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## Faculty Perceptions of E-Learning: Case Study

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### **Abstract:**

Today, e-learning plays crucial part of the educational delivery process aimed at empowering students and facilitating the learning process. In its simplest form, e-learning blend employs simple and innovative technologies via digital and online media, whereby the learning environment can be accessible anywhere and anytime, allowing learners, who are partially or fully active, to acquire knowledge at their own pace. E-learning scheme has significantly impacted the relationship between students and the academic practitioners. Likewise, there is a need to explore the faculty attitudes toward the usefulness of e-learning, as this would allow proposing the e-learning platform that is most appropriate for higher education institutions in Bahrain. The aim of the present study is to understand the faculty perceptions toward the existing e-learning platform and examine the impact of e-learning on conventional teaching from the perspectives of students and faculty. The findings yielded by this study can contribute to analytically understanding the strengths and weaknesses of e-learning at the university level in Bahrain and assist with proposing a new in-class e-learning platform that permits blending all teaching methods.

**Keywords:** e-learning, Faculty and perceptions, Bahrain, Perception

### **1. Introduction**

E-learning is the utilization of information communication technologies (ICT) through innovative applications in the service of learning or learner support to enhance the learning capabilities through utilization of Internet (Aparicio *et al.*, 2016). Generally speaking, e-learning has been viewed as the process of transforming the educational delivery from the traditional modes of learning toward those requiring content delivery via information technology. This is achieved by implementing creative and interactive models utilizing technological platforms aimed at sustaining the learning process. Upon reviewing the literature related to the educational process, one can observe that educational process has undergone many changes since the last century, starting from the printing of learning materials, hardcopy handouts to be given to students as homework, to developing educational recorded media, to creating educational television programs, to recent innovative interactive web-based learning tools supported by Smartphone e-learning student-centric applications. Obviously, technological advancement has contributed significantly to this evolution of the teaching paradigm, resulting in new curriculum design and teaching strategies, and leading to the creation of new teaching delivery platforms aimed at efficient and effective learning outcomes and establishing strong linkage between students and teachers within the learning equation. However, while the new e-learning paradigm has transformed learning itself, it has also resulted in many challenges for the stakeholders, prompting them to either embrace or dismiss the e-learning evolution. Dismissing or ignoring the adoption e-learning would put them at disadvantage compared to their more technologically literate peers. E-learning applications and platforms are being disseminated across different levels of educational framework, from the early learning stage to the higher educational levels. Following an investigation of the relationship between the e-learning development and the higher education, Laurillard (2004) concluded that e-learning can support students through capabilities, such as Internet access, allowing access to digital version of the teaching material irrespective of the physical devices utilized. It also facilitates communication and collaboration with other learners as well as the faculty, and provides means for interactive simulation and data mining capabilities to distance learners. Integrating and encompassing wide range of innovative technologies, including online embedded webcam conference environment, is another benefit of e-learning.

However, the issue of acceptance and adoptability of the e-learning model has been the focus of the educational institutions, especially those at the higher educational level. Likewise, there is a need to explore the faculty attitudes toward the usefulness of e-learning at the institutions of higher learning. Therefore, the first aim of this study is to understand the faculty perceptions toward the existing e-learning platform and examine the impact of e-learning on conventional teaching from the perspectives of students and faculty.

## 2. Literature Review

Recent technological advancements in information communication technology (ICT) have facilitated the diffusion of the practical dimension of e-learning globally to allow both teachers and students access to educational curriculum, as well as essential and supported teaching materials within internal and external academic environment (Gamdi *et al.*, 2016).

Ginns and Robert (2007) studied the quality of blended learning, incorporating online and face-to-face teaching and learning methods, by examining student perceptions of the e-learning environment. This study was conducted taking semi-exploratory approach, whereby information yielded by the participants was subjected to descriptive and factor analyses. The study sample comprised of 127 3rd and 4th year students from a metropolitan university in Australia, most of whom were females and were 23 years old on average. The study findings indicated that student-focused teaching methods could be blended with online teaching, resource, workload and students interaction. The authors further reported a positive relationship between the students' perceptions and high grade achievement, thus suggesting that e-learning is contributing to the quality of student learning in higher education.

Kamsin (2005) conducted a study attempting to answer the question "Is e-learning the solution and substitute for conventional learning?" In this study, the benefits of e-learning were outlined as convenience and flexibility in offering interactive educational material to a broader spectrum of learners beyond the conventional environments in a group or personalized participation and engagement methods evolving around the cyberspace technology. Kamsin (2005) highlighted the view of others that conventional learning is the best approach to maintaining a learning process, and is thus superior to other methods.

When it comes to comparing the efficiency of conventional learning to distance learning, the views are justified accordingly:

Some professors and researchers believe that face-to-face instruction able to convey the meaning of the lecturer than using distance learning. Conventional learning also gives more chance to students to meet their lecturer and discuss with them directly. Distance learning through Internet widens the gap between lecturers and students and this may lead to message being interpreted wrongly by students. Kamsin (2004, pp. 79-80)

However, e-learning also faces some resistance, typically associated with the lack of basic technical skills, reluctance to use computer technology, insufficient training, customer support, development of effective curriculum mapping to e-learning delivery content platform, not to mention that many universities initiate e-learning experiences without proper planning and efficient training to the beneficiaries (Peter Cheese, 2003). This resistance could be the reason behind low adoption of e-learning at many universities.

Some studies suggest that, in order to make e-learning successful, universities need to offer training on e-learning to the students as well as facilities on regular interval and link it to the student and faculty's academic passport. The issue of training has been examined by different researchers, most of whom emphasize the relationship between usability rate and e-learning adoption (Muñoz Carril *et al.*, 2013). However, Rosalía *et al.* (2016) noted a gender difference in the level of faculty's e-learning knowledge. In their study, Gamdi *et al.* (2016) aimed to measure the barriers towards e-learning by faculty members in higher academic institutions. The authors concurred with the findings reported by Rosalía *et al.* (2016).

The outcome of Kamsin's (2004) study, as expected, confirms that e-learning has many benefits that conventional learning cannot offer. However, they complement each other, since problems existing in the conventional mode will be solved by the e-learning, and generally e-learning can contribute to spreading the expert knowledge to a wider spectrum of the society due to its delivery platform and mobility. However, it is important to integrate different technologies such as multimedia tools to enhance the efficiency and usability of e-learning. In sum, e-learning cannot be a substitute for the conventional learning model.

## 3. Methodology

To achieve the first objective, which is to measure the faculty perception toward the existing e-learning platform, a questionnaire was developed. This data collection instrument was evaluated by a group of three peer reviewers who provided suggestions and checked the content validity. The final version of the questionnaire constituted of sections pertaining to faculty background and demographic profile, received training assessment, faculty perceptions toward the e-learning, adoptability of e-learning, and type of e-materials used. The study participants were recruited from the academic institutions and were selected via convenience sampling. The sample consisted of 50 faculty members of both genders and aimed to be representative of the target population, which is all faculty members. Of the 50 questionnaires distributed to the faculty, 38 were completed. These 38 questionnaires were subjected to descriptive data analysis, which was performed on each variable to understand the faculty attitudes toward e-learning.

## 4. Results

Out of 50 distributed questionnaires, only 38 valid questionnaire were received, corresponding to 76% response rate. Descriptive analysis was performed on these 38 valid questionnaires and the results are presented below.

In terms of their demographic characteristics, majority of the respondents were Bahrain nationals (47%) and were female (65%). Their age group is reflective of the target population, with 8% of the faculty aged below 30, 30% in the 31–40 as well as 41–50 age range, and 32% aged above 50.

In addition, the majority (90%) of the respondents received e-learning training workshop at least twice within one year. The main expectation from training was learning new teaching methods, followed by learning how to prepare e-learning material, and becoming familiar with e-learning platforms.

When the participants were asked to what extent they are interested in e-learning, 68% of the group showed high interest, while the remaining 32% showed no interest.

About two thirds (60%) of the participants reported using e-learning for their teaching courses. The majority reported producing e-materials supporting their lectures, such as PowerPoint presentations, while some also utilize multimedia materials such as videos, and audio materials.

In this study, the faculty had the opportunity to express their opinion of e-learning. The responses provided focused on two major topics. Majority (81%) of the faculty indicated that they prepare all the e-learning tools they use. Only few (11%) indicated that they do not see any relevance of e-learning materials for the subject they teach.

To develop an effective training strategy, the questionnaire included an item aimed at measuring the faculty's training priorities. Majority of the respondents (50%) stated that how to use e-learning would be their preferred training course topic, followed by learning how to design an e-learning course.

When it comes to challenges, only 5% of the participants expressed having difficulties in the use e-course because they do not know how to use it, or obtain guidance and support to overcome their difficulties.

The participants identify their choice to use of e-course by giving the importance to only achieved objectives (57%), while of the contrary only quarter of the respondents (25%) chosen use of e-course for all topics. Table 1 show the summary of this study major finding.

In summary, the findings yielded by analyzing the questionnaire responses revealed that the majority of the faculty have interest in obtaining more e-learning training, whereby their most important expectation of e-learning is to facilitate learning new teaching methods. It is important to highlight that majority of the faculty are using e-learning, such as PowerPoint presentations, within their teaching courses. However, some faculty utilize multimedia, such as video or audio, as a part of the e-learning.

Number of Valid Participants	38 faculty (76% response rate) Majority of the sample was female (65%)
Nationality	Bahrain (47%) and Non-Bahrain (53%)
Participants Age Group	Less than 30 years (8%) 31 to 40 years (30%) 41 to 50 years (30%) Above 50 years (32%)
Respondents received e-learning training at least twice within one year.	90%
<b>Faculty Expectations:</b>	Learning new teaching methods Learning how to prepare e-learning materials Becoming familiar with e-learning platforms
Faculty interested in e-learning	High interest (68%) No interest (32%)
Top usage of e-course materials	Participants report using e-learning for their teaching courses. Producing e-materials supporting their lectures, such as PowerPoint presentations. Adding multimedia material such as videos and audio materials.
Faculty attitudes toward e-learning	Majority (81%) of the faculty indicated that they prepare the e-learning materials they use in class. Only few (11%) indicated that they do not see any relevance of e-learning material to the subject they teach. Majority of the respondents (50%) stated that how to use e-learning would be their preferred training course topic, followed by learning how to design e-learning materials Only 5% of the participants expressed having difficulties in the use of e-courses.

*Table 1: Summary of the key findings*

## 5. Conclusion

The findings of this study can lead us to conclude that faculty at the higher education institutions in Bahrain have a positive attitude towards the implementation of e-learning in their teaching. This favorable attitude stems from their understanding and appreciation of the benefits of e-learning to their class and particularly their students. However, based on the study findings, it is obvious that e-learning cannot presently substitute the conventional learning methods. In addition, faculty do recognize the importance of integrating e-learning in the course they teach. Furthermore, this study emphasizes the importance of training as the driving force for efficient and effective e-learning implementation model in any academic institute. Finally, there is a need to conduct further research within this domain.

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