

Chapter 16

E-Learning Status and Quality in Context of Arab Universities: Challenges and Threats

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the status and quality of e-learning in Arab Universities located in the Middle East. The first objective of the study was to provide an analytical overview of the use of e-learning and the quality of electronic courses and learning objects in these universities to fill the gap in the literature in this particular topic regarding the Middle East region, and also to draw into different solutions and recommendations in order to make a successful match that could result in a better adoption and serving of the e-learning technology. The study was based on two different approaches that included a survey to navigate the official websites of universities in the region plus a survey into e-learning courses to obtain the current stand of e-learning quality in the region. The results of each approach have been analyzed, and the outcomes and recommendations were presented to be used for future adoption and other related studies.

INTRODUCTION

Research in the topic of “e-learning status in Arab countries” provides useful information that is indicative of the general status of ICT infrastructure and e-learning deficiencies in the Arab countries.

This study employs comprehensive survey tools to accurately define the status of adopting e-learning, e-courses and learning objects that can help in defining the status of e-learning in

particular. The survey study was initiated based on content analysis methodology (Krippendorff, 2004); to provide different questions that could assist in answering the main research question, i.e., the current status of e-learning, e-courses and learning objects in the Middle Eastern universities. The results of the survey study are believed to assist in filling the gap in literature. It is also at that stage of the research to gain insight knowledge of the situation on the ground.

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METHODOLOGY

The approach used was based on content analysis methodology (Krippendorff, 2004) for defining both the e-learning status and “e-courses and learning objects” quality and uses two surveys.

The first survey was conducted by navigating 172 official universities’ web sites across the Middle East. Content analysis methodology is based on defining criteria for analyzing the content. Therefore, two criteria have been defined and employed to collect information pertinent to the each of the visited web sites. The criteria in concerned with the following:

1. Availability of e-learning portal through the universities web site.
2. Accessibility of the e-learning portal through the internet.

The study also adopts a set of analysis targets that are associated with the survey data. The targets are:

- Identifying the adoption of e-learning services in the region.
- Defining the e-learning adoption percent in terms of public and private universities.
- Defining the adoption level of e-learning based on the classification of the region countries as (Gulf and Non-Gulf).
- Defining the e-learning adoption level based on region classification and university type.
- Defining the e-learning adoption level based on e-learning type and region classification.
- Defining LMS adoption level with respect to each country in the region.

Following the definition of the above criteria and targets, lists of universities were obtained from the Ministry of Higher Education in each country surveyed. Each university’s web site was

visited and data was gathered and categorized with respect to each country and stored in MS Excel Spreadsheet. The data was analyzed using both Microsoft Excel and SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) (Elliot, A.C., 2007). Excel was used for generating percentages and charts, while SPSS was used for generating cross tabulation to display the joint distribution of variables in a contingency table in a matrix format.

The second survey was conducted by navigating 9 e-learning portals with a total of 268 e-courses. Two-parts criteria were defined for this study and that were used in assessing each visited e-learning portal:

1. Availability of e-learning courses within the portal.
2. Availability of different electronic modules within the course, such as:
 - Chat
 - Forum
 - Assignment
 - Assessment
 - External Resources
 - HTML Pages
 - PowerPoint Slides
 - Files (PDF, Word, Excel etc.)
 - Interactive files or applications (Flash, Java Applet, JavaScript etc.)
 - Video Files (original or embedded)

For defining the quality of e-learning courses within the Middle East region, the following analysis targets were defined for the survey data:

- What are the percentages of the different electronic modules within the courses?
- What are the predominant electronic modules used in constructing e-courses in the region?

After the definition of the criteria and targets, nine universities’ e-learning portals were visited and the data was gathered and categorized with

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