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The Impact of Social Distancing on Teaching in Iraq

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Abstract

Background in eastern countries as in Iraq sociality is an important subject in all life experiences, teaching is one of these experiences. The teaching in governmental and non-governmental institutions is shifted from face to face (traditional) teaching into electronic one because of the covid-19 pandemic and the social distancing proposed by the world health organization (WHO). **Objectives** This study aims to address how electronic learning affects the social relationship between teachers and students.

Materials and Methods Forty teachers from different colleges at Al-Bayan University were enrolled in this study whose students in virtual classes had not been their same students in ordinary previous classes. They were asked to give a percentage of the students who are recognizable to the teacher by both name and face regarding virtual or electronic classes compared with the percentage in previous ordinary classes, this criterion has been taken as one indicator for social contact between students and teachers.

Results for ordinary classes, the mean percentage was 79.95; while for electronic classes the mean percentage was 24.63. The difference was statistically significant.

Conclusion electronic learning has an impact on the social relationship between students and teachers as most teachers have difficulty in recognizing their students by faces with the names.

Keywords: Electronic learning; face to face contact; social distancing; teaching; virtual classes

Introduction

Teaching is carrying out certain activities with certain ethical tasks that are effective in student's learning; learning is the responsibility of the teachers (Smith, 2004). Schlechty, (2004) defines teaching as the art of student's induction to behave in ways that result in learning, it is an art because teachers have to facilitate learning and motivate the students to become interested in it. Teaching and learning have

a complex relationship because learning cannot be mandated as student's learning cannot be guaranteed by the teacher (Jackson, 1986). The teacher tries hard to teach the students, but several factors affect the learning process that lies outside the teacher's control as If the student is properly motivated? Is the student interested in the subject? Are the conditions are conducive to learning? Is there a supportive parent? Is there enough time to digest

the ideas and practice new skills? (Suzanne et al, (2006). The definition of electronic learning is the use of the internet, the new multimedia technologies, and communication technologies to extend the process of education and to support learning by making access to facilities and services easier (European Commission, 2001). Abbad et al, (2009); Aguti and Fraser, (2006); Mayende et al, (2017) were stated that when the student's face-to-face contact with their teachers is minimum and they learn on their own far from the institution most of the time, this is called distance learning. Electronic learning has a positive impact on the educational system as a whole including learners and teachers, it comes with a lot of benefits as available access to every student anytime and anywhere, it saves time and cost, it reduces the level of stress because the students can learn with their speed, different learning styles could be accommodated, and effective technologies use many strategies as frequent testing and assignments and immediate feedback (Bosamia and Patel, 2016). By comparing to physical classrooms, virtual classes had the potential to offer well and distance education, although there are parts of the developing world still struggling to meet these needs in this turbo-charged digital race. Nwabude et al, (2020) were used the body language and facial expressions are some benefits of the face to face classes and help in communication and get the message across to the students, such benefits are absent in online classes as it is limited to using text and/or images to help to get the point across (Mitchell-Holder, 2020). To communicate effectively with students in online education we should understand the differences in communication between face-to-face teaching and online environment (Betts, 2009). Robinson et al, (2015) and Mitchell-Holder, (2020) were stated that for the communication to be effective, the conveyed message should

be received and understood in exactly the way it is intended, it is a two-way street, to gain the full meaning of what is being said, you should listen and the other person to feel heard and understood. There are many barriers to online teaching and learning, emotional barriers as fear, isolation, and mistrust due to the absence of emotional connection between teachers and learners (Nkonge and Gueldenzoph, 2006). Sarısakaloğlu, (2015) reported that 74% of learners would prefer conventional classes and would like to be able to make eye contact with the teacher and classmates and that online learning does not take individual requirements into account (50%). Teachers have difficulty in determining whether the learners understood the subject or not as their gestures cannot be observed as in a conventional class environment. Mayende et al, (2017) proposed many ways to improve communication as a joint discussion area for all learners, and for smaller groups, he proposed learning group communication.

Aims of the study

To address the social aspect associated with theoretical sessions in E-learning as practical and clinical sessions are postponed during the study period. And to understand the shift in the relationship between teachers and students.

Materials & Methods

Teachers at Al-Bayan University/College of Dentistry have been asked to fill a questionnaire as shown in Figure (1); which was filled toward the end of the study year, only teachers whose students in the virtual classes had not been the same in ordinary previous classes and those who don't have any previous health problems regarding memorizing (40 teachers) are included in this study. The age range was 28-64 years with a mean age of 39.2.

Teachers were asked to give a percentage

of how many students they knew in name and face or the students who are recognizable to the teacher by both name and face regarding virtual or electronic classes compared with the percentage in previous ordinary classes, this criterion has been taken as one indicator for social contact between students and teachers. The electronic study started in February 2020 with the emergence of COVID-19 and what follows of the quarantine and social distancing as recommended by the WHO. A shift into electronic learning occurs in all educational institutions in Iraq. So the study includes teachers who have been involved in electronic learning for at least 7 months. Edmodo, Google classroom, free conference call platforms have been used for communication with the students, in addition to electronic mail and telegram application.

Results

In this study, 40 teachers were included whose students in the virtual classes had not been the same in ordinary previous classes (Figure 1). Each Teacher gave a percentage of the students who are recognizable to him/her by both name and face regarding virtual or electronic classes and the same percentage in previous ordinary classes; this was taken as an indicator for social contact between students and teachers. For ordinary classes, the percentage was ranging from 30% to 100% with a mean of 79.95, and a standard deviation of 17.88, while for electronic classes the percentage was ranging from 5% up to 80% with a mean of 24.63, and a standard deviation of 20.76 as shown in Table 1 & Figure 2. The difference was statistically significant ($p > 0.001$) according to paired sample T-test as shown in tables 2, 3, & 4. This means that electronic learning significantly affects the social relationship between the teachers and the students.

Table (1): Descriptive Statistics.

e-learning & students	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std.
% of students recognized by the teacher in ordinary learning	40	30	100	80	18
% of students recognized by teacher in e-learning	40	5	80	25	21
Valid N (listwise)	40				

Table (2): Paired Samples Correlations.

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	percentage of students recognized by the teacher in ordinary learning & percentage of students recognized by the teacher in e-learning	40	.310	.052

Table (3): Paired Samples Statistics.

		Mean	N	Std.	Std. Err. Mean
Pair 1	Percentage of students recognized by the teacher in ordinary learning	80	40	18	3
	Percentage of students recognized by the teacher in e-learning	25	40	21	3

Table (4): Paired Samples Test.

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig.
		M	Std.	Std. Err. Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	percentage of students recognized by teacher in ordinary learning - percentage of students recognized by teacher in e-learning	55	23	4	48	63	15	39	.000

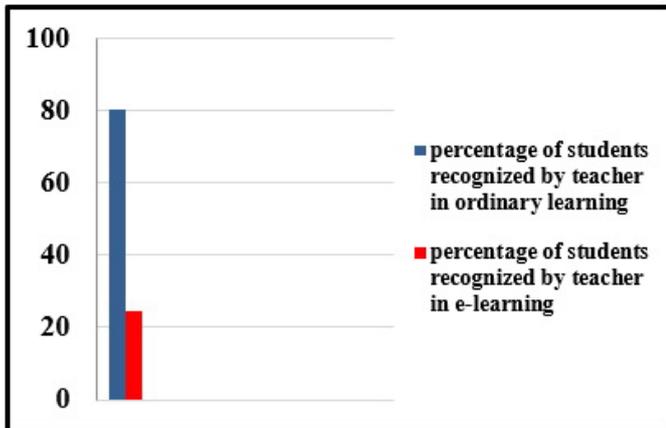
Figure (1): Questionnaire for Teacher.

Questionnaire for teachers

Name of teacher: _____ Age of teacher : _____

1. How long you have been teaching?
2. Have you been practiced E-learning before covid-19 pandemic?
3. Did your students in virtual class in 2020 have been your same students in ordinary previous classes.
 Yes No
4. In the ordinary learning before covid-19 pandemic, you can recognize your students by names and faces in percentage of
5. In the electronic learning with covid-19 pandemic, you can recognize your students by names and faces in percentage of
6. Did you have any previous health problems regarding memorizing?

Figure (2): Percentage comparison.



Discussion

It is well-known that education is one of the most prominent channels on which the educational process depends, it is no longer viewed as an individual or human need related to the individual himself only but rather has become linked to society's strength, its development, its growth, and the achievement of its goals and objectives. It is no longer confined to information and its acquisition, but rather on the necessity to provide all the reasons and factors that help to accomplish the stu-

dent's personality, to identify his potentials, and develop opportunities for their investment in life activities, according to what his capabilities allow him. Electronic learning is an interactive system for learning that is presented to the learner using communication and information technologies, and it depends on an integrated digital electronic environment that displays the courses via electronic networks, provides guidance and direction, and organizes tests, as well as managing and evaluating resources and processes. For most online students, their primary contact with an institution is through their communication with faculty» Betts, (2009). In this study, with traditional face to face learning the teachers can recognize their students by name and face in about 80% and the rest could be recognized by face only, while in electronic learning the percentage down to about 25% only, this means that communication and social contact with students is significantly affected during electronic learning. Some teachers with the highest percentage of recognizing their students in electronic classes stated that the picture in the student's profile can help the teacher in recognizing the students. Although most profile pictures for the students were taken from far distances or old ones, could be filtered or with glasses making recognition very difficult for the teachers. Face to face contact with the students, talking to them, eye contact, body posture, and body language during the lecture, in addition to practical sessions, all help the teacher to imprint the name, the face, and even the personality of each student. Contacting students outside the traditional classroom as in corridors, café, gardens, and parks, even in social events or gathering held by the university enforce the social bond with the students. In virtual electronic classes, the contact between teachers and students was through text messages or voice and photos, eventually; the teach-

ers were dealing with names and grades rather than a real human being and this affect the social relationship significantly. Mayende et al, (2017), proposed arrangements for physical meetings of two weeks twice a semester or occasional face-to-face meetings to improve engagement of the students, and when a lecture is a live event, it is more valuable than playback. He said that communication with the students and the methods of such communication helps to foster a sense of community in the class which helps the students feel connected to the teacher and to their classmates, this can make a difference in student's success. Mitchell-Holder, (2020) stated that bonding enforce with the students, the teacher can provide some information with a personal picture before the beginning of the class to get them to know him/her best and to personalize your communications and build positive relationships with your online students. Although solitude and peaceful silence provide good learning opportunities, learning in social groups have a critical role in understanding development. The social occasions of conversation, discussion, joint work, and debate are important in learning (Suzanne et al, 2006).

Conclusion

Electronic learning is a new experience practiced widely this year 2020 in Iraq, it comes with many benefits as available access at any time and anywhere, it saves time and cost and many other benefits found in the literature, although, it has an impact on the social relationship between students and teachers as most teachers have difficulty in recognizing their students by faces with the names.

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Conflict of interest

I am the author's (Alaa Mohammed Shaheed) state that the manuscript for this paper is original, and it has not been published previously or part of MSc. dissertation or PhD thesis and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere, and that the final version has been seen and approved by all authors.

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