NATURE OF TEACHER-STUDENTS' INTERACTION IN ELECTRONIC LEARNING AND TRADITIONAL COURSES OF HIGHER EDUCATION- A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Present paper explores differential teacher-student interaction in electronic learning (el) and in face to face traditional learning (tl) courses at higher education. After thorough study literature available and getting information from university teachers teaching el and tl courses about the nature of teacher-students interaction in both modes it was found that teacher-students interaction is significantly different in el and tl higher education courses. There are fewer opportunities for developing students' moral judgment, critical thinking, communication and interpersonal skills in teacher-students interaction in el courses at higher education level.

Courses of tl do provide opportunities to students for developing their developing moral judgment, critical thinking, communication and interpersonal skills through face to face interaction with the teacher in direct communication and group discussions on past and current issues along with learning achievement. Arrangement for conducting local educational conference for some e. courses may arrange and participation in such conferences for e. learners may be made mandatory for qualifying a particular degree. El course may be redesigned and practical activities may be incorporate for developing in students' moral judgment, critical thinking, communication and interpersonal skills.

Keywords: Electronic learning; traditional learning; courses, moral judgment; critical thinking; communication and interpersonal skills; students, higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Electronic learning or E. learning (el) is the modern method of obtaining education. The American Society for Trainers and Development (ASTD) defines e learning as "instructional content or learning experiences delivered or enabled by electronic technology" (www.IsoDynamic.com retrieved on May 26, 2010). E-learning can be delivered synchronously.

Synchronous e- learning takes place "live"--a virtual classroom of sorts. It may feature real-time, Web-based videoconferencing, audio conferencing with presentation material, and on-line chat (SCORM, Version 1.1, and Advanced Distributed Learning Initiative). Currently there are various academic and professional courses in which one can enroll one self.

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These courses are presented in the form of e. lectures, CDs (Compact Disks), online education, web- based lectures, e-mail etc. students who are enrolled. Learning courses need not to attend regular classes in any institution.

E-learning can be considered to be highly related to learning and teaching as Jain et al. (2002) observe. The difficulty is what terminology to use in order to refer to these new forms of education. The term *mixed-mode* is commonly used to describe a blend of face to face and distance education that does not necessarily have a high technology component. Some prefer the term *resource-based learning* (Nichols 2001). Others, particularly in industry-based training, use the term-blended *learning*. Weller (2002) provides a helpful framework for categorization of such courses based on the extent to which they are didactic/constructivist and make use of high/low levels of technology. There is no face-to-face interaction of the teacher and students. Each course has its own package. Some times they are presented on form of Modules. The students may enroll themselves in these courses each course has its own objectives and fee package. These courses are flexible in the sense that if some students has any problem and is unable to continue it, then she/he has an opportunity to several requests for seize of his/her courses for a particular time period. When it is feasible for him/her then she/he may request of continuation of the program.

Generally different terms are used for e. learning like online learning, distance learning, web based learning, video conferencing, etc.

"E. Learning — the use of various technological tools that are either Web-based, Web-distributed or Web-capable for the purposes of education.

Online learning — this term describes education that occurs only through the Web, that is, it does not consist of any physical learning materials issued to students or actual face-to-face contact. Purely online learning is essentially the use of eLearning tools in a distance education mode using the Web as the *sole* medium for all student learning and contact.

Mixed-mode/blended/resource-based learning -these terms interchangeably describe an approach to education that combines face to face and distance approaches to education in that an instructor or tutor meets with students (either in a face to face mode or through a technological means) and a resource-base of content materials and learning activities is made available to students. In addition, some e. Learning approaches might be used "(www.olinelearning.net retrieved on May 02, 2010).

Education is a training process through which individuals gain training and information about the desirable modes of behavior and thinking. Education can be understood as "activity undertaken or initiated by one or more agents that is designed to effect changes in the knowledge, skill, and attitudes of individuals, groups, or communities" (Knowles et al., 1998). Learning is defined as dealing with some idea or skill and it brings change in behavior that is observable. Learning comprises "the act or process by which behavioural change, knowledge, skills, and attitudes are acquired" (Boyd et al., 1980). How can change in behavior be observed in e. learning courses? The change may be to memorization of some facts only. No machine can be replacement of a teacher's role in developing moral judgment in students. E. Learning involves the use of a number of technological tools that can be applied in various contexts; it is not a distinctive educational system in itself. Therefore e. Learning cannot be compared with face-to-face delivery or distance education because it can be used within either of these models. Instead, e Learning is a means by which these education models can be implemented.

This hypothesis is confirmed by institutions such as the Open University, which uses e. learning as an adjunct to its "supported open learning" model (Eisenstadt and Vincent, 2000).
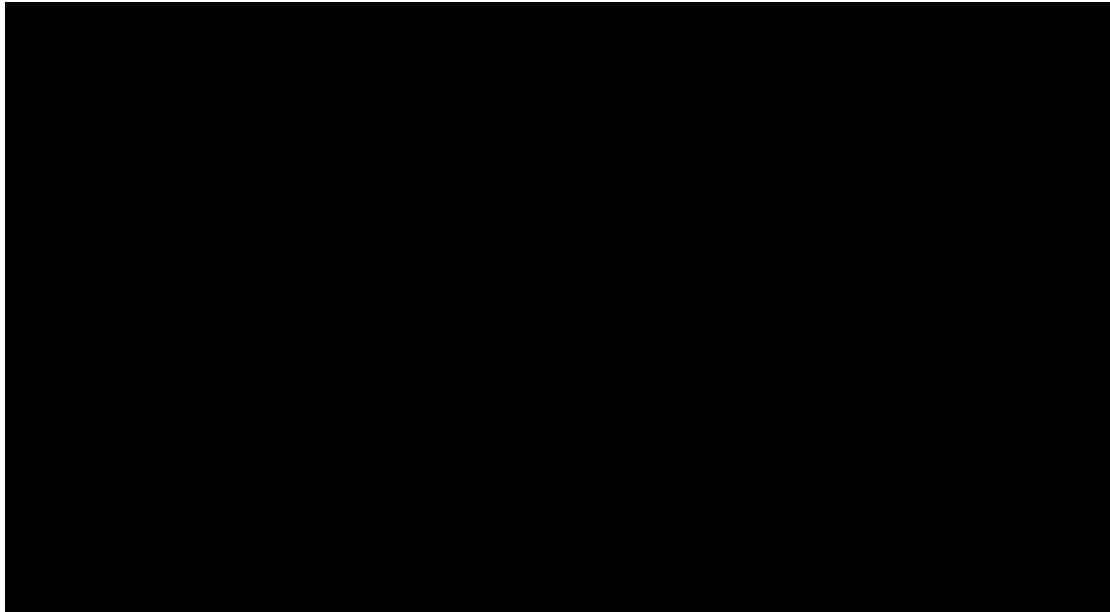
In the fast changing world of today learning cannot be delimited to traditional classroom or traditional courses only. Now making it borderless has broadened the dimensions of learning.

The body of literature appears fragmented and there are few common terms used consistently. It is unlikely that el practice will continue to evolve unless the theoretical underpinnings of el are explored and debated, providing a wider platform and a common philosophy for e. Learning development.

There are few examples of academic literature specifically concerned with e. learning theory and unfortunately the use of technology in education has tended to be technology-led rather than theory-led (Ravenscroft 2001). It is observed by Watson (2001) "the cart has been placed before the horse." It is also possible to apply different education philosophies using e. Learning. Students can be encouraged to construct their own knowledge using technology tools, and those same tools can also be used to present materials that deliberately lead students to pre-determined conclusions in highly structured ways. The use of technology in education has a significant history. Initially, computers were applied in behaviourist modes in accordance with Skinner's work (Ravenscroft 2001), which emphasized the teacher's control over what is learned and how it is to be learned. More recently, emphasis is on the constructivist use of technologies, which provide students with opportunities to construct their own understandings. Skinner's behaviourism, Piaget's cognitive constructivism and Vygotsky's social constructivism can all be facilitated through e. Learning.

The present study was a theoretical review of available literature and of the situation. The current research was delimited to evaluating nature of teacher-student interaction with reference to developing moral judgment, critical thinking, communication and interpersonal skills in electronic learning (el) and face to face traditional learning (tl) courses at higher education level.

The researchers used brushers of universities in Pakistan through internet research resources, books, research articles, consulting and discussion views with teachers of face to face traditional courses and teachers of virtual/ electronic learning and her own experiences in the field of teaching, research, course designing and interacting with students regarding e. learning courses and students. Receiving higher education degree through electronic learning means has certainly made higher education accessible for every one with out any type of discrimination. Consequently it has also given rise to problems relating to students' moral judgment, and development of students' critical thinking, communication and interpersonal skills enrolled in e. learning courses.

The present research paper was designed to explore the nature of teacher- students' interaction in electronic learning courses of higher education in developing moral judgment, critical thinking, communication and interpersonal skills students.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study was designed to achieve the following objectives:

> ➢ to compare the nature of teacher-students' interaction in electronic learning and traditional courses in developing moral judgment among students of higher education.
> ➢ to determine difference of nature of teacher-students' interaction in electronic learning and traditional courses in developing critical thinking among students of higher education.
> ➢ to contrast the nature of teacher-students' interaction in electronic learning and traditional courses in developing communication and interpersonal skills, among students of higher education.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

> ➢ What is the nature of teacher-students' interaction in electronic learning courses and traditional courses in developing moral judgment among students of higher education?
> ➢ what is the nature of teacher-students' interaction in electronic learning courses and traditional courses in developing critical thinking among students of higher education?
> ➢ what is the nature of teacher-students' interaction in electronic learning courses and traditional courses in developing communication and interpersonal skills, among students of higher education?

Research Question No. 1:
What Is the Nature of Teacher-Students' Interaction
In Electronic Learning Courses and Traditional
Courses in Developing Moral Judgment Among Students Of Higher Education?
The nature of teachers-students interaction in e. learning is of remote and virtual. Students of e. learning definitely are deprived from among practical life experiences. There are research evidences that there exists a significant different of moral reasoning between students who get education through e. learning and between those who get education through traditional way. Kuldeep Nagi (2006) concludes that digital content and Internet applications have transformed teaching and learning but they have also created new issues around ethics and accountability. The end results of the e. learning programs have created both advocates and detractors.

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Some experts say that the successful utilization of e. learning programs appears to hinge primarily on the trust and honesty of the targeted remote learners.

Another ethic dilemma associated with e. learning is that it opens up wide opportunities for learners to copy from literature available on internet and such type of practice is not only a crime and a moral sin but it also prevents the intellectual growth and creativity. Furthermore it is conducive for developing habits of cheating. A term used for literary cheating is called plagiarism. As Bowyer (2001, p.267) explains that plagiarism is the taking of the ideas, writings, drawings, words, or other similar intellectual property created by others and presenting it as your own. It is generally not a legal issue, like copyright infringement, but it is an ethical one. For example, you can reuse writings in the public domain without worrying about the legal problem of infringing a copyright, but presenting them as your own without proper credit to their true origin is an act of plagiarism and plagiarism is unethical.

Austin and Brown (1999) also maintain that plagiarism has become easier for students in two ways: "word processing programs allow students to easily "cut and paste" information from the Internet or other electronic media to develop a paper that appears to be original work" and "students' use of Internet information that may be unavailable in traditional sources makes documenting academic dishonesty more difficult to faculty.

When a person becomes competent in use of computer then he starts misusing his knowledge and skills and gets involved in such crimes like piracy (illegal copying of software) hacking (scratch software systems of organizations) and various illegal functions are performed on computer and thus caused the moral values of the society. Just to damage others computers, it can said that just for enjoyment, some computer experts send harmful virus on net for the purpose of blocking software systems.

Then there are restrictions in introducing programs that are helpful for creating awareness about social and moral values among students. Just as Resnick (2000) points out that organized extracurricular activities cannot be replicated online, ant that these activities "have been a crucial component of a traditional college education" which "create social capital, prepare students for civic engagement and combat the self-absorbed individualism which undermines democratic society."

In actual and real classroom setting when students discuss on various moral and social issues with their teachers, this thing enhances their moral understanding and enables them to relate learning with their real life situations.

As e. learning courses are designed for such students who are unable to attend regular classes. These courses are mostly for life long learning needs of students. Consequently in selection and construction of courses the needs of students are given importance. It may be called work demand driven courses. Generally students who are engaged with some sort of work already and they take seek admission in e. learning course in order to enhance their educational and professional standard. It can be said that e. learning courses are selected and constructed on work demand basis of the current times/needs and moral or social values are not given due consideration.

In traditional classroom setting the teacher and students are having face to face discussion and explanations and wherever needed the teacher keeping in view the internal and external classroom environment alters and adapts his teaching methodology according to students needs and tries to make it effective and learnable for students. These types of elements are to great extent missing in e. learning.

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Therefore Eaton (2000) observes that the dispersion of faculty and students in distance education may lead to a loss of "collegiality and shared governance," which she considers a core academic value. We observe that e. learning students' situations and limitations, it is obvious e. learning students remain deprived from class activities that are helpful for development of moral reasoning through practical application of knowledge. Their thinking level is limited, as they have been no exposed towards broad thinking and reasoning. The material that is available is shape of electronic resources that lacks moral aspects.

Research Question No. 2:
What Is the Nature Of Teacher-Students' Interaction
In Electronic Learning Courses and Traditional Courses
In Developing Critical Thinking Among Students Of Higher Education?
Generally e. learning courses are designed for remote students therefore normally there is no direct and face-to-face teacher- student interaction. If students have some problems they can send electronic mail (e. Mail) to their teachers or can online chat with their teacher.

Students learn from online lecture or using other electronic resources like CDs, DVDs, web based learning, etc. It is acknowledged that e. learning changes the role of the instructor, particularly in online environments (Coppola et al 2002) and in blended modes however it is argued that this represents a more developed form of existing instructional methodologies.

If electronic learning is a means to education, then it can be applied in accordance with various pedagogical techniques. Weller (2002) lists the following as pedagogies:

> - Constructivism
> - Resource based learning
> - Collaborative learning
> - Problem based learning
> - Narrative based teaching
> - Situated learning.

Definitely there are many aspects of students' personality and thinking that can be developed, reshaped and remodeled through direct teacher –student and students-students' interaction and communication. For example they gain confidence in classroom environment when they discuss with each other and with the teacher, their way of expression, emotional stability, self- confidence, communication and interpersonal skills and moral reasoning are improved. There are many social and moral values that students learn through interaction with the students and with teachers. Students' in general regular stream have opportunities to discuss with their teachers different issues. Such type of class constructive discussion and communication with the teacher are conducive for developing students' critical thinking.

Research Question No. 3:
What Is the Nature of Teacher-Students' Interaction
In Electronic Learning Courses and Traditional Courses
In Developing Communication and Interpersonal Skills,
Among Students of Higher Education?
In teaching learning process teacher is given a pivotal status as it is the teacher who is responsible not only of the learning achievement of students, it is the teacher who is consider responsible for over all personality development of students.

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However, it is possible only if students' and teachers have direct, face to face live conversation, discussion and sharing of ideas. We find no such opportunities for e. learners to develop in them critical thinking about issues and problems.

We are familiar with the term-hidden curriculum. It is actually based on all types of moral and social values that are value by the society that we have in educational institution in shape of hidden curriculum. Therefore at school, college or university every teacher takes care of hidden curriculum. These moral and social values are learnt practically through interaction and communication with the teachers as well as within the climate of the educational institution. However this aspect of curriculum is to great extent missing in e. learning courses hence e. students miss the important objective of education.

Therefore it can be said that there is significant difference between students' moral reasoning enrolled through e. learning courses difference and students who are enrolled through general stream of education.

As result the e. learner has degree of higher level but when he enters the world of work he may find a lot of deficiencies in his personality. He may have enough knowledge of theory but unable to implement theory on suitable practical environment. Whereas in regular class the students have to perform some project/some practical task in order to achieve his degree. He has to work in team and get opportunities to have experience of real life experiences wherein e. learning students is deprived of such benefits. From the aspect of real life experiences and development of moral reasoning e. learner gets a great part of his education that may be called imaginary.

As a conclusion in the era of 21st century Many controversial moral issues can be resolved or corrected through mutual dialogue among students and the teacher. Practical aspect of moral judgment was found missing in e. learning courses.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF THE SITUATION

The followings are some suggestion for making some improvement regarding moral aspect of e. learning:

> - At least 50% el courses may be reserved for internship in the organization where students may have opportunities to directly interaction with other people. Arrangement for conducting local educational conference for specific el courses mandatory for el students may be designed for direct interaction and discussions with seniors. It will raise quality of e. learning. More researchers may be organized to for addressing problems like self-concept development, emotional intelligence, communication and interpersonal skills in students of el courses.
> - Electronic tests may be developed to check from time to time moral concern of students of e. learning, practical activities may be designed that are helpful for overall personality development of learners, at least 50% course may be reserved for internship or field work in the organization where students' acquired degree or knowledge can be applied.
> - E. learning courses may include contents to address moral judgment of electronic students so that he/she proves to be as successful person in his/her practical life as students of regular institutions.

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- Material relating to universal moral values may be incorporated in course of e. learning to check cyber crime.
- Arrangement for conducting local educational conference for specific e. course may design and attending and participating of such conferences for specific e. courses learners may be made mandatory for qualifying a particular degree. It will raise quality of e. learning.
- More researchers may be organized to for addressing and managing students' self-confidence, emotional stability, communication and interpersonal skills in e. learning courses in addition to moral judgment.
- Arrangement for conducting local educational conference for specific e. course may designed and attending and participating of such conferences for specific e. courses learners may be made mandatory for qualifying a particular degree. It will raise quality of e. learning.
- In eLearning courses online discussions may be incorporated as an essential element and it would be equivalent of class discussions in a face-to-face traditional classroom. Discussions might be designed for one of the following purposes (Painter, et al., 2003; and Goodyear et al 2003, cited in Grogan, 2005):
    - Provide an open question and answer forum
    - Encourage critical or creative thinking
    - Reinforcing domain or procedural processes
    - Achieve social interaction and community building-have the students get to know each other personally and intellectually
    - Validating experiences
- Supporting students in their own reflections and inquiries.
- In conventional courses students learnt content through direct and face-to-face interaction with their respective teachers. Teachers' concern not only is to teach the content of their courses but they certainly try to develop the moral reasoning of their students in positive direction according to values that are upheld by the particular society.
- A major drawback with designing for content as a priority is that it focuses attention on what the faculty member is doing, thinking and talking about and not on the interaction and engagement of students with the core concepts and skills of a course. The new focus on learners encourages a focus on learners as a priority.
- The new focus on the student is to develop a habit of asking, what is going on inside the student's head? How much of the content is being integrated into their knowledge base? How much of the content and the tools can he/she actually use? What are students thinking and how did they arrive at their respective positions? (Retrieved on May 15, 2010 from www.desingingfor).
- After 1995 a lot of improvements have been done in the filed of e. learning but there is a lot to be done in this filed especially in developing and designing programs that are conducive for enhancement of moral reasoning in students of e. learning courses.
- Of course in the fast world of 21st century E. learning is the best solution to keep place with the world and to meet the increasing needs of large quantity of learners and to provide equal access to education in the society. At the same time making e. learning compatible with learners' overall personality development and learners' various needs like social, psychological, economic, mental, religious and moral so that he proves to be as successful and as productive person in his practical life as students of general stream.

- Courses of e. learning may include content relating to development of all life skills like communication, interpersonal, emotional stability and some amount of this course may be included as compulsory practical component. Practical activities may be designed that are helpful for overall personality development of learners.
- More researchers may be organized to for addressing and managing students' self-confidence, emotional stability, communication and interpersonal skills in e. learning courses in addition to moral judgment. Oral presentation in front of teachers' panel may be given some weight as core component of each course of elearning.
- Practical aspect of each e. course may extend unto 50% course in internship or fieldwork in the organization where students' acquired degree or knowledge can be applied.
- Arrangement for conducting local educational conference for specific e. course may designed and attending such conferences and participating of specific e. courses learners may be made obligatory for passing or for being eligible for grant of a particular degree. It will raise quality of e. learning. So a specific portion of e courses may be designed as core course where there in normal and regular interaction of teacher and students in normal and usual classroom environment. This may give students real classroom experience of higher level and may be helpful in development of certain skills.

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