A DIAGNOSTIC STUDY OF THE DIFFICULTIES OF USING WEB BASED INSTRUCTION (WBI) AT COLLEGE LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to diagnose the difficulties and discouraging factors impinging upon the use of distance education practically Web Based Instruction (WBI) by students at Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. 442 students from seven university colleges interested in WBI were asked about how far a set of factors outlined in the study discourage them from the use of distance education in general and web-based instruction (WBI) in particular as a supplement to the traditional classroom lecture/lab approach. Apparently if such difficulties or discouraging factors are neutralized, the students will be better motivated to use distance education and web-based instruction. The research used questionnaires to determine the influence of the factors in question upon student's use of distance education and (WBI). The major findings of the study indicate that the difficulties or factors discouraging students from using distance education and (WBI) were negatively correlated with technology skills and use. the participants have good to very good computer and Internet skills. Thus, it was found that the computer and Internet skills and use were correlated with age, the technology skills and use were correlated with gender, and the technology skills and use correlated with colleges.

Keywords: Diagnose, Discouraging Factors, Encouraging Factors, Distance Education, Technology Use, Study Tasks, Internet Skills.

INTRODUCTION

The attempts by the Saudi government to lay a solid foundation for education in the country date back to about 50 years ago. Today, there are more than 33,000 educational institutions in Saudi Arabia located throughout the different regions of the Kingdom and more than five million students enrolled in these institutions. These institutions include about 32 universities, several teacher's colleges and a variety of technical and vocational colleges, that provide modern and comprehensive programs in several fields of higher education. According to the latest census, the population of the Kingdom stands at well over 28 million (22 million Saudis and 6 million non – Saudis). (Central Department of Statistics and Information, 2012).

Statement of The Problem

In recent years, there was a rapid growth of students enrolling in higher educational institutions in Saudi Arabia which created a lot of pressure on these institutions. and Al-Erien (1999) Al- Saif (2005), note that the response of the higher educational institutions to the problem of the increasing numbers of students was to establish new branches and expand existing college buildings. This remedy may not always be possible due to the niggardliness of financial resources arising from the bureaucratic nature of the financial system in the country. However, many higher educational institutions in Saudi Arabia are now considering the initiation of distance education programs, especially Web-Based Instruction (WBI), as one way of solving problems stemming from the increased student enrollment (Distance Education and Web Training, 2004).

The University of Qassim in Saudi Arabia was founded in 1984 and given university status in May 2003 as a result of a merger of a branch of King Saud University and another branch of Imam Mohammed bin Saud Islamic University. At present, the 34 colleges of the university, embrace more than 45000 students, and more than 4000 faculty members studying and working within two campuses and many colleges located mostly in the main towns of Qassim province. The two campuses provide students with all the facilities necessary to accomplish their academic tasks.

The University of Qassim has not as yet completed the establishment of the infrastructure of its own Internet server and continues to utilize the Internet services of the former universities. Although, the University has established the Distance Education and E-learning Center (DE), the Center has not yet been utilized due to a number of reasons, such as the low enthusiasm of the University higher administration to Distance Education, the absence of a Distance Education policy and system, and the low level qualification and training for most faculty members of Distance Education especially WBI. Thus, only less than 15% of the faculty members, especially those who are U.S and U.K educated, have attempted to utilize the Internet for academic purposes. They have established web sites for their courses, required their students to use the Internet for research purposes. Nonetheless, the university has established a long- term plan to adopt distance education programs. It considers distance education as a solution to a number of problems such as the overcrowded classrooms, and the inability of some students to attend regular classes on campus due to a variety of reasons (Al Saif, 2005).

There are several encouraging factors which should enhance distance education in Saudi Arabia. However, and as pointed out by AL-Erieni (1999), AL-Hussein (2004), and Al Saif (2005), the paucity of distance education in the Saudi higher institutions can be attributed to a number of factors obstructing its adoption and implementation. Hence the main focus of this study was to further investigate and identify the main difficulties and obstructions inhibiting students from utilizing distance education especially WBI and by implication the positive or motivating factors encouraging students to use distance education and WBI in Saudi educational institutions as represented by Qassim University.

Literature Review

Many studies show that using computers in education can constitute a positive motivating factor for students' learning (McDonald & Reushle, 2000), as well as a way of providing flexibility in learning and furnishing additional resources for the students' studying process (Corderoy & Cooper, 2000). In addition, the literature shows that students gain added competence with technology, are encouraged to participate in online discussion (Siekmann, 1998) and are prompted to improve achievement and communication (Daugherty & Funke, 1998,Carey & Crittenden, 2000;Wernet et al., 2000, Cole et al., 2000; Wernet et al., 2000 as cited in Chan and Russell, 2007). Other scholars found a strong correlation between students' positive attitudes towards computers and students' use of computers (Hayes & Robinson III, 2000).

Although, computer use has grown relatively fast, many school and college instructors don't use them as an essential component of the teaching and learning process (Garcia, 1998 as cited in Chan and Russell, 2007). In addition, many studies have shown that the lack of certain components such as technical support is a significant problem when using computers in teaching and learning (Selwyn et al., 2000). Therefore, it is important to explore and overcome some difficulties that might face students' use of computers in learning (Selwyn et al., 2000). For example in many instances some students might prefer face-to-face contact rather than using technology (Morss, 1999 as cited in Chan and Russell, 2007). Also, some of the students complain that they simply don't have enough time to read and post e-mail messages related to their course work (Hofmann, 2002). Still others complain of the lack for immediate feedback (Perdue & Valentine, 2000). Other students simply fear the use of technology (Duvall & Schwartz, 2000), have high levels of computer anxiety (Hong & Koh, 2002), poor attitude towards computers (Khine, 2001) or limited previous computer experience (Hong & Koh, 2002). Thus, it is clear that there are positive and negative aspects for using computers in distance education as shown in the literature.

Encouragement and Discouragement Factors

The literature shows that there are some factors that encourage students to participate in WBI programs such as accessing the course at their own convenience, obtaining information easily, solving their academic problems, reviewing or downloading course materials easily and quickly, communicating with peers and tutors, learning from others and working out study schedules to their own convenience (Chan and Russell, 2007). Similarly, Keller and

Cernerud (2002) found that some of the students engage in e-learning to get updated information easily using the Web platform, plan their own study time because of the increased flexibility and communicate easily with students who did not live close to the University. Flexibility is one of the factors that encourage students to get involved in online courses in addition to establishing closer connections with peers and with the instructor (White ,2000). Siew, (2003) who studied the case of the Grant MacEwan Community College in Edmonton, Canada, found that students did like the flexibility in learning and its helpfulness in understanding the various topics of a course.

With regard to the factors that discourage students from actively participating in WBI programs, Chan and Russell (2007) identified the lack of incentives, insufficient study help, slowness of the platform, technical problems, individual learning preference and lack of human contact. In addition, Tarbin and Trevitt (2001) found that technical problems and individual learning styles were two of the obstacles that reduced students' participation judging from their experience in offering e-mail discussion lists to their students. Other researchers have found that technical problems, such as the slowness of the platform, was one of the disadvantages related to the use of the Web (Keller & Cernerud, 2002; Perris et al., 2004) in addition to the lengthy waiting time needed to load the information (Litchfield et al., 2002; White, 2000). Some studies indicated that the lack of computer experience underlies several of the technical problems encountered by students. (Chan and Russell, 2007).

Sometimes, students are frustrated by the inadequacy of WBI's system support to their language. For example, Chan and Russell (2007) found that some students did not use WBI because the system could not support their language's characters (Chinese characters) and they could not express their opinions well using English. They also found that Chinese students who use English as a second language had difficulties expressing themselves in English, even when the messages were written carefully and slowly. The use of a second language for communication is thus a problem that discourages a few students from participating in the WBI. Therefore, as the students suggested, it would be better if the WBI system supported both their native and English languages.

Moreover, the Chat Room was a tool that the students used infrequently. The reasons for the low usage of the Chat Room included the non availability of time to schedule the chat in advance and preference for the use of own e-mail. Sanders and Morrison-Shetlar's (2001) found that conflicting time-tables because of job and family commitments, and the Chat Room being a synchronous mode of communication requiring students to be available at a specific time of the day, were further factors discouraging student participation in the room. Therefore, the majority of students did not use the Chat Room at all because of time pressures and because they preferred to use modes of asynchronous communication, such as E-mail or the Discussion Board. Some of the students in that study commented that they preferred to communicate with I Seek You (ICQ) rather than with the Chat Room because they could talk freely with anonymity. Similarly, Kennedy (2002) found that a Chinese student who was perhaps unwilling to speak out in class, might participate in a collaborative group learning via e-mail. Lastly, Chan and Russell (2007) stressed that the format of a synchronous mode of communication may need to be changed, if the provision of this kind of communication for students is to be maintained. For instance, electronic tutorials (e-tutorials) may be a worthwhile suggestion for increasing synchronous communication.

Implications of Distance Education For Higher Education

As indicated in the literature, distance education has been defined from different perspectives over the years. In this regard, the definition of the U.S Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement for Distance Education defines distance education as "the application of telecommunications and electronic devices which enables students and learners to receive instruction that originates from some distant location" (Simonson, 1997, p.1). As a type of educational delivery system, a number of studies have discussed the uses of distance education in a variety of contexts and its implications for different levels of learning. Distance education has become a popular technique in

educational environments and communities and more accessible for every educational level from K-12 to higher education. In higher education, a great deal of distance education instructional activity is taking place today as a local phenomenon.

Many classroom instructors have established their web courses using online pedagogical techniques such as chats, discussions, web-based testing, or simulation sites on the Internet in order to create new opportunities for their students (Eastmond, Nickel, & Du Plessis, 2000 as cited in Chan and Russell, 2007). If higher education students have the ability to utilize technology effectively, they can use WBI as the most popular distance education type, either as an aid to promote learning in the traditional classroom, or as a distance education medium. In such environments, professors can utilize WBI to post course materials such as course syllabi, course schedules and meetings, reading materials, and course requirements. They can also use WBI to test students' in-class learning on campus so that they can receive instant feedback in order to adjust their lecture plans. In some classes, professors use a stylus-based laptop, which incorporates the use of notes handwritten directly into the computer, when they lecture. At the end of each class, professors can send their notes as e-mails to their students, which helps students focus on the lesson, rather than take notes (T.H.E. Journal, 1997 as cited in Khan, 1997, Zacharis, Nick Z, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

In light of the apparent usability of distance education as indicated above, the present study aims to diagnose the difficulties associated with using web based instruction and also identify the factors that discourage students to use this type of instruction as well as those factors encourage them to do some based on the research questions laid out below.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed:

- What are the difficulties of using WBI at college level?
- What are the relationships between selected student characteristics (demographics) and students skills and access to technology (computer skills and access, Internet skills and access)?
- What are the relationships between selected student characteristics (demographics) and student use of technology (computer use, Internet use, and WBI use)?
- What are the relationships between selected student characteristics (demographics) and potential situations?
- What are the relationships between selected student characteristics (demographics) and the encouraging factors for distance education?
- What are the relationships between selected student characteristics (demographics) and the discouraging factors for distance education?
- What are the relationships between selected student characteristics (demographics) and study tasks related to distance education?

Method

Participants

The participants of this study included students from the University of Qassim (n=442). These participants included male and female students from seven colleges at the University. Although the number of colleges at the university has grown considerably to as high as 34 colleges, the seven colleges included in the study are nonetheless the most active ones as far as the use of distance education is concerned. These seven colleges are: the college of Arabic and Social Science, College of Business and Economics, College of Engineering, College of Agriculture and Veterinary Science, College of computer Science, College of Islamic Studies, and School of Medicine.

Research Design

A survey research design was used for this study. Using data collected from the survey, the relationships between the dependent, independent, and antecedent variables were explored. The key variables of the study are:

Dependent Variables =

(1) Computer use (non- Internet)

(2) Internet use

(3) WBI use

Independent Variables =

(1) Potential situations

(2) Encouraging factors for distance education

(3) Discouraging factors for distance education

(4) Study tasks related to distance education

Antecedent Variables = Student characteristics

Instrumentation

The data of the research were collected using a survey as the main instrument. The survey included more than 1100 male and female students. The total number of responses was n=442. The survey consists of seven parts.

Data Collection

The Deputy Rector of Postsecondary Studies and Scientific Research at the University lent his full support to this research and functioned as the project champion during the data collection period. He endorsed a letter to all the college deans advising them to facilitate questionnaires distribution and data collection of this study within their departments and among students.

In the data collection process, one month elapsed between sending the surveys out and receiving them back. After the questionnaires were distributed, there was daily contact between the researcher, the office of the Deputy Rector and the offices of the seven college's deans. Several follow ups were made following the distribution of questionnaires by calling the departments' chairpersons to get updates about the data collection process and to urge participating students who did not return the questionnaires on time to do so.

Data Analysis

The data of this study were analyzed on the basis of their relationship to the research questions through seven major components: participant demographics, computer and Internet skills and access, technology use, potential situations, discouraging and motivating factors for distance education and study tasks related to distance education.

The data were analyzed using two types of analysis; descriptive analysis and inferential statistical analysis. In the descriptive analysis, the data analyses were accomplished by using measures of central tendency (mean) and measures of variability (standard deviation) as well as the frequency distributions of the responses. The inferential statistical analyses were conducted to address the seven research questions and examine the relationships among the major components.

Results

This part discusses the results of the statistical analyses of the data collected from the students who responded to the survey questionnaire. It also addresses and answers the seven research questions.

The data were collected from all the available the students responded (N = 442). The number included the male, female, studying at the seven colleges.

Descriptive Analysis

The Participants

The demographic questions of the survey instruments contained five items about the students characteristics (1=age, 2=gender, 3 = nationality, 4= college, 5= academic rank). Each item of these five items was summarized using descriptive statistics such as the number of participants, and percentage in Table 1.

The majority of the participants (N=321) identified their gender as male and the remaining (N = 121) were females. The participants' ages ranged between less than

Characteristics	N	Percentage %
Gender:		
Male	321	72.6%
Female	121	27.4%
Age:		
Less than 21,	153	34.6%
21 - 25	277	62.7%
26 - 30,	8	1.8 %
31 - 40	3	7%
41 - 45	1	.2%
College :		
College of Arabic and Social Science	105	23.7%
College of Administrative and Economy	80	18.7%
College of Agricultural	70	15.8%
College of Computer Science	25	5.6%
College of Engineering	42	9.5%
College of Islamic Studies	98	22.1%
School of Medicine	22	4.9%

Table 1. A Description of the Participants (N =442)

21 to over 41 years. The participants study at the seven colleges and the highest number of the participants (23.7%) was from the College of Arabic and Social Science followed by the participants from College of Islamic studies and College of Administrative and Economy (20.2% for each).

Computer and Internet Skills and Access

The participants were asked to rate their computer and internet skills and access on the scale from 1 to 5 where 1= non-existent, 2= poor, 3= good, 4= very good, and 5=excellent. From the responses of the participants, mean and standard deviation were obtained for each factor. The standard deviations for the factors studied ranged from 0.877 to 1.553. As summarized in Table 2, the overall computer and Internet skills of the participants had a mean of 3.561 and 3.531 respectively. This indicates a "good" to "very good" skill levels among the participants. A mean of 3.038 for the computer access indicates reasonably good access of computers among the participants. On the other hand, the Internet access showed "poor" to "good" rating (mean= 2.481). The lack of the Internet access also identified later as an inhibitor of using WBI. (Table 2)

Technology Use

The participants were asked to rate their technology use on the scale from 1 to 5 where 1= never, 2= less than once a month, 3= 2-3 times a month, 4= once a week, and 5=daily. The mean and standard deviation were obtained from the responses of the participants for each factor. The standard deviations for the factors studied ranged from 1.168 to 1.394. Based on their current usage of technology, the participants provided different use frequencies. For instant, most of the participants use a computer excluding Internet use from once a week to daily (mean = 4.089). This use includes using computer for studying proposes. The participants also use the Internet for non instructional purposes from once 2-3 time a month to once a week (mean = 3.488). The participants' use of the Internet for instructional purposes was from 2-3 time a month to once week (mean = 3.265). The use of WBI was the least type of technology used by the students (mean = 2.304) which reflects the use from once a month to 2-3 time a month (Table 3).

Difficulties Discouraging the use of WBI

Discouraging factors for WBI consists of eight items (29-36) in the survey, and they are to provide information about the extent to which some disadvantages of distance education may be considered as discouraging factors for the participants towards distance education. The participants rated their responses to the discouraging factors by using the scale from 1 to 5 where 1= strongly disagree, and 5=strongly agree. The mean and standard deviation were obtained from the responses of the participants for each factor. The standard deviations for the discouraging factors studied ranged from 0.914 to 1.236. The discouraging factors that affected the students to use WBI were ranked according to their respective samples means.

It was found that the factors discouraging students from distance education were negatively correlated with age, GPA, distance between the University and place of accommodation, potential situations, and the encouraging factors for distance education. The data shows that students were ,for the most part, skeptical about the relevance of most of the so called discouraging factors to the use of distance education. This should lead us to stress the importance of implementing distance education at the University since the students appear to be highly appreciative of the encouraging factors for distance education. Furthermore, the results of this analysis support the findings of Arbaugh (2001) which state that the factors encouraging media use

Factor	N		SD
Skill Rating:			
Computer skills	442	3.561	0.877
Internet skills	442	3.531	0.937
Access Rating:			
Computer access	441	3.038	1.530
Internet access	442	2.481	1.553

Table 2. Computer and Internet Skills and Access (N = 442)

Type of Usage	N	SD	
Using computer, excluding use of the Internet	442	3.561	0877
Using the Internet for non-studying purposes	442	3.531	0937
Using the Internet for studying purposes	441	3.038	1'530
Involvement in WBI	442	2.481	1'553

Table 3. Students Technology Use (N=442)

and its variables were positively linked to overall job satisfaction.

Encouraging Factors

The part of encouraging factors consists of seven items (22-28) in the survey, and they are to provide information about the extent to which some advantages of distance education can be considered as encouraging factors for the participants towards distance education. The participants were asked to rate their responses on the scale from 1 to 5 where 1= strongly disagree, and 5=strongly agree. The mean and standard deviation were obtained from the responses of the participants for each factor. The encouraging factors that affected the students to use WBI were ranked according to their respective sample means. The standard deviations for the encouraging factors studied ranged from 0.754 to 1.103.

In this study, it was found that the factors encouraging students towards the use of distance education were positively correlated with the distance between the University and place of accommodation variables which means that students who live in remote places were more appreciative of the encouraging factors toward distance education. Moreover, factors encouraging distance education were related to potential situations and study tasks. However, it was found that the factors which discourage students from the use of distance education were negatively correlated with students' GPA which can be explained by considering the relationship between campus attendance and GPA. This finding shows that students were quite receptive to distance education use

Discussion

A correlation analysis was carried out to study the relationship between computer and internet skills and use, and the students' characteristics. It was found that the computer and Internet skills and use were correlated with age, which means that whenever age increases, the technology skills and use decrease. This finding is compatible with what Gary (1997) and Al Erieni (1999) found regarding the consequence of computer and Internet skills and use for using such technologies. In addition, it was also found that the technology skills and use were correlated with gender. Although, the analysis indicates that the male students use internet for instructional purposes and WBI more often than female students, the female students have higher skills in using computer and Internet than their male counterparts. This finding could be explained by the fact that the nature of girls' majors in the study was purely scientific. It supports the findings of Lindner, Murphy & Dooley (2001) that female students had the highest distance education value scores and stated a need for further research in this area.

The technology skills and use were also found correlated with colleges. Thus, it was found that the students of colleges of natural sciences were more skillful in computer and Internet than the students of other colleges. The same can be said for students' GPA which was found correlated with their technology skills and use. Students with high academic achievements were found more skillful and they use technology more than students with low academic achievements. These findings support what some studies have showed that using computers in education can constitute a positive motivating factor for students' learning (McDonald & Reushle, 2000), as well as a way of providing flexibility in learning and furnishing additional resources for the students' studying process (Corderoy & Cooper, 2000). In addition, these findings are compatible with what other studies found that students gain added competence with technology, are encouraged to participate in online discussion (Siekmann, 1998) and are prompted to improve achievement and communication (Daugherty & Funke, 1998,Carey & Crittenden, 2000;Wernet et al., 2000, Cole et al., 2000; Wernet et al., 2000).

In regard of encouraging factors for distance education use, this study found that "factors encouraging" students towards using distance education were positively correlated with their skills and use of computer and Internet. On the other hand, "factors discouraging" students from using distance education were negatively correlated with the technology skills and use. These findings led us to conclude that whenever student's skills and use of computer and Internet increase, his/her motivation toward using distance education increases and vice versa. Moreover, it was observed, in this study, that whenever the skills and access of computer Internet decrease the

inhabitation for using WBI increases. Similarly, the students attitudes toward using technology has correlated negatively with the "discouraging factors" which means as the students attitudes toward using technology decreases, the inhabitation for using WBI increases or vice versa. However, Selwyn et al, (2000) found that the lack of certain components such as technical support is a significant problem when using computers in teaching and learning. Therefore, it is important to explore and overcome some difficulties that might face students' use of computers in learning.

The correlation between computer and Internet skills and access on one hand and technology use on the other hand was found statistically significant for all factors. The strongest relationship observed between variables was the relationship between computer skills and computer use. On the other hand the weakest but statistically significant relationship observed was the relationship between Internet access and Internet use by students. It is also observed that the overall relationship of computer and internet skills with technology use by students are among the strongest relationships. It is compatible with what Chan and Russell, (2007) found that the lack of computer experience underlies several of the technical problems encountered by students.

In this study, it was found that the "factors encouraging" students toward the use of distance education were positively correlated with the distance between the University and place of accommodation variables which means that students who live in remote places were more appreciative of the encouraging factors toward distance education. Moreover, "factors encouraging" distance education were related to "potential situations" and "study tasks". However, it was found that the "factors discourage" students from the use of distance education were negatively correlated with students' GPA which can be explained by considering the relationship between campus attendance and GPA. This finding shows that students were quite receptive to distance education use.

The data show that the students' study tasks were correlated with the distance between the University and place of accommodation, potential situations, distance education encouraging, and discouraging variables. This finding indicates that the type of tasks that a student is engaged in during to in his/her study, greatly influences the factors encouraging or discouraging students' use of distance education. The correlation between study tasks and these variables supports the findings of Murray (2001) that there are many reasons why a prospective student would choose to take online courses. However, it can be argued that the number one reason is flexibility. The ability to log on anytime day or night from practically anywhere is attractive.

Summary

The data obtained from the responses of 442 students members were analyzed using descriptive and inferential analyses. The results of the descriptive analyses indicate that the participants have good to very good computer and Internet skills. The inferential analysis shows that there is a relationship between students characteristics and technology use. Thus,. it was found that the computer and Internet skills and use were correlated with age. It was also found that the technology skills and use were correlated with gender. Moreover, the technology skills and use were also found correlated with colleges. The strongest relationship was observed between technology use with the skills and access of computer and Internet. It was also found that there was a relationship between students characteristics and encouraging factors. The relationship between students characteristics and discouraging factors was also found to be significant for variables.

Recommendation

Recommendations for the University

The University should develop distance education infrastructure in order to gain acceptance for distance education programs. In establishing this infrastructure, the University decision makers could acknowledge the faculty perspective and students encouraging and discouraging factors to develop strategies that will encourage both faculty and students participation in distance education activities. There are several ways that the University could support distance education. For instance, the University could provide the faculty and students and related academic facilities with adequate technology such as

systems reliability connectivity/access, hardware software, and setup. In addition, the University could also provide sufficient computer labs and develop active blackboards for online activities in general and WBI in particular. Putting the management of distance education project under one center could ensure a more dynamic process of distance education programs.

The University could initiate professional development processes directed toward distance education by providing distance education awareness seminars, tutorials for distance education faculty and students prior to implementing the system. The lack of technology literacy is a major factor affecting distance education development and use. This was true of the University of Qassim as well as universities studied in other research. The University could introduce distance education services to its faculty and students prior to starting the service to ensure more involvement into distance education activities. This introduction could be done through the DEC by providing formal and informal seminars explaining the nature of the new paradigm. The DEC could also provide tutorial seminars for interested faculty. Moreover, the University could provide effective distance education training for students prior to implementation. The students should be able to recognize technologies' strengths and weaknesses so they are able to select the most appropriate ones for a particular lesson.

Recommendations for Further Research

The present study was limited to the difficulties and discouraging and encouraging and factors affecting students use of distance education only, Interested investigators are, therefore, encouraged to conduct similar studies with other types of samples to include university administrators, faculty and staff, beside the students.

The current study concentrated on certain difficulties and discouraging and encouraging factors for students toward using distance education. It is recommended that future studies be conducted to further investigate these factors and examine additional, factors so as to obtain further results on the kinds of issues raised in this study.

The factors influencing student's use of distance education which were the focus of this study could be explored further in different cultural contexts to see to what extent these cultures impact the adoption and implementation of distance education.

The current study used the survey instrument only for collecting data; therefore, it would be appropriate if further researchers use additional tools such as interviews, observation, and focus groups.

Conclusion

The prevalence of distance education courses requires university students to face new challenges and make new decisions in several areas. The purpose of this study was to diagnose those difficulties affecting student's use of distance education at the University of Qassim. The results of this study indicate the existence of opportunities for successful distance education (practically WBI) implementation at the University if due attention is paid to certain issues. Essentially, this study found that students' use of distance education is influenced by a variety of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. For instance, computer and Internet skills and access are critical factors discouraging and encouraging students to use WBI. The study tasks were found a critical factor in encouraging students towards WBI use.

The students have demonstrated a great inclination toward distance education use. They were in much agreement with "the potential situations" and "the encouraging factors" for distance education. However, "the discouraging factors" of distance education require considerable and close cooperation among the different levels of the University administration, colleges, faculty, staff, students, and all other relevant parties. Effective and clear policies for distance education programs must be structured prior to distance education implementation.

Finally, the results of this study were compatible to a great extent to a number of similar studies conducted in the US at different universities, although they were conducted in different cultures and educational systems. This could lead to a conclusion that the difficulties and factors that influence students' use of distance education (WBI) may be the same regardless of the impact of cultural differences

Appendix A

Part I

Profile Characteristics. This part of the survey consists of items (1-5) and they are to provide the personal and professional characteristics of a participant in terms of age, gender, college, GPA, and the distance between the campus and residence.

Part II

Technology Skills and Access. This part consists of six items (6-11) and they are to provide information about the participants' computer skills and access. The participants rated their skills and access by using a 5 –point Likert scale (1=none and 5= too high).

Part III

Computer and Internet Use. This part consists of four items (12- 15) and they are to provide information about the participants' computer and Internet use. The participants rated their usage by using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never, and 5= everyday).

Part IV

Potential Situations. This part consists of six items (16-21) and they are to provide information about the encouraging or discouraging factors for the participants regarding some potential situations in distance education. The participants rated their usage by using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, and 5= strongly agree).

Part V

Encouraging Factors for distance Education. This part consists of seven items (22-28) and they are to provide information about the extent to which some advantages of distance education can be considered as encouraging factors for the participants towards distance education. The participants rated their usage by using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, and 5= strongly agree).

Part VI

Discouraging Factors for Distance Education. This part consists of eight items (29-36) and they are to provide information about the extent to which some disadvantages of distance education may be considered as discouraging factors for the participants towards distance education. The participants rated their usage by using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, and 5= strongly agree).

Part VII

Study Tasks Related to Distance Education. This part consists of eleven items (37-47) and they are to provide information about the study tasks related to distance education which were accomplished by the participants. The participants rated their usage by using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, and 5= strongly agree).

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