

Ed-tech Start-ups Lead The Way

From music and Arabic to lessons in PR and comms, young students and corporate learners can now expand their abilities with a click of the keyboard.

By Hina Navin



Digital technology is changing the way we learn. With the ever-rising penetration of tablets, computers and mobile phones in our daily lives, the industry is investing increasing amounts in ed-tech products to evolve lesson plans.

According to a report by Research and Markets titled the “Middle East Online Education & E-Learning Market Size, Demand, Opportunity & Growth Outlook 2023,” the regional online education and e-learning market is expected to see a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.8% over the next five years. Saudi Arabia holds the most significant share in the regional market and is expected to earn \$237.1 million from e-learning by 2023. The U.A.E. market is expected to follow closely with a CAGR of 10.3%.

Ed-tech companies are now popping up across the globe, with the Middle East contributing to e-learning through various initiatives, for K-12 students through to corporate learners. Thanks to this, online education in the Middle East is expected to witness continued growth in the coming years.

Here is a quick snapshot of what some Middle Eastern Ed-tech start-ups are offering.

Orient Planet consultancy has partnered with the Irish Academy of Public Relations—an Ireland-based international online education provider—to offer internationally recognized certificate courses in PR, Online Marketing & PR, Journalism, English Grammar and Event Management. Nidal Abou Zaki, Managing Director of Orient Planet Academy, says “Despite major developments in PR and communications throughout the Arab region, various communication platforms are also rapidly growing, particularly digital technologies. We saw the need for the sector to step up its efforts to fill this gap and make professional learning for Arab professionals more accessible. There is no better way to do it than e-learning.”

Bon Education creates and delivers learning programs and experiences that reflect how people want to learn and work in both the physical and digital world. Anna Batchelder, CEO & Co-Founder, says “Our latest program—Bon for Work—is a fully virtual solution. We work with leaders and teams to identify the areas they need to develop and deliver custom sequences of learning content, tools and activities to their inbox. This is supported by an online portal of resources and monthly virtual mentor and coaching sessions.”

izif is the region’s first online education platform for music,

which enables users to learn through video tutorials by some of the best musicians in the Arab world. Bisher Abu Taleb, Founder of izif.com, says “Our users log-in and watch a few free video tutorials, then subscribe to access full courses and a library of sheet music titles. We have a blended model. They get an experience that brings the best of online (convenience, ability to repeat lessons and learn from the best) and the best of offline (interacting with the musician, playing music with fellow students, performing in front of others). The program is currently being applied in Jordan in selected community centres and public schools, and has been recently approved by the ministry of education.”

ArabiaTube is a YouTube Channel and website that offers educational topics in short and easy-to-understand animation videos. Yousef Odeh, Founder, says “We cover subjects like Philosophy, Math, Literature, History, Science and other topics that are attractive to young adults. Professional Arabic content on these topics is not widely available, so I decided to create some and post it online. The main aim is to create a fun and exciting portal where people can learn about educational topics and not feel bored while doing it. I hope people enjoy the time they spend watching those videos.”

TeachMeNow allows teachers to sign up, set their own prices and teach students through an online platform. Thea Myhrvold, Founder and CEO, explains “Anyone can teach, and everyone can learn. We have built a powerful marketplace for schools, institutes and entrepreneurs who want scale their online training and sell their time online. We simply plug-in our collaboration tools to their website, so it looks and feels like theirs. This allows people to charge for their time and deliver live virtual training.”

Little Thinking Minds advances Arabic language learning among school-aged children, to improve skills and increase cultural connectedness. Lamia-Tabbaa Co-founder and GCC partner, says “We felt a dire need to create relevant content for children in Arabic. We started with pre-school content and schools and nurseries globally.” Rama Kayyali, Co-Founder and Managing Partner adds that Ireadarabic.com was their first product sold directly to schools. “In just under 18 months, 100,000 students are using it. We have also created a product for expatriates in the GCC wishing to learn Arabic as well as a nursery product.” 