

Chapter 32

Design, Development, and Implementation of an E-Learning Course: A Case Study Implemented in the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The researcher implemented an e-learning course at the Faculty of Education in Birzeit University that had been designed and developed years earlier. The researcher's experience as an assistant professor in curriculum and instruction within this university represents a valuable asset which has enabled her to present this research effectively by demonstrating how technological innovation changes the way that universities teach and students learn. The implementation of an e-learning approach within the educational psychology course as a pilot study utilized qualitative methods to investigate the perceptions of students regarding the quality of online education, based on their own online learning experiences. Interviews were conducted with five students. Various digital documents were collected. Positive and negative experiences of students were examined. Factors that contribute to those experiences were also identified.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a massive impact on global human life and has undeniably affected the education sector, including in Palestine. A wide range of educational program activities had to be cancelled. Our own university had to cancel some important activities that should have been held in mid-March but were canceled by local authorities after the level of Corona virus in Palestine rose and spread.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-7540-9.ch032

Birzeit University, as one of the campuses in Palestine, was very responsive to this pandemic and took steps related to prevention of COVID-19 transmission by eliminating activities on campus in the middle of the pandemic. Officially, Birzeit decided to continue to run via online learning by utilizing E-campus facilities or other methods. Furthermore, because this pandemic is not yet over, learning activities that previously took place by the face-to-face method in the classroom switched to the online learning system.

The concept of social distancing and physical distancing requires everyone to stay home so that the spread of this virus does not continue. Thus, both lecturers and students are expected to remain at home and still carry out their duties and responsibilities. Lecturers are required to keep teaching to keep students informed of proper education and course content. The university lecturers continue to perform teaching tasks by interacting with students online. This interaction involves inputting lecture materials into e-campus applications, providing assignments, online discussions, and review of the learning process.

Changing models from face-to-face learning to online learning brings out different perceptions from various parties. There are both advantages and disadvantages of this kind of learning model, and it has an impact on achieving the purpose of learning itself. Smart and Cappel (2006) examined learners' perceptions of integrating online components in two undergraduate business courses, where learners completed online learning modules prior to class discussion. Their findings suggest that instructors should be selective in the way they integrate online units into traditional courses. This integration should be carefully planned, based on learner characteristics, course content, and the learning context.

Experience has shown that the quality of an e-learning course requires that the teaching material is prepared by a professional instructional designer that the lecturer is pedagogically trained to deliver the program and the students are equally exposed to the pedagogy of e-learning (Lederman, 2020).

E-learning offers the student more flexibility and freedom in time and pace of learning. Switching to, or embedding, e-learning in existing educational systems poses important issues for institutions. Delivering an online course that is designed and developed properly to suit various levels of students and cater to various personal capabilities is a very difficult matter, taking into consideration that the tutor and the students can only meet virtually. Quality of course design, use of appropriate tools and the context in which learning takes place are prime factors affecting the success of online education (Wahab, Hejazi and Hodhod, 2006).

Holmes and Gardner (2006) sum up by noting the ability of e-learning to assess the learners as they learn, while at the same time increasing their experiences in education, by way of interactivity suitable for community education, cultural diversity and globalization, and eradicating boundaries of place and time. To them, the most vital characteristic and chief advantage of e-learning in education is that it centers on the learners.

There are a number of technologies available for online education, but sometimes they create a lot of challenges. These challenges and problems associated with modern technology include downloading errors, issues with installation, login problems, problems with audio and video, and so on (Dahwan, 2020). Sometimes a student finds online teaching to be boring and un-engaging. Personal attention is also a huge issue facing online learning; students want two-way interaction, which is sometimes difficult to implement. The learning process cannot reach its full potential until students practice what they learn. Sometimes, online content is all theoretical and does not let students practice and learn effectively. Mediocre course content is also a major issue (Song et al., 2004). In a study, students were found to be insufficiently prepared for balancing their work, family, and social lives with their study lives in an online learning environment. Students were also found to be poorly prepared for several e-learning competencies

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