A Study of the Attitude of Learners Towards Tutoring in Distance Education

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Abstract

This study focused on to ascertaining the attitude of learners towards tutoring in distance education. It was a descriptive study and was delimited to B.Ed Programme of Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), Islamabad. Population of the study consisted of learners of B.Ed. Programme of AIOU. The sample of the study consisted on 600 learners from five Regional Campuses of AIOU in the Province of Punjab i.e. Multan, Faisalabad, Lahore, Gujranwala and Rawalpindi. The sample was drawn by using convenient-cum-purposive sampling technique(s) from five. A questionnaire was used as research tool. It was developed on 5-point rating (Likert) scale. A pilot study was conducted to finalize the tool. The finalized research tool was administered and data was collected. The data was analyzed in terms of percentage. The findings of the study demonstrated positive attitude of learners towards tutoring in distance education. It was evident from the data analysis that learners acknowledged tutors having subject knowledge and they the help them in self-study for developing new knowledge. However, learners wished feedback and comments of the tutors on their assignments in proper way. In the light of the findings of the study the researcher recommended training for distance education tutors on how to provide feedback and comments on students' work.

Keywords: Tutoring, Distance Education, Assignments, Distance Learners, Feedback

Introduction

Distance education is an innovative form of education which facilitates a large student body. It is recognized all over the world and in almost all countries of the world it is imparted by public and private sector institutions. Programmes and courses are offered in almost all academic disciplines. Amongst others, the separation of tutors and learners or distance between tutors and learners is its main characteristics.

Tutoring in distance education is a focused and specialized task which needs training and commitment of the tutors. The success of a distance education programme is generally associated with tutor and tutoring. Husain (1999) regarded a tutor to be the backbone of distance education system. Therefore, a tutor occupies a significant place in the system and plays an important role.

Tutors use different strategies and techniques in instructional process to facilitate learners and their learning process. A tutor needs to be equipped with instructional abilities and in 21st s/he is expected to have technology-based skills of tutoring and instructing. S/he has *"to develop special skills of imparting education through remote instruction coined with motivational and counseling techniques acquired through training. Andragogy and training of tutors are interrelated with each other"* (Hussain, 2013, p. 124) as the later equips tutors with andragogical skills.

Tutoring is regarded as an instructional skill which can be seen synonymously with andragogy or andragogical skill. Whereas, according to Hussain (2013) the term andragogical skills, emerges from andragogical assumption and principles. According to him Knowles (1970) used the term *"andragogy"* by asserting, *"truly artistic teacher [tutor] conscientiously*

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suppresses what he knows his students ought to learn in favor of helping his students learn for themselves what they want to learn" (p.51). As andragogy is associated with adults and distance learners are also adults being self-decisive about their studies. Therefore, Van-Gent (1996) supported a proper method of teaching and tutoring the adults. Whereas, Zmeyov (1998) regarded it –the *"andragogy"* an appropriate technique because of the reason that it is based on essential activities to design and offer to the learners. Here tutors assume crucial role of planning, executing, evaluating and improving learning appropriately.

Various studies have been conducted for evaluating attitude of learners towards tutoring in distance education. Hussain (2007) conducted a study on attitude of learners towards virtual education and found learners to be satisfied. Similarly, in another study he (Hussain, 2013) found that learners were satisfied with tutoring in distance education. Seemingly, they showed satisfaction with tutoring of their tutors. However, tutors needed training in using social websites, and online discussions. However, some studies (Cassity, 2005; Henschke, 2008; Gross, 2006; Wie, 2003; Toman, 2005) affirmed learners acknowledged andragogical skills and tutoring in distance education to be effective but needed training on how to comment on and provide feedback on assignments.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study were:
a. to ascertain state of tutoring in distance education in Pakistan
b. to examine tutoring through educational technology in distance education

Research Methodology

It was a descriptive study and was delimited to B.Ed Programme of Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), Islamabad. Population of the study consisted of learners of B.Ed. Programme (semester spring 2017) of AIOU. The sample of the study consisted on 600 learners from five Regional Campuses of AIOU in the Province of Punjab i.e. Multan, Faisalabad, Lahore, Gujranwala and Rawalpindini. The sample of the study (600 learners) was taken through purposive cum convenient sampling technique from five regional campuses of AIOU i.e. Multan, Faisalabad, Lahore, Gujranwala and Rawalpindi.

A questionnaire for eliciting opinions of the learners was developed on 5-point rating (Likert) scale. The questionnaire was piloted by administering on distance learners in Bahawalpur. It was finalized in the light of the results of the piloting. The finalized questionnaire was administered on the respondents (600 distance learners) with the help of data collectors who were trained during pilot study. The response rate was 78% as 468 respondents responded i.e. 468 questionnaires completely filled-in in all respects were received back.   The data was analyzed by using percentage through MSEXCEL.

Data Analysis and Findings of the Study

Results of the data analysis are given below;

Table-1 explains attitude of learners towards current status of instructional skills and how to tutor in distance education tutors. The data indicated that 81% of the respondents affirmed that tutors helped them in acquiring new knowledge by offering such tasks; 80% of distance learners elicited that their tutors created situations or offered them activities to apply the newly gained knowledge in real situations; according to 84% of the respondents their tutors appeared to having mastery and command over their respective subjects; whereas, 80% appeared to be satisfied with

communication skills of the tutors and commented that they communicated in effective way and they used innovative approaches.

Table 1
Attitude of learners towards current status of tutoring in distance education

Andragogical Area	Responses *(Percentage is given in parentheses)*				
	SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA
Tutors offer activities for developing new knowledge	211 *(45.1)*	167 *(35.7)*	3 *(0.6)*	36 *(7.7)*	51 *(10.9)*
Tutors offer activities of application nature	188 *(40.2)*	139 *(29.7)*	0 *0.0*	65 *(13.9)*	76 *(16.2)*
Tutors are masters of their subjects	191 *(40.8)*	203 *(43.4)*	2 *(0.4)*	32 *(6.8)*	40 *(8.5)*
Tutors use effective communication	141 *(30.1)*	234 *(50.0)*	4 *(0.9)*	56 *(12.0)*	33 *(7.1)*
Tutors provide comments	82 *(17.5)*	102 *(21.8)*	2 *(0.4)*	159 *(34.0)*	123 *(26.3)*
Tutors follow academic criterion	124 *(26.5)*	167 *(35.7)*	4 *(0.9)*	97 *(20.7)*	76 *(16.2)*
Tutors utilize useful resources	99 *(21.2)*	161 *(34.4)*	3 *(0.6)*	118 *(25.2)*	87 *(18.6)*
Tutors help learners in self-study	199 *(42.5)*	187 *(40.0)*	3 *(0.6)*	53 *(11.3)*	26 *(5.6)*
Tutors guide learners	136 *(29.1)*	203 *(43.4)*	4 *(0.9)*	68 *(14.5)*	57 *(12.2)*

Similarly, 62% of the respondents indicated that the tutors know academic criterion of the university –the AIOU. However, just more than half i.e. 56% of the distance learners acknowledged that distance tutors assisted them in searching and utilizing educational resources in realizing their academic needs according to the demands of the course and/ or programme. A prominent majority of the respondents i.e. 83% seemed to be affirmative towards facilitation extended by tutors in learning through self-study; whereas, about ¾ (73%) of the respondents appreciated efforts of their tutors in providing counseling services to them. But 60% of the distance learners asserted that their tutors needed training on providing comments and feedback to the learners on their assignments and other academic work appropriately.

Table-2 indicates that 69% of the respondents were of the view that their tutors were computer literate and they used printed handouts for instructing in distance learning mode. Slightly more than one fourth (28%0 of the respondents affirmed that their tutors used electronic communication (email); whereas 35% of the distance learners acknowledged that their tutors used social media for communication purpose with the learners and other colleagues. Similarly, 30% of the respondents revealed that distance tutors encouraged group interaction through group mobile phone call(s) but not consistently rather occasionally. Only about one fourth (24%) and one fifth (20%) of the distance learners appreciated that their tutors were aware of the Skype and

they used different websites respectively. Only 13% of the respondents elicited that their tutors encouraged their online interaction showing their lower expertise, interest and/or availability of the technology.

Table 2
Attitude of learners towards tutoring skills and educational technology

Andragogical Area	Responses (Percentage is given in parentheses)				
	SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA
Tutors use printed handouts	169 (36.1)	152 (32.5)	2 (0.4)	79 (16.9)	66 (14.1)
Tutors use e-mail	77 (16.5)	53 (11.3)	0 0.0	164 (35.0)	174 (37.2)
Tutors use social media	98 (20.9)	67 (14.3)	4 (0.9)	127 (27.1)	172 (36.8)
Tutors use Skype	53 (11.3)	61 (13.0)	6 (1.3)	207 (44.2)	141 (30.1)
Tutors encourage group interaction	90 (19.2)	52 (11.1)	8 (1.7)	197 (42.1)	121 (25.9)
Tutors used websites	38 (8.1)	56 (12.0)	7 (1.5)	201 (42.9)	166 (35.5)
Tutors encourage online interaction	34 (7.3)	28 (6.0)	8 (1.7)	187 (40.0)	211 (45.1)

Conclusion

The study concluded that distance education learners acknowledged their tutors having tutoring skills i.e. they helped them in developing new knowledge, how to applying it in practical situations with command over their respective subjects; communicating in effective styles using innovative approaches and techniques. Tutors knew academic criterion of the university and they helped leaners using academic resources properly for meeting academic standards. Seemingly, they assisted learners how to learn through self-study programmes and/ or courses by providing counseling to them for blending information with their life experience. However, learners wished feedback and comments of the tutors on their assignments in proper way. In the light of the findings of the study the researcher recommended training for distance education tutors on how to provide feedback and comments on students' work.

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