Understanding the Technology Receptivity in Higher Education: Evidence From the UAE

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to investigate factors that predict students’ attitudes and intentions to use technology in higher education in the UAE context. A survey research was conducted on a sample of public and private University students using blackboard learn system and other educational technologies in the UAE. A model was developed, and structural equation modeling was used to ascertain the goodness of fit of the model. Computer literacy, ease of use and usefulness were hypothesized to impact the electronic satisfaction and retention of a student with Blackboard and other technology based educational platforms. Perceived usefulness and perceived computer literacy to e-satisfaction and retention was found to be statistically significant. This paper emphasizes technology implementation and receptivity in higher education students in a developing country context, and makes tentative suggestions and recommendations on how policy makers might respond to current and future technology needs.

KEYWORDS

Higher Education, Students, Technology, Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), United Arab Emirates

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world, the learning process is becoming a vital factor in the development of business and in the socioeconomic growth of countries. In this scenario, customary instructional methods are found wanting in their ability to attract and motivate students for better learning. Education can play its role effectively if it is managed properly and is supported by technology. The convenience of using various devices, pooled with wireless implements and background sensitivity, makes them great potential learning tools, both in the traditional classrooms and in informal learning outdoors (Moreira & Ferreira, 2016). The dominant role of such technology is to help improve the process of instruction, learning, and research. In recent years, the world has experienced fast and eye-catching developments in the use of technology in the field of education and this has paved the ground for establishing new potential ways for linking students and classes across nations and institutions. For

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example, mobile learning and various other technologies are being utilized widely in the field of education (Gitsaki, Robby, Priest, Hamdan & Ben-Chabane, 2013). Information and communication technology improves both access to and effectiveness of learning in the form of e-learning systems (Ma & Yuen, 2011). The interactive environment between the instructors and the students has resulted in revolutionizing the traditional idea of the classroom (Akour, 2009). Students feel that exchanges with the instructors are essential in an educational environment as they are perceived by the students as experts in their respective subjects (Small, Dowell & Simmons, 2012).

Technology acceptance can be defined as a user’s willingness to employ technology for the tasks it is designed to support. Over the years, researchers (Nair, Ali & Leong, 2015) have become more interested in understanding the factors influencing the adoption of technologies in various settings. Literature shows that much research (Chatzoglou, Vraimaki, Diamantidis & Sarigiannidis, 2010; Ifinedo, 2011; Lin & Chang, 2011) has been done to understand the acceptance of technology in the business context. This is understandable, given the close relationship between the appropriate uses of technology and profit margins. In most acceptance studies, researchers have sought to identify and understand the forces that shape users’ acceptance so as to influence the design and implementation process in ways to avoid or minimize resistance or rejection when users interact with technology. In recent years, technology acceptance research has been reported with increasing frequency in education-related journals which explicitly shows its growing importance in the educational research field.

The Technology Landscape in the UAE Higher Education

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is aggressively promoting higher education through the establishment of many private institutions and full-fledged international branch campuses (Ahmad & Hussain, 2015). The number of licensed higher education institutions has increased sharply during the last two decades and now stands at 71 in number (UAE Ministry of Higher Education, 2014). Over the past decade, dramatic competition and growth in the UAE higher education have driven various public and private universities to strive for continuous quality improvement of teaching and learning. Functioning in such a competitive environment, the development of appropriate strategies to deliver quality educational service to students, in order to obtain a competitive advantage, has become increasingly important (Khan & Matlay, 2009). The integration of new technologies within the educational framework is one of the main objectives of the higher education environment worldwide (Sánchez, Hueros, & Ordaz, 2013), and higher education in the UAE is following the same trend. Teaching quality and variables directly associated with the students’ study program had the most significant impact on student satisfaction (Fernandes, Ross & Meraj, 2013). Wilkins and Balakrishnan (2013) reported that the quality of lectures, the availability of resources, and the effective use of technology were the most influential factors in determining student satisfaction in the UAE universities, and were similar to their international counterparts (Garci’a-Aracil, 2009; Miliszewska & Szteudur, 2010). Hence, technology must be taken advantage of in the modern classroom (Al Khan, 2014), and new pedagogies need to be implemented to improve learning with the aid of technology (Gitsaki et al., 2013).

Research (Al-hawari & Mouakket, 2010; Fernandes et al., 2013; Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2013; Gitsaki et al., 2013) related to technology acceptance in higher education in the UAE context is limited. This study adopts the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to investigate the acceptance and perception of the use of technology amongst the local and expatriate students in the UAE context. The study aimed to understand the nature of the relationships between the independent variables of TAM factors, namely perceived ease of use (PEOU), perceived e-literacy and perceived usefulness (PU) and the dependent variables, namely students’ e-satisfaction and retention.

The structure of the paper is as follows: we begin with a brief literature review that deals with the main constructs. Next, we probe into the methodology and follow it up with the research results and findings. The findings are discussed with regard to their theoretical and contextual implications.
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