



The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Academic Research Productivity and Faculty Performance in Palestinian Universities: A Qualitative Investigation

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Abstract: COVID-19's worldwide spread in early 2020 necessitated the implementation of various precautionary measures by governments worldwide to restrain the fast-paced propagation of the pandemic. One of the strategies called for the brief shutdown of educational establishments such as schools, colleges and universities. Objectives of the study: The present investigation intends to examine the viewpoints of Palestinian academic personnel on the influence of the Coronavirus on their research activities and academic achievements. **Methodology and procedures:** The study utilized a qualitative research methodology, which primarily relied on a semi-structured open-ended interview technique to collect data. Five esteemed professors from a prestigious university in Palestine were purposefully selected to participate in the study. **Results:** The results of the investigation demonstrated that the Ministry of Education's online education legislation and procedures regarding teaching, the decrease in the use of university resources required for scientific research, as well as the absence of training to switch from in-person learning to online learning, had a substantial influence on academic staff performance and scientific production. **Conclusions:** As a result of these outcomes, there were fewer possibilities to publish studies and participate in academic conferences. Additionally, the Coronavirus pandemic had a detrimental impact on the scheduling and scientific output of Palestinian academic personnel, as they were unable to attend in-person conferences. Furthermore, the change from conventional sessions in person to distance education presented significant obstacles for instructors as well as students. **Recommendations:** the necessity of resolving the obstacles encountered throughout the pandemic, as well as the need for complete support, explicit directions, and proper training to guarantee a smooth switch to online learning. By implementing these strategies, colleges, and universities in Palestine encourage lecturers and improve the level of teaching in the electronic arena, thus enhancing student learning and successful achievement.

Keywords: COVID-19 Pandemic, Academic Research Productivity, Faculty Performance, Palestinian Universities, Qualitative Investigation.

أثر جائحة كوفيد-19 على إنتاجية الأبحاث الأكاديمية وأداء أعضاء هيئة التدريس في الجامعات الفلسطينية: دراسة نوعية

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الملخص: فرض انتشار فيروس كورونا المستجد (كوفيد-19) على مستوى العالم في أوائل عام 2020 الحاجة إلى تطبيق مجموعة من التدابير الاحترازية من قبل الحكومات في جميع أنحاء العالم للحد من السرعة المقلقة لانتشار الوباء. ومن بين هذه الاستراتيجيات إغلاق المؤسسات التعليمية مثل المدارس والكلية والجامعات لفترة وجيزة. هدف البحث: يهدف البحث الحالي إلى دراسة وجهات نظر العاملين الأكاديميين الفلسطينيين حول تأثير فيروس كورونا على أنشطتهم البحثية وإنجازاتهم الأكاديمية. منهج الدراسة: وقد استخدمت الدراسة منهجية بحثية نوعية، اعتمدت في المقام الأول على أسلوب المقابلة المفتوحة شبه المنظمة لجمع البيانات. تم اختيار خمسة من المدرسين البارزين من إحدى الجامعات المرموقة في فلسطين بشكل مقصود للمشاركة في الدراسة. نتائج الدراسة: أظهرت نتائج البحث أن سياسات وزارة التربية والتعليم العالي وإجراءاتها المتعلقة بالتدريس، وانخفاض استخدام الموارد الجامعية اللازمة للبحث العلمي، فضلاً عن غياب التدريب على التحول من التعلم التقليدي إلى التعلم عبر الإنترنت، كان لها تأثير واضح على أداء أعضاء هيئة التدريس والإنتاج العلمي. الاستنتاجات: بناءً على النتائج السابقة، انخفضت فرص نشر الأبحاث والمشاركة في المؤتمرات الأكاديمية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، أثرت جائحة كورونا سلباً على تنظيم وإنتاجية الأكاديميين الفلسطينيين، حيث لم يتمكنوا من حضور المؤتمرات شخصياً. علاوة على ذلك، فإن التحول من الجلسات التقليدية شخصياً إلى التعليم عن بعد شكل تحديات كبيرة للمدرسين وكذلك الطلبة. التوصيات: ضرورة تدليل العقبات التي تمت مواجهتها طوال فترة الوباء، فضلاً عن الحاجة إلى الدعم الكامل والتوجيهات الصريحة والتدريب المناسب لضمان التحول السلس إلى التعلم عبر الإنترنت. ومن خلال تنفيذ هذه الاستراتيجيات، يمكن للكلية والجامعات في فلسطين تشجيع المحاضرين وتحسين مستوى التدريس في الساحة الإلكترونية، وبالتالي تعزيز تعلم الطلاب وإنجاز الناجح.

الكلمات المفتاحية: جائحة كوفيد-19، إنتاجية البحث الأكاديمي، أداء أعضاء هيئة التدريس، الجامعات الفلسطينية، البحث النوعي.

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Introduction

The emanation of the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the coronavirus first surfaced in November 2019 in Wuhan, China, and has led to a global sense of concern and apprehension. This virus primarily affects the respiratory system and has been a cause of alarm for people worldwide. Kirilova and Windarti (2020) indicate that the virus's actual origin is unknown, however, research indicates that it is transferred between animals and can afterwards cause infection in people. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused considerable obstacles and aroused various worries across diverse industries and activities throughout the world during the last two years. Onyeaka et al., (2021) point out that this pandemic has had a significant influence on industries such as air travel, higher education, transportation, tourist attractions, and businesses. The current medical crisis has resulted in important shifts in many areas of life, as well as a slew of health-related difficulties.

Gostin et al., (2020) state that the worldwide effect of the Coronavirus pandemic has sparked widespread global interest. Because of its extensive spread throughout several different countries, the World Health Organization (WHO) has designated it as a worldwide pandemic, forcing authorities to adopt strategies targeted at controlling and regulating its propagation. As a result, governments and world bodies have implemented a variety of tactics to reduce and control the virus's spread. According to Ahmad et al., (2022), Despite the limited number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Palestine, the WHO has classified and evaluated the danger as high, owing to Palestine's inadequate medical facilities in comparison to other countries. The scarcity of ventilation and intensive care units (ICUs) has led considerably to a notable rise in mortality. Hamamra et al., (2021) articulate that Palestine has just 375 beds in intensive care units and 295 ventilators, significantly restricting the Palestinian Ministry of Health's ability to adequately provide medical treatment for serious cases of COVID-19.

Guest et al., (2020) state that under the pandemic's global breakout, governments throughout the world immediately established a variety of policies and legislation targeted at limiting the spread of disease. Travel limitations, social distance, work-from-home procedures, and the brief closure of facilities like teams, churches, mosques, and colleges and universities are among the strategies used to reduce the propagation of the sickness (Sahu, 2020). In reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic, Palestine has enacted several rules and measures. Some of these policies prohibit people from meeting and participating in events outside of their homes, creating a stay-at-home lifestyle. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education has legislated that colleges and universities take a 14-day vacation throughout each semester to organize learning processes (Salameh et al., 2021). Universities have created distant learning ways to maintain their educational mission due to these government demands (Subaih et al., 2021). As a result, the researchers ran this investigation to gauge the views of professors on the pandemic's influence on academic achievement and scientific production.

The Palestinian government has reacted rapidly to the COVID-19 outbreak, utilizing a globally and locally organized, informed-by-data strategy to limit the propagation of the virus inside our borders. The Palestinian government's policy is containment and reduction, which is intended to safeguard our population from contagion while additionally decreasing the pressure on our already overburdened healthcare sector (Government of Palestine, 2020). In this context, the Palestinian Ministry of Education adopted the essential decision to halt academic activity at educational institutions to safeguard the public's health. Consequently, the importance of remote learning

and online classes as a viable alternative to traditional classrooms became obvious (Farrah & Al-Bakri, 2020).

In light of the COVID-19 eruption, Palestinian universities encountered substantial difficulties, exacerbated by prevailing socioeconomic and political uncertainties (Hamamra et al., 2022). The sudden shift to online learning compounded the existing digital disparity, as numerous students lacked access to dependable internet and digital devices, especially around the countryside and refugee camps. The shift was further impeded by regular electrical blackouts and insufficient online services, particularly in Gaza Strip. The financial crisis impacted both undergraduates, a majority of whom struggled to afford tuition due to economic troubles, and universities, which experienced decreased revenue and income. The effectiveness of education declined since lecturers and students were unprepared for distance education, resulting in reduced involvement and difficulty with practical training courses. The stress and isolation caused by the pandemic have hampered research activity and worsened psychological difficulties within the academic community (Jamal et al., 2022). Despite the implementation of various legislative measures to address these issues, the assistance provided was often insufficient. This has led to long-term consequences such as learning deficiencies and a stronger dependence on mixed learning methods after the pandemic.

The unique circumstances created by the fast propagation of COVID-19 created new procedures that have resulted in substantial ramifications in a variety of areas, particularly studying and scientific research. Al-Maskari et al., (2022) indicate that in reaction to this calamity, online education developed as an acceptable substitute for conventional physical attendance for university and college learners. As a result, the researcher aims to address the following investigation question:

How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact academic staff performance and research activities at Palestinian universities?

The worldwide extension of the coronavirus pandemic that started in 2020, designated by the World Health Organization as an international health disaster, presents a major threat to the well-being of people globally. The coronavirus has had a considerable influence on tertiary education. Some universities and regional colleges have chosen to delay the commencement of new courses, resulting in an intermittent halt of scientific and academic activity at these educational establishments (Bandyopadhyay, 2020). According to Sahu (2020), this disturbance has serious repercussions, hurting both students' educational journey and staff productivity. Furthermore, its impacts transcend beyond the field of education, influencing university academics' research pursuits and career commitments.

Likewise, Alhumaid et al., (2020) have emphasized the effective execution of various efforts in response to the circumstances to promote seminars, meetings, and lectures. However, Hoq (2020) mentions that the transition to e-learning and distance learning necessitates the provision of appropriate technical and infrastructure facilities such as internet access, electricity, mobile devices, and a qualified faculty in this sector. In the same context, Khalaily (2023) indicates that it is necessary to offer training programs in e-learning and remote education to instructors and students in order to inform and mentor them in this new mode of instruction and emphasize their respective roles in the educational process.

The move to online learning requires a purposeful strategy as opposed to one that is reactionary and is made in responding to a particular problem since the latter might have unfavourable effects on both lecturers and learners. Carefully designed online learning is different from unforeseen online learning that is

implemented rapidly. Several studies contrasting in-person class instruction with virtual and distance education before the Coronavirus pandemic were carried out in universities in industrialized nations, where necessary resources were easily accessible (Hodges et al., 2020). Nevertheless, El Said (2021) indicates that because of a shortage of technological knowledge and inadequate support for computer systems, which are seen as the main barriers to the embrace of online learning at institutions, there is limited comparable research in underdeveloped countries.

In this context, the main goal of creating educational establishments is to advance knowledge and social progress within its functional framework. Universities strive for excellence in the following three primary fields that highlight their contributions to scientific research in a variety of applied, social, humanitarian, and medical domains (Labanauskis and Ginevius, 2017). Similarly, Flexner and Kerr (2021) state that universities play an important role in society by contributing to three critical areas, each of which is followed by a dedication to excellence via scientific research that incorporates different applied, societal, humane, and medical fields University's potential to have a significant effect on the community is dependent on its academic performance.

Qureshi and Naseer (2020) define the concept of academic performance as a term that pertains to a person's mental, emotional, physical, and social progress in society. Farhana (2021) provided another definition, describing it as tasks conducted by lecturers that include instruction and investigation. Academic staff's research endeavors constitute the primary root of all societal challenges. As a result, research publication is widely acknowledged as a metric of academic accomplishment. Still, publishing in journals with low-impact factors reduces the scholar's academic quality (Basil and Lucy, 2007). Furthermore, numerous research studies have shown that the lecturer is the most influential variable in the educational process, as well as the degree of academic achievement (Alamodi & Arafat, 2021). In the same sense, Stoner and Fincham (2012) assert that the lecturer is the primary source of scientific output.

Additional investigations have shown that the primary responsibilities of faculty members in the setting of university education are both research and teaching. In the field of tertiary education, innovation is defined as the ability to implement unique organizational strategies that have a significant and critical influence on the daily activities of educational establishments and all of their constituents (Hanandeh et al., 2021). Thus, the academic staff is responsible for the overall quality as well as instructing and searching (Chiasson et al., 2015).

Accordingly, the researchers conducted a study due to the significant anxiety resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, which is severely affecting academic and scientific performance. The pandemic has created a challenging situation, worsened by its various implications on research and science, leading to a negative impact on knowledge development and innovation. The ongoing investigation concentrates on the academic staff working at a Palestinian institution as they fulfil their academic duties and carry out research activities during the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic. The overarching aim of this investigation is to examine the influence of the pandemic on the academic staff's capacity to teach and conduct innovative scientific research until the first semester of 2022.

This study intends to contribute to present knowledge by elucidating how the Coronavirus affects the academic staff's performance and productivity in scientific research.

Research Methodology

Study design and setting: The present research carefully examined the impact of COVID-19 on educational achievement and the effectiveness of teaching personnel in Palestinian universities. To accomplish this goal, qualitative data was utilized to get a full knowledge of the academic staff's views and experiences regarding the pandemic's impact on their academic achievement and output. The researcher used a set of 10 questions to carry out semi-structured interviews with the individuals who took part. Based on past research investigations, these inquiries for interviews were designed and updated. To gather the necessary information, face-to-face interviews were done. The investigation was conducted at a university in Palestine's northern region.

Participants: The participants of the present investigation consisted of five male instructors from the University's Faculty of Art, which is located in Palestine's northern area. The reason for selecting male academics was based on their experience and ability to provide research support. The chosen male professors are professionals in their respective fields and can offer valuable advice and research knowledge.

Sampling: Gathering data is critical when conducting studies since it allows for a more in-depth understanding of the theoretical structure. Therefore, it is crucial to carefully choose the data-gathering method from participants. In this investigation, the researchers utilized a purposive sampling technique to gather the required data. Purposive sampling is a strategy of deliberately choosing individuals according to specified traits (Bernard, 2017). It aims to provide a homogenous sample in which the units have comparable characteristics such as university, degrees, and employment. According to Etikan et al., (2016), the incentive for employing purposive sampling arises from its capacity to give the researcher more chances to acquire information from informed and experienced individuals. Based on their expertise and experience in their respective fields, the sample consisted of five academics who met the inclusion criteria.

The major goal of the present investigation is to assess the academic performance of teaching staff at a Palestinian institution and examine the influence of the Coronavirus outbreak on their scientific outcomes. Teaching staff, according to (Fishman et al., 2003), are critical in commencing the teaching and learning process and serving as the core of each investigation or academic endeavor. They also occupy roles of leadership and authority in making decisions inside the university. So, the study sample of this current research was intentionally chosen and comprised five lecturers from a university in Palestine.

Validity and Reliability: The interview, as the study instrument employed in this work, was carefully designed to address general validity problems. Before conducting the study, the researchers provided the interview questions list to three experts in the same area. The professors were from three well-known Palestinian universities: Al-Istiqal University, The Arab American University, and Palestine Technical University - Kadoorie. After reviewing the specialists' comments, the researchers made adjustments to the interview questions by adding and removing certain queries. The experts evaluated its validity in addressing the primary study issues.

To maintain the reliability of the interview, the researchers employed the "constant comparative" technique, which is widely regarded as one of the most robust methods for analyzing data and drawing accurate conclusions (Silverman, Saavedra, & Pina, 2001). This approach promotes consistency and reliability throughout the research process, assuring that our study

accurately reflects real-world social dynamics. The researchers evaluated and analyzed the tool's validity and reliability by scrutinizing two transcripts, ensuring that the findings were grounded in rigorous analysis.

Data Collection: To collect the needed data, semi-structured interviews have been carried out, concentrating on different facets including academic activities throughout the pandemic's emergence, the pandemic's influence on the university's academic accomplishments, and academic staffs' perspectives on the possibility of academic growth of Palestinian universities. According to Karatsareas (2022), the semi-structured interview is a type of interview that primarily comprises open-ended questions that encourage participants to delve deeper into their thoughts and ideas. It is allowed to express their personal views on the subject matter, discuss their experiences and use their own words to convey their thoughts. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the topic at hand, thus contributing to the overall success of the interview process. The interview comprised ten questions with open answers that allowed respondents to express themselves openly and offer comprehensive responses. Last, semi-structured interviews involving five professors were undertaken for data gathering, allowing for a thorough examination of the influence of the pandemic on their activities.

Data Analysis: The researcher used thematic analysis to analyze the gathered data. It is a qualitative research method aimed at identifying, analyzing, and decoding patterns of meaning, commonly referred to as 'themes,' that emerge from the data (Akinyode et al., 2018). This method provides a straightforward and systematic approach to extracting codes and themes from qualitative research data. Codes, which are the smallest units of analysis, capture important aspects of the data that are relevant to the research question and facilitate the identification of patterns and relationships between the data. By using thematic analysis, researchers can reveal meaningful insights and develop a comprehensive understanding of the research subject. Thus, it is a technique used in research to not only describe the data but also to identify and analyze critical elements of data that are relevant to the study subject. This analysis can help identify patterns in the data that relate to respondents' personal experiences, perspectives, opinions, and behaviors. By doing so, it provides a better understanding of people's thoughts, feelings, and experiences. (Clarke & Braun, 2017)

The researcher used a carefully manual thematic analysis approach to thoroughly explore the data acquired from semi-structured interviews. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and manually coded through textual analysis, yielding an exhaustive and precise account of the data. The acquired data transcript was rigorously checked for repeating patterns, which allowed for a more in-depth interpretation of the data. Each pattern was then allocated a specific code to aid in the incorporation of pertinent codes into larger themes. The outcome was a captivating and coherent story that logically presented the narrative of the data (Azungah, 2018). Thematic analysis usually involves six important steps: (a) Familiarization with the data, (b) Creating initial codes, (c) Identifying topics, (d) Reviewing and recognizing themes, (e) Defining and naming the themes, and (f) Writing the report (Clarke & Braun, 2017). This method provided a comprehensive understanding of how the coronavirus affected the performance and research output of academic staff.

1. Data Familiarization

As part of the research process, the researchers conducted a thorough analysis of the available transcripts to obtain a deeper knowledge of the content. During this stage, the researchers took

careful note of their initial observations in the margins, providing for a more thorough knowledge of the subject at hand.

2. Generating Initial Codes

The researcher started coding by identifying segments of text related to the research question and assigning codes to these segments, representing the essence of the content.

Example Codes

- Code 1: "Closing and reopening the university"
- Code 2: "No meeting and gathering"
- Code 3: "Shift to online learning"
- Code 4: "Direct contact"
- Code 5: "Government quarantine (14 days)"
- Code 6: "No movement within all urban areas"

3. Searching for Themes

One way to do this is by grouping related codes. This involves looking for similar patterns and connections between different codes. By identifying these linkages, researchers can acquire a better understanding through research and study of the underlying themes and patterns that exist within the data. This process requires careful attention to detail and a thorough analysis of the data, but can ultimately lead to more meaningful insights and conclusions.

Example Theme

Theme 1: "legislation and procedures of Ministry of Education"

4. Reviewing and Defining Themes

During this particular phase, the researcher undertook the task of refining and defining the themes. The purpose of this was to ensure that the themes accurately represented the coded segments of the collected data. Furthermore, it was imperative to ensure that the themes were presented coherently and logically, thereby creating a narrative that was easy to understand.

5. Naming and Describing Themes

The researcher assigned each theme with a definitive and pertinent name that corresponds to their inquiry. The nomenclature employed aims to establish a clear and concise association between the theme and the research question. The researcher's approach in naming each theme is a deliberate and calculated effort to provide an efficient and effective framework for the research study.

6. Writing the Report

Upon concluding the process of gathering themes and details, the researcher proceeded to amalgamate them into a comprehensive, cohesive narrative. This was accomplished by synthesizing the various elements into a unified structure that captured the essence of the research findings.

Results

During the initial section of the interview, various questions were asked to determine the important features of the study sample, such as the age, field of experience, and qualifications of the lecturers. The study included five professors from a Palestinian institution who have extensive expertise in scientific research and are highly competent in their respective fields.

The recorded interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a systematic method for qualitative data analysis. The textual analysis allowed for the identification of repeated patterns in the acquired data, which were assigned a code. These codes were then categorized into overarching themes to tell the story of the data (Langley et al., 2007).

Based on the analyzed data, it is clear that three themes are extremely pertinent to our study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on academic staff performance and research activities at Palestinian universities. Our findings suggest that the Ministry of Education's pandemic-related processes and legislation had a notably negative effect on the staff's performance. Additionally, the study highlights two themes that require prompt attention: the decline in the utilization of university resources essential for scientific research, and the lack of training to support the transition from face-to-face to online learning.

Theme 1: "The Ministry of Education's online learning legislation and procedures"

The replies of the study's subjects to questions on the pandemic's important effects on their academic and research activities revealed that the Ministry of Education's online learning laws and procedures were the most significant.

Participant (GR 3) indicated

"When we shifted to e-learning in Palestine, most of the ministry's plans and processes during the coronavirus outbreak harmed my classes".

For learners as well as lecturers, switching from conventional face-to-face instruction to online instruction may be a substantial adjustment. It frequently necessitates the adaptation of instructional techniques, the use of new technology, and the solving of any connection or accessibility challenges. Probably, the ministry's plans and processes did not adequately handle these problems, having a negative impact on their classes. These findings were similar to the findings of studies done by Basilaia and Kvavadze in 2020 and Eldokhny and Drwish in 2021, which suggested that the impact of using online courses as a result of the worldwide Corona outbreak was at a moderate level. Throughout the epidemic, the Ministry of Education also issued hundreds of regulations and decisions, the bulk of which restricted conferences and meetings at colleges and universities and stopped classes. Both academic achievement and the productivity of scientific research were negatively impacted by these kinds of behaviors.

Higher education officials must give instructors thorough instructions on teaching strategies, online learning environments, evaluation procedures, and other pertinent online education topics during emergencies like pandemics. This makes it easier for instructors to prepare their courses and interact with students since they have a better understanding of their demands.

Participant (SA 05) stated

"The Ministry's regulations regarding closing and reopening universities were perplexing and had a detrimental influence on my academic performance".

The study's author argues that numerous education ministries throughout the entire globe, including those in Palestine, enacted different instructions and regulations to stop the coronavirus from spreading within educational settings during the outbreak. By reducing face-to-face meetings, events, and social gatherings, these policies sought to emphasize safety and health for everyone. Although these efforts were required in terms of the health of the public, they also had some effects on scholastic achievement and the output of scientific research. Limitations on conferences, seminars, and meetings within colleges and universities probably reduced the chances for researchers and students to interact in person and work together on assigned tasks. This may have affected how ideas were shared, how study groups were formed, and how the academic atmosphere as a whole functioned.

Theme 2: "The decline in the utilization of university resources essential for scientific research".

Additionally, the utilization of libraries, language labs, and other assets necessary for academic research may have been reduced as a result of the shutdown of colleges and universities or constraints on their ability to operate. This constraint could have reduced production and slowed down the advancement of active research endeavors.

Another participant (MA 03) indicated

"There has been a major impact as a result of the brief shutdown of institutions, the postponement of classes, closure of libraries, and the cancellation of conferences, which reduced the prospects for publication and attendance at educational classes."

The investigator considers that this circumstance has made it more difficult for academics and researchers to share their work, participate in academic debates, and keep up with the most recent developments in their disciplines. Additionally, the lack of in-person meetings and networking possibilities has restricted options for cooperation and slowed down the development of scholarly work and information exchange in general.

Another lecturer (AS 02) indicates

"Due to the circumstances surrounding the pandemic and the fact that universities made a variety of options about how to teach, the method of instruction during the Coronavirus outbreak was unclear".

It might be difficult for lecturers to successfully execute educational instructions when they are given general, non-detailed textual instructions. Clear and detailed instructions are necessary for an e-learning transition to be effective and preserve the standard of education.

Educational institutions must give lecturers thorough instructions on teaching strategies, online educational environments, evaluation procedures, and other pertinent online learning topics throughout emergencies like pandemics. As a result, lecturers are better able to design their classes and interact with students since they have a better understanding of their demands and needs.

Theme 3: "The lack of training to support the shift from in-person to online learning".

Another theme stemmed from the analysis demonstrating the lack of training among some lecturers' students to switch to electronic learning.

Participant (YH 01) says

"Before employing online learning, it is necessary to undergo training".

It is critical to offer training before executing a shift to e-learning to guarantee a seamless transition. This training is required to provide instructors and learners with the skills as well as information needed to successfully employ and utilize online instructional tools and resources. The training program should include a variety of topics, such as how to navigate the online classroom, how to use technological resources for teaching and evaluation, how to facilitate virtual interactions, and how to ensure the confidentiality of information and online privacy and safety. Thus, before introducing distance learning in Palestine, appropriate training and preparation is necessary.

Participant (JN 05) mentions

"It is important to provide the staff with the necessary preparation and make sure of the equipment of e-learning".

Lecturers necessitate training to get acquainted with the online platforms and technologies that enable online learning. They ought to understand how to use the platforms, create online classrooms, distribute materials, administer exams, and successfully communicate with learners. Lecturers might find it difficult to adapt their instructional techniques to the online setting if they are not given adequate training. Furthermore, online education necessitates distinct instructional methods than regular classroom training. Lecturers need to be provided with online strategies for involving learners, supporting active learning, fostering dialogues, and delivering useful feedback.

Training can assist them in developing the skills required to provide a compelling online learning environment. Online education frequently makes use of a variety of electronic devices and technology. Instructors must be trained in technical skills such as diagnosing technological difficulties, using multimedia tools, and maintaining good interaction and accessibility throughout online lectures. Training assists instructors in surpassing technological obstacles and delivering flawless online training. Furthermore, teaching online courses necessitates good classroom administration abilities in an online context. Lecturers must be trained on how to manage online debates, resolve problems, develop a pleasant online learning setting, and guarantee learners' engagement and accountability. Lecturers also can benefit from training in order to preserve discipline and participation throughout online classes.

The study argues that by offering extensive training, educational institutions can provide instructors with the understanding as well as the skills required to successfully shift to online instruction. This will guarantee that they are ready to give outstanding educational classes and assist learners in succeeding in the digital arena, thereby increasing the efficiency of online learning in Palestine.

Discussion of the results

As part of the study, we investigated how Covid-19 affected the productivity and scientific output of staff at a university in Palestine. We found that the Ministry of Education's guidelines for online teaching, reduced access to university resources necessary for research, and insufficient training to adapt from in-person teaching to online teaching had a major impact on the performance of academic staff and their scientific output.

In this study, instructors faced considerable problems when they switched from conventional in-person instruction to e-learning. Throughout the pandemic, the ministry's policies and processes were judged to have a negative impact on classes, emphasizing the need for better direction and assistance for instructors in adjusting their teaching techniques and efficiently using online tools. The findings were similar to Chingara et al. (2021) study, which emphasized the minimal reality of online education and the mild impact of online classes as a result of the pandemic.

The Ministry of Education's procedures and directions to combat the Virus's widespread propagation inside higher education institutions, such as closure and activities and events constraints, had an impact on academic attainment and scientific research production. Direct contact, cooperation possibilities, and accessibility to research instruments were limited, stifling the interchange of thoughts and advancement of existing initiatives.

Additionally, the reduced access to university resources necessary for research and the indefinite shutdown of institutions, as well as the cancellation of lectures and conferences, drastically reduced prospects for publishing and attending scientific conferences. This result corroborates the findings of Suart et al. (2021) that the procedures for an

instructional online session are intricate and the communication is inconsistent, resulting in discomfort for participants who are receiving instruction from their homes. The participants experienced a higher level of discomfort due to the lack of a classroom environment. These results are significant for the educational sector as they emphasize the importance of clear communication and streamlined procedures for remote teaching and learning. Thus, researchers and lecturers alike have encountered difficulties in publishing their papers, participating in academic conversations, and maintaining up to keep up with the most recent developments in their areas of study. The interaction was hampered by a lack of actual gatherings and social events, which restricted scientific investigation and knowledge exchange.

The research results also emphasized the need to have specific and straightforward rules in place to reduce confusion throughout the shift to distance learning. Full instruction for lecturers, managers, and learners has been highlighted as critical to the effective shift to distance learning. Training should include a variety of topics, such as how to navigate the class via the internet, how to use electronic devices, how to facilitate online dialogues, and how to ensure the confidentiality of the information and online security. By providing lecturers with the required skills and information, they will be able to give adequate instruction while preserving an interesting online educational atmosphere. As per the findings of Almaghaslah et al. (2018), the efficient conversion of all classes to fully online mode necessitated the provision of online training to the lecturers. The training mainly focused on live-streaming and pre-recording classes, facilitating electronic conversations, and providing evaluations and feedback.

Finally, the study underlines the necessity of resolving the obstacles encountered throughout the pandemic, as well as the need for complete support, explicit directions, and proper training to guarantee a smooth switch to online learning. By implementing these strategies, colleges, and universities in Palestine can encourage lecturers and improve the standard of instruction in the electronic arena, thereby enhancing student learning and successful accomplishment.

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