



D2L

DESIRE2LEARN

Developing a hyper-connected ecosystem

How Ankabut linked up multiple campuses to international learning resources

Ankabut – Connecting students to learning

Ankabut is the UAE's National Research and Education Network (NREN) – it connects academic institutions within the UAE to each other, and further connects these institutions to other research and education networks from around the world. Currently, Ankabut provides connectivity to 33 academic institutions within the UAE, spanning K-20, higher education, vocational training centres and research institutes.

On a national level, Ankabut provides high-capacity, high-speed broadband connectivity between educational, research and eligible non-profit organisations within the UAE. On an international level, Ankabut is liaising with government-approved parties in neighbouring countries to determine the possibility of collaboration through international interconnect services. Ankabut also represents the UAE at educational conferences, exhibitions and forums around the world.

In order to facilitate this bevy of connections, Ankabut was recently looking to implement a single, uniform learning management system across its member institutes, which would not only benefit students and faculty members, but also facilitate ease when architecting bridges between the institutions and learning resources around the world.

AT A GLANCE

Client Ankabut, UAE

Students 100,000

Level Undergraduate and post-graduate

Solutions Brightspace Learning Management System

CHALLENGE:

- unify disparate legacy learning systems across nation
- reduce carbon footprint of country's education sector
- reduce costs of ownership of systems and infrastructure
- allow students to remain in touch with learning experience from anywhere
- enhance parent involvement through monitoring tools

SOLUTION:

- implement single-point cloud-hosted platform
- provide device-neutral communications platform
- provide easy-to-use dashboard for parents to monitor performance
- provide tools for teachers to add multimedia and other engaging visual aids in lessons

RESULT :

- 78 campuses connected
- positive feedback from institutions
- 60% reduction in total cost of operation
- reduced carbon emissions from reduction in power consumption
- improved performance from students

Overview

Scaling up its quality of education ranks pretty high on the UAE's national agenda – the country's educators are constantly on the hunt for learning tools and systems that could foster a smarter, more connected learning experience.

Fahem Al Nuaimi, CEO of Ankabut, realised that having multiple and often very different learning tools across the UAE's campuses was a hindrance to connecting them to a host of online learning resources from around the world.

With the adoption of the Brightspace Learning Management System, the academic institutes connected by Ankabut have not just been linked up to global online learning resources, but have also seen improved student performance, a reduced carbon footprint and more involved parents.



Challenge

THE MISSING LINK

Ankabut is a nationwide research and education network. Its primary objective is opening up information exchange highways between academic institutions in the UAE and the rest of the world.

But, over the years, Fahem Al Nuaimi has clocked a severe disparity between the learning tools used at the different campuses scattered across the UAE.

“You’d see everything from open-source systems that have limited capacity, capability and availability, to very expensive, out-of-date solutions,” explains Al Nuaimi. In time, his frustration grew: the wide mix of tools being used by students and faculty members at different learning centres was proving a serious roadblock to connecting them to each other as well as to a host of invaluable international resources.

Another detrimental effect was that each of the institutions housed its own network and its own server, significantly scaling up the carbon footprint of the UAE’s education sector. “Along with the increased impact on the environment, such systems were also burdening the institutions with unnecessary costs,” notes Al Nuaimi.

LIMITED CONNECTIVITY

The way Al Nuaimi saw it, a uniform contemporary learning management system (LMS) across different learning centres would not just allow educators to better deliver learning through cross-faculty collaboration, two-way feedback channels and comprehensive performance analytics. It would also open the doors to a more connected learning experience for students.

“In today’s digitally enhanced environment, access to lectures and other learning materials should not just be limited to the classroom. Students should have access to multiple resources from multiple points of origin, anywhere and anytime,” comments Al Nuaimi on the growing need for remote connectivity.

PARENTS LEFT OUT OF THE LOOP

In addition, inept and out-of-date learning systems also side-lined parents. “There were some systems that allowed parents to monitor the academic progress of their children, but these were not user-friendly enough to allow parents to easily log in and see, at a glance, what was going on in their child’s day-to-day academic life,” says Al Nuaimi.

The CEO of Ankabut, therefore, decided that it was time to sweep in change.



A UNIFORM, HYPER-LINKED ECOSYSTEM

Once the Brightspace LMS entered the picture, it facilitated the uniformity required to enable a hyper-connected ecosystem – following the implementation of the platform, Ankabut was better able to connect its member institutions to each other and to its education partners around the world.

“This is a first for this region: learning centres within the UAE can now connect to online learning resources no matter their location, and can do so with minimal disruption,” says Al Nuaimi.

Meanwhile, adds Al Nuaimi, the use of online learning materials and feedback tools has drastically scaled down the use of paper, while the centralised cloud architecture has reduced the use of electricity consumed by different learning centres for on-site servers and other equipment.

LEARN ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

As Al Nuaimi notes: “With the Brightspace platform in place, students can access learning resources anywhere and anytime, can keep in touch with their peers and educators, and can do so from multiple devices. They no longer have to be on university premises to communicate or to have access to learning resources. Essentially, they can now carry their classrooms in their pockets.”

This also fits perfectly with the increased proliferation of the bring-your-own-device (BYOD) trend in the UAE’s learning centres and its offices – students can now use their mobile devices to access online learning resources.

PARENTS NOW PLUGGED IN

The Brightspace platform provides an easily accessible, dashboard-style interface to monitor, at a glance, how a student is performing – according to Al Nuaimi, this feature has not just proved useful to teachers, but has also given parents meaningful insights into the academic lives of their children.

As a parent himself, Al Nuaimi sees this as a game changer: “This system has completely changed our interactions with our children on the academic front. A simple dashboard shows parents all the information they need to get a real understanding of how their son or daughter is doing, thereby allowing them to offer targeted help. The feedback we have received from parents is they now feel more involved in the academic development of their children.”



78 CAMPUSES AND 100,000 STUDENTS CONNECTED

The cloud-based architecture of the new learning management system and Ankabut's provision of it on a free trial basis to learning centres across the board has encouraged high adoption rates among the UAE's institutions, with 78 campuses and 100,000 students now connected to online learning resources from around the world.

Meanwhile, Ankabut's member institutes have reverted with high praise for the leap forward represented by the unified system: "We have had an excellent response from the institutes. We've even received letters of appreciation from several of them. Faculty members have noted that student performance has improved considerably from an academic point of view," says Al Nuaimi.

SCALED-DOWN COSTS

Cloud computing is traditionally associated with reduced costs of ownership. By forgoing swathes of equipment, as well as its administration and maintenance, organisations see a reduction in costs and a subsequent, scaled-up ROI. For academic institutions, this translates into increased budgets for other, often under-funded departments.

"With the implementation of an online learning management system, which is hosted in the cloud, institutes have seen a dramatic reduction in their costs. Our total cost of operations has gone down by sixty per cent," notes Al Nuaimi.

He further adds: "The institutes are now also playing a part in reducing the carbon footprint of the country's education sector. We are not just reducing the cost of operations but are also having a positive impact on the environment."

SCALED-UP COMMUNICATIONS

According to Al Nuaimi, Ankabut has seen a marked improvement in communications between students and teachers owing to the always-connected nature of the Brightspace platform: "If a student has a question or problem, he or she can reach the instructor at any time through the system, and through any device."

According to Al Nuaimi, student performance has also been enhanced, with improvement expected to continue. Meanwhile, teachers and lecturers can formulate lesson plans and build presentations more quickly. Mentors also have access to numerous tools that allow them to come up with increasingly innovative lessons, by incorporating website sources, multimedia clips and other visual aids that were not possible under legacy systems.

About D2L

A global leader in EdTech, D2L is the creator of Brightspace, the world's first integrated learning platform. The company partners with thought-leading organizations to improve learning through data-driven technology that helps deliver a personalized experience to every learner, regardless of geography or ability. D2L's open and extensible platform is used by more than 1,100 clients and almost 15 million individual learners in higher education, K-12, healthcare, government, and the enterprise sector—including Fortune 1000 companies. The company has operations in the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, Brazil, and Singapore. www.brightspace.com | www.D2L.com

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