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RESEARCH PAPER

Challenges of E-Learning for Interior Design and Art Education students studying at the College of Basic Education in Kuwait

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Abstract

The first few months of the spread of the Covid – 19 pandemics forced educational institutions to shut down. New means of educational methods and tools had to be adapted to move forward with education. Although most educational institutions were not ready to adapt and implement “e-Learning”; yet they strived to do their best to pick up where they left.

Interior Design and Art Education (ID&AE) at the College of Basic Education (CBE) in the State of Kuwait were two areas of specialization in that e-learning was new to them. The objectives of this study were to address the factors that affected e-learning for ID&AE students since the beginning of the Covid-19 Pandemic and to investigate the way to redeem educational losses of the ID&AE Students resulted from the unexpected spread of Covid-19. One hundred and eighty-two (182) male and female students participated in the group discussion for 10 weeks. Group discussions with open-ended questions were applied between the researcher and the students to address 13 main areas of concern.

Students struggled at the beginning of their e-learning, but they managed to catchup. A detailed comprehensive research study is recommended to be done to elaborate on the ID&AE male and female students’ attitudes and perceptions toward e-learning.

Keywords: Challenges, E-Education, Interior design students, Art education students, College of basic education (CBE), Kuwait

Introduction

Since the day the Coronavirus (Covid –19) started spreading among the people of Wuhan City in China in December 2019 ([World Health Organization, 2020](#)), a new global pandemic has started. In the beginning, no one had any idea regarding the severance of its spread and effects on all walks of life globally. However, within few months this virus began spreading from one country to another in unprecedented matters and conditions. The entire world was not ready to respond to it. No vaccines were developed to face this mortal virus.

Furthermore, this virus kept mutating as it spreads from one country to another and from one continent to the next. As a result, most of the affected countries had to go under lockdown for different periods, and many societal activities had to shut down. Moreover, people had to follow certain protective measures such as wearing masks, keeping social distances, avoid getting to gather in groups, and minimizing social gathering to its lowest levels.

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adapted to move forward with education. Although most educational institutions were not ready to adapt and implement “e-learning”; yet they strived to do their best to pick up where they left. Global demand increased for improved technical tools and software to meet the escalating educational needs. Existing and new computer programs and software became in high demand to meet the growing need for the different educational subjects at the different educational levels. However, students' needs for successful distant e-learning of applied sciences and art areas were not met properly and completely.

Interior Design and Art Education (ID&AE) at the (CBE) in the State of Kuwait were two areas of specialization in that e-learning was new to them. Although communication platforms were developed for educational purposes in a rushing manner; yet many of them did not meet the exact demand and requirement of those fields of study. As a result, there is a real need to fill out the existing gap between ID&AE as two areas of specializations and the tools and methods suitable for them for e-learning.

Objectives

This paper is meant to be performed as an exploratory study to accomplish the following:

1. Investigate the factors that affected e-learning for ID&AE students at the CBE in the State of Kuwait since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. Address the way to remedy educational disruption of the ID&AE Students resulted from the unexpected spread of Covid-19.

Methodology

Open group discussions with open-ended questions were conducted in this exploratory study with students of four different Interior Design courses during the Spring semester of the academic years 2020–2021. Art students were taking Interior Design courses as they were minoring in Interior Design. The group discussions were conducted through the “Teams” platform. Male students were studying Geometric Drawing and Elements of

Design courses, while female students were studying Geometric Drawing and Residential Design (2) courses.

Literature Review

With the huge advancement in technology, increased populations around the world, the spread of people over expanded lands, and the increased cost of traditional education, e-learning became inevitable. It has been predicted that it was just a matter of time and e-learning will take place side by side with traditional education if not overcome it. Therefore, the need for serious, fast, and well-prepared education updating is highly required because of the fast advancement of technology. As [Wolfinger \(2016\)](#) suggested that the need to learn at any time and any place was in its way, and the time is now.

When covid-19 hit the world many businesses and administrative private and governmental facilities were shut down because they were not fully ready to use modern technology. Furthermore, most schools, colleges, and universities couldn't incorporate e-learning in their system because they did not have the proper infrastructure to meet the needs to implement e-learning, nor its staff and faculty members were fully prepared to move to this type of practice ([Mahyoob, 2020](#)).

There has been indeed a massive number of online courses taught online through the internet, however, they were offered by a limited number of institutions and taken by selected groups of people for very specific reasons. The change to e-learning requires that both the teacher and students need to learn new social, teaching, and learning skills to adapt to online learning especially through unexpected circumstances ([Eccles et al., 1993](#); [Harter et al., 1992](#); [Midgley et al., 1995](#); [Roeser and Eccles, 1998](#)).

Presently, challenges to adapt to e-learning became less of a problem because of the fast improvement in communication technology, as well as the increased knowledge of teachers and students on using that type of technology. Most of the students became native to computer-based technology, and many teachers have improved their knowledge of using that

kind of technology to become computer immigrants (Prensky, 2001; Pellegrini et al., 2020; Byun, Sooyeon and Slavin, 2020).

To explore the effectiveness of hybrid or blended learning in Interior Design education, Afacan (2016) found that teaching both online and face-to-face can create an effective learning environment for non-studio classes while contributing to a considerable value for Interior Design education in terms of the teaching process. On the contrary, most of the Interior Design courses are in need to use studios. Furthermore, to assure the success level of distance teaching to Interior Design courses through e-learning, the development of academic staff is needed to increase awareness of the learning needs of all Interior Designer students. Educators are required to redesign and align their curriculums and course syllabuses according to the requirements of the new methods in e-learning to assure successful distance education. In addition, further empirical studies are needed to explore the significant difference in course outcomes when students are taught online versus when students are taught through regular education (AL-ayash & Hussein, 2020).

Results

One hundred and eighty-two (182) male and female students participated in the group discussion for 10 weeks from May 9, 2021, to July 11, 2021. Eighty (80) male and female students were Interior Design majors; however, Art Education male and female who were taking Interior Design courses as minors counted for one-hundred and two (102).

Those participants were divided into the following:

1. Forty (40) male students studying Geometric Drawing.
2. Forty (40) male students studying Elements of Design.
3. Fifty-three (53) female students studying Geometric Drawing.
4. Forty-nine (49) female students studying Residential Design (2).

Discussions of open-ended questions were discussed as they were raised by the courses'

educator (researcher) or by the students. Issues of the discussion and open-ended questions included the following concerns:

1. The effects of Covid-19 Pandemic and studying Interior Design courses.
2. Students' concerns regarding the validity of distant education (e-learning, teaching methods, training, turning in and grading assignments and exams ... etc.)
3. The sufficiency of e-learning.
4. The effects of social distancing on ID&AE students' learning.
5. The quality and magnitude of Interior Design curriculums taught online.
6. The sudden use of advanced technology (hardware & software) in teaching and learning Interior Design courses.
7. The application of educational ethics in e-learning.
8. Challenges associated with the increased number of students in every Interior Design section.
9. The sudden increase cost of e-education.
10. The expected changes in the future of educational institutions.
11. The future needs of educational buildings and supporting facilities.
12. The future of Interior Design educators.
13. The type of new educational resources needed to continue teaching and learning Interior Design (studios, libraries, technical support ... etc.).

Findings

Group discussions revealed quite important concerns for both ID&AE students. Those concerns varied based on students' experiences in dealing with the covid-19 pandemic, technology, and e-learning. Those concerns were best manifested at different levels like the following:

1. The effects of Covid-19 Pandemic on studying Interior Design courses:

The spread and the fear of the spreading of the covid-19 pandemic among several family members as well as students themselves caused many of the students to be anxious and preoccupied. Thus, many of them suffered from the low retention of information and ended up delaying handing or missing up their assignments. As a result, many of the students did not

perform well in e-learning and couldn't do their best in their assignments and exams.

2. Students' concerns regarding the validity of distant teaching (e-learning, teaching methods, training, turning in and grading assignments and exams ... etc.).

Before the covid-19 pandemic, students were used to studying and interacting with their educators and classmates in class. They normally will sit in their classes, studios, or workshops to listen to their lectures and work on their class assignments or projects. They used to get immediate help from their educators when help is needed. Moreover, they often can get and discuss their grades face-to-face with their educators. However, due to the spread of covid-19, students had set behind the screens of their computers, laptops, iPods, tablets, note pads, or smartphones to listen to live or recorded lectures. Moreover, they lost the benefits of face-to-face interaction with other classmates. This entire new situation caused them different degrees of discomfort which caused them different levels of negative effects on their learning and academic performance.

3. The sufficiency of e-learning.

In the beginning, most of the students did not have the proper experience in e-learning. They had to train for a very short period on using e-learning to study Interior Design courses. The replacement of the typical classroom education with e-learning through the screen of an electronic device was not quite comfortable and appealing. Students who had no computers, laptops, iPods, tablets, or note pads and couldn't afford to buy one, had to listen to their lectures and follow the given assignment instructions through the small screens of their smartphones. As a result, they had to zoom in and zoom out several times to see the different parts of their assignments or exams and make the proper connections between what they see and what they need to do and perform.

4. The effects of social distancing on students learning.

Social distancing is a foreign practice to the Kuwaiti culture. Therefore, students were not quite happy with social distancing. Male and female students often when they arrive early to college, get together with others of their gender at the student center or the cafeteria to have some snacks and chat. Next, they walk to their classes, studios, or workshops. However, students felt with e-learning that they were distant from each other. Most of the students expressed their discomfort with social distancing. That situation prohibited them from the convenient exchange of information and studying together in groups. Also, it reduced their chances to have comfortable group discussions, as well as group projects.

5. The quality and magnitude of Interior Design curriculums taught online.

Due to the sudden change in teaching and learning methods during the covid-19 pandemic, a sizable number of male and female students expressed their discomfort with e-learning. They felt that Interior Design curriculums were addressed in a way that they were not used to. Moreover, many of them felt overwhelmed with the information and assignments. Although the Interior Design educators tried to be as helpful as possible by videotaping many of their lectures and send them to their students; yet students were not used to that way of learning Interior Design information and do the required assignments and projects. It took the student time to get acquainted with that. Furthermore, the students felt overwhelmed with the e-learning materials and assignments coming together from the different Interior Design subjects as well as the minor courses, elective and compulsory courses.

6. The sudden use of advanced technology (hardware & software) in teaching and learning Interior Design courses.

Most of the students had fair to good use of their smartphones. However, most of them had less experience when it comes to using regular computers. As a result, they were taken by surprise when they had to turn from traditional learning to e-learning. Furthermore, students

were not familiar with the “Teams” platform as the official and only software in e-learning at the CBE. Around twenty thousand students at this college had about six weeks to learn how to use the “Teams” and perform somewhat efficiently with it. Some students managed to operate well on it, but most of them struggled for some time before they mastered the use of that platform. That did slow down both e-teaching and e-learning of Interior Design subjects.

7. The application of educational ethics in e-learning.

Educational ethics are quite important to teaching and learning. The need for this factor increased with e-learning. Both Interior Design educators and students had to fulfill their tasks in the best and most efficient and honest way they know. After three open meetings with the faculty of Interior Design at the CBE, it became obvious that few of their male and female students were not adhering to the e-learning ethics. Those students tried to share answers during exams while others may take other students' work and claim that it was their work. Moreover, several the students would register their names in e-meeting, then they would get busy either doing other courses' assignments, study for the exam of another subject, do different kinds of chores, or go back to sleep. Although that did not happen quite often; yet it happened especially in the early morning classes and in the early afternoon classes.

8. Challenges associated with the increased number of students in every Interior Design section.

Since e-learning started on August 9, 2020, for all ID&AE students, the number of both male and female students in each class were doubled and tripled in number some times. The rationale behind that is that through e-learning more students can take the same course at the same time. That was true in the concept, yet it was quite disturbing for both the students and their educators. Students were having less time to work one-on-one with their educators to get the proper assistance, and the educators had a hard time revising the students' assignments and return

them on time. Part of that problem was because the educators had to revise the photo images of the students' assignments and projects through their computer screens rather than revising the original drawings or projects. It was almost impossible to check the accuracy of the measurements and dimensions of the drawn objects or plans on the computer screen.

9. The sudden increase cost of e-learning.

Before the spread of covid-19 in Kuwait, the cost of e-learning was reasonable. How that cost jumped skyrocket soon after the implementation of e-learning on all students including college students. Prices of desktop computers, laptops, iPods, notebooks, smartphones increased due to the sudden increase in demand. Luckily, there was no cost to the use of the “Teams” platform to be paid by the students or their families because it was covered by the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training. On the other hand, families with more than one student had to buy a device for each one of them to avoid overlapping classes for more than one child at the same time and day. That hit many families financially and disturbed their children's e-learning. That happened to many ID&AE students and disturbed their e-learning and caused them a lot of discomfort and worry which in many cases influenced their e-learning in negative ways.

10. The expected changes in the future of educational institutions.

Most of the ID&AE students when asked about their expectations regarding the possible changes in the educational institutions, as well as learning Interior Design in the future, they had quite different answers and concerns. Many of the students believed that e-learning will be the way to learn in the future since covid-19 will not go away for good, and people must be careful about its spread or the spread of a new virus that might mutate from it. The more optimistic students believed that life would go back to normal as it always does. They admitted that it might take some time before life can be safe again, but this epidemic

will decrease with time just like any other epidemic that previously hit the world. The third group of students felt strongly about the hybrid or blended education where some courses will be taught traditionally in regular classes, while the theoretical courses will be taught online. As a result, the students were quite concerned about their future educational knowledge and skill when it comes to studying practical Interior Design courses. That concern led them to believe that future educational institution could change their educational systems, curriculum, teaching methods, and facilities gradually to accommodate future educational challenges.

11. The future needs of educational buildings and supporting facilities.

ID&AE students who were more convinced that future education will be either hybrid or blended along with online education, are convinced that future educational building and supporting facilities will be less in number, maybe smaller in lot-sized, more appropriate in design, and quite advanced with technological equipment. As they have experienced in the past two years, the entire world turned to technology. Schools and colleges which were well equipped with good computers and proper software managed to operate and recover during the covid-19 pandemic much faster than the less fortunate ones. Thus, students were more convinced that the future of Interior Design will depend more on the advancement of technology and the supporting software and platforms rather than the number and sizes of the traditional educational building.

12. The future of Interior Design educators.

Since e-learning became more of a fact rather than a dream to many ID&AE students, they believed that this new method of education may reduce the need for more Interior Design educators. This assumption was made because many of their lectures were previously videotaped by their educators and later broadcasted to them on YouTube or other popular platforms. Therefore, they believed that this trend can be the beginning of a new era in e-learning and distance education. This conclusion was

inevitable to them because they see that the internet is getting loaded with the videotaped online course given by recognized intuitions. Upon the completion of those courses, individuals who studied those courses are examined and provided with notarized certificates.

13. The type of new educational resources such as studios, libraries, technical support ... etc. needed to continue teaching and learning Interior Design.

When the participating students were asked regarding the type of new educational resources needed to continue e-learning of Interior Design, they replied with very interesting visions and ideas. Many of the students believed that there will be reduced demand for the physical building to host Interior Design studios, workshops, resource rooms, and libraries. With the proper technical support, students believe that they can use professional design software on their computers to replace the need to have the classic studios with drafting tables. Furthermore, they prefer using electronic reading materials rather than having to buy and carry actual books and handouts. Thus, they see that soon traditional libraries will become reduced in numbers and sizes. On the other hand, they strongly believe that more advanced technical support facilities and highly trained and experienced manpower should be employed to fulfill the increasing demand for that.

Educational Remedy to Disruptions of the ID&AE Students

Caused the Unexpected Spread of Covid-19

Serious efforts were made by the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training in Kuwait to provide educational the remedy to disruptions cause to all the students who have been studying under the umbrella of its different colleges and training institutions. The CBE is one of those educational institutions and Interior Design is one of the different programs that function in one of its departments.

Due to the spread of Covid-19, ID&AE students as well as all the other students studying at the CBE stopped going to college for about 6

months. As a result, a working plan was placed in place to make up for that loss of time. First, massive training efforts were taken to train all the faculty, staff, and student on using the “Teams” platform. Second, breaks between the different semesters were reduced to minimal time. Third, course sections were open to more students than usual. Fourth, curriculums were modified to meet the challenges of e-learning. Five, technical support was provided to faculty, staff, and students always. Those measures helped all students and specially ID&AE students in specific to make up for their lost time in education.

Conclusion

In conclusion, ID&AE students who participated in the group discussions strongly believed that e-learning is coming stronger than before. Therefore, educational institutions, teaching methods, curriculums, teaching materials, and all other related things and activities must be well developed and carefully applied to meet the current and future needs of advanced e-learning. Any failure to meet this urgent and pressing demand will make education fall short of meeting the future needs for local as well as global competitions. Moreover, they believed that it is quite important to set new and more realistic ethics for e-learning to help in preventing the misconduct of all entities associated with online education.

Implications

Due to the sudden change in education since the beginning of the spread of covid-19 up to now, we must accept the fact that e-learning is here to stay. Previously, e-learning in Kuwait was not recognized as a legitimate method and way of education due to the difficulties associated with its implementation in traditional education. However, new laws were established to legitimize using e-learning. Now, it is highly important to keep developing and establishing more rules and regulations to enhance e-learning and protect it from misconduct. Furthermore, current and future educators must be well trained in dealing with e-learning to assure the high quality of their performance and to fulfill their tasks in the best ways

possible. Moreover, educational facilities, programs, curriculums must be altered and better constructed to meet the sensitive and very essential needs of e-learning.

Recommendations

As a final output in this paper, it is quite important to state the following recommendation:

1. A detailed comprehensive research study should be done to elaborate on the ID&AE male and female students regarding their exact perceptions and attitudes toward e-learning.
2. Decision-makers should address students' concerns regarding e-learning and consider them when planning the future of education in Kuwait.
3. Future educational plans to continue with e-learning and blended or hybrid education should be carefully studied to be successfully implemented.
4. A comprehensive e-learning plan must be put together and carried out carefully to avoid any drastic interruption to the current or future educational plans.
5. Educators must be well trained to use updated platforms and software used in the field of Interior Design to strengthen their teaching skills and methods of teaching.
6. Government intervention must take place to put a cap on the factors that cause the increased cost of e-learning.

Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest.

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