The Tendencies of University Students towards the Use and Integration of Technology When Studying Social Work

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ABSTRACT:

This study aims at identifying the tendencies of university students in Bethlehem Governorate towards the use and integration of technology and the most important obstacles and technological challenges they face when studying social work. The study adopted the qualitative approach, utilizing the interview as a tool for data collection from the field. It was applied on an available sample of 36 male and female students. The results of the study revealed that: The integration of specialized major courses in the social work program with technology meets the demands of contemporary global changes. This involves utilizing modern technological means in the educational process. There is awareness about the nature of technology usage in the educational process, and there is significant importance attached to using technology in higher education, which is available for everyone. The results also showed that there were some obstacles, including a shortage of Arabic sources or sources translated into Arabic. The available websites that meet the students' informational needs are somewhat limited. Challenges also arose from the lack of sufficient time for students between lectures and their failure to utilize the time to enhance their skills through participating in online activities or workshops to highlight their effectiveness through cultural and scientific forums that provide information through electronic Apps

Keywords: Tendencies, Technology Use, Technology Integration, Social Work, virtual learning environment

1 INTRODUCTION

Arab universities have turned to e-learning platforms to keep up with global innovations and to implement global policies for the growth of the comprehensive education system. Palestinian universities have also concentrated on activating and upgrading e-learning systems through their campuses. They focused on creating an e-learning platform in which materials are uploaded electronically and students interact with the platform. The e-learning system was considerably strengthened during the Corona epidemic and has persisted long after the pandemic has ended (Khouj et al., 2022; Kanan et al., 2023).

However, Students in humanities faculties face challenges with e-learning platforms due to debates and dialogues. To improve e-learning in the Department of Social Work, it is crucial to assess students' proficiency, evaluate their use of e-learning techniques, and identify obstacles. This will help foster a culture of information technology and computers in social work education, ensuring effective and engaging learning experiences.

This prompted researchers to conduct a study on the reality of e-learning in the Department of Social Work at universities in Bethlehem Governorate, identifying students' e-learning skills and the extent to which they use e-learning methods, as well as recognizing the obstacles and problems they face.

Statement of the problem

Based on the interest of Palestinian universities in the necessity of using and employing technology in education, one of their development aims is to transform and develop the educational process. The university has shown a strong interest in offering courses that are taught either fully or partially through online platforms, including courses from the social work program. Nevertheless, the integration of technological instruments and their application in the learning process for social work students has diverged from traditional education, giving rise to a novel educational system that holds significance in advancing the discipline.

Due to the prevalence of modern technology and their numerous benefits, the utilization of electronic platforms for explanations and presentations has become widespread. Nevertheless, there are drawbacks associated with this instructional approach, characterized by a multitude of difficulties and barriers, as well as students seeing that certain individuals struggle to articulate or evaluate. The convenience of accessing and amassing vast amounts of information has prompted certain students to depend solely on online resources, without any work or effort. This trend was further fostered by the shift to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of integrating technology into education in many countries, certain nations continue to face challenges when it comes to incorporating technology into university learning, particularly in the field of social work, which requires a combination of theoretical and practical learning. Hence, the researchers deemed it crucial to examine the perspectives of university students in Bethlehem Governorate concerning the utilization of technology and its application in the field of social work education. The study aims to address the key question: What are the views of university students in Bethlehem Governorate towards the utilization and integration of technology in the process of learning social work?

Significance of study

Theoretical significance:

The study will act as a primary resource for scholars and those interested in investigating the utilization of technology in social work education in Palestinian universities, particularly those in the Bethlehem Governorate. The material will be distributed in university libraries and online platforms to enhance accessibility for scholars.

Applied significance:

The findings of this study will be advantageous for social work students attending colleges in Bethlehem Governorate, since it explores the effective utilization of technology in the learning process. The study's findings will offer suggestions to optimize the utilization of technology in education.

Objectives of the study:

1- Identifying the prevalence and utilization of technology in social work education among university students in Bethlehem Governorate.

2- Identifying the primary barriers and difficulties in implementing technology in social work education among university students in Bethlehem Governorate.

2 THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND PREVIOUS STUDIES

Modern theories suggest that using technology into social work education is the most efficient approach to enhance teaching and learning in digital contexts. Learning activities are organized as social-cognitive activities, emphasizing communication and the sharing of ideas and information, as well as individual abilities and privacy in relation to conventional tools. The origins of traditional computer-based learning were based on the assumption that active learning was limited to activities such as reading, watching movies, or using digital tools (Young 2003). This phenomenon is commonly known as "computer-based learning" (Mustafa, 2005), where the student is perceived as a mechanical being programmed to operate machinery in the same way they were instructed.

The teacher facilitates learning by providing structured environmental cues and rewards, focusing on the student's personality. Evaluation and assessment are conducted using explicit techniques and pre-established criteria, including quizzes, daily tasks, and final exams. The exams consist of challenging questions with accurate responses, and the instructor provides repetitive, affirmative, and motivating feedback. (Jonassen,2000)

Constructivism emerged as a philosophical viewpoint that emphasizes learning as a cognitive process that values individual thinking, understanding, and the development of meaning, rather than mere memorization and recollection of information and facts (Brown, Collins, and Duguid, 1989). From this perspective, a connection arose between current trends in using information and communication technology for learning and the constructivist approach. This is because modern technology offers various exciting possibilities to implement constructivist principles. This involves establishing suitable and varied settings that highlight the student's pivotal position in the learning process, while also offering a range of cognitive resources that can be customized to foster intellectual collaboration between teachers and students, thereby promoting the growth of critical thinking skills.

The efficacy of structuralism comes in its recognition of learning as a process of constructing meaning, taking into account individual capacities, interests, and inclinations, as well as the social aspect of developing communication skills and integrating knowledge within a team. It also includes "metacognitive" abilities, which are advanced cognitive processes that are specific to each person. These abilities involve actively and continuously thinking about, controlling, and arranging information to accomplish goals and objectives (Flavell, Miller, and Miller, 1985).

These talents represent the highest level of skills and abilities that modern educational philosophies aim to impart to students. This concept is defined as pupils being cognizant of their learning process and their ability to possess the abilities necessary to select the most effective approach for themselves and apply it (Biggs, 1985). The subject of "metacognition" was subsequently examined, with a particular focus on self-assessment and self-management. Cognitive self-assessment involves introspection, when an individual assesses their cognitive state and capacity by responding to a set of inquiries, such as: What knowledge do I possess? How can I engage in the process of thinking? At what time and in what manner should I employ my expertise and strategy? Self-management encompasses an individual's ability to proficiently create and execute strategies, as well as oversee, regulate, and address issues related to performance.

Cognitive subjective constructivism, influenced by Jean Piaget's research, emphasizes the importance of individual cognitive abilities and learning preferences. E-learning innovators have developed digital systems that cater to students' unique characteristics, such as age, gender, nationality, language, and prior

experiences. The rapid expansion of digital technology has prompted individuals to actively use their cognitive abilities in educational and learning endeavors, transforming cognitive learning into a dynamic process where individuals develop and evaluate their own hypotheses. (Ezziane, 2007).

Radical constructivism, a theory by Ernst von Glasersfeld, emphasizes knowledge generation within an active framework and its significance when organized. (Glasersfeld,1995). Social structuralism, based on Joan Solomon's perspectives, emphasizes collaborative learning, where instructors, parents, peers, and community members participate in the learner's role. Structuralism suggests that technology enhances social interaction among learners, providing numerous opportunities for studying a particular subject.

The trend of using options and indexes in e-learning has significantly increased over time due to its qualitative transformation from a simple learning management system to a platform offering a wide range of resources for problem-solving, self-regulation, and collaborative activities. Objectivity facilitates the transfer of knowledge sequentially, while subjective structuralism facilitates information exchange through dialogue and bargaining. Social structuralism aims to create a suitable setting for learners to shape and build their own knowledge through a self-directed learning platform. Traditional tools like PowerPoint presentations have minimal influence on teaching and learning methods and management processes. Virtual learning environments (VLEs) and managed learning environments (MLEs) significantly influence every part of the learning process and its management.

A study by Kah (2022) found that the e-learning environment was the most accessible, with an average score of 3.91 and a standard deviation of 0.93. The second position was obtained in terms of understanding the concept of e-learning, with an average score of 3.81 and a standard deviation of 0.76. The e-learning outcomes field ranks third in terms of size or importance.

There are statistically significant differences, at a significance level of $\alpha \leq 0.05$, between online education during the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on academic achievement among university students in the southern West Bank. These differences are observed from the perspective of the students and are attributed to the variable of gender, with females showing better outcomes. The occurrence of statistically significant variations can be attributed to the variable of the academic year, with the fourth year showing less favorable results compared to the other years.

There is no statistically significant correlation, at a significance level of ≤ 0.05, between online education during the COVID-19 pandemic and academic achievement among university students in the southern West Bank. This lack of correlation is attributed to the variables of age, place of residence, and university, as perceived by the students. Asma's study (2021) found that online social work education had a high level of reality, as seen by the students. This was attributed to the social work instructors' dedication to consistently encourage student participation in debates.

Online social work education offers students convenience, flexibility, and financial relief. A study by Al-Aswad (2017) found that students at Al-Quds Open University have significantly enhanced their skills in electronic learning, with a score of 70.76%. However, the study also revealed significant gender disparities in proficiency, with males showing a higher degree of proficiency in Moodle and virtual classrooms. Overall, the study highlights the positive aspects of online social work education.

The study found significant differences in electronic learning proficiency among students at Al-Quds Open University, with a preference for scientific subjects. Bakhous (2016) found technology integration enhances teaching, and academics generally support its use. However, Al-Khail (2015) found modest technology utilization among students in King Saud University's scientific, health, and humanities colleges.

The findings indicated that there were no statistically significant variations ($\alpha < 0.05$) in the amount of usage associated with the student's academic level. However, the study did reveal statistically significant variances ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) related to the college variable,

with a preference for scientific colleges. Furthermore, the findings revealed that students enrolled in the scientific, health, and humanities colleges at King Saud University encounter modest challenges when utilizing the e-learning management system. Moreover, their opinions towards its usage were predominantly unfavorable. Hassan and Areej (2015) discovered that there are technological possibilities for utilizing an electronic learning management system. However, the results revealed that there are several hindrances to the utilization of the electronic learning management system, with the primary impediment being the absence of an electronic assessment system for creating exams digitally.

Several faculty members at the university encounter challenges when utilizing the system due to their limited proficiency in English. Similarly, it was discovered that gender and academic degree do not exhibit any statistically significant variations, however there are statistically significant disparities favoring scientific colleges in terms of college type. Furthermore, there are statistically significant disparities associated with years of experience, with a preference for individuals with less than 5 years of expertise in the sector.

The researchers emphasized the significance of integrating Arabic language support into diverse programs and websites to facilitate faculty members in accessing their advantages. The significance of delivering instruction on proficiently maneuvering the e-learning system was underscored. In their 2012 study, Okkeh and Itmazi emphasized the significance of the social network's component as the primary part, with the social aspect of the student being of secondary importance. On the other hand, the feature of the student's scientific side was determined to have the least consensus. Anderson's (2008) study confirmed the existence of several barriers faced by students and faculty members when using e-learning, demonstrating that students meet a bigger quantity of problems in comparison to faculty. Adeya and Oyeinka (2002) found that academics in these two nations do not use the technology because it is not available, requires significant financial investment, and they lack the necessary competence to use it. Furthermore, the primary focus of internet usage has revolved on email, academic research, and teaching.

3 METHODOLOGY

Data was collected from the field via in-depth interviews, employing a qualitative methodology. The study examined the perspectives of university students in Bethlehem Governorate on the utilization and application of technology in social work education.

Study tools

An extensive interview was carried out utilizing a meticulously crafted guide, which was given to a cohort of seasoned experts who offered their input. The guide was revised in accordance with the feedback provided by the reviewers. The completed version of the interview guide comprises two sections: the initial piece encompasses the basic data, while the subsequent section encompasses the research questions.

Research questions

1- How extensively is technology utilized in the education of social work among university students in the Bethlehem Governorate?

2-What are the primary barriers and difficulties in implementing technology in social work education for university students in Bethlehem Governorate?

Disciplines of study

Spatial domain: The universities located in Bethlehem Governorate in the West Bank include Bethlehem University, Palestine Ahliya University, and Open University of Al-Quds.

Duration: The study commenced in September 2024 and concluded in January 2025.

The subject of study: Students enrolled in the social work program in universities in Bethlehem Governorate. The study sample comprised all students enrolled in the Bachelor's degree in Social Work for the academic year 2024-2025, from universities in the Bethlehem Governorate. The total number of students was 524.

Study sample

A purposive sample was employed to gather data from students who had the capacity to comprehend and analyze the obstacles and limitations that restrict the utilization of technology in the social work learning process. The study had a total sample size of 36 male and female students, who were evenly dispersed among the three universities.

The validity of the study tool.

The judges' validity was established by developing the research instrument through consulting specialized references and past studies. The tool was subsequently shown to a panel of five judges who offered their linguistic and grammatical observations. Subsequently, the researchers made the required modifications in anticipation of implementing it to the study population in the field.

4 RESULTS

The first question aims to assess the extent of technology use and integration in social work education among university students in Bethlehem Governorate. Interviews revealed that the social work program aligns with global advancements through the use of modern technological methods, helping students stay updated with theoretical and practical developments. Students effectively engage with teachers and utilize electronic resources for research.

Some students acknowledged the importance of technology in education, though they prioritized practical experience over theoretical knowledge gained through digital tools. They recognized the internet as a valuable source for acquiring skills relevant to the job market. While technology aids in accessing global training programs, students also emphasized its role in staying informed about professional advancements and ethical standards in the local market.

Access to professional information is facilitated through browsing websites, conducting research, and engaging with various societal sectors, helping students develop technological and educational skills. Many students highlighted the value of incorporating technology in education and the importance of effective communication. The university's electronic infrastructure plays a key role in supporting their learning.

Students also expressed the desire to collaborate with teachers to improve their skills and address challenges in using technology for learning. They recognized the need to familiarize themselves with modern social work theories to link academic knowledge with practical application in the field, ultimately enhancing their professional abilities.

The study by Al-Khail (2015) found that students' use of technology in education was not moderate, and they faced challenges with e-learning management systems. This contradicts Okkeh et al. (2022)'s claim that students lack e-learning skills for models and virtual classrooms. However, Asma (2021) found that students perceive a high level of learning in social work when taught electronically, and the benefits of delivering social work education through electronic lectures. Bakhous (2016) also found evidence supporting the role of educational technology in enhancing teaching processes.

Social work students in Bethlehem Governorate universities are enthusiastic about integrating technology into their education, despite their limited linguistic proficiency. They are actively seeking technology information and collaborating with educators to improve their skills. However, the main challenges include limited availability of Arabic sources, English-language references, and subjects that don't meet the specialization criteria. The number of websites catering to students' cognitive needs is small, and some are fraudulent or obscure. Additionally, there are fraudulent or obscure websites that undermine the availability of knowledge.

The university library is addressing challenges faced by students in using computers for report creation and research, and promoting citation in scientific publications to improve social work skills. Despite these challenges, students are willing to work with educators to enhance their knowledge and use technology effectively in the professional sphere.

However, students face challenges such as a shortage of time between lectures and not effectively using electronic applications for online activities or

workshops. They also struggle with prolonged screen time and slow engagement with devices.

This differs from Anderson's (2008) research, which found students face more difficulties than faculty personnel. Al-Tayti's (2022) study revealed that most students lack an electronic learning environment and have limited understanding of e-learning concepts. Kah's (2022) study highlighted barriers within the program components that hinder its ability to achieve its goals. Al-Aswad's (2017) study confirmed that students have a predisposition towards using technology in their learning and demonstrate comparable levels of expertise across various scientific disciplines.

The researchers propose that the issues voiced by students in acquiring social work skills using online platforms are potentially advantageous. The students have explicitly addressed these challenges as a means to surmount them and address any barriers hindering their utilization of technology for social work education. Moreover, the students' inclination towards utilizing technology for gaining information suggests that these obstacles could have a beneficial impact on certain students. It is feasible to surmount these problems by improving students' proficiency in utilizing technology for educational purposes.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers suggest the following course of action:

1) Motivating students majoring in social work to actively engage in and attend international seminars focused on social work.
2) The imperative of employing students' leisure time to enhance their intellectual and scientific knowledge with the current advancements in the field of social work.
3) The social service program aims to enhance student engagement in international specialist forums related to social work, with the purpose of exchanging and gaining global professional knowledge and information.
4) Furnishing students with the most up-to-date websites that give scientific and practical services in the realm of social work.

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