



**UNIVERSITY
OF MALAYA**

FACULTY OF MEDICINE

*DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND PREVENTIVE
MEDICINE*

Society, Behaviour & Health (SBH)

MQB7004

Lana Fathelrahman Hassan Ali / MQB 180044 / 2021

*Challenges of online education in Higher Education Sectors of
Saudi Arabia & their impact on society during Covid 19
pandemic*



Introduction

What is e-learning? It can be defined as an educational system to provide educational or training programs for students or trainees at anytime and anywhere using interactive information and communication technology such as (the internet, TV channels, e-mail, computers, and teleconferencing, etc.) synchronously or asynchronously. (Elhady, Elhadary et al. 2020).

Since Covid-19 was declared as a global pandemic and universities accredited online education the public health in general and particularly the mental, physical health of higher education student in Saudi Arabia has become threatened, the damage associated with it could equally affect our economy, social, and educational systems. (Khoshaim, Al-Sukayt et al. 2020). Online learning is incredibly convenient, but with this benefit come a few drawbacks. Connecting with academic peers, communicating with the instructor, and maintaining a personal social life can become a challenge when all interactions take place remotely.

The sudden shift to exclusive eLearning methods of instruction has produced anxiety and depression symptoms among a significant portion of the students due to the stressful load of work required. (Fawaz and Samaha 2021).

Recent studies have indicated that individuals who spend an excessive amount of time on electronic devices like a student of higher education sector experience difficulties focusing and internet addiction, which can seriously impact the whole society and their mental health in particular in a way leading to social isolation, ultimately resulting in decreased academic achievement and even mental illnesses such as depression. (Hand).

A study done in Saudi Arabia showed about 35% of the students experienced moderate to extreme levels of anxiety. These findings can enlighten government agencies and policymakers on the importance of making prompt, effective decisions to address students' anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Khoshaim, Al-Sukayt et al. 2020). This policy note recommends ministry of higher education identify appropriate strategies that could help students not only cope with the adverse effects of online education during the current pandemics but that can also enhance students' resilience to similar disasters in the future. It helps universities authorities improving the ways to enhance students' adaptability skills that will enable them to cope in such situations.

Current Situation

The COVID-19 outbreak has disrupted the lives of the many people across the planet. The worldwide rapid rise of infected cases has created a sense of insecurity and anxiety about what is going to happen. It has also caused a tremendous level of stress among the university community, inclusive of students. This stress may cause unfavorable effects on the education and psychological health of academics. Students are concerned amid widespread fears that the outbreak will adversely affect their exam performance and learning outcomes, the sudden shift to e-learning in addition to the lack of clear directions for them on online technical education regarding the procedures for administrating exams, assignments, and projects, furthermore, sitting long in front of computer screens

to completing tasks on time, gives an additional burden that leads to anxiety & depression. Sahu, P. (2020).

In Saudi Arabia due to a lacking learning approach both student and educators confront various challenges and troubles counting mental issues. Although online educating is one of the promising choices to the physical classroom, students appear a negative recognition of online learning behavior, which may be a noteworthy result that is capable of mental distress. a survey by Cao et al. (2020), which includes 7143 participants of college students, found around 25% of students are suffering from severe anxiety due to e-Learning crack-up, and 26% of students are unable to get access to mental health support.

The switch to virtual learning is an uncommon and unexpected experience in Saudi Arabia, we can anticipate such circumstances to be related to mental challenges for the students. The fear of getting trained or losing cherished ones to the illness whereas having to quickly alter to the modern teaching and evaluation strategies would have had tremendous pressure on the understudies. Assortment of studies has appeared that college students in Saudi Arabia share the same symptoms of uneasiness and stress recorded a predominance of depression extending from 14 to 50%. In addition to a study reported around 66 and 44% level of anxiety and depression in females and males, respectively, when looking at Saudi medical school students . (Khoshaim, Al-Sukayt et al. 2020). Another point for the impact of Covid-19 on E-learning at higher education is that there is Some of the students are unable to buy various infrastructure for online education, which can put more load on student mental health & their families.

Numerous researchers reported excessive technology use leads to isolation, which can lead to depression that has been reported by Yen, Ko, Yen, Wu & Yang 2012. Several researchers have reported mental overload they also noted the use of technologies, including computers, is one of the factors contributing to overweight and obesity. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, excessive technology use led to disordered and unhealthy eating. Furthermore, it is well-documented that obesity and overweight can lead to Type II diabetes and early-onset heart disease. (American Academy of Pediatrics (2014).)

These conditions offer a situational demand to live psychological distress among college students thanks to the negative perception of the e-Learning system.

Recommendation

Universities should set priorities in developing digital psychological interventions, like apps and online programs, alongside other services like text messages, chatlines, forums, and phone calls. Awareness of the presence of such interventions should be communicated to the student population. online psychological treatments could also be an efficient way to treat mild to moderate depressive symptoms and stop the emergence of relapse of major depression. (Klein, Berger et al. 2013).

Universities should also provide psychological services remotely, as they will mitigate the emotional and mental impacts on students. It is crucial to be constantly in tune with the scholars. Universities need to start structured programs to scale back anxiety, like life skills training and mindfulness therapy, which are validated to scale back anxiety levels.

Ministries and related agencies in coordination with the WHO, UNESCO, and CDC got to intensify community mindfulness, specifically for the scholars, by using AI to get evidence based and scientific measures for pandemics. (Sundarasan, Chinna et al. 2020) Universities should take a proactive measure to support the mental health and wellbeing of students in cooperation with professionally trained counsellors who can understand such students. This way University authorities can encourage students and faculty to stay connected online or any social media platform and move forward together during this extremely difficult time.

Universities should provide a clear direction regarding the exams, assignments, and projects, in addition, the faculty members, with the respective heads, should frame a flexible assessment guideline to keep in mind that students are not at a disadvantage. If any student isn't ready to attend a course online thanks to illness or any disturbance, universities should remain as flexible as possible to make sure that he or she will not get any negative impacts in terms of grading. Sahu, P. (2020).

Colleges should create a new guideline for student counselling.

References

- 1- Khoshaim, H. B., Al-Sukayt, A., Chinna, K., Nurunnabi, M., Sundarasan, S., Kamaludin, K., ... & Hossain, S. F. A. (2020). Anxiety Level of University Students During COVID-19 in Saudi Arabia. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 11, 1397.
- 2- Hand, B. (3). Common eLearning Health Issues and How to Overcome Them. *eLearning Industry*.
- 3- Klein, J. P., Berger, T., Schröder, J., Späth, C., Meyer, B., Caspar, F., ... & Moritz, S. (2013). The EVIDENT-trial: protocol and rationale of a multicenter randomized controlled trial testing the effectiveness of an online-based psychological intervention. *BMC psychiatry*, 13(1), 1-10.
- 4- Elhaty, I. A., et al. (2020). "Teaching University Practical Courses Online during COVID-19 Crisis: A Challenge for ELearning." 7(8): 2020.
- 5- Fawaz, M. and A. Samaha (2021). E - learning: Depression, anxiety, and stress symptomatology among Lebanese university students during COVID - 19 quarantine. *Nursing Forum, Wiley Online Library*.
- 6- Sahu, P. (2020). Closure of universities due to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): impact on education and mental health of students and academic staff. *Cureus*, 12(4).