Chapter 16
VLEs in a Post–COVID World:
Kuwait's Universities

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ABSTRACT

Once exposed, the COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented pressure on all sectors causing many temporarily closures and organizations working from home. Daily norms were interrupted and further complicated with the declaration of quarantine curfews worldwide. One major sector which has been greatly impacted is the education sector. Due to the nature of its complicated infrastructure, all stakeholders were heavily affected as the world turned to online learning for solutions. By doing so, many educational institutes were able to continue with their teaching, even with strict social distancing measures in place. Although remote learning is not a new concept in the education sector, it is a new concept in Kuwait. In this chapter, a thorough review is given on the strategy which Kuwait's universities adopted as they prepared for distance learning for the first time throughout the country. Khan's 8-element VLE model will be used as a reference.

REMOTE LEARNING X KUWAIT

Remote learning has been an active medium of education in numerous institutes around the world. However, it seems to have conflicted sentiments among relevant stakeholders when compared to conventional classroom teaching methods. Kuwait's education sector could use a push into the expectations of the future knowledge economy as anticipated in the 'New Kuwait 2035' vision. The country has long hesitated with the acceptance of the uncertain future, which has occurred on several occasions, and can benefit from a more modern perspective for Kuwait's education.

While the concept is crucial in promoting learning, understanding how remote learning within higher education in Kuwait has proven to be an important issue to research and discover. It is crucial to analyse and gain insight on elements of remote study how Virtual Learning Environments influence students and employees on multiple levels, which will help in identifying the pros and cons of using it in Kuwait's education sector. It can lead us further into identifying a potential framework to be adopted

by universities/schools. Undertaking these elements is equally important in aiding the government, universities, schools, teachers, students, as well as parents, and all relating stakeholders understand how remote learning can impact, either positively or negatively, the students. Although new, these newly implemented mediums of education may open new doors for some as we experience the elimination of the brick-and-mortar method of teaching.

VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS (VLE)

A Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is a software-based system which enables teachers to manage various educational courses online in one place (Thorsteinsson, 2013; AlQudah, 2014). Onlnie Learning Management Systems (LMS) such as the Moodle platform are types of VLE (Awang et al., 2019). E-Learning, now a widely used term, refers to learning remotely by means of technology and electronic devices to access the educational curriculums outside the conventional classroom (AlQudah, 2014; Elkaseh et al., 2015; Otto & Becker, 2019;eLearningNC.gov, 2020). It may refer to a course, diploma and/or degree program which is delivered online either completely or through a hybrid strategy. There are variable names which are used to describe online learning like distance education program, online learning, Web-based learning, mobile learning, nomadic learning, distance learning and so on (Khan, 2001; Bjørke, 2011). E-Learning has proven to be successful in various levels of education and has become a widely accepted way of education particularly during this year's Covid-19 outbreak (Elkaseh et al., 2015). The recent pandemic has led to great changes in modes of social interaction and education (Murphy, 2020).

VLE is simply a platform that allows students and teachers to interact, present and share resources/activities with one another to complete an entire online course or have been used as a supporting feature in traditional teaching courses (Mosquera, 2017). VLE's main goal is to manage, motivate and ease the learning experience of students (Sneha & Nagaraja, 2013). According to Morais et al.(2017), "the main potentiality of VLEs is the provision of a set of tools aiming to support the production and distribution of contents, communication, and the assessment of the teaching and learning process" (p. 518). In addition, authors like Barker and Gossman (2013) also claimed that "VLEs boast a wide spectrum of research showing positive impacts across different contexts" (p. 22). To support the above statement, Dahlstrom et al. (2014) research showed that VLEs produce positive change in the learning experience within higher education, which is also supported by Morais et al. (2017) by concluding in their research that students' performance were quite positive with accessing and using VLEs platforms within their education. Other advantages of using VLE platforms include:

- *Flexibility:* With the assistance of VLE, the educational procedure turns out to be increasingly flexible, particularly as far as time (Alario et al., 2013). Having lasting and free access to all the learning materials, students can undoubtedly adjust their studies with different plans and exercises. Thus, it gets less difficult to proceed with studying in any event, even with full-time jobs or a child requesting a lot of time and consideration. Notwithstanding that students are allowed to work at their own pace since all students can access presentation slides and watch the recordings number of times as needed without distractions.
- *Accessibility:* Since learning can be accessible online, it makes education available for disabled individuals just as for those living in remote areas or even in different countries. The virtual learn-

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