

Interviews with **Badrul Khan**



Interview with **Yasser Dakroury,** **Egyptian E-Learning University (EELU)**

How did the Egyptian E-Learning University (EELU) get started?

The Egyptian Government's strategy for higher education development has aimed, as its first objective, to increase educational opportunities to address growing market needs and to expand the demand for higher education. E-learning is a modern tool—using information and communications technologies—to help in achieving these goals.

The Ministry of Higher Education in September of 2005 submitted a feasibility study of the university (<http://www.eelu.edu.eg>) to the Board of the Education Development Fund. In August of 2009, a Presidential decree was issued, establishing EELU as a private, non-profit university in Egypt. Our new Government continues to support the institution.

The university commenced its educational activities in October of 2009 with two initial programs—Business Administration and Computer and Information Technology. Learning Centers were established in three locations: Cairo, Tanta, and Assiut.

How is EELU progressing at this time?

Badrul H. Khan, a Contributing Editor, is an author, educator, and consultant in the field of e-learning. His 1997 best-selling book, **Web-Based Instruction**, was important in paving the way for the field of e-learning. In recognition for his work in this field the Egyptian E-Learning University Council has appointed him an honorary distinguished professor of e-learning. He has held faculty positions at the University of Texas and the George Washington University (Website: www.BadrulKhan.com).

Our mission is to provide high-quality education and training services for men and women (now 60% male, 40% female in enrollments) to supply the labor market with personnel able to deal with advanced technologies in the modern world. We aim to continually improve our teaching and learning environments as we move ahead.

It is our vision to be regionally recognized—spreading our efforts beyond Egypt itself—as a premier e-learning university, preparing future leaders throughout the region who are able to positively impact the economic and social activities of Egypt and the Arab world. We already have students from a number of other countries, in addition to our base of students within Egypt.

The main objectives of establishing the EELU are:

- Enhance the quality of education by utilizing modern technologies.
- Participate in improving Egypt's higher education and increasing student enrollment.
- Provide those unable to attend traditional campus-based universities with the opportunity to achieve a high-quality education.
- Establish a strong line of research in technology-related areas, including establishing links with reputable research centers worldwide; for example, we have ongoing activities with universities in Europe, and especially France.

In addition to our online activities, we provide face-to-face learning activities between tutors and students. We have some 30 tutors now, along with our 15 full-time and 28 part-time faculty. Thus, blended learning is part of our overall program.

We employ both asynchronous self-paced lessons and synchronous virtual classrooms, along with video conferencing in some instances.

I should add that English is the language of instruction in all of our activities, and our system is based on credit hours.

Yasser Dakroury is President of the Egyptian E-Learning University (EELU). Previously, he served as Professor of



Computer Engineering at Ain Shams University in Cairo and Director of the Information Systems Centre at the Faculty of Engineering. He received a Ph.D. in Computer Engineering from Ecole Centrale de Nantes in France. The author of more than 70 research papers delivered at academic conferences and published in research journals, he has supervised doctoral and masters level theses in research

fields related to real-time systems, computer networks, Internet security, software engineering, and e-learning (e-mail: ydakroury@eelu.edu.eg).

What challenges does EELU face?

There are several ongoing challenges. One has to do with society's perceptions of e-learning, which is a new trend in Egyptian higher education. Is it a credible form of higher education? Are faculty willing to work with this new form of instruction? We believe that we are making much progress on these fronts. Another challenge is generating our own funds and thereby decreasing dependence on governmental allocations.

On the other hand, we no longer face the challenge of ensuring the reliability of the technological infrastructure.

I had the pleasure of delivering a keynote speech on e-learning at the international conference on e-learning in the Arab world (ICEL 2012), which was organized and hosted by EELU. In that talk, I outlined issues facing developers of e-learning, including pedagogical, technological, interface design, resource support, management, evaluation, ethics, and institutional interactions. How attentive is EELU in addressing these critical issues?

EELU from its inception has given attention to these kinds of issues. We have carefully designed a course structure which enables and facilitates the learning experience and allows for self-paced learning and assessment activities. EELU includes an e-learning support center that focuses on helping students and faculty and staff to effectively use e-learning tools. In 2010, we established a Quality Assurance Department that is responsible for maintaining the highest possible standards of quality in all administrative, academic, and technical processes within EELU. This group continually monitors and evaluates EELU performance at all levels and suggests improvements in procedures in order to ensure that the best possible student performance is achieved. On the technological side, EELU uses top-quality ICT infrastructure, that is maintained and supported in-house through our staff of quality engineers, working 24/7 to achieve 100 percent availability and security throughout our systems.

What aspects of your work are exportable to other systems and countries?

The academic programs and our know-how in establishing e-learning environments are exportable to others, including:

- Technological infrastructure
- Design of academic programs and courses
- The production of e-courses
- Evaluation and assessment activities
- The management and organizational structure
- Staff and faculty training
- Cooperation with national and international institutions

Where do you see EELU in five years?

We hope to be known as the leading university in e-learning within Egypt, and we would like as well to attract more students from other countries in our region of the world—we already have some of these students in our programs, as noted earlier.

In addition, we plan to have learning centers all over Egypt and then to establish centers throughout the Middle East and northern Africa, while continuing to increase our cooperation with international educational organizations worldwide.

Historically, Egypt has been the preeminent nation in the Middle East and North Africa. In recent years and even decades, however, Egyptian civilization's influence on the world at large has waned. It is our hope that EELU will be one of the institutions that will be instrumental in reasserting the nation's position of leadership in the world.

If one of the developing nations is planning to establish an e-learning university, what advice would you offer?

First of all, one must have an appropriate and effective technological infrastructure to be able to service all of the necessary processes involved in e-learning. Then, the overall society must be made aware of the potential of e-learning. Easy access must be provided to all geographical regions of the country, via both e-learning and local learning centers. Finally, both academic and non-academic programs should focus on the specific requirements of the country and its local labor markets. □

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