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### Implementation barriers in virtual education in Payame Noor University in Iran

*Barreras de implementación de la educación virtual en la Universidad Payame Noor en Irán*

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#### ABSTRACT

This research has been conducted with the aim of the priority of implementation barriers to virtual education at Payame Noor University. The research method is applied in terms of purpose and is descriptive in terms of data collection. The results showed that: The main barriers to implementing virtual utilization education are cultural barriers. The findings of this study indicate that: The lack of support from university administrators, lack of information and useful training for students, and lack of awareness of the higher education authorities to the virtual educational system are in the first priority of implementation barriers to providing virtual education.

**Keywords:** Implementation barriers, Payame Noor University, virtual education.

#### RESUMEN

Esta investigación se realizó con el objetivo de priorizar las barreras de implementación a la educación virtual en la Universidad Payame Noor. El método de investigación que se aplica en términos de propósito es descriptivo. Los resultados mostraron que: Las principales barreras para implementar la educación virtual de utilización, son las barreras culturales. Los resultados de este estudio indican que: La falta de apoyo de los administradores universitarios, la falta de información y capacitación útil para los estudiantes y la falta de conciencia de las autoridades de educación superior sobre el sistema educativo virtual, es la primera prioridad de las barreras de implementación para proporcionar servicios de educación virtual.

**Palabras clave:** Barreras de implementación, educación virtual, Universidad Payame Noor,

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## INTRODUCTION

By revising the processes of the traditional educational system in comparison with the modern educational system, we can find many advantages in the modern educational system, which are the most important reasons for guaranteeing this type of education in today's world (Faramarizian: 2005). For example, E-learning is one of the newer ones. The characteristic of E-learning is the breadth, diversity, and capability of change based on the talents and interests of individuals that have been able to influence the process of education from both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Virtual and E-learning approach with enormous achievements, potentials, and ability to deliver education at any time and any place put the imagination at the forefront of pioneers' field of vision so that in recent years using virtual education techniques is at the top of the curriculum of most educational systems in the world. Therefore, such an evolution is an essential and inevitable necessity in the foundation of the educational system. On the other hand, institutionalizing this approach is possible only through the development of culture, clarification, and development of methods and tools for applying E-learning through researchers, professors and experts in the field of teaching and learning (Islamian et al.: 2015; Putri et al.: 2019, pp.393-400).

With the advent of new technologies in individual and social spheres, education has not escaped this phenomenon, and a slow revolution is underway that marks the foundation of traditional education and brings with it new learning opportunities. It can be said that many educational goals, which were sometimes regarded as inaccessible ideal, are now on the verge of being developed with the development of new communication and information technologies, especially the Internet. Among these goals, which have remained almost untapped so far, are the attention to the individual talents of learners and the creation of a suitable context for the comprehensive development of their talents (Sadykova & Meskill: 2019, pp. 5-21). Technology is now claiming that in the learning process, attention to talent is the basis of its activity, that is, in the process of teaching and learning, the learner is responsible and center. Other advances in new technologies in education include enhancing the spirit of inquiry and the realization of inquiry, the use of multimedia tools and devices, and, subsequently, making education more enjoyable, more effective and applicable, the realization of lifelong learning, that is education without the support of time and place and access to numerous and varied resources (Abbasi Parsa: 2012; Ahmed et al.: 2018, pp.1-9; Yavorskaya & Bocharov: 2019, pp. 237-242).

With the advent and development of Internet technology during the 1990s, a powerful new tool was provided to universities and research institutes to help them achieve their goals and create new and dynamic learning and teaching environments. And, in addition, they can address problems such as the growing demand for higher education, the use of excessive manpower for administrative and other affairs, the high educational costs, the need for learners to access non-content, their time and space constraints and problems arising from compulsory and timely classroom attendance (Newman: 2003, pp.1226-1237). One of the characteristics of virtual education is that, unlike the teacher-centered environments that have provided traditional practices, the emphasis is on the learner environment. In this type of education, rather than the teacher's task of providing information to the learners, it is the learners who search for the information they need (Abbasi Parsa: 2012). The growing and increasing effect of technologies on all aspects of life, including at the education level, has made it necessary for countries to grow and develop to focus on progress in higher education through the adoption of new educational systems and technologies (Miliszewska & Rhema: 2010, pp.423-437). Most universities today are striving to increase the effectiveness of emerging technologies in their educational activities (Andone & Sireteanu: 2009). Due to the benefits of virtual education at the higher educational level, the demand for virtual education courses in university curricula has increased (Zameer: 2010, pp.1-8.; Marques et al.: 2018, pp.1-12).

As a novel strategy, choosing and applying Information and Communication Technology in the teaching and learning process for the masters has a number of reasons include enhance and improve the teaching and learning process, and increase flexibility in their work activities by removing time and space constraints, responding to students' need for educational activities electronically, continued interaction with students, and

creating new contexts for creativity in educational activities (Soltani et al.:2011, pp.23-42). Given the increasing tendency of young people to pursue academic education in Iran, this is due to the recent global developments and the entry into the information age, where knowledge creates the highest value-added; executers face a major challenge that can be overcome through virtual education. In the meantime, numerous factors have hampered the development of E-learning and virtual education in higher education, which are considered barriers to the development of this type of education. In recent years, virtual education has emerged as one of the most important applications of information and communication technology in the world, and a wide range of activities have started. Due to the rapid changes taking place in the surrounding environment, the implementation of virtual education to provide new services and technologies in the field of teaching and learning has become an essential need. With all the benefits associated with this type of education, there are challenges and barriers to its implementation that have affected the educational system in many ways. Virtual education is the product of information technology and drives society towards the great educational revolution and can be the key to the transition of old approaches to new approaches (Largani et al.: 2008, pp.1-12).

Therefore, considering the importance of virtual education in higher education centers, this study seeks to answer the main research question: What are the implementation barriers to providing virtual education and what is the prioritization of these barriers at Payame Noor University from the perspective of faculty members?

## METHODS

The present study is applied in terms of purpose. It is also descriptive in the present study will describe the present situation. Methods of data collection are methodological. The statistical population of this study includes all Payame Noor University professors of Sabzevar, Nishabour, and Mashhad in the academic year of 2017-2018.

**Table 1.** The research community by universities

Community	Numbers	Male	Female
Payame Noor University of Sabzevar	14	7	7
Payame Noor University of Nishabur	21	15	6
Payame Noor University of Mashhad	66	50	16
Total	101	72	29

In this study, due to the small number of the population under study, the census method was used, and all individuals were selected as the sample. The tool used in this study is a researcher-made questionnaire. Implementation barriers to providing virtual education have been identified through the research literature, and based on identified components, a researcher-made questionnaire has been developed to evaluate implementation barriers to providing virtual education. It should be noted that content validity has been used to determine validity, and Kronbach's Alpha Coefficient has been used to determine reliability.

In analyzing the data, to determine the type of tests that used, the normality or abnormality of variables should be identified. Therefore, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test has been used for this purpose. According to the results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test in the inferential statistics section of Friedman test for prioritizing research variables, one-sample t-test for comparing the status of variables with a hypothetical mean, independent t-test

for comparing two Independent group scores (Male and Female) and Anova tests have been used to compare the scores of individuals in more than two groups.

## **RESULTS**

Today, with the maturity and growth of virtual education, the increasing complexity of user-centric, and the increasing intensity of competition, success in this field has become a critical problem. Research shows that many students who start virtual education courses are reluctant to continue and complete. The question that arises here is what is the problem with the virtual educational system that does not work well. Answering this question has led researchers and experts to evaluate the success of these systems so that methods of evaluating the effectiveness of virtual education systems has become nowadays a very important topic both in research and in performance (Otarhkhani & Delavari: 2012, pp.51-73). On the other hand, since the unsuccessful attempt to implement virtual education is reflected in return on capital, success in virtual education is one of the most important problems (Govindasamy: 2002, pp.287-299). In fact, the continued growth of the global demand for virtual education and acceptance of virtual communities needs to be measured in terms of their effectiveness and usefulness in education, and similar to all types of systems, in virtual education, the evaluation must also be considered to determine the effectiveness of the training and learning process (Karal et al.: 2010, pp.1597-1601).

In the field of this study, there are similar themes, such as the success of virtual education, the factors that have an effect on the success of virtual education, as well as the critical factors of virtual education success. Despite some commonalities between the problems mentioned, there are also differences. The assessment of success in virtual education considered the situation after implementation and executive of virtual educational systems, whereas key success factors are related to the pre-implementation of systems (Kanaani: 2010). It means things that must be done if there is a desire to succeed (Salim: 2007, pp.396-413).

Despite many efforts, it is difficult to define success factors and measure them, and many factors need to be measured to account for what causes the failure or success of a virtual educational system. According to Yaghoubi's (2009) research, the factors that have an effect on the success of the virtual educational system were studied from the perspective of virtual graduate students at Shiraz University of Science and Technology, and Amirkabir University. The factors that have an effect on the success of the E-learning system showed that it could be classified into two categories of support, content, and educational tools.

## **DISCUSSION**

In a study conducted by Feizi and Rahmani (2004), to identify E-learning problems in Iran with emphasis on higher education in the country, the analysis showed that in viewpoint of students, problems with the country's telecommunications platforms and students' lack of access to a suitable computer and communication line, are reasons of failing to implement virtual education in Iran. According to experts, these problems cover a wider range; Cases like stakeholders' responses to the virtual educational approach, disability of this approach to transmit academic culture, specific implementation challenges in the first instance, leading problems in composing the E-lesson plan, national telecommunications platform problems, insufficiency to have suitable software and hardware, intensification of degree orientation and inadequate access to appropriate computer by students are recognized as barriers and challenges.

Based on their study, Volery and Lord (2000) emphasize on three aspects: technology (ease of access and guidance, interface design, and level of interaction), educator (student attitude, classroom interaction, and teacher technical skill), and prior use of technology and prior knowledge of student about computers. The results of a study about the quality of virtual education in Australian higher education show that effective factors in the

success of E-learning are teacher specialization in online teaching, student readiness, technology infrastructure (Yaghoubi: 2009, pp.496-514).

Govindasamy (2002) addresses seven key factors in E-learning success: organizational support, content formulation, teaching and learning, lesson structure, student support, faculty support, and evaluation. Based on the Karal and Colleagues' (2010) study, students' interest and motivation, their level of computer literacy and technical infrastructure play an important role in success of distance education.

According to Salim's (2007) studies, the key factors for success of virtual education have been divided into 4 categories: teacher characteristics (desire to use and control technology and teaching style), student characteristics (computer-based capabilities, interactive participation and, design and contents of E-learning courses), technology (ease of access and infrastructure), and support for E-learning, mean any activity that can be effective in ensuring the success of virtual education. These factors have effect on the decision-making process of adopting E-learning technology in higher education institutions (Salim: 2007, pp.396-413).

In a study that had been designed by Bordbar and colleagues (2010) to evaluate the views of faculty members on the implementation of E-learning, the results showed that changing attitude of university officials along with professors and providers of this type of education is the most valuable factor in development and success of virtual education. Therefore, culturing and identifying the reasons and merits of using network-based and distance education for university officials and policymakers can be considered as the first step in implementing this type of education. Obviously, if E-learning providers receive the support of university officials, they will quickly resolve the problems and move on to E-learning. Other factors that can be considered as positive for E-learning by faculty members are the existence of appropriate hardware and software infrastructure and context. Aspects of developing E-learning infrastructures require costly investments that can be easily financed by universities in country. To this end, it has been suggested that universities located in the same region, in co-operation, provide the necessary infrastructure. In addition to facilitating investment and providing hardware, is an appropriate effort to produce educational content. Vafaie Najaar and Colleagues (2011) also believe that faculty members accepting and having a positive attitude toward changing the educational approach is one of the factors contributing to success of virtual educational system and its continuation. Therefore, studying the attitude of learners and instructors with appropriate design and technology infrastructure can prevent failure of design.

In this study, variables related to implementation barriers to virtual education at Payamnoor University were categorized into five categories that included technical barriers, skill barriers, ethical barriers, content barriers, and cultural barriers.

The results showed Technical barriers include weakness of telecommunication infrastructure for learner and teacher, lack of face-to-face communication between teacher and learner, weakness of virtualization software, weakness of security software in virtual educational systems such as virus killers.

Skills barriers included teachers' unfamiliarity with the structure and technology used in the virtual environment, difficulty evaluating learners' topics, inadequate assessment practices with virtual education courses, poor computer literacy, and learner information, teachers' resistance to enter the age of technology and change the traditional evaluation methods.

Ethical barriers included lack of awareness and disregard for ethical problems such as plagiarism, privacy and copyright, the bias in the design, delivery, and use of educational content in cyberspace, and the possibility of learners cheating on virtual education.

Content barriers included disability to produce appropriate electronic content, disability to create databases and electronic journals, disability to create electronic libraries; and cultural barriers included lack of support from top university administrators for deploying virtual education, lack of information and useful training for students on virtual education, and lack of awareness of higher education officials about virtual educational system.

From the perspective of faculty members, cultural barriers are at the top of implementation barriers to delivering virtual education in Payame Noor University. Then, skill barriers came in second, content barriers, ethical barriers, and technical barriers in the next ranks of implementation barriers of virtual education in Payame

Noor University according faculty members viewpoint. The above result can be attributed to this fact that there is a great deal of awareness of the cultural dimensions of virtual education in Payame Noor University, and the need for these ethical and cultural aspects has been felt by faculty members. Also, the results of prioritizing the executive components of virtual education in terms of faculty members showed that among the technical barriers of providing virtual education, the weaknesses of the telecommunications infrastructure for learner and instructor are first priority of technical barriers for virtual education that provided by faculty members and then lack of face-to-face communication between teacher and learner, and weakness of virtualization software are in second place respectively and weakness of security software in virtual educational system, such as virus killers, is at the bottom place of the technical barriers.

Among the skill barriers to providing virtual education to faculty members, low level of computer literacy and learners' information ranks first as skills barriers and then, incompatibility of assessment methods with virtual education courses is in second place, difficulty of assessing the quality of discussions is in third place, teachers' unfamiliarity with structure and technology used in virtual environment is in fourth place, and teachers' resistance to entry with advent of technology and change of traditional assessment methods are at the bottom rank of skill barrier.

Among the ethical barriers to providing virtual education, the bias in designing, delivering and using educational content in cyberspace is prioritized, followed by possibility of cheating learners in virtual education as second, and lack of awareness and disregarding ethical problems such as plagiarism, privacy and copyright are at the bottom of the list.

Among the content barriers, disability to produce appropriate electronic content is in the first place, the disability to create databases and electronic journals are in the second place, and disability to create electronic libraries are in the last place of prioritizing the content barriers of providing virtual education.

Finally, among the cultural barriers of providing virtual education to faculty members, lack of knowledge of higher education authorities about the virtual education system was in the first place, the disability to inform and educate students about virtual education was in the second place, and finally lack of support from senior university executives for deploying virtual education was the last among the cultural barriers to providing virtual education.

The findings of the above question, obtained through the One-sample t-test, showed that the technical barriers to virtual education at Payame Noor University are lower than average from the faculty members' point of view. These results indicate that from the view point of them, there are telecommunications infrastructures for learners and teachers; virtual lessons and security software in virtual educational systems such as virus killers and there is little problem with training. The first problem that challenges the implementation of virtual education is the telecommunications infrastructure needed to exchange information and implement virtual education. Regardless of infrastructure needed to implement virtual education, its effectiveness cannot be assured. The results of this study showed that there are not many barriers and difficulties for faculty members to implement virtual education in Payam Noor University.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings of this research about: what are the barriers to virtual education in Payame Noor University from the perspective of faculty members show that the skill barriers to virtual education in Payame Noor University in terms of faculty members are above average. These results show that virtual education in computer literacy and learner information is at a low level, evaluation methods are not commensurate with virtual education courses, quality assessment of learner discussions is difficult, Instructors are struggling to enter the age of technology and changing traditional assessment methods, and instructors are insufficiently familiar with the structure and technology used in the virtual environment. Most learners have little experience and skill in using information technology when entering the virtual educational environment, a fact that has not been

overlooked by faculty members. Inadequate experience and skills of teachers and the speed of adaptation of teachers with virtual education are some of the most important problems for implementation of virtual education. Another problem that teachers face when conducting virtual education is determining how to evaluate the quality of learners' discussions. In traditional teaching methods, teachers can see learners and hear their words; but this is not the case in virtual education, and it appears as a skill problem in implementing virtual education. Another factor that influences the implementation of virtual education is the teachers' resistance to implementation of virtual education. Among reasons there are reasons like lack of training skills required to perform virtual education, lack of motivation and belief in effectiveness of traditional teaching methods.

Research findings on ethical barriers of virtual education provided by faculty members indicated that status of ethical barriers to virtual education is a moderate level. These results suggest that in terms of Payame Noor University faculty members, the potential of learners to cheat on virtual education, bias in design, delivery, and use of educational content in cyberspace and lack of awareness and disregard of ethical issues such as plagiarism, privacy and copyright is not sufficient to constitute a barrier to virtual implementation. For successful and effective implementation of virtual education in university, they must develop guidelines for social and ethical behavior such as online social networking, plagiarism, and privacy, that faculty members and their learners adhere to them. Also, content providers in virtual education should not be biased towards a particular subject, advocate for specific educational content and cause misunderstanding and conflict between learners.

The findings of research on content barriers of virtual education provided by faculty members indicated that content barriers in terms of providing virtual education are at a moderate level. These results show that, for Payame Noor University faculty members, they are capable of producing appropriate electronic content for virtual education, as well as there is the possibility for creation of databases and electronic journals, and electronic libraries for virtual education.

Research Findings on cultural barriers of implementation of virtual education by faculty members showed that the status of cultural barriers is above average. These results indicate that, senior management support of virtual education is low and the authorities have little knowledge about the virtual educational system and there is no useful information and training provided to students, and these are barriers to implementation of virtual education. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is that there are basically no specific policies and executive laws to implement virtual education. The more managers believe in benefits and success of virtual education, less negative attitudes toward its implementation will decrease. A review of research on virtual education shows that, despite the growing trend of using virtual education in universities and other organizations, unfortunately, the use of virtual education has not yet found its proper place.

It should be noted that implementation barriers to providing virtual education in terms of female faculty members are at higher level. Also, implementation barriers of virtual education provided by faculty members did not differ significantly in terms of academic rank, but this difference is significant in terms of age and records of service. It is hoped that by considering these barriers and prioritizing them, an important step will be taken in design and implementation of successful virtual education in the country's academic system.

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