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E-LEARNING IN MEDICAL UNIVERSITY: THE STUDENTS' OPINIONS

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ABSTRACT The growth in internet has brought changes in all walks of life including the education sector through e-learning. E-learning is learning done by studying at home using computers and courses provided on the internet. The present study explores e-learning in medical university seen from the students' point of view. The study is a descriptive survey and carried out in Zahedan University of Medical Sciences (ZAUMS) in Zahedan. the target population comprised of all the Students of ZAUMS. The sample consisted of 900 Students that randomly were selected. One questionnaire (33 items) was used in order to collect the data. The validity and reliability of instrument tested and confirmed. Majority of the students (90%) opined that E-Learning in higher education is So Effective. And 85% of students opined that E-learning, if done right, can produce great results by decreasing costs and improving performance. Ultimately, ZAUMS students have positive attitudes to implenting new technologies in ZAUMS such as E-learning.

KEYWORDS : E-Learning; Higher Education; Student; University.

Introduction:

Earlier, if you did not have time to visit a University and attend the usual classes or training programs then it could be a cause of concern. However, things have changed now, and with so many e-learning tools available you can opt for any course and sit and learn from the comfort of your own home. E-learning, electronic learning or online learning offers you the chance to select your desired institution from any part of the world, select any course you prefer, and also select the hours when you will study, thus making things a lot easier for one and all. It is widely being used for business purposes to train the employees of companies located worldwide.

E-learning is the computer and network-enabled transfer of skills and knowledge. E-learning applications and processes include Web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual education opportunities and digital collaboration. Content is delivered via the Internet, intranet/extranet, audio or video tape, satellite TV, and CD-ROM. It can be self-paced or instructor-led and includes media in the form of text, image, animation, streaming video and audio. In the other words, E-learning is a relatively new concept implying learning by means of digital media such as computers, Web pages, video conference systems and CD-ROMs. Abbreviations like CBT (*Computer-Based Training*), IBT (*Internet-Based Training*) or WBT (*Web-Based Training*) have been used as synonyms to E-Learning.

The use of Information and communication technologies (ICTs) in university education is not a new phenomenon. In the 1980s online methodologies were developed to support campus-based and distance education, under the headings 'computer-based' or 'computer-managed learning', using e.g. bulletin board systems, electronic mail and computer-mediated conferencing (Williams *et al.,* 1999). Since the 1980s text-based systems, audio graphics and videoconferencing have been used in distance education (Mason, 1994). When the World Wide Web emerged, new opportunities were created providing access to education without the limits of time and space. The World Wide Web integrates text, audio and video, and provides means for both real-time communication and asynchronous interaction (Mason, 1998).

ICTs are increasingly being used in staff training in trade and industry as well as in university education. In university education of today ICTs are used for distance tuition but also to create a complement to teacher-controlled tuition on campus (Clegg *et al.,* 2000; Hazemi & Hailes, 2002). In recent years, computer programs for e-learning, consisting of tools such as text, graphics, video, three-dimensional objects and animations, have been developed. Virtual classrooms can be used to broaden educational services (Husu, 2000). It is predicted that ICTs will bring about major benefits to the learner and the teacher as it will include sharing of resources and learning environments and promote collaborative learning (Wheeler, 2001).

So far, most discussions on the use of e-learning in Higher Education have focused on ways for the teacher to incorporate the new technology into their teaching. Discussions, or even knowledge, about e-learning from the student perspective seem to be very sparse. However, there are reports of students overwhelmingly preferring to take class using e-learning than a traditional course. They felt that e-learning was a helpful tool in their learning (Brotherton & Abowd, 2002). Students' perceptions of e-learning in university education may be influenced by specific individual variables.

Irrespective of age, men are supposed to be more used to computers than women. Women typically display lower computer aptitude and higher levels of computer anxiety. Research has indicated that men's technology usage decisions are more strongly influenced by perceptions of usefulness. In contrast, women are more influenced by perceptions of ease of use. Men and Women focus on different aspects of using computers (Venkatesh & Morris, 2000). Hence, it could be hypothesized that young male students are more prone to adapt to e-learning than young female students.

It can be seen that e-learning is moving rapidly from the margins to being a predominant form of post-secondary education. As there is a tough competition going on all over the world especially in the field of education, quality of service and student satisfaction plays a crucial role for success. The present study explores e-learning in university seen from the students' point of view in Zahedan University of Medical Sciences (ZAUMS) in Zahedan, Iran. It discusses their attitudes to and experience of e-learning used in regular university training programs.

Material and Method:

The design of the study is a descriptive survey and carried out in ZAUMS in Zahedan city on 2018. The target population comprised of all the Students of ZAUMS, Zahedan, Iran. The sample consisted of 900 Students that randomly were selected. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire (33 item) that developed and validated by the researcher. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using Cronbach alpha (0.79). In order to data gathering, the researcher visited the sample Students personally and administered the questionnaires to the sample students. The respondents were requested to record their free, frank and independent responses. An assurance was given to the respondents that their responses shall be kept confidential and information collected will be used only for the purpose for it was collected. The collected data were analyzed by using SPSS v.16

software.

Results:

In this study 41% respondents are in the age group of 15-25 years, 26-35 years (52%), and 36 and above (7%). 44% respondents were female and 56% male. 39% respondents were bachelor, 48% Master, and 13% PhD. And 81% of respondents were native students and 19% non-native students. Analysis of the student's opinions showed that:

- Majority of the students (90%) opined that E-Learning in higher education is So Effective. live classroom-based training is becoming too costly and cumbersome. Even if employees had the time to attend all the courses and seminars and to read all the books and reports they should to remain up-to-date in their area of work, the cost of such learning would be prohibitive.
- 85% of students opined that E-learning, if done right, can produce great results by decreasing costs and improving performance. Also, unlike a one-time classroom session, the e-learning course is available for others.
- 84% of students informed that E-learning supports the Organization's Goals, and e-learning can i**mproved training costs (73%),** and d**ecreased material costs (81%).**
- Majority of the students held that e-learning **increase productivity (93%)**. Because e-learning is not bound by geography or time, you can control training's impact on production by training people during down times.
- **Majority of students believe that** E-learning allows you to create a standardized process and consistency in the delivery of content (93%).   It also compresses delivery time (87%). They have combined e-learning courses with facilitated sessions (90%), and E-learning delivered consistent content (79%).
- Students expressed that E-learning supports the Learner's Development include **Real-time access (97%), freedom to fail (90%), improved retention (94%), and personalized learning (88%).** Live learning events require that those who participate align their schedules to the training calendar. E-learning eliminates this because the course can be accessed anytime, anywhere. This can also happen without Internet access.
- In terms of students, the Six benefits of e-learning, in order of importance, are: study anywhere(100%), Time and Money Savings and reduce costs(92%), flexibility(87%), better access(86%), focused learning(72%), knowledge development(65%).
- Also, in terms of students, the four disadvantages of e-learning, in order of importance, are: less face to face interaction(74%), access to technology tools(62%), lack of control(60%), isolation feel(54%).
- Finally, results indicated that students generally appear to be at least as satisfied with their on-line classes as they are with traditional ones, and also, ZAUMS students have positive attitudes to implenting new technologies in Zahedan University of Medical Sciences such as E-learning.

Conclusion:

Results of this study showed that students are comfortable with e-learning methods, also student expressed that interactive technology offers a new mode of engagement with ideas via both material and social interactivity online social - the reduction in social difference afforded by online networking fits with the idea that students should take greater responsibility for their own learning. They opined that e-learning offers the ability to manage quality at scale, and share resources across networks; its greater flexibility of provision in time and place makes it good for widening participation, and more importantly, Networks and access to online materials offer an alternative to place-based education which reduces the requirement for expensive buildings, and the costs of delivery of distance learning materials. Ravenscroft (2001) expressed that implementation of e-learning technology in higher education provides a wide range of new opportunities for development by increasing flexibility in time and location of study. There are many advantages to online and computer-based learning when compared to traditional face-to-face courses and lectures, includes:

- Students can study anywhere they have access to a computer and Internet connection
- Class work can be scheduled around work and family
- Reduces travel time and travel costs for off-campus students
- Self-paced learning modules allow students to work at their own pace
- Flexibility to join discussions in the bulletin board threaded discussion areas at any hour, or visit with classmates and instructors remotely in chat rooms
- Develops knowledge of the Internet and computers skills that will help learners throughout their lives.
- Also there are a few disadvantages as well, includes:
- Hands-on or lab work is difficult to simulate in a virtual classroom (One size doesn't fit all)
- Learners with low motivation or bad study habits may fall behind
- Students may feel isolated from the instructor and classmates (Less face-to-face interaction).
- Instructor may not always be available when students are studying or need help
- Slow Internet connections or older computers may make accessing course materials frustrating.

However, like most new technology, e-learning still has its drawbacks. "New ways of learning, require new forms of institutional management", so, if universities are to rethink their methods of teaching, they need a management structure that is capable of supporting innovation. "The process of change must be initiated from both 'bottom-up' and 'top-down', with the bottom having the knowledge and the top the power. The top must use its power, not overtly and directly, but to facilitate the work from the bottom and to provide conditions under which it can prosper".

E-learning has been used very effectively in university teaching for enhancing the traditional forms of teaching and administration. On the other hand, properly trained staff must also be hired to work with students on-line.

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