


PERCEPTIONS OF ONLINE LEARNING AMONG INSTRUCTORS: HOW TO MAXIMIZE INSTRUCTORS' COMPETENCIES IN VIRTUAL AND BLENDED LEARNING

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history:</p> <p>Received 01 August 2023</p> <p>Accepted 02 November 2023</p>	<p>Purpose: This study aims to evaluate instructors' perceptions of e-learning at the Public Authority For Applied Education and Training (PAAET) in Kuwait. It sheds light on the effectiveness of Ms-Teams as a learning management tool used by instructors and students. The outcome of the study will help to introduce guidelines for enhancing the role of instructors in virtual and blended learning.</p>
<p>Keywords:</p> <p>Perceptions of Online Learning; Instructors; Competencies; e-Learning; Human Resource Management.</p>	<p>Theoretical framework: Information technology will change education if used properly by skilled teachers. Technology's rapid adoption and investment have changed education, and instructors are crucial to 21st-century learning standards and methods. Because AI, advanced technology, and automation will rule the future, the next generation of workers must be tech-savvy. This study will identify instructors' digital skills and provide recommendations and a road map to support advanced technological tools and new innovative learning strategies in human resource management.</p>
	<p>Design/Methodology/Approach: The research used both qualitative and quantitative methods. A focus group session was conducted to investigate further, and the results of the session helped shape a survey questionnaire that was distributed to 161 instructors at PAAET. The survey aimed to identify the challenges and opportunities presented by online learning.</p> <p>Findings: Instructors have a positive view of online learning and Ms Teams as a learning management. The study also found some obstacles to online learning platform implementation. These issues include poor helpdesk support, training, management motivation, and electronic educational resources. These obstacles must be overcome for PAAET to adopt a learning system that improves academic performance. No significant gender differences in instructors' perceptions are found.</p> <p>Originality/Value: This study should help education policymakers be more brave when investing in IT and human resources "Instructors" to create a better and more competitive teaching and learning environment. This study proposes an HRM-based framework to improve digital instructors and the educational process.</p> <p>Doi: https://doi.org/10.26668/businessreview/2023.v8i11.3924</p>

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PERCEPÇÕES DE APRENDIZAGEM ONLINE ENTRE INSTRUTORES: COMO MAXIMIZAR AS COMPETÊNCIAS DOS INSTRUTORES NA APRENDIZAGEM VIRTUAL E MISTURADA

RESUMO

Objetivo: Este estudo tem como objetivo avaliar as percepções dos instrutores sobre e-learning na Autoridade Pública de Educação e Treinamento Aplicados (PAAET) no Kuwait. Ele esclarece a eficácia do Ms-Teams como ferramenta de gerenciamento de aprendizagem usada por instrutores e alunos. O resultado do estudo ajudará a introduzir diretrizes para melhorar o papel dos instrutores na aprendizagem virtual e combinada.

Enquadramento teórico: A tecnologia da informação mudará a educação se for utilizada adequadamente por professores qualificados. A rápida adoção e investimento da tecnologia mudaram a educação e os instrutores são cruciais para os padrões e métodos de aprendizagem do século XXI. Como a IA, a tecnologia avançada e a automação governarão o futuro, a próxima geração de trabalhadores deve ter conhecimentos tecnológicos. Este estudo identificará as competências digitais dos instrutores e fornecerá recomendações e um roteiro para apoiar ferramentas tecnológicas avançadas e novas estratégias de aprendizagem inovadoras na gestão de recursos humanos.

Desenho/Metodologia/Abordagem: A pesquisa utilizou métodos qualitativos e quantitativos. Uma sessão de grupo focal foi realizada para investigar mais profundamente, e os resultados da sessão ajudaram a moldar um questionário de pesquisa que foi distribuído a 161 instrutores do PAAET. A pesquisa teve como objetivo identificar os desafios e oportunidades apresentados pela aprendizagem online.

Constatações: Os instrutores têm uma visão positiva da aprendizagem online e do Ms Teams como uma gestão de aprendizagem. O estudo também encontrou alguns obstáculos à implementação de plataformas de aprendizagem online. Estas questões incluem apoio deficiente do helpdesk, formação, motivação da gestão e recursos educativos eletrônicos. Esses obstáculos devem ser superados para que o PAAET adote um sistema de aprendizagem que melhore o desempenho acadêmico. Não foram encontradas diferenças significativas de gênero nas percepções dos instrutores.

Originalidade/Valor: Este estudo deverá ajudar os decisores políticos da educação a serem mais corajosos ao investir em TI e em recursos humanos "Instrutores" para criar um ambiente de ensino e aprendizagem melhor e mais competitivo. Este estudo propõe uma estrutura baseada em GRH para melhorar os instrutores digitais e o processo educacional.

Palavras-chave: Percepções da Aprendizagem Online, Instrutores, Competências, e-Learning, Gestão de Recursos Humanos.

PERCEPCIONES DEL APRENDIZAJE EN LÍNEA ENTRE LOS INSTRUTORES: CÓMO MAXIMIZAR LAS COMPETENCIAS DE LOS INSTRUTORES EN EL APRENDIZAJE VIRTUAL Y BLENDED

RESUMEN

Propósito: Este estudio tiene como objetivo evaluar las percepciones de los instructores sobre el aprendizaje electrónico en la Autoridad Pública de Educación y Capacitación Aplicada (PAAET) en Kuwait. Arroja luz sobre la eficacia de Ms-Teams como herramienta de gestión del aprendizaje utilizada por profesores y estudiantes. El resultado del estudio ayudará a introducir directrices para mejorar el papel de los profesores en el aprendizaje virtual y combinado.

Marco teórico: La tecnología de la información cambiará la educación si la utilizan adecuadamente profesores capacitados. La rápida adopción e inversión de la tecnología han cambiado la educación, y los instructores son cruciales para los estándares y métodos de aprendizaje del siglo XXI. Dado que la IA, la tecnología avanzada y la automatización dominarán el futuro, la próxima generación de trabajadores debe ser conocedora de la tecnología. Este estudio identificará las habilidades digitales de los instructores y brindará recomendaciones y una hoja de ruta para respaldar herramientas tecnológicas avanzadas y nuevas estrategias de aprendizaje innovadoras en la gestión de recursos humanos.

Diseño/Metodología/Enfoque: La investigación utilizó métodos tanto cualitativos como cuantitativos. Se llevó a cabo una sesión de grupo focal para investigar más a fondo, y los resultados de la sesión ayudaron a dar forma a un cuestionario de encuesta que se distribuyó a 161 instructores de PAAET. La encuesta tuvo como objetivo identificar los desafíos y oportunidades que presenta el aprendizaje en línea.

Hallazgos: Los instructores tienen una visión positiva del aprendizaje en línea y de Ms Teams como herramienta de gestión del aprendizaje. El estudio también encontró algunos obstáculos para la implementación de plataformas de aprendizaje en línea. Estos problemas incluyen soporte deficiente del servicio de asistencia técnica, capacitación, motivación gerencial y recursos educativos electrónicos. Estos obstáculos deben superarse para que

el PAAET adopte un sistema de aprendizaje que mejore el rendimiento académico. No se encuentran diferencias de género significativas en las percepciones de los instructores.

Originalidad/Valor: Este estudio debería ayudar a los responsables de las políticas educativas a ser más valientes a la hora de invertir en TI y "instructores" de recursos humanos para crear un entorno de enseñanza y aprendizaje mejor y más competitivo. Este estudio propone un marco basado en HRM para mejorar los instructores digitales y el proceso educativo.

Palabras clave: Percepciones sobre el Aprendizaje en Línea, Instructores, Competencias, Aprendizaje Electrónico, Gestión de Recursos Humanos.

INTRODUCTION

The popularity of online learning has grown significantly in both traditional and non-traditional educational settings, thanks to technological advancements. These advancements have helped developers create learning management systems that enable meaningful learning experiences and collaborative student development. To ensure that educational and learning materials are used to their fullest potential and that student-instructor interactions are optimized, it is critical to prioritize usability during the development of information systems. Unfortunately, usability analysis is often overlooked during the development process.

In developing countries like Kuwait, effective human resource management (HRM) practices are essential for organizations to manage crises such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. Educational institutions of all levels have had to transition to e-learning, also referred to as "distance" or "virtual" learning, as a result of the pandemic. (Gigauri, 2020). This shift to e-learning is particularly challenging for developing countries like Kuwait (Al-Hunaiyyan, Al-Hajri, & Bimba, 2021). A new method of acquiring technical skills has been introduced, but not everyone is ready for the change. Instructors play a crucial role in the successful implementation of online and virtual learning, as stated by (Yengin, et al. 2010). However, they were not given enough time to prepare for this shift, and their technical abilities may not match their previous classroom teaching experience. Despite these challenges, e-learning offers customized learning experiences that benefit not only the education sector but also various industries worldwide, according to (O'Doherty, et al. 2018). Universities and colleges are incorporating these technologies to enhance the quality of education and accommodate different user groups involved in the teaching and learning processes. Blended learning models, as mentioned by (Al-Sharhan, Al-Hunaiyan, & Gueaieb, 2006), can merge these technologies within the classroom. Alternatively, virtual access to new teaching and learning environments can be provided by these technologies, as discussed by (Rudestam & Schoenholtz read, Globalization in Online Learning, 2010).

In today's world, the role of educators in the learning process is an increasingly important topic of discussion. To effectively handle the various modes of delivery through different learning management systems, instructors require extensive training as highlighted in adays (Al-Sharhan S. , Al-Hunaiyyan, Alhajri, & Al-Huwail, 2020; Al-Hunaiyyan, Al-Sharhan, & Al-Hajri, 2020). Moreover, it is crucial to address other concerns that facilitate the efficient adaptation of all parties to the new environment. These issues go beyond the educator's responsibility and focus more on the concepts and work processes involved. Educators must make informed decisions about integrating new technologies into their teaching, including the use of e-learning exclusively or a combination of both. They must also consider how to transfer their courses online most effectively while maintaining student engagement and which virtual/blended tools and technologies to leverage for optimal output.

This research proposal focuses on improving the system processes and functions at PAAET. Although several studies have analyzed User Experience (UX) for various information systems, MS Teams is not typically included. Thus, this study aims to fill this gap and provide insights into ways to enhance the usability of MS Teams as a learning tool. While usable system design is crucial, it has often been overlooked in Arab Gulf nation colleges, and there has been little research in this area. Additionally, many usability studies have failed to include instructors' feedback adequately in the evaluation and development of these systems. To address this gap, this research proposal aims to examine instructors' experiences, opinions, and attitudes toward online learning in general and MS Teams as a learning management tool, in particular. Ensuring an updated system that caters to the needs of both students and academic staff is critical for ensuring smooth academic procedures and operations. It is anticipated that the outcomes of the study will be used to inform the development of future policy and generate working recommendations on how to enhance the quality of the system in use at PAAET. The specific objectives governing this study are as follows:

1. Review the literature concerning Learning Management Systems (LMS) and MS Teams to understand success stories and research results for system improvement that affects students' academic lives.
2. Investigate instructors' perceptions and attitudes towards online learning and MS Teams at used at PAAET.
3. Compare statistical differences between males and females in perceptions of . online learning and MS Teams.

This article is divided into sections to make it easier to understand. Section 2 provides a thorough review of the literature, section 3 describes the methodology used, section 4 presents the results and also includes a discussion, and lastly, section 5 concludes the article.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

During The initial phase of the Covid-19 outbreak, governments worldwide implemented restrictions on public gatherings, prompting the education sector to explore new ways of delivering and receiving academic instruction. One such method was mandatory online learning, which allowed ongoing courses to be completed despite the restrictions (Lau, Yang and Rudrani 2020). However, the sudden shift to distance learning had a significant impact on instructors worldwide. Many lacked confidence in using the necessary technologies, despite their prior competence in teaching the required skills and knowledge (Alainati S. , 2021 A; Alainati S. , 2021 B). This led to a debate on the effects of online delivery on students' learning, involving instructors, learners, and other experts in the field (Lau, Yang and Rudrani 2020).

Institutions faced challenges in distilling curricula designed for face-to-face instruction into a format suitable for e-learning, leading to some reluctance to embrace the new technological requirements (Gherhes, Simon, & Para, 2021). Before the pandemic, Kuwait had little use of technology in education, with most lessons delivered in traditional classroom settings (Al-Hunaiyyan, Alhajri, & Al-Sharhan, 2018; Al-Hunaiyyan, Alhajri, Al-Sharhan, & Al-Ghannam, 2021). Despite numerous attempts to implement online learning in public education institutions, there has been little interest among users. Kuwait's low capacity and lack of innovation has caused it to lag behind other states in this area, despite its wealth (AlKharang 2014). One of the main obstacles to adopting e-learning in the Kuwaiti public education sector was the lack of training and infrastructure, as well as the scarcity of digital educational materials (Alainati, Alshawi, & Al-Karaghoul, 2009; Alainati S. , 2015). Instructors' technical knowledge also posed a significant challenge to properly adopting online learning in the Arab region.

In educational contexts, there are various Learning Management Systems (LMS) being utilized, such as Moodle, Canvas LMS, Blackboard, Desire2Learn, Edmodo, Google Classroom, Schoology, TalentLMS, LearnUpon, eCoach, and A Tutor. According to Edutechnica in 2016, Blackboard is the most widely used LMS in the USA, followed by Moodle (19%) in many colleges. LMSs can be categorized as either open-source or commercial, as (Alenezi, 2018) pointed out in 2018. Open-source LMSs are free to use, with Moodle being one

example, also used by PAAET. However, there is a lack of research on the User Experience (UX) of MS Teams, as it has not been included in existing literature (Pal & Vanijja, 2020). Although it is crucial to have a functional LMS, there has been little research in this field, particularly in institutions in Arab Gulf nations. Furthermore, many usability studies have not considered students' and instructors' feedback and their UX while evaluating and developing such systems.

In 2014, (Azlim, Husain, Hussin, & Zulisman, 2014) conducted a study in Malaysia to investigate the frequency of usage of LMS by instructors in higher education institutions. Employing a quantitative approach, the researchers distributed a questionnaire to 93 instructors to assess their perceptions of the various features and tools of the LMS, including Groups, Chat, Discussions, Exercises, Announcements, and Documents. The findings of the study indicated that while most instructors acknowledged the benefits of LMS usage, only a small percentage of them actually utilized it. Similarly, in 2016, (Alghamdi & Bayaga, 2016) conducted a study aimed at exploring the attitudes of 222 professors from six universities in Saudi Arabia towards the features and tools of their LMS. The study revealed that most courses did not actively use LMS tools and applications, and it was observed that older instructors tended to use LMS features more frequently than their younger colleagues.

Research has identified several obstacles to the effective utilization of LMSs, including usage anxiety and dissatisfaction with advanced features related to collaboration and engagement. However, LMS functions and tools have the potential to facilitate flexible cooperation and discussion between students and instructors (Dahlstrom, Brooks, & Bichsel, 2014). To foster active participation from students, instructors may require additional support. However, instructors may require additional support to encourage students to actively participate in the LMS. It is imperative that academic institutions determine the usability level of an LMS from the HCI perspective. As such, developers should focus on generating more usable, enhanced systems by taking into consideration the social and cultural context of their target users (Alhajri, Al-Sharhan, Al-Hunaiyyan, & Alothman, Design of educational multimedia interfaces: individual differences of learners, 2011); their respective differences (Al-Huwail, Al-Sharhan, & Al-Hunaiyyan, 2007); and age and gender variations (Al-hunaiyyan, Al-Sharhan, & Alhajri, 2017).

Extensive research has been conducted on instructor's role in e-learning. In order to effectively engage learners, instructors can follow a model developed by (Yengin, Karahoca, Karahoca, & Yucel, 2010), which outlines steps for creating online learning content. This model

also provides access to free-for-use tools that can be used to produce interactive learning. Additionally, (Almas & Machumu, 2021) conducted quantitative and qualitative research at Mzumbe University in Tanzania, exploring the perspectives, motivations, and e-learning competence of instructors. Results from a survey questionnaire administered to 42 participants indicate a generally positive perspective on e-learning. These systems are primarily used for generating teaching notes, assessments and feedback, course outlines, and online grading of learners' work. According to the authors, teachers are motivated to use e-learning systems due to their personal beliefs in their ability to improve learning, personal interest, course type, and ease of use. In conclusion, the survey found that instructors' competence in designing and implementing e-based tuition was average.

In 2016, (Zareie & Navimipour, 2016) A study was conducted on the relationship between e-learning systems and employee commitment. The study found that learner satisfaction, 24/7 access to training materials, personalized learning, and efficiency significantly impacted employee commitment in a positive way. In a similar manner, (Liu, Zhao, & Su, 2022) investigated instructors' perceptions of online learning outcomes among students. They found that teachers' resilience and competence in online delivery were crucial to predicting such outcomes. The authors recommend that interventions targeting these elements and instructors' well-being be employed to improve teachers' resilience and teaching competence before they start online delivery. Additionally, instructors of different age groups should receive different training to enhance their future competence and resilience. (Batalla-Busquets & Pacheco-Bernal, 2013) also emphasize the need for instructors to undergo training before designing and delivering online courses.

Multiple studies have demonstrated culturally-based differences between male and female in technology usage (Hijazi-Omari & Ribak, 2008; Alhajri, Al-Sharhan, Al-Hunaiyyan, & Alothman, 2011; Baron & Campbell, 2012). The reference (Baker, Al-Gahtani, & Hubona, 2007) examines these factors within the context of Saudi Arabia, where gender differences are evident due to cultural tendencies. Reference (Boy, 2017) discovered that users' perspectives are likely to vary substantially, with age and gender serving as defining factors for such preferences. Indeed, it is essential to recognize differences in viewpoints due to age, gender, culture, and background (Prayaq, 2019). In a study based on Arab GCC nations, for instance, (Sherifi, 2015) examined the factors that attract female users to online bulletin boards to express themselves. Respondents confirmed that corresponding online allowed them to feel more active and stimulated by topics they may not have otherwise wished to discuss in a social setting.

According to the researchers, all of these factors were associated with the conservatism of society as a whole. Kuwait shares a culture with other Arab nations characterized by a dominant and collectivist attitude. According to a reference (Al-Kandari, Al-Sumait, & Al-Hunaiyyan, 2017), one characteristic of this disposition is the general approach to social situations, family, and friends, which are all ranked highly among personal priorities ((Al-Kandari, Al-Sumait, & Al-Hunaiyyan, 2017; Al-Hunaiyyan, 2000). The authors (Al-Hunaiyyan, Al-Sharhan, & Alhajri, 2017) examined learners' perspectives on the potential of mobile learning through 620 responses from higher education institutions in Kuwait. The results reveal clear differences based on age and gender, as well as social and cultural factors. Likewise, (Al-Kandari, Al-Hunaiyyan, & Alhajri, 2016) explored the impact of culture via Instagram concerning gender differences. Men are more likely to feel comfortable posting confidential information, according to the findings. In contrast, women are wary of whether this aligns with the values and expectations of a conservative culture.

RESERACH METHODOLOGY

System Selection

Microsoft Teams was selected as the standard online learning platform for this investigation due to various factors. First, PAAET colleges provided an enterprise edition of Microsoft Teams to all faculty, staff, and students through the "Office 365 Education" plan, allowing for immediate IT support. Second, Microsoft Teams offers a robust teaching and learning environment with features that are equivalent to or superior to Moodle-based platforms. With each college using unique learning management systems, Microsoft Teams provides a comprehensive solution to address the demands of the pandemic.

Focus Group Discussion

The qualitative approach used was a focus group discussion session which was organized, in which 15 (7 males and 8 females instructors) from PAAET were involved to participate in the discussion considering their individual differences (Alhajri & Al-Hunaiyyan, 2016; Alhajri, Al-Sharhan, Al-Hunaiyyan, & Alothman, 2011; Alhajri, Al-Hunaiyyan, & Almousa, 2017). The objective was to ask the participants to give their thoughts, notes, and ideas about their experiences, including their opinions about the use of online learning and Ms-Teams including instructors' role and skills in the online learning environments, the delivery, and evaluation of online learning and the role of college administration in that.

Questionnaire Design

To gather instructors' opinions and examine the challenges and potential of MS Teams at PAAET, a quantitative approach was used, which includes developing and administering a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed and administered with 13 items to gather data from a sample of instructors from PAAET. The participants in the study responded to the questions using a five-point Likert scale, with 1 representing Strongly Disagree, 2 for Disagree, 3 for Neutral, 4 for Agree, and 5 for Strongly Agree.

Data Analysis

To test the adequacy and feasibility of the survey and validate the initial results, a pilot study was conducted. The information gathered from the questionnaires was analyzed using statistical methods in SPSS. These methods included frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation. The independent-sample t-test will be used to assess whether there is a statistically significant difference between the means of two unrelated groups (independent variables such as instructors' gender). Since the data collected are considered to be parametric data on an interval scale, we have chosen to use the t-test, and a significance level of 0.05 will be used in all cases to ensure that any disparities between variables are objectively evaluated. Correlation coefficients were also calculated using SPSS. The correlations between the individual dimensions and the overall score were strong and ranged from 0.805 to 0.902, indicating high reliability and construction integrity. Additionally, the questionnaire's reliability was assessed by finding Cronbach's alpha in SPSS. The questionnaire dimensions showed high levels of reliability, with coefficient degrees ranging from 0.82 to 0.94. The total score of Cronbach's Alpha was 0.98, The questionnaire can be generalized to the study sample, which ensures trustworthy results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Study Sample

This study involved 161 participants, comprising 63 male and 98 female instructors from PAAET, Kuwait. Table 1 displays the demographic data and sample distribution by gender.

Table 1: Distribution of Instructor Samples Based on Gender

Variables	Frequency (F)	Percent %
Gender		
Male	63	39.1
Female	98	60.9
Total	161	100%

Source: Prepared by the authors themselves.

Quantitative Analysis (Questionnaire)

The data in Table 2 displays the findings of a preliminary analysis on Table 2: Instructors' Perceptions of Online Learning and Ms-Teams (98 Female, 63 Male), Level of Significance (t-test) $p < 0.05$. The responses of the instructors were analyzed using statistical methods such as frequency, mean, and standard deviation (SD). Out of the thirteen items listed in Table 2, the mean value of each item is above 3.0, indicating that instructors have a favorable outlook on online and virtual learning at PAAET. In table 2, green cells represent the highest rank, red cells represent the lowest rank, and yellow cells indicate statistical significance between male and female instructors. Item 1 received the highest rank with a mean value of 4.21, confirming that instructors agree with this statement "Ms-Teams helps me to communicate better with my students". Also, item 8, "Ms-Teams saves my time as an instructor" got the second rank with mean value 4.15. An instructor stated "online learning with ms-Team serve as an aid to communicate better and quick."

Table 2: Instructors' Perceptions of Online Learning (98 Female, 63 Male), Level of Sig. (t-test) $p < 0.05$

No	Item	Gender	Mean	Strong Agree	Agree	Neutral	Dis-Agree	Strongly DisAgree	Mean	SD	Sig.	Rank
1	Ms-Teams helps better communicate with students	Male	4.10	76	58	15	9	3	4.21	0.958	0.22	1
		Female	4.29									
2	Ms-Teams helps me to prepare learning activities	Male	3.76	48	66	33	10	4	3.89	0.985	0.17	8
		Female	3.98									
3	Ms-Teams provides effective learning for students	Male	3.49	33	64	39	21	4	3.63	1.030	0.18	11
		Female	3.71									
4	I will try to use Ms-Teams as part of my teaching activities	Male	3.89	52	66	35	6	2	3.99	0.898	0.24	6
		Female	4.06									
5	I intend to learn more about the features of Ms-Teams	Male	3.86	48	71	33	6	3	3.96	0.908	0.24	7
		Female	4.03									
6	I like using Ms-Teams via mobile devices	Male	3.86	58	70	20	11	2	4.06	0.933	0.03	5
		Female	4.19									
7	Ms-Teams helps me to monitor students' performance	Male	3.78	48	71	24	13	5	3.89	1.022	0.25	9
		Female	3.97									

8	Ms-Teams saves my time as an instructor	Male	4.17	77	49	19	14	2	4.15	1.020	0.80	2
		Female	4.13									
9	I believe that Ms-Teams is easy to use	Male	4.00	62	71	18	8	2	4.14	0.891	0.12	3
		Female	4.22									
10	I would recommend others to use Ms-Teams	Male	4.02	65	59	30	3	4	4.11	0.939	0.33	4
		Female	4.16									
11	I got proper training about Ms-Teams from my institution	Male	3.83	34	75	24	24	4	3.69	1.044	0.19	10
		Female	3.60									
12	I receive technical support that helps me to use Teams	Male	3.57	22	70	41	24	4	3.51	0.988	0.52	13
		Female	3.47									
13	I organize group work/projects with	Male	3.27	24	68	42	21	6	3.52	1.019	0.01	12
		Female	3.67									

Source: Prepared by the authors themselves.

Item 9 “I believe that Ms-Teams is easy to use” comes third with a mean value of 4.14. A faculty member stated that “if you know little about technology, Ms-Teams will be easy to use”. Item 10 “I would recommend others to use Ms-Teams” comes in fourth with a mean value of 4.11. One instructor praised the platform for its usefulness in conducting exams, submitting assignments online, and facilitating communication between professors and students. Another instructor suggested that the shift to online education necessitates a re-evaluation of our traditional understanding of attending school in person and resuming normal life. Question number 6, “I like using Ms-Teams via mobile devices”, ranked 5 with a mean value of 4.06. An instructor suggested that in order to successfully implement e-learning in educational institutions, a comprehensive approach is necessary. This involves utilizing all available electronic services on virtual learning platforms and mobile devices, rather than limiting their use solely to teaching purposes. In addition, Question number 6, “I like using Ms-Teams via mobile devices”, ranked 5 with a mean value of 4.06. An instructor commented that for successful implementation of e-learning in educational institutions, a holistic approach is necessary to fully utilize all electronic services provided by virtual learning platforms and mobile devices. The use of these services should not be limited to teaching alone. Item number “I will try to use Ms-Teams as part of my teaching activities” ranked 6 with a mean value of 3.99. An instructor stated, "To benefit from this experience, we should integrate technology into physical classroom learning through blended learning. "With this, we can introduce digital transformation into the classroom and prepare students for a future that requires dealing with computers and various applications”.

Item 5 “I want to increase my knowledge of the functions and features of Microsoft Teams”, ranked 7 with a mean value of 3.96, while item 2 “The use of Ms-Teams helps me to

prepare learning activities” comes eight with a mean value of 3.89. According to (Daniels, Jacobsen, Varnhagen, & Friesen, 2013), online learning is not the best way to engage students in teaching and learning. They emphasized that instructors have a crucial role in motivating learners to make the most of the features available to enhance the quality of online learning practices. In addition, Item 7 “Ms-Teams helps me to monitor students’ performance” ranked nine with a mean value of 3.89, and Item 11 “I got proper training about Ms-Teams from my institution” ranked 10 with a mean value of 3.69. The last three items ranked 11, 12, and 13 as follows: item Item 3 “Ms-Teams provides effective learning for students” ranked 11 with a mean value of 3.63, This implies that the instructors believe online learning moderately motivates students to learn. Item 13 “I organize group work/projects with Ms-Teams” ranked 11 with a mean value of 3.52, The lowest mean value is in item 12 “I receive technical support that helps me to properly use Ms-Teams” with a mean value of 3.51 which indicates that instructors were not very happy with technical support issues. According to a study conducted by (Alenezi, 2018), it was found that training instructors for online teaching poses a significant challenge. Similarly, (Smith & Abouammoh, 2013) asserted that in Saudi Arabian institutions, the major challenges of LMSs include inadequate training and support for educators, weak infrastructure within the institutions, and insufficient technical support.

Qualitative (Focus Group Discussion)

In a discussion session, participants weighed the pros and cons of online learning. One attendee saw it as a way to tackle the challenges posed by the Coronavirus, while another enjoyed teaching small online classes. One of the participants was initially interested in online learning. A faculty member mentioned that online learning promoted the development of technical skills for both students and instructors. The college provided online training to enhance their abilities. Instructors found online platforms useful and supportive. Another participant believed that online learning could prepare students for the job market by exposing them to advanced technologies, while another thought it could help them get ready for the workforce. E-learning platforms contributed to creating a paperless environment and allowed for auto-correction, which saved instructors time. During a focus group session, cameras proved useful for monitoring students during exams, and the help desk responded promptly to technical issues. Attendance tracking was more accessible online. Instructors could use various media and tools to teach, making online learning more efficient and time-saving.

Instructors have highlighted several benefits of online learning, including the adaptability of this mode of education that allows students to study at their own pace and convenience. They have emphasized that online learning can be customized to meet the specific needs of individual students. There is also a wealth of learning resources available online, including multimedia materials. Online learning enables enhanced availability of education, enabling students to access it anytime, anywhere. Online learning fosters increased collaboration and participation among students through virtual discussion boards, group projects, and other interactive activities. It is also cost-effective, as it eliminates the need for physical classroom space and course materials, leading to potential savings for institutions. One instructor noted that e-learning platforms can reduce the workload for instructors while saving money for the institution. Another recommended blended learning, which combines online education with in-person exams and quizzes. Modern education methods have made distance learning an established teaching approach that is more accessible than ever before. To ensure success in this mode of education, both male and female students must develop strong study skills and time management abilities. According to research by (Kayaoğlu and Dağ Akbaş 2016), both instructors and students should strive to improve their proficiency in using e-learning tools and applications. When students are self-directed, motivated, and confident, instructors can guide them effectively. Therefore, it is important for teaching staff to receive training on designing and delivering online courses, especially if Kuwaiti educational institutions are shifting towards blended learning.

Teaching online can be challenging due to several factors. Participants have identified issues such as communication barriers, virtual classrooms that are hard to manage, and difficulties in teaching certain subjects, such as practical and lab classes. There is also a concern that e-learning platforms may be misused, and students may face problems due to inadequate internet connectivity and a lack of private study spaces. Some instructors have pointed out that comprehensive learning may not always be achieved, and cheating during online exams is a potential concern. It has also been mentioned that students with learning disabilities may require extra support, and technical assistance may be insufficient. Inadequate interaction between students and teachers can also pose a problem. Regarding obstacles to online learning, there was a comment "Our institution did not evaluate the e-learning experience objectively. Unfortunately, the poor implementation of e-learning does not accurately reflect students' educational attainment.". Another stated "Students are not actually attending online lectures and sometimes have someone else take tests for them, resulting in inflated grades. E-learning

is unsuitable for our students.” Additionally, instructors may struggle with using online tools effectively, and the college administration may face challenges with incompetent instructors. One female instructor said, “We as instructors should be paid equally. However, incompetent instructors are in the same boat as professionals.”. Another male instructor said, “Some instructors don't know how to use a mouse. How are they still employed??”. Similar to that, one said, “I understand that faculty recruitment requires an ICDL exam, but what happens to faculty members who lack technological skills?!”.

Gender Differences

Regarding gender differences in instructors' perceptions, this examination finds no substantial variation between the genders, apart from item 6 concerning “I like using Ms-Teams via mobile devices” resulted in substantial variations with a ‘level of significance’ ($p=0.03$), in favor of female (t-test) $p < 0.05$, and item 13 “I organize group work/projects with Ms-Teams”, with a ‘level of significance’ ($p=0.01$), in favor of female (t-test) $p < 0.05$. The gender differences that do exist can impact how individuals approach and utilize online technology. Learners' perspectives vary according to various user characteristics, such as individual traits, cognitive tendencies, age, gender, and prior experience, which can influence attitudes and behaviors regarding online learning (Alhajri, Al-Hunaiyyan, & Almousa, 2017). Furthermore, gender differences may exist in the utilization of online tools due to societal dynamics. As a result of Kuwait's collectivist culture and gender-segregated education system, it is anticipated that both men and women will use online media for social purposes before any other use. Despite the fact that this research identifies Ms-Teams evaluation results that can be used to help designers improve systems, the findings also indicate that neither gender exhibits a preference for aesthetics or functionality.

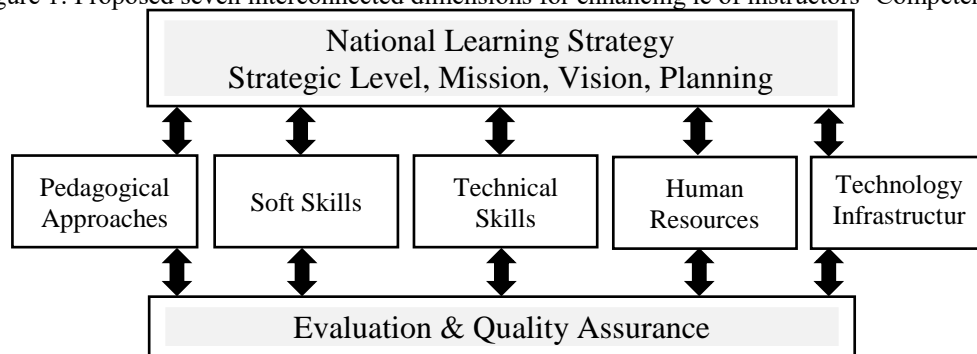
Enhancing the Role of Instructors in Virtual and Blended Learning

In blended and online learning environments, the Online instructor role and behavior are crucial. Traditionally, classroom instruction has been primarily instructor-led, top-down, and one-size-fits-all, with some differentiation sprinkled in; however, with blended learning, it is now more student-led, bottom-up, and individualized, with differentiation as a central feature. The increased role of technology in instruction is largely responsible for this new learning dynamic. Blended learning strikes a healthy balance between online instruction, which offers the interactive, tech-based learning, individualized pacing, and privacy that keep students

continually engaged and motivated, and teacher-led instruction, which personalizes the learning experience and adds the human elements of encouragement, compassion, and caring guidance that only teachers can provide.

To achieve the goal in the field of education and promote it through digital transformation, the application of digital education or the development of smart digital schools must be in accordance with a clear strategy, a scientific model that defines its pillars, and an integrated operational framework that implements and integrates the system's various components efficiently and accurately. This paper's authors are proposing seven interconnected dimensions, illustrated in Figure 1, for enhancing the role of instructors in virtual and blended learning.

Figure 1: Proposed seven interconnected dimensions for enhancing the role of instructors' Competencies.



Source The authors of this article Proposed.

The first dimension for successful e-learning transformation includes strategic planning, change management, and delivery support. This requires the formulation of a clear mission statement, the training of faculty, the implementation of an appropriate ICT infrastructure, and a shift in culture. A comprehensive strategic plan should outline technology adoption, curriculum development, instructor digital competence, and student engagement. Additionally, the plan should outline a road map for implementation with major milestones, timelines, and dependencies. It is essential to align immersive learning environments with national education strategies in order to achieve educational objectives. For the successful adoption of new technologies and processes to ensure the sustainability of the e-learning strategy, proper governance, planning, and change management principles are essential.

The second dimension is Pedagogical Approaches. A pedagogical framework should be established that aligns with learning objectives and educational standards. The curriculum should include digital instructors, provide resources for digital pedagogy, and provide training on digital tools and platforms.

The Third dimension is Soft Skills. Soft skills are indispensable for effective online interactions and meaningful learning experiences. Effective communication, empathy, student-centered learning, positivity, conflict resolution, resiliency, cultural sensitivity, and adaptability are required skills for online instructors. They should be able to convey instructions, explanations, and feedback effectively, inspire and motivate students, foster a sense of enthusiasm for learning, and create an environment where all students feel valued. In addition, they should maintain resiliency, patience, and composure under pressure, and be receptive to modifying their teaching methods, content, and activities in response to student feedback. Moreover, effective time management, problem-solving, critical thinking, and collaboration skills are crucial for digital teachers and students.

The Fourth dimension is technical skills. Instructors' lack of technical proficiency is one of the greatest obstacles to adopting e-learning effectively. Before introducing new technology into a traditional environment, it is crucial to assess the users' knowledge and skills, as well as the instructors' and management's training requirements, to ensure the successful implementation of the e-learning components (Al-Sharhan & Al-Hunaiyyan, 2012). The literature discusses the necessary technical skills for digital instructors (Al-Hunaiyyan, Al-Sharhan, & Al-Sharrah, 2012; ITU, 2018 B; Farmer & Ramsdale, 2016; Alainati S. , 2021 A). Al-Hunaiyyan et al (2012) presented a model for developing computer skills in teachers based on a six-step ladder. ITU 2018 B, Farmer, and Ramsdale (2016) categorized digital skills as beginner, intermediate, and advanced. On a ladder, the proposed model categorizes technical skills into three levels: elementary, transitional, and innovative. After mastering the first step, the instructor advances to the second.

The Fifth dimension is human resource management (HRM) practices. In educational structures, HRM plays various roles, but in education, particularly universities and colleges, these roles must align with sector requirements (Menon, 2015). Concerns have been raised about the impact of the shift to digital instruction on the quality of education, as well as instructors' and students' readiness for this new mode of learning (Sahu, 2020; Nutsunidze & Schmidt, 2021; Al-Doub, Goodwin, & Al-Hunaiyyan, 2008). HRM's significance in facilitating the digital transformation of education has increased. The use of technology in education relies heavily on human resource management (HRM) practices. Educational institutions have been compelled to utilize advanced technology to improve teaching and learning. Recruitment and selection are essential HRM components for ensuring sufficient staffing levels for every position, with an emphasis on hiring digitally savvy instructors of high quality. Organizations

must provide training and development opportunities to enhance employee skills after hiring (Alhouti, 2020). Performance evaluation is effective for guiding behavior and monitoring goal attainment. As an alternative to relying solely on mandatory forms of appraisal, internal systems for evaluating individual performance should be developed (Menon, 2015). Compensation for active instructors is a core HRM function, but in some nations promotions and bonuses are not tied to performance. In educational institutions, relationships between instructors, administrators, and management are crucial, and instructors should be encouraged to voice concerns about their work. Administrators are responsible for keeping teachers informed of current technological and pedagogical trends in order to ensure digital migration competency in teaching and learning.

The Sixth dimension is Technology infrastructure. A dependable technology infrastructure, including high-speed internet, devices, Cloud Computing, Connectivity, Smart Schools/campus, LMS, educational portal, LXP, e-Library, AI & Futuristic tools, e-content development tools, Video Conferencing, data security, and Technical Support, is required to support digital instruction. This component's primary objective is to integrate smart technologies into traditional classrooms in order to create a contemporary and effective learning environment for both instructors and students. This component is also the core of a private cloud for distance learning that serves schools nationwide. The LMS is the central system for implementing Technology-Enhanced Learning (TEL). It is responsible for managing online courses, tracking student activities, delivering electronic learning materials, and reporting on the learning process and student performance. In addition, it contains a comprehensive hierarchy of public websites for the initiative's various stakeholders. The e-library, or digital library, provides access to huge scientific and international research databases, eBooks, and other online resources required during the learning process. The e-library is accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week via computers and mobile devices. Data security is essential for educational institutions to protect sensitive information, uphold privacy, and maintain the trust of students, parents, faculty, and the larger community. Institutions operating in the digital age are obligated to implement stringent data security protocols.

The Seventh dimension is Evaluation and Quality Assurance. Adding complexity to the evaluation process is ensuring instructors' digital teaching competence. Institutions must take into account technical characteristics, social norms, and pedagogical issues such as access, informality, engagement, and pervasiveness. Quality assurance is a challenge; online content and instruction require transparent QA (Al-Sharhan & Al-Hunaiyyan, 2012). Institutions of

higher education should cultivate a culture of continuous improvement by continuously refining their e-learning strategies based on student feedback, data analysis, and changing needs. The success of the e-learning strategy transformation should be measured by key performance indicators (KPI), and instructors' performance in the digital learning strategy should be evaluated. Comprehensive training and professional development programs for instructors are required to ensure that they are proficient with the use of digital tools and technology in their teaching practices (Almonawer, et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE STUDIES

The purpose of this research is to investigate the current practices, opinions and challenges faced in online learning in order to improve both online and blended learning practices and academic achievement. A questionnaire and focus group were conducted with 161 instructors at PAAET, Kuwait, using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Based on the results of the study, instructors have a positive view of online learning and Ms Teams as a tool for managing learning. However, the study also identified some challenges that could hinder the effective implementation of online learning platforms. These challenges include inadequate helpdesk support, insufficient training, low motivation from management, and limited electronic educational resources. These obstacles need to be addressed to ensure that PAAET adopts a system that enhances the learning process and academic performance. Regarding gender differences in instructors' perceptions, this examination finds no substantial variation between the genders.

According to Ms-Teams' use within PAAET institutions, positive and negative opinions were recorded. By combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, the responses gathered from 161 PAAET instructors informed the results. In addition, for qualitative purposes, a focus group meeting was held to gain insight into participants' usage and opinions in order to improve the questionnaire's content. When taken together, the focus group findings and the statistical analysis of survey data suggest that the students' attitudes toward Ms-Teams were positive, and that there were significant differences between male and female instructors. The study found that there are a few obstacles that could slow down the implementation of e-learning, including getting students to engage with the system, the difficulty of using online learning interfaces, and making sure that both teachers and students are ready for the transition. Cultural and social factors are also important when it comes to accepting and embracing online education. However, as time goes on, teachers who were initially hesitant about using technology in the

classroom will become more open to new approaches to teaching. To ensure success in their courses, institutions should carry out HRM practices in a professional manner, provide training and motivation to their faculty to encourage the use of online instruction. The authors proposed seven important dimensions for enhancing the role of instructors in virtual and blended learning.

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

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