

“ATTITUDES OF STUDENTS OF TAFILA TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY TOWARDS DISTANCE LEARNING”

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ABSTRACT:

This paper focuses on identifying the attitudes of the students of Tafila Technical University towards distance learning. The study sample consisted of 314 undergraduate students for the academic year 2020/2021. The results of the study show that students' attitudes toward distance learning were positive. As for the difference between students' attitudes and study variables, it was found that there were no differences between students' attitudes towards distance learning and gender (males and females). On the other hand, differences were found due to the type of college and were in favor of the scientific colleges.

Keywords:

Attitudes, Distance Learning, Students

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INTRODUCTION

The current era is characterized by the rapid changes resulting from scientific and technological advancements and information technology. This has made the world a small village and has also led to the need to exchange experiences with others. Learners also need rich multi-source environments for research and self-development. Also, a lot of new models and methods of learning and teaching appeared. This includes the emergence of e-learning, which is defined as a method of learning using modern communication mechanisms from a computer, its networks, and its multiple media, including sound, image, graphics, search mechanisms, and electronic libraries. Thus, this entails the use of technology of all kinds in communicating information to the learner within the shortest possible time, using the least effort, and serving as the greatest benefit (Al-Mousa & Al-Mubarak, 2005).

Kabli (2013) defined e-learning as an innovative way to provide well-designed interactive learning environments centered around the learner, in which electronic media is used for all individuals anywhere and anytime through the use of the Internet and digital technology in line with the principles of instructional design.

Advantages of Distance Learning

Distance learning aims to achieve several goals (Saleem, 2018; Al-Khafaji, 2015), which includes the following:

1. It compensates for the shortage of academic and training cadres in some educational sectors through virtual classes.
2. It helps to spread the use of technology in the society and gives a broader concept of electronic continuing education.
3. It is used to prepare a generation of teachers and learners capable of dealing with technology, current skills, and the tremendous developments that the world is witnessing.
4. It helps in solving the problem of cognitive explosion and the increasing demand for education.
5. It provides an interactive learning environment and allows the learner to study at the time and place he prefers.
6. It allows for live interviews and discussions on the network, and also provides up-to-date information that is consistent with the needs of learners.
7. It makes it possible for housewives and workers to be educated online, thereby contributing to raising the literacy rate and eliminating illiteracy.
8. It contributes to solving the problem of crowded classrooms.
9. It helps learners to overcome the barrier of the fear and anxiety they have. Also, it gives them the freedom to express their thoughts and search for

information in a variety of ways different from what is followed in the classroom.

Disadvantages of Distance Learning

Despite the many advantages of distance learning, there are some drawbacks associated with its application as some researchers pointed out (Abdel Hay, 2010; Al-Khafaji, 2015):

1. Distance learning requires an intense effort to train and qualify teachers and learners in preparation for this experience.
2. There is a link between e-learning and other technical factors, such as the efficiency of communication networks, the availability of hardware and software, and the ability to produce content well.
3. The cost factor in production and maintenance, as well as the extent to which the educated people are able to bear the costs of the technical requirements of the net equipment and packages.
4. Learner's boredom with techniques and lack of seriousness in dealing with them.
5. Weakening the university's role in refining the personality of the learner.
6. Weak social communication between learners and the surrounding environment.

Subsequently, the development of positive attitudes towards e-learning among learners is an important aspect of the goals of e-learning teaching at all educational levels. Thus, attitudes can be defined as the human tendency to respond to a specific event or idea in a specific way (Siddiq, 2012).

Attitudes Components

- A. Knowledge: It refers to the information, knowledge, and beliefs that are related to the topic of the trend, that is, to what extent the individual knows about the topic of the trend.
- B. Behavioral: It is the response of the individual towards the subject of the trend in some way, which may be negative or positive
- C. Emotional: This refers to the person's feelings and desires about a certain issue or topic, either in his interest or his aversion to it, that is, the response may be negative or positive (Awad & Hels, 2015).

The attitudes differ based on the degree of their strength and weakness. This may be positive trends represented by the individual's acceptance of a situation, negative attitudes represented by the individual's rejection of a position, and neutral attitudes represented by the individual's hesitation between accepting or rejecting a position (Kabli, 2013). Among the most important factors include the family through socialization and educational institutions through interaction between the student and the teacher, as well as friends and the media (Al-Zoubi, 1994).

Educational institutions bear a great responsibility in changing the attitudes of individuals in general and their students in particular towards many areas of importance in society. This includes the field of technological innovations and their implications, foremost of which is e-learning.

STUDY PROBLEM

The study was carried out as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, which led the world to turn to distance learning. Regardless of its infrastructure and full preparation, the nature of the epidemiological situation led to acceptance of this inevitable idea.

Since the researcher is a faculty member at the university, she lived through the pressures that officials and colleagues were subjected to on how to use technologies in education. Teachers also undergo intensive training to master them, especially since some are not familiar with the use of modern technologies. In addition to the difficulties faced by students such as how to access the platform and deliver their duties, performance of exams, poor internet networks, lack of devices to attend lectures and other problems that may face us all (teachers and students), this paper aims to ascertain students' attitudes towards distance learning and its relationship with some variables.

STUDY QUESTIONS

This study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What are the students' attitudes towards distance learning?
2. Are there statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$) based on students' attitudes towards distance learning due to gender?
3. Are there statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$) based on students' attitudes towards distance learning due to college?

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The importance of the study emerges from the importance of e-learning as a modern technology in the educational learning process that contributes to solving many educational problems, such as the knowledge explosion, the information revolution, the problem of overcrowding of students' classrooms, and the shortage of qualified and trained teachers. It is also possible to benefit from this study in order to strengthen students' positive attitudes, deal with negative attitudes, and modify them. Thus, distance learning is directed towards students. Therefore, it is imperative to identify students' attitudes towards this type of education in order to provide information that helps university officials to improve the quality of e-learning and to take action. Hence, this is required based on students' attitudes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mekdade (2020) aimed to reveal perceptions of high school students in government schools in Jordan to use distance education in light of the Coronavirus crisis and its developments, and to identify the significance of the differences in the perception of high school students based on the use of distance education in Irbid according to the gender variable. The study sample consisted of 167 male and female students. The number of male respondents was 89, and the number of females was 78 who were chosen by simple random method. The results of the analysis related to the first question showed that there is a positive

impact of the use of distance education. Also, there were no differences in the estimates of the sample individuals on the means of the tool as a whole according to the gender variable (male, female).

Al-shareef (2016) study aimed to identify the students' attitudes in Shaqra University towards e-learning. The study sample consisted of 366 students, studying in undergraduate programs. The study results show that the students' attitudes toward e-learning were positive. There are no statistically significant differences in favor of females at the level of 5% based on the students' responses to e-learning in terms of gender (i.e., male or female). Furthermore, there are statistically significant differences in the students' responses to learning depending on the specialization variable (i.e., scientific or literary).

Awad and Hillis (2015) study aimed to identify the trend towards distance education and its relationship to some variables among graduate students in Palestinian universities. Thus, the study sample consisted of 91 male and female students. The results of the study show that the attitude of postgraduate students was positive. It was also found that there are no statistically significant differences in their responses to distance learning based on the variable of gender and educational level.

KandilIngeç (2015) study aims to determine the attitudes towards e-learning among the students of technical and vocational high school for girls and in examining them in terms of certain variables. The sample consisted of 119 students of technical and vocational high school for girls. The results show that there were no significant differences between the attitudes of students of technical and vocational high school for girls towards e-learning with respect to gender, experience in the use of computers, and frequency of using internet and motivation style.

In 2013, Kabli revealed students' views about distance learning using a study sample of 151

students from Taibah University. The results show that the study sample individuals support distance learning for ease of learning and the clarity of educational content for students.

Alshonaq and Bane-domee(2010) study aimed to ascertain the attitudes of teachers and students towards the use of e-learning in sciences. The teachers' sample consisted of 28 male and female teachers and 118 students. The study found that teachers have positive attitudes towards e-learning, and it was also found that the average scores of students on the trend towards pre-e-learning scale are higher than the average of students' scores on the dimensional scale. Therefore, this indicates that there is a negative change in students' attitudes towards e-learning.

In their study, Liaw, Huang, and Chen (2007) explored instructors' and learners' attitudes toward e-learning usage. Accordingly, 30 instructors and 168 college students are asked to answer two different questionnaires for investigating their perceptions. The results demonstrate that instructors have very positive perceptions toward

using e-learning as a teaching-assisted tool. Regarding learners' attitudes, self-paced, teacher-led, and multimedia instruction are major factors that affect learners' attitudes towards e-learning as an effective learning tool.

METHOD AND PROCEDURES

Methodology:A relational descriptive survey approach was used in this study.

Study Population

The study population consists of all undergraduate students at Tafila Technical University who are registered for the first semester of the academic year 2020/2021 as stated in the lists, whose number is 5552.

Sample

The study sample was selected from the total study population using a simple random sampling by distributing an electronic link to the university students. This is as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of the study sample according to the gender and college variables

College	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Scientific	90	72	162
Humanity	72	80	152
Total	162	152	314

Study Tool

The tool for measuring students' attitudes towards distance learning was developed by referring to previous theoretical literature related to the subject of the study. This includes the studies of Al-Shanqa and Bani Domi(2010), Al-Sharif(2016), and Awad and Hels (2015). Therefore, the tool consisted of 30 items.

Validity

Arbitrators Validated

The study tool was presented to a group of 10 arbitrators with experience in measurement and evaluation and educational psychology. The paragraphs that obtained an agreement rate of not less than 80% were approved. Also, the items of the tool were modified based on the comments of the arbitrators. Likert's five-point scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree) was adopted and the paragraphs from 1-5 have been graded.

Stability

The stability of the tool was calculated through the method of internal consistency using Cronbach Alpha. Here, the study tool was applied to an exploratory sample from the study population and outside its sample consisting of 25 male and female undergraduate students and the value of Cronbach Alpha was 0.78. The stability was also calculated using the test and retest method. And after two weeks, the tool was re-applied, and the value was 0.92. This indicates

that the scale has acceptable reliability for the purposes of this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To answer the first question “What are the students' attitudes towards distance learning?”, means and standard deviations were calculated for the paragraphs of the study questionnaire as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2 The means and standard deviations of the paragraphs

N	Items	Mean	SD	Range
1	Distance learning adds a new burden to me	1.47	0.49	23
2	Distance learning adds a new burden to me	2.97	1.51	17
3	I prefer to use the usual teaching methods such as textbooks or lectures	2.80	1.68	20
4	The distance learning lecture ends quickly	4.50	0.48	6
5	Distance learning is a waste of time and effort	2.82	1.66	19
6	Feel free to use the computer and the internet to learn	4.52	0.48	5
7	Distance learning requires one computer for every student	4.44	0.49	11
8	Distance learning gives me self-confidence	4.63	0.48	2
9	Distance learning makes me anxious and afraid	2.97	1.60	17
10	I think distance learning raises my motivation to learn	1.52	0.49	22
611	I think distance learning helps me remember what I have learned	1.66	0.47	21
12	I feel that distance learning contributes to solving the problem of mobility and travel	4.64	0.50	1
13	I feel that distance learning contributes to reducing study costs	4.49	0.50	7
14	I believe that distance learning contributes to my social isolation from others	4.48	0.50	8
15	Feel fun and happy when using distance learning applications	3.11	1.57	15
16	Distance learning saves time and effort	4.64	0.48	1
17	I prefer studying from books	2.90	1.54	18
18	I believe that distance learning has provided me with a wide range of options to do what I want	4.53	0.49	4
19	Distance learning added new skills to me	4.62	0.48	3
20	Distance learning eliminated the human aspect of learning	4.46	0.49	10
21	I feel embarrassed when mistakes are made in regular learning compared to distance learning	4.63	0.47	2
22	I think distance learning helps to forget the material of the subject	4.42	0.49	12
23	I prefer distance learning because I can practice it anytime and anywhere	3.04	1.62	16
24	I believe that distance learning takes into account the individual differences between students	1.45	0.49	24
25	I can learn from distance a lot of information within a	2.89	1.58	19

Therefore, it is evident from the table above that the mean of the students' attitude scale reached 3.65. This indicates a positive trend towards distance learning, and the most prominent trends came in a descending order according to the arithmetic averages as follows:

Phrase 12: "I feel that distance learning contributes to solving the problem of mobility and travel", means (4.64).

Phrase 16: "Distance learning saves time and effort", means (4.64).

Phrase 8: "Distance learning gives me self-confidence", means (4.63).

Phrase 21: "I feel embarrassed when mistakes are made in regular learning compared to distance learning", means (4.63).

Phrase 19: "Distance learning added new skills to me", means (4.62).

Phrase 24: "I believe that distance learning takes into account the individual differences between students", means (1.45).

Phrase 1: "Distance learning adds a new burden to me", means (1.47).

Phrase 10: "I think distance learning raises my motivation to learn", means (1.52).

Phrase 11: "I think distance learning helps me remember what I have learned", means (1.66).

Phrase 3: "I prefer to use the usual teaching methods such as textbooks or lectures", means (2.80).

Consequently, we noted that from the review of the phrases that the students' attitudes towards distance learning are positive and have brought them many benefits. From their point of view, it has helped to solve the problem of mobility, travel, and the difficulty of transportation, as Tafila University is located in the south of Jordan. Hence, this requires the student time and effort to reach it, rent housing, and what follows. This is one of the costly requirements and needs. Therefore, distance learning is considered as a solution to this problem and it has made it possible for students to

attend lectures from their homes with their families with less effort and time.

Another benefit is the feeling of self-confidence, lack of embarrassment, and discomfort if the student made a mistake in the answer or lack of knowledge. However, the researcher remarked during her teaching that there is a response and commitment to attendance and class interaction, continuous preparation of study materials, and inquiry and participation in a manner that differs from traditional teaching and in classrooms. E-teaching may contribute to reducing feelings of fear and anxiety or reluctance to participate or answer for fear of ridicule or embarrassment.

The table also shows another benefit, which is the students' acquisition of new skills. Subsequently, we are now in the technological age and the digital revolution. Nevertheless, students learned skills that were not of their interest, such as dealing with an educational platform, receiving information, and submitting exams and assignments through it. These are skills that require knowledge and time to master, yet they are practiced within a short period of time with perfection and accuracy.

On the other hand, we noticed a negative trend towards distance learning, and this is what appeared in some of the phrases. Also, some mentioned that it adds a burden to them, and this can be explained by the fact that the engineering, mathematics, physics, and computer disciplines all depend on training and application and not indoctrination or traditional teaching. As a result, some students are forced to seek the help of teachers. Others close to their places of residence visit them to get clarification to an idea or information. Other times, they rely on self-effort to search for information and clarify ambiguities in some subjects, as it was evident from the students' responses that distance learning does not take into account individual differences between them and does not raise their motivation to learn. Thus, this might be because they lack the university atmosphere. They also have a sense of independence and self-reliance, meeting friends

and student gatherings, and practicing activities because of its important role in motivating them and encouraging them to learn. In addition, it does not help to remember what has been learned from the students' point of view, and this can be explained by the fact that distance learning depends on the cognitive side and may neglect the skillful and emotional aspects of the student. Therefore, the focus is on information and it neglects the movement and application side, which in turn helps to preserve and store the information. Finally, it was found that the attitudes of some students towards using the usual teaching methods and the use of books and lectures are better than distance learning. This can be attributed to the fact that some academic subjects, such as accounting and scientific colleges require attending lectures, practical training, and direct communication with the teacher, which is better and easier to understand than distance learning.

Therefore, this result is consistent with the results of the studies of Mekdade (2020), Al-Sharif (2016), and Awad and Lahus (2015) which indicated that the students' attitudes towards distance learning were positive. On the other hand, they differ from the study of Al-Shinaq and Bani Domi (2010), indicating negative attitudes of students towards distance learning.

To answer the second question "Are there statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$) in students' attitudes due to gender?", the t-test was used as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. The results of the t-test test for the differences between the mean attitudes of students according to the variable of gender

Gender	N	Mean	ST	T	Df	sig
Male	162	3.66	0.082	1.397	312	0.163
Female	152	3.65	0.083			

It is clear from the table that there are no statistically significant differences at the level of

significance ($\alpha \geq 0.05$) between students' attitudes towards distance learning depending on the gender variable. Thus, this can be attributed to the similarity of the electronic services used, as all students receive lectures in the same way and through the platform approved by the university. This result is consistent with the study results of Awad and Hillis (2015) which indicated that there are no differences between students' attitudes towards distance learning according to the gender variable. On the other hand, the study result differs from the study of Al Sharif (2016). Thus, there are no statistically significant differences at the level of significance ($\alpha \geq 0.05$) between students' attitudes towards distance learning depending on the gender variable. Thus, this can be attributed to the similarity of the electronic services used. All students receive lectures in the same way and through the platform approved by the university.

To answer the third question "Are there statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$) in students' attitudes due to college?", the t-test was used as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. The results of the t-test test for the differences between the mean attitudes of students according to the variable of college

College	N	Mea n	ST	T	df	sig
Scientific	16	3.69	0.07	9.7	31	0.00
	2		9			
Humanit y	15	3.61	0.06			
	2		4			

It appears from the table that there are significant differences at the level ($\alpha \geq 0.05$) between students' attitudes towards distance learning depending on the variable of the college, and in favor of the scientific college with an arithmetic mean of 3.69. This can be explained by the fact that the requirements and materials of scientific colleges require training and practical application, which is difficult. Its practices during distance learning, such as engineering drawing, and the use of laboratories, unlike human faculties that rely on

indoctrination and traditional teaching, facilitates the process of electronic teaching for students. The result of the study differs from the study of Al-Sharif (2016), which indicated that there are no differences in students' attitudes towards distance learning depending on the faculty variable.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the results of the study, the researcher recommends the following:

1. Students' awareness should be developed on the use of distance learning in university teaching and its role in developing their skills.
2. A study should be conducted on the reality of the teaching staff's use of e-learning in university teaching.

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