



ONLINE LEARNING IN IRAQ: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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| Article history: | Abstract: |
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| <p>Received: November 8th 2022 Accepted: December 6th 2022 Published: January 6th 2023</p> | <p>The Covid - 19 pandemic posed a serious threat to humanity throughout the world. Many activities, including educational activities, have been stopped in the whole world as a result of the epidemic, so all countries of the world turned into e learning. Countries of the Middle East especially the Arabic countries were still in the beginnings in using e learning, before the pandemic, though other countries outside the Middle East were using e learning in the learning and teaching process some years ago before the Arabic counties. IRAQ is one of countries that were affected by the epidemic. After the outbreak of Covid-19 in it, the educational system made simple and limited attempts to integrate e-learning into their classrooms; though e learning has been used in a very limited way in some universities, and using technology in the learning process was rare. There are several barriers to the successful implementation of this technology inside Iraq. The current study aims to identify the barriers to effective e-education implementation in Iraq and to suggest potential solutions to these barriers.</p> |

Keywords: e learning, learning process, educational system

INTRODUCTION

The goal of technology was always to improve education for learning communities. Today, this is arguably more crucial than ever. All parties involved in education are now concentrating their efforts on technology in order for it to flourish and grow in the future due to the information revolution and technological advancement.

These days, technology is regarded as a key component in the educational system of many nations worldwide (Al-Abdali, 2016). University of Illinois early in the 1960s, made a classroom connected with a computer system, this classroom marks the beginning of the history of electronic learning. While listening to the lectures, students could access informational materials on a particular course (Zaid, 2022), as compared to the past. Nowadays, at various educational levels and contexts, many forms of cutting-edge educational technology are used and employed in the teaching and learning processes. Technology is frequently viewed as a facilitator of the teaching and learning processes. However, technology is not necessarily a panacea or "silver bullet" to all problems and obstacles in education (Tsang, Chow, So, Liu, Kwok, & Ho, 2017).

Covid-19 infected higher education facilities in 2020, not just those in Wuhan, China, where the virus was discovered, but also those in 188 other nations. This virus spread quite quickly, taking only a few minutes. All humans are susceptible to the catastrophic effects of this contagious disease since no one is resistant to it once it enters the body. Due to the virus's rapid spread, schools and universities around the world have been closed, and countries have chosen to learn online. (Bender, et.al, 2020).

COVID-19 remains the greatest challenge that these expanded national education systems has ever faced. The epidemic has clearly revealed the brittleness of our educational systems, even those that were thought to be relatively robust. This has a significant impact on students, instructors, and educational institutions. While some students continued their education, many were denied the chance to do so and frequently lacked necessary resources like technical tools or learning support services (Daniel, 2020). E-learning systems have been effectively implemented in few universities in some Arab nations, like Jordan and the United Arab Emirates. However, compared to other Arab nations, Iraqi higher education universities stand behind in the usage of online learning because of many facilities that is unavailable for most of the Iraqi higher education institutions.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

McBrien et al., 2009, stated that online learning rapid advances in IC Technological advancements have made distance education more accessible to the vast majority of students. around the world. According to Cojocariu et al. (2014), most terms such as (online learning, web-based learning, software learning,, and mobile learning) are mutual

in the competency to use a computer connected to the network, thus which provide learning from anywhere, at any time, at any pace, and by any means.

Singh & Thurman, 2019 defined "Learning experiences as simultaneous or simultaneous settings using numerous devices", and how online learning are characterized (e.g. mobile phones, laptops, with Internet access). In these settings, students can learn and interact with their teachers and other students from anywhere (independently). The simultaneous learning environment is set up so that students may participate in live lectures, professors can engage with students in real time, and there is a chance for quick feedback. In such a learning environment, learning materials are available through various learning systems and forums rather than lectures including in sessions. Prompt opinions and responses are not possible in such a setting (Littlefield, 2018). Simultaneous learning can provide numerous opportunities for interpersonal participation (McBrien et al. 2009).

Online teaching has become a requirement. A significant portion of the globe is under quarantine due to the deadly COVID-19 worldwide disease outbreak. All of this online education can be compared to a miracle cure. Institutions that were previously resistant to change have become more open as a result of the crisis, to accept modern technology. Online learning stands out as triumphant in this mess. Therefore, improving the quality of online teaching and learning is crucial at this stage (Carey, 2020).

EFFECT OF E-LEARNING

Higher education will be significantly impacted by the use of e-learning. Nowadays, students have the free choice of the best learning method based on their interests, commitments, or both. Studies from the past demonstrate that implementing E-learning effectively is a way of solving real learning and achievement issues (Govindasamy, 2002).

Below are some benefits of e learning:

1. Access to information: Students can access easily to their classes at any time and from any location. The ability of learning methods to meet learners' unique demands is another benefit of information access.
2. Flexibility and adaptation strategies: In a traditional learning environment, it may be very challenging to capture the teaching curricula, content presentation, and learning routes of a specific student, but this is entirely doable in e-learning..
3. Effective interaction: Off-campus interaction possibilities and regular working hours can be expanded and substituted for by e-learning.
4. Using the LMS's built-in communication facilities, such as forums, wikis, and chat, as well as assigning students to various groups so they may work together, cooperation and collaboration can both be increased.
5. Choosing the best method to offer and receive educational content in a synchronized or asynchronous environment is a choice that both learners and teachers can make.
6. Cost-saving: Students who complete E-learning courses can forego tuition. Additionally, E-learning can save time and effort and save trip expenses.
7. Improving the quality of instruction: Using e-learning tools, instructors can add educational theories and make lessons more engaging.
8. Management and monitoring of learner actions are made simple by learning management systems, which offer detailed log files for doing so.
9. A learner-centred environment and self-directed learning A face-to-face (F2F) strategy is primarily reliant on teachers. Considering the disparity in age groups and background knowledge, this is ineffective for all pupils.

E-LEARNING IN IRAQ

As in other regions of Iraq, the spread of violence in the majority of the governorates impacted Iraq's higher education after 2003. A lot of university professor in Iraq were killed or immigrated due to the bad political situation since 2003 till now. Iraq may be was the last country that used e learning due to many challenges includes: internet was forbidden inside Iraq before 2003, high prices to get internet inside the houses, instability, a lack of readiness, and assurance are a few of these. Until keep Iraq current with the latest technology advancement, there have been significant efforts made from 2016 to the present. Every year, a number of initiatives are started to develop e-learning platforms to alleviate the severe lack of educational institutions in Iraq. These systems continue to function successfully, but Iraqi universities still need to improve and advance in order to regain their position among those of their neighbouring institutions (Matar, el 2010).

Iraqi educational institutions' somehow doesn't accept e-learning as a way of learning, but in the present, when COVID-19 has spread all across the entire world, this virus has impacted educational systems worldwide. Due to this, almost all of our institutions, universities, and schools have had to close, necessitating the use of e-learning in order to allow students to complete their education and support continuous teaching. A vital lifeline for education today is online learning. Institutions work to limit social mobility potential (Murphy, 2020). With the help of technology, both teachers and students may have access to specialized resources beyond textbooks, in a variety of forms, and in ways that connect time and location (OECD, 2020), and this is why all the educational institutions worldwide and in Iraq also, used platforms like doodle, Google classroom, and free conference call.

The above mentioned platforms were more effective on the learning process than traditional methods. Technology-assisted learning has become a common method, with traditional methods of teaching and learning replaced by new methods and methods. More importantly, the use of technology in education in general has been a target for many teachers for many years, as technology has changed teacher teaching and learning practices because

the classroom has become more student-focused rather than teacher-focused. The student and teacher can be thousands of kilometres away from each other, and can still have a fruitful exchange of interactions. Moreover, this procedure assumes that time is not a factor in the entire process of trying to register materials. E-mail services and messages ensure that recorded lectures presented later can be as useful as new lectures. However, despite the fact that the use of technology in classroom settings can help encourage education and enhance the learning capacities of students, classes at Iraqi universities still lack access to this technology due to some of the nation's difficulties facing them (Ghraib and Muhammad, 2017). Compared to other Arab States, the launch of E-learning programs were very recently introduced to Iraq.

Strengths

E-learning methods and processes provide strong time flexibility and space in the learning process. Techniques of E learning encourage the learners also to adopt some methods suitable for them. Teachers use a range of audio, video lectures to communicate with their students. This can aid in the creation of a collaborative and dynamic learning environment in which students can provide immediate feedback, ask queries and learn interesting. The Anywhere-Anytime e-learning feature is useful in times of crisis. For example, , natural catastrophes, or generalities such as COVID- 19. Lockdown and unsafe road travel can cause a lot of problems, but e-learning won't at least deny us access to education in our homes or workplaces. In times of crisis, technology provides innovative and flexible solutions to combat turbulence, allowing people to communicate and even work without having to interact face-to-face. This leads to many changes in the system in institutions because they adopt a new technique of interaction and action (Mark & Semaan, 2008).

Weaknesses

E-learning has some weaknesses in the form that can impede communication between learner and teacher, i.e. loss of direct contact and human connection. Many technological issues may arise for users, obstructing and slowing down the teaching and learning process (Favale et al., 2020). Time flexibility and space, although it's the power of These characteristics of online learning are weak and cause complications. Student behaviour that is not serious in terms of time and flexibility might lead to a variety of issues. Every student and learner is unique. Their abilities and confidence levels differ. Some people are uncomfortable learning online, which leads to increased frustration and confusion. Inadequate compatibility between technology design and the psychology required by the learning process; Inadequate allocation of learning processes can hinder teaching and create imbalances.

External Challenges

The adoption of e-learning in Iraq is being hampered by both internal and external issues. The technological use of e-learning in the external problems includes things like the Internet services' limited bandwidth. The lengthy download times for videos, graphics, and animations. Undoubtedly, another challenge to successfully adopting E-learning in Iraq is the lack of individual abilities. Users struggle to use e-learning platforms as a result, which may prompt them to look for other excuses to avoid utilizing this sort of learning (Ali & Magalhaes, 2008; Al-Shboul, 2013). Any technology cannot be successfully implemented without a qualified staff to set it up and keep it running. Teachers and students have discovered that there isn't enough technical help available to handle any issues that users might have. To maintain the system and address any issues that users might run into, there are a certain number of specialists, more specifically in the field of networks. This outcome is consistent with research showing that promoting e-learning is difficult due to a lack of suitable technological assistance (Al-Shboul, 2013; Sife et al., 2007; Ssekakubo et al., 2011). One of the main obstacles to the incorporation of e-learning in government universities is a lack of ICT infrastructure. Universities don't offer free Internet access or have enough computers.

Furthermore, research has revealed that few professors and students view Iraq's frequent power outages as a concern that will hinder the successful implementation of e-learning. After the first Gulf War, this case initially surfaced in 1991, and there hasn't been much progress since then. On the other hand, several other ways are used by people to meet their minimal electrical needs. Other challenges include: and (1) the absence of Arab electronic resources for the humanities. As a result, preparing for electronic lectures takes more work. (2) There is a concern about impersonation if lectures are downloaded electronically because there is no stringent copyright protection law in Iraq, and (3) the country is now insecure due to war and corruption. This is among the crucial

Internal Challenges

The user's willingness to switch from conventional teaching and learning curricula to more advanced teaching and learning curricula is more related to internal obstacles. Additionally, some users think that e-learning entails delivering e-learning materials via PCs, iPhones, and other mobile devices, whether such devices are online or not. However, e-learning entails a much broader concept than this superficial viewpoint. It entails leveraging the benefits of e-learning to integrate educational and educational theories. Derouin et al. (2005) indicates that e-learning is an appropriate technique for integrating effective educational theories rather than being used only as an information delivery factor. An example of these theories is the theory of multimedia principles (Mayer, 2009). The results of the studies show that many teachers and half of the students consider that ICT and illiteracy in e-learning impede the effective integration of e-learning. Not surprisingly, modern educational techniques have recently been introduced in the context of Iraqi higher education. Therefore, older teaching members and those from humanitarian fields are not familiar with such techniques (Ssekakubo et al, 2011). This has also been found to be a problem in developing countries.

The lack of ICT awareness is another obstacle, he described. It is hard to convince faculty members dedicated to traditional ways of teaching to start teaching through the web and prepare electronic lectures. In other words, there is an issue with employing contemporary learning strategies. Studies also suggest that other significant obstacles to e-learning uptake include staff and students' hesitation, apathy, and irritation. Some users are averse to trying anything new. Many factors were identified by respondents as potential causes of this unfavourable attitude. One disadvantage of e-learning is that it only allows for the downloading of e-lectures. Other examples include the fact that creating e-learning content takes longer than using a traditional technique. They concluded that there was no distinction between e-learning and other communication methods like e-mail or even the distribution of lectures created in the classroom based on these points of view.

Teachers must embrace e-learning with enthusiasm. Faculty members must commit themselves to implementing e-learning in order to help all students achieve their goals more smoothly and eagerly. Another reason for the negative attitude and interest in e-learning could be a lack of English proficiency. While users must have adequate English language skills to use learning techniques and electronic resources, Iraqi teaching staff and students' English proficiency is either moderate or minimal (Borg, 2015). In addition, the teacher's motivation to use e-learning has waned. Most teachers are unaware with such systems and require extensive training to understand their advantages. Students are hesitant to try something they haven't done before, but if it's done, they'll be willing to use it. The majority of students and instructors are unaware of the benefits of e-learning and what these systems might provide. It's the

Suggestions

The blueprint for future national e-learning development must begin changing the old ways of teaching, make reforms to university frameworks, and finally investment in capacity-building. Iraqi universities must control e-learning on two different steps: the first step is to recognize e-learning degrees. So far, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research has refused to recognize any degree obtained through the Internet. This issue must be addressed by establishing some guidelines and protocols for identifying specific online certificates obtained from prestigious institutions. A significant amount of policy work is urgently required to foster the development of e-learning programs. The second goal is to maximize the benefits of e-learning and e-technology in everyday life. Based on research and books to support the view that for e-learning to be successful, academics must remain close to media capabilities, where. They must create a learning experience that allows students to interact with the knowledge and skills they are acquiring. This means that the teaching tools used by teachers must reflect the experience of what works for the learner, and must be user-friendly for teachers.

It is not possible to execute e-learning successfully by stabilizing the e-learning system and making it available to all users. However, before implementing e-learning, a series of preliminary tasks must be completed. This study offers a few suggestions for how to attain the goals of implementing e-education to Iraqi State universities. It is necessary to undertake a methodical e-learning implementation plan in Iraq. The researcher strongly advises co-operation with other institutions that have made advancements in the application of e-learning, both from neighbouring and developed nations, as it is a fresh experience for Iraqi universities.

Priority should be given to the budget for the establishment of an integrated ICT and e-education infrastructure, as well as other necessary requirements.

A crucial step in maintaining e-learning and assisting users is the creation of a skilled technical staff. In order to prevent offending the user, prompt assistance must be given whenever students or teachers encounter any problems. Advanced training programs are needed, and they should be led by multiple individuals. The first step is to acquaint users with e-learning features and boost their self-assurance in using it. The possible consequences of e-learning for educational practice must also be presented by experts in the production of e-content and e-learning educational theories.

The cornerstone of successful e-learning adoption is user engagement. The best electronic material can be developed through a competition sponsored by educational institutions. However, if students use e-learning properly, they may receive rewards such as bonus points.

Academic professionals in Iraq are not even permitted to teach at the university level in order to take and pass the teaching techniques programme. We advise, then, that such courses' curricula incorporate e-learning ideas. Include the usage of e-learning as a further factor in the process of annual faculty performance review. This may promote the use of online learning (Al-Azawei, et al , 2016).

CONCLUSION

This research aims to discuss e learning in Iraq, and the obstacles that face the effectual use of e-learning in Iraq for e-education had been recently applied in some government universities. Iraq is still relatively early in its adoption of e-learning. Additionally, it has been clarified that while most government universities have made modest steps to implement e-learning, the majority of teachers had insufficient information and expertise to use it effectively. The findings of these researches supported the presence of barriers to the adoption of e-learning in Iraq, including historical staff isolation from the scientific community, lags in the use of e-learning strategies in higher education, and on-going national instability and insecurity.

With regard to this research, external and internal challenges have been identified, including major obstacles, Low Internet bandwidth, a lack of funding, insufficient training opportunities, a shortage of ICT grandwork, a lack of

policy, on-going power outages, illiteracy in e-learning, and a lack of knowledge, interest, and drive for e-learning technology are all contributing factors., and a lack of training programs are a few examples. Based on these challenges, a number of suggestions and proposals have been made, which we hope will lead to efficient e-learning integration at Iraqi State higher education institutions. Despite special problems, the institutions of higher education are seriously considering developing e-learning use.

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