EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Innovative Education Approach- Connected/Blended Learning for Refugees

April 2019

Introduction

As part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 2018 Global compact on refugees which paved the way forward to ensure an "inclusive and equitable quality education" and to promote "lifelong learning opportunities for all", UNHCR continues to explore innovative approaches to ensure greater access to quality higher education for refugees. In the MENA region, UNHCR and UNESCO co-hosted "The Regional Conference on Higher Education in Crisis Situations" held in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt in 2017 towards achieving the objective of a more accessible education.

In Jordan, several initiatives have been launched recently to find ways to strengthen the Connected Learning approaches to benefit both Jordanians and displaced communities in the Kingdom. Key among them is the Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium (CLCC), co-led by UNHCR and the University of Geneva (InZone), which aims to promote, coordinate, and support the provision of quality higher education in contexts of conflict, crisis and displacement through a blended learning approach that combines face-to-face and online learning. In December 2018, CLCC, together with the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) organized the first "Round-Table for Connected Learning in Jordan". Recommendations of this roundtable helped in drawing seeds for a future road map in the field on connected learning by establishing strong global and national partnerships with key international and national academic institutions.

Specifically, to fulfil the basic requirements for an accessible community-based education, UNHCR is establishing some 10 Community Learning and Innovation Hubs throughout Jordan in order to provide refugee youth with high quality post basic education pathways. The first of these centres was inaugurated in Amman on 27/03/2019, in partnership between UNHCR, Google, Johud and Learning Equality.

What is Connected Learning/ Blended Learning?

Connected Learning is an approach to education in which learners pursue their personal interests with the support of peers, mentors, and caring adults, and in ways that open up opportunities for them. Connected learning puts progressive, experiential, and learner-centered approaches at the center of technology-enhanced learning.

Blended Learning is a brand-new approach which is currently used for technology integration in providing education courses, and it refers to an approach that mixes both traditional face-to-face learning and e-learning.
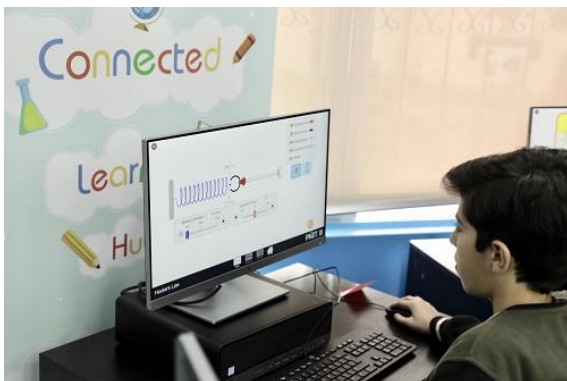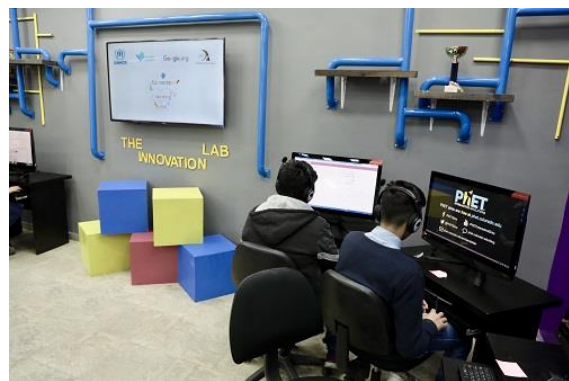
Benefits of Connected / Blended Learning

In addition to flexibility and the reduction of time and cost, there are other benefits of the blended learning (from the students' perspective) according to the small-scale research that was conducted by the University of Jordan, as follows:

- It has the potential to involve different learning styles to enhance the learning experience and the quality of the students' education.
- It is not restricted to a specific place and time.
- Students can study at their own pace and speed.

UNHCR and Connected/ Blended Learning in Jordan

In partnership with UNHCR national partner "JOHUD", a blended learning program was launched to offer secondary and tertiary online courses through an educational platform supported by face-to-face instructions through facilitators in three community centers in Jordan (Amman, Irbid, and Mafraq).

A Connected Learning Hub in Jordan ©UNHCR / Mohammad Hawari

Consultations with Persons of Concern (POCs)

In order to examine the attitudes and perceptions of PoCs to blended/ connected learning, UNHCR has conducted its own small-scale consultations with beneficiaries.

Methodology

Ten Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted in July and November2018. Seven FGDs were conducted in July with 275 refugees from different age groups who have never been enrolled in any Connected Learning approach, while some of them have experience with online courses. The FGDs were conducted in 7 different locations in Jordan: AlKarak, Sahab, Nuzha, Madaba, Salt, Zarqa, and Azraq. The other three FGDs were conducted in November with 26 participants who were enrolled in CL program(s). The majority of the participants were refugees (85%) along with Jordanian youth. The 3 FGDs were conducted in 3 different locations: Mafraq, Amman, and Irbid. In all FGDs, a

questionnaire was designed to reflect the participants' experience with online courses and CL. The table below presents the participants' different responses.

-	Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in July 2018	Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in November 2018
Awareness of "connected learning" approach	49%	54%
Defining the CL approach	"Learning, studying, or researching a subject and gaining new knowledge and skills using the internet".	"learning through the internet and taking online courses using electronic devices"
The percentage of those who completed online courses	25%	77%
The percentage of those who found the courses helpful	92%	85%
Preferred language of instruction	Arabic (58%)	English (77%)
Courses of interest	English language courses, Math, and Arabic	English language courses, computer science, and foreign languages

Refugee and Jordanian Youth Reflection Regarding Certificate Accreditation
35% of November FGDs' participants believe that the certificates they obtained after completing the on-line courses are accredited as they are issued by international institutions, 30% believe that the degrees are not recognized, and 35% do not know as they have not tried to use any certificate to pursue their education or to apply for a job. E-learning is valuable for those who missed out on years of education or who experience interruptions in their formal education. Access to online learning can bridge the gap in preparing the learners for post basic education.

Challenges
Some of the obstacles that learners face while studying online/through a CL approach are: intermittent internet connection, high English level needed, lacking of PCs, lack of accreditation for the soft-copy certificates, difficulty of content, and limited course offerings.

Recommendations for the Way Forward
1. Always offer English language and computer skills as preparatory on-line modules as these two skills are mandatory in most online courses.

2. Combine face to face coaching by instructors as well as peer interaction for it proved achieving successful connected learning results.

3. Provide learners' original stamped hard-copy certificates once they complete the on-line courses.

4. Recognize and accredit Certificates will help in terms of job searching or when pursue education in colleges and universities inside and outside Jordan.

5. Offer courses in different and various majors and aspects (academic and non-academic courses), and not to be limited to particular majors.

6. Offer courses that are related to different life skills (communication and interpersonal skills, critical thinking, decision making and problem solving, in addition to courses that show the learners how to engage in a new community).

7. Counselling provision before the students' enrolment in on-line courses to explain clearly the purpose of the courses, recognition and accreditation aspects for pursuing education and applying for jobs and what future opportunities it will provide.

8. Offering online courses that consist of intermediate and advanced level.

Conclusion

Taking into consideration the obstacles and the challenges that refugees encounter in e-learning, UNHCR seeks to find sustainable solutions for various problems, such as offering offline educational platforms , and collaborating with leading satellite operators to provide internet access solutions for urban and rural areas where CL programs will be implemented. As observed in FGDs, Blended/Connected learning is making a positive impact on the learners' educational pathway and their future life prospects, while providing flexibility and accessibility. Also, Blended/Connected learning can open employment opportunities for refugees to work as facilitators in various CL programs, by developing and utilizing their educational capacities and skills. Greater demand and interest in blended learning opportunities by the refugee community in Jordan is anticipated.

Contacts
- Francesco Bert, Senior External Relations Officer: bert@unhcr.org
- Zeina Jadaan, Associate Protection Officer: jadaan@unhcr.org

For more information, please visit UNHCR Data Portal.