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Exploring the Attitudes of Employees to E-learning as a Part of
their Training Program: The Case of a Private Hospital in
Lebanon

By

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Dedication Page

To my loving family and fiancé who supported me all the way

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ABSTRACT

With the ongoing development of technology, the world is witnessing an exponential increase in the implementation of E-learning as a method for teaching students in the educational sector and training employees in the organizations. This study aims to explore the employees' attitudes towards implementing E-learning as a part of their training method within a private hospital in Lebanon. Literature review, qualitative analysis, and both face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews (due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic) with 15 employees working at different levels and departments in the hospital including human resources managers, training specialists, learning and development specialists, and billing officers. The questions focused on the features of the E-learning training program in the hospital, its implementation, its drivers and barriers, and the employees' opinions towards it. Most of the interviewed employees have positive feedback on the implementation and usage of E-learning as a part of their training program. This study presents an overview of a new E-learning training program implemented in a private hospital in Lebanon. It provides future research recommendations in the spread and implementation of E-learning in different organizations and regions in Lebanon.

Keywords: E-learning, Information Technologies, Internet, Training, Learning, Knowledge, Skills.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 General Background

E-learning is a new form of training which is going popular and is being accepted by most training professionals. It aims to ensure that technology effectively contributes to the development of skilled workforce. There was a debate among researchers to find a common definition for e-learning, thus many researchers have introduced different definitions for the term. According to Rossi (2009), e-learning is a set of learning methods, processes, and applications. Fry (2001) has stated that e-learning involves the use of internet and other technologies to create methods and materials for learning.

While the European Commission (2001) summarizes it as the usage of internet and new technologies to improve the quality of learning. E-learning refers to the obtaining and usage of knowledge where electronic means act as facilitators (Wentling et al, 2000).

Liu and Wang (2009) found that e-learning features are centered on the internet and the global sharing of learning resources, while Gotschall (2000) stated that it is based on distance-learning delivered by video presentations. Referring to Maltz et al (2005), it is presented in different perspectives such as online-distance learning, hybrid learning and distributed learning. Jennex (2005) and Twigg (2002) defined e-learning as a revolutionary road to provide the workforce with the needed knowledge and skills to make a change. Twigg (2002) described the term “e-learning” as an interactive,

customizable, repetitious, and self-paced system. Some researchers refer the term “e-learning” to the communication technologies that enable access to online learning or teaching resources. Keller and Cernerud (2002) defined it as any learning which is web-based, internet-enabled or learning empowered by digital technologies. According to Liaw and Huang (2003), the term e-learning is defined by referring to its characteristics. It is a multimedia environment incorporating several types of information. E-learning systems support collaborative communication where the users have control over their personal experience of learning. It allows the free implementation of systems on several computer operating systems. Tao et al (2006) stated that the e-learning environment has given learners the chance to receive support on individual basis and to have flexible learning schedules that are suitable to their personal schedules. According to a survey held by the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) in 2003, 95% of the respondents reported that they are using some form of e-learning in their companies (Ellis, 2003). As defined by ASTD, electronic learning (e-learning) is a broad set of processes and applications such as digital collaboration, virtual classrooms, web-based learning, and computer-based learning. Kaplan-Leiserson (2002) added that its content is delivered via intranet/extranet, internet, interactive TV, audio and videotape, CD-ROM, and satellite broadcast. E-learning allows the presentation of online lectures through video technology and live stream audio, discussions through chat rooms and message boards, and textual materials through displaying PowerPoint slides. According to Burgess and Russel (2003), through e-learning organizations can deliver consistent training to each employee anytime and anywhere, update the training content and minimize the costs of travel for abroad training facilities. E-learning is used to train individuals for IT skills (information technology skills) (Brennan, 2004), and

interpersonal skills such as leadership skills, teamwork, and communication skills (Dobbs, 2000). The most familiar soft skills and business skills that are taught in organizations via e-learning according to Skillsoft (2001) are leadership, customer service skills, management, human resources skills, and quality management. In the purpose of enhancing their competitiveness, organizations are obliged to change into an intelligent organization or a learning organization. According to Heraty (2004), technology has given valuable implications for employee development and organizational ability to face the surrounding challenges where the traditional training can no longer match it. According to Lim et al. (2007), e-learning is the major factor in the delivery of workplace learning which affects the effectiveness of training. Many studies have shown the positive effects that e-learning has on job performance (Beamish et al, 2002). Rolda'n et al. (2006) added that e-learning facilitates learning content in organizational learning. Internet enables integrating learning resources and events into cohesive learning paths (Henry, 2001). Offering internet-related technologies enhance effective learning and communication among members of the organization and facilitates organizational memory. According to Henry (2001), e-learning is the suitable internet application that supports delivering learning knowledge, skills, and content in a holistic approach of unlimited courses, infrastructures, or technologies. Sun et al. (2006) added that e-learning provides new tools which add value to the traditional learning techniques. Rolda'n et al. (2006) define organizational learning (OL) as a dynamic creation of knowledge which takes place over time across individual level, group level, and organization level. Rhodes and Lok (2008) explain that OL is a process that creates tension between new learning (feed-forward where new ideas flow from the individual to the group and organization) and what has already been learned (feed-back which

flows from the organization to the group and individual). The successful implementation of technologies enabling OL depends on the learning capacity of the organization (Robey et al, 2000). According to Daghfous (2004), information technologies promote effective organizational learning by successfully transferring knowledge into the workplace and enhancing learning processes and activities. Effective OL is an essential element to each organization for maintaining its competitive advantage in the long term (Guputa & Thomas, 2001).

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Based on literature review, it is found that with the widespread of easy-to-use Web 2.0 tools (blogs, podcasts, wikis...) e-learning has become a popular process for individual training (Rossi, 2009). While individuals use these tools hoping to improve their performance and efficiency, this relationship is still not clarified (Mohammadyari & Singh, 2015). This relation is also not clarified in Lebanon due to less adoption of e-learning as a part of the training process in its companies.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The objective of this study is to determine the attitudes of employees toward e-learning when used as a part of the training program in a case of a private hospital in Lebanon. This study investigates the reactions of employees toward the implementation of e-learning as a part of their training program in a private hospital in Lebanon.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study has contributed to:

- Understand the concept of E-Learning.
- Understand the importance of implementing organizational E-Learning.
- Understand the benefits of implementing E-Learning as a part of the employees' training program.
- Understand the success factors of E-Learning as a part of the employees' training program.
- Understand the factors that employees consider as challenges or barriers of E-Learning as a part of their training program.

1.5 Methods

As a part of data collection, face-to-face interviews, and telephone interviews (due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic) were conducted with 15 employees working at different levels and departments in a private hospital in Lebanon including human resources managers, training specialists, learning and development specialists, and billing officers. The interviews were conducted on two parts, individual interviews with 3 employees and interviews with a focus group of 12 employees. The questions focused on the features of the E-learning training program in the hospital, its implementation, its drivers and barriers, and the employees' opinions towards it.

1.6 Research Question

This thesis attempts to answer the follow research question:

RQ1: What are the attitudes of employees toward using e-learning as a part of the training program?

RQ2: What are the advantages, disadvantages, and challenges of e-learning as a part of the training program identified by employees?

1.7 Theoretical Background

Our study is based on the constructivism learning theory (Yilmaz, 2008) which proposes that learning is an active process of constructing knowledge that is influenced by the individual's interpretations and interactions to new ideas.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Historical Development of E-learning

Moore et, al (2011) have proposed that “e-learning” term is almost originated during 1980 where the origin of this word is not certain. E-learning evolution is connected to technical improvement and development where the manner of evolution can be described as a chain process (Downes, 2005). It is said to be a natural evolution of distance learning (Sangra, et al, 2012).

Referring to Horton (2001), e-learning originated from mail-learning method used by Sir Isaac Pitman in 1840 which was the first distance education. Sir Pitman introduced a teaching system of shorthand technique (abbreviated symbolic writing method) by mailing texts transcribed on postcards and receiving transcriptions from his students in return for correction. Horton (2001) added that throughout the history, the concepts were the same, but the medium changed due to technology development. The evolution path of distance learning could be considered as a variable pedagogy technique (act of teaching or approach to teaching) that uses conventional (based on generally accepted standards or criteria), unconventional and new mediums of communication in purpose of delivering material without geographical constraints.

Referring to Moore (1990), distance education delivery format has taken several forms as instructions delivered by mail, print format materials, classes via computers or mobiles and virtual classes. Distance education has presented since centuries, but it has

started to evolve only since 1960. Fletcher and Rockway (1986) pointed that it influenced Academic Institutions, in-Training, Corporations and even Military. According to Benjamin (1988), Sidney Pressey emerged the concept of “teaching machines” in 1924 and was widely popularized by Harvard Professor Burrhus Frederic Skinner (known as B.F Skinner) in 1954. Teaching machines were mechanical devices that presented educational materials. Pressey’s machine originally administered multiple-choice questions. Benjamin (1988) added that the era of personal computers began later in 1980 and paved the way for e-learning. In the late eighties and the nineties, the Computer-Based Training was born which is considered the cornerstone of today’s e-learning (Eger, 2005). Rouse (2011) defines CBT (the computer-based training) as a training technique where primary data is transferred over internet or intranet into a computer through certain software. In 1960s, computer assisted instruction (CAI) developed into computer bases learning (CBL).

Programmed Logic for Automatic Teaching Operation (PLATO) is the pioneer system of computer-based training that was created in 1960 by Don Bitzer at the University of Illinois. PLATO has the basic layout which is used in modern e-learning technique such as chat rooms, graphic elements, email, instant messaging, multiplayer games, forums, and text along with graphics (Shimura, 2006). It is considered as the direct ancestor of the modern e-learning systems such as Blackboard and WebCT.

To facilitate the design of CBT, multimedia learning methods have introduced several guidelines and ideologies. CD-based training was the new e-learning training technology in early 90s. Occasional workshops were held as a part of CD-ROM based training.

According to Cross (2004), Web took over CD-based training around 1998. It provided a “personalized” learning experience by introducing learning materials and instructions

through study groups, newsletter, chatrooms an interactive content over the Web (Cross, 2004).

The concept of e-learning started taking form during the late 20th century when personal computers and internet became phenomenal. A complementation of technology, device and concept provided new learning trend. Referring to Sheridan et al (2002), Cecil was the first Web-based learning management system (LMS) to be launched in 1996. It is a software which provides organizing, documenting, recording, and delivering e-learning courses. Web-based LMS enables hosting or (/and) delivery of various learning content types such as: video and audio, reading materials, chats, blogs, testing, grading, web conferencing, wikis, forums and learning games... around 2000 corporations and business organizations have adapted concepts of e-learning to support their necessities. The modern e-learning techniques provided communicative and interactive features with an open access to information (Garrison & Anderson, 2003). Downes (2005) describes modern learning trends as “learner-oriented design” where the learner has total control over the whole learning process.

The mobile technology development introduced a new form of e-learning called m-learning. M-learning or mobile learning is introduced as the portable platform that allow learner to be engaged in learning activities without geographical constraints through smartphones, mobile phones, handheld computers, laptops, Tablet PCs, palmtops and media players... (kukulska-Hulme, 2005). According to Berge and Muilenburg (2013), a handheld device known as “Palm Pilot personal digital assistants (PDAs)” was created in 1990s that performs multi-tasks like calendar, calculator, and notepad. As the “learner centered design” were developing, m-learning technique began to flourish. Passing through diverse phases of evolution, e-learning is still witnessing evolution alongside the

advancement in new technology. Modern e-learning techniques are described as revolutionary learning systems while Sir John Daniel (2014) states that history shows that the development of education can be achieved by evolution and not revolution. In the last decade, a new educational phenomenon enabled by e-learning and MOOCs initiatives has emerged. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) aim to provide massive, online free education system that comprises open-access and self-learning courses. “Udemy” is an example of an online e-learning website that introduces massive online instruction-oriented courses. Referring to Joseph and Nath (2013), Udemy courses have engaged online over 100,000 students in 2011. Over 4200 MOOCs were introduced, more than 500 universities have offered these courses and around 35 million students have signed up for a minimum of one course in 2015 (Shah, 2015).

2.2 Aspects and Types of E-learning

The basic elements of e-learning process are technological infrastructure, e-learning platform, e-learning module (content), and participants. According to Devedzic (2006), e-learning has two major perspectives/aspects: technological and pedagogical. The technological aspect includes the infrastructure and the platform which enables developing, hosting, and delivering the content for the participants. The pedagogical aspect includes the e-learning content and how it is used to develop the knowledge of the participants (learners). Referring to Rosen (2009), e-learning has two modes/types: synchronous learning and asynchronous learning. Synchronous learning is defined when the instructor and learner both participate at the same time in an e-learning activity via internet. Their communication can be through various methods such as video chat,

webinars, or instant messaging. This type offers the advantage of instantaneous feedback (Almosa and Almubarak, 2005). Whereas the asynchronous learning is when the instructor posts the content in advance and then the learners can be enrolled in web-based training whenever they need it at their own pace (Rosen, 2009). This type advantage is that learners can engage in the e-learning activity at a timeline suitable to them, whereas the disadvantage is not receiving an instant feedback from the instructors (Almosa and Almubarak, 2005).

2.3 E-learning Tools

E-learning process is not always supported by learning management system only. According to Horton (2003), the technologies/tools enabling e-learning are internet connection, web browser, personal computers, e-mail programs, media players, microphone for audio conferencing, client software for online meetings, video camera for video conferencing. Patil (2014) added another technologies/tools that are also used in e-learning such as podcasts, webcasts, video broadcasting (in Skype, YouTube, Adobe Connect and webcams), blogs, screen casting, whiteboards, tools as Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Excel and PDF.

They can be divided as tools for synchronous learning and tools for asynchronous learning. For asynchronous learning, tools that are used for self-paced learning include audio and video, forums, reading materials, and wikis. Moreover, tests and quizzes are asynchronous tools that allow instructors and learners to track the progress and evaluate the effectiveness of learning (Driscoll, 2002). Whereas the synchronous tools that are

used when the instructor and learner are both present at the same time, include webinars, video conferencing, and virtual classrooms.

Webinar is defined as an online seminar that aims to achieve certain goals in an economical and effective approach. Horton (2006) explains that a webinar consists of a question and answer session and in-meeting activities. According to Bingham (2011), some tools are considered like social learning tools that help individuals to have wider perspective, to be updated with new concepts, and earn higher education through collaboration with others.

Learning Objects (LO) are explained as the scholastic resources that could be used in modern digital learning. It can be developed with “2D/3D” models, text elements, graphical images, websites, videos, or any source used in learning. Computer animations are self-explanatory that can be implemented within learning environments of complex multimedia. Pelet (2013) added that the main objective of e-learning is to offer the chance to be comfortable with using new technologies, that is being provided by the various features of e-learning platforms.

2.4 E-learning Trends

E-learning has been embedded in both the society and business since several decades. The development of Information Technology enables various approaches and implementation of new learning process techniques. As the technology develops, specific approaches and tools are being widely adopted and used by several institutions and business organizations. Some of the emerging trends include but are not limited to:

- Blended Learning:

It is defined by Brodsky (2003) as the “thoughtful combination of training methods”. It is defined by Friesen (2012) as the combination of two or more teaching techniques such as pedagogical approaches, web-based technologies, job tasks and instructional technologies. According to Kovaleski (2004), blended learning refers to the training which combines traditional classroom sessions with e-learning and self-study. This technique uses various teaching medium to develop a training course. Based on the course needs, the traditional and digital teaching methods complement each other. Bersin (2004) added that the aim of the blended learning is developing the teaching media into a combined unit to create an effective impact. This learning method offers cost savings accompanied by e-learning and personal touch of classroom instructions (Goodridge, 2001). Referring to Woodall (2012), based on the US Department of Labor statistics report, nearly 70 to 90% of workplace learning is informal and social through conversation with fellow employees, reading books, experimental methods, and water cooler discussions. While 10 to 30% of workplace learning is formal through conferences, organized courses, and classes.

- Gamification:

Hamari et al (2014) define gamification as the process of adding e-learning facilities by including gaming elements which engages people in commerce and education sector independently and communally. Designing the player experience is the challenging part in gamification development process. According to Burke (2014), this method basically focuses on the design part to achieve learner objectives in shorter timeline. This technique may be useful for building skills as it provides practice chances and feedback

where it is engaging, fun and motivating to learners at the same time (Prensky, 2001).

The gamification players are found to achieve higher scores in skill-oriented tests, facts and remembering rates.

- Micro Learning:

Hug (2005) defines micro learning as the procedure that has a short and measurable learning time, a small and simple content, modules and episodes of curriculum, concomitant and iterative process, e-medium or traditional medium, and learning method for classroom or corporation. This method provides learning material in chunks called “nuggets”, where the learners subscribe to these chunks when needed; known as “subscription learning”. This interaction generally lasts less than ten minutes. A specific learning sequence is created, and only after the learner completes this sequence, he/she is given technical and electronic access to further and more information. This technique is known as “Integrated Micro Learning” (Gassler and Glahn, 2004).

- Personalized Learning:

Leadbeater (2005) defines personalized learning as the opportunity for learners to become co-producers in choosing the content and structuring the instructions of learning. New tools, methods and pedagogical aspects which support collaborative learning are created as a result to the growing necessity and to create new outlooks. In this method, knowledge space theory is used to describe the knowledge of learner state in specific domain which is characterized by a package of evaluation problems. The learner’s knowledge state is specified based on the set of problems the learner can solve. Then the modules of learning are set in accordance to the learners’ need (Heller et al, 2006).

- Continuous Learning:

It is also known as “Lifelong Learning” and is defined as the continuous pursuit for expertise and knowledge for job-related or own purpose. According to Sharma (2004), it is defined as an extension or development of educational facilities as a method to improve life. Referring to Field (2006), this learning method is available only after ongoing involvement in a confining learning environment. There are three principles of this method: learner centrality, equal opportunities, high quality, and relevance.

Longworth (2005) differentiates between two types of this learning trend: work-based learning that trains for employment and short-term needs, and life-based learning that coaches for employment and long-term fulfillments. By referring to Edwards (1997), lifelong learning can be considered as writings that are established by descriptive methods. It can be narrated, written, read, and understood through single or several conclusions. Moreover, it can be rewritten and represented with different meanings.

2.5 E-learning in Organizations

Organizational learning (OL) is defined as a dynamic process related to creating knowledge which occurs over a timeline across individual level, group level, or organization level (Rolda'n, 2006). Zupancic (2007) state that technology can enable organizational learning if it is well designed and implemented.

According to Chen (2008), e-learning is the combination of technology and learning. Due to the high demand for the newest technological innovations, the development of communication systems, and the dissatisfaction toward traditional methods of training

delivery, e-learning becomes an alternative form of training for companies (Clarke and Hermens, 2001).

E-training is a distance training that uses the Internet or Intranet to provide the employees with the necessary knowledge and soft skills. Faried et al (2015) stated that the internet-based training facilitates communication between trainers and trainees to develop education. According to Moore et al (2011), there are many terms for e-training such as: virtual training, distance training, online collaborative training, training by technological media, and web-based training. Yamani (2006) defines e-training as a process that aims to deliver training contents through modern communication (as computers and internet) thus overcoming any geographical boundaries between trainers and trainees. In other words, Yamani (2006) explains it as a training system connecting geographically and timely distant trainers and trainees. Other researchers define it as a process to acquire a certain set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes through using electronic media by an individual or a group.

According to Skillsoft (2001), e-learning is primarily used in the development and training of IT skills (for instance programming skills). Some of the business and soft skills to be provided via e-learning in organizations are leadership, customer service, management, communication, human resources skills and quality management (Skillsoft, 2001).

The modern organizational e-learning programs offer the learners (trainees) a high control level over their own learning such as self-pacing, where trainees are free to join or leave the instructional material whenever it suits them and they can choose to finish the training tasks rapidly or slowly as they prefer. According to Skipper (2000), lack of engagement is one of the basic reasons that force learners to drop out of distance

learning courses. Consequently, organizations focus on implementing methods to motivate learners and increase their involvement in e-learning programs.

Referring to Horton (2002), learning games is one of the used ways to accomplish this plan. Learning games are computer-based games such as crossword puzzle games that are used to present or practice the training topics. Horton (2002) explains that learning games tools are accompanied with entertainment and recreation, they can improve the trainees' performance, encourage trainees to practice more, discover new aspects within the material, and reduce the fears rising from testing and evaluation during training.

Customization and personalization are another two methods used by organizations to engage e-learners (Clark & Mayer, 2003). Customization refers to the adaption of several instructional elements to meet the needs and preferences of the learner.

Personalization is to change the structure of the program in a way the learner feels of engaging in a conversation with this program. It can be promoted by using conversational language such as audio recording or on-screen text (Clark & Mayer, 2003). For instance, SmartTutor is a web-based tutoring system that uses information about the learner and the content of course to give a personalized feedback regarding the current performance in the course, subjective advices for the upcoming work in the course, and quizzes or tests that are based on the current knowledge level of the learner (Cheung et al, 2003).

Using stories or narratives promotes learner engagement by “bringing to life” the concepts that are abstract or uninteresting (Prensky, 2001). In this method, the learning objectives are presented in dialogues, where characters are being created in a way to be similar with the learners. The learning process occurs through how the characters solve the problems mentioned in the story (Hakkaladaddi, 2005).

Moreover, organizations are increasing the collaboration of trainees in e-learning programs by offering more opportunities for them to communicate between each other. This can happen through either synchronous communication that uses threaded discussions (such as chat rooms) which allow conversations between trainees in real time, or asynchronous communication that uses message boards and several types of communication where questions, answers and comments are being posted and later accessed by the trainees (Selix, 2001).

Due to the need of several training programs to be developed in short time and because the training content becomes outdated, organizations are moving toward rapid e-learning (Bersin, 2004). Rapid e-learning is defined as the type of e-learning that needs a short time to be created, and administered, and a limited effort to be developed and delivered. The training programs that are created based on rapid e-learning technique, take a duration of less than three weeks to be developed and often include Microsoft PowerPoint presentations uploaded on the Web (Bersin, 2004). An innovative feature of e-learning was created by placing video-based training sessions on the Web to be accessed by the employees or trainees.

2.6 Advantages of E-learning

The adoption of e-learning has several benefits and advantages that many studies and authors have provided in their searches. Referring to Smedley (2010), e-learning adoption provides flexibility of time schedules and place of delivery with an ease of access to a wide range of information, where each trainee can choose the time and place that is most suitable according to him/her. The internet is a good solution for training,

learning and education. Through the internet, learning becomes available all around the globe 24 hours a day, seven days a week. E-learning improves the efficiency of qualifications and knowledge.

Wagner et al (2008) note that e-learning provides chances to build relations between trainees through discussion forums, thus eliminating the barriers of communication such as the fear of talking to others face-to-face. It motivates the trainees to interact, exchange and respect the different point of views among each other.

It is cost-effective where trainees can avoid tuition fees and traveling expenditures (if travel is needed to finish certain training sessions abroad) and it gathers the trainees in one online platform rather than several rooms or buildings. When training is conducted electronically, it is less expensive due to the elimination of salaries specified for consultants and trainers. Employees do not need to travel to access the training sessions, rather they may use their time efficiently to improve productivity.

According to Algahtani (2011), e-learning allows learners or trainees to learn at their own pace and speed thus increasing their satisfaction and decreasing their stress. Rabah (2005) states that objectives can be achieved in short time and less effort through e-learning.

According to Khan (2005), e-learning ensures educational ethics because its environments offer the learners equal access to information regardless their location, age, gender, race, and ethnics. Moreover, e-learning motivates trainees to depend on themselves as trainers are no longer the direct knowledge source, they become advisors and guides (Alsalem, 2004). E-learning provides ease of managing and tracking learner activities through log files within the learning management systems.

In the business environment nowadays, employees must develop their knowledge, skills, and competencies more than ever before. Face-to-face classroom-based training becomes too costly and inconvenient for several organizations which need an efficient, flexible, and modern alternative: e-learning. The implementation of e-learning in corporations and organizations aims to provide an up-to-date and cost-effective program to its employees. Corporate e-learning allows organizations to distribute learning and training materials into multiple locations conveniently and easily. Moreover, employees might access these materials whenever it is convenient for them, either at the office or at home. E-learning motivates employees, develops their skills, and increases their knowledge.

According to Bersin (2002), e-learning is not only a training tool but a business performance improvement tool. As e-learning is trackable, managers are given the opportunity to chart the impact of its investment by measuring the business KPIs before and after its implementation and tracking the employees' tests scores and completion of courses.

2.7 Disadvantages of E-learning

According to Dobre (2010), one of the most familiar disadvantages of e-learning is the lack of face-to-face monitoring, discussions and direct feedback which are usually provided by trainers in the traditional training methods.

Moreover, Welsh et al (2003) state that online training requires specific costs for the design, development and maintenance of e-courses, and considerable investment in human resources training and technology. Cook (2007) adds that the creating and implementing online tutorials can be very expensive, although its overall costs are lower

compared to the traditional methods. According to Demiray (2010), e-learning has insufficient motivation for the trainees to engage in the online programs.

Demiray (2010) points to the technical problems that may face the e-learning process resulting in limiting the access to services. According to Dobre (2010), some online administration difficulties may face the e-learning process such as providing security of users, registration, monitoring and access to offered courses.

2.8 Challenges of E-learning

One of the main challenges of e-learning explained by Fujuan et al (2010) is the resistance to change by the trainees. Many trainees still prefer traditional learning or traditional training methods as they feel more comfortable to use hardcopies of the sessions and meet their trainers face-to-face.

In addition to the lack of trainees' trust in e-learning programs and the limited experience of some trainees in using computer (Arabasz et al, 2003). Many individuals do not have the enough experience or even the basic experience of how to use electronic instruments such as computers, laptops, tabs, mobiles. According to Bernard (2011), the current digital environment is changing from having access, to knowing how to use these information technologies. Martin (2009) adds that users who are new to online learning medium lack time management skills, metacognition awareness and self-directed learning need.

Referring to Martin (2009), e-learning environment lacks the presence of trainers or teachers and face-to-face interaction or discussion. Therefore, the well-planned online instructional environment is not only enough to provide motivation and interest to the

learner. Especially for the learners who do not have the enthusiasm about the course content or are not interested in the topic.

According to Sywelem et al (2012), learning style and culture are of the main e-learning challenges, where each trainee or learner has an own learning style accompanied by cultural influences.

Nowadays, most people claim that their schedules are busy, and they do not have enough free hours during the day. They are hesitant to be enrolled in an e-learning course because they consider that it will require a great deal of their time and a great effort to start it at their own pace.

2.9 E-learning in the Middle East

In general, Middle East has been a late follower of e-learning adoption which can be attributed to the delay in the Internet adoption by most governments of the countries in region. Due to cultural, social, and economic restrictions in traditional societies such as ME, traditional learning methods could not provide appropriate learning opportunities.

Between 2000 and 2007, Middle East has grown considerably in the usage of Internet.

According to Cisco (2005), the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector will positively shape the future of education systems in the Kingdom of Jordan.

Alomari (2009) mentions that Jordan developed a partnership with Cisco systems aiming to create an effective model of internet-enabled learning. In the UAE, learners in education institutions are being prepared for a rapidly changing technology and information driven world. Moreover, e-learning is increasingly being used as part of the curriculum in Universities and Higher Colleges of Technology in the UAE. In Qatar

also, e-learning has been implemented in universities, schools, banks as a teaching program for students and a training program for employees. In Saudi Arabia, a National Center for E-learning and Distance Learning was established in 2005 to support the implementation of e-learning. Despite the delay in the adoption of e-learning in most of the Middle East, the 21st century has witnessed an increasingly interest in implementation of e-learning in most ME countries.

2.10 Attitudes of Employees Towards E-learning

According to Brewer et al (2008), on-the-job e-learning is a relatively new form of training in organizations. The aim of e-learning is to show that technology effectively contributes to the development of employees' skills and knowledge and support the progression of their career (Ong et al, 2004). A study conducted by Ruiz et al (2006) proposes that e-learning is more effective in acquiring new skills and attitudes than face-to-face technique. Doo and Hyunjoong (2003) state that emotion affects the employee attitudes when it comes to training. Emotion depends on the personal attitudes to change, corporate culture or atmosphere, and viewpoints of fellow workers and management. By referring to a study conducted by Batalla-Busquets and Pacheco-Bernal (2013), 92.5% of employees quite or completely agreed that on-the-job e-learning offers an opportunity, 96.3% perceived it as a method to progress professionally, 92.7% considered it a way for keeping their job, and 83.6% expressed that on-the-job e-learning links them to the company. The results of the questions regarding employees' attitudes were very positive in general and the level of agreement with the positive aspects is notable. To reach higher levels of efficiency in on-the-job e-learning, employees should

have an open attitude to e-learning. Moreover, corporate e-learning is most beneficial when there is a similarity between aspects to learning and to working, in a career using intensive information and communications technology and up-to-date learning content (Batalla-Busquets & Pacheco-Bernal, 2013). By referring to the study conducted by Batalla-Busquets and Pacheco-Bernal (2013), the attitudes of employees to e-learning are classified into three groups: attitudes that are more affective and social motivations, attitudes revealing poor adaptability or fear of the new requirements of training, and attitudes linked to the knowledge society.

The first group includes training to meet other colleagues or simply relational motivation for training and it relates training to an affective link with the company. The feeling of belonging to a company or a group is accompanied by the perception that training is a chance offered by the company and a good method to progress in their careers. The second group includes motivation that gives training initiative and responsibility to the company where employees do not have personal interest in their training. It includes the perception that training is not a focus of personal enrichment but rather a focus of tension. The third group includes motivation which concerns ongoing training that relates to the current training requirements and the need for lifelong training, and that identifies training and profession as a unity rather than two separate stages.

Moreover, the advantages of virtual training from the employees' standpoint, depend on their attitude towards the use of this form of training to a great extent.

2.11 Constructivism Learning Theory

The origin of the constructivism theory is founded by Jean Piaget. According to Yilmaz (2008), constructivism proposes that learning is an adaptive activity that requires constructing conceptual structures and self-regulation. Pitchard and Woollard (2010) add that constructivism learning ensures higher independence by stimulating the critical thinking of learner, the ability of learner to define problems, the learner participation in discussions, researching, and solving real-life problems. It implies that learning occurs through participation in practical activities and social interactions between learners. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), the educator should make sure that learners are participating in the learning communities.

Modern information and communications technology (ICT) that are connected to the Internet, provides opportunities of interaction, collaboration and cooperation among individuals and groups who are geographically distant, which creates pre-conditions for knowing the constructivist-oriented learning. Easily accessible and free of charge advanced software over the internet (Skype, Google Talk, Gizmo...) allow simple and fast distant communication through audio and visual communication. One of the most known communication mediums is a web forum which gives the opportunity to discuss various topics even if not all the participants are logged in at the same time. It offers the users more freedom to choose when they want to join the discussion. It is possible at the web forum attaching files or inserting links to other web contents such as presentations, documents, web pages, multimedia contents...).

Recently, many social networks have developed and become popular such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Google Plus, Facebook. These systems provide connections, communication, and engaging in diverse social activities for their users.

Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment (MOODLE) is the best-known system among course management systems which carries out e-learning.

According to Dougiamas and Taylor (2003), MOODLE software was based on the constructivist learning principles from the beginning. It provides interactive materials such as lessons, choices, assignments, and tests where learners can write essays, answer questions, or upload files. According to Rice (2011), the most important activities for the constructive approach are those where learners and educators can communicate in a forum, glossary, chat, and wikis.

According to Bates (2011), constructivism depends on Web 2.0 systems where the basic feature is to empower the end-user to access, disseminate, create, and share information easily. In this approach, learning mostly becomes the responsibility of learners. Where learners are participating in various social activities and interacting with other participants of the educational process, thus constructing their knowledge and its function.

Murphy (1997) presented a summary of characteristics of constructivism learning:

- Multiple representations and perspectives of content and concepts are presented and encouraged.
- Educators act as guides, monitors, coaches, facilitators, and tutors.
- The learners play a central role in controlling and mediating learning.
- The learner's beliefs, attitudes and previous knowledge constructions are considered in the knowledge construction process.
- Deep understanding, problem-solving skills, and higher order thinking skills are emphasized.

These characteristics contribute to the technique and features of e-learning implementation as a part of the employees' training program.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Sample

The sample was extracted from one of the largest private hospitals in Lebanon. The organization was selected to reflect the development and implementation of a new e-learning technique as a part of the employees' training program in a Lebanese corporation. We also chose to make a blend of health sector and business sector that have differences in structure and employees' positions or titles, to show the efficiency of business strategies when implemented in a medical center. This purposive sampling will allow our study to address the proposed research question mentioned earlier, the attitudes of employees toward using e-learning as a part of the training program. We approached the contacts in the selected hospital and obtained the required approvals to proceed with the study.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

We collected data from different sources. First, the key contacts in the selected hospital provided major documents on the e-learning technique used in the training program. We also reviewed the hospital's website to obtain additional background information regarding organizational structure and training programs. Then we conducted interviews with 15 employees working at different levels and in different functions and departments across the selected private hospital. They included human resources managers, training specialists, learning and development specialists and billing officers. The number of

interviews in this research meets the general recommendation by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) who recommend that interviews in qualitative research should be anywhere between 12 to 15 to reach data saturation. We intended to choose the sampling from departments whose employees used the new e-learning training program to explore their attitudes towards its usage and check their opinions regarding its advantages, disadvantages, and challenges.

The interviewees were categorized into a focus group and independent employees. The questions focused on the features of the e-learning training technique, its implementation, its drivers and barriers, and the employees' opinions towards it. Three employees were separately interviewed including training and development specialists and human resources manager. They were asked about the planning of the e-training program, how it was implemented, tested, and later evaluated. The second part of interviews was with a focus group consisting of 12 members including human resources managers and billing officers. They were asked about their opinions regarding the barriers and benefits of this program.

The interviews were approximately one hour long each and were planned to be conducted face-to-face, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic the plan was changed.

Interviews were partially conducted face-to-face and partially conducted online (telephone interviews) as a response to the recent pandemic which did not make it possible to do face-to-face interviews. The online interviews were conducted through "Zoom Application" using both call and video-call methods.

Based on previous literature, telephone interviews have several advantages and benefits. According to Mann and Stewart (2000), telephone interviews allow real-time

communication with both audio and video which is like traditional interview, but the interviewer and interviewee are in different locations.

The main advantage of telephone interviews is the flexibility it provides for both interviewers and interviewees. Mann and Stewart (2000) mentioned in their research the wide geographical access characteristic that plays an important role in such interviews, where people from all over the globe having access to telephone or computer can be interviewed. It enables interviewers to contact individuals who might be difficult to meet face-to-face such as shift workers, individuals with disabilities, individuals living abroad, elderly individuals, and parents of newborn babies (O'Connor and Madge, 2001). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) also acknowledged that telephone interviews provide access to individuals who are geographically distant or located in dangerous places.

According to Taylor (2002), telephone interviews are cost effective where interviewers access to various resources and experiences while avoiding the expense and time needed to travel to different places. Moreover, both interviewers and interviewees have no need for additional equipment, they only need telephone and web access to participate in the telephone interview. Alexander (1996) suggest that in telephone interviews interviewees tend to be more open with others than in face-to-face communication. Murray and Sixsmith (1998) add that in such interviews, interviewees tend to be more direct in their answers and more able to discuss sensitive issues comfortably in their language.

As we proceeded with qualitative research, we used inductive analysis approach to analyze the collected data. The findings presented are based on the analysis of the participants' responses resulting from the conducted interviews.

Chapter Four

Results and Discussions

4.1 Findings

The findings of our study analysis will be presented in three parts. The first part will display the features of the e-training program implemented in the selected private hospital. The second part will discuss the success factors identified by the collected data. The third part will discuss the challenges or barriers that the interviewed participants mentioned.

4.1.1 LinkedIn Learning Program:

LinkedIn Learning is a new e-training program implemented at the selected hospital. It is an American website offering video courses taught by industry experts in business, creative and software skills. It is a subsidiary of LinkedIn. It was founded in 1995 as the online training site “Lynda.com” by Lynda Weinman and her husband Bruce Heavin before being acquired by LinkedIn in 2015. Weinman could be considered as the pioneer of online education.

“LinkedIn Learning” implemented at the selected huge private hospital in Lebanon is an online platform that offers more than 16,000 courses. Each course is made up of a group of videos, each video represents a certain percentage of the course completion. These courses are designed by leaders in learning content and taught by expert instructors having at least 22 years of experience. They are available in several languages: English, French, German, Japanese, Spanish, Chinese, Portuguese. The courses are classified

into three categories: Business, Technology and Creative where each category contains courses of sub-sections of the related fields and functions.

Business courses include: Business Software and Tools, Career Development, Customer Service, Finance and Accounting, Human Resources, Leadership and Management, Marketing, Professional Development, Project Management, Training and Education.

Technology courses include: Cloud Computing, Database Management, Data Science, IT Help Desk, Mobile Development, Network and System Administration, Software Development. Security, Software Methodologies, Web Development. Creative courses include: Design and Engineering, 3D and Animation, Art and Illustration, Graphic Design, Motion Graphics and VFX, Photography, User Experience, Video, Web Design. Noting that about 2000 new courses are added per year.

It can be accessed by employees anytime and anywhere by using either the desktop version or the mobile application version. Employees can access the LinkedIn Learning website by entering the organization (hospital) URL to log in through the portal, and then sign in by their organization username and password. Employees can search and access any course even if it is not related to their position or function. They can specify their interests in their profiles and based on them they will receive recommendations for videos or courses. Moreover, the website recommends “Course of The Month” which is the most watched course by users, so that other users can benefit from.

One of the main features of LinkedIn Learning program that the employees’ training activity is being tracked by admins. There are two types of admins: main admins represented by human resources managers and training and development specialists, sub-admins represented by managers or supervisors of departments. Due to the large number of employees at this private hospital, the main admins might not be able to track

them all, they mostly track employees with low-performance and those preparing for promotion or having a career ladder. For this purpose, each sub-admin is responsible to track the employees' learning activity in the related department and send reports to the main admins. Reports include information regarding the finished courses, number of completed hours, most watched courses, and percentage of the completion of courses. As a part of the performance appraisal, each manager rates the competencies of the employees of his/her department. Based on the results, human resources managers track the low performance employees to improve their performance, and employees who have career ladder to prepare for their promotion. Human resources managers and the training and development specialists construct a detailed development plan of 6 month-duration for those employees to complete a specific stage. They send the employees guidelines, steps how to accomplish it, reminders and track them during this plan period.

Main admins also add courses or videos to a section called "My org". Each period, Human Resources Department announce for a certain course to be completed by all employees within a certain duration. These courses are related to interpersonal skills, communication skills, competencies, knowledge, etc. Although the broad deadline is specified, employees are free to complete the course at any time either gradually or completely at once within the set duration. These courses aim to develop the employees' skills, knowledge, and competencies and to improve their performance and professionalism.

Employees are not limited to the courses chosen or uploaded by the Human Resources Department. They can search by using keywords which results in a list of courses related to the mentioned keywords and they can have access to any course even if it is not related to their job title or level. The LinkedIn Learning program can be accessed by

employees even beyond the working hours. They can save courses to “collections” section and they can download courses to watch them offline later. Employees may construct a weekly goal to achieve. As well as they can view their learning history and their “in progress” courses. Upon the completion of a course and after successfully passing the exam at its end, employees receive a Certificate of Completion or letter of completion. Some courses that have frequent updates such as “weekly tip courses” are not eligible for certificates because new content is continuously being added.

Some on-demand courses offered by LinkedIn Learning program are accredited by well-known institutions such as PMI (Project Management Institute), NASBA (National Association of State Boards of Accountancy), CompTIA (The Computing Technology Industry Association), HRCI (HR Certification Institute), SHRM (Society for Human Resource Management). These courses are based on a certain number of credits. The institution will track the employees for a certain period to refresh and update their acquired information and knowledge with the newest updates. As well as sending the employees certain tests and quizzes to apply. Employees will receive an accredited certificate after completing any of these courses and the exam/s related to it. These courses help individuals prepare for professional certification exams and earn continuing education units.

Employees can control the privacy and security settings, as well as they can choose to connect the LinkedIn Learning account to their personal LinkedIn account. Employees will receive a more personalized learning experience which includes special course recommendations based on job title, skills, and industry. They will discover and receive more relevant learning content. By connecting the two accounts, employees can share the completed courses on their professional profiles of their personal LinkedIn accounts,

and they have the option to choose which courses to publish. Thus, they enrich their CVs by developing their area of knowledge and skills. Although the LinkedIn Learning program is trackable by admins, admins cannot access the private activity from the personal LinkedIn account (such as: connections, private messages, job posts the employees viewed...) in case the employees choose to connect both accounts.

In purpose of motivating employees to use and proceed with LinkedIn Learning program, the Human Resources Department organizes an event to announce Top 50 users of this program. They pass over the departments and units to honor and reward the top learner in each department and unit.

4.1.2 Success Factors:

- Ease of Access and Flexibility:

Upon interviewing the participants, 84% agree that LinkedIn Learning program is easy to access anytime and anywhere based on what suits them, especially it can be downloaded as a mobile application which make it easier to check frequently. The best part of the program according to the employees is not being restricted to a pre-set schedule specifying the location and timing where they are obliged to attend. But rather, they can access it according to their own schedule and timing which is not necessary to be during office hours.

Regarding this point, a billing officer said “Being obliged to attend a pre-scheduled session set by others is somehow annoying because I may be not willing to do it at that moment, I rather prefer to choose my timing based on my schedule”. Another billing officer added “I can access the program whenever I want, being free to choose what suits me especially in things related to work is very interesting, this is so flexible”.

16% of the interviewees argued that using LinkedIn Learning program is not comfortable to them. They prefer face-to-face meetings with the trainers. According to the interviewees, during face-to-face meetings they can discuss the topics, express their ideas, and ask questions seeking an explanation or clarification for any issue they may have where direct feedback and response would be available. A human resources manager mentioned “some employees still prefer face-to-face meetings, they like direct contact and communication with the trainers, they believe that this would be more beneficial and easier where they can ask questions about any issue and they can get an instant answer”.

Some employees expressed that they also prefer traditional method because it is limited to a certain number of sessions that start and end according to scheduled timing and duration which is enough to cover the required material. Whereas completing the courses through the LinkedIn Learning program may take more time as the employees can choose their own time to complete the course according to what is suitable for their schedules which may take longer time. Those employees believe that they need great motivation to take the initiative to access the courses offered by the program especially after a long day at work. An officer said “After a long day at work all what I need is to rest and spend time with my family, I do not think I would be enough active to take the initiative and spend a while studying a course”.

- Content:

There was a general acceptance and agreement from the participants that LinkedIn Learning program is rich with a variety of courses covering several areas. They mentioned that it helps in expanding their knowledge, acquiring new skills, improving their performance, developing their competencies, facilitating the preparation for their

promotion, and supporting their career ladder path. A billing officer mentioned “it is amazing to access a plenty of courses in one platform which covers several areas that I might be interested in, these courses are beneficial in a way or another even if it is not related directly to my job”. Noting that the 16% preferring traditional methods, find it more comfortable if the information provided by the program are distributed in the form of booklets or hardcopies. They consider that documented information is easier to be accessed and acquired. Another officer added “I find it more comfortable to get this material in the form of papers, so that I can add notes on my own”.

- Features and Privacy Settings:

Participants had positive feedback regarding the privacy settings provided by this program even when they link it with their personal LinkedIn accounts. As well as controlling which courses to be published on their professional profiles. Moreover, the most features having positive feedback by the interviewed employees were the development and enrichment of their CVs by mentioning the completed courses, the improvement of their educational level, openness to new educational areas and the accredited certificates they may earn after the completion of certain courses.

- Motivation:

Employees expressed that although they are not meeting the trainers face-to-face, but the training and development specialists follow up their learning activity and are always ready to help them with any issue and direct them. The human resources managers always ask for employees’ feedback regarding the LinkedIn Learning program.

A human resources manager explained “employees’ feedback is important for the success of the program implementation. We aim to improve the program progress and

features, motivate employees to proceed with it and minimize the barriers or challenges that they may face. We seek to create a positive training and learning experience for the employees”.

Moreover, interviewees added that the idea of honoring the top learner in the departments and units makes things more interesting and motivate the employees to give more. A billing officer commented “knowing that you efforts are being appreciated through a reward or even just a word of “well done, keep going on”, is so beneficial for the employees to give more efforts in that area”. Employees added that the idea of enriching the CV through connecting both LinkedIn accounts is also a great deal of motivation. A human resources manager added “usually individuals seek to attend different training sessions or institutions aiming to improve their skills, competencies and knowledge and enrich their CVs. We are offering this activity in one online platform and for free”.

4.1.3 Challenges or Barriers:

- Limited Computer Skills and Experience in Web Use:

The 16% who preferred the traditional training methods, argued that they have somehow poor computer skills and mainly in web access as their experience is limited to the systems they use at work. During the interview, they responded that they find it difficult or different to adapt with soft copies and virtual training program. A billing officer said, “It is not comfortable to me using this program as I am not interested in computers and online activity, my experience is limited to the system we use to finish our job”. They mentioned that written content can be more beneficial and flexible to them. Moreover, they prefer face-to-face meetings for the open discussions and direct feedback it provide.

- Internet Connection Speed in Lebanon:

During interviews with the employees, some of them mentioned the problem of poor internet connection as it is not fairly distributed among different regions in Lebanon. Poor internet connection might affect the access to the online courses offered by the program especially if it was not during work hours which may cause a delay in the completion of the course. They added that this might become more time consuming in some areas which in its turn might affect the employee motivation or enthusiasm to proceed with other courses.

4.2 Suggestion

As the LinkedIn Learning program offers the feature of downloading the courses to be watched offline later, employees can consider it one of the solutions to the barrier of poor internet connection in their regions. The selected private hospital as a big organization depends on the internet in most of its systematic and administrative operations, where the internet connection in big organization is stronger and faster than that in personal homes. For employees having poor internet connection at their homes, they can download the course while they are at work and watch it offline when they return home. Thus, they avoid any delay in the course completion.

4.3 Implications

Based on the conducted interviews with the employees, the majority favored the LinkedIn Learning training program for many positive aspects. Some employees considered face-to-face meetings and traditional methods as more comfortable and

easier to communicate with the trainers. The revealed attitudes were differentiated between positively social, affective and knowledge attitudes and attitudes revealing poor adaptability or fear of new training forms. The results we obtained were generally similar to the results of the study conducted by Batalla-Busquets and Pacheco-Bernal (2013) concerning the attitudes of employees and the positive feedback towards e-learning as a part of the training program.

The main positive features of LinkedIn Learning program mentioned by employees:

- Easy and flexible to use
- Opens new educational areas for the employees
- Helps them acquire new skills and develop their knowledge
- Prepares employees for their upcoming promotion
- Facilitates employees' career ladder or path.

Employees can access it anytime and anywhere which makes them feel more comfortable and motivated to proceed with learning. We noticed that the features and advantages of the LinkedIn Learning program given to the employees in this private hospital are based on the constructivism learning theory, where employees are given the independence to construct their knowledge and develop their skills, and trainers act as guides, coaches and monitors. Based on our study and sample, implementing E-learning as a part of the employees' training program has witnessed positive feedback. Therefore, the attitudes of employees at the selected private hospital were positive, motivating and encouraging towards implementing e-learning as a part of their training program. The implementation of e-learning in Lebanese institutions and organizations is still somehow

limited and needs further efforts and consideration mainly through advertising and awareness campaigns.

4.4 Limitations

Our study was conducted in one Lebanese organization located in one geographical area in Lebanon. Moreover, it was applied on a small population or sample which might not be adequately representative. Further searches to be conducted in multiple organizations from different regions in Lebanon using larger population, so that the implementation of e-learning as a part of the training program among Lebanese organizations could be compared and its spread could be more tracked.

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Appendix

Interviews Questions:

1. What are the features of LinkedIn Learning program?
2. How was LinkedIn Learning program implemented?
3. Where did the idea come from?
4. What are the advantages of LinkedIn Learning program?
5. What are the disadvantages of LinkedIn Learning program?
6. What are the challenges or barriers of LinkedIn Learning program?
7. How did LinkedIn Learning program affect the employees?
8. How did LinkedIn Learning program benefit the employees?
9. What is the best feature of LinkedIn Learning program?
10. What do you prefer between E-Learning method and traditional method of training?