Chapter 14
Blended Learning in HEIs in the Middle East:
Institutional Framework for Adoption and Implementation

Basil John Thomas

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8095-758X
Sur University College, Oman

Ali Al Jarrah
Sur University College, Oman

Nisha Joseph
Saintgits College of Engineering, India

ABSTRACT

During the pandemic, many universities have different types of BL adoption and implementation guidance provided by individuals or organizations, but this does not include overall institutionalization. Without proper institutionalization, educational institutions will have inconsistent blended learning environments, and the research indicates that clear institutional guidance and policies are essential for a BL model to succeed. However, there are still debates on whether instructors who are enthusiastic about e-learning systems prefer traditional learning platforms to be successful, while they also support the idea that instead of replacement of conventional learning by online learning, it is better to combine these two. The current study analyzes the frameworks for BL adoption and implementation in higher educational institutions in the Middle East from the quality assurance perspective. The aim is to gain a better understanding of HEIs in the Middle East's overall blended learning framework.

INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions are faced with the difficulty of activating e-learning resources in today's world of spreading negative effects of globalization. "At this time, the leading countries of the globe give special emphasis to education in the production and accumulation of human capital," as stated by Zinina et al. (2020, p. 102). Educational system in many countries have transformed to distance learning, which has forced to create new standards and models, while at the same time created challenges for instructors in terms of conducting teaching and learning process in a distant mode. One of the challenges according to Khudolev and Olentsova (2018) is that instead of attending traditional lecture halls, students can participate in online debates and chat sessions with lecturers and other students. Regardless of the challenges, modes of online learning are implemented in educational system continuously.

For thousands of years, education and training that displayed within a triangle of school-teacher-student has now utilized new, multifaceted, multi-channel alternatives with the help of technologies in the education system (Orakcı, 2020; Durnalı, Orakcı, & Aktan, 2019). One of these alternatives can be considered as "Blended Learning". Blended Learning is considered the future trend for higher education system, which has already taken place across the globe (Duarte, 2016). Due to the technological transformation that offers many opportunities for qualified student-content, student-teacher and student-content interactions (Orakcı & Gelişli, 2021), more agile ecosystem is needed to transform conventional classrooms into the environments that offer new learning models. According to the academic literature, the new system actually extracts the best practices from conventional and new models and blend them in a single platform. Henceforth, the agile usage of technology provides opportunities for non-traditional learners for balancing their careers outside the school and their lives, while benefitting from face-to-face (f2f) interaction and learning in a classroom

Majority of the students' passive knowledge engagement has become effective with the approach of Blended learning, which eventually increases learning outside the traditional face-to-face learning environment (Oakley, 2016). BL is interchangeably used with different terms, including flex, hybrid and mixed forms of learning, while it is defined as a combination of f2f learning and computer-assisted instruction (Wang, Han, & Yang, 2015; Bonk, 2006, p. 5)

Moreover, BL is at present trending among the institutions because of its positive impact on the motivation and performance of the students, Lu et al. (2018). BL enables instructors to engage the students in active learning that encourages majority of skills including creativity, communication, collaboration and information literacy that transform into the capability of utilizing digital technologies for various purposes. If adopted properly, BL can turn HEIs into a better agile and flexible state for rapidly adapting to contextual changes; that even in a cost-effective manner (Oakley, 2016). With the widespread technology use in teaching and learning, blended learning can be approached in numerous ways today, flipped learning, gamification, rotation model, flex model and enriched virtual model being the examples.

Zinina et al. (2020) emphasized that at a current time, developed countries put more emphasis on education for nourishing human capital. In this regard, modern education system is transformed to a digital platform (Belyakova et al., 2019)), which provides access to limitless knowledge accumulation. Higher education instructors are provided knowledge and skills regarding massive open online courses (MOOCs), LMS Moodle, e- and m-learning, where digital technologies on learning contributes to gaining competitive advantage. Such that, when online lessons are taught at higher education institutions (HEIs), instructors must adhere to pre-defined rules and regulations on using those e-learning tools for the effectiveness of online education.

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