

Pioneering innovative approaches to language teaching at tertiary level in Australia

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This poster presentation outlines an innovative approach to the teaching of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) online using a range of sophisticated interactive media assisted delivery strategies. The course uses an outcomes-based approach to course design. This course takes the view that technology can be both tool and tutor in language education. The role of technology in language education is examined as an aspect of curriculum design, that is, the starting point is needs analysis and the resulting curriculum, rather than technology.

It deals with the exploration of the problem of taking the teaching of Arabic outside the classroom to make it more readily available to learners at more times and places than the traditional regular timetabled classroom lessons. It explores the research into suitable delivery strategies and the normal problems associated with online delivery strategies for language teaching.

The presentation shows the innovated and sophisticated methods developed to provide interactivity by linking audio to the written Arabic text and by introducing a series of matching exercises to allow practice to aid the assimilation of the language. Finally, the program has proven success as a way of enhancing intellectual educational and administrative partnerships with other universities that teach Arabic (i.e UniSA)

The Arabic Online Study Program has been an amazing success in its ability to extend the study of Arabic language beyond the classroom. Traditionally, a foreign language must be learnt in the confines of a classroom or language laboratory. The important aspect of this project has been in finding a tool that extends the opportunity to master a complex language away from the classroom.

While there have been numerous audio language programs consisting of sets of cassettes or more recently, DVDs, the added difficulty with languages like MSA, is that the written word is not the familiar Roman letter set that contemporary European and English languages are based on. With Arabic the new learner is not able to simply read the letters forming the words and determine an appropriate sound represented through knowledge of phonetics.

Being able to listen to a dialogue in Arabic, watch Arabic letters being written on the screen, access the interactive lectures and complete homework and practice questions all through the Deakin Studies Online (DSO) has made it an important asset for the study of this rapidly emerging language that is seen of great importance in the new world order.

The most impressive feature of this approach is the inbuilt capacity for students to self assess and test ones progress. This is supported by the use of ready made Self Tests and Flash Cards which allow students to associate sounds with pictures online. This is further supported by weekly online assignments to allow students to develop a much firmer grasp of the language.

The Learning Objectives Modules provide the primary method of learning the course material, the practice and assessment modules are also very important for students to practice and test their own knowledge and it indicates to them just which material they must practice and study, in an accessible and efficient manner.

Students report that they thoroughly enjoy studying Arabic in this online format at Deakin and find the online teaching and learning environment a welcome and integral part of their study regime that supports the development of independent learners who can manage their own learning experience at a time and a place of their choice. Most students report that they find the Learning Objectives Modules on the online learning platform an essential and powerful resource that allows them to prepare for lectures and provides an important vehicle for revision.

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