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Kholoud Imhammad Al-Mseidin

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Post Pandemic Readjustment to Traditional Education System: Analyzing Difficulties of University Students and Recommendations

Kholoud Imhammad Al-Mseidin

Assistant Professor, Educational and Psychological Counselling, Irbid National University, Jordan

kh.alsaudi@inu.edu.jo

ORCID: 0000-0002-0498-5893

Abstract:

The recent outburst of COVID-19 has utterly revolutionized the world in every sector of life, be it health, economy, tourism, employment or education. Internet revolution, for the first time, with such pace and potential played the most important role amidst crises. Though, work from home and virtual education system have been existing long before the outburst of COVID-19, however, the rampant and widespread use of internet appeared as a result of global pandemic which mandated social isolation as the most important COVID combating measure. It was the December of 2019, when COVID-19 outburst in the Chinese district of Wuhan and then started spreading to other countries. Along with many other measures to combat the situation, virtual education system was introduced at every level of education; PG, primary, secondary, higher secondary, graduation and post-graduation level. Once, the global expedition for vaccination is launched successfully, and many people got vaccinated as well, and the danger of COVID-19 shattered to an extent, different institutions started to normalize their systems to the pre-COVID-19 era. Readjustment to the traditional education system from virtual/ online education system was also commenced. When the online or virtual education system was launched, it wasn't adapted without hardships, like learning to use virtual education tools to the problem of the affordability of these tools and access to internet. However, once the whole education system switched to the virtual class system, a call back to the traditional education system came, since the hovering threat of COVID spread was shedding away. To this, the reaction was observed. Many of the students wanted to continue their education with the online/virtual system, for which, they present many reasons. This research paper targets the population of the university students and aims at exploring the difficulties the university students are facing in readjustment to the traditional education system. Also, some recommendations are given to ease the issue of readjustment to the traditional education system keeping in view the targets of educational institutes.

Keywords: online education; traditional education system; virtual education; higher education students.

Introduction:

There is a plethora of literature about the fact that; “the COVID-19 epidemic has produced tremendous economic, social, and political issues throughout the world.” According to UNESCO; “it has resulted in more than a health catastrophe; it has also resulted in an educational crisis. 87 percent of the world’s student population was affected by lockdowns and quarantines, and 1.52 billion students were absent from school and related educational institutions.” (UNESCO Learning Portal, 2020) COVID-19’s abruptness, unpredictability, and volatility placed the educational system in a rush to handle the shifting learning landscape. The disruption caused by COVID-19 in the educational system is so severe that institutions must address it immediately. This is one issue that was to be addressed whence there was global online education system. There are many studies suggesting the negative impacts of online education on students’ learning as well as socialization process in which universities and other education institutions play a very important part (Ivanova, 2021) Many of the students as well as teachers graded online or virtual education system good and proficient in terms of accessibility of the students to education while observing social isolations norms amidst COVID, accessibility, affordability, anonymity amongst students and creative learning. Likewise, there are negative aspects of online or virtual education system are there, owing to which many of the students, teachers, education institutions and education policy makers demand revert to traditional education system once the thread of COVID is over. The reasons are the general drawbacks of the online education system like; online education system is difficult to learn for many students due to their lack of IT knowledge and computer literacy. Likewise, virtual class system may bring forth sense of isolation amongst the students which may further lead to psychological and cognitive problems. Many of the students are prone to be indolent, for whom, later on, it becomes difficult to abandon their routine, or to be more precise, their “comfort zone” and get adjusted to newer ones. In the current scenario, since the education institutions are switching to the traditional education system, many of the students and teachers are happy and satisfied. On the other hand, also, there is a number of students who report difficulties in adjusting to the traditional education system once they’ve got used to the online or virtual education system. Thusly, there are two different

schools of thought with different sentiments as to the post-COVID readjustment to the traditional or on-campus education system (Al-Mseidin, Omar-Fauzee, & Kaur, 2017). The research targets university students and teachers with social and natural sciences subjects and in the light of group discussions of the targeted populations highlights the concerns and difficulties (social, psychological or economic) which the students are suffering in readjusting to the traditional system. Suggestions are also given to address the issues of the students. Institutions of higher learning must begin to recognize and identify the medium- and long-term ramifications of the epidemic on teaching and learning as well as the student experience, infrastructure, operations, and people in the context of the pandemic. In order to handle the current issues that each university is experiencing, scenario analysis and an understanding of the university’s environment are essential (Al-Mseidin & Al-Zu’bi, 2021; Pilz, Theiler-Schwetz & Trummer, 2020) Universities must be able to remain resilient in the face of hardship. Resilience is defined in the educational system as the ability to overcome a range of obstacles—trauma, tragedy, and crises—and emerge stronger, wiser, and more personally powerful as a result of the experience (Abdel-Qawi, 2023; Al-Mseidin, 2021; Henderson, 2012). The educational system must be prepared to develop solutions for going forward and adjusting to the new normal that will emerge as a result of the calamity, and it must do so quickly. Higher education must address the continuity of teaching and learning both during and after the pandemic if it is to remain resilient.

Research Method:

• Study Design

We used a “qualitative online focus group design” for this research study for a variety of reasons. To begin, this research design makes it possible to conduct “an interactive and in-depth examination” of the respondents’ experiences (Kitzinger, 1995; Berg, 2009) Secondly, the group method can assist participants in clarifying points of view that may not surface during a “one-on-one interview.” Additionally, it can provide substantial individual and group perspectives on a subject, as well as perceptual discrepancies across individuals and groups. (Berg, 2009) Thus, focus group talks were the most appropriate method for efficiently addressing the study’s objectives. The conversations

were placed online due to the global nature of the research and also because of the current Covid-19 pandemic and social isolation that persists in many colleges. Additionally, because this strategy was cost effective. (Tates, 2009) Additionally, it ensured a thorough examination of participants' perspectives, expectations, and obstacles, and was scheduled to create recommendations for changes and hypotheses for future study.

• **Research questions**

Following are the research questions aimed to be answered and explored in this research study are:

1. In the post-COVID era, while the universities are switching to the traditional education system, are the social sciences students readily willing to comply with the university mandate?
2. What are the various reasons and factors the social sciences university students and their teachers present to continue education by "online education system" in the post-COVID world?
3. Since, the universities are essentially returning to traditional education system, what are the different recommendations to make this switching (from online to traditional education system smooth?

• **Hypothesis**

Using the "Push-Pull-Mooring Model" literature, the research study seeks to create a research model that describes university students' switching (from online/ virtual system to traditional education system and vice versa) behavior throughout the epidemic. According to the circumstances of the virtual education environment, this study identifies the individual orientation of the "Push, Pull, and Mooring" variables.

1. Push factors:

Students' willingness to switch between traditional and online learning environments is influenced by the convenience with which they may do so (Michaelidou and Christodoulides, 2011). Chen and Keng (2019) claim that online learning platforms cause learners to feel inconvenient when attending physical classrooms, which has a negative impact on the overall convenience of the platform. As a result, students change their learning platform from the classroom to the internet, thereby increasing their "individual learning effect." Even if they are concerned about being affected by the pandemic, students will be willing to switch from traditional classroom learning to online learning if

they believe they will be at risk of contracting the disease.

The Security Risk program encourages students to reduce their likelihood of attending classes in traditional classroom settings while increasing their preparedness to participate in online learning, in the case of a pandemic. Physical classrooms are unable to provide real-time learning services to students because they are unable to return to the physical classroom during the epidemic. As a result, students are more likely than ever before to shift away from physical study and toward online learning. The outcome is that service quality is a motivating factor in this situation. People abandoning existing services, according to the PPM framework, is a result of the Push factor, which is a negative influence element. Earlier study has identified push-oriented variables such as the convenience of learning, the quality of services, and the risk of injury or death (Chen and Keng, 2019; Cheng et al., 2019; Liao et al., 2019). The initial hypothesis is made up of the factors listed above.

2. Pull factors:

Ease of Use is described as the ease with which an individual can utilize information systems (Davis, 1989; Davis et al., 1989). Learners are also under the impression that using online learning systems will assist them improve their learning performance, which motivates them to use online learning systems more freely. The effect of this is that when students perceive that online learning systems are useful and straightforward to use, they are more likely to continue to utilize them (Chang et al., 2017; Ayele and Birhanie, 2018; Huang and Teo, 2019; Huang et al., 2020).

In today's world, technology is a tool that may be used to aid consumers in achieving particular activities. A task, on the other hand, is described as the work that must be completed by the application of technology (Goodhue and Thompson, 1995). Consequently, when a task meets the requirements, task performance for information system users is maximized as a result (Khan et al., 2018). A number of academics have explored the relationship between learners' performance and learning environments on online learning platforms, which is worth considering while assessing previous research on online learning. The findings of the study revealed that the task-technology fit had an impact on both willingness to use and performance when acquiring new skills (Yu and Yu, 2010; Lin and Wang, 2012; Kissi et al., 2018; Isaac et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2019). Students' decisions to move to online

learning will be influenced, in part, by whether Tasks (learning objectives during the epidemic) and Technology (online learning platforms) meet or exceed their expectations.

The primary determinants of Pull factors are; “utility, ease of use, task–technology fit, and teachers’ teaching attitude.” These are all positive factors that increase a person’s readiness to switch, and hence comprise the second hypothesis.

3. Mooring Factor

Students’ previous use habits contribute to their proclivity for maintaining the status quo, which results in a low incentive to convert from offline to online learning. This is referred to as the third hypothesis.

Thus, the major hypotheses are as follows:

H1: “The greater the convenience, quality, and perceived security risk of offline learning services, the less likely students will migrate from offline to online learning.”

H2: “The greater the perceived ease of use, task-technology fit, instructor attitude, and perceived usefulness, the more likely the user will have intents to transfer from offline to online learning platforms.”

H3: “The greater the degree of offline habit formation, the less likely students will have a desire to transfer from offline to online learning platforms.”

H4: “The more ingrained previous behaviors are, the weaker the link between push factors and switching intentions.”

H5: “The more ingrained previous behaviors are, the weaker the association between pull factors and switching intentions.”

• Study Participants

Participants for the study were selected purposely. To ensure a substantial diversity of viewpoint amongst the groups, we recruited social sciences students and lecturers from several universities using a maximum variation sampling technique (Cohen, 2018) Participants were chosen using roll-call lists of social sciences undergraduates as a sampling frame. The class leaders were first approached. Class leaders were chosen first because they had direct contact with the professors and their peers. As a result, they served as connectors, with the assistance of those class leaders, additional participants were picked. Upon initial contact, each student was informed about the study’s context and invited to participate. Sixty students took part in eight focus group conversations, with each group

consisting of seven or eight individuals. During discussions, a satisfactory male-to-female participant ratio (40/60) was maintained. Discussions in focus groups were continued until the saturation point of new material was reached.

• Procedure

The participating students received an e-mail with instructions on how to utilize the online focus group platform, as well as a discussion guide to stimulate conversation. Each was assigned a unique “log-in name” and “password” to the online forum. Only moderators had access to the forum during data collection. The confidentiality and security of the data, as well as the anonymity of statements in the transcripts and final report, were ensured. Due to the Internet-based nature of data collection, participants expressed informed consent by clicking a button after reading all pertinent information.

• Study Setting and Data Collection

The “synchronous electronic focus group discussions” followed a discussion guide established in cooperation with specialists for this project. It included six open-ended questions (the research questions), which encouraged participants of the study to address as many aspects as possible. Dual moderators moderated the focus group conversations in November and December of 2021. Each group’s forum began with an introduction and then asked participants about their experiences with online learning, the differences between online and on-campus learning, the difficulties they encountered during readjustment to the traditional education system, their level of satisfaction with online evaluation, and their preferences for learning modalities for the following academic year. By logging into the website, all students in each focus group participated in a live synchronous session for discussion. The students communicated via an internet conferencing platform, and their conversations were recorded and transcribed. Two moderators were present; one guaranteed that the focus group sessions progressed smoothly and the other ensured that all of the issues in question were covered. Focus groups with a dual moderator led to highly productive sessions. Each of the group discussion lasted approximately 90–120 minutes. The moderators agreed during the final two focus group talks that saturation had been attained and that more responses would consequently be superfluous.

• Data Analysis

The group discussions were duly recorded, verbatim was transcribed, and the content was assessed thoroughly. This helped reduce the data into important elements in a systematic way. The data were organized around the discussion questions. Inductive analysis was utilized to code each significant sentence and group related codes into overarching sub-themes of the study. Lastly, the related sub-themes were grouped into a major subject. Initial research was done. The initial coding was then compared. It was then discussed and adjusted until more representational coding scheme, themes, and sub-themes emerged.

Results and Discussion:

In the wake of global pandemic; the COVID-19, the education system turned to be virtual, with E-learning the new “new”. Since that time, there have been three phases of educations; traditional, virtual/online and again traditional. During the period, the education system transformed twice; in the earlier phase, from traditional to online and in the later or current phase from online to on-campus or traditional education system. A lot has been discussed about the pros and cons of online and traditional education system. (Cellini, 2021) While the other studies show that many of the students demanded back their traditional “pre-COVID” education system, the plethora of the students of social sciences are found reluctant to resume education in the traditional education system. There is a lot of literature about the difficulties the students faced while adjusting to the online education system. (Karakose, 2020; (“Impact of online learning on school education”, 2021) Since, this research study focused on the difficulties social sciences university students are facing in readjustment to the traditional education system after a long period of online virtual education system, the research is very significant. The group discussions of various concerned groups of social sciences university students elaborated various themes in which the general opinion of the social sciences students was first taken and with careful sampling the students with the “pro-online education system” were further interviewed to deeply analyze the core reasons and concerns the students with pro-online education system presented. These reasons are regarded as the themes of the study. Thus, the discussion gave forth various themes. Many of the students who were reluctant to readjust to the traditional education system reported their fear of COVID re-outburst. Many of the students

had the roots of their fear in their parents’ perceptions. They said their parents were reluctant to let their children go to the on-campus classes and demanded maintaining the “status quo” i.e., the online education system. The other theme that came to be, was that, the social sciences students had no laboratory work as the health, pure, and natural sciences students have to do, and also that the social sciences students needed reading material to pursue their education which they readily secured from the internet, thus, they preferred the online system. For these students, online education system presented flexibility to create their own schedule. The other theme was, there were many students who didn’t readily accept the “change of routine” and thus, readjusting to the traditional education system is a burden for them. The most important theme that appeared is that, in higher education institutes, there are the students who have been living out of their home-cities and settled in other cities. Online education system gave them opportunity to stay at home and still fulfil their dream of higher education, this, in turn, saved a lot of money as well as time. Family time spending also has an impact on the students’ willingness or unwillingness to go for traditional education system option. Online education system thus, facilitated the “distant students” socially as well economically population and especially the social sciences students. to them, the lectures, notes, books, reading material and handouts are all they need to proceed to next level of education. The teachers made the content required available to them while facilitating them. Many of the students were found indolent, who were not ready to leave their “comfort zone” once the online education system created for them. This theme is also the popularly accepted notion that online education system makes people anti-social, introvert and indolent. (Mishra et al, 2020) The teachers of social sciences subject also presented the similar themes for the subject under study. They’ve highlighted the role of educational institutions in this regard as well, whose budgetary allocation and education policies also favor “online education” for the time being until and unless the full-fledged traditional education system with all the curricular and extracurricular activities commence back and the hovering threat of COVID and its variants is long gone.

Limitations:

This study has certain limitations. Since, the study was conducted only for the students and teachers of social sciences subjects, the findings of this study cannot be generalized. The health and

physical sciences, medical, and certain natural sciences students were not included in the study, thus, subject wise responses and generalized view couldn't be taken (though, voluntarily) Also, the time frame for the study was limited, which in the dynamic and ever-changing scenario could limit the scope of this study. Shortly, "to ensure the effectiveness of online learning modules for university students, the principles of online learning model and learning outcomes should be rigorously and regularly evaluated."

Recommendations:

The outcomes of our research confirm the evidence regarding the efficiency of online learning for social sciences university students. But it's vital to recognize that online learning is not the sole means of efficiently transferring knowledge. Naturally, there're more teaching modalities that must be implemented as mandatory components of an ideal graduate and post-graduate education model. Because of its emphasis on synchronous learning, the online module holds significant and promising promise for the future of higher education. It can be integrated into the curriculum to improve the effectiveness of lifelong learning programs. The need for research to uncover new efficient "online and offline teaching modalities," as well as the formulation of a comprehensive model through "the integration of an optimal proportion of online learning in higher education," are both urgently required. Additionally, the rapid transition to the standard education system limits the acceptability of certain kids. The smooth transition from the current education system to the old system will require a collaborative effort by the government, education policymakers, educational institutions, students, and teachers. In order to accomplish this, it is necessary to first analyze and overcome the concerns and difficulties of the students, which have been discussed, before developing any additional educational policies.

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