

Perceptions of Online Learning Among Academicians: Gender Differences

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Abstract:

This research investigated the perceptions of male and female instructors toward online learning. Gender is highly recognized in the literature as an influencing factor in human resource management (HRM) as well as in human-computer interaction research. Organizations, such as educational organizations, faced the crises of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, during which educational institutions at all levels have had to shift to e-learning. Instructors have had to adapt to this change in the way skills and knowledge is delivered, and not all actors have been properly prepared to do so: Instructors' ability to manage e-learning is vital to ensuring its effective implementation, but the rapid change from traditional to online methods, with very little opportunity for preparation or training, has undermined the confidence of some instructors. This study used a quantitative approach and a questionnaire collected from 309 instructors to elucidate instructors' perceptions at the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET), a higher education institution in Kuwait. The findings indicated that there are significant differences between male and female instructors' perceptions of online learning. The results also indicated that instructors had a positive experience with online virtual learning however, barriers such as poor helpdesks, lack of training, fewer management motivations, and limited electronic educational materials were recorded.

Key Word: Gender differences, Human Resource Management, Online learning, e-learning, faculty members

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I. Introduction

Organizations face crises such as the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, during which educational institutions at all levels have had to shift to e-learning, also known as "distance" and "virtual" learning [1]. This is a crucial issue for developing countries when faced with an issue like COVID-19 pandemic [2]. Instructors had no chance to prepare for this change, their ability to teach their subject in the classroom may not be so satisfied with their technical abilities. With these difficulties, e-learning remains beneficial not only for the education sector but also for all aspects worldwide with the customized learning experience [3]. There may be a considerable amount of research on gender differences and online learning perceptions in developed countries; however, there have been very few in the Middle East and gulf region. This research study aims to explore gender differences in the experiences of human resource management (HRM) policies in the workplace.

Universities and colleges are adapting such technologies to develop quality education and accommodate user groups to be involved in the teaching and learning processes in their educational institutions. The role of HRMs and educator within learning has been much debated, but it is arguably gaining in importance. Hence, it can be argued that intensive training is required for instructors, in particular, so that they are competent to deal with new modes of delivery with the various learning management systems nowadays [4, 5]. That said, it is also important to address other issues which will enable all actors to adapt efficiently to the new environment, and this concern less the educator's role than concepts and work processes. Developers, therefore, need to constantly be creating better, more usable systems informed by understanding their potential users with considerations of social and cultural issues [6]; individual differences [7]; and gender and age differences [8]. Because of societal conventions, the usage of technology may differ between males and females. By understanding the conservative society, we live in, particularly in the field of HRM, technology and system

utilization requires synthesizing this sensitivity, gender, and culture [9]. Given their collectivist cultural milieu, it is reasonable to expect Kuwaiti males and females to utilize online programs primarily as a social link [10, 11]. In Kuwait, little study has been conducted on individual variables such as gender variations in mobile learning [12]. This study attempts to close the gap by examining online learning with an emphasis on gender inequalities.

The differences between people, which can be affected by gender, may have an impact on the way users use online systems. Instructors' perception varies depending on different user constructs such as personality, cognitive styles, gender, age, and prior knowledge, which can affect users' perceptions and attitudes toward technology [13]. Equality and diversity are promoted as a deliberate approach to human resource management in response to growing matters about employee well-being in the workplace and constitutional obligations in this area [14]. They are also examples of cutting-edge approaches to HRM [15, 16, 17]. Experts in the field of human resource management are placing a premium on diversity and inclusion. Equally important to businesses is using HRM strategies to increase workplace diversity [18, 16].

The purpose of this research is to investigate male and female instructors' impressions of online and virtual learning technologies utilized by the College of Business Studies (CBS) at the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET). Thirty years ago, female instructors at the CBS are less than 15% of total instructors at the college, while at the year 2022 they become about 40%. Given the scarcity of research on this topic and the backdrop of Kuwait's educational system, it is a pioneering study [19]. It assesses online learning in an uncharted environment in Kuwait, where minimal research has focused primarily on gender disparities. This study's findings will teach system developers about unique growth opportunities that can increase prospective usage of online and virtual learning. These enhancements will not only increase the efficiency and beauty of the systems but will also improve user interactions, taking gender differences into account, and improving their perception of its associated functions [20].

This article is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature, and section 3 explains the methodology. The results and a discussion are presented in section 4, while section 5 draws the conclusion.

II. Literature Review

In the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, governments around the world introduced restrictions on how many people could meet in public spaces. Under these circumstances, the sector globally was obliged to seek out new modes of delivering and receiving education, among which was the creation of mandatory online learning so academic courses underway at the time the restrictions were imposed could be completed [21]. This sudden transition to distance learning impacted instructors in practically all countries. In particular, instructors who to that date had not questioned their competence to impart the required skills and knowledge found themselves less confident when obliged to use the technologies involved in the online delivery [22] which abruptly became the "new normal" during the pandemic [23, 24]. Given Kuwait's position as a developing nation, pre-pandemic little use was made of information and communication technology (ICT) within the education sector. Online learning, where present at all, was at a rudimentary stage, and the vast majority of lessons were delivered face-to-face in a traditional classroom setting [25, 26]. Although a variety of initiatives have attempted to introduce and support online learning in public education institutions, there has been little take-up among users. Indeed, although Kuwait is a wealthy nation, it appeared that its low capacity and poor rate of innovation had caused it to fall behind other states in this regard [27].

A considerable body of research has emerged on the role of instructors in e-learning. The model developed by [28] lays out steps that instructors can follow to create online learning content that will effectively engage learners. It also offers instructors access to free-for-use tools that can be used to produce interactive learning. Meanwhile, [29] carried out quantitative and qualitative research to explore the perspectives, motivations, and e-learning competence of instructors at Mzumbe University, with results indicating a generally positive perspective on the use of e-learning systems and suggesting that such systems are principally used to generate teaching notes, assessments and feedback, and course outlines, as well as for the online grading of learners' work. The authors [30] investigated the relationship between e-learning systems and employee commitment and found the latter was significantly positively impacted by four variables: learner's satisfaction, 24/7 access to training materials, personalized learning, and efficiency. Similarly, [31] examined perceptions among instructors of students' online learning outcomes and whether such outcomes could be predicted by instructors' resilience and competence in online delivery. The authors [32] stressed that instructors should be trained before they embark on designing and delivering online courses [33].

The study presented in this paper emphasizes gender differences. Gender role theory [34] provides a theoretical framework for understanding how women and men experience systematically different patterns of rewards and sanctions throughout their lives. Gender differences in attitudes, values, and behavior are generated by these gendered systems and manifest across social settings, including the workplace. For example, due to pressures to fulfill the traditionally masculine role of breadwinner, men pursue occupations that provide high

levels of earnings and earnings growth than women [35]. Because of pressures to conform to stereotypical femininity [36], women value working with people and helping others in the workplace more than men [37]. Two of the most important employee-centered practices are those that promote diversity and gender parity. The concept of gender equality in the workplace refers to the equal treatment of men and women in areas such as hiring, training, compensation, and promotion [38]. Diversity is a more general concept that may include fairness [39]. According to Emmott, “Diversity consists of a range of characteristics, such as gender, race, disability, religion, belief, sexual orientation and age, as well as personal characteristics, such as work style, personality, and culture” [40].

Several studies have found gender variations in technology use in cross-cultural contexts [41, 42, 6]. Goh [43] investigated how male and female students in New Zealand perceived a text messaging service (SMS). The findings demonstrated substantial variations in perceived utility and intention to use between males and females, but no significant differences in self-efficacy or ease of use. Furthermore, Baron and Cambell[44] report on gender characteristics discovered in cross-national research of college students' usage of smart phones in four countries: the United States, Japan, Sweden, Italy, and Korea. The findings indicated many gendered usage and attitude trends. Baker et al. [45] used Saudi Arabia as an example of a country with cultural traditions linked to gender inequalities. According to [46], users' impressions might vary greatly, and their views of systems can fluctuate depending on their age and gender. It is critical to comprehend users' perspectives based on their gender, age, background, and culture [47]. [48], for example, researched the reasons why females in the Arab GCC countries use online bulletins and discovered that they utilize them for self-expression. Females stated that internet communications enable them to participate more, ask questions, and discuss issues that they would not be able to ask or discuss in traditional social settings. The authors portrayed these motivations in the context of the constraining conservative cultural contexts.

III. Methodology

The research methodology is described in this section, which includes research sample and research instrument. This study used quantitative approach in which an online questionnaire was distributed to the entire study population.

Research Sample

This study included 309 participants (187 male and 122 female instructors) from The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET) in Kuwait. Table 1 presents the demographic data and sample distribution of the study population (gender, IT competency, and teaching experience).

Table no 1:Sample distribution according to the demographic variables

<i>Variables</i>		<i>Frequency (F)</i>	<i>Percent %</i>
Gender	Male	187	60.5
	Female	122	39.5
IT Competency	Little	15	4.9
	Average	99	32.0
	High	195	63.1
Teaching Experience	Less than 10 years	57	18.4
	10 years to 20 years	89	28.8
	More than 20 years	163	52.8

Research Instrument

This research used a quantitative approach in means of a survey. The items in the questionnaire reflect the specific nature of PAAET instructors. The final version of the questionnaire used in this study consists of two parts. The questionnaire was specifically designed for this research with the aim of eliciting opinions from participants and examining both problems and opportunities in PAAET' current e-learning processes. Part 1 collects participants' demographic data, including gender, professional experience, and IT competency, Part 2 investigates instructors (male and female) perceptions of the online learning at PAAET. Answers use a 5-point Likert-type scale, where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. A pilot study was carried out on all research instruments to ensure the questionnaire meets its intended aims, assess the feasibility of the survey, and verify initial results.

The data collected from the questionnaires were statistically analyzed in which several statistical methods were used, including frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation (SD), an independent-sample t-

test. The independent-sample t-test is carried out to detect any statistically significant difference between means in two independent variables (in this case, male and female instructors). In addition, SPSS was used to calculate the correlation coefficients. The correlations between the individual dimensions and the overall score were high ($p < 0.01$) and ranged from 0.805 to 0.902, which indicates high internal reliability and construction integrity. Similarly, the reliability of the questionnaire has been calculated through finding Cronbach's alpha by using SPSS. The total score of Cronbach's Alpha is (0.94). So, the questionnaire can be generalized to the basic study sample, and the results can be trusted.

IV. Results and Discussions

Instructors' Perceptions of Online Learning

Table 2 shows the results obtained from the preliminary analysis to reflect instructors' perceptions of online learning. Instructors' responses were statistically analyzed using frequency, mean, and standard deviation (SD), and t-test. Among the 15 items presented in Table 2, each item's mean value is higher than 3.0, which indicates that instructors have positive perceptions about online and virtual learning at CBS. Item 9 got the first rank with an average mean value of 4.61, which demonstrates that instructors agree that teaching online has reduced the use of papers and photocopying. Also, item 15, "I prefer teaching in the classroom while getting the benefit of e-learning platforms and tools" got the second rank with an average mean value 4.50. one participant stated that the combination of physical education and taking advantage of the features of online learning platforms is valuable. Another stated that "e-learning platforms serve as an aid to physical classroom education and not a substitute for it". Another said, "I see that blended learning helps to achieve the goals of modern education".

Item 14 "Students cheat to a large extent through online learning" comes third with an average mean value of 4.40. A faculty member stated that "teaching online is exciting, however, many students of CBS are not prepared for online learning, and cheating spreads easily in exams using MS-Teams platform and the grades do not reflect the level of students". He added "I agree to use the online learning platforms as a teaching tool, but I refuse to use it to conduct exams". There is a widespread perception in the area that online learning encourages misconduct and makes cheating easier. However, with new technology, [49] listed some tools and techniques that discourage cheating in online examinations. Question 1 "E-learning tools facilitate managing and correcting exams and tests" comes in fourth with an average mean value of 4.30. An instructor stated that the platform is excellent for exams, excellent for submitting assignments online, and excellent as a means of communication between the professors and students. Another stated that "With the online education experience, we must renew the concept of returning to normal life and attendance education. We must benefit from this experience by integrating technology into the physical learning in the classroom through blended learning". Question number 11, "I was well trained to use the e-learning platform", ranked 7 with an average mean value of 3.90. One comment from an instructor stated that in the event that we want to implement e-learning in our educational institutions, there must be a holistic view to benefit from all the electronic services available in the virtual learning platforms, and their use should not be limited to teaching only.

Table no 2: Gender Differences in Instructors' Perceptions of Online Learning (Frequency)

N.	Question	Gender	Freq.	Mean	SD	t	t-test Sig. (2 tailed)
Q1	E-learning tools facilitate managing and correcting exams and tests	male	187	4.21	0.999	-1.899	0.06
		female	122	4.43	0.899		
Q2	Teaching through the e-learning platforms is exciting	male	187	3.48	1.224	0.917-	0.36
		female	122	3.61	1.223		
Q3	e-learning platform motivates the students to learn	male	187	2.95	1.211	-1.194	0.23
		female	122	3.12	1.263		
Q4	e-learning platform has increased the quality of teaching practices	male	187	3.21	1.247	-2.361	0.02
		female	122	3.56	1.253		
Q5	e-learning platform helped increase the interaction between instructors and students	male	187	2.98	1.261	-1.962	0.05
		female	122	3.28	1.392		
Q6	Teaching through e-learning platform saves my time and effort	male	187	4.01	1.037	-0.380	0.70
		female	122	4.06	1.086		
Q7	Educational electronic materials are available for my courses	male	187	3.76	1.046	-1.408	0.16
		female	122	3.93	1.018		

Q8	Students get high grades through e-learning	male	187	4.09	0.860	-2.117	0.04
		female	122	3.86	1.039		
Q9	Teaching online has reduced the use of photocopying	male	187	4.56	0.696	-1.604	0.11
		female	122	4.69	0.657		
Q10	E-learning help students to be well prepared for the labor market	male	187	3.27	1.216	-2.144	0.03
		female	122	3.57	1.192		
Q11	I was well trained to use the e-learning platform	male	187	3.74	0.904	-3.858	0.00
		female	122	4.15	0.924		
Q12	I see a need to provide incentives for instructors who use e-learning platforms	male	187	3.32	1.321	-2.550	0.01
		female	122	3.70	1.251		
Q13	Technical support is available to solve my problems with the e-learning	male	187	3.53	0.918	-0.418	0.42
		female	122	3.62	1.086		
Q14	Students cheat to a large extent through online learning	male	187	4.39	0.850	-0.192	0.85
		female	122	4.41	0.898		
Q15	I prefer teaching in the classroom while getting the benefit of e-learning platforms and tools	male	187	4.41	0.846	-2.733	0.01
		female	122	4.66	0.678		

The lowest mean value is in item 3 with an average mean value of 3.02, this implies that the instructors moderately believe that online learning motivate the students to learn. The fifth question, “e-learning platform helped increase the interaction between instructors and students,” ranked 14, with an average mean value of 3.10. One comment from an instructor “E-learning loses the sense of interaction between the instructors and the students and loses the sense of body language between them”. However, [50] stated that students and instructors have the flexibility to collaborate through LMS, allowing better collaboration and interaction [51]. Similarly, item 4 “e-learning platform has increased the quality of teaching practices” ranked 13 with an average mean of 3.35, this is supported by [52], who stated that Online learning itself is not the optimal solution for student engagement in teaching and learning stressing that instructors play an important part in inspiring learners to take advantage the features to increase the quality of online learning practices. Item 10 “E-learning help students to be well prepared for the labor market” ranked 12 with an average mean value of 3.39. Question number 12 “I see a need to provide incentives for instructors who use e-learning platforms” ranked 11 with an average mean value of 3.47. As for motivation, one suggested “I suggest honoring the professors who excelled in their performance and teaching through e-learning platforms”. Also, motivation was identified as a critical factor in achieving a successful online learning environment [53]. Question 3 reflects respondents' opinions, which imply that instructors do not feel confident that their institutions encourage or motivate the use of e-learning. Item 10 “Teaching through the e-learning platforms is exciting” ranked 10. In regard to technical support, item 13 “Technical support is available to solve my problems with the e-learning platform” rank 9 with an average mean value of 3.57. The study of [54] concluded that preparing instructors for online teaching is a real challenge. Similarly, [55] claimed that the significant challenges of LMSs in Saudi Arabian institutions are a lack of or insufficient training and support, and infrastructure weakness in the institutions, and a lack of proper technical support.

Gender Differences

This research study aims to explore gender differences in the experiences of human resource (HR) management (HRM) policies in the workplace. The results documented that there is a significant difference between males and female, demonstrated in 5 items of the questionnaire, as indicated in table 2. Item 4 “e-learning platform has increased the quality of teaching practices” shows significant differences between males and females “level of significance” ($p=0.02$), in favor of females (t-test) $p < 0.05$. In addition, item 8 “Students get high grades through e-learning” indicates significant differences between males and females “level of significance” ($p=0.04$), in favor of males (t-test) $p < 0.05$. Similarly, item 11 “I was well trained to use the e-learning platform” shows significant differences between males and females “level of significance” ($p=0.00$), in favor of females (t-test) $p < 0.05$. Item 12 “I see a need to provide incentives for instructors who use e-learning platforms” also shows significant differences between males and females “level of significance” ($p=0.01$), in favor of females (t-test) $p < 0.05$. While item 15 “I prefer teaching in the classroom while getting the benefit of e-learning platforms and tools” shows significant differences between males and females “level of significance” ($p=0.01$), in favor of females (t-test) $p < 0.05$.

As discussed in this section, female instructors may interpret online learning challenges differently than males. The variations between people, which might be influenced by gender, may influence how instructors use online platforms. Instructor perceptions fluctuate depending on user variables such as personality, cognitive styles, gender, age, and prior knowledge, all of which can influence users' perceptions and attitudes about technology [13]. Due to societal conventions, the use of technology in teaching and learning may differ between male and female instructors. In view of their collectivist cultural setting, it would be expected that Kuwaiti males and females would utilize online applications primarily as a social link, especially because the Kuwaiti educational system is gender segregated.

V. Conclusion

Organizations face crises such as the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, during which educational institutions at all levels have had to shift to e-learning. Numerous educational institutions use online education to foster a collaborative learning environment. This research investigates instructors' perceptions of online and virtual learning systems focusing on gender differences in the perception of online and virtual learning and learning management system, a key platform in the operation of any contemporary academic institution, by analyzing instructors' perceptions from PAAET. Using a quantitative methodology, a questionnaire was administered to 309 faculty members from PAAET. Findings obtained from the questionnaire indicated that instructors were generally comfortable and had positive perceptions about online learning. The study also pointed to some challenges and barriers overcoming the proper implementation of online learning platforms, such as poor helpdesks, lack of training, fewer management motivations, and limited electronic educational materials were recorded. These should be studied to ensure that PAAET will adopt a system to improve the learning process and academic performance. Equality and diversity are promoted as a deliberate approach to human resource management in response to growing matters about employee well-being in the workplace. This study highlighted gender differences and found significant differences in the perceptions of online learning in favour of females. In addition, cultural and social factors play a crucial influence in the acceptance and adoption of online learning. Over time, instructors who had been averse to adopting technology in the classroom will become more receptive to their newest teaching approaches. Considering this, the institution, through its HRM, should assist in training and motivating its faculty to promote the use of online instruction in order to succeed in its courses.

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