

Editorial

'What is the difference between an online and a face-to-face teacher' is an interesting debate, especially in those countries where e-learning is not very common, lacks awareness of the masses, or still needs to establish its acceptance amongst the seasoned fraternity of face-to-face teachers. There are multiple definitions of online teachers due to the multiplicity of contexts. The terms e-moderators and e-tutors are often used interchangeably for online teachers. Online teachers are mostly misunderstood as either part time teachers or facilitators who do not contribute much to pedagogical practices. However, online teachers' roles may vary in different countries and institutions. They act as process facilitators, mentors, counsellors, advisors, assessors, evaluators, material producers, content writers, content curators, technological guides, managers, administrators, instructional designers, and researchers based on diverse contexts and organizational cultures. Mostly, the responsibilities include mentoring students in a discussion based asynchronous online environment, managing courses through a Learning Management System (LMS) as content facilitators or instructional designers, take up pedagogical responsibilities like content creation, curation, designing assessment and directly teaching through a synchronous mode.

Teachers in a face-to-face learning environment impart knowledge to students through a similar pattern of delivering a lecture, organizing discussions, designing assessment activities and grading assignments/portfolios/exam papers to achieve intended learning outcomes through in-person and real time contact. However, the difference in modus operandi changes the nature of online instructional design and makes it challenging for online teachers to create meaningful learning experiences in online learning environments as the nature of interaction amongst teachers, students and content changes because of the intervention of technology. Online teachers have the uphill task of bridging distance, not only geographical but also social, cultural and pedagogical by enabling students to adapt themselves to a learner-centred, self-directed learning environment. They have to ensure their teaching presence through involvement in all teaching-learning activities; cognitive presence by engaging students in information processing and developing critical thinking; and social presence by creating a community of inquiry and ensuring affective presence through motivation and conveying emotions. To face such challenges they can seek help from the existing taxonomies of learning or adapt them to their context by adding the flavour of their experiences.

Virtual University of Pakistan –the only fully online University in Pakistan – has two types of teachers. First type includes national and international eminent professors who record video lectures and disseminate their knowledge through ever available lectures on CDs, TV transmission, or LMS. The

second type is that of e-moderators who perform managerial, pedagogical and social roles. From the beginning of the semester, they manage all LMS activities, for example, announcements, facilitate students with learning materials and guide them through the use of asynchronous or synchronous modes. They plan and structure assessment activities, grade them and share feedback. They are the evaluators of the courses and programs too. Interestingly, all these tasks make them far more technology savvy than any of the traditional face-to-face mode teachers, apart from being involved in knowledge construction process. Also, if they have switched from the traditional to online mode of teaching; the arduous adaptability, once achieved, makes their position more advantageous. However, if they have begun their career as teachers in an online mode, they may need exposure to face-to face teaching.

Adapting oneself successfully to an already existing system is not an achievement as online teachers must empower themselves through critical reflection, action, transformation and retrospection for analysing the implemented changes. They can become change agents by looking for new ways of teaching methods in online teaching and design better instructional designs with the help of research and praxis. Their empowerment lies in their own hands! How e-moderators operate in different countries of the world now-a-days and what status they enjoy amongst the fraternity of teachers calls for more research.

The 2017 Volume of JDER includes five papers on diverse topics which evaluate the practices in correspondence distance education, e-learning, mobile learning, open learning and tool development in Pakistan.

Izzat Gul, Muhammad Ramazan and Sumera Batool's paper "The Efficacy of E-learning Technologies in Higher Education: Students' Perspective" examines the usefulness of e-learning technologies i.e. television channels, the Internet and video lectures on DVDs for the students of Virtual University of Pakistan (VUP). The study looks at the students' perceptions about the effectiveness of the use of internet and lecture DVDs versus the television channels run by VUP. The findings of the study revealed that VUP TV channels are less important due to the time difference in the availability of the required lectures for the VUP students whereas the content on the Internet and DVDs is more preferred because it is readily available all the time. Muhammad Saleem & Muhammad Bakhsh's paper "Impact of Mobile Phone Usage on Students' Writing Skills: A Case Study of the University of Peshawar" evaluates the impact of mobile phone usage on students' writing skills at the University of Peshawar. The study concludes that mobile text messaging is mostly used for entertainment purposes and has a negative impact on the writing skills of the students. Muhammad Safdar Bhatti, Mahwish Shamim and Rafia Mukhtar's paper "Investigating the Perspectives of TEFLers About Distance Learning: A Case Study"

investigates the problems faced by TEFL students in a correspondence distance learning mode in Pakistan. Whereas distance learning mode helps them improve their vocabulary and pronunciation, they find a huge gap between the students' and tutors' understanding of the learning objectives. This leads to the development of self-perception/misconception which make them misunderstand the objectives of the program.

Imran Ihsan's paper "Making MOOC Slides Semantically Accessible: A Semantic Content Generation Tool for PowerPoint Slides" proposes a tool to convert MOOCs PowerPoint lecture slides into a semantically accessible format to enable search within the slides. The proposed technique can make the lecture slides more interoperable, open and reusable, making MOOCs based e-learning more semantically accessible. Muhammad Bakhsh, Amjad Mahmood and Nazir A. Sangi's paper "Mobile and Ubiquitous Learning Contents: The Meta-analysis" provides an analysis of the articles published during 2010 to 2015, selected from the leading educational and technology related journals. This study evaluates development, management, context, and delivery of m-learning contents to mobile users. The findings of this research study present recent and future research trends in mobile and ubiquitous learning.

I hope you would enjoy reading the articles as they would provide an insight about the research taking place in distance education and e-learning in Pakistan. In the end, I'd like to thank Ms Nadia Saleem for assisting me in the editorial process, Ms. Saria Kazmi for proofreading the articles and Mr. Mubashar Majeed Qadri for copy editing this edition. I'd also like to thank the editor Dr Tanveer Hussain for providing his support whenever required.

Happy reading!

Ayesha Perveen

Co-editor, JDER