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English Language Lecturers' Attitudes Towards E-learning in the Context of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

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ABSTRACT

The adoption of e-learning is often deemed essential during emergencies in the Gaza Strip. As a result, Many Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are compelled to transition their classrooms to online delivery. This study, therefore, attempted to investigate the attitudes towards e-learning held by the English Department faculty members at five HEIs in the Gaza Strip-Palestine. The data collection instrument used in this research was the Test of e-Learning Related Attitudes (TeLRA) scale. The collected data were analyzed through means and percentages using SPSS v20 statistical package. The findings show that the participants hold mildly favourable attitudes towards e-learning. It was speculated that lecturers holding mildly favourable attitudes towards e-learning rather than strongly favourable attitudes may be attributed to the lack of training and some other difficulties which may hinder the successful implementation of e-learning in the Gaza Strip HEIs. It is then recommended that training and professional development on e-learning need to be provided to the lecturers in order to raise their awareness of e-learning and its benefits. Further research on lecturers' attitudes towards e-learning and the difficulties they may encounter while adopting e-learning is essential. Such research may enable lecturers to become aware of their attitudes towards e-learning. It may also help educators and other stakeholders find ways to overcome these difficulties, ultimately supporting the successful implementation of e-learning in the context of the Gaza Strip HEIs.

Key Word *E-learning, Attitudes, Higher Education Institutions.*

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INTRODUCTION

E-learning has, over recent years, become ever more popular and is gaining wide acceptance as a non-traditional mode for accessing higher education, Walsh (2011). Throughout the world, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are increasingly turning to e-learning in order to support and enhance their learning and teaching activities, Behera (2012). In this study, e-learning

refers to all types of learning that is supported electronically where the student reacts with teachers, content, and other students online irrespective to time and place, Al-Musawi & Abdelraheem (2004).

Recently, learning through online communication has been developed rapidly and it takes various forms such as e-mails, chat rooms, social networks, interactive multimedia applications, web conferences, zoom application and other internet technologies, hence, the internet effectively used in educational environment, Mills, *et al.* (2013).This evolution has led to the invention of a modern educational environment like electronic, distance and e-learning, Liaw & Huang (2011).

Utilizing e-learning across the HEIs in Palestine has largely been considered as an innovation in language learning which needs to be developed yet further due to the actual need to keep in pace with the rapid technological learning developments, Wahbeh (2006). The literature on innovations in language learning often associates teachers' attitudes to the successful implementation of these innovative ideas in practice, (Kisanga & Ireson 2016; Al-Musawi & Abdelraheem, 2004 & Liaw, *et al*., 2007).

Given that the Palestinian education system is in the transition from face-to-face classroom learning to e-learning and lecturers been the key stakeholders of all formal education, their attitudes towards e-learning have a significant impact on their decision of whether to accept or reject it, Rogers (2003). Therefore, the main purposes of this research are surveying the lecturers' attitudes towards e-learning in the Palestinian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and reaching the potential implications of these lecturers' attitudes in terms of implementing e-learning in their context. In order to fulfil the purposes of this study the following research questions were formulated: (1) What are the lecturers' attitudes towards e-learning?, (2) What are the potential implications of these lecturers' attitudes in terms of implementing e-learning?

Many studies in the field of educational technology concluded that the developments in the field of science and technology influenced education as many other scientific areas, Johnson & Palmer (2015). For this reason, it has become very important to develop the technological infrastructure for education institutions particularly the higher educational institutions, as the methods and technologies of education are changing quickly, Holden & Rada (2011). The internet widespread usage and the development of social media interactions through internet technologies have affected the technology which facilitated the pedagogical purposes. Accordingly, our everyday lives rely heavily on technology more and more, Vasantha & Harinarayana (2016).

Teachers' educational attitudes are one of the prominent factors that indicate teachers' acceptance of a particular method, Cázares (2010). This would be attributed to the common fact that teachers are not vacant vessels, but they hold beliefs and attitudes which affect their rejection or acceptance of a particular idea, Prabu & Ramesh (2013). Teachers' attitudes towards e-learning can be viewed as an umbrella for the methods of education that is supported by ICT and specified with teachers' beliefs about the importance of technology and their special skills, Singh & Priola (2001). In addition, teachers' attitudes towards e-learning may be influenced by their convictions of the pros and cons of this type of education, Sun & Yang (2021).

Previous studies on teachers' attitudes towards e-learning like (Hussain, *et al.* 2018; Baghzou, 2017; Suri & Sharma 2016; Behera, 2016; Kisanga, 2016; Andersson (2007) drew attention to an important issue which indicates that successful integration of e-learning is still a controversial issue (Byram & Garcia, 2009, p. 504; Li, 2001, p.146). These studies, therefore suggest factors that should be taken into account when implementing e-learning. Firstly, the importance of diversity contexts. Secondly, the significance of computer exposure. Thirdly, the importance of raising teachers' awareness as to the aims and benefits of e-learning. Finally, the importance of teachers' educational attitudes towards pedagogical innovations.

RESEARCH METHOD

For the purpose of this study, a questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was an adaptation of a Test of e-Learning Related Attitudes (TeLRA) scale developed by Kisanga & Ireson (2016). The questionnaire consisted of six themes. The first theme is intended to measure teachers' general beliefs about e-learning; the second theme aims to measure teachers' affective and cognitive evaluation towards e-learning and the third construct aims to explore teachers' cognitive information about e-learning i.e. what knowledge they have about the worth of e-learning to education and their job as a whole. The last three themes are intended to examine teachers' affective evaluation about e-learning in terms of how to interact with computers, interest in e-learning innovations as well as their future participation in e-learning.

According to Kisanga & Ireson (2016) reliability of the (TeLRA) scale was measured by computing Cronbach's Alpha. The Cronbach Alpha score obtained was 0.909 which is relatively high and acceptable. The intrinsic validity coefficient was established by taking the square root of reliability coefficient which is 0.953. Thus, the tool was found to be highly reliable and valid. To ensure consistency among the participants, (TeLRA) scale

encompassed four-point Likert's response format with degrees of agreement ranging from 1-Strongly Disagree (SD), 2-Disagree (D), 3- Agree(A) to 4-Strongly agree (SD).

Following the high level of internal consistency and the validity of the 36 items of the adapted questionnaire, no further changes were deemed necessary. Therefore, total 25 web-based self-completion questionnaires along with a cover letter and a consent form were designed using Google Forms Application. The survey link was sent to the participants via email and Facebook. The participants are from 5 Palestinian HEIs in the Gaza Strip. These HEIs are found in three areas in the Gaza Strip namely; the South, the Middle, and the North.

The web-based self-completion questionnaire approach was applied in this research for various reasons: firstly, and most importantly, it was not possible for the researcher to give the questionnaire to the participants in person due to emergency restrictions; secondly, such type of questionnaires would increase the rate ecological validity of the resulting database; thirdly, they are used quite widely in social sciences and psychology research as they save time and effort, Vasantha and Harinarayana (2016), Wilson and Jean (2010). Having received the questionnaires, the number of the received questionnaires has been counted by Google Forms Application automatically and they were altogether 20 which represents 80% return rate. However, further emails were sent to the late participants to make sure whether there was any possibility of getting more responses, but no more questionnaires were received.

After careful checking of all the 20 questionnaires, no missing responses for the data analysis were found. The data from all the returned questionnaires that were received from the 20 lecturers' responses were then gathered and analysed using SPSS v20 statistical package. Descriptive statistics were performed on these data to obtain the mean, percentages and standard deviation. The frequency procedure (count & percent) was also performed to assess how the lecturers rated each of the 36 items. Tables and graphical techniques typically bar and pie charts were used to display the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSION

Results

Descriptive Statistics.

The data collected from 20 lecturers in 5 Gaza HELs, was processed by SPSS v20 statistical package. All questionnaire items were entered into SPSS. Negative worded statements were reversed accordingly such that low scores

indicated unfavorable attitude and high scores indicated favorable attitude, that is SD=1; D=2; A=3; SA=4.

As such, the favourable items of the scale were scored 4 for "strongly agree" decreasing to 1 for "strongly disagree" whereas the scores for unfavourable items were reversed by assigning 1 for "strongly agree" and increasing up to 4 for "strongly disagree". Hence, all the scale values were summed in order to give overall positive scales.

Lecturers' Scores of TeLRA Scale.

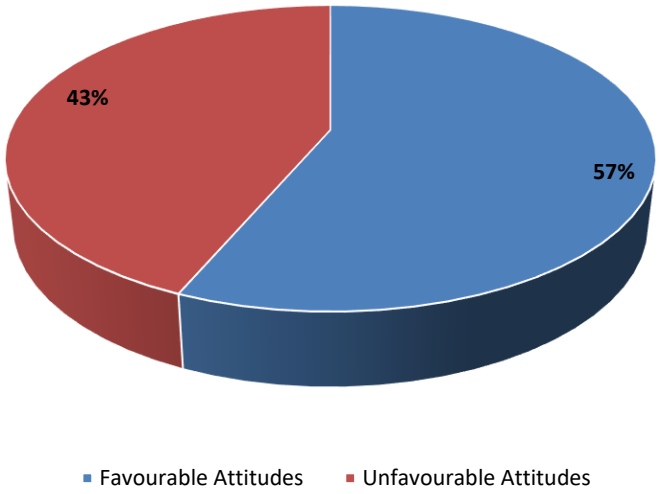

Figure 1.
Distribution of Lecturers' Favorable and Unfavorable Attitudes

The percentage of the lecturers' scores in the attitude scale is shown in figure-1. As can be observed from the figure, the majority of the lecturers' scores that fall in between agree and strongly agree. The percentage of favorable scores is 57%, whereas the percentage of the lecturers' scores that fall in disagree and strongly disagree and represent the most unfavorable scores is 43%.

Table 1.
The Mean and Standard Deviation of the Lecturers' Scores in the Attitude Scale

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Lecturers scores in the attitude scale	20	18.00	32.00	24.0000	3.27383
Valid N (list wise)	20				

As can be seen in table 1, the mean score of the lecturers in the scale was 32 and standard deviation 3.27. Taken at the face value, lecturers' scores seem to suggest that, on the whole, lecturers hold mildly favorable attitudes towards e-learning.

Thematic Analysis of TeLRA Factors.

Lecturers' scores to each statement in the TeLRA scale were calculated in order to obtain the mean for each statement. The mean score for each statement indicates the average number of lecturers' responses on each statement. The statements of the attitudes scale were grouped into four thematic factors. The 4-point TeLRA scale (See Appendix.1) consists of 36 items. The statements of the attitude scale were grouped into the following four thematic factors as shown in the table below:

Table 2.
Thematic Factors and Number of Items

No.	Factor	Number of items	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	Challenges of e-learning	12	3.95	0.50
2.	Benefits from e-learning	9	3.61	0.60
3.	Attitude on using computer systems	6	3.54	0.75
4.	Leisure interest on e-learning innovations and use of computers	9	3.22	0.60

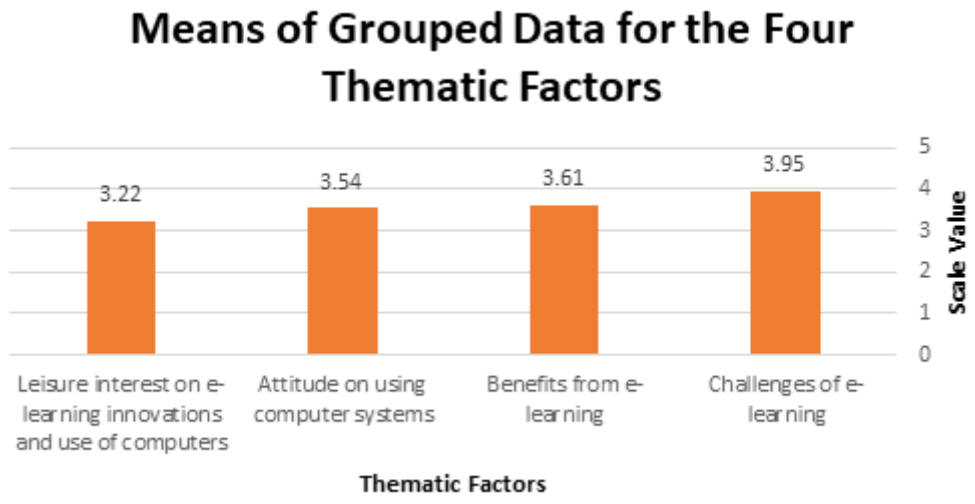

Figure 2.
Means of Grouped Data for the Five Factors

As can be seen from figure 2, most of the lecturers' scores are centered between the values 3 and 4, in other words lecturers scores in general ranged in the area between "agree" (3) and "strongly agree" (4). The highest mean value of 3.95 obtained from lecturers' scores in the attitude scale was for challenges of e-learning suggesting that lecturers' encounter significant challenges while applying e-learning. The next highest mean value of 3.61 was for benefits from e-learning. This mean score seems to suggest that the majority of lecturers are aware of the benefits of e- learning. This is followed by attitudes on using computer systems with a mean value of 3.54 and leisure interest on e-learning innovations and use of computer with a mean value of 3.22 indicating that lecturers hold mildly favorable attitudes towards these two factors.

Discussion

Results from the study revealed that the majority of the lecturers hold favorable attitudes towards e-learning. Findings from this study match with findings from other previous studies such as Bali & Sharma (2021) ; Behera, *et al.* (2016); Kisanga (2016); Andersson (2007); as well as Baghzou (2017). The aforesaid studies found that although lecturers hold positive attitudes towards e-learning they may encounter particular difficulties. According to Andersson (2007) lecturers perceived difficulties of using e-learning may have negative influence on their attitudes and their practices afterwards.

Findings also significantly demonstrated that the majority of lecturers are aware of the benefits of e-learning. This may indicate that lecturers with exposure to computers had more favorable attitudes towards e-learning than those with no familiarity and no exposure to both computer and internet. This suggests that computer familiarity has a strong influence on lecturers' attitudes towards e-learning. The same assertion concurs with Ajzen (2001) as well as Ajzen and Fishbein (2005) that the more the lecturers are aware of the e-learning benefits the more positive attitudes they may hold towards it.

As for lecturers' attitudes on using computer system, it is obvious that lecturers hold mildly favorable to unfavorable attitudes towards utilizing computer system. Lecturers' responses to the items of this domain in the TeLRA scale showed that they had negative experience while using computer at home. Such negative experience might decrease their motivation and bring about negative attitude towards e-learning in general. Interestingly, the data indicated that lecturers think that using e-learning technologies will allow them to accomplish more work than would otherwise be possible. Such attitude contradicts with what they stated about the previous statements in which they seem to believe that e-learning is frustrating and annoying. According to Baghzou (2017) lecturers' contradicting attitudes may reflect their inconsistency

in responding to the attitudes object. This might be due to the fact that they either didn't understand the statement of the attitude scale or they hold negative attitudes towards the attitude object.

Data finally showed that the least favorable attitudes were given to the fourth factor which is related to the lecturers' leisure interest on e-learning innovations and use of computers. These data suggest that the lecturers are not highly interested in technology innovations or using computer for leisure. It seems that they use technology either at home or at work place just to achieve their workloads. Lecturers' responses to the statements demonstrate that they have a high unfavorable attitude towards this factor. Thus, they may not have the motive to improve their technological skills yet further.

Overall, it is clear that the lecturer participants at Palestinian HEIs hold mildly favorable attitudes towards e-learning. This said that the lecturers may not yet be fully ready to implement such approach in their teaching practices due to some practical challenges reflected in their responses to TeLRA scale. These challenges may make lecturers' readiness to adopt e-learning even more complex and require an extensive study that may help explore them further.

Limitations of the study

Firstly, one of the most important limitations of this study is the difficulty of measuring lecturers' attitudes by using attitude scale. Such direct method is often conducive to some effects that might change the results, Bohner & Wanke (2002). The subjects may answer according to what they think they should feel rather than how do they feel. Hence, their responses may not elicit their real attitudes. In this study the extent to which lecturers' attitudes were matching their actual feelings and practices could not be investigated face-to-face due to the emergency restrictions.

Secondly, the researcher is well aware that it would have been better to extend the number of HEIs and participants for the study. However, due to the emergency restrictions which brought about lack of accessibility, this study was limited to 20 lecturers from 5 HEIs in the Gaza Strip, Palestine.

Finally, the data extracted through the attitude scale questionnaire was an online self-reported survey. Such kind of data is not highly valid or reliable, Wilson (2010) & Dillman (2000). This may be due to the fact that self-reported data doesn't often cover large number of participants and may have a low rate of returned questionnaires, Vasantha & Harinarayana (2016). The researcher, therefore, believes that it would have been better to design a more reliable research instrument for gathering data which will eventually help to extract information from larger number of respondents and therefore get more generalizable findings.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings from this study, that the lecturer participants at Palestinian HEIs generally hold mildly favorable attitudes towards e-learning or moderate acceptance of the ideas underlying e-learning. One of the most noticeable points from the data is that the lecturers also have their own reservations regarding the implementation of online learning. Lecturers' reservations reflect some constraints that could be attributed to particular difficulties that they may face while utilizing e-learning. These lecturers' perceptions may bring about negative attitudes and consequently affect the choice of the way they teach.

From a broader perspective, these findings may draw attention to the discrepancy between lecturers' attitudes and developers of e-learning initiative at the HEIs revealing issues that should be taken into account when transferring innovations to other contexts. Lecturers' attitudes and convictions which would underlie the choice of their teaching style. Additionally, intensive training would be indispensable in the process of diffusing e-learning as an innovation. Ultimately, lecturers would accept or reject such innovations in terms of their compatibility with the exiting realities mainly the socio-economic situation. Taken together, the aforesaid challenges become even more pronounced, making the widespread adoption of e-learning an uncertain endeavor particularly in times of emergencies.

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