1. Extend ICT systems to measure KKU performance and benchmark against international standards for teaching and learning. Extend existing campus-wide information systems, to provide an easy way to track changes and rates of change in key performance data (accessibility of Internet services across campus).

- Action 4.2. Support pilot projects and codify best practice in teaching, scholarship, and community service. Use KKU eLearning systems to support pilot projects in faculties to codify and share external and internal “e-Knowledge” such as insights from communities of practice and from individual faculty about teaching, research/scholarship, community service.

- Action 4.3. Provide KKU with ways to raise the profile and effectiveness of faculty. For example, these include eLearning and e-Knowledge systems, e-Portfolios and Social Networking tools to develop the professional networks of KKU faculty, to increase faculty access to eLearning content, contacts and tools, and to raise their global visibility so that they can join high-quality international projects and networks of excellence, and be co-authors on prestigious publications.

- Action 4.4: Develop maximum possible operational compliance with national and international quality practices and recommendations. Set up a panel to review the quality of existing courses, and assess which ones are good enough to be made available immediately in e-versions.

- Action 4.5: Develop partnership relationships with international institutions. Explore and evaluate possible partnership relationships. Test them out through pilot projects bringing KKU together with internationally-recognized leaders in eLearning.

e. Deanship units

In order for the deanship to offer the right services with the desired quality, it was structured to have units and active teams each specializing in part of the service and all integrate to form the body of the deanship. Below is a summary of the deanship units and teams with their responsibilities:
TABLE I. DEANSHIP UNITS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Team</th>
<th>Description / Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Management</td>
<td>Responsible for: • Supervising the eLearning systems projects and setting plans for systems operations. • Setting technical and administrative standards • Coordinating between the different university departments in relation to eLearning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>• Planning for faculty members training on eLearning systems and skills. • Conducting training, Preparing training materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The eLearning Team</td>
<td>• Setting and executing plans for eLearning deployment. • Providing support and consultation for faculty members. • Maintaining and administering the deanships website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Web Team</td>
<td>• Design work for the deanship; printed materials and web based. Design work in support for faculty members for educational content and Audio-visual services including recording and video montage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems and support</td>
<td>• Supervising all IT related work to ensure a stable working infrastructure. • Providing support for students and faculty members on systems usage and technical issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studio Team</td>
<td>• Task of this group to photograph and document the lectures, seminars, internal and external and the work of editing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and Innovation Team</td>
<td>• Supervise development projects of learning and teaching through innovation and innovative practices using modern technology. • Supervise programs of innovation and researches for faculty members and students. • Study and search for new international initiatives and best practices in e-learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE II. AVAILABLE ELECTRONIC SYSTEM & TOOLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Management System (Blackboard) <a href="http://lms.kku.edu.sa">http://lms.kku.edu.sa</a></td>
<td>The central component in the eLearning platform of KKU. Used to offer courses, and manage content and users.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Testing (Question mark) <a href="http://qm.kku.edu.sa">http://qm.kku.edu.sa</a></td>
<td>Question mark is an electronic testing application with great features.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Tegrity) <a href="http://tegrity.kku.edu.sa">http://tegrity.kku.edu.sa</a></td>
<td>This application enables faculty members to record their classes in video and offer them on the course site. Tegrity is integrated with Bb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual Classroom (Elluminate) <a href="http://vc.kku.edu.sa">http://vc.kku.edu.sa</a></td>
<td>Enables video communication between participants in real time. Sessions can be recorded for future review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Mail <a href="http://mail.eKKU.edu.sa">http://mail.eKKU.edu.sa</a></td>
<td>Mail and collaboration tools for all KKU students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ePortfolios (Bb ePortfolio) <a href="http://lms.kku.edu.sa">http://lms.kku.edu.sa</a></td>
<td>An ePortfolio for all faculty members and students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning objects Repository (Hive) <a href="http://lor.kku.edu.sa">http://lor.kku.edu.sa</a></td>
<td>Offers a modern mechanism for storing and sharing digital content. The system is connected to the national and LOR international repositories.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

V. E-LEARNING AND E-KNOWLEDGE PLATFORM

The eLearning Center has designed and deployed a world-class technology platform to support eLearning and e-Knowledge processes at KKU. Figure 1 depicts this platform.

This platform combines best-of-breed applications. It also features seamless integration between Blackboard and all the other applications such as Tegrity, Elluminate, and so forth. Students, faculty, and administrators achieve authorized/authenticated access through the Blackboard portal to a robust, fully integrated learning management system (LMS) and supporting applications and knowledge resources. This LMS extracts data from the student information systems (SIS), and in the future the KKU library, and Blackboard’s e-Portfolio. It also is supported by the Classroom Capture Application, Authoring Tools, e-Assessments, and Virtual Classroom Tools. A learning object repository (LOR) can share learning objects drawn from a variety of international open learning resources and content providers.

ICT tools Adopted At KKU For E-Learning is given in Table II.

VI. STATISTICS OF E-LEARNING AT KKU

Presented by the e-test management department, the E-learning deanship is proud of the leap of success taken by the e-testing process which is considered a first time ever
accomplishment in the history of e-learning in King Khalid university, where only in the year 2010/2011 the university has had 288 e-tests including 11170 students. The statistics for the usage of e-learning for the year 2011-2012 as follows:

When comparing the numbers to previous years the development and success is outstanding, while the statistics are the clear evidence to this success.

VII. CONCLUSION

This case study addressed the need to bring together principles of quality management, at KKU.

To ensure quality in E-learning in KKU, it is recommended that

- Teachers in e-learning programmes should given mandatory training and retraining of ICT programmes to provide them with practical and functional knowledge of the computer, internet and associated areas of ICT.

- Internet Connectivity: Connectivity refers to the quality and extent of the internet infrastructure. KKU needs to lead in broadband connectivity, as effective online learning cannot take place if the internet disconnection exists.

- Providers of e-learning should strive to use quality and reliable ICT hardware and software supported by highly skilled personnel armed with knowledge and skills needed to ensure that the system runs smoothly.

- If Face book or Twitter for example tools are to be used in e-learning, so each student is better to have a separate page to discuss his/her own ideas and problems generally.

- The quality circle approach should be adopted in the designing of course contents and learning materials to ensure quality in course content delivery.

- On-line assessment of students work and end of course examination should be encouraged in e-learning programmes. This will check examination malpractices and hence, enhance quality of assessment of student’s performance.

This study also provides evidence that these domains can be successfully integrated in near future to support an e-learning unit at KKU for great success.

REFERENCES


[5] Cavanaugh C., Distance Education Quality; University of North Florida, USA, 2010.
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