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Extended Abstract

THE FUTURE OF TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED LEARNING AT THE UNIVERSITIES IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: THE TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE

The term technology-enhanced learning (TEL) is frequently used in the academic community to describe the application of information and communication technologies to teaching and learning processes (Kirkwood & Price, 2014). Having in mind the rapid technological development within the past 20 years, along with the profound impact that technologies have on every aspect of our life, application of technologies in the classroom became the necessity of the modern higher education. Moreover, the generation of digital natives, proficient with all technological tools, have different educational expectations: they prefer graphics over text, search for information quickly, multitask and tend to read randomly (Uyguar et al., 2016). The aim of this study is to explore the levels of usage of technology-enhanced learning in the classroom, taking into account considerations, preferences, and perspectives of the University teachers from the United Arab Emirates. The following research hypotheses have been suggested:

H1: University teachers in the United Arab Emirates do not utilize the possibilities offered by the technology-enhanced learning to the full extent.

H2: There is a difference between different socio-demographic groups included in the sample, in terms of the technologies used in the teaching and learning processes.

H3: University teachers in the United Arab Emirates believe that technology-enhanced teaching and learning processes will be more present in the future, comparing with the present moment.

The research survey included 126 University teachers from different public and private Universities operating in the United Arab Emirates. The sample incorporated different strata – by age, scientific field and academic ranking. The respondents have been asked to identify the tools they are using in the technology-enhanced learning process, their teaching practices and obstacles related to the use of different tools: generic social network sites, professional and academic networking services, writing and commenting tools and available audio-video content tools. Also, the respondents have been asked to express their opinion regarding the presence of technology-enhanced learning in their future work, and if mobile phones are going to become a tool in the in-classroom learning process.

The results demonstrate that PowerPoint presentations and videos are still dominant in the learning process. 100% of the respondents use PowerPoint presentation, while 95% of them use videos in the learning process. Mobile devices and applications, social media, simulations and e-portfolio became significantly present in the teaching process – more than 2/3 of the respondents use these tools. However, they are less present than PowerPoint presentations and videos. These study findings are in line with the findings from the study conducted by Manca and Ranieri (2016) regarding the use of social media in higher education teaching in Italy. Moreover, there is a notable difference when the responses are analyzed by the age groups: the younger respondents are more likely to consider mobile learning, social media and e-portfolio as the vital tools than the older ones. Virtual reality, augmented

reality, artificial intelligence and machine learning are still not incorporated in the learning processes to high extent: less than 20% of the respondents are using them. These advanced technologies are dominantly used by the University teachers in the field of technology and IT, while they are almost not used at all by the teachers from the fields of business and law.

The respondents consider all technologies, except blogs, as predominantly effective in the learning process. Simulations, videos and e-portfolio are considered as the most effective tools by the respondents. According to the respondents, all technologies, except blogs and PowerPoint presentation will be more present in the learning processes of the future.

95.1% of the respondents believe that more technology-enhanced learning tools will be involved into teaching process in the future, while 67.5% of the respondents agree or strongly agree that mobile phones and devices will become a regular tool in the in-classroom learning process in the future. Thus, the findings from the present study support the hypothesis that technology-enhanced learning will be better represented in the future work of the University teachers in the United Arab Emirates.

Additional comments of the respondents also demonstrate the difference in perception of the role of technologies in the learning process. Some respondents are very enthusiastic („Mobile phones and devices already are regular tool in the in-classroom learning process. Digital gadgets as well and hologram design too. Distance learning technology is the key of future and actual universities“, „Cyber Psychology tools should be considered“), while some others do not consider technology-enhanced learning as overly relevant („Except for powerpoints, videos and simulations, all of which are 30 years old, technology is largely irrelevant. The highest-rated courses use none“, „Number of questions here: What does the technology bring? It reduces the interaction with the students. What is the student benefit from losing interaction with the teacher? How to make sure learning outcomes are reached if the teacher does not teach physically? Needs further discussion“).

Badri et al. (2017) demonstrated that the forthcoming generation of students is already extensively using both mobile devices and social media: 81.7% of current high school students in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi have social media accounts, spending in average 5.2 hours per day on social networking. Although there are University teachers in the United Arab Emirates who are fully aware of the significance of technology-enhanced learning and the necessity of technology integration in classroom, there are still University teachers whose awareness and capabilities for technology integration and in-classroom use of the technology-enhanced learning need to be improved.

Keywords: Learning, Technology, Higher Education, Technology-Enhanced Learning