

Distance Learning in Kuwait: Cases and Challenges

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Abstract

In these days, some Arab countries have troubles and it may be difficult for Arab youth to travel to complete their Master or PhD studies outside their countries. In this research, we present the different definitions of distance learning, its objectives, characteristics, benefits, and applications. Also, some Universities that offer distance learning in Kuwait are mentioned and the challenges are discussed.

Keywords: *Distance Learning, Kuwait, Challenges, Open Education.*

1. Introduction

Nowadays, many universities now face a problem of delivering subjects, programs and courses across more than one campus. The learners today have many problems related with fees, time and type and the level of the study they want. Education is a process which helps to obtain the necessary knowledge, ability, and understanding for taking part in society, to develop their personalities in the school or out of it. Learning is a part of education and if teaching knowledge's changes the persons' behaviors positively, learning becomes as an education. Education includes continuity, active attendance, equality in educational opportunities and education of trainers (Marsap and Narinb, 2009). Learning is a process that continues formally or informally throughout our lives. This is the underlying belief that made the concept of lifelong learning so trendy. Paradigm shift has been experienced in the classroom learning realized in face-to-face relation between the instructor and the students in the traditional education classrooms since the early 1900s. In parallel to this process, rapidly growing technological innovations have affected learning and teaching methods in the classrooms, while they have brought different teaching platforms to the fore. While the technologies used in distance learning changed more slowly in the beginning, it has started to change faster with the digital age and this speed gained momentum continuously (Karadeniz, 2009). Most developing countries however, lack the capacity to develop, handle and/or commercialize these biotechnology products and often face major barriers to access the technology and derived products (Pertry et al., 2014). Distance learning has become a growing market as it allows the learners who cannot go to university, obtain

diploma or continue their graduate and post-graduate education to improve their professional carrier. The distance learning via internet includes an important processing in many fields. Distance learning is emerging education opportunity especially for people at work. This method that applied in higher education provides time and place independent education. With the increased use of Distance Learning the physical aspect of learning is often neglected. Social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, are thriving on the use of short snippets of information (Dolidze, 2013). The cost per student for face to face education is higher than distance education courses and the economic benefits of distance education are higher than its cost (Atici and Atik, 2011).

Most of the Arab have problems and revolutions so the conditions in these countries are not stable and this instability has a bad effect on the income of citizens which leads to minimizing the expenses of education. So, distance learning will be a better alternatives for citizens of these Arab countries.

The paper is organized as follows; distance learning is defined in section 2, section 3 is assigned for its objectives, section 4 is assigned to characteristics of distance learning. Benefits of distance learning are presented in section 5, and some applications are mentioned in section 6. The distance learning cases and challenges in Kuwait are discussed in section 7. Finally, conclusions are shown in section 8.

2. Distance Learning definitions

Distance learning is a flexible learning tool and it is a model of education that is done where the teachers and the students can't see each other in face to face mode but they can interact with each other through some equipments. Distance learning becomes more of an issue by the help of demand of education, civil and social instruction. The distance learning's facilities such as students' freedom in terms of the duration, place and order of the instruction, the issues are planned for student's self studies, printed texts, publication of television and radio and provide the other visual and audio equipments moreover he defines as helping students on face to face learning, gathering all of experts in one's field and for traditional education

providing the costs of education to the least level (Marsap and Narinb, 2009). Distance Learning is a synonym of distance education, this term has been widely used for describing the desired product of distance education and also for the learning occurs with various technologies where instructor and learner are in separated locations. Distance learning concept gives emphasis on learner and learning process. All common and emerging technologies such as CD/DVD, radio, television, teleconference, internet, simulations etc. and synchronous or asynchronous interaction among learners and instructors can be used in designing distance learning. The problem is how can we select and use these media in harmony to design distance learning in order to ensure effective, efficient and flexible learning for the learner (Karadeniz, 2009). Face-to-face learning in classrooms and using textbooks are primary media for formal learning and they are also important for adult distance learners because of they are familiar to them. Also distance learning can use face-to-face learning environments to help learners to acquire skills, construct knowledge through discussions and real-life situations, and provide social learning context. Textbooks, journals or other printed media can also help learners to study in their own time and place. The shift in the learning-teaching paradigm and rapid change of technology enable us to use various media and strategies together. Keegan (2002) defines this shift as shift from d-Learning to eLearning (electronic learning) and from there to m-Learning (mobile learning). In addition, applications depending on b-Learning (blended learning) which is a combination of eLearning and face-to-face mode can be observed in distance learning environments (Karadeniz, 2009). Distance learners come from a variety of backgrounds and they have diverse characteristics and needs which may influence their learner autonomy or behavioral intentions to participate in learning. These intentions are substantially influenced by the individual's personal characteristics, learning styles, prior experience and other factors, including their perception of their learning environment. Experience with computer technologies has been suggested as influential in whether learners can successfully complete distance programs. Previous research has found that having high levels of computer technology experience enhances the ability of individuals to self-regulate learning in Web courses (Ng and Confessore, 2011). Distance education is a field where web-based technology was very quickly adopted and used for course delivery and knowledge sharing. Typical web-based learning environments include course content delivery tools, synchronous and asynchronous conferencing systems, polling and quiz modules, virtual workspaces for sharing resources, white boards, grade reporting systems, logbooks, assignment submission components, etc. In distance learning, instructional and

design strategies are using internet-based environments to promote student satisfaction and learning effectiveness (Işık and Güler, 2012). Florit et al. (2012) described distance learning as any instructional arrangement in which the teacher and learner are geographically separated to an extent requiring communication through media.

3. Objectives of Distance Learning

There are a series of objectives of distance learning. Florit et al. (2012) mentioned:

1. The institutional mobility, of both students and teaching staff.
2. Life-long learning.
3. The intensive use of advanced technologies.
4. The fostering of joint programs at undergraduate and graduate levels.
5. The opening of universities to students of any region of the world.
6. Joint research projects.

Stefanovic (2013) stated the following objectives for remote/virtual laboratories:

1. Instrumentation. This objective means that students should apply appropriate sensors, instrumentation and/or software tools to make measurements of physical quantities. This objective could only be partly met because in the case of remotely controlled experiments, a low level of flexibility could be reached due to the need for equipment to be placed and remotely controlled using different hardware and software solutions. In the case of complete virtual reality and virtual labs this objective could be achieved.
2. Models. Students need to identify the limits and scopes of theoretical models. It is very important to provide a real connection between theory and a laboratory experiment. This may include evaluating whether a theory adequately describes a physical event and establishing or validating the relationship between the measured data and underlying physical principles. This objective could be achieved with both remote/virtual laboratories.
3. Equipment. Students or trainees need to specify equipment, and procedures in order to acquire results and to interpret the data. In the remote/virtual laboratories it is possible to implement different procedures and for students to have the opportunity to interpret data.
4. Data Analysis. Students need to collect, analyze, and interpret data and results in order to make their own judgments and conclusions. Using the web environment and data base systems that collect examples or previous measurements, students could compare and contrast their results with other results.

5. Design. Students need to design a system using specific methodologies and meeting specific predefined requirements. The design of an experiment in remote controlled laboratories has very limited scope, and in, to some extent, virtual laboratories a student could design their own system.
6. Learn from Failure. Since the remote controlled laboratories, as well as the virtual laboratories, have unlimited access to the registered users, they are in the position to repeat their laboratory exercise a number of times, from any place and at any time. Since the students have an extended opportunity to access labs, they have more chances to experiment with different approaches and different solutions.
7. Creativity. The fundamental objective of laboratory experiments is to improve students' creativity and capability in real-world problem solving.
8. Psychomotor. Demonstrate competence in selection, modification, and operation of appropriate engineering tools and resources. This objective could not be met using remote/virtual laboratories.
9. Safety. One of the advantages of the virtual and remote controlled laboratory is safety. In cases where students control real laboratory equipment in labs, the laboratory set-ups are on remote location, so students are completely safe. In the case of virtual laboratories, students work with software simulations. One drawback is that students do not take care in relation to safety and environmental issues when they work in remote/virtual labs, so there is a chance that they may transfer that attitude to a real life environment.
10. Communication. Connection and communication with team members, instructors and others, both directly and through written reports.
11. Teamwork. Working effectively in teams, respecting all important rules for teamwork such as roles, responsibilities, monitoring of progress, deadlines, tasks, and integration of individual efforts in the final outcome.
12. Ethics in the Laboratory. Behave with the highest ethical standards, including reporting information objectively.
13. Sensory Awareness. Use the human senses to gather information and to make sound engineering judgments in formulating conclusions about real-world problems.

4. Characteristics of Distance Learning

Florit et al. (2012) defined the following six characteristics of distance learning:

1. Separation of the teacher and the student.

2. The influence of an educational organization in the planning, preparation, or delivery of material.
3. The use of technical media.
4. The provision for two-way communication.
5. The possibility of an occasional seminar.
6. The evidence of a division of labour.

5. Benefits of Distance Learning

Marsap and Narinb (2009) mentioned some benefits of distance learning:

1. By increasing e-learning process to use commonly in projects at future with the help of providing improvement and looking e-learning processes in terms of constant environmental feedbacks at system of distance learning,
2. By developing creative and improver thoughts with the help of examining interactive instruments integrally,
3. Development of new standards with multi-presentation techniques in execution of interactive virtual course.
4. Creating center of attraction and interest for students with the help of some kind of interaction elements such as script, content, design and examples at units of preparing content.
5. Importance of association and communion in face to face education environment of academic interaction process.
6. System of distance learning education calls for professionalism and specialty. Thus, e-learning will solve the industrial problems.
7. Collaborating the studies between the system of distance learning and work life by developing the process of decisions can provide the active participations with the programs of exam and certificate and performance.
8. It is appropriate to benefit from developing profession standards about system of distance learning, concentrating on application in business and sector and universal applications
9. Utilization in the technical of results supported by inquiries about education, fulfilled in the world, integrated proportion of 50 face to face education in system of distance learning could utilize for graduated from e-learning in terms of progressive throughout life and employment in new sphere of business.
10. Preparing yearly work plans of e-learning units and calendar help to apply governance principles at communication between units.
11. Providing participation of distance learning manager, employer, consultant and students in yearly social cultural activities may develop the performance.

Dolidze (2013) mentioned other benefits of distance learning:

1. Is very convenient, tests could be passed any time and in any place;
2. It helps to improve my knowledge of English;
3. It helps to put into practice my self-evaluation;
4. It helps teacher to put into practice the evaluation of students' level;
5. It saves teachers' time on control implementing;
6. It helps to get the additional skills of work using computers.

6. Distance Learning Applications

The applications in the world are dating to 19th century. The examples of distance learning application throughout the world are listed below (Marsap and Narinb, 2009):

1. In 1840, Isaac Pitman started to teach steno by letters.
2. On Apr 20th, 1878, an advertisement was given in the American newspaper, Boston, about the lesson of steno that was given by letters.
3. An advertisement was seen which included a lesson that given written expression lessons by letters in the last quarter part of 1800s.
4. In 1922, New Zealand Correspondence School was founded in New Zealand.
5. National College (NEC) that opened in 1974 built the foundation of open university.
6. The sample institutions were “Ecole Universelle par Correspondance” that opened in 1907 in Paris and “Centre National d’Enseignement par Correspondance” that opened in 1937.
7. Australia is the country that was a good sample of system of distance learning in primary and secondary education. Distance learning was started in the Queensland University with the degree of higher education.
8. In Japan 1948, for educate the students that were far away or doing the military service distance learning was taken into the scope of junior high school, high school, and academy.
9. In Spain 1972, University of National Distance Learning was founded.
10. Holland Open University accepted their first students in the first days of September in 1984.
11. The countries such as Canada, India, Israel, Italy and Poland were developed and applied the projects of distance learning.

Rodrigues et al. (2014) discussed the development of a cooperative learning environment in distance education model adopted by the institution for the undergraduate courses, conduct applied research with qualitative base, where 160 students participated and 30 tutors teachers from different teaching units of University Anhanguera - Brazil. They pointed out that 80% of students often use

online means to answer your questions. As for material, 95% use books and access to virtual libraries. Regarding the difficulties encountered, 85% can handle of all technological resources that are available. Students responded that 85% chose to take the course in distance learning by schedule flexibility and because they believe in distance learning, even not having previous experience. 95% highlights good infrastructure suitable for the proposed course as well as the contents of the disciplines. As for the proposed evaluation system, 85% approve the evaluation methods applied. 90% highlighted the good relationship with tutors teachers. Udokang and Ogundele (2014) made a comparative study of the products of the distance learning system and those from conventional institutions in relation to the job performance of teachers especially on secondary schools in Kwara State, Nigeria. They concluded that the students in distance learning system are trained to complement conventional institution efforts in the man power development in Nigeria. Pertry et al. (2014) discussed the applicability of a different approach to biosafety capacity building based on a distance e-learning system. They concluded that distance e-learning brings several advantages to biosafety capacity building such as minimizing geographical constraints and costs and combine the training with their daily profession. Stefanovic (2013) presented the main objectives of learning through distance learning laboratories and the pre requests for remote controlled/virtual labs according to different stakeholders, different architectures compared and evaluations and students' feedback. İşik and GülerIn (2012) compared distance and traditional learning. From the point of view of students, advantages of distance learning are time and place independences, repetition opportunity of virtual classroom section. For place challenges, it has been tried to enhance web based distance learning features and methodology. Ng and Confessore (2011) analyzed a stratified structured sample of 249 responses from adult distance learners at three Malaysian universities. They concluded that there exist a significant relationship of learning styles, perceived learning environment, computer technology experience and English language proficiency to learner autonomy.

7. Distance Learning in Kuwait

In this section, we show some cases and challenges of distance learning in Kuwait.

7.1 Cases of Distance Learning In Kuwait

In this subsection, we review some universities that provide distance learning in Kuwait.

1. Center for Distance Learning of Kuwait University

The Center was established in 2002 to promote a culture of e-learning at Kuwait University and is affiliated to Office of Vice President for Academic Support Services, with the main purpose of facilitating the learning process through advanced technology that would strengthen the university system and support it with electronic means through transmitting universal education programs and providing the feature of distance education for students via means of communication, electronic conferences and multi media. Distance Learning was a successful process at Kuwait University through transmitting courses in various university sites, ranging from three courses in 2002/2001 to 11 scheduled courses in the first semester of 2003/2004. The center, located in Khalidiya campus, also organizes electronic seminars, lectures and conferences in collaboration with higher education institutions regionally and globally to meet the scientific needs of the various Colleges

[<http://www.kuniv.edu/ku/Centers/DistantLearning/index.htm>] Also, some foreign universities offer distance learning such as University of Essex which offer Online MBA in Human Resource Management, General, Oil and Gas Management, Finance, and in Marketing [<http://www.mbastudies.com/MBA/Kuwait/Distance-learning/>]

There is a list for foreign universities that offer distance learning in Kuwait. These universities offer all sorts of programs that might interest you, starting from graduate, post graduate and doctorate programs, to short courses.

[<http://www.kuwaiteducation.info/distance-education/list-of-universities-offerenig-distance-education.html>]

2. Harvard University Extension School

The esteemed Harvard University in America now also offers more than 200 courses online via distance education. These offerings include videos of actual lectures on campus which are available in different formats based on students' needs. Current popular subjects are management, English, environmental management, government courses and computer science.

3. Boston University Online

Boston University is another respected American university currently offering great courses through distance education. Apart from undergraduate to doctoral level, various non credit professional courses are also available.

4. Indira Gandhi National Open University

Founded in 1985, the Indira Gandhi National Open University offers 310 degree programs in science, arts, social sciences, commerce, and information technology through 21 Schools. It is the biggest university in the world with more than four million students in India as well as 36 other countries.

5. Open University of Catalonia

The Open University of Catalonia in Spain was only founded in 1994 but already boasts somewhat 60 876 students. They offer more than 1000 degree programs up to doctoral level in three different Schools, including Open Programs.

6. University of South Africa (Unisa)

With more than 250 000 students, Unisa has campuses in Pretoria and Florida, Johannesburg, South Africa and numerous contact centers abroad. It also has mega university status. The University was founded in 1873 and in 2004 merged with Technikon Southern Africa to form the new Unisa. It offers internationally recognized qualifications ranging from undergraduate to doctoral studies as well as informal courses in six Colleges.

7. United Kingdom Open University

Founded in 1969, and with approximately 250 000 students worldwide, the UK Open University, whose academic faculties and research centers are based in Milton Keynes, United Kingdom, offers more than 250 undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications of a high standard.

8. University of the Philippines Open University

University of the Philippines Open University was founded in 1995 as a campus of the University of the Philippines. It provides online teaching and learning in three Faculties, namely that of Education, Management and Development Studies and Information and Communication Studies. It offers qualifications ranging from undergraduate to doctoral and non-formal courses to students in the Philippines and abroad.

9. Open University of the Netherlands

The Open University of the Netherlands was founded in 1984. Students can study academic programs or select from almost 300 modular courses. Students have the option to either register for a full-length degree program or for modular courses, meaning they can register for two modules only if they wish. Programs in Computer Sciences, Learning Sciences, Environmental Sciences, Law, Management, Cultural Sciences and Psychology are offered.

10. Open University of Hong Kong

The University offers more than 100 postgraduate, degree, associate degree and sub-degree programs to its students, determined to provide only high quality education.

11. Thomson Rivers University Open Learning

It has more than 20,000 registrations and offers approximately 55 degrees, diploma and certificate programs online, web-based and in printed, formats according to student's own personal requirements.

12. The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand

More than 100 qualifications and 1200 courses are offered including technical and vocational training to higher professional and continuing education. Bangladesh Open University. The Bangladesh Open University was founded

in 1992 after researching a new mode of education for many years. It already has more than 2 million students and offers both formal and non-formal programs through six different Schools.

7.2 Distance Learning Challenges in Kuwait

There are many challenges face distance learning in Kuwait like other countries all over the world. These challenges are the course content, face to face training, technological and sociological. Kim and Shih (2003) discussed some of these challenges.

1. Technological Challenges For Distance Learning

To ensure the successful operation of distance education systems, computer facilities and network infrastructures must be integrated with appropriate software systems. There are several important research issues from the technology perspective. These issues require researchers from education and information technology fields to work together. In Kuwait, we have computers devices and many networks but we don't have enough research or researchers in the two fields of education and information technology. Some of the issues have been partially solved, while several issues related to intelligent technology remain open such as:

- Intelligent tutoring: While a student is navigating an online course, an intelligent agent may analyze his/her behavior, and provide useful suggestions in real-time, for example, by guiding her through different learning topologies.
- FAQ summarization and automatic reply: It is time-consuming for an instructor to answer students' e-mails. An auto-reply system should be able to use information retrieval techniques to summarize frequently asked questions, and reply to new questions with answers to past questions. In Kuwait, we are in very need for this point to be able to use distance learning in the best way.
- Unbiased examination: It is difficult to ensure proper behavior of students when administering online examinations without a human monitor. Some students can bring other people to help them in solving the exams.
- Individualized quizzes: Some distance learning systems are able to generate different test questions for different students according to difficulty levels. This type of system should ensure unbiased examinations.
- Online supervision of chat room discussions: Chat room discussions can be assigned points in student's performance. An intelligent agent can be implemented to grade chat room participations. Misleading or irrelevant conversations can be reported to the instructor. Some students don't concentrate enough with the instructors in distance learning.
- Universal and mobile accessibility: Students and instructors should be able to access distance learning

websites from any location with any of a variety of different devices, such as cellular phone. Wireless communication techniques may be incorporated into distance learning systems. In Kuwait, we have a powerful infrastructure networks, so we can make the best use of these learning system.

- Remote lab and simulation: Domain-specific remote labs connected to the Internet need to be developed to support online experiments. If remote labs are not available, online simulation tools (i.e., virtual lab) should be provided. In Kuwait the remote labels are not available, so simulation tools will be best solution.

2. Sociological Challenges For Distance Education

Some of the sociological issues are difficult, more difficult than technological issues, to solve. The motivation of students is one of the key factors that will determine the success of a distance learning program. Mostly, adult working individuals take distance education for professional growth. They all want to get something out of a distance education program. They want to learn something practical today and apply them at work tomorrow. Some of them want to receive diplomas or at least course credits. To such students, acceptance by the employers (industry and government) of the course credits and diplomas is very important. The quality of education and diplomas awarded depends on assessment of the educational institutes, as well as the quality of instructions. It takes many years and concerted efforts before a traditional university is established, and the same will be the case for cyber universities.

There are some additional interesting sociological considerations for distance education. Will there be a threat from "the super professor" and "the super university?" Since there is no geographical limitation in distance learning, will there be a professor who teaches, say calculus, so well that all freshmen take his/her course? Is it possible that a particular institute becomes so popular that all students receive credits from it? How will professors react to these possibilities? Another consideration is from the student's view. If students seldom see each other, how does the social life in universities change? In most of Arab countries, students used to meet and see each others during the learning period and process to help each other in doing assignments and this will be a big problem. This problem will take a long time to be solved.

8. Conclusions

From this research, we conclude that distance learning is very important especially these days for all the countries

all over the world. As we see there are many troubles in many Arab countries and the students of these countries cannot travel to foreign countries such as United States of America, England, or other countries to learn to complete their studies. So, distance learning can help youth of Arab countries to complete their higher education; master and doctor degrees. Distance learning has many challenges, in Kuwait, we can face most of these challenges..

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