# THE EQUITY OF PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES IN E-LEARNING INITIATIVES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

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## ABSTRACT

The slow adoption of e-learning in Higher education institutions (HEIs) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been attributed to many Information Technology (IT) success factors or factors related to the management of IT. While many researchers were able to identify legitimate factors that have an impact on the adoption of e-learning, the impact of the cultural factors has not been thoroughly studied. The HEIs in the UAE have implemented e-learning solutions developed in Western countries. When these e-learning solutions are used without any cultural pedagogical consideration, they are creating inequitable learning conditions for UAE students. This case study aimed to investigate the role of the western-oriented culture e-learning pedagogy on the adoption of e-learning among UAE female students. Data was collected qualitatively from interviews with colleagues who are using western-oriented cultural pedagogies in their e-learning classes. A pattern matching technique was used to analyse the collected data. The cultural constructs of the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) were used as a lens to guide this study. The findings revealed the impact of the western-oriented pedagogy of Blackboard Learn (BBLearn) on the slow adoption of e-learning in the researchers' department. This study confirmed the importance of the local UAE culture on the adoption of e-learning and calls for further studies in that domain.

## KEYWORDS

Technology Enhanced Learning, Technology Adoption Models, e-Learning, e-Learning Pedagogy, Adoption of e-Learning, Unified Theory of Acceptance

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, Higher Education institutions in the UAE have spent millions of dollars on e-learning initiatives in an attempt to leverage their benefits (Vrazalic, Macgregor, Behl, & Fitzgerald, 2009b). Noesgaard and Ørngreen (2015) listed 19 distinct criteria to investigate the effectiveness of e-learning initiatives. Learning outcomes, students' performance, adoption, and users' satisfaction are among the most commonly used criteria. The rate of adoption as described by the UTAUT is among the highest used criterion to judge the effectiveness of e-learning initiatives (Abbad et al., 2009; Buche et al., 2012; Mirza & Al-Abdulkareem, 2011; Moon & Kim, 2001; Wu et al., 2006). The rate of adoption of e-learning among UAE students is still slow when compared to the large investments and the number of e-learning courses in the UAE HEIs (Elango et al., 2008; Vrazalic et al., 2009a). This is confirmed by the existence of only one e-learning university offering accredited e-learning courses out of the total 76 licensed universities in the UAE by the ministry of higher education ("CAA," n.d.). The executives of the UAE HEIs are raising legitimate concerns about the reasons for this slow adoption of e-learning initiatives.

Many researchers have used information technology (IT) success factors to investigate the adoption of e-learning in HEIs (Abdullah & Ward, 2016; Kassim, Jailani, Hairuddin, & Zamzuri, 2012; Tarhini, Hone, Liu, & Tarhini, 2017; Y.-S. Wang, Wang, & Shee, 2007).While these studies have identified some legitimate factors that impact the adoption of e-learning in HEIs, we found that the cultural factors have been neglected (Capatîna, 2015). The current pedagogy in e-learning initiatives in HEIs in THE UAE is founded on western cultural values, language, orientations, and epistemology. This western-oriented culture of e-learning pedagogy creates inequitable learning conditions (Bennett, 2001) for many UAE female students at my department. In this paper,

I attempt to study the impact of this western-oriented culture e-learning pedagogy on the adoption of e-learning among UAE female students at the institution of the Higher education institutions (HEIs)  using a case study research methodology.

## 2.  THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The social influence construct of the UTAUT determinants of intention and usage provides a theoretical lens that was used to direct this case study. Based on the previous work of Keller et al. (2009) who studied the impact of national cultural on e-learning implementation, teaching and learning western cultural attributes were selected as part of the social influence construct to guide the development of this case study. The selected attributes are presented in Figures 1 and 2.
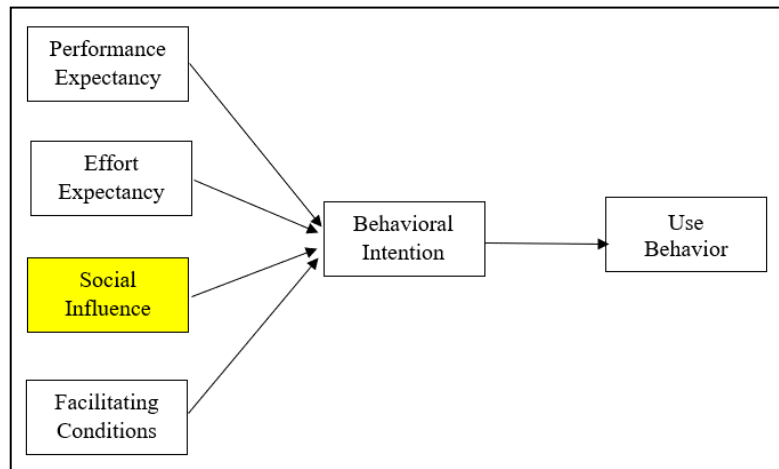


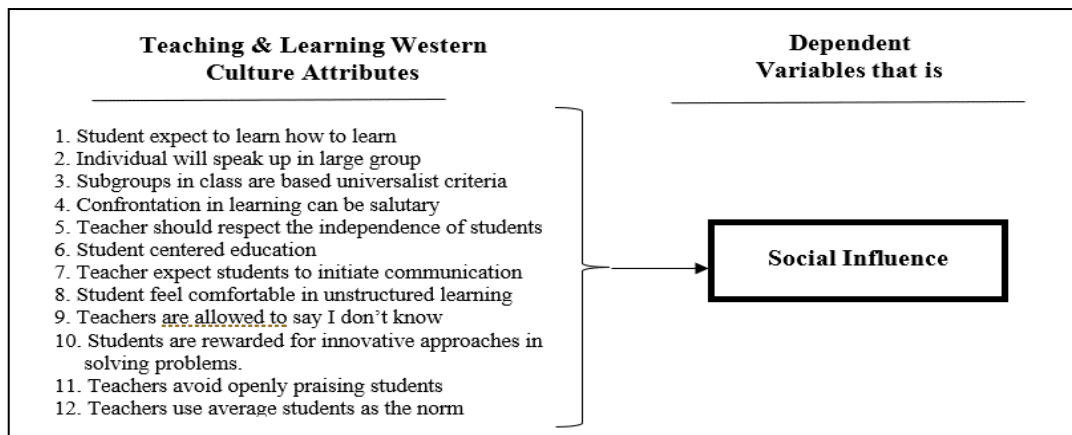Figure 1. Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)



Figure 2. Teaching and learning western culture attributes that are part of the social influence construct

### 2.1 Research Methodology

The research methodology used in this study is a case study. A case study research is considered as one of the most challenging research methodologies that can examine complex issues and contemporary real-life situations (Yin, 2013). Case studies allow researchers to examine cases where large samples of participants may not be easily available, and this is exactly the case of this research (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2013).

### 2.1.1 Data Collection

Data was collected from open-ended questions conducted in face to face interviews. Interviews are listed among the most important source for data in case studies (Padgett, 2003). Leedy and Ormrod (2010) stated that the most common types of interview questions are the open-ended and semi-structured ones. Three of my colleagues from my CIS department who are currently involved in developing courses using BBLearn agreed to participate in this research. The demographic profiles of the three participants referred to as P1, P2, and P3 are summarized in table 1 below:

Table 1. Summary of the sample demographics
[Note: This table summarizes the sample demographics of the 3 participants]

|  | Age | Gender | Total experience | BBL experience | Job Title | Department | Education |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **P1** | 57 | Female | 20 | 12 | Lecturer | CIS / Business Solution | MS |
| **P2** | 38 | Female | 9 | 5 | Assistant Professor | CIS / E-Commerce | PhD |
| **P3** | 62 | Female | 23 | 15 | Assistant Professor | CIS/ Business Solution | PhD |

The design of the 9 interview questions of this research were of open-ended and semi-structured types that allowed me to question participants about facts and their opinions and to follow up on certain answers. All interviews were completed in a maximum one hour. All data collected were text generated from the immediate transcription of the participants' answers. The 9 interview questions along with answers are listed in Appendix A.

## 2.2 Findings

This section reports the findings of the interviews. All participants answered the questions with full details. In these answers, culture was mentioned as one of the main reasons for the slow adoption.

The three participants confirmed that their e-learning pedagogy is a culturally western oriented one. The western e-learning pedagogy of BBLearn was mentioned by the three participants as one of the main challenges encountered by the female students at our college.

All participants revealed that students prefer to learn from their teachers the content of the courses and not to learn how to learn. Students are not comfortable to speak in large groups, and the three participants confirmed that subgroups are formed based on social and personnel criteria and not Universalist ones. Students don't enjoy confrontation during their learning and they look for certificates more than looking for competences. Please see figure 3 below.
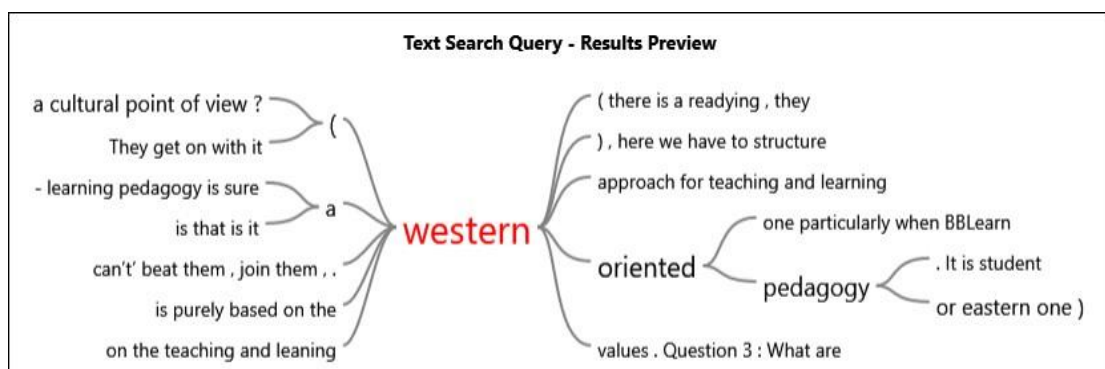


Figure 3. The text search results on the word Western and its relationship with the other words used in the answers of the first 4 questions

In particular, the three participants revealed that their students don't have the attributes of small power distance culture. While the participants did not elaborate on what attributes the students have, there is an agreement between the three participants that while teachers prefer student-centered education, students to find their own way, unstructured learning, innovative approach in solving problems, and other feminism attributes, the students' teaching and learning preferences are different. From the answers to these questions, it is clear that teachers prefer to use teaching and learning western culture attributes. However, students may not be comfortable to learn in such pedagogy. The three participants confirmed that some adjustments are needed in order to motivate their students to learn.

Overall, Participants' answers revealed that collectivist cultural aspects such as working in small groups and creating them randomly are suggested by the participants to be used in e-learning pedagogies. Avoidance of small power distance aspects is suggested by the participants to motivate students to engage in e-leaning classes. However, the three participants agree that with time, students should be taught using small power distance teaching and learning pedagogies. However, with time, students should be introduced to western e-learning pedagogies and encouraged to learn in such an environment. Overall, a balance should be achieved between the two.

## 3. CONCLUSION

This case study research confirmed the impact of the western culture e-learning pedagogy of BBLearn on the adoption of e-learning among the female students in our college. It revealed that this western pedagogy if used without any consideration to the teaching and learning local cultural differences will slow down the adoption of e-learning. The analysis of the participants' answers confirmed the lack of the teaching and learning western cultural attributes among the female students in our college. In this case study a pattern matching logic using the sufficient condition proposition argument was used as the main analytic technique (Yin, 2013). The lack of western cultural attributes among the female students confirmed the sufficient condition proposition. It revealed the existence of a negative effect of the western-oriented culture e-learning pedagogy on the adoption of eLearning among the female students at our college. This negative effect answered the first research question of this study. The effect of the cultural differences while using e-learning platforms is also noticed when students from the UAE study abroad in the western universities. For example, Al Hashlamoun (2021) listed some challenges that e-learners from the UAE face when enrolled in Western Universities. One of them is the irrelevance of Western universities' curricula to socio-cultural values of UAE.

Based on the findings, collectivist cultural activities and avoidance of small power distance attributes were among the aspects of the UAE culture that participants had suggested to be incorporated into their e-learning pedagogies to improve e-learning adoption among female students in my college.

In conclusion, this case study research study explored and investigated the role of the western-oriented culture e-learning pedagogy on the adoption of e-learning among female students in my college. Further research is needed to extend the findings of this study to other departments in my college and to other UAE tertiary institutions.

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