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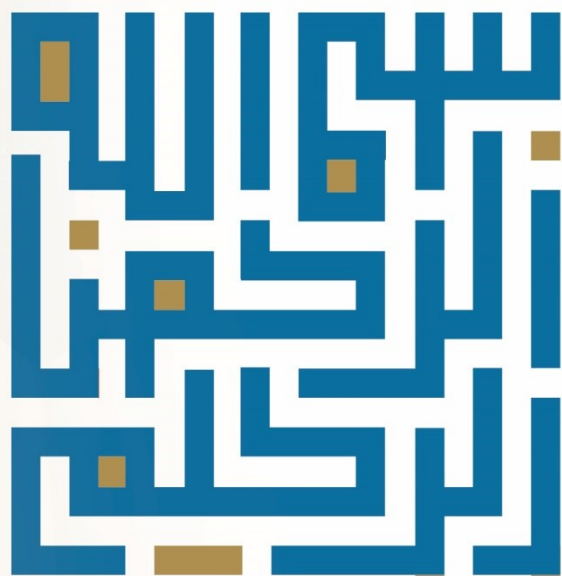




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البحوث المنشورة في المجلة
تعبر عن آراء الباحثين ولا تعبر
بالضرورة عن رأي المجلة

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أن لا تتجاوز نسبة الاقتباس في البحث المقدم (25%).

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آراء طلاب الدراسات العليا تجاه التحول من
التعلم التقليدي إلى التعلم عن بعد خلال
COVID-19

Graduate Students' Opinions Towards
Transforming from Traditional Learning to
Online Learning during COVID-19

إعداد

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المستخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى فهم تصورات طلاب الدراسات العليا وتوقعاتهم وخبراتهم ومواقفهم تجاه خبراتهم التعليمية عبر الإنترنت خلال جائحة COVID-19. تم تطبيق نهج مختلط لجمع البيانات؛ شارك في الإجابة على الاستبانة واحد وعشرون طالب دراسات عليا. أجريت المقابلات مع ٣ طلاب و ٣ طالبات من نفس مجموعة العينة لفهم نتائج البحث بشكل كامل. تظهر نتائج الدراسة أن التعلم عبر الإنترنت لا يمكن أن يحل تماماً محل التعلم التقليدي وجها لوجه. على هذا النحو، ذكر جميع المشاركين تقريباً أن التعليم عن بعد يضيف عنصراً علمياً وثقافياً مهماً إلى التعلم وسيظل مكوناً عملياً للتعليم في شكل التعلم المدمج. لذلك، يجب أن تركز الممارسة المستقبلية على تطوير نموذج التعلم المدمج لتقديم مواد الدورة، خاصة الدورات التي تشمل الجوانب النظرية والعملية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: كوفيد -١٩، التعلم عن بعد، اتجاهات طلاب الدراسات العليا، التعلم التقليدي، التحول الرقمي في التعليم.

Abstract

This study aims to understand graduate students' perceptions, expectations, experiences, and attitudes, toward their online educational experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. A mixed-method approach was applied to collect data; Twenty-one graduate students participated in answering the questionnaire. Interviews were conducted with 3 male and 3 female students from the same sample set to fully understand the research findings. The study results show that online learning cannot completely replace traditional face-to-face learning. As such, nearly all of the participants stated that distance education adds an important scientific and cultural element to learning and will remain a practical component of education in the blended learning format. Therefore, future practice should focus on developing a blended learning model for delivering course materials, especially courses that include both theoretical and practical aspects.

Keywords: COVID-19, Online Learning, Graduate Students' Attitudes, Traditional Learning, Digital transformation in education.

Introduction

The COVID-19 outbreak has led to a massive disruption to education systems globally. The online learning format considers that graduate students find and process a substantial amount of the materials individually. The growing demand for such a format is driven by people's need to continue learning even during epidemics and crises. A proper educational infrastructure should guarantee that it will facilitate organized online learning in the future, and educational institutions will not have to spend additional amounts on unnecessary capacities and resources.

The coronavirus pandemic resulted in a significant shift in education processes. For instance, its outcomes have affected approximately 1.6 billion students in more than 190 countries and each continent (United Nations, 2020). The study conducted by Rapanta et al. (2020) claims that new approaches in education are being taken to ensure the continuity of learning and training, including radio and television broadcasts in order to provide home study kits. New technologies have been adopted, for example, conferencing platforms, such as Zoom, WebEx, MS Teams, and learning management systems (LMSs): Moodle, Blackboard, and Google Classroom (Dias et al., 2020). Therefore, at the same time, it should be noted that the crisis served as a stimulus for transformation in education.

Online learning and its worldwide impact on global education are of interest due to the lack of experience analysis and knowledge gap; therefore, one particular country's example can benefit the current international research. Saudi Arabia's experiment in shifting its educational process during the COVID-19 pandemic was worth studying. In most universities in Saudi Arabia, the educational process of the Instructional Design course is performed in the form of face-to-face interaction. However, all universities have adjusted their educational process during the pandemic outbreak by shifting to an online teaching format. The course Instructional Design is mandatory for all students with a major in Educational Technology. This paper's author offers an online course on Instructional Design in the Educational Technology Master Program at King Khalid University.

The research reveals the Saudi graduate students' opinions on online education. It aims to investigate whether they can effectively and appropriately study in such a situation. This research examined six Saudi graduate students' perceptions and opinions towards the online course of the Educational Technology Master Program at King Khalid University.

The purpose of the study is to examine the attitude of graduate students toward online learning. It is crucial to evaluate their perceptions of new educational formats. Thus, the research question pertains to the graduate students' perceptions, expectations, experiences, and attitudes, including positive or negative, toward their online learning experiences. It is analyzed through the perspective of graduate students' online interactions in comparison to their traditional classroom experiences. This study provides an understanding of how online learning conditions can be improved for Saudi graduate students.

Research questions:

1. What are the Graduate Students' attitudes (likes and dislikes) toward their online learning experiences?
2. What are the Graduate Students' perceptions (expectations and experiences) toward their online learning experiences?
3. How do the online interactions experienced by graduate students compare to their traditional classroom experiences?
4. What suggestions can be made for the future design of online learning environments for graduate students?

Literature Review

Online Learning Worldwide and Covid-19 Effects

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the success factors are different from those during usual times for many reasons. First, during COVID-19, the shift to e-learning happened for all educational institutions, which was unexpected. Not all educational systems could exchange smoothly as not all were previously applied to e-learning, barring institutions that already offered e-learning and were planning for and funding the e-learning process. Second, during COVID-19, political and health factors impacted the educational process, which makes it an uncommon condition. Third, the course materials taught through e-learning pre-COVID-19 were well-prepared, while during COVID-19, the courses were not planned to be taught through e-learning (Behforouz et al., 2021).

The studies provided all over the world examine the consequences, advantages, solutions, and recommendations for online learning in terms of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. The coronavirus contributes to moving towards online and remote learning (Dias et al., 2020). The implementation

of e-learning is predicated on the degree of established familiarity with technologies; for example, Chinese universities successfully adopted the video-conferencing platforms Zoom and Moodle (Ali, 2020). In contrast, some Australian educational institutions have faced difficulties with the rapid shift to online learning. Thus, the Covid-19 outcomes on the learning process rely on existing experience with digital tools.

There are various positive points to implementing online educational processes. Mukhtar et al. (2020) argue that these are remote learning, easy administration, accessibility, a comfortable environment, student-centered learning, and asynchronous learning. Regarding content, the basis for e-learning is various materials, including lectures, videos, and different assignments (Rapanta et al., 2020). Students can re-watch, record, and use lectures as much as they need (Mukhtar et al., 2020). Such technologies promote the opportunity to integrate numerous types of media and enhance the anonymity of students (Rapanta et al., 2020). According to Rapanta et al. (2020), the online format benefits educational personnel in experimenting and exploring creative alternatives. To achieve quality in knowledge, teachers are required to find reliable materials. For this reason, various studies assert that the shift to online learning education can bring several positive outcomes for students and educators.

Concerning the disadvantages of the Covid-19 outbreak, some aspects are disturbing the learning process. The survey conducted by Adnan and Anwar (2020) in Pakistan estimates that distance learning does not produce favorable results in developing countries. Adnan and Anwar (2020) point out that in such economies, many students do not have access to the Internet due to technical and financial problems. However, 78.6% of higher education students argued that traditional learning was more effective compared to online one (Adnan & Anwar, 2020). The crucial element in education is communication between teachers and students. This aspect can significantly impact the performance of students, whereas teachers' support contributes to a better understanding of the course material (Rapanta et al., 2020). Hence, due to online learning, there is no clear pedagogical framework (Picciano, 2017). Consequently, as educational institutions have not determined additional pedagogical dimensions that should be considered for online learning, distance learning might negatively impact students.

Online Learning in Saudi Arabia

The educational system in Saudi Arabia is well-equipped to provide opportunities for online learning. According to Tanveer et al. (2020), higher education in KSA has been developing various campaigns promoting online classes and distance learning. While online learning is regarded as a novel style in Saudi Arabia, most universities have been advancing by adopting e-learning to the curriculum of on-campus and distance courses (Alanazy, 2018). Before the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak, there had been a positive attitude towards online learning as it fastened the communication between faculty members and students (Alanazy, 2018). Implementation of online learning before the coronavirus was perceived as a good process.

However, the nation faces challenges and limitations regarding online learning in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the study conducted by Tanveer et al. (2020), figures show that well above 67% of Saudi Arabia students note that shutting down the education sector may adversely affect their learning process. About a quarter of the research participants argue that assignments can be handled without external support (Tanveer et al., 2020). For instance, some medical students in Saudi Arabia claim to experience methodological challenges, technical challenges, and behavioral challenges regarding content delivery and technological hindrances of internet connectivity (Khalil et al., 2020). Particular academic projects and internships are not completed; therefore, it affects the graduates' performance in the labor market (Khalil et al., 2020). Tanveer et al. (2020) argue that encouraging social distancing and closing the campus involves pausing research projects; consequently, students experience an enormous level of stress. Overall, higher education in Saudi Arabia is ready to manage a significant volume of online learning.

Technologies Used in Online Learning

Referring to solutions taken in Covid-19 circumstances, several studies promote technological advances and educational staff competencies. The effective online learning process requires continuous faculty development. Owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) emphasize the need for faculty's digital skills (Dias et al., 2020). It can be achieved through a technological backbone, stimulating learner motivation and participation in the learning process (Dias et al., 2020). Students recommend diminishing cognitive load and increasing interactivities (Mukhtar et al., 2020). Mukhtar et al. (2020) opine that institutions can

enhance quality by purchasing premium software and proctoring software. It is essential in detecting plagiarism in assignments and cheating on exams (Mukhtar et al., 2020). According to Dias et al. (2020) , the sudden elimination of in-person classes is supposed to accelerate the adoption of OLEs as learning mediators. Hence, focusing on the faculty's digital skills, online education processes require quick adaptation to technological advances.

Methodology

Research Method:

The purpose of this research study was to understand graduate students' perceptions, expectations, experiences, and attitudes, including positive and negative, toward their online learning experiences during this COVID-19 pandemic period. The research is a mixed-method approach that uses both qualitative and quantitative methods and the concurrent triangulation research design to explore the attitude and perceptions of graduate students toward online learning. Researchers deliberately combine quantitative and qualitative data instead of analyzing them separately (Creswell & Clark, 2017). With the help of a Student Attitude and perceptions Survey, it is possible to apply accurate estimates, quantitative research, and proper qualitative research to study students' attitudes and perceptions of online learning.

A pragmatic knowledge stance was the researcher base of this research study. In the pragmatic knowledge stance, “the researcher bases the inquiry on the assumption that collecting diverse types of data best provides an understanding of a research problem” (Creswell, 2003, p. 21). This philosophical stance claims that the researcher could use both quantitative and qualitative approaches when they engage in their research (Creswell, 2003).

A survey research design was used to collect appropriate statistical data to explore graduate students' attitudes and perceptions toward online learning. In particular, the researcher utilized an online questionnaire quantitatively. Then, the online interview procedure (via Zoom) was used in the qualitative phase to explore the graduate students' perceptions (expectations and experiences) toward their online learning experiences. The administration of the semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to gather textual data from six selected graduate students, after which coding

and thematic analysis were undertaken to develop themes and undertake a cross-thematic analysis based on the qualitative research question (Miles & Huberman, 2001). In the online interview procedure, no video recordings were made, nor was identifying information collected either in written notes or on the audio recordings.

Additionally, no other data, such as observations or artifacts, was taken from the participants. The participants had full knowledge of the purpose of the study well earlier. In qualitative research contexts, the researcher defined dependability using the stepwise replication strategy and ensured that two or more researchers evaluated qualitative research data to note any inconsistencies. To ensure the study's credibility, specific steps were taken to ensure that qualitative findings were congruent with reality, validity was ensured by:

1. Having a transparent, systematic approach to data collection,
2. Maintaining an audit trail to document the flow and processing of data and
3. Member checking to ensure that the approaches and techniques used are valid.

In quantitative research contexts, the survey was reviewed by a content expert to ensure each prompt was aligned with valid content from the field. Additionally, reliability statistics were obtained using Cronbach's alpha coefficient that indicated acceptable internal consistency levels exceeding 0.7.

Population & sample

The study participants included 21 graduate students registered in an online instructional design course in the educational technology Master's program at King Khalid University. A non-probability sampling technique, also referred to as the purposive sampling method, is employed to select the participants for the research studies. Different courses most likely deployed different approaches in teaching and learning techniques which might affect students' attitudes and satisfaction with online learning during this pandemic.

Of the total set of graduate students, those selected are in their fourth master's semester in the Educational Technology program, and none of them had previous experiences with online courses. The anonymity principle was followed at all stages of the study, accompanied by the use of pseudonyms to

keep personal data in confidence. At the same time when the survey was being distributed via online format, the students were asked whether they were willing to participate in interviews via Zoom video interviews. A total of 6 participants responded 3 male and 3 female students. All the students had full knowledge of the purpose of the study and agreed to participate in it.

Online Course Format

The Instructional Design course in the Educational Technology Master Program at King Khalid University is entirely online. Every week, students interact in the discussion board on the Blackboard platform. The learning management system Blackboard is fully interactive. Students do not meet in person in the audience but communicate on the Internet. Course materials are submitted electronically; discussions are performed through interactive means. The Blackboard platform increases the availability of materials; the latter can be accessed anytime and anywhere. Students can receive all of their learning materials, including assignments, lecture notes, slides, hyperlinks, and audio/video applications. Every week, lectures are provided regarding the coursebook, texts, and materials; a project is assigned every two weeks. The procedures are repeated for each assignment module. The Blackboard platform helps learners collaborate on the Internet; their performance is also evaluated online and sent feedback immediately. In the end, it requires a midterm and a final exam.

Data Collection Procedures

Student Attitude Survey

Students responded to 18 points of the questionnaire during the 2021 Spring semester's final week as part of a sociological study that reveals students' attitudes and perceptions towards online learning in terms of the educational process. It includes 5-Likert-type questions from 1, which means "strongly disagree" to 5 - "strongly agree".

Focus Group Interview

The study examines open-ended questions, including students' favorite program formats and attitudes toward online education in advance and afterward. The open-ended questions have been created in the participants' language which is Arabic and after that, the researcher has been translated them into English. The interview data were collected through online interviews (via Zoom). A total of 6 students 3 males and 3 females responded to the open-ended questions.

The open-ended questions results had been collected; they had been coded and interpreted. After these steps, particular patterns obtained from the analysis are distinguished by the researchers. A focus group is a qualitative method of collecting information (Robinson, 2020). As it is a moderated discussion, all members of this discussion should have similar socio-demographic characteristics, attitudes, or behaviors (Robinson, 2020). Therefore, a focus group interview is conducted with all six participants. The objective is to identify the models by which opinions are formed.

Procedure

Each graduate student engaging in the study is a member of a different group in the actual course. All participants should respond to the Student Attitude Survey after concluding the course. The focus group interview with all study participants was carried out at the end of the Spring semester of 2021. Regarding duration, the interview lasted approximately 40 minutes in total.

Data Analyses

Quantitative data obtained through the Student Attitude and perceptions Survey was assessed and rated in accordance with the particular study inquiry. The research provided numerical data that can be statistically analyzed to support hypotheses. To test the mean differences in graduate students' attitudes toward their online learning experiences, the mean and standard deviation tests were used as two main relative statistical approaches. Qualitative methods such as open-ended questions provided details that have been recorded, transcribed, and categorized. Audio recordings were transcribed from the interviews, following which data was processed and organized by the researcher to ensure that qualitative data was used by the most relevant themes of graduate students' perceptions (expectations and experiences). Data was coded based on themes developed about the qualitative research question. Reading the data assisted in identifying the main and common elements brought from the interviews, and categorization was used for dividing the information regarding the research questions.

Results

Introduction

The purpose of the study is to explore the attitude of graduate students toward online learning collected in this research. To achieve this purpose,

the survey research method is used to investigate and collect 21 graduate students' attitudes toward expectations and experiences of online learning. A mixed-method approach has been applied for data collection; 21 graduate students participated in answering the questionnaire survey. Interviews are being conducted with 3 male and 3 female students of the same group of samples to get a total understanding of the research findings. The research questions this study attempts to answer are as follows:

1. What are the Graduate Students' attitudes toward their online learning experiences?
2. What are the Graduate Students' perceptions (expectations and experiences) toward their online learning experiences?
3. How do the online interactions experienced by graduate students compare to their traditional classroom experiences?
4. What suggestions can be made for the future design of online learning environments for graduate students?

Results Finding

To answer research question 1: What are the Graduate Students' attitudes toward their online learning experiences?

A descriptive statistic was used to present the data gathered from the Graduate Students' Attitude towards Online Learning Survey. Table 1 displays that students had the highest mean score for Item 3. I will be able to apply the information gained in online education in the future ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 0.582$), with 73.7% Strongly Agree, 21.1% Agree, and 5.3% Neutral. Item 10 is the second-highest mean score. Students and teachers need to be taught how to work online ($M = 4.63$, $SD = 0.496$), with a total number of 63.2% Strongly Agree and 36.8% Agree. The next highest mean score is Item 14. Online training develops self-management skills ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 0.692$), with 68.4% Strongly Agree, 21.1% Agree, and 10.5% Neutral.

The following mean score is Item 4. Online learning enhances the interaction between teacher and students ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 0.582$), with 63.2% Strongly Agree, 31.6% Agree, 6 and 5.3% Disagree; and the least mean score is for Item 9. I have faced the problem of completing practical tasks without the teacher's explanations ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.284$), with 15.8% Strongly Agree, 5.3% Agree, 31.6% being Neutral, 31.6% Disagree and 15.8% Strongly Disagree.

Table 1. Students' attitude on online learning experiences.

SD	D	N	A	SA	Std. Deviation	Mean	Item
0%	5.3%	10.5%	42.1%	42.1%	0.85	4.21	1. Online learning seems to be more convenient than traditional education
0%	10.5%	21.1%	36.8%	31.6%	0.99	3.89	2. Online learning gives me a deeper understanding of the subject
0%	0%	5.3%	21.1%	73.7%	0.58	4.68	3. I will be able to apply the information gained in online education in the future
0%	5.3%	0%	31.6%	63.2%	0.77	4.53	4. Online learning enhances the interaction between teachers and students
0%	0%	31.6%	26.3%	42.1%	0.88	4.11	5. I received an answer to the arisen questions promptly
0%	5.3%	5.3%	26.3%	63.2%	0.84	4.47	6. The opportunity to re-watch the video of the lecture allowed me to understand the material better
0%	10.5%	5.3%	36.8%	47.4%	0.98	4.21	7. The low speed of the Internet connection makes it difficult for the educational process
10.5%	15.8%	26.3%	42.1%	5.3%	1.12	3.16	8. Online learning aggravates my social isolation
15.8%	31.6%	31.6%	5.3%	15.8%	1.28	2.74	9. I have faced the problem of completing practical tasks without the teacher's explanations
0%	0%	0%	36.8%	63.2%	0.50	4.63	10. Students and teachers need to be taught how to work online
0%	10.5%	5.3%	36.8%	47.4%	0.98	4.21	11. Online training gives me enough time to complete the assignments
0%	0%	21.1%	42.1%	36.8%	0.76	4.16	12. Online learning assignment instructions are clear
0%	5.3%	15.8%	57.9%	21.1%	0.78	3.95	13. My level of motivation has increased due to the online format.
0%	0%	10.5%	21.1%	68.4%	0.69	4.58	14. Online training develops self-management skills
0%	5.3%	5.3%	26.3%	63.2%	0.84	4.47	15. It is necessary for me to study in a comfortable and familiar environment

SD	D	N	A	SA	Std. Deviation	Mean	Item
15.8%	15.8%	26.3%	26.3%	15.8%	1.33	3.11	16. Online learning should replace traditional education
5.3%	5.3%	15.8%	26.3%	47.4%	1.18	4.05	17. I would like to continue studying online in the future
0%	10.5%	26.3%	21.1%	42.1%	1.08	3.95	18. I will recommend online learning to other people

To answer research question 2: What are the Graduate Students' perceptions (expectations and experiences) toward their online learning experiences?

To answer the question, the data retrieved from the interviews showed that most of the graduate students interviewed for this study stated that they prefer online learning for its flexibility, access, and opportunity to participate. One male participant said online learning formats are more efficient and it is easier to explain the course content and enables the "learner to follow the steps better than the presentation in the traditional learning environment." Additionally, the participant said that online learning "helps reduce the presence of individual differences between learners as it places various accessible educational resources, and it saves effort and time and motivates the learner to individual self-learning and helps him to do so." Although most of the participants did agree that the practical part of the course should be taught in the traditional, face-to-face format, they were also more likely to state that distance education is critical to the current learning environment due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, one of the male participants said that distance education "plays an important and effective role in raising the cultural and scientific level of the learner." A female participant also said that the "theoretical part of the course should be an online format." A male participant agreed that the theoretical part is best taught using an online learning format, stating that "distance education for this course and its teaching has the advantage of having an effective impact on the theoretical side of the course." As such, almost all the participants said that distance education adds an important scientific and cultural element to learning and will remain an effective component of education in the blended learning format.

To answer research question 3: How do the online interactions experienced by graduate students compare to their traditional classroom experiences?

To answer the question, the data retrieved from the interviews showed the participants overwhelmingly stated that their experiences with online interactions were positive and they had more opportunities to learn about new educational tools and technologies that deliver course content. In particular, one female participant stated that the online course *“opened up my horizons in education, so it is possible to learn through video, virtual classes, comics, simulation, creating electronic tests, distance training courses as well as electronic games, so education became accessible to everyone.”* Other participants added that they believe that online learning is more accessible, cost-effective, and efficient, and makes individualization easier to apply to every student. A female participant said they believe that distance education may be better and offer greater opportunities than traditional or blended education as it obliterates some barriers to education, such as geographic location, travel distance, etc. Specifically, the participant said that online learning may be better *“in the presence of some circumstances for graduate students from work and family responsibilities and distance from the university from the student resident and other difficulties.”* Nevertheless, the participants also agreed that distance education cannot replace some aspects of the course, and learning in general, namely practical knowledge that is more effectively gained through hands-on, face-to-face interactions. Further, courses are strictly separated by gender in the traditional, face-to-face classroom environment, and one of the female participants noted that although they believe a blending learning method is preferred, the online environment makes it easier to simultaneously deliver course content to both male and female students. Specifically, one female participant said, *“the course professor must be the same gender as the learners because eye contact is necessary between the learner and the teacher.”* Similarly, one of the male participants noted that online learning is the *“most effective and most efficient method when it includes more than one target group of male and female students.”*

To answer research question 4: What suggestions can be made for the future design of online learning environments for graduate students?

The data retrieved from the interviews showed that the participants were more likely to agree that online learning is efficient and convenient, removes barriers to education, and promotes easier and more effective interactions with professionals using novel technological tools and methods. However, some suggestions for improvement were made, such as creating a blended course that teaches the practical side in the traditional, face-to-face format. The male participants agreed that the course is better delivered through the blended format to allow them to participate in labs and high-level training. In a similar vein, female participants stated they prefer the online learning format is more productive and effective because it is more organized; however, they would also prefer more direct contact with the professor when learning the more hands-on and practical application of the content. In particular, one of the female participants said that they would rather receive *“information and direct indoctrination from the professor in the practical part, as it is more useful if it is presented in an interactive practical way.”* Another female participant said they believe that the online format was less flexible than the traditional blended format as students were required to use the same application to learn the course material. Therefore, students who preferred other methods of learning or content delivery may not have derived the same benefits as other students. Based on the responses from both male and female students, the future design of online learning environments for graduate students should focus more on delivering practical components of the course and give more options for the delivery of the course for greater individualization.

Discussion

This study aims to examine graduate students' perceptions of online learning as the academic world embraces digital and remote technologies to facilitate distance education. This chapter, therefore, provides a discussion of the findings and connects the findings to the previous literature. Further, this chapter includes any limitations, recommendations for practice and future research, and a summary in the conclusion.

The findings from the study show that graduate students generally agree that online learning may improve access to education and learning outcomes. The study's participants perceive online learning as efficient and convenient

which helps enhance interactions between students and professors due to ease of access. As a case in point, a majority of both male and female participants stated that they believe online learning makes it easier to simultaneously deliver course content to more students because online learning technologies facilitate an environment in which both male and female students can learn in the same space. The interview and survey results also show that the graduate students preferred the different technologies that they can use through online learning, such as video, simulations, online tests and quizzes, training courses, and games. Research shows that the use of these tools can improve learning outcomes by allowing students to re-watch lectures and videos and refer to them as needed (Rapanta et al., 2020; Mukhtar et al., 2020). Rapanta et al. 's (2020) research also found that these technologies provide greater opportunities for anonymity. Further, the findings show that online learning may better support student-centered education and emphasize the role of the student in knowledge production (Mukhtar et al., 2020). According to the study conducted by Mukhtar et al. (2020) , online learning transforms educational opportunities for many students who otherwise might be unable to gain easy access to higher education. However, online learning also requires specific equipment to deliver course content, and those who are not in high and middle-income countries may not have access to such equipment (Adnan & Anwar, 2020). Overall, the graduate students interviewed for this study opine that a blended learning model that uses both traditional, face-to-face methods and online learning is the best format for teaching both theoretical and practical aspects of courses.

Limitations

Some potential limitations of this research include a small sample size, possible biases in the interview answers, and self-selection bias. A small sample size curtails the ability of research findings to be attributed to a wider population. Further, participants may be biased in their answers and may be influenced to answer questions in a certain way and may not accurately reflect the selected group under study. Participants may also be influenced by the perceptions of the researcher, which may be reflected in the way the survey and interview questions are worded and/or delivered.

Recommendations

According to the finding of this study, the graduate students agreed that online education is a valuable and effective alternative to delivering higher

education courses during the COVID-19 pandemic and that efforts should be made to continue developing and improving online courses. However, some shortcomings of online learning were identified, and some aspects of the coursework should be taught face-to-face. Based on the findings and the extant literature, online learning still needs to be accepted to replace traditional learning entirely. Future practice should focus on developing a blended learning model to deliver course material, particularly courses that include both theoretical and practical aspects.

Future Research

Online learning at the graduate school level would benefit from future research on different types of courses and course materials. For instance, the findings of this study suggest that specific elements of the course changed the graduate students' perspectives about whether face-to-face or online learning would be more beneficial and effective. Therefore, future research should focus on differences in courses and the way that content is delivered to the students. In this case, the research can provide insights into different online learning models, methods, and tools that can enhance learning outcomes based on individual differences in students and differences in course content.

Conclusion

The study examined the opinions of online learning among Saudi graduate students and the impact that online learning has on course learning outcomes. The participants consisted of both male and female students who were enrolled in the same online course and found that the majority of the students agreed that although online learning is efficient and cost-effective, some aspects of traditional, face-to-face education cannot be replaced by online technologies. However, online learning is capable of enhancing student engagement and student-centered learning and played a critical role in delivering higher education to students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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