Education Leaders' Perception on the Effectiveness of Online Learning during the COVID -19 Crises in UAE Universities

Atef Abuhmaid[1*], Hani Jarrah[2]

[1] The Hashemite University, Department of Instruction and Curricula, Zarqa 13133, Jordan.
[2]AL Ain University, Al Ain, United Arab Emirates.

*Corresponding author: Atef Abuhmaid (Email: A_abuhmaid@yahoo.com)

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The current study aimed at exploring education leaders' perceptions of online learning in four universities in the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) during the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The study explored two dimensions of educational institutions' experiences during the pandemic: the effectiveness and educational impact of online learning.

Design/Methodology/Approach: To achieve the aim of the study, a 34-items survey was developed. The validity and reliability of the survey were ensured. A total of 113 education leaders across five UAE universities were surveyed in order to know their views on the effectiveness of online teaching during COVID-19 lockdowns.

Findings: The results of the study showed that despite the pressure, stress and uncertainty that accompanied the shift to online education as a result of the spread of coronavirus. University education leaders highly appreciated online teaching in both domains of the survey. However, the more experienced education leaders expressed positive views on the effectiveness of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, there were no significant differences in perceptions among education leaders based on gender, academic rank or position.

Conclusion: The current study explored education leaders' views on online learning. Apparently, addressing differences among education leaders can help in providing more effective and sound learning experiences.

Practical implications: The results of the study highlighted the crucial role of education leaders especially during times of crises and massive disruptions and the need to take into account the differences between their views. Therefore, the study suggests dealing with education leaders' differences carefully in order to deliver effective online learning.

Contribution to literature: The study provides a different perspective on online learning as it captures education leaders' perspectives on online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: *COVID-19, Education leaders, Higher education, Online learning effectiveness, Time of disruption, UAE universities.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In late December 2019 and early 2020, the world was stuck by the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving humanity with unprecedented challenges. The pandemic has propped and reshaped many of our long-established habits, behaviors and ways of living. In education, the massive disruption to educational norms required education systems to abandon face-to-face teaching and select the online world as part of the global efforts to contain and stop the spread of the virus (Duan & Zhu, 2020; Pan, Cui, & Qian, 2020; Tang et al., 2020). Educators, students and parents have shifted to the online world, posing real challenges to practices, beliefs and education-related mental models. The implications of COVID-19 pandemic worldwide had various economic, health, social and personal consequences (Pan et al., 2020; Satici, Saricali, Satici, & Griffiths, 2020; Yeasmin et al., 2020; Zhao, 2020; Zubascu, 2020). Universities worldwide experienced the pandemic's impact as they were suddenly asked to shift to online teaching in order to control the spread of the virus. Education leaders at universities face a new teaching environment as a result of the significant shift from traditional to online teaching. Thus, universities had to focus on delivering effective teaching during the exceptional time of the pandemic. They had to deal with various novel and unconventional educational issues related to the unpopular

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teaching model among many educators. They had to deal with pedagogical, managerial and infrastructure as well as psychological issues while maintaining their focus on effective teaching. The rapid and sudden shift to online teaching highlighted the importance of education leaders' crucial role as they play a key role in facilitating educators' jobs and students' accomplishments (Beaudoin, 2003). On the one hand, the role of educational leaders is felt by all stakeholders particularly during times of massive disruptions. On the other hand, education leaders oversee performance and achievement giving them a better position to see the full picture of the education landscape. Therefore, shedding light on their perspective can help us understand online education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally disrupted education systems worldwide since its first appearance in late December 2019. Due to the high risk of spreading coronavirus, lockdowns and restrictions have been imposed in order to stop the spread of the virus which has moved university education worldwide largely from campuses to homes (Satici et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2020; Yeasmin et al., 2020; Zubascu, 2020). Online learning adopted by universities was perceived as the only safe and possible choice to continue teaching and learning while lockdowns were imposed and the threat of the virus remained high. The disruption caused by COVID-19 broke the rhythms and routines, changed patterns and norms and exposed the best and worst of humanity and human institutions including universities and schools (Zhao, 2020). Thus, the abrupt disruption shocked many educational institutions and their stakeholders worldwide raising a high level of uncertainty and chaos. Numerous studies have examined how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected instructors and students (Dirani et al., 2020; Yeasmin et al., 2020). However, despite education leaders' key role during the online learning experience, little research has focused on their views. The massive disruption caused by the pandemic and the sudden shift to online learning highlighted new roles for educational leaders while at the same time, they had to tackle the overwhelming new responsibilities as a result of the pandemic which added burnout and overload to their traditional leadership roles (Dirani et al., 2020). Therefore, the crucial role of education leaders was further highlighted by the outbreak of the pandemic. Thus, grasping the perspective of education leaders on the educational impact and effectiveness of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic at universities across the United Arab Emirates was believed to be of great value which adds to a better understanding of the full picture.

2.1. Education Leaders

Education leaders hold a pivotal role in universities as they play a key role in providing effective teaching and learning (Huber, 2004). Thus, their role can help in dealing with the complexity of teaching and learning issues (Mulford, 2010). According to Beaudoin (2003) educational leaders have a crucial role in establishing attitudes and behaviors that foster the development of new changes including teachers and students. Therefore, the success and failure of online education during difficult times depends on online education leadership (Beaudoin, 2003).

Additionally, during crises and massive disruptions, education leaders can provide valuable perspectives on online learning that provide better insight into online learning experiences. They can provide valuable pieces to better respond to massive disruptions in education systems. According to Schrum and Barbara (2009) effective educational leaders are concerned with integrating modern technology into their institutions.

The unexpected COVID-19 crisis as well as the subsequent measures and restrictions forced education leaders to adopt and integrate digital tools.

2.2. Online Learning

In recent years, online learning has expanded due to the advancement of digital technologies and their wide spread use among teachers and students (Tang et al., 2020). Online learning is considered an innovative way to provide an interactive, learner-centered, well-designed, pre-designed, accessible environment through the internet at an appropriate time and place. The literature points to various benefits of adopting online learning especially in terms of flexibility (Keengwe & Kidd, 2010; Northrup, 2002) allowing students to make decisions about their own learning (Grieve, Kemp, Norris, & Padgett, 2017; Morrison, Steven, & Jerrold, 2011). In addition, it enables universities to be 'more responsive and relevant' to diverse student populations (Beaudoin, 2016). The pedagogical aspect of online learning has also been mentioned for its potential to encourage autonomous and independent students' learning (Grieve et al., 2017; Ituma, 2011). According to Tang et al. (2020) when compared to online learning, students preferred face-to-face interaction because they

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could ask questions and get answers. In addition, Toto and Nguyen (2009) found that the separation of the instructor from students in online learning is reported to cause a sense of isolation among students (Palloff & Pratt, 2007). The distance between teachers and students in online learning may also lead to frustration, boredom, overload and low course completion (AL-Takhayneh, Karaki, Alhwayan, Khader, & Altarawneh, 2022; Eunice & Cosmas, 2019; Govender & Govender, 2022; Hara, 2000; Northrup, 2002; Zubair, Akmal, & Laeeque, 2022).
Nevertheless, universities worldwide adopted online learning as precautions to contain the COVID-19 pandemic (Kenawy, 2020) and universities in the UAE were no exceptions.

2.3. Research Statement and Questions
The rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted traditional education to a large extent. Its impact has been felt by all participants in education worldwide. Education leaders were at the forefront of making decisions and arrangements swiftly in order to continue teaching and learning online from home. They were also in the front to answer questions from all participants and solve issues faced by instructors and students from a distance. Therefore, education leaders may be in a position to know the full picture of online learning during the crisis.
The current study seeks to understand the education leaders' perceptions of the educational impact and effectiveness of online learning during the COVID-19 crisis by answering the following research question:

- What are the perceptions of education leaders about the effectiveness of online learning during the COVID-19 crisis?
- Are there significant differences at the level (α=0.05) in education leaders' perceptions of the educational impact and effectiveness of online learning during the COVID-19 crisis based on gender, experience, position and academic rank?

3. METHOD

3.1. Participants
A total of 113 education leaders from five universities in the United Arab Emirates responded to an online survey. They were asked about their perceptions and experiences with online teaching during the COVID-19 crisis and lockdowns. Participants were both male and female leaders from universities across the United Arab Emirates. They were selected from several faculties. They held all academic ranks including assistant professor, associate professor, and full professor). The participants were also holding various leadership roles in their faculties including head of department, assistant or vice dean and dean. Figure 1 presents the characteristics of participants in the study according to their: (a) gender, (b) experiences, (c) academic ranks and (d) positions.

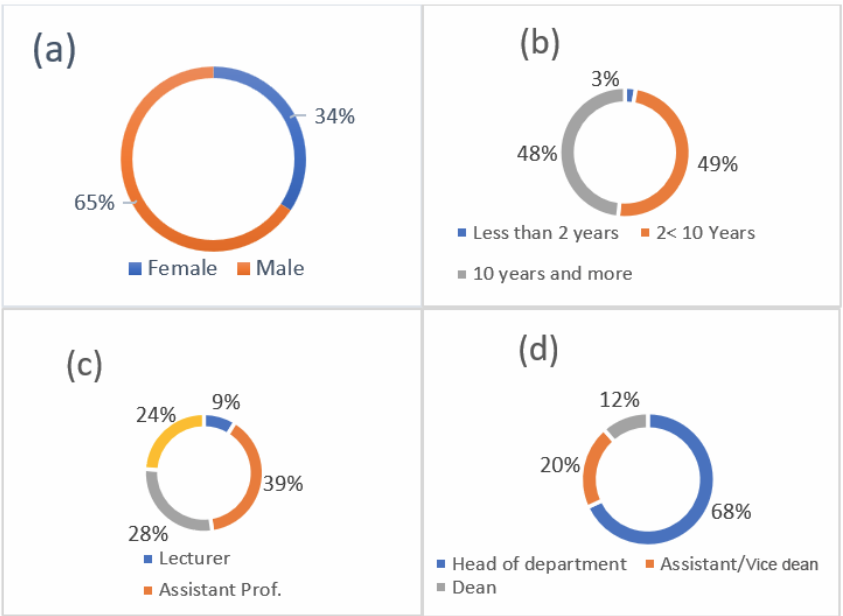

Figure 1. Characteristics of the respondents: a) gender, b) experience, c) academic rank and d) position.

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3.2. Research Instruments and Analysis

The researchers developed 34-items survey in order to collect data from participants. The survey included two sections: the demographic section and the main section which consisted of two domains: the effectiveness and educational impact of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistical methods were used to ensure the overall coefficient of reliability for the survey which was (0.87) on Cronbach's alpha and believed to be sufficient for conducting the current study. Means, standard deviations, t-test and the MANOVA analysis were used to answer the two research questions.

4. RESULTS

In order to answer the first research question which stated, 'What are the perceptions of education leaders on the effectiveness of online learning during the COVID-19 crisis?'. Statistical analysis was used in order to calculate means, standard deviations and levels which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean and standard deviations on the effectiveness of online learning.

Items	Mean	SD	Level
Online learning deals better with students' large numbers in classrooms.	4.24	0.957	High
It provides part-time students with more time to study.	4.18	0.975	High
It deals better with the shortage of academic staff.	4.12	1.036	High
It makes registration procedures more flexible.	3.89	1.03	High
It reduces costs compared to traditional learning.	3.89	1.145	High
It opens opportunities for new knowledge.	3.87	0.921	High
It provides students with self-assessment and instant feedback.	3.85	1.02	High
It promotes positive attitudes toward using digital technologies in learning.	3.85	1.046	High
It allows educators to diversify teaching methods.	3.81	1.187	High
The learning materials are easy to modify and develop.	3.76	1.096	High
It enables ongoing assessment of students.	3.75	1.13	High
It helps developing students' skills and competencies.	3.73	1.054	High
It fosters better student awareness.	3.65	1.109	Moderate
It fosters better student understanding.	3.65	1.171	Moderate
It improves interaction between instructors and students.	3.65	1.164	Moderate
It helps in identifying and dealing with students' issues.	3.63	1.087	Moderate
It enables differentiated curriculum design.	3.58	1.124	Moderate
It helps overcome various educational problems.	3.57	1.133	Moderate
It encourages better interaction among students.	3.54	1.165	Moderate
It can save effort compared to traditional learning.	3.4	1.473	Moderate
Total	3.78	1.101	High

Table 1 shows that education leaders in the United Arab Emirates' universities had an overall strong view of the effectiveness of online learning with an overall mean of 3.78 (SD=1.101). The item state that "Online learning" deals better with students' large numbers in classrooms' scored the highest mean of 4.24 (SD=0.957) and the second-highest item was 'It provides part-time students with more time to study' with a mean of 4.18 (SD=0.975). On the other hand, the two items with the lowest scores were ' It can save efforts compared to traditional learning' with a mean of 3.4 (SD=1.473) and the item 'It encourages better interaction among students' with a mean of 3.54 (SD=1.165).

Furthermore, participants were asked about the educational impact of online learning during the COVID-19 crisis when universities were asked to close and their responses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that education leaders in the United Arab Emirates' universities had strong views of the educational impact of online teaching with an overall mean of 3.75 (SD=1.13). This was apparent in their detailed responses to the individual items of the survey. The two items 'Online learning increased education leaders' overload' and 'We will continue to encourage teachers and students to use online learning even after the crisis halts' scored ' high' with means of 3.96 (SD=1.077) for each item. On the other hand, the two items that scored the least were 'Online learning helped students to become more academically ethical ' and 'Online learning improves students' problem-solving skills' had a 'moderate' level with means of 3.49(SD=1.226) and

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3.54(SD=1.195) respectively. However, the responses to all items ranged only between 'high' and 'moderate' which indicates the strong views of participants about the educational impact of online learning during the COVID-19 crisis.

To answer the second research question 'Are there significant differences at the level (α=0.05) in education leaders' perception on the educational impact and effectiveness of online learning during the COVID-19 crisis based on gender, experience, position, and academic rank?', means, standard deviations, a t- test and MANOVA are presented next.

Table 2. Mean, standard deviations and levels of the educational impact of online education.

Item	Level	Mean	SD
Online learning increased burden on the education leaders.	High	3.96	1.077
We will continue to encourage teachers and students to use online learning even after the crisis halts.	High	3.96	1.077
Online learning has enabled me to deal with teachers' and students' problems more efficiently.	High	3.93	1.201
Online learning technologies and channel facilitated more effective communication with other stakeholders.	High	3.88	1.028
Online learning helps students become life-long learners.	High	3.87	1.013
Online learning has increased transparency while teaching has moved outside of the classroom.	High	3.83	1.125
Online learning increased interaction (between students and between students and instructors).	High	3.79	1.168
I think online learning during the COVID-19 crisis has been successful.	High	3.71	1.17
Online learning helped me deal better with problems facing teachers and students.	High	3.7	1.202
Online learning motivates students to investigate and research.	Moderate	3.65	1.043
Online learning helps students receive large amounts of information quickly and easily.	Moderate	3.64	1.134
Online learning improves students' scientific thinking skills.	Moderate	3.61	1.168
Online learning improves students' problem-solving skills.	Moderate	3.54	1.195
Online learning helped students become more academically ethical.	Moderate	3.49	1.226
Total	High	3.75	1.13

4.1. Gender

The means and standard deviations of male and female leaders' perceptions of the effectiveness and impact of online learning during the COVID-19 lockdown on their personal and professional lives were calculated and presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Means and standard deviations of the UAE education leaders' perceptions on effectiveness and educational impact domains of online learning during the COVID-19.

Domains	Sex	N	Mean	SD
Effectiveness	Male	74	3.85	0.745
	Female	39	3.62	0.897
Educational impact	Male	74	3.85	0.777
	Female	39	3.56	0.940

Table 3 shows apparent differences between the mean scores of female and male teachers' perceptions on the effectiveness and educational impact domains of online learning during the COVID-19. Apparently, male education leaders had stronger views on the effectiveness and impact of online learning in both domains with mean scores of 3.85 (SD=0.745) and 3.85(SD=0.777) on the effectiveness and educational impact domains respectively. On the other hand, female education leaders had mean scores of 3.62(SD=0.897) and 3.56(SD=0.940) on the same domains.

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Table 4. T-Test comparison of gender differences.

Domains	F	Sig.	T	df
Effectiveness	3.339	0.070	1.451	111
Educational impact	2.715	0.102	1.710	111

In order to test the significance of the differences between male and female education leaders on the effectiveness and impact of online learning, a t- test was carried out and presented in Table 4.
Table 4 shows no statistically significant differences in perceptions between male and female education leaders in both domains. For the effectiveness domain, the t value was 1.451 (p=0.70) and for the educational impact of online learning the t value was 1.710 (p=0.102) indicating that male and female education leaders had similar views on the effectiveness and impact of online learning during the COVID-19 crisis and lockdowns.

4.2. Experience

According to their experience, education leaders' perceptions on the effectiveness and educational impact of online learning during the COVID-19 crisis and lockdowns were calculated and presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Means and standard deviations of education leaders' perceptions on the effectiveness and educational impact of online learning according to their experience.

Domains	Experience	N	Mean	SD
	Less than 2 years	3	2.66	0.663
Effectiveness	2 - Less than 10 years	55	3.85	0.865
	10 Years and more	55	3.76	0.708
	Total	113	3.78	0.804
	Less than 2 years	3	2.85	1.084
Educational impact	2 - Less than 10 years	55	3.79	0.903
	10 Years and more	55	3.76	0.756
	Total	113	3.75	0.843

Table 5 shows apparent significant differences related to education leaders' experiences and their perceptions of both the effectiveness and educational impact domains of online learning during COVID-19. In the effectiveness domain, the lowest mean was 2.66 (SD=.663) for the ' less than 2 years' group while the highest mean was 3.85 (SD=.865) for the '2- less than 10 years' group. Furthermore, in terms of the educational impact of online learning, the ' less than 2 years' group had the lowest mean of 2.85 (SD=1.084) and the highest mean was 3.79 (SD=.903) for the group '2-Less than 10 years.'
However, multivariate tests were used to test the significance of the differences in results which showed no significant differences between education leaders' perceptions of the effectiveness and educational impact of online learning during the COVID-19 in respect to their experience (Wilks' Lambda=0.934, F=1.885, p=0.114). Table 6 presents a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) of the two domains of the survey.

Table 6. MANOVA for differences between education leaders' perceptions on the effectiveness and educational impact of online learning.

Variable	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Effectiveness	4.062	2	2.031	3.263	0.042
Educational impact	2.502	2	1.251	1.781	0.173
Effectiveness	68.466	110	0.622		
Educational impact	77.266	110	0.702		
Effectiveness	1687.192	113			
Educational impact	1671.681	113			

Table 6 shows the MANOVA results for differences in education leaders' perceptions which shows that there are no statistically significant differences in education leaders' perception of online during the COVID-19 lockdowns in terms of their experiences on the educational impact with an F value of 1.781 and p=.173. However, there were statistically significant differences in the effectiveness domain with an F value of 3.263 and p=.042. In order to examine to which, group the differences belong, Scheffe's test was used and the results are presented in Table 7.

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Table 7 shows apparent significant differences existed between education leaders who had 'less than 2 years of experience' when compared with the leaders group who had '2 to less than 10 years' of experience for the benefit of the latter group. However, there were no significant differences when compared with the '10 years and more' of experience group. This result may indicate that education leaders with more experience tend to have stronger views of the effectiveness of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic as they become more effective at handling various tasks simultaneously when compared with the less experienced education leaders who might struggle to do the same.

Table 7. Scheffe's test on the comparison of teachers' perception of flipped learning regarding teaching subject variable on the teacher role dimension.

Dependent variable	(I) Experience	(J) Experience	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. error	Sig.	95% Confidence interval	
						Lower bound	Upper bound
Effectiveness	Less than 2 years	2 < 10 years	-1.1906*	0.46775	0.043	-2.3513	-0.0299
		10 Years and more	-1.0970	0.46775	0.068	-2.2577	0.0637
	2 < 10	10 Years and more	0.0936	0.15044	0.824	-0.2797	0.4670

Note: * p < 0.1.

4.3. Position

In order to examine the perceptions of education leaders on the effectiveness and educational impact of online learning according to their position (head of the department, dean assistant or vice dean and dean), means and standard deviations were calculated and presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Means and standard deviations of education leaders' perceptions on the Effectiveness and Educational impact of online learning according to their position.

Position	Mean	SD	N
Head of department	3.73	0.843	77
Dean assistant/vice dean	3.68	0.749	23
Dean	4.22	0.512	13
Total	3.78	0.804	113
Head of department	3.70	0.873	77
Dean assistant/vice dean	3.64	0.816	23
Dean	4.24	0.539	13
Total	3.75	0.843	113

Table 8 shows apparent significant differences between education leaders' positions on their perceptions of online learning. University deans had the strongest views on online learning during the COVID-19 crisis in both domains of the survey; the effectiveness domain with a mean of 4.22(SD=0.512) and the educational impact domain with a mean of 4.24(SD=0.539). However, the dean assistant or vice dean had the lowest mean in both domains with a mean of 3.68(SD=0.749) for the effectiveness domain and a mean of 3.64(SD=0.816) for the educational impact of online learning during the crisis.

Table 9. MANOVA for differences between education leaders' perceptions on the Effectiveness and Educational impact of online learning according to their position.

Dependent variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Effectiveness	2.930	2	1.465	2.316	0.103
Educational impact	3.541	2	1.770	2.555	0.082
Effectiveness	69.597	110	0.633		
Educational impact	76.227	110	0.693		
Effectiveness	1687.192	113			
Educational impact	1671.681	113			
Effectiveness	72.528	112			
Educational impact	79.768	112			

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However, in order to test the significance of the differences in the results, multivariate tests were used which showed no significant differences between education leaders' perceptions on the effectiveness and educational impact of online learning during COVID-19 with respect to their positions (Wilks' Lambda=.955, F=1.275, p=.281). Table 9 presents a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) of the two domains.
Table 9 presents MANOVA results for differences between education leaders' perceptions according to their leadership positions. The results show no statistically significant differences between education leaders' perceptions in the effectiveness and educational impact domains of their views of online teaching during the COVID-19 lockdowns based on their academic positions. The results show that the F value for the effectiveness domain was 2.316 (p=.103) and the F value for the educational impact domain was 2.555(p=0.082). Thus there were no significance if the differences according to the education leaders' positions at their universities.

4.4. Academic Rank

The study also examines education leaders' perceptions on the effectiveness and educational impact of online learning as they ascend the academic ranking scale (Lecturer, Assistant Prof., Associate Prof. and Full Prof.). Therefore, the means and standard deviations of education leaders' perceptions according to their academic rank were calculated and presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Means and standard deviations of education leaders' perceptions on the Effectiveness and Educational impact of online learning according to their position.

	Rank	Mean	SD	N
	Lecturer	3.86	0.757	10
Effectiveness	Assistant Prof.	3.88	0.890	44
	Associate Prof.	3.70	0.631	32
	Full Prof.	3.67	0.874	27
	Total	3.78	0.804	113
	Lecturer	3.60	0.609	10
	Assistant Prof.	3.86	0.935	44
Educational impact	Associate Prof.	3.67	0.714	32
	Full Prof.	3.71	0.919	27
	Total	3.75	0.843	113

Table 10 shows apparent significant differences between education leaders' academic rank variables and their perceptions of the effectiveness and educational impact of online learning. Assistant Professors had the strongest views of online learning during the COVID-19 on the effectiveness and educational impact domains with a mean of 3.88 (SD=.890) for the effectiveness domain and a mean of 3.86 (SD=.935) for the educational impact domain. However, full professors had the lowest mean for the effectiveness domain with a mean of 3.67(SD=.874) while lecturers had the least mean of 3.60(SD=.609) in the educational impact domain. Wilks' Lambda was used to determine whether the differences between education leaders were significant. (Wilks' Lambda=0.882, F=11.341, p=.510). The results show no significant differences between education leaders' views of online learning based on their academic ranking. Table 11 presents a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) of the two domains.

Table 11. MANOVA for differences between education leaders' perceptions on the Effectiveness and Educational impact of online learning according to their academic ranking.

Source	Dependent variable	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Rank	Effectiveness	1.036	3	0.345	0.526	0.665
	Educational impact	1.011	3	0.337	0.466	0.706
Error	Effectiveness	71.492	109	0.656		
	Educational impact	78.756	109	0.723		
Total	Effectiveness	1687.192	113			
	Educational impact	1671.681	113			
Corrected Total	Effectiveness	72.528	112			
	Educational impact	79.768	112			

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Table 11 shows no statistically significant differences between education leaders' perceptions of online during the COVID-19 crisis in terms of their academic ranking in both domains. The F value in the effectiveness domain was 0.526 (p=.665) and 0.466 (p=.706) in the educational impact domain.

5. DISCUSSION

Education leaders at universities had strong views about the impact and effectiveness of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This indicates that they are satisfied with the impact and effectiveness of online learning as it appeared to provide an effective teaching and learning environment for teachers and students during the crisis. The promising characteristics and potentials of online learning empower teaching and learning with opportunities in terms of flexibility (Grieve et al., 2017; Keengwe & Kidd, 2010; Northrup, 2002) and ensure the continuity of education during times of disruption (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Faucher, 2018). Therefore, it is believed that education leaders' positive perceptions of online learning are supported by earlier findings with respect to the effectiveness and educational impact of online learning. Nevertheless, the positive perceptions did not eliminate the issues associated with the transformation of education to become completely online.

Education leaders pointed out that online learning did not save efforts but rather it increased their burden. Apparently, this can be linked to the stress and pressure they went through during the COVID-19 lockdown as they had to deal, from home, with their academic and administrative responsibilities as well as the mental stress caused by the crisis. Clearly, professional responsibilities often clashed with other personal and social responsibilities. However, there were no significant differences between male and female education leaders in their views of the effectiveness and impact of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Education leaders with more experience also tended to have stronger views on the effectiveness of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic as they became better at handling various tasks simultaneously when compared with the less experienced ones. The less experienced education leaders may become overwhelmed by the variety and amount of the tasks losing focus and overlooking the benefits of online teaching during the COVID-19. They tend to be more preoccupied with basic duties mainly managerial (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

However, the results showed no significant differences between education leaders in their views of online learning's educational impact or effectiveness based on their sex, academic ranking or position. This can point to the nature of the sudden shift to online learning by universities across the UAE eliminating the differences between them as everyone was caught off guard by the responses and measures taken to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

6. CONCLUSION

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis was felt by all educators worldwide. Education leaders were among those whose professional and personal lives were reshaped and redesigned as a result of the COVID-19 impact. However, the transformation of education by the crisis was successfully adapted by flexible education systems by providing an online learning environment for both students and educators. Therefore, the current study examined the perceptions of education leaders of the online learning environment in terms of its effectiveness and educational impact which are frequently overlooked.

As education leaders oversee different layers of the education system, they can bring a different perspective to the online learning experience during the COVID-19 crisis which might give better insight into the whole experience. Their perspective on online learning during the massive disruption to education systems caused by COVID-19 precautions can provide valuable insights into how to respond in similar situations.

The COVID-19 pandemic eliminated many differences between people including education leaders. Everyone was facing similar situations such as working from home having to deal with similar educational problems, lockdowns, fear, anxiety and uncertainty. Nevertheless, experience, as shown in the current study is a factor that can be relied on when crises strike educational institutions as education leaders with more experience had different views on online learning.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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Both authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study.

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