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THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY IN TEACHING ARABIC TO NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS REMOTELY

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the effective role of the International Open University in teaching the Arabic language remotely to non-native speakers, a role that has rapidly developed in recent years. This development is due to the ease and convenience of modern E-learning tools for remote education, as well as the prestigious position the International Open University holds among other universities in the field of remote Arabic language education. This research paper is divided into an introduction and two sections. The introduction is dedicated by the researcher to providing an overview of the International Open University. The first section is titled "The Development of Studies at the International Open University," and the second section is titled "The Arabic Language Department at the International Open University." This section consists of five topics: the programs available in the Arabic Language Department, the content of the study system in Arabic language courses, and the evaluation system in Arabic language courses, and the teaching method in the Arabic Language Department at the International Open University, the status of the Arabic Language Department at the International Open University among other virtual universities, and the study concluded with a conclusion in which the researcher mentioned the key findings, along with a list of the research references.

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Keywords: Arabic language- Studying- International open university- Learning

The researchers relied on two methodologies in their study. The researcher used the descriptive methodology because it focuses on studying a phenomenon as it exists, then accurately describing it by gathering information about it and categorizing it to reach conclusions that contribute to understanding this reality. The descriptive methodology is particularly suitable for educational matters. Along with the use of the descriptive methodology in studying the International Open University and its educational system, the researcher also employed the historical methodology when discussing the history of the founding of the International Open University and the stages of development of distance learning for the Arabic language within it.

1 – INTRODUCTION

Learning or teaching languages remotely is generally related to two other broader fields: one is distance learning in various academic subjects, even those that rely on pure experimental scientific lab work[(1)] , and the other is the teaching of second and foreign languages. There is no doubt that the crisis caused by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the widespread adoption of distance learning in both pre-university and university stages across all disciplines in general, this crisis has had a clear impact on the teaching of the Arabic language remotely, Many countries have resorted to teaching Arabic remotely to their students at all educational levels, especially in higher education[(2)] , It is worth noting that studies have proven the effectiveness of remote learning and its ability to meet the

(1)Distance education has been applied in teaching some scientific subjects that depend on experimentation. A group of professors designed visual presentations to be shown to students remotely via television and the Internet in teaching chemistry. This can be seen in:

(2) Simonson Michael, Smaldino Sharon, and Zvacek Susan, "Teaching and learning at distance: Foundation of distance education", (6th edition, USA: Library of Congress, Information Age Publishing, 2105), 2-5

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needs of learners in terms of objectives, content, and various teaching methods, particularly in the teaching and learning of all branches of the Arabic language(1) .

1-1 Previous studies:

Previous studies on teaching Arabic to non-native speakers remotely at the International Open University are extremely limited. Therefore, reliance was placed on websites, with a few paper references, including the following:

1- The publication of the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education, issued in 2023, titled "Benchmarking for Open Universities: Guidelines and Good Practices," discusses the International Open University on pages 90 to 92(2) .

2- An interview with Dr. Bilal Phillips about the Open Islamic University, its seven-year history, its challenges and hopes," published on the Alukah website on 15/4/2015, under the supervision of Dr. Saad bin Abdullah Al-Hamid. The link to the interview is [https://www.alukah.net/translations/0/85214/]. This interview includes information about the founding and development of the International Open University over the years.

3- Dr. Bilal Phillips' website, where some excerpts about the founding of the university were published:m The website of the

(1) Stern H. H. “Fundamental concepts of language teaching.”, (Oxford: Oxford University Press. Seventh impression 1991), 10, Also see Dr. Al-Shammari, Aqeel bin Hamid Al-Zamai, “Distance Learning: Foundations and Principles of Designing the Optimal Educational Environment from the Psycholinguistics Perspective of Second Language Acquisition.” Research published in the series: Linguistic Investigations, entitled: Teaching the Arabic language at a distance: reality and hopes, (first edition, Riyadh: King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Center for Arabic Language Service, 2015): 18

(2) Benchmarking for Open Universities: Guidelines and Good Practices’ 90: 92

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International Open University, which contains a lot of information about the Arabic Language Department and the study system [https://iou.edu.gm/]

1-2 Research Questions

1- When was the International Open University established?
2- When did Arabic language studies begin at the university?
3- What are the different programs for teaching Arabic at the university?
4- What are the key facts that can be learned about the founding, development, and departments of the International Open University?
5- What is the status of the International Open University in promoting distance education in Arabic for non-native speakers compared to other virtual universities?

1-3 Terminology of the Study

1-3-1 Distance Education and Distance Learning/Learning from Distance,

Education" is the noun form of the verb "to teach," while "learning" is the noun form of the verb "to learn." The root of both words is the same, derived from the trilateral root ,(عَلِـــمَ) which consists of the letters 'Ayn,' 'Lam,' and 'Meem,' and it indicates a distinction or effect by something that sets it apart from others[(1)], From Ibn Faris' definition of this linguistic root, it becomes clear that it refers to the effect of the teacher or educational institution on the student, and the teacher or institution may have a distinguishing mark that sets them apart from others, The word "distance" is a noun derived from the trilateral root ",بَعِـــــــــــدَ" which contrasts with the word "proximity [(2)].

(1) See: Ibn Faris, Abu Al-Hussein Ahmad, "Language Standards." Investigation by Professor: Abdul Salam Haroun. (Unprinted, Beirut: Dar Al-Fikr, 1979), (Science) 4: 109

(2) Ibn Faris, Standards of Language, (after), 1: 268

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It is noted that the term "Distance education" and the term "Distance learning" or "Learning from a distance" often appear together in many Arabic writings and websites. Some have differentiated between the two, considering education as the cause and learning as the result and the goal(1) . However, in English, both terms are used interchangeably, where they mention the terms and place the word "or" between them, as in "Distance education or distance learning." This indicates that one may be used in place of the other in English(2) .

The term "distance learning" overlaps with other terms that are closely related to its meaning, which has led to the emergence of many definitions for this term, along with more than one description of it in English, Among these descriptions are home study, external study or degree, independent study, and other terms that are partially or entirely related to it, such as correspondence education, mail education, broadcast education, and other terms, which have reached up to eighteen different terms(3) .

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(1) Consider the difference between the two terms: “teaching and learning process”. Article published on 6/17/2022, Anbar University, College of Education for Girls, retrieved on 5/1/2024, link https://www.uoanbar.edu.iq/WomenEducationCollege/CMS.php?ID=300

(2) What are the differences between distance education and online learning? - JAIN “E-learning platform” Deemed to-be university- Bangalore- India- 24 Feb-2022- https://onlinejain.com/blogs/what-are-differences-between-distance-education-and-online-learning Accessed 1April 2024, and Michael Simonson & Gary A Berg, "Distance learning". https:::www.britannica.com:topic:distance-learning, last update 9 Feb 2024, Accessed 2 March 2025

(3) Consider: Sharqi, Nadia, “Ingredients for the Success of Distance Education” (5/17/2018), retrieved on 6/4/2024, from the website https:::ila.io:8d9uv, and in Wikipedia all of these terms are equal in meaning to the term “learning from distance.”, Wikipedia, Home study, was edited on 27 September 2023, link https:::en.wikipedia.org:wiki:Home_study & Wikipedia, External degree, was edited on 15 May 2022, link https:::en.wikipedia.org:wiki:External_degree & Wikipedia, independent study, was edited on 11 November 2023 link https:::en.wikipedia.org:wiki:Independent_study, Also considered: Abdul Wahab Abdullah Al-Maamari, “The Quality System in Open and Distance Learning.” Scientific Development Journal for Studies and Research, Yemen, first issue (2020): 78

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Distance learning can generally be defined, based on definitions found in various studies, as encompassing all types of education and learning within recognized formal institutions. It is the process of transferring knowledge to the learner at their geographical location without the need for their physical presence in the educational institution, the learner is distant from the teacher either in space, time, or both, this type of learning involves delivering knowledge, skills, and educational materials through two-way communication using media for transmitting auditory or visual information (live, recorded, or printed), or through various technological methods like computers or the internet. In this model, the learner is separated from the teacher or the educational facilitator, and technology is used to bridge the gap between the two parties, simulating face-to-face communication. Distance learning is based on self-directed learning, where the learner relies on themselves[(1)] .

1 – 3 – 2- Open Education

The term "Open Education" is closely related to the term "Distance Learning/Teaching," and some have argued that they are synonymous and used interchangeably[(2)] , However, some researchers believe they are not identical; rather,

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(1) See the collection of definitions of distance education: Al-Farra, Ismail Saleh, "Distance Learning and Open Education: Roots, Concepts, and Justifications." The Palestinian Journal of Open Distance Education, Palestine, Volume One, Issue One, January (2007): 17, and Al-Tahih, Salem Marzouk, "Distance Learning and E-Learning, Concepts and Experiences: The Arab Experience." (Second edition, Kuwait: Kuttab Company 2011): 13, and Masoud, Khairiya Hussein, "Open University Education and Distance Education) ".(Faculty of Education, Mansoura University, research presented to the First International Scientific Conference, February 2013): 945, and Amer Tariq Abdel Raouf, "Distance Education and Open Education." (Unprinted, Amman: Dar Al-Yazouri Scientific Publishing and Distribution, 2013): 3, and "Distance education, its concept, tools and strategies." Issued by the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre, (United Nations Educational, Educational and Cultural Organization, UNESCO, 2020): 14

(2) See Al-Sharhan, Salah Ayed, "Distance Education and Open Education in the Arab World: Towards Development and Creativity," 2, and Al-Maamari, "The Quality System in Open Education and Distance Learning": 76, and see also
Difference between open schooling and distance learning? (Without a date of publish- Accessed: 1st May 2024 https://sscoaching.in/Difference-open-distance-learning-_1224.html

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they merely share some things in common [1] . They also have many common features[2] . However, distance learning is an older method and a broader term than "open education." Open education is one of the many applications of distance learning. Additionally, open education is mostly confined to higher education studies[3] . Often, the term "university" is placed between the two parts of the term "open education," thus becoming "open university education[4] ."

Open education is typically governed by an educational institution with a formal structure, while distance learning is used in the context of providing knowledge in open education through a university called the "open university." Therefore, open education can be defined as higher education that enables learners to study at times and places suited to their individual circumstances and needs. Communication between the learner and the educational institution takes place through mechanical and electronic devices, printing tools, and other specific means. The focus is on the student rather than the educational institution[5 . Thus, it can be said that open education is an institutionalized, university-level, distance education that fundamentally relies on flexibility in terms of student admission, selection, methods of teaching, timing, and location.

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(1) Bri Stauffer, "What's the difference between online learning and distance learning?". (CTE Curriculum for Middle and High School Teachers. Available at: https:::www.aeseducation.com:blog:online−learning−vs−distance−learning' published: 5 October 2020,

(2) See: Amer, Tariq Abdel Raouf "Distance and Open Education": Introduction III

(3) Al-Maamari, "Quality System in Open and Distance Learning," 74: 76

(4) See: Al-Farra, Ismail Saleh, "Distance Learning and Open Education: Roots, Concepts, and Justifications": 17

(5) Here's the translation of the Arabic text into English: "Reference: Mahmoud, Hussein Bashir, 'The Open University, University of the Future.' (12th National Conference: Development of the Performance of Arab Universities in the Light of Total Quality, Ain Shams University, Center for University Education Development, Cairo, 2005): 136, and Al-Basha, Ali Hussein, 'The Effectiveness of Using the Internet in Teaching English to Open Education Students in the Syrian Arab Republic.' (Doctoral Thesis, Omdurman Islamic University, Republic of Sudan, 2012): 82, and Masoud, Khairiya, 'Open University Education and Distance Learning,' 945."

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1 – 3 – 3 The Open University

The term "Open University" refers to a modern model of higher education that expands access to university education for those who were unable to attend for various reasons. It takes advantage of technological advancements in the field of information and communications. This type of education is characterized by flexibility in dealing with students, regardless of their ages or locations. Education in Open Universities relies on a distance learning system, which includes the use of modern technological tools in teaching(1) . Additionally, these Open Universities establish offices in the countries of remote learners to ensure a smoother and more flexible experience in this type of education(2), The origins of this term date back to the Open University in Britain, which was officially established in 1969, and began its studies in 1971(3) .

1 – 3 – 4 International Open University

This term is one of the newly introduced terms specific to the university based in Banjul (the capital of Gambia)(4) . It refers to a model of higher education that is delivered remotely, open to all students from all over the world without being restricted to any specific country or age group.

The main conditions for joining the International open university can be summarized in the following three conditions:

= A student enrolling in an accredited bachelor's degree program must have at least a high school diploma or its equivalent, meaning the student must have completed

(1) See: Mahmoud, Hussein, “The Open University, the University of the Future”: 137

(2) See: Al-Maamari, “The Quality System in Open and Distance Learning”: 76

(3) See: Qarnaba, Qamar al-Din Ali, “The Open University in Britain.” (Arab Organization for Culture and Science, Experts’ Symposium to Study the Possibility of Establishing the Arab Open University, Amman, 1979): 52

(4) Requirements of the bachelor degree at IOU: https:::iou.edu.gm:stream:bais:requirements:

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twelve years of schooling before joining the university(1). However, a student wishing to join the Intensive Arabic Language Program does not need to meet this condition, as the program is available to all students who know the basics of reading and writing in Arabic(2)

= The student must have access to a computer connected to the internet, with a good ability to use it.

= The student should have a good knowledge of the English language to communicate with the university administration, as most of the university staff and most of the study programs for students rely on the use of English for teaching. This is because the university was originally established for English speakers.

The study at the International open university is characterized by a high degree of flexibility for students. Therefore, it can be said that the International open university is based in The Gambia and offers distance learning, accessible to all students from around the world, without being limited by any specific country or region, This is in contrast to other open universities that are tied to a specific region, such as the Open University in the UK, which is only available to residents of the UK(3) , another feature of the International open university is that students are not restricted by a specific age to join(4) .

(1) يُنظر في ذلك Requirements of the bachelor degree at IOU: https:::iou.edu.gm:stream:bais:requirements:

(2) https://iou.edu.gm/stream/iap/

(3) See Qurnabi, "The International Open University in Britain": 58, and Al-Khatib, Ahmad Mahmoud, "The Open University". Education Magazine, Qatar National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, Issue No. 83, (1987): 84.

(4) Wikipedia: International Open University https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Open_University

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1 – 3 – 5 Teaching Arabic Remotely to Non-Native Speakers

The term "learners of Arabic who are non-native speakers" refers to those who study Arabic as a foreign or second language, rather than as native speakers. For example, if an English speaker learns Arabic, it is considered a foreign language for them. This language is referred to by several terms, such as the second language, foreign language, secondary language, or weak language(1) . It is worth noting that when we talk about "teaching Arabic to non-native speakers," the term can be expressed in various similar ways, such as teaching Arabic to non-Arabs, foreigners, or those speaking other languages, The most common term among researchers is "teaching Arabic to speakers of other languages," though this term can be somewhat long. Therefore, many researchers prefer to say more concisely, "teaching Arabic to non-native speakers" It is important to note that distance education is not a recent phenomenon that emerged with the invention of the steam engine, as noted by Western scholars(2) , or by Arab scholars who followed their approach, In fact, studies have shown that distance education for Arabic language learning via correspondence has been a part of the authentic Arab heritage since the 3rd century AH(3) .

2 - DISTANCE TEACHING OF ARABIC FOR NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS AT THE INTERNATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY

2-1 Introduction (Introduction to the International open university)

The idea of establishing the International Open University originates from its founder, Dr. Bilal Philips, born in Jamaica in 1947. He grew up in Canada and

(1) Stern ،"Fundamental concepts of language teaching.", 9

(2) Rumble, Greville, "The costs of providing online student support services". (Germany, the 20th World Conference of the International Council for Open and Distance education, April 2001): 73 See also: Schlosser, Lee Ayers, and Simonsen, Michael, "Distance Education and E-Learning Terminology." Translated by Dr. Nabil Jad Azmi, (2nd ed., Muscat: Beirut Library, 2015), 7.

(3) See: Abu Dhawi, Ibrahim, "Distance Education between Western Attribution and Arabic Rooting, Teaching Arabic Language at a Distance as a Model," Al Qasimia University Journal of Arabic Language and Literature, Volume 2, Issue 1, December (2023): 177.

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embraced Islam in 1972. Afterward, he studied Arabic at the Islamic University of Madinah and then became a teacher at the Manarat Al-Riyadh Islamic School for ten years(1) , he obtained a master's degree in Islamic studies from the University of Riyadh in 1985 and completed his doctoral thesis in Islamic theology at the University of Wales in the United Kingdom in 1994(2) , In the same year, He founded the Islamic Information Centre in Dubai, United Arab Emirates(3) .

He also worked as a lecturer in Arabic and Islamic studies for ten years at the American University in Dubai(4) . During his time at this university, in 2000, he had the idea of creating an Islamic university that would operate remotely, like the American Open University in Washington and the London Open College(5) . At these universities, educational materials and recorded tapes were sent to students at their places of residence via postal mail. The goal of creating the International Open University was to use information technology as a substitute for sending educational materials to students, Dr. Bilal began to collaborate with some computer programmers to implement this idea, Specialists in computer science developed a system that enabled students to register for the university online, and a database was created for registered students who paid their tuition fees through bank transfers or Western Union, the university started with just one course, titled "The Ethical Foundations of Islamic Culture." Students were able to access the educational

(1) Translated from Dr. Bilal Philips' official website, https://bilalphilips.com/about/

(2) See its translation, its official website: https://bilalphilips.com/about/, and see also Narmin Al-Shal's article, "Canadian Dr. Bilal Philips: Islam is a cure for all of humanity's problems," an article published in the Egyptian newspaper Akhbar Al-Youm on February 17, 2023, retrieved on June 10, 2024, link: https://akhbarelyom.com/news/newdetails/4019873/1/

(3) See the article entitled: "Dr. Bilal Philips," Islam Story website, supervised by Dr. Ragheb Al-Sarjani, 7/23/2008, retrieved on 6/10/2024, link http://97.105.52.213/ar/artical/21526

(4) His official website is https://bilalphilips.com/about/

(5) An article entitled: "An interview with Dr. Bilal Philips about the Islamic Open University, and a seven-year history with it, pains and hopes," Al-Alokah website, supervised by Dr. Saad bin Abdullah Al-Hamid, dated 4/15/2015, retrieved on 5/5/2024, link: https://www.alukah.net/translations/0/85214/

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materials at their places of residence through a dedicated website, this took place in 2001, the year the university was founded(1).

2-2 Chapter 1: The Evolution of Studies at the International Open University

The study at the International Open University began modestly, starting with only one course on Islamic ethics, titled "The Ethical Foundations of Islamic Culture." The educational materials for this course consisted of texts and articles uploaded to a website that students could read or download to their personal computers. However, these materials lacked audio or visual content and included only simple midterm exams. The texts were divided into units. Afterward, the university ceased its academic activities for a period, and this situation remained until 2006 when efforts began to develop the university's study system using Moodle as an educational platform(2) . In that year, two courses in Islamic studies were offered, and the number of courses gradually increased. A diploma program in Islamic studies was launched in 2007(3), which included fourteen short courses(4) . The year 2007 marks the true beginning of the university's expansion when it was officially named the Islamic Online University(5) . In this period, audio and video lectures were recorded for each course, and textual content for each lecture was provided as a PowerPoint presentation, which was then converted into a PDF file. Following this, various departments were created within the university, bringing the total number of departments to seven: Islamic Studies, Arabic Language, Economics, Business

(1) International Open University https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Open_University#cite_note-NigerTimesFees-3

(2) UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education "Benchmarking for Open Universities: Guidelines and Good Practices" (Published by the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education ,Mosco, 2023), 91

(3) The official website of Dr. Bilal Philips is https://bilalphilips.com/iou/

(4) the previous references

(5) UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education "Benchmarking for Open Universities: Guidelines and Good Practices", 90

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Administration, Education, Psychology, and Information Technology(1) . In January 2020, the name was changed from the Islamic Online University to the International Open University when the National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Authority in The Gambia began recognizing the university's programs(2) .

2-3 Chapter 2: The Arabic Language Department at the International Open University

The Arabic Language Department at the university began by offering the "Intensive Arabic Program," which is a program for beginners in Arabic that enables them to read, write, and express themselves, with a focus on learning Arabic Grammar.

2-3-1 Programs Available in the Arabic Language Department

Since its establishment, the university has offered a variety of programs, including:

1-The Intensive Arabic Program (IAP), which was the first program introduced by the university in the Arabic Language Department. It was launched in 2008, after the Islamic Studies Diploma program was introduced, and before the official establishment of the Arabic Language Department in 2012. In this program, students study the book *Arabic Grammar Made Easy*, which explains Arabic grammar for beginners in English. The book was written by Dr. Bilal Philips. Students also study *Al-Tuhfa Al-Sunniya in the Explanation of Al-Muqaddimah Al-Ajrumiya*. The Intensive Arabic Program consists of eight intensive courses spread over four academic terms, with two courses in each term(3) . The courses are taught using English, and the program is designed for beginners learning the Arabic language.

(1) For more information about these departments, please visit the university website https://iou.edu.gm/

(2) Wikipedia: International Open University https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Open_University#cite_note-NigerTimesFees-3

(3) See the International Open University website https://iou.edu.gm/stream/iap/

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2- The bachelor's Program in Arabic Language Studies (BA ALS), which is recognized by the Gambia's NAQAA, was initially launched in 2014 under the name "Bachelor in Arabic Language." However, this version of the program was not accredited. The program primarily focuses on a range of curricula designed for non-native Arabic speakers. Its foundation is based on the curriculum of Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University for teaching Arabic to non-native speakers. The program continued until the fall of 2020, after which it was paused. It received accreditation from Gambia starting in March 2021, following the addition of some new courses. The name was changed to "Bachelor of Arts in Arabic Language Studies (BA ALS)." This program is the first at the university to be recognized by Gambia's quality assurance agency.

The program consists of four academic years during which the student studies thirty-six courses in Arabic. The system of study is primarily designed for English-speaking students, as the instructors use Arabic with the assistance of English for explanations(1) . In the first semesters of the program, the focus is on teaching Arabic with the help of English. Gradually, the instructors reduce the use of English until it is eliminated in the eighth and final semester of the program.

3 – Master's Program in Arabic Language Studies, **(MA ALS)** which is also recognized by The Gambia. This program includes two tracks or systems:

A - The research-based track MA ALS (Research-based), which consists of only one course focused on writing research papers and theses in Arabic. This course is taught over an entire semester, specifically the first semester, during which the student writes their research plan. Afterward, there are three additional semesters during which the student works on their research. The total duration of the program is two

(1) https://iou.edu.gm/stream/ba-als/

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years at a minimum, and in certain cases, the duration can be extended. The program began in the fall of 2023(1) .

B - The coursework-based track (MA ALS) consists of twelve courses, which the student completes over two semesters, taking six courses each semester. In the second semester, the student selects a research topic and writes an initial plan. The student then begins writing the research paper at the start of the third semester until the end of the fourth semester. The duration of study in this track is also two years. The difference between this track and the research-based track lies in the scope of the research. In the research-only track, the thesis is much larger in size compared to the coursework-based track. Specifically, the word count for the research in the first track is twice that of the second track. The study in this track began in the spring of 2024.

4- MA Diploma Program in Arabic Language Studi (Bridge to MA in Arabic language studies) BM ALS

The BM ALS Diploma qualifies students to join the MA in Arabic Language Studies program at the International Open University. The duration of study in this diploma is three semesters, and in each semester the student studies five advanced subjects in the Arabic language and literature. The total of what the student studies in this diploma is fifteen subjects, after which the student is eligible to join the MA in Arabic Language Studies.

Anyone who wants to join this diploma must have a bachelor's degree in any of the knowledge specializations, with a sufficient knowledge of the Arabic language. He

(1) https://iou.edu.gm/stream/ma-alsr/

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must also pass the designated test in the Arabic language with a score of 60% or more before joining this diploma [1] .

2-3-2 Contents of the Arabic Language Course Study System

Each course in the Arabic Language Department consists of the following educational materials:

1-Curriculum: Each course has a book or a set of books that are taught during the course, available in PDF format. The materials are accessible to students on the course page, where they can download them at any time to their personal computers.

2- Recorded Audio and Video Lectures: There are thirty lectures for each course, with each lecture lasting one full hour. Students can watch or download the lectures through their specific link on the Campus portal. Each lecture is divided into three parts. The professor records the lecture using Camtasia Studio, after which the university's IT department edits and uploads the lectures to the university's Moodle platform.

3 .The Reading Material for the Lecture:** Each of the thirty lectures has a specific reading material prepared by the professor, based on the syllabus and course materials. The professor prepares this material using a PowerPoint presentation. This reading material is made available alongside the recorded lecture on the course page, and students can download it anytime they need it. It is worth noting that during the recording of the lectures, the professor displays the text on the computer screen using PowerPoint.

(1) https://iou.edu.gm/stream/ma-alsc/

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4. Weekly Live Sessions:** This is another component, separate from the thirty recorded lectures, consisting of fifteen live sessions. A teaching assistant is assigned to each course to conduct these live sessions with students. In each live session, the teaching assistant explains and summarizes two of the thirty recorded lectures created by the professor. During the live sessions, students engage in discussions with the instructor about any difficulties or unclear concepts they encounter in their studies. After each live session, the teaching assistant uploads the session to the course page, making it available for students to access anytime they need it.

5- Midterm Review Lecture, which is a live lecture announced by the teaching assistant on the course forum, with its scheduled time. It is available for student attendance, and in it, the teaching assistant reviews the first fifteen lectures. After the review, the session is uploaded to the course page to be available to all students as well.

6- Final Review Lecture, which is like the previous one, but it serves as a summary and review of the second half of the lectures[(1)], specifically from the sixteenth to the thirtieth lecture.

2-3-3 -Evaluation System in Arabic Language Courses

The evaluation of each course is divided as follows:

1. **Module Test**: Each of the thirty modules in any of the Arabic Language Department's courses contains ten multiple-choice questions, After the student finishes listening to the lecture, they must answer these questions within a time limit set by the system, Once the student submits their answers, the system automatically adds the module test scores to the student's grade.
2. **The Assignment**: Each Arabic language course has a specific assignment. For beginner students, the assignment consists of brief questions. For higher-

(1) https://iou.edu.gm/stream/ma-alsc/

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level students, the assignment is an essay that the student writes, complete with footnotes and comments, Student assignments represent research work that the student answers over a long period, often extending over a month or more, At the end of the given period, the student uploads their assignment to their personal page, and then the teaching assistant manually grades the assignment after it has been checked for plagiarism using plagiarism detection platforms.

3- Midterm Exam, which evaluates the first fifteen lectures. It is divided into two sections. The first section contains a variety of multiple-choice questions, with a set time limit provided by the system to answer these questions. The grades are automatically added to the student's total score. The second section consists of short or medium-length open-ended questions, which are graded by the teaching assistant. The grades for these questions are then added to the multiple-choice questions for the midterm exam.

4- Final Exam, which is the same as the midterm exam, except that the midterm covers only the first fifteen lectures, while the final exam covers all thirty lectures. It is worth noting that the university has centers around the world where exams are conducted, the student goes to the center located in their place of residence to take the exam there.

The distribution of grades is as follows:

No.	Evaluation	Percentage for Each Evaluation
1	Unit Questions	20%
2	Assignment	20%
3	Midterm Exam	30%
4	Final Exam	30%
	Total	100%

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2-3-4 Teaching Methods in the Arabic Department at the University

The university is primarily aimed at native English speakers, and it relies on a combination of two teaching methods for Arabic language instruction: the grammar-translation method and the direct method(1) .

For example, in the undergraduate stage, the students begin with the grammar-translation method, This method undoubtedly attracts many students, as translation greatly eases the difficulties of learning a foreign language, as students' progress to higher levels towards the end of their undergraduate studies, there is a gradual shift away from this method, and the direct method is used, meaning instruction is given entirely in Arabic without the use of a helping language. In the master's stage, English is no longer used at all, and Arabic is relied upon exclusively.

2-3-5 The position of the Arabic Language Department at the International Open University among other virtual universities

in 2018, the International Open University was ranked among the top six universities for distance learning in the Middle East. However, it was removed from this list in June 2020(2) , Generally, the International Open University is considered

(1) The definition of these two methods and the advantages and disadvantages of each are discussed in: Al-Usayli, Abdul Aziz bin Ibrahim, "Methods of Teaching Arabic to Speakers of Other Languages," (no edition, Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University, 2002), 33: 50, 60: 75.

(2) The Best Online Middle Eastern Studies Programs, link: https://successfulstudent.org/best-online-middle-eastern-studies-programs/ last update, 26th March 2024, assessed 13/6/2024 ،International Open University https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Open_University#cite_note-NigerTimesFees-3

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one of the most diverse universities in terms of the nationalities of its students, with the number of students reaching 435,000 in 2018 from 250 countries(1) .

Additionally, the Kenyan newspaper Tuko ranked the International Open University sixth among the top seven accredited universities for distance learning in Africa in 2021(2) .

It is worth noting that the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education published a report in 2023 titled "Benchmark Standards for Open Universities: Guidelines and Best Practices.(3) " The UNESCO Institute mentioned the International Open University several times in this report, dedicating a special section to it on pages 90 to 92. It was also noted that the university had over four hundred thousand students in 2022.

As for the Arabic Language Department at the International Open University, it focuses on promoting the Arabic language among non-native speakers, particularly English speakers. It is noticeable that the fees at the International Open University are relatively low, which explains the large interest from populations in countries where English is an official language in learning Arabic. Examples of such countries include some African nations like Nigeria and Kenya, as well as Asian countries like Pakistan, India, Malaysia, and Indonesia, Generally, most students in the Arabic Language Department at the university come from these countries, with a few students from other nationalities around the world.

Many prestigious institutions and universities have recognized the degrees awarded by the International Open University, for example, an Indonesian student received a

(1) slamic Online University signs agreement with FBC, last update 11/4/2018, Assessed 14/6/2024, Link.https://web.archive.org/web/20190923170413/http://ayvnewspaper.com/index.php/k2-categories/politics/item/5024-islamic-online-university-signs-agreement-with-fbc

(2) Top distance learning universities in Africa to enroll in 2021, last update 28th April 2021, Assessed 13/6/2024 https://www.tuko.co.ke/408497-top-distance-learning-universities-africa-enroll-2021.html

(3) This is a translation of the original document entitled 'Benchmarking for Open Universities: Guidelines and Good Practices.'

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master's degree in Arabic from the university, and this degree was then recognized by the Ministry of Higher Education in Indonesia. Additionally, King Saud University in Saudi Arabia also recognized this degree. As a result, the student completed his doctoral dissertation at King Saud University(1) .

3- RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

- The actual study at the International open university began in 2007.
- The International open university was initially named "Islamic University via/through the Internet" before changing to its current name in 2020.
- The International open university is one of the largest virtual universities offering Arabic language and Islamic studies through distance learning in the Islamic world, with over 400,000 students in 2022.
- The first program accredited by the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Authority in The Gambia was the bachelor's in Arabic studies, which started in 2021.
- Many prestigious academic institutions have recognized the degrees granted by the Arabic Language Department at the International open university.
- The International open university is ranked among the most famous and best universities in terms of distance learning systems in the Middle East.
- The UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education listed the International Open University among the open universities adhering to quality standards in educational technology in its 2023 report.

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(1) https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HcMEWbToslZYxBL4MmDMEoVSKTWRXaTO/view?usp=sharing

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