

## LETTER to the EDITOR

## E-learning Development in Academic Classrooms: Resistance and Willingness

Majid Zare Bidaki<sup>1,\*</sup><sup>1</sup> Department of Medical Microbiology, Faculty of Paramedical Sciences, Birjand University of Medical Sciences, Birjand, IRAN<sup>\*</sup> Faculty of Paramedical Sciences, Ghafari st, Birjand, IRANEmail : m.zare@live.co.uk  
Tell: 09151567683*Dear editor-in- Chief, The Future of Medical Education Journal*

During the Sixth National Conference and the First International Congress on E-Learning in Medical Sciences (21 October to 24 October 2013) at Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, a panel titled "Challenges of e-learning in medical universities in Iran" was held. AS the director of E-learning department in a university leading to the development of e-learning, I had this opportunity to share my views and experiences with participants and the panel members. The current letter summarizes the author's views of resistance and willingness to use e-learning in university classrooms. This letter aims academic staff in all universities of medical sciences in Iran.

In a general view, most university teachers are aware of the benefits of using e-learning techniques in their face-to-face teaching and the advantaged of electronic management of their classrooms. It is proposed that the majority of these teachers intend to use this new style of instructional interaction with their students if there is enough hardware, software, support and appropriate empowerment training available (1, 2, 3). However, there are still groups of teachers who are absolutely conservative and stand against the side of any change in their learning environments. Specifically, they are not interested in using Web technology in their classrooms. During for-years experiences of holding e-learning workshops in many different universities in Iran and dealing with many academic colleagues, I have noticed that each of these groups has its own reasons and excuses.

Many teachers insist on using chalk and blackboard/whiteboard in their classroom and believe that an outstanding characteristic of a teacher is to teach the students by his/her own skills and to master the classroom by his/her artful management and not by technology tools. It is quite evident that personal charisma and interpersonal skills of a teacher are outstanding advantages in a learning environment which may not be replaced by any form of technology. However, these colleagues may have already encountered with some limitations of traditional teaching. The question is this: What do they deal with this kind of restrictions?

Some other staff supposes that only universities in developed countries are eligible for using e-learning methods and believe that we, as teachers in third world still have more important educational problems which need to be solved. I ask these people to answer this question: What are the problems? If the problems are relevant to the overall management and the educational policies of the university, then solving them is out of the teachers' responsibilities and their capabilities. But, if

these problems are associated with the classroom achievement levels and some other issues like these, developing e-learning methods in the classroom is strongly proposed as a solution.

Other critics may be concerned about the lack of adequate technical support for e-learning software as well as hardware systems. This is what is referred to as the Achilles' heel of this technology. These people express that it will be frustrating if after spending a plenty of time for preparing their e-learning content and uploading in a learning management system/LMS for learning purposes, they may not be able to use it or even they may lose it just when needed due to unexpected technical problems! The answer is that technical support is basically an important issue in e-learning environments but why we are not concerned when we use many types of technology in home every day?! That is because we are sure that there is always someone in the town to technically support our devices. Nowadays, there is the same situation for informatics technology/IT support in academic institutions. Indeed, supporting networks and informatics software is now becoming a standard establishment in university management systems all over the country. This means that the mentioned issue is not a restriction anymore and therefore it should not be a concern. However, in Iran we are still standing in a transition era, much left to conquer e-learning peaks. This means that the teachers who use e-learning skills should always be prepared with traditional teaching methods as the alternatives. This would be helpful when e-learning connections go off or e-learning contents are unexpectedly lost.

Some teachers are concerned that with the arrival of e-learning to classrooms, their role, in particular their administration in the classroom is essentially to be trimmed. This view to the technology reminds me of a postman's concerns years ago when emailing was emerging. He was worried about the broader adoption of e-mail, so imagined that sooner or later he will lose his job! It is obvious that in a blended learning system, some changes occur in traditional roles of teachers in their classrooms. However, these changes do not reduce his respected position, but also enhance his status from a mere transfer of learning concepts to a facilitator of learning. While these changes still need keeping the presence of teacher in the class, the role of learners in educational interactions significantly increases.

Finally, there are other colleagues who express that the use of technology in the classroom requires minimal knowledge of informatics which they are lacking. Moreover, it will take their time to learn it. Subsequently, they believe that using e-learning methods are slow, time-consuming and unreliable. To answer these, I claim that teacher empowerment for using e-learning methods only

requires being slightly familiar with the software and having a little patience. Instead, educational productivity, savings time and costs as well as possibility of vast learning interactions and finally learners' academic progress are so widespread outcomes which will easily pay off the cost of time used.

In brief, it seems that the resistance and unwillingness of some academic staff to practice e-learning skills and usage it in their classrooms is due to their lack of awareness about the functions, advantages and productivity of this new route to learning. This is the true words of our Lord, Imam Ali (AS) who said: People are enemy to what they do not know (4).

Therefore, for optimal and balanced development of e-learning at university classroom level, we need to improve the faculty members' knowledge and their overview about e-learning, the advantages and its flexibility. Indeed, the abilities of an e-learning system should be demonstrated by the vast rate of instructional activities, classroom managements, and other educational services which can be provided by the system. Academic members need to know that in a blended learning program, which is a justification of e-learning in a face-to-face learning environment, the teacher and learners use all the advantages of a face-to-face learning while they do not lose the benefits of web-based technology as well.

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