Developing online English language courses in Jordanian Higher Education: prospects and challenges of the first pilot experience

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Online education is at its early stages in the Jordanian higher education system despite previous attempts to build trust around online offering by Queen Rania Foundation’s MOOC initiative Edraak, one of the few MOOC platforms in the Arabic-speaking world, and by the Arab Open University’s Jordanian branch. The present paper details the experience of building the first English language online course at Yarmouk University within the framework of the EQTEL project aimed at developing and implementing accreditation standards, guidelines and procedures for quality assurance of online courses in Jordanian higher education institutions.

The English course was designed mirroring its face-to-face counterpart, a mandatory English course for Freshman-year students. The course, aimed at developing the essential English language skills to be able pursue a university education, focuses on the development of receptive skills (reading, grammar and vocabulary) to be able to read and understand material in English in their area of specialization. Additionally, the course was expected to have a positive impact on the attitudes of the students towards learning English, an aspect which was measured with pre- and post-evaluation questionnaires and focus groups.

During the first iteration in its online form, the course attracted 180 students, half of students registered for the mandatory course. The online course was run in 3 sections with 3 different instructors who were also each teaching one of the face-2-face sections. Before the beginning of the course, the students had to attend two mandatory orientation sessions to inform them about the content, technical procedures and to assess their readiness to take the course fully online. After setting up the different components of the course in the VLE, several teacher training sessions with the instructors were conducted to make them acquainted with online teaching pedagogies and to make them comfortable using with the course’s VLE.

Keywords: Online Courses, English Language Teaching, Students Attitudes.