

FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF ONLINE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: KUWAIT CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Instructors' ability to manage e-learning during Covid-19 pandemic is vital to ensuring its effective implementation, but the rapid change from traditional to online methods, with very little opportunity for preparation or training, has undermined the confidence of some instructors. This research evaluates instructors' perceptions of e-learning in the College of Business Studies (CBS) in Kuwait, shedding light on factors including learning competency, motivations, commitment to, and perception of online learning, to identify obstacles to the use of technology in this area to help instructor to have an active role in his career. Accordingly, a qualitative and quantitative method was carried out in CBS in Kuwait. First, a focus group session was conducted for deeper investigation, then the result of the focus group helped in shaping out a survey questionnaire collected from 309 college instructors to reveal both the challenges and the opportunities presented by online learning. The results indicated that instructors had a positive experience of the online virtual learning however, barriers such as poor helpdesks, lack of training, less management motivations, and limited electronic educational materials were recorded.

Keywords: Online learning, e-learning, faculty members, Instructors, Evaluation.

1. Introduction

The purpose of human resource management (HRM) operations is to allow organizations to attain their goals by introducing initiatives and offering support and guidance on issues related to those working for the organization (Tom 2021). Human resource management (HRM) carries out multiple activities, both supporting and proactive, whose aim is to enable employees and organizations to meet their goals (Alainati S. , 2021). In developing countries, including Kuwait, HRM practices are crucial in determining how well organizations face crises such as the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, during which educational institutions at all levels have had to shift to e-learning, also known as "distance" and "virtual" learning (Al-Hunaiyyan, Al-Hajri, & Bimba, 2021). This is a crucial issue for developing countries when faced with an issue like COVID-19 pandemic (Gigauri, 2020). Educational establishments had to move all their teaching online, forcing instructors to depend on e-learning, especially in developing countries such as Kuwait. This shift to e-learning due to the pandemic introduced a new way of acquiring technical skills. Even though e-learning was the solution of continuing education, not everyone was ready for the new shift. However, the role of instructors is vital toward successful implementation of online and virtual learning (Yengin, et al. 2010). Instructors had no chance to prepare for this change, their ability to teach their subject in the classroom may not be so satisfied with their technical abilities. With these difficulties, e-learning remains beneficial not

only for the education sector but also for all aspects worldwide with the customized learning experience (O'Doherty, et al. 2018). Universities and colleges are adapting such technologies to develop quality education and accommodate user groups to be involved in the teaching and learning processes in their educational institutions. These technologies can be merged within the classrooms, based on blended learning models (Al-Sharhan, Al-Hunaiyan, & Gueaieb, 2006), or be used to provide virtual access to new teaching and learning environments (Rudestam and Schoenholtz read 2010).

The role of the educator within learning has been much debated, but it is arguably gaining in importance. Hence, it can be argued that intensive training is required for instructors, in particular, so that they are competent to deal with new modes of delivery with the various learning management systems now adays (Al-Sharhan S. , Al-Hunaiyyan, Alhajri, & Al-Huwail, 2020; Al-Hunaiyyan, Al-Sharhan, & Al-Hajri, 2020). That said, it is also important to address other issues which will enable all actors to adapt efficiently to the new environment, and this concern less the educator's role than concepts and work processes. Instructors will then make their own decisions as to whether, or how (e.g., e-learning only or blended), they will incorporate the new technology into their teaching by asking themselves questions including how best a given course can be shifted online to ensure continued student engagement and which tools and technologies (virtual/blended) they can choose to best leverage the new technology.

This study was conducted to understand the perceptions of online learning among CBS instructors. Specifically, this paper evaluates how instructors in the higher education sector used e-learning in the College of Business Studies (CBS) in Kuwait, shedding light on factors including learning competency, motivations, commitment to, and perception of learning and teaching processes, to identify obstacles to the use of technology in this area. The specific research site is the College of Business Studies (CBS) in Kuwait and the subjects are the instructors working there, whose benefits, motivational factors, and processes are examined. Thus, this study will look closely at obstacles, whether academic, technical, or organizational, faced by the instructors using and attempting to further their knowledge of working in the new e-learning environment at the CBS (Al-Sharhan, Al-Hunaiyyan, & Al-Sharrah, 2010; Alainati s. , 2021; Al-Hunaiyyan, Alhajri, Alzayed, & Alraqqas, 2016). It is therefore anticipated that the research will be significant by examining perceptions, motivations, barriers, and competencies of CBS instructors regarding e-learning.

This article is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature, section 3 explains the methodology. The results and a discussion are presented in section 4, while section 5 draws the conclusion

2. Literature Review

In the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, governments around the world introduced restrictions on how many people could meet in public spaces. Under these circumstances, the sector globally was obliged to seek out new modes of delivering and receiving education, among which was the creation of mandatory online learning so academic courses underway at the time the restrictions were imposed could be completed (Lau, Yang and Rudrani 2020). This sudden transition to distance learning impacted instructors in practically all countries. Instructors who had not questioned their competence to teach the required skills and knowledge found themselves less confident when obliged to use the technologies involved in the online delivery (Alainati S. , 2021). The ensuing debate about the possible positive or negative impact this switch in delivery mode will have on students' learning has consulted instructors, learners,

and other experts in the field completed (Lau, Yang and Rudrani 2020). One challenge faced by institutions, which provoked some reluctance to embrace the new technological requirements, was to distill the curricula designed for face-to-face tuition into something which could be delivered by the new format of e-learning (Gherhes, Simon, & Para, 2021). Given Kuwait's position as a developing nation, pre-pandemic little use was made of information and communication technology (ICT) within the education sector. Online learning, where present at all, was at a primary stage, and the vast majority of lessons were delivered face-to-face in a traditional classroom setting (Al-Hunaiyyan, Alhajri, & Al-Sharhan, 2018; Al-Hunaiyyan, Alhajri, Al-Sharhan, & Al-Ghannam, 2021). Although a variety of initiatives had attempted to introduce and support online learning in public education institutions, there had been little take-up among users. Indeed, although Kuwait is a wealthy nation, it appeared that its low capacity and poor rate of innovation had caused it to fall behind other states in this regard (AlKharang 2014). Among the obstacles to greater take-up of e-learning in the Kuwaiti public educational sector were not only a lack of training and infrastructure, but the fact that very few digital educational materials have yet been made available in Arabic. One of the most difficult barriers to properly adopting online learning in the Arab region is instructors' technical knowledge (Alainati, Alshawi, & Al-Karaghoul, 2009; Alainati S. , 2015).

It has long been known among HRM specialists that placing employees in new or uncertain situations causes them to become stressed (Stahl 2005). Reactions to this stress vary according to workers' disposition and coping mechanisms (Shaffer 2012, Stahl 2005). Many advantages to be online education have been identified, including accessibility, flexibility in terms of scheduling, adaptability to a variety of learning styles, range of tools, and ease of monitoring and recording instruction activities (AlKharang 2014). Although many instructors are aware of these potential advantages and their own important role in realizing them, they are equally aware of the magnitude of the challenge facing them to equip their learners with the standard of IT literacy which 21st-century living demands (Al-Hunaiyyan, Al-Sharhan and Al-Sharrah 2012). Not only must teachers deliver educational content, but they must also coordinate work processes in this new environment as well as facilitating students' access to the technology required for learning (Bucea-Manea-Țoniș, et al., 2020). Moreover, while using unfamiliar technologies and acquiring the skills required to use them, they must also deal with the stress engendered by the uncertainty inherent in the situation and their own possible fear of being inadequate to carry out their work properly (Mohammadyari and Singh 2015).

A considerable body of research has emerged on the role of instructors in e-learning. The model developed by (Yengin, Karahoca, Karahoca, & Yucel, 2010) lays out steps which instructors can follow to create online learning content that will effectively engage learners. It also offers teachers access to free-for-use tools that can be used to produce interactive learning. Meanwhile, (Almas & Machumu, 2021) carried out quantitative and qualitative research to explore the perspectives, motivations, and e-learning competence of instructors at Mzumbe University, Tanzania. A survey questionnaire was administered to 42 participants, with results indicating a generally positive perspective on the use of e-learning systems and suggesting that such systems are principally used to generate teaching notes, assessments and feedback, and course outlines, as well as for the online grading of learners' work. Moreover, the authors indicate that motivations behind teachers' willingness to engage with e-learning systems include personal beliefs in the potential of such systems to enhance learning, personal interest, course type, and ease of use. Finally, the authors concluded from the survey that the level of instructors' competence in terms of design and implementation of e-based tuition was average.

The authors (Zareie & Navimipour, 2016) investigated the relationship between e-learning systems and employee commitment and found the latter was significantly positively impacted

by four variables: learner’s satisfaction, 24/7 access to training materials, personalized learning, and efficiency. Similarly, (Liu, Zhao, & Su, 2022) examined perceptions among instructors of students’ online learning outcomes and whether such outcomes could be predicted by teachers’ resilience and competence in online delivery. According to their results, before teachers start online delivery of lessons, they should enhance both their resilience and their teaching competence through interventions which address both these elements and instructors’ well-being. The authors also suggest that instructors of different ages should be differently trained to enhance their future competence and resilience. The authors (Batalla-Busquets & Pacheco-Bernal, 2013) stressed that instructors should be trained before they embark on designing and delivering online courses.

3. Methodology

The research methodology is described in this section, which includes research sample and research instruments. This study used quantitative and qualitative approaches. A focus group was organized before administering the online questionnaire to the entire study population.

3.1 Research Sample

This study included 309 participants (187 male and 122 female instructors) from the College of Business Studies, The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) in Kuwait. Table 1 presents the demographic data and sample distribution of the study population (gender, IT competency, and teaching experience).

Table 1: Sample distribution according to the demographic variables

	<i>Variables</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent %</i>
Gender	Male	187	60.5
	Female	122	39.5
IT Competency	Little	15	4.9
	Average	99	32.0
	High	195	63.1
Teaching Experience	Less than 10 years	57	18.4
	10 years to 20 years	89	28.8
	More than 20 years	163	52.8

3.2 Research Instruments

This research used quantitative and qualitative approaches in means of a survey and focus group. The items in the questionnaire were modified to reflect the specific nature of CBS instructors. A focus group session was organized in a meeting room in the college of business studies (CBS), in which 15 instructors of CB piloted the adapted questionnaire. The objective was to find any ambiguity in the statements and alter them accordingly. The final version of the questionnaire was shaped by findings from the focus group and the pilot study. During the focus group the administrator ask the participants to give their opinions, notes, ideas about their experiences, including their recommendations. The final version of the questionnaire used in this study consists of two parts. The questionnaire was specifically designed for this research with the aim of eliciting opinions from participants and examining both problems and opportunities in CBS’ current e-learning processes. Part 1 collects participants’ demographic data, including gender, professional experience, and IT competency, Part 2 investigates their perceptions of the online learning at the college, and addresses obstacles and barriers found while implementing e-learning during the pandemic. Answers use a 5-point Likert-type scale,

where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. A pilot study was carried out on all research instruments to ensure the questionnaire meets its intended aims, assess the feasibility of the survey, and verify initial results.

The data collected from these questionnaires were statistically analyzed using SPSS to shed further light on practices, challenges, and benefits, after which recommendations and suggestions for administrative staff at CBS to help in the successful development of both educational and administrative processes and guide the development team in terms of improving e-learning systems and platforms. Several statistical methods were used, including frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation (SD). In addition, SPSS was used to calculate the correlation coefficients. The correlations between the individual dimensions and the overall score were high ($p < 0.01$) and ranged from 0.805 to 0.902, which indicates high internal reliability and construction integrity. Similarly, the reliability of the questionnaire has been calculated through finding Cronbach's alpha by using SPSS. The dimensions of the questionnaire have a high degree of reliability, where the co-efficient degrees range between (0.79-0.92). The total score of Cronbach's Alpha is (0.94). So, the questionnaire can be generalized to the basic study sample, and the results can be trusted.

4. Results and Discussions

Table 2 shows the results obtained from the preliminary analysis to reflect instructors' perceptions of online learning. Instructors' responses were statistically analyzed using frequency, mean, and standard deviation (SD). Among the fifteen items presented in Table 2, each item's mean value is higher than 3.0, which indicates that instructors have positive perceptions about online and virtual learning at CBS. Item 9 got the first rank with a mean value of 4.61, which demonstrates that instructors agree that teaching online has reduced the use of papers and photocopying. Also, item 15, "I prefer teaching in the classroom while getting the benefit of e-learning platforms and tools" got the second rank with mean value 4.50. one participant stated that the combination of physical education and taking advantage of the features of online learning platforms. Another stated that "e-learning platforms serve as an aid to physical classroom education and not a substitute for it." Another said, "I see that blended learning helps to achieve the goals of modern education reducing the use of paper and photocopying machines."

Item 14 "Students cheat to a large extent through online learning" comes third with a mean value of 4.40. A faculty member stated that "teaching online is exciting, however, many students of CBS are not prepared for online learning, and cheating spreads easily in exams using MS-Teams platform and the grades do not reflect the level of students". He added "I agree to use the online learning platforms as a teaching tool but refuse to use it to conduct exams". There is a widespread perception in the area that online learning encourages misconduct and makes cheating easier. However, with new technology, (Meilleur 2018) listed some tools and techniques that discourage cheating in online examinations. Among the tools are video surveillance, timed quizzes, random questions, biometrics, and other authentication tools. Item 1 "E-learning tools facilitate managing and correcting exams and tests" comes in fourth with a mean value of 4.30. An instructor stated that the platform is excellent for exams, excellent for submitting assignments online, and s excellent as a means of communication between the professors and students. Another stated that "With the online education experience, we must renew the concept of returning to normal life and attendance education. We must benefit from this experience by integrating technology into the physical learning in the classroom through blended learning. With this, we can introduce digital

transformation into the classroom and prepare students for a future that requires to deal with computers and various applications”.

Table 2: Instructors’ Perceptions of Online Learning (Frequency)

NO	Item	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	SD	Rank
1	E-learning tools facilitate managing and correcting exams and tests	164	103	21	12	9	4.30	0.965	4
2	Teaching through the e-learning platforms is exciting	74	110	53	49	23	3.53	1.223	10
3	e-learning platform motivates the students to learn	40	80	72	80	37	3.02	1.233	15
4	e-learning platform has increased the quality of teaching practices	68	89	59	69	24	3.35	1.259	13
5	e-learning platform helped increase the interaction between instructors and students	54	79	63	69	44	3.10	1.321	14
6	Teaching through e-learning platform saves my time and effort	121	121	32	25	10	4.03	1.055	5
7	Educational electronic materials are available for my courses	93	116	61	33	6	3.83	1.037	8
8	Students get high grades through e-learning	108	120	55	25	1	4.00	0.940	6
9	Teaching online has reduced the use of photocopying	219	64	23	2	1	4.61	0.682	1
10	E-learning help students to be well prepared for the labor market	66	92	69	61	21	3.39	1.214	12
11	I was well trained to use the e-learning platform	86	138	55	28	2	3.90	0.933	7
12	I see a need to provide incentives for instructors who use e-learning platforms	86	80	69	42	32	3.47	1.306	11
13	Technical support is available to solve my problems with the e-learning	47	135	84	32	11	3.57	0.987	9

14	Students cheat to a large extent through online learning	185	79	28	17	0	4.40	0.868	3
15	I prefer teaching in the classroom while getting the benefit of e-learning platforms and tools	200	76	25	5	3	4.50	0.792	2

Question number 11, “I was well trained to use the e-learning platform”, ranked 7 with a mean value of 3.90. One comment from an instructor stated that if we want to implement e-learning in our educational institutions, there must be a holistic view to benefit from all the electronic services available in the virtual learning platforms and their use should not be limited to teaching only.

The lowest mean value is in item 3 with an average mean value of 3.02, this implies that the instructors moderately believe that online learning motivate the students to learn. The fifth element, “e-learning platform helped increase the interaction between instructors and students,” ranked 14, with a mean value of 3.10. One comments from an instructor “E-learning loses the sense of interaction between the instructors and the students and loses the sense of body language between them”. However, (Azlim, Husain, Hussin, & Zulisman, 2014) stated that students and instructors have the flexibility to collaborate through LMS, allowing better collaboration and interaction (Emelyanova & Voronina, 2014). Similarly, item 4 “e-learning platform has increased the quality of teaching practices” ranked 13 with (mean=3.35), this is supported by (Daniels, Jacobsen, Varnhagen, & Friesen, 2013), who stated that Online learning itself is not the optimal solution for student engagement in teaching and learning stressing that instructors play an important part in inspiring learners to take advantage the features to increase the quality of online learning practices. Item 10 “E-learning help students to be well prepared for the labor market” ranked twelve with a mean value of 3.39. Question number 12 “I see a need to provide incentives for instructors who use e-learning platforms” ranked 11 with a mean value of 3.47. As for motivation, one suggested “I suggest honoring the professors who excelled in their performance and teaching through e-learning platforms”. Also, motivation was identified as a critical factor in achieving a successful online learning environment (Hartnett 2016). Question 3 reflects respondents' opinions, which imply that instructors do not feel confident that their institutions encourage or motivate the use of e-learning. Item 10 “Teaching through the e-learning platforms is exciting” ranked ten. Regarding technical support, item 13 “Technical support is available to solve my problems with the e-learning platform” rank 9 with a mean value of 3.57. The study of (Alenezi, 2018) concluded that preparing instructors for online teaching is a real challenge. Similarly, (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013) claimed that the significant challenges of LMSs in Saudi Arabian institutions are a lack of or insufficient training and support, and infrastructure weakness in the institutions, and a lack of proper technical support.

One comments from an instructor “The use of e-learning platforms reduces the effort of Instructors and saves money for the institution.” While another said “I recommend the blended learning in which there is online education (recorded and live) while at the institute for exams and quizzes. Distance learning is a teaching method that has been applied for decades and has become easier with modern education methods. In addition: It is important to teach male and female students study skills and time management to avoid problems with distance education.” The analysis shows that instructors and students need to improve their knowledge and skills to be competent in the use of e-learning tools and applications. The study

of (Kayaoğlu and Dağ Akbaş 2016) suggests that once the students are self-directed, motivated, and confident, by instructors. That is why teaching staff needs to be trained to design and deliver online courses, especially if the Kuwaiti educational institutions moving into the blended learning.

As for barriers of online learning used in CBS, one comment “Our institution did not evaluate the e-learning experience in a neutral manner. Unfortunately, the experience and application of e-learning was bad and does not reflect the actual educational attainment of students”. Another stated “Students do not actually attend the online lecture, I mean fake attendance, and sometimes having another person take the test online instead of the student while getting high grades. The e-learning is not suitable for our students.”

5. Conclusion and Future Directions

Human resource management (HRM) practices are crucial in determining how well organizations face crises such as the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, during which educational institutions at all levels have had to shift to e-learning. Numerous educational institutions use online education to foster a collaborative learning environment. Before investing in systems, institutions should determine their needs and comprehend the functionality and benefits of the systems. This research seeks to investigate existing practices, opinions, and obstacles that administration and academicians might use to contribute to improved learning practices and academic accomplishment. Using qualitative and quantitative methodologies, a focus group and questionnaire were administered to 309 faculty members from the College of Business studies (CBS). Findings obtained from the questionnaire and the focus group indicated that instructors were comfortable and had positive perceptions about online learning. The study also pointed to some challenges and barriers overcoming the proper implementation of online learning platforms such as poor helpdesks, lack of training, less management motivations, and limited electronic educational materials were recorded. These should be studied to ensure that the college will adopt a system to improve the learning process and academic performance. This study highlighted certain small challenges that can hinder the adoption of e-learning, such as student interaction with the system, the complexity of online learning interfaces, and instructors' and students' preparation. In addition, cultural and social factors play a crucial influence in the acceptance and adoption of online learning. Over time, instructors who had been averse to adopting technology in the classroom will become more receptive to their newest teaching approaches. Considering this, the institution should assist in training and motivating its faculty to promote the use of online instruction to succeed in their courses.

As for future study, I suggest increasing the sample of the study which includes instructors from various colleges in Kuwait to generalize the results.

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