



Publication:	Arabian Computer Network	Circulation:	60,000
Date:	9 SEP, 2017		
Page Number:	42-43	Section:	Education

/EDUCATION

→ Shadi Saadeh, general manager, ESKADENIA.

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“Our management information system is Cloud-based. So all of our schools can access it, and even parents can access it as well, which is helpful,” explains David Talbert, head of Technology Integration, Dubai British School Jumeirah Park.

“Moving away and having your system stored in the Cloud, means that you rely more on the vendor than your own infrastructure and in terms of providing that extra security. That reduces your overall cost, making you more cost-efficient.”

The head of technology adds that being Cloud connected has enabled the brand to centralise its academic data, while also cutting down on the need for physical servers. At the same time, students are also being taught how to use the system, in particularly accessing the Cloud-based structure of Office 365. Furthermore, the platform is mobile enabled, so both students and teachers can access resources through their preferred mobile device.

The brand itself is also in the middle of implementing iSAMS, a browser-based management information system that oversees the generation and storage of reports.

“All our schools has iSAMS as part of the MIS. This is where we do most of our reporting ... We use iSAMS a lot to collect our data on our students, reporting, and parents use it to access their child supports,” explains Talbert.

“Parents are able to access their child support options on their phone, laptop, or any device. And that is the advantage of the cloud, which is no matter what device you have, you're able to access your information and complete it yourself.”

This accessibility is particularly useful in the case where parents are travelling abroad, but still want to remain informed on their child's academic progress.

From the vendor's side of the fence, ESKADENIA is a recognised name within the IT education market. Since 2008, the company has offered its ESKA Academia solution, an Education Management System ideally suited for either secondary or tertiary academic institutions. To date, ESKADENIA has fostered a portfolio of 22 education institutions that are running ESKA Academia's web-based software products.

“Although educations institutions were a little late in adapting technology in the Middle East, we have rapid growth and technology adoption in the past 10 years. We are witnessing a breakthrough in education technology allowing higher involvement of parents and interactive capabilities with students,” comments Shadi Saadeh, general manager, ESKADENIA.

“In past three years, we see educational institutions are favouring a low CAPEX IT infrastructure, investing in hardware for onsite implementation. Therefore, private cloud implementations are becoming more and more appreciated.”

When pressed on what he sees as being the challenges of Cloud adoption in education, the GM noted that the main challenge lies with moving towards, “the shared cloud infrastructure providing the SaaS subscription.”

As internet connectivity is a key requirement in accessing Cloud-based storage and services, having a fast internet connection is a critical business need, but one that is often expensive. While the protection of data is undoubtedly paramount, the question of data ownership is a lingering issue.

This also implies that both cyber security and backup recovery are two important challenges that need to be addressed, both in protecting sensitive student information and minimising disruption of service.

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SHADI SAADEH

Despite these obstacles however, the GM maintains a positive viewpoint for Cloud in education over the next couple of years.

“We are witnessing a huge technology transformation in educational institutions, an understanding and appreciation of technology tools, as well as a trend towards minimising the CAPEX and day-to-day management of IT routines,” explains Saadeh.

“The Cloud is there already, the tools are all set for this move to take place. All we need is to drive the awareness of the advantages of cloud, while tackling all foreseen challenges to increase trust.

“Students will no longer be required to physically be located inside the school when all distance learning tools and capabilities are offered. Students in rural areas in the Middle East can still get the proper education offered to students around the world while being with family and friends,” he concludes. ■