The Role of Responsive Leadership in Meeting Customer Needs During Crises: A Case Study on a Higher Education Institution in the UAE

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ABSTRACT

This case study was conducted to investigate the impact of a responsive leadership approach in meeting customers' needs in a higher education institution in the UAE during the COVID-19 pandemic. For this purpose, a mixed-method model has been used. The data has been collected from a convenient sample working and studying at Al Qasimia University Language Center in fall 2020. This result indicates that the provided responsive leadership support during COVID-19 was effective and helped in motivating learners and customers to keep learning and making progress greater than what was shown before COVID-19, during the face-to-face teaching and physical assessment. Although the qualitative and quantitative results in this case study revealed a significant impact of responsive leadership approach on customers' progress, there is still a need to conduct other researches to develop and validate a responsive leadership inventory to facilitate measuring of responsive leadership attributes in a large-scale sample and/or population.

KEYWORDS

Al Qasimia University, Customer Needs, Higher Education, Responsive Leadership, UAE

INTRODUCTION

The world today is facing an increasing number of “wicked and unforeseen” problems – climate changes, food security, water scarcity, gender inequality, unsustainable economic development, global pandemic, and others, to name a few. The COVID-19 global pandemic health crisis has had and will have a long-term bearing on societies, schools, and higher education systems. The COVID-19 pandemic and its related consequences directly affected about 1.6 billion learners globally, from primary to tertiary education (UNESCO, 2020). This pandemic has created a point of no return to the conventional higher education system. The lockdown experienced across countries and regions have already led to a sudden and rapid shift to online modes of teaching and learning. However, most of the educational systems worldwide has adopted the shift from traditional face-to-face to a blended learning paradigm; the challenge we have is that trying to solve or overcome our problems with the same mindset that created the problems will just not work.

Due to COVID-19 pandemic, many countries across the world have implemented school closures affecting over 1.6 billion learners who were not allowed to attend regular schools with the purpose to prevent the spread of the epidemic (Li & Lalani, 2020). The decision was sudden and educational

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institutions had no alternative but to introduce online distance learning to maintain and transmit its services to all educational stakeholders (ÖZER, 2020; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2020). The rapid response includes different forms of learning such as distance learning solutions and home-based distance learning during the pandemic, and tech-enhanced school systems after the pandemic (Miao, 2020).

According to UNESCO statistics (2020), the closures of schools all over the world in order to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 has affected 91% of the student population. National exams have been canceled, schools and universities are locked down, and learning has moved from classroom settings to homes. Teachers, school principals, and parents are now tasked with home schooling, aided by online learning technologies to provide education.

In the United Arab Emirates, as in countries worldwide, there has been a widespread shutdown of non-essential businesses, schools and universities to encourage social distancing and ensure a high safety rate. Therefore, like 1.6 billion learners across 165 countries, learners in the UAE have been either asked or required to stay home from school (UNESCO, 2020). The UAE's government mandated the closure of all schools and universities on March 8, bringing the school and universities holidays forward and requiring approximately 1150,000 learners to transition to distance learning. Distance learning was further extended till June 2020, the end of the academic year. Meanwhile, the government began to work closely with school principals and teachers to immediately start pursuing online and distance education (Houalla, 2020).

As hundreds of thousands of teachers, faculty and learners around the world, log into teaching and learning cyberspaces, we explore how this transition could change the educational landscape for decades to come. As universities deliver education through online mode, learners are at the receiving end of online education and so the resistance towards online education may be considerably reduced. There has been a paradigm shift in the concept of schools and schooling, which need modern methods of management and leadership. Thus, the higher education institutions, public and private sectors, and organizations are asked to generate innovative and disruptive learning solutions and policies to respond to and lead the digital transformation shift while keeping customer's needs and satisfaction as a strategic priority.

BACK GROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital Transformation Shift in Schools and Higher Education Institutions Although there was already high increase and adoption of educational technology before the pandemic (Graham, 2006; Ichsan et al., 2020; Li & Lalani, 2020, Wargadinata, Maimunah, Dewi & Rofiq, 2020), the significant demand for online learning as a result of the pandemic led many countries especially the technologically advanced ones to quickly enhanced their online education platforms (Adobe, Blackboard, Desire2Learn, Moodle, Cloud Systems, etc.). This helped in facilitating effective teaching and learning through virtual classrooms and provide stakeholders access to variety of e-resources (Azzi-Huck & Shmis 2020). The online platforms were used to provide and facilitate excellent features including e-learning resources, smart classes, virtual labs, question banks and learning and assessment centers. Those features were accessible by instructors and learners at all education levels (Abidah, Hidaayatullaah, Simamora, Fehabutur & Mutakinati, 2020). Even those countries who are less technologically advanced and do not have adequate technology infrastructure turned to traditional technologies to compensate the loss of school closures. Television and Radio channels have been used to provide live and recorded educational lessons for learners (IAU, 2020).

With such unplanned and rapid change, some questions were raised related to the impact of online distance learning, readiness of educational systems for this innovative transform and move, and affordances and challenges associated with it. The related existing studies and reports yielded mix findings about the rapid shift to online learning. Several published reports or studies documented that the online mode delivery will continue to emerge and become an integral component of school

education with significant benefits (Dhawan, 2020; Ferdig, Baumgartner, Hartshorne, Kaplan-Rakowski & Mouza, 2020; Goh & Sandars, 2020; Li & Lalani, 2020; Reimers, Schleicher & Ansah, 2020; Saxena, 2020; Sintema, 2020; Verawardina et al., 2020; Wargadinata et al., 2020). As stated by Ferdig et al. (2020), the pandemic of COVID-19 has significantly affected education by forcing schools to embrace digital technologies to deliver online and remote instruction. Despite of the existing challenges, the situation resulted in creating success stories of innovation in preparing well-qualified schoolteachers and university instructors. In another study conducted by Reimers et al (2020), senior administrators, other school administrators and teachers from 59 countries participated in the survey have positively viewed responded to the new strategies deployed to maintain teaching and learning. The study also indicated that those the strategies provided flexible access to at least part of the curriculum for a considerable number of learners in extremely challenging situations because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the other hand, some researchers and educators reported that the sudden and quick move to online learning without sufficient training, adequate infrastructure, and appropriate preparation will lead to a poor learning experience that will affect the sustained growth (Li & Lalani, 2020). For instance, Reimers et al. (2020) indicated that there is an agreement among participants representing 59 countries that only part of learners have been able to engage effectively and consistently in the alternative learning opportunities developed under these unexpected conditions.

Moreover, Reimers and Schleicher (2020); Abdelaziz and Al Ali (2020) stated that there are other factors that will increase the already existing gaps in learning experience across jurisdictions. Those include differences among learners in parents' support during their online learning, differences across school systems and capacity to design and deploy effective online learning, and differences in learners' personalized learning skills and capabilities, motivation, and flexibility to learn online at their own pace. In this regard, Andreasyan (2020) summarized the challenges for ensuring continuity of education during COVID-19 crises as follows:

- § Technological readiness: This includes lack of technological devices and lack of internet access.
- § Content readiness: availability of teaching and learning materials aligned with national curricula that can be delivered through online platforms.
- § Pedagogical readiness for delivering online classes and activities.
- § Monitoring and evaluation ecosystem: Lack of comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system for online learning.
- § Responsive leadership: availability of leader who can guide, support, facilitate, empower, and mentor online learners' agency.

For these reasons, it is imperative that education leaders and researchers should delve in the issues further to be able to develop and implement strategies to enhance learners learning during and after COVID-19 pandemic. As such, the purpose of this study is to explore and investigate the role and impact of responsive leadership on the transforming to online and distance education on the higher education institutions.

Responsive Leadership and Customer Satisfaction in a Digitally Transformed Era

Leadership is a process by which an individual guides, empowers, and encourages a group of people to achieve a shared vision and common goals (Northouse, 2004). Leaders are mainly deals with people inside and outside an organization or business. The action of leaders is not only to inspire his people but also to address and respond to their current and future needs in different situations and work contexts in a world that is challenged by many problems and dynamic changes. Of these dynamic changes is the digital transformation that became a foreseen fact than ever in the last decades.

According to Forbes magazine narrated in an article on 17 Jan 2016, and revealed results of a survey which show 84% of organization around the world could not succeed to achieve their targets

due to failure to incorporate with digital technology. These companies are unable to show tendency towards innovations and carried on with traditional methods. The survey also blamed the leaders who were falter in taking initiatives in helping people change (Rogers, 2016).

In Digital transformation, the role of leader is a central to driving fast decision-making process and propelling the change. Digital leadership is combination of leadership style of transformation leadership and the uses of digital technology. Digital Leadership is defined as the combination of culture and competence of leader in optimizing the use of digital technology to create value to the firms (Lui, 2021; Sainger, 2018).

Due to the digital and health challenges facing the world of education and business, leadership goes beyond what we may seem to be. It is quality and effectiveness empowering and inspiring internal and external customers. There are two major aspects of quality and effective leadership. The first aspect is the employee's perception of the leader-member relationship as positive, meaningful, and supportive. The second aspect is a leader's capacity to learn about, understand, and respond to unique needs, value, goals, and strengths of his people and intended customer inside and outside his organization (De Groot, 2016).

The above two aspects can and will guide educational leadership in the future to build bridges of trust, respect, empathy, and integrity among current and prospective learners especially in digital transformation and health challenges era. They will shape the concept of "the greatest leadership experience ever." To put these four elements into action, there should be an emphasize on responsive leader attributes to be opted and implemented in the higher education institutions. According to Mahsud, Yukl, & Prussia (2010), leader-customer relationships that contribute to leadership effectiveness are derived by a high level of trust, respect, and responsiveness. For this, the focus of the current case study is responsive leadership in a higher education institution.

Responsive leaders focus on people within the organization to achieve success and scale up a unique customer relationship. Responsive leaders are characterized by four major attributes: Curiosity, Humility, Empathy, and Resilience (Jenkins-Scott, 2020). These four attributes of responsive leadership are explained below.

1. Curiosity

Curiosity drives leader's desire to continuously learn, discover and grow intellectually. It shapes the growth mindset of any organization to explore and take the advantage of any unexpected challenges and see it as an opportunity to learn and change old or traditional practice. Curiosity is the fuel of innovation. With a curious mind, the leader will optimize knowledge, skills and understanding from a diversity of sources, including subordinates, peers, experts and trusted advisers. Exceptional companies nowadays makes curiosity a core company value (Malik, 2020). Failing to have a high level of curiosity, a higher education leader will not be able to lead the change and make improvement. This in turn may cause rigorous impact on competitive delivery of quality education in higher education institutions (Raghunadhan, 2009).

2. Humility

Humility, on the other hand, guides leader-customer relationship to have a collaborative and collective mindset that forces on the win-win type of action and reflection. Employees often respond best to a humble and collaborative leader. Humility increases the level distributed responsibility and leadership. It increases and empowers organizational culture, readiness to learn, change, and success together. According to Akdemir, & Ayik, (2017), there is a positive and significant relationship between school principals' distributed leadership behaviors and teachers' organizational commitment. Besides, school principals' distributed leadership behaviors significantly predict teachers' organizational

commitment. Thus, the sustainable development of the higher education institutions need to be supported by leadership that is distributed among partners to build customer-centricity responsive actions. Implementation of distributed leadership at schools and universities contributes to the emergence of organizational commitment which means that both faculty and learners feel sincere attachment and commitment to their organization effectiveness and change (Sloan, 2013). According to Vilorio (2019), culturally responsive leadership practice was shown as a major driver to promote teachers' self-efficacy, develop a human agency and utilize high-needs learners' communities.

3. Empathy

Empathy refers to leader's ability to feel, understand and appreciate other partners, customers, and human in any business or professional situation. Empathy is the fuel of respect and trust of strong customer relationship. Empathy is the first principal to workplace positive cooperation and productive collaboration. With the high level of digital transformation and health challenges, empathy keeps leaders tuned into the impact that dramatic industry changes are having on the people around them and on the organization (Jenkins-Scott, 2020).

According to Scott (2020 a), many leaders agree that empathy is a basic and very important quality of a successful organization. The leaders' ability to demonstrate empathy during crisis and challenging times will also help build trust and confidence in the leader and the decisions they are making. In addition, empathy supports a people-centered response to the crisis. In his exploratory study, Gigliotti (2020) found that the practice of leading others in a suddenly online context needs systematic emergency operations plans, ongoing leadership communication, and a people-centered response to the crisis.

4. Resilience

Resilience is leaders' capacity to recover, to keep going forward in the face of difficulty or challenge. Unlike systematic leadership, responsive leadership can be flourished anywhere. Resilience is a psychological ability that supports responsive leader to have a built-in attribute to empower, enrich and accelerate human capital in all work related conditions especially in crisis time. Resilience is one of the 21st soft skills and is seen as a secret to motivate people and make them feel they are on the right track (Scott, 2020 b). In higher education institutions, resilience can help leader to recover quickly and faster since it focuses on distributed actions to take steps beyond measuring the skills, behaviors, and achievements of individual learners or customer (Jones, Harvey, Hamilton, Bevacqua, Egea, & MacKenzie, 2017).

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a high level of uncertainty and complexity to higher education all over the world. To face this high level of complexity and ambiguity, higher education leaders should be equipped with high level of resilience. They also require agile leadership that is responsive to pressures in the environment and capable of managing conflicts. Adaption and flexibility is the core of resilience in any work place. In their study, Tsai, Poquet, Gašević, Dawson, & Pardo, (2019) revealed that learning analytics can help higher education institutions to face complexity and challenges by adopting a new form of leadership that creates and nurtures an adaptive space in which innovations are supported and ultimately transformed into the mainstream operation of an institution.

The above mentioned four attributes are functioning and intersecting in a dynamically manner, rather than independently, to maximize the type and level of expected results impact. Figure 1 summarizes the nature of the relationship between these attributes. Each attribute has equal weight of impact in forming the responsive leadership model.

Figure 1. Responsive leadership attributes

To sum it up, COVID-19 had made the world of business and education unstable, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the research agencies, organizations, and universities were forced to adapt to new changing situations. There was a great challenge to carry out the job and managing ongoing operations. The pandemic has posed a huge threat to higher education. In this situation, only responsive leaders with certain vision and ingenuity can cope with situation. The able responsive leadership has never been so important than before. This new model of responsive leadership in Higher Education is needed to a university undergoing rapid growth in a highly multicultural context.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, most institutions of higher education institution around the world decided to lockdown their campuses and branches. As a result, teaching and assessment activities were carried out remotely and, generally, on the Internet (OECD, 2020). Meanwhile, governments in more than 160 countries have closed their educational facilities completely or partially to control the rapid spread of COVID-19 and higher education institutions around the world have adopted a similar response and closed their campuses, affecting about 99% of the world's higher education learners. This situation has disrupted teaching and learning in higher education on a large scale. A recent study by the International Association of Universities (IAU) of higher education institutions around the world showed that more than 90% of the institutions surveyed either have replaced face-to-face education with distance education or are in the process of developing solutions for continuing teaching and distance learning (IAU, 2020).

As such, most of higher education institutions offered their courses remotely through online learning platforms. The shift to online teaching and learning has raised important challenges in organizing and managing exams and ensuring that learners can progress in their studies. Many educational programs on the Internet use exam centers rather than online exams. This is not a possible solution in the context of strict social distance measures lockdown. The recent shift to offering online courses and programs in higher education requires additional solutions that need to be put in place to measure the acquisition of knowledge and skills remotely. Several practical solutions can be considered

for adapting on-site examinations to online learning environments. Alongside these adjustments, this crisis allows further reflection on how exams will be conducted in the future.

Therefore, the questions are: How do these institutions make sure that learners take their exams by themselves or without assistance? How do they assess learners' competence in some practical or professional areas when it is difficult to verify from a distance? How do they design and manage remote exams that reliably attest to learners' progress and add value to their learning? All of these questions need a transformative leadership to respond to learners needs, assure and build a high quality online learning and assessment. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to provide an in-depth description of a case study on a higher education institution (Al Qasimia University) in the United Arab Emirates, which is considered one of the best practices for applying responsive leadership characteristics to meet the needs of distance learners and customers during the COVID-19 crisis. This case study investigate the following research questions:

1. How Al Qasimia University adapted to a period of crisis and transition to online learning by adopting an approach of responsive leadership?
2. What is the impact of this exercise on customers' academic progress?

RESEARCH DESIGN

The Case Study Setting

Place

Al Qasimia University was established under a royal decree issued by HH Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al-Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council, Ruler of Sharjah, No. (2) in 2013, on the establishment of an Islamic, Arab University in the Emirate of Sharjah under the name of "Al Qasimia University". The University includes an integrated set of services provided for supporting learners out of the University's keenness on creating an attractive and prominent educational environment serving learners from all over the world.

The Mission of Al Qasimia University is working to form a distinguished academic community in higher education, scientific research and community service. This academic community aims to attract learners and researchers from all parts of the world and provide them with a competitive educational level that highlights Islamic and human values. It also prepares them for effective participation in a global community, in order to achieve the greatest harmony among people all over the world. Al Qasimia University is a beacon of excellence in higher education and scientific research, basing all its actions on the fundamentals, principles and teachings of the tolerant religion of Islam open to the entire world.

Embodying the message of the United Arab Emirates in spreading and teaching the Arabic language, and English language Al Qasimia University, represented by the Language Center at Al Qasimia University, to implement a program to teach non-Arabic speakers with the aim of spreading Arabic and English among non-native speakers. This program was proposed in responding to the repeated desires of state workers who do not speak Arabic and would like to learn it, and it is one of the targeted additional programs that the university can implement to serve Arabic and English and serve the community. The program was establishing at the Language Center to support leaners to achieve the following goals:

- § Understand spoken and written Arabic and English.
- § Speak Arabic and English easily, especially in the field of daily life
- § Read Arabic and English at ease.
- § Provide leaners with a measure of the Arabic language to enable them to understand Islamic culture and deepen his understanding and knowledge of Islamic law.

- § Write in Arabic and English.
- § Provide learners with information that could later allow them to learn about the Islamic civilization, its heritage, history, culture, and the Arabic language and literature.
- § Provide learners with many possibilities aimed at raising their level in Arabic and English and empowering them with its skills, since they can obtain scholarship to study in various colleges of the university as follows: College of Sharia and Law, College of the Holy Quran, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Faculty of Economics, and College of Communication.
- § Help learners who wish to enroll in the college of Communication and Economics to obtain an IELTS or TOEFL certificate because they are the conditions for admission to these two colleges.

Context and Situation

In view of the Corona pandemic and the crises, it caused many problems, not only in the United Arab Emirates but also around the world. This pandemic caused the inability of Al Qasimia University learners to attend the university campus. These learners are two kinds. First, the new learners who are entering the university for the first time. The second is the old learners who have returned to their countries for the purpose of visiting or spending the summer vacation. Accordingly, the old learners were not able to obtain the financial aids that they are receiving from the university due to the expiration of their residency due to the expiration of the legal period for their stay outside the country. As for new learners who are entering the university for the first time, they could not come to the UAE due to safety measures and precautionary measures for the spread of COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants

The participants were 256 male and female learners from different nationalities around the world, totaling 31 nationalities. The following table shows those nationalities and the number of learners of each nationality.

To answer the proposed questions, a mixed-method research design using both qualitative and quantitative methods was used in the study. The mixed-method design was employed to raise the data above possible biases stemming from use of single methodology. This is known as triangulation of information. Triangulation is as an attempt to gather observations using various sampling strategies to ensure that a theory is tested in more than one way. In the present research, triangulation data was done by verifying and validating information from the interviews using information from the customers' performance and reflection.

Qualitative Research Approach

In order to answer questions 1 posed by the study, a qualitative research approach was followed: interviews were used to obtain information as to how the concept of 'responsive leadership' was implemented by the Al Qasimia University Language Center's manager, instructors, and staff and how they perceived their roles in the incorporation process. As previously indicated, responsive leadership entails four major attributes: Curiosity, Humility, Empathy and Resilience. A qualitative design was appropriate for this part of the research, because it is used when a researcher wants to study a phenomenon in its natural setting and interpret it in terms of the meanings attached to that situation. In this research, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate because of the nature of the issue under investigation, which required detailed information about the meanings that people attached to the matters under consideration, given the emotive nature of change.

Research Strategy

A case study strategy using structured interviews as a data collection method was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the responsive leadership' roles used by the target sample and participants in the Al Qasimia University Language Center.

Table 1. Participants number and nationalities

	Nationality	Number of Participants
1	Afghanistan	6
2	Benin	9
3	Burkina Faso	12
4	Cambodia	1
5	Cameroon	1
6	Chad	1
7	China	4
8	Eritrea	1
9	Gambia	28
10	Ghana	12
11	Guinea	4
12	Guinea Conakry	1
13	Guinea-Bissau	2
14	India	2
15	Indonesia	56
16	Ivory Coast	6
17	Malaysia	2
18	Malaysia	2
19	Mali	9
20	Niger	2
21	Nigeria	13
22	Philippines	16
23	Republic of the Congo	1
24	Russia	1
25	Senegal	20
26	Sierra Leone	2
27	Tanzania	4
28	Thailand	36
29	Togo	2
30	Uganda	2
31	Uzbekistan	1
Total		256

Research Method

Interviews and reflection analysis were conducted within the Al Qasimia University Language Center's environment, specifically during the implementation of online distance learning strategy in fall 2020.

Data Collection Methods

The 'phenomenological interview' was used as the interview method. Using a 16-item structured interview guide, the interviewer asked a core question to solicit institutional employees and learners' understanding of responsive leadership. The question asked was: 'As one of the institutional employee responsible for supporting your customers who were studying remotely fully online, what is your understanding of the term responsive leadership and how did you implement it during the university lockdown down period because of COVID-19 pandemic?'

Qualitative Data Analysis

Aligned to the research method suggested, analysis of the qualitative data was conducted through transcribing each interview and a content analysis was used to determine the underlying themes for each responsive leadership attribute. The content analyst seldom has any effect on the subject being studied. However, it is only limited to the examination of recorded communications and written and collected reflection from learners.

Quantitative Research Approach

In order to answer question 2 of the study, a quantitative research approach using pre-post test results comparison was used to understand and measure the impact of adopting responsive leadership approach on customers' satisfaction and academic progress. Quantitative designs deal with a large number of respondents, use numbers to generalizable comparisons and conclusions about populations. It was for this reason that a qualitative approach was chosen: a large number of learners/customer were involved, making the interviews a time-consuming process, and in addition it provided a platform for the comparison of data.

Sample

The second sample consisted of 216 learners, because 40 learners have been discarded because some of them has not attend lessons (29), and others (11) has not completed the final exam (post-test).

Measuring Instruments

The administrated test consists of four sub-tests: listening test, reading and comprehension test, writing and grammar test, and speaking test. All test items are multiple-choice test format except speaking test which administrated individually. The total mark is 100 which divided learners into three levels: beginners, intermediate, and advanced level. Every level consists of two sub levels A and B.

Procedure

The test was distributed to all the learners from the three campuses of the institution via the eLearning and assessment platform called Canvas. The date of performing test has been determined, and the link has been sent to them in order to enable them to take the exam. After they finished the test, they divided into six sections according their result based on the criteria of the test. The Technology Department at Al Qasimia University has created an account for each student on the (Canvas) program, which is the educational platform used by the university. The invitation was sent to every student to be accepted by him/her to be able to access and take the exam.

The following procedures have been taken:

1. Determining the date of the placement test for learners in Arabic for non-native speakers called the Test of Arabic as a Foreign Language (TAFL), which is also a pre-test.
2. Administer the test among all learners.
3. Monitor learners' grades after they performed the test.
4. Classification of learners into three language levels according to their grades with a placement test, which includes three original levels of language: beginner, intermediate and advanced, and each of the three levels is divided into two sub-levels. They are: Beginner A and B, Intermediate A and B, and Advanced A and B.
5. Then the program of teaching Arabic for non-native speakers was applied for a period of two months (October and November 2020). Eight lecturers specialized in teaching Arabic to non-native speakers participated in teaching the program.
6. After the end of the program, the learners were tested for the post-test and compared the scores of the learners in the two tests.

Statistical Analysis

Using a confidence level of 95%, a parametric statistic, the paired sample t-test was used to determine gained progress and achievement among customers' pre and post-test. The idea was to establish whether the participants' responses for each question were improved across the values of the items tested.

Ethical Considerations

Permission was sought and granted by the institution's authority. Voluntary informed consent was sought from the interviewed participants through email exchange and conversation in which the researchers explained the purpose of the study. After each interview, time was allocated for the participants' debriefing to avoid any harmful effects of their participation in the study. In addition, confidentiality was maintained at all times and participants were informed of the rationale, recording and safekeeping of interviews and transcriptions. Confidentiality of information was also guaranteed.

RESULTS

How Al Qasimia University Adapted to A Period Of Crisis And Transition To Online Learning By Adopting An Approach Of Responsive Leadership?

To answer this question, based on the available data and information collected during the COVID-19 and the transformation to online distance learning especially in fall 2020, the researchers applied the four attributes of responsive leadership discussed in the literature review section.

As for the first attribute: Curiosity

1. An open interview meeting was held for all those involved in the educational process and administrators, such as faculty deans, department heads, academic support services, and instructors to discuss ways of continuing the educational process in light of the Corona pandemic. Besides, how to communicate with learners and send educational materials to them, the regularity of lectures, and control attendance and absence processes and evaluation procedures. In addition, other universities have been contacted to exchange experiences and benefit from their experiences and expertise in this regard. The experiences of similar universities, which give scholarships to foreign learners, such as Umm Al-Qura University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the Islamic University of Madinah in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, were reviewed to benefit from their experiences in this field.
2. The Director of the Language Center at Al Qasimia University created a contact group on the Canvas program that includes all participants in the program in order to exchange information

and participate in discussing the difficulties facing learners that arise during the implementation of the program.

3. The third action addressing the Curiosity attribute is that the Language Center at Al Qasimia University has created and developed a new form of instructional materials based on video objects. These learning objects were shared with and distributed to all learners enrolled in the system.
4. The fourth action addressing the Curiosity attribute was the high level of collaboration and cooperation between all faculty and staff at the Language Center at Al Qasimia University. For example, there was a daily feedback process to explore all difficulties or challenges they face in a daily manner so that a relevant intervention is taken. This feedback platform helped all instructors to discover the best solution of implementing this new model of distance education.

As for the second attribute: Humility

1. Responses from relevant departments have been very encouraging. A brainstorming session was held to discuss the difficulties faced by the learners, which they sent via e-mail that was allocated for this purpose. These difficulties were analyzed and solutions were found to these problems according to the nature of each problem and benefit from previous experiences in this field.
2. The tasks were distributed to all administrative units to achieve speed in the achievement, so the Admission and Registration Department registers the names of the learners, prepares lists, establishes the academic divisions and determines the number of learners in each division. Then the Admission and Registration Department sends those lists to the Technology Department to make an account for each learner on the Canvas program to communicate with him through this account and receiving lessons, and instructional materials and activities. Then the IT team communicated all teachers by creating an account for each teacher and specifying the people to whom he will teach in order to be able to deliver lessons and manage the exams.
3. The third action addressing Humility attribute is that there was a high level of delegation. For example, instructors were informed that they have the right to change the regular classes' timetable to a flexible time-table.
4. The fourth action addressing Humility attribute is that there was a high level of voluntary cooperation from instructor side. For example, most if not all, instructors at the Language Center at Al Qasimia University agreed to take extra load without any compensation or remuneration.

As for the third attribute: Empathy

1. A special electronic address was created on the university's e-mail dedicated to sending learners' comments and the difficulties they face during the learning process, such as not receiving educational materials, difficulties they face in accessing the university's electronic portal, low volume, disconnections, and other issues. These problems are discussed and solved by the University's Technology Department. Among the difficulties faced by learners, especially learners from Africa, the interruption of the Internet, the weakness of the network and the power outage, which resulted in not attending the lessons. These problems were solved by the teachers recording those lectures and sending them to the learners, and then the student who encountered these problems could refer to the recorded lectures at a time convenient for him so that the network is good. Groups have also been created on social media, such as WhatsApp, to communicate with learners who have impaired use of the Canvas program. In addition to the above, workshops have been organized to train vulnerable learners in the use of Canvas by the University's IT Department, and record these workshops and videos and send them to the learners.
2. The second action addressing Empathy attribute is that the Language Center at Al Qasimia University provided a psychological support for all learners. For example, the university chancellor

was too close to his employees by giving them a daily a phone call to make sure they are safe. This in turn increased the level of welling among the faculty and staff.

3. The third action addressing empathy attribute is that Al Qasimia University provided a high level of appreciation. For example, the university chancellor awarded an acknowledgement letter for each employee as a small token of appreciation for their effort and cooperation during this crisis.
4. The fourth action addressing empathy attribute is that there was a high productive work rate from all employees at Al Qasimia University. For example, the IT support team was available 24/7 to provide instant support which is not the case before this pandemic.

As for the fourth attribute: Resilience

1. Some of the difficulties encountered by the learners were the different local times of the learners' countries. For example, it is early in the morning for some learners, especially West African countries, and at the same time it is late at night for learners from East Asian countries. In order to overcome this difficulty instructors were allowed to change the dates of lecture schedules according to learners' conditions and not to strictly adhere to the schedules announced by the university registration office.
2. Also, one of the problems is that learners were not able to perform the mid-term and final exams on time due to the problems of power cuts and the weakness of the Internet. These problems were solved by setting another time to take these tests and sending equivalent copies of the tests to learners so that they could continue studying.
3. These measures have also been applied to other problems such as learners' delay in sending the activities and training they are assigned to. Also, with regard to the issue of recording learners' attendance in lessons, the instructors used to record some learners' absence, and it became clear after that this was the result of technical problems, and this was taken into by excluding the absence rate.
4. One more action addressing the Resilience attribute is that there was a high level of flexibility of financial expenses out of the allocated budget. For example, there was a room to buy what is needed of advanced technology and software needed to recover this situation, even if it is out of the planned and allocated budget.

What is the impact of adopting and implementing responsive leadership on customers' academic progress?

In addressing this question, the researchers used two main quantitative indicators: a) the learners' academic performance as reflected in the pre-post test results, and b) the progression rate as reflected on the percentage of learners who pass the posttest before and during COVID-19.

- a) For leaners' academic performance, we conducted the paired sample t-test to compare between the average of leaners' performance in pre and posttest in fall 2020. Table 2 demonstrates the results of running the t-test.

This result revealed a significant difference between learners' performance in the pre and post qualification test of Arabic Language Skills, $t(215) = 24.620; p < 0.001$. Cohen's test showed a very high and significant effect size, $d = 1.675$.

- b) The progression rate. We computed the progression rate based on the number of learners who attended, completed and pass the post test in Fall 2019 (before COVID-19), and for those who attended, completed and pass the post test in Fall 2020 (during COVID-19). Table 3 summarizes these ratios.

Table 2. Paired sample t-test results

Test	N	Mean	SD	SE	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Post	216	75.565	13.527	0.920	24.620	215	< .001	1.675
Pre	216	44.069	15.459	1.052				

Table 3 shows that the performance of learners who study and take during the COVID-19 in fall 2020 was greater than their classmates who study and took the same test before the COVID-19, in fall 2019. In fall 2020, 91% of enrolled learners has achieved the needed cut score to be admitted in the undergraduate programs at Al Qasimia University, whereas, 84% of enrolled learners in fall 2019 was able to achieve the required cut score. Additionally, the fail rate in fall 2019 was greater than the fail rate in fall 2020.

Table 3. Pass-fail ratio in fall 2019 and 2020.

Fall 2019				Fall 2020			
Number of learners attended the exam	Number of learners pass the exam	Pass Ratio	Fail Ratio	Number of learners attended the exam	Number of learners pass the exam	Pass Ratio	Fail Ratio
116	98	84%	14%	216	196	91%	9%

DISCUSSION

Collaborative responsibility, distributed and responsive leadership have gained local, regional, and international reputation as emphasis has transformed and shifted towards overcome the global pandemic and its impact on education and other development sectors. The shift to distance online learning during the COOVID-19 pandemic was highly demanded across higher education institutions and programs worldwide within which synergistic collaborative, distributed, and responsive leadership may be mediated. Collaborative leadership was found to be the potential motive for knowledge and skills sharing in learning contexts and continuous professional development (Akdemir, & Ayik, 2017; Jameson, 2007)

The analysis of the data related to question 1 reveals that there are four critical attributes (Curiosity, Humility, Empathy, and Resilience) to be considered as responsive leadership approach that supports the digital transformation in higher education sector. These four attributes are functioning together in a dynamic manner that regenerates synergistic impact on internal and external customers' behavior and performance. These results are reinforced by the qualitative data generated through the open-ended interview with Al Qasimia University Language Center's manager, instructors, and staff. With regard to how Al Qasimia University Language Center adopted a responsive leadership approach to meet the customers'(leaners') needs during the transformation to online/distance learning, notable themes emerging from the analyzed qualitative include:

- Managing the delivering of online classroom and collaboration through ongoing discussion and negotiation between the instructors, staff, and the director of the center (Curiously),
- Designing and managing online assessment tools and test, instructional materials, and video based lessons and give learner remote access on their convenience (Resilience),

- Provide technical support and psychological presence to help learners to overcome any challenge they remotely facing (Empathy),
- A high level of delegation was assured and distributed between instructors and staff to assure work-life balance during crisis (Humility).

We may conclude that the focus group interview identified that adopting this approach of responsive leadership during COVID-19 pandemic has promoted learners' engagement through flexible online learning space, online assessment, and online collaborative learning strategies. Besides, it was a great opportunity for Al Qasimia University Language Center's manager, instructors, and staff to learn and gain new experience that made difference. This findings is similar with the previous studies, such as (Jenkins-Scott, 2020; Jones, Harvey, Hamilton, Bevacqua, Egea, & MacKenzie, 2017; Reimers and Schleicher, 2020).

The analysis of the quantitative data showed a significant impact of responsive leadership attributes on learners' performance in the Arabic Language Qualification Test. More than 90% of the participants were able to achieve the cut score they needed to get admitted in the undergraduate programs in the Qasimia University and other similar programs in other universities in the Arabic world. This result indicates that the provided online support during COVID-19 was effective and helped in motivating learners and customers to keep learning and making progress greater than what was shown before COVID-19, during the in-person, face-to-face teaching and physical assessment. This result is similar to findings of Lui, 2021; Sainger, 2018' study. They concluded that responsive leader who optimizes the use of digital technology can help in creating value to internal and external customers.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This case study conducted to investigate the impact of responsive leadership approach in making effective and sustainable transformation to distance online learning at Al Qasimia University Language Center. In a responsive leadership model, responsibilities for supporting internal and external customers support was assured through creating a learning and caring organization. Learning organization has high level of readiness for changes. Responsive leadership was addressed in the organization's ability to explore and discover by curiosity the best approaches to support its internal and external customers. Besides, learning organization adhere to generate a high level of humility and empathy to create work-life balance among all employees and stakeholders. An observed level of resilience was also deployed to response to customers' needs.

In responsive leadership approach, responsibilities for providing feedback and feedforward and support to customers are shared by the manager, director, instructors and staff. This integrated mechanism of feedback and feedforward can be used formatively for self-reflection, and collaborative planning. Implementing responsive leadership approach creates a shared opportunity for higher education institutions to ensure all customers are receiving high quality services to improve their performance and practice. Additionally, responsive leadership builds a culture of trust, curiosity, humility, empathy and resilience needed to synergize human performance. Although, the qualitative and quantitative results in this case study revealed a significant impact of responsive leadership approach on customers' progress, there is still a need to conduct other research to develop and validate a responsive leadership inventory to facilitate measuring of responsive leadership attributes in a large scale sample and/or population.

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