

Chapter 63

M–Learning in the Middle East: The Case of Bahrain

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ABSTRACT

The introduction of e-learning in higher education has brought radical changes in the way undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are designed and delivered. University students now have access to their courses anytime, anywhere, which makes e-learning and m-learning popular and fashionable among university students globally. Nevertheless, instructors are now challenged, as they have to adopt new pedagogies in learning and teaching. This chapter explores the adoption of m-learning at universities in the Kingdom of Bahrain, as well as the relevant current developments and challenges related to the major stakeholders (educators and students) in higher education. It mainly investigates the educators' views and perceptions of m-learning, as well as its future potential in higher education. Most of the educators use m-learning tools to some limited extent, and there is still opportunity to reach full integration with curriculum and the blended learning approach. Further, it is proposed that professional development should be provided to instructors to enable them to use the available new technologies in an appropriate and effective way.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid technological advancements in the context of globalization have changed our everyday lives at individual and societal level. Universities worldwide are among the first to embrace these changes and prepare their students with the appropriate tools to enter the 'real' world of work. Two decades ago the technological advancements

infiltrated the traditional classrooms with the introduction of e-learning. The extensive use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) – especially the use of the Internet – revolutionized and changed for good the design and delivery of curricula in universities around the world. During the last decade, an unseen 'revolution' emerged from the introduction of e-learning and even more recently of m-learning tools in the

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classroom. The magnitude of these information technology developments is still not very well understood, simply because practice has run well ahead theory. In addition, many argue that the m-learning community is still fragmented among the various stakeholders, with different national perspectives, differences between academia and industry, and between the school, higher education and lifelong learning sectors (Al Saadat, 2009). Whether one looks at this phenomenon of e-learning and m-learning as a fad, threat, or a solution to educators' problems in delivering mainstream learning in higher education (Peters, 2009), it is currently a hot issue that needs our attention.

The emergence of the World Wide Web supported the development and the popularity of e-learning (Peng, Su, Chou, & Tsai, 2009). In addition, mobile devices such as mobile phones, laptops have increased drastically and are widely used in e-learning (Iqbal & Qureshi, 2012; Koszalka & Ntloedibe-Kuswani, 2010). The use of e-learning in higher education has grown in the past two decades, transforming the nature of higher education, as the technologies are supplementing the course delivery (Bharuthram & Kies, 2013). There are ongoing debate and criticisms on using e-learning, nevertheless most of the literature has shown a positive impact of e-learning in educational contexts, as the drastic developments in technologies have produced a new revolution in education.

Nevertheless, most studies in e-learning and m-learning focus on its acceptance by students in developing countries (i.e. Rhema & Sztendur, 2013; Wang, 2011), on the challenges and opportunities from the adoption of e and m-learning, but very few focus on its acceptance by instructors or on their perceptions of m-learning and its future potential. Therefore, this chapter discusses the origins of m-learning, its pedagogical value and the current developments and challenges in higher education context; in addition, it presents the instructors' perceptions of m-learning in general

in the Middle East and more specifically in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The chapter is organized as follows: the first part provides a summary of the origins and concepts of e-learning and m-learning. The following section explores the opportunities and challenges from the use of m-learning in higher education, as well the instructors' perception and use of m-learning via the survey results. The final part discusses the current and future status of m-learning followed by the conclusions.

THE ORIGINS AND CONCEPTS OF E-LEARNING AND M-LEARNING

E-Learning in Higher Education

Despite the relative recent appearance in literature, the concept of e-learning has fueled a number of debates regarding its usefulness in higher education and more particular, in the development of learning and teaching strategies. The few theoretical models describing this concept are still not adequate to capture the dynamics of the e-learning and m-learning proliferation in universities globally. The growing body of literature is still too narrow and short-sighted to capture the changes that currently take place in higher education. Nevertheless, the future is here, at least from a technological perspective.

In fact, practice has understandably run well ahead of theory, and in some issues and approaches away from theory, for example, the use of virtual learning environments (VLEs) and the use of applications to support them in mobile devices. A VLE is a set of teaching and learning tools designed to enhance a student's learning experience by including computers and the Internet in the learning process (Demian & Morrice, 2012). The principal components of a VLE package include curriculum mapping (breaking curriculum into sections that can be assigned and assessed), student tracking, online support for both teacher and student, electronic communication (e-mail,

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