

SERIES: EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND GLOBALISATION

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script

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Music

Speaker 1:

Education and Computers: Jordan's investment in the future.
You are listening to a co-production of Radio Jordan and Deutsche Welle.
From the Series "Educational Opportunities and Globalisation".

Music

Mike

.....*Mike: Where are you taking us? – "Now we are going to our computer-labs.
We have four computer-labs at school. We have 160 computers for both teachers
and students. We have the basic server....*

Speaker 2 :

The tapping of keyboards, the rustling of papers – we can almost feel the tension
in the air.

Speaker 1:

Together with our guide Tawfik Shomar – the educational adviser of the school,
we entered a room where a bunch of girls are having their examinations. But not
an ordinary one:

Mike

“This know the online exam for IT. They do all the exam online by our teachers.”

Speaker 1:

Working online at school is part of the students daily activities at the Ahlijjah school in Amman, the capital of Jordan. Two years ago, the school has introduced a very new and ambitious project that has been launched all over the kingdom - Electronic learning – or E-learning as it is called here. Seemingly satisfied with the progress of the project, Haifa H. Najjar, principle of the 75-year old school, explains:

Haifa H. Najjar

“We are not just a traditional school. We present ourselves as a centre of excellence, and definitely we are an IT-centre. Technology is a major tool. We are very much aware that the students have to compete with the whole world. And to be able to do that, they have to have the e-technology as a major tool. And that’s why we have been preparing the school to be an e-learning school.”

Speaker 2:

The E-learning project was initiated by H.M. the King Abdallah II four years ago. A project that aims to modernise education by computerising all the schools in Jordan. But the concept of e-learning is not just bringing computers into a school. It is more than that: for example having exams through e-technology, interacting with other students and teachers online, both in school and at home, and sharing information through the internet. A breakthrough project: for only a few years ago, the IT-culture in education was nearly non-existent, says Khaled Toukan, minister of education.

Khaled Toukan

“E” is the key for making this change within our educational system. The policy that we adopted is that every Jordanian citizen, whether he is in the capital Amman, or in the village, or in the remote region, in the badia, in the desert, should have the same chance as any student in the city or the big capital..“

hall/school

Speaker 1:

Strolling through the corridors of Ahlijjah School, we meet with some of the girls. They just finished their exams. Just in time to tell us their impressions about the whole project.

Girl 1

“The most thing I like in this curriculum is the IT. We are learning new stuff about database, spreadsheets, word-processing.”

Girl 2

“It is like an open window. You can see much more then to see it on TV. Each one has ist own point of view. You can find it written on the internet and you just gonna have common knowledge about everything.”

Speaker 1:

E-learning is implemented by connecting all classes to a central server. From the first grade reaching up to the sixth grade students can access the whole of maths, sciences, and arabic online. They can either access it from home or from school, says Tawfik Shomar, educational consultant of the school.

Tawfik Shomar

“Now for higher education there is a lot e-learning going on by just introducing a lot of information that is not available in the books via the net, through in class teaching or in class learning. The teacher will get a computer and data base in the class and they will interaract with certain sites, that were already researched by the teacher. Then the students can go home and build on what they learnt in class.”

Speaker 1:

In this private school the vision of E-learning is one step ahead. Since most of the students attending Alahlijah have complete access to the cyber world at home. Not to mention the well-equipped technology they have at school.

Speaker 2:

That's a nice vision. But what about the less privileged schools? Will every student be able to access the internet? A big challenge awaits the ministry of education, since there are around 3000 public schools that need to be connected. According to the ministry, all schools are expected to be computerised by the end of 2004. Lets listen again to minister Khaled Toukan:

Khaled Toukan

"By today we have connected 1850 schools. We still have to connect the rest. We are now starting the digitisation and re-authoring of our curricula. And we started with the Math curricula, followed by science. Now we want to go to geography. So there is a lot of work to be done. So there is lot of investment and time, that has to be infused in this system in order to say that we have been able to establish an E-learning platform throughout the whole country."

Speaker 1:

A different picture awaits us at Mahes public school for Boys in the region of Salt, around half an hour drive from Amman, computer learning has been introduced two years ago. The school owns about 20 computers and e-learning is not yet fully installed as there is no internet access. However, the students are happy with the changes, says the school's principle.

Zaid El Ziadat (Voice over)

"Students are more enthusiastic attending a class especially when using a computer. Instead of listening to the teacher explaining the lesson on the board, students are more interested when it comes to computer learning."

Speaker 1:

During a lesson, it becomes quite obvious why a lot of students at the Mahes-School prefer having a computer instead of a notebook.

Hussein Al Madi (Voice over)

"It makes learning easier for us. Instead of using pencil and paper. Like maths is much easier on the computer."

Ashraf Izzat (Voice over)

“There are a lot of mathematical equations that are solved faster on a computer than doing it on your own.”

Speaker 1:

E-learning is supposed to help students in having a better education through using E-based curricula and better computing skills. This transformation from traditional learning to E-learning is revolutionising studying methods. It is also an investment into the Jordanian economy. Because Jordan is a country which is poor in natural resources – unlike the other Arabian states in the Middle East, it has always invested in the education sector and training of its human resources as a major strategic source of national wealth. Over the last century it has been known as a major exporter of its human resources mainly to the neighbouring Arab countries. Thus, being part of the global village is essential for the future.

music**Speaker 2:**

To proceed in accordance with the E-learning project that is still regarded in many ways a pilot project, some of the women non-governmental organizations in Jordan realised that using the cyber dimension, would help in spreading their message through establishing an international data base about their activities. Among those NGO's, the Sisterhood is Global Institute or the Arabic Centre for Resources and Information about Violence against woman took part in the process by a program called Aman. From the name itself Aman, which in Arabic means to be safe or provide with safety, the aim of such an institution is to familiarise women with their rights, says Lina Quora, director of the NGO:

Lina Quora

“These are the main two objectives: to make available and to provide information on human rights and violence against women, and fields related. And to compile all information in one place that you can access it. And do networking among human rights and women rights organisation on an Arab level. These were basic

need that we tried to meet through the web-site and we are providing a lot of tools woman.”

Speaker 2:

Two years ago it was hard for a woman to have full access to important information regarding her rights. Web-sites dealing with women issues in the Arabic language were impossible to find. That was back then. Nowadays, 6000 visitors for the web-site of Aman proves that such a problem no longer exists. Webmaster Munir De'ebes explains:

Munir De'ebes (Voice over)

“Information to women used to be provided through traditional ways and one of the most important of these are, symposiums, training and educational courses, conventions and television. However, having Internet will help a lot of women in getting the information about women rights through the training courses held at the Internet, especially that a lot of Arabian Countries don not allow women to participate in public conventions or courses, sometimes they can not even travel abroad. So this is a chance for those women to become familiar and defend their rights through the Internet.”

Speaker 2:

The Centre and the Aman-website is not only about providing Jordanian women with information, but it also helps in gradually eradicating computer illiteracy. Women are being offered training lessons and workshops that will help develop their computing skills. The centre's activities are not restricted to the capital Amman, in fact they try to reach out to all women, whether in the suburbs or villages in remote areas. This is made possible with the help of regional training centres that cooperate with the Sisterhood-Aman. Once again, Lina Quora:

Lina Quora

“We are trying to make these computer centres available for women, for some hours. So they can come, especially for certain limitations, they would not like to go if there are a lot of man. So sometimes we are dedicating the place for them. So that they can access computer and internet.”

Speaker 2:

Hala is one of the users of Aman. All the topics and issues discussed on the web are essential to her work as a legal consultant:

Hala (Voice over)

“The website is an important tool to provide the information in an easier way. Because sometimes getting hold of books is a difficult thing over here. And not knowing foreign languages is made easier by having such websites in Arabic.”

Speaker 2:

Due to some of conservative backgrounds and traditions found in the Jordanian society, the topics discussed on the web-site stir controversy among Jordanians: for example honour killing of women, sexual abuse or battery.

Lina Quora

“Many women are ignored of their basic rights. They should know their rights. And one of these rights is the right of safety and security. Because you know many of them, when they used to be beaten, they felt it is natural. But when they read, when they listen, when they communicate, they felt that no, it is their right to enjoy safety and security. They would start defending this right of them.”

Speaker 2:

Unfortunately in some Arabian countries the right of discussing such issues is looked at as a crime. As a result the website is censored, thus women end up gazing at a screen saying: “page not found”.

Munir De’ebes (Voice over)

“So this means that the people in charge of the networks do not want women to get hold of information or to know more about their rights.”

Speaker 2:

In the end, despite of all the problems that they encountered – whether they are caused by technological problems or censorship by other Arab countries – they want to continue with their work to allow Arab women to find their places on an international level - and most importantly within their own society.

MUSIC

Speaker 1:

Moving to a modern technology society and being part of the global village is one thing. However there is also a need to strengthen vocational training. With 15% unemployment, according to official figures, there are many young academics who can't find work after completing their studies which causes a surplus.

Speaker 2:

Which brings in the need for more emphasis on vocational training and improving its low image within the Jordanian society. A step taken by the government in co-operation with local NGO's and international organisations – also on a regional level.

Speaker 1:

One example is the Theodor-Schneller Boarding-School for boys and young men in the outskirts of Amman. For decades now this private school offers education and vocational training for young boys – mainly orphans and youngsters from a difficult social background.

Speaker 2:

Today's Schneller School is the follow-up institution of the Syrian Orphanage which was founded in 1860 by German priest Theodor Schneller in Jerusalem. In 1948 it was closed by the emerging Israeli state. The school was moved to Jordan in the late 50's. Since, the boy-school, where Christians and Muslims alike live together, has gained experience and reputation in the field of vocational training across the kingdom.

Carpentry

Speaker 1:

The smell of wood flows in the air. A bunch of young men are busy working pieces of wood at the school's carpentry-training centre.

The future carpenters are completing their second and last year of professional training. Besides carpentry, the school offers two more branches of vocational training: mechanics and blacksmiths. It's reputation as a vocational training centre has grown ever since its foundation in Jordan, says Hanna Mansour, director of the school.

Hanna Mansour

“On a professional level, the Schneller-School is sort of a connection, between, student, graduate, market and the school itself. In the sense of we are known to be a good school of vocational training, a good vocational training centre. And the market is all the time is calling us to ask for labour and work.”

Speaker 2:

Often the vocational training is taught by former students - like Ibrahim, a Palestinian Jordanian who came as an young orphan in 1967 to the School. After completing his tenth grade at the school, he started vocational training as blacksmith. Then he spent two years in Germany, for further specialisation in his field. Today, Ibrahim teaches at the school. For many students, his is not just a teacher:

Ibrahim (Voice over)

“We were orphans, too. My colleague and me, just like the other kids. You know, life is not easy for them. So when they ask me: what should I do later?. They ask: How can I get a good job, how can I earn my living. I say: you have to learn, to work a lot, gain experience and then, only then think about the money that will come.”

Speaker 2:

The strong relation between students and teachers is part of the concept of Schneller School: Most of the young pupils attending the school from first class to tenth grade, have experienced a troubled childhood: some suffered from the divorce of their parents, others were physically abused, and some are orphans. Within a traditional conservative society like the Jordanian one, these children are more or less left in the shade. The Schneller School wants to give them a chance

to live and learn like any other Jordanian child or teenager – says father Hanna Mansour, priest and director of the School:

Hanna Mansour

„The school is considered to be a centre for empowerment for marginalized youth. Meaning those who stay with us as boarders and come to study as day students and also the surrounding community through the different activities we do here at school.

room kids having lunch/dishes

Speaker 2:

Some 15 young men have just finished their lunch. It was a hard day for them, as they had to pass their midterm exams in the morning.

Speaker 1:

Many of the around 200 young boys and teenager from age 6 to 21 years old live together with teachers and trainers on the campus. They are divided in to seven groups – each group is regarded as a family with its own name. Once again father Hanna Mansour.

Hanna Mansour

“The motivation, the idea behind having the kids here in families is to increase the sense of belonging to a small unit. It doesn’t start as nuclear as a family, but later on with time the kids find an identity, within a family, within a group of students.”

Speaker 1:

A way of life that seem to be appreciated by the youngsters:

Fadi El Hen (Voice over)

“I found that here is much better than home or any place else. Here you can feel that there are people who care about you.”

Ali Ahmad Khalil Abu Hajar (Voice over)

“I was in a difficult situation at home. So I came to the school seeking help and they took me in. Since I was a little boy they care for us.”

Speaker 1:

Taking into account not just education but also the personal development of each pupil, is part of the success of the school. However, the school has to cope with new challenges to be up to date for the market. New technologies have to be reintegrated into the curriculum – but due partly to the lack of finance, it is a slow process.

Speaker 2:

The vision of an all computerised Jordan, however, has not stopped in front of the school gates. In fact, the school offers since 1995 computer training. Established with the help of a German foundation, it was one of the first computer centres in the region. Nevertheless, the students have not yet access to the internet, says computer teacher Alaa Abu Laile.

Alaa Abu Laile

„We have the basic courses here. We do the introduction to computer science and word processing, spreadsheets using Microsoft excel. And also we do technical course like Autocad 2 and 3 dimensions. Unfortunately we do not have any internet service in this centre. Because as you know it is very expensive. So it is our plan to connect to internet services.“

Speaker 2:

Connecting to the global village community is however not a priority to the school yet. At Schneller, it is more important to connect with the local community: changing ideas about young people on the edge of society.

Hanna Mansour

“To which level the market will appreciate and take the less advantaged people? You ask me a question about the mentality, the consensus of the community: I

believe that the community and the demand of the market are very selective. Extremely selective.”

Music

Speaker 2:

Leaving this secluded village of vocational training, and as we approach the borders of Amman. We hear an interesting discussion about major changes in the Jordanian school curriculum by the ministry education taking place on the radio. An initiative that causes quite a controversy among Jordanians.

Speaker 1:

Wanting to know more about these changes currently debated and discussed by the Jordanian Parliament. We met again with the minister of education Khaled Touqan.

Khaled Touqan

“Actually human rights, intercultural dialogue, peaceful coexistence have always been an integral part of our curricula. You know Jordan has always been a moderate Islamic and Arab country which always believed in intercultural dialogue, openness to the other, positive interaction with the others and the rest of the cultures, so we already have this in our curricula. Now we are actually within the whole revision of our curricula we are re-authoring maths, sciences (..), we will definitely touch upon the humanities aspects in order to build a positive attitude of openness within our youth towards other cultures, towards their human family at large, globally.”

Speaker 1:

These changes or the Matrix as referred to by the Ministry of education are about peace culture, Human rights and international values – based on a concept developed by the UNESCO. Where is the controversy you might ask?

Speaker 2:

Well, according to more than fifty parliament deputies, part of the controversy lies in the word “peace culture”. They believe that it is more of a surrender culture than of peace. Since Jordan is a neighbouring country to Palestine and Israel, the

conflict in that area is one of the most important issues to Jordanians: all what is happening in the West-Bank and Gaza-Strip touches the feeling of all Arab nations. A meeting with Munther Masri, director of the National Human Resource Centre in Amman and member of the national Board of Education, gave us a clearer image of the debate.

Munther Masri

“The specialities come under two major headings: one, (...), the concept of culture of peace. Which is acceptable. But you have to add to it what does it mean, what does it mean to a nation, a people under occupation. Occupation means resistance. Everywhere in history. So we add the culture of resistance. How do you act under occupation. You should resist, but again you should do it in a human way. Another major heading is when you talk about human rights. Human rights again, at the general concept, everybody accepts it (...). But the Western notion of human rights emphasises on the individual. The human rights on the individual. It doesn’t focus enough on the rights of people, of countries.”

Speaker 1:

Masri also told us what some of the deputies were really concerned about.

Munther Masri

“Some members of parliament were concerned that this is part of the pressure undertaken by the US. Especially by the US pressures to change the curricula in certain directions.

Speaker 2:

No matter here you live a controversial debate may take a long time to solve. And to solve the Jordanian debate about curriculum Khaled Touqan was questioned about these changes, changes that are bound to happen to any society Arab or Foreign.

Khaled Touqan

“With all objectivity, I think when the flurry has subsided, and the parliament has put it under scrutiny and discussion, we realise that this has been brought up a little bit out of context, and I still emphasise that the educational system in Jordan

should not be subject to political ends and the most important is, no matter whom, bringing issues that would try to politicise our educational system. Under any excuse, this is not acceptable at all."

Speaker 2:

The Hashimite Kingdom of Jordan is one of the middle eastern countries standing on the door steps of a new era. A computerised future with the E-learning project in it's infancy stage and an educational development that still lies uncertain .

Changes take time and Jordan has certainly crossed a long way into the future.

Music

Speaker 1:

You have been listening to "Education and computers: Jordan's investment in the future.

A co-production of Radio Jordan and Deutsche Welle.

The programme was presented by Reem Zumot and Mike Derderian.

It was written by Tania Kraemer and Mike Derderian, and produced by Mohammed Abu Soufeh.

Music