

Dear distinguished and honorable Ministers of Education: His Highness *Sheik Nahayan Mabarak Al Nahayan*, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research in the United Arab Emirates, His Highness Dr. Atta-ur-Rahman, Federal Minister of Education in Pakistan, His Highness Dr. Adnan Badran ex-prime Minister of the Kingdom of Jordan, Professor Richard Larson, Keynote speakers, distinguished University Presidents, Vice Presidents, Rectors, professors, scholars, and conference organizers. Good morning... everybody.

It is my honor to be present among you today and share with you the prospects of positive change in our educational institutions and societies, and I feel very privileged to be invited as guest speaker in this symposium, *Technology-Enabled Education: A Catalyst for Positive Change* which is held under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Maktoum bin Mohammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum whose sponsorship of this leading symposium in Dubai embodies a leadership vision for positive change in a rapidly transforming world driven by the impetus of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

The Learning International Network Consortium (LINC) is a momentous joining of hands initiative incepted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and supported by visionaries and renowned scholars. We are indebted to MIT and those who sponsored this visionary initiative and translated it into action. I thank all of you for making this vision a challenging reality and a platform for engaging us in the process

of assuring quality education and cross-cultural building bridges that would narrow the digital divides between the affluent and the underprivileged. Overall, isn't it a basic human right to provide a good *education to all*? Isn't it also an opportunity to provide access to education to what Malcom Knowles (1991) described in his portrayal of the adult learner as "A Neglected Species"?

If I may "linc" visionaries' forethoughts in this symposium to my experience as President of Notre Dame University in Lebanon, I would agree with them that change in our educational contexts is inevitable; such a change, however, should be facilitated by the fulcrum of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). And I use the term *fulcrum* to connote regulatory change without disruption, and accommodation of original and innovative thinking without obliterating the vibrant cultural and educational heritage of our region.

My hypothesis is that technology should revive our longstanding heritage of innovation and transformation in education and renovate it to become a benchmark for positive change. At this historic juncture of time, it is imperative to make use of ICT in our endeavor to guide our students into becoming competent and original contributors to knowledge rather than being consumers of knowledge in this ever changing and challenging global information and technology era. It is time to empty education from its traditional lethargic styles of pedagogy and to make it a vibrant and useful experience to learners; ICT is such a

tool for creating lively learning environments that presuppose a paradigm shift.

There is compelling reason for engaging ourselves in what Thomas Kuhn's (1962) coined as "*paradigm shift*" in his popular book titled "*The Structure of the Scientific Revolution*", where one can deduce reference to sharing of common core values, beliefs and above all commitment as essential requisites for success. What are our core values, beliefs and commitments in the context of positive change and innovation in our educational institutions and broadly in our societies? What do we really want to achieve? These two questions reverberate everyday as we are interested in achieving by doing, not through edification and theorizing.

To answer the first question, I believe that we are agile to make use of the most up-to-date technology and sophisticated tools in the teaching and learning processes. The goal is not to hastily jump on the bandwagon of technology for the sake of using it aimlessly, but rather we need to consider innovative styles of pedagogy-technology blending that would help identify learners' learning needs and thereby set strategies and plans to meet these needs.

The prime purpose underpinning the use of technology in education at NDU has been to achieve desirable pedagogical outcomes such as learning by doing, mastery learning and fulfilling performance objectives of subject matter at play in a due and discernible process of assessment and evaluation. Herein, I subscribe to a few examples

gleaned from NDU's early experience in adopting technology in teaching and learning. But before that, it would be helpful to briefly introduce you to Notre Dame University.

Founded in 1987, Notre Dame University is a Lebanese non-profit institution of higher education which adopts the American system of higher education and is dedicated to academic excellence. It seeks to provide quality education to men and women by focusing on student, faculty and staff learning. Although it was officially established in 1987, the University's heritage and identity are traceable to roots in the Lebanese Synod held in the Monastery of Our Lady of Louaize in 1739, more than two centuries ago. Our longstanding heritage in culture and education guided us into serving the educational and developmental needs of our society and the region over the years.

At present, NDU has seven faculties and a number of research centers. Additionally, it houses 5000 undergraduate and graduate students who are enrolled in three campuses: the North Lebanon Campus, the Shouf Campus and the Louazie Campus which is the main campus situated to the north east of Beirut. With the tremendous expansion of the student body at the University and the need to take advantage of the recent technological advances in education, the University has considered to enhance its learning and teaching processes through integrating technology into teaching, learning and research.

Many faculty members and students have been attracted to the learning opportunities facilitated through technology. One of the opportunities provided was to offer extensive training workshops to students and faculty members in areas of instructional design and broadly on the use of technology for the purpose of learning, teaching and research.

As follow up of the outcomes of the use of the *Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)* Blackboard at NDU since 2001, we conducted a series of surveys that sought to examine faculty and student e-readiness and desire to adopt Blackboard in teaching and learning. Favourable attitudes and enthusiasm gave us confidence that the purposive use of technology that would assist and facilitate teaching and learning, encouraged us to establish the University e-Learning Centre. This centre aimed at:

1. Spreading the e-culture and the latest technologies and methodologies among faculty and students, to enhance teaching and learning;
2. Providing students and faculty with collaboration tools that will enhance group work and collaborative technology-based learning;
3. Widening the outreach of the University to the community and region it serves;
4. Expanding on the University's collaboration with institutions of higher education in the USA and Europe through appropriate technological tools.

In line with this, and to answer the first question, the core values of NDU rest with achieving excellence in higher education not as oasis or isolated educational entity from the region and the world, but in close collaboration and partnering with those interested in undertaking the challenge of positive change. Hence, our mission, vision and core values chime with the very nature, vision and spirit of this leading visionary conference, i.e., positive change or what I coin here as *positive and pragmatic paradigm shift*. This shift is really needed in our region today.

I have been saddened by recent studies and reports which allude to the little use of, and experimentation with technology in education in a number of Arab higher educational institutions. Some Arab education systems have been charged with stagnant curricula, lingering teaching techniques and obsolete educational policies that rendered the process of learning and teaching nearly inefficient (Rugh, 2002)¹. One of the most noticeable criticism has been leveled against the remarkable failure of many educational institutions to contribute to the process of social and economic change by remaining mostly traditional in teaching and research despite the readily accessible opportunities provided by the recent impressive breakthroughs of ICT. There is a growing need to focus on our students' education more than ever and provide them with the best available tools that would facilitate good learning and original research.

¹ William Rugh (2002 Arab education: tradition, growth, and reform.

It is in this context that NDU is working hard to assure quality education, and for this reason we started in 2006 a rigorous process of accreditation with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). Assuring quality education at NDU is not enough. We would like to see ourselves more and more involved in regional and international initiatives that seek to do and implement change through making use of innovative technology in education, training and research.

Regarding my second question, “what do we really want to achieve?” from this symposium, I believe that it is time to join our efforts within the boundaries of innovation transformation, and positive change.

I have in mind hosting parts of the MIT initiative or partnering with institutions of higher education on potential areas of cooperation in e-learning and collaborative joint research. Moreover, technology-pedagogy initiatives can be jointly hosted by our newly established Center for Applied Research in Education (CARE) alongside with the University e-Learning Center and our Faculties.

In connection with the Center for Applied Research in Education (CARE), I cherish the founding of this Center in consultation with colleagues at NDU. To mention but a few of CARE’s objectives, it seeks to utilize our established contacts with local, regional and international academic communities to conduct joint cross-cultural research in a bid to establish a common modicum of educational research networks that

would disseminate empirical data needed to support educational innovation.

We open our ranks for collaboration, scholarly exchange and mutual learning which are much needed in this globalized world, yet splintered by digital divides and cross-cultural misunderstanding.

Let us create valuable learning experiences; together we can 'Linc' and 'click' on the fulcrum of positive change.

Thank you.

References

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