Bringing History Alive: Face to Face vs. On-Line Courses
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Introduction

In the modern day the numbers of learners of different ages pursuing their education online has increased drastically (Kearsley, 2000). As a matter of fact, the momentum at which online courses are offered for different levels of educational programs, particularly at the post secondary level has increased to such high degrees. There have been mixed feelings about scholars, philosopher, teachers and the general public in different parts of the world as regards this new development. As a matter of fact, Stacey and Rice (2002) are convinced that the force behind the increased pursuit and availability of online educational courses is actually financial and fiscal as opposed to pedagogical. It is for this reason that great numbers of academicians in the modern day have asserted their efforts into investigation the manner in which learners perform in the assessments and tests of educational courses offered online as opposed to those offered in the conventional face to face educational forums (Baumgartner et al, 2003, p. 5). It is important to determine whether or not an educational course design affects the achievements of students.

This study inclines towards a utilization of the history course as a case study in order to investigate whether or not students do better in tests in History on-line courses or face to face History courses. After describing both the online and face to face forms of learning in History educational course, this paper will elucidate the testing process in History as well as the category of learners that perform bets in tests. This will be followed by a summative conclusion and a list of the references cited in the paper.
On-Line History Courses

As in the other educational courses that are offered online, there are a number of particular elements that characterize an online course in history. This mostly regards the manner in which the constituents of the course are configured. The first element that is considered in designing an online History course to be used by online students is that the expectations and instructions given by the online educators must be very definite and clear. Clear and straightforward instructions will ensure that the online students experience less anxiety and a heightened feeling of self effectiveness (Herman and Banister, 2007, p.325). In addition to this, History online courses offer learners weekly framework of the educational activities, homework and tests that they are expected to participate in. This ensures that the online history learners are guided to cultivate a culture of self regulation as well as the capacity to complete the assigned tasks without fail. The online History educators also ensure that they present the online History students with timely responses and feedback; this is a very important aspect of an online educational course in History since it ensures that the learners maintain their focus and are increasingly motivated to work hard at successfully completing the tasks given (Herman and Banister, 2007, p. 323).

Herman and Banister (2007, p. 325) indicate that despite the History educational course being pursued online, the online students, in a similar manner with the ones exposed to a face to face course of learning, require educational materials to guide and offer them the information that they require to complete their educational course in History successfully (Herman and Banister, 2007, p. 323). The online students in the History course are usually provided with multimedia modules as well as online readings and textbook.
Through such academic materials the learners are exposed to exigent and stimulating educational discussions that encourage them to seek more knowledge and work harder at their tasks. MacKinnon and Aylward (1999, p. 17) claims that in order for learners to be successful and attain academic success in an online History course, it is important that there be weekly online group discussions in which the learners can engage their colleagues in educational discussions and gain clarifications on their assigned tasks.

**Face to Face History Courses**

As is to be expected, there are a number of factors and elements that differentiate online teaching and learning of History from the face to face teaching and learning of History course. The face to face method of teaching is sometimes referred to as ‘teaching presence’. Teaching presence is understood by learners as the visible mannerisms as well as the utterances that are made by the teachers through their being in classrooms with the students. Teacher presence, especially for an educational course like History, is very important in determining the quality and amount of interactions between the teacher and students. Teaching presence is a very important factor in the teaching of History, as in many other educational courses, since it allows the teacher to teach while at the same time offering guidance to the learners (Redmond, 2011, p. 1051).

In the face to face method of teaching the History course, an educator has three main roles that they are expected to fulfill so as to ensure the success of their students in accomplish the set educational objectives and excellent performance in the set tests (MacKinnon and Aylward, 1999).
The first role of a History teacher in the face to face forum of learning is that they are expected to formulate and organize the educational content and instructions that they will utilize in their pedagogical activities (Redmond, 2011, p. 1052). Such a task includes the setting of the curriculum according to the rules and regulations laid down by relevant educational policy makers as well as coming up with effective teaching methods. The History teacher is also expected to utilize the resources and media of teaching History that is at their disposal effectively. The second role played by a History teacher in a face to face educational forum is that they are expected to facilitate discourse in the classroom (Redmond, 2011, p. 1052). As they present the learners with the historical educational content, the teachers should be able to recognize the different areas of agreement or divergence amongst the students as regards the educational content they are exposed to. After discovering the point of complicit the History teacher should, in their wisdom, bring about consensus. All the while the teacher makes sure that the opinions and contributions of the learners are recognized, encouraged and reinforced. In this role the History teacher is tasked with the responsibility of setting the mood for learning and facilitating discussions from the students. After, this the teacher evaluates the success of the learning process.

Redmond (2011, p. 1052) reveals that the third and last role of a History teacher in a face to face classroom as opposed to an online one is the fact that the History teacher is tasked with the responsibility of direct instruction. The History teacher is expected to present the learners in class with educational content as well as any questions or assignments that the learners are expected to complete. The teacher should also be able to focus the educational deliberations in the History class in a manner that is specific to the issues in question so as to avoid being distracted from the objectives of the lesson.
After the objectives of the lesson have been achieved, the history teacher in the class is then expected to summarize it in a manner that makes sure that the learners understand the main points that they are expected to. The knowledge that is offered to History students by their teacher tends to be from diverse sources such as textbooks, field work and that acquired from resource people (Redmond, 2011, p. 1052). The teacher is expected to ascertain whether the objectives of the educational course have been attained by exposing the History students to a process of evaluation; after the students are done with their tests, the teacher is expected to offer them explanatory feedback.

**Evaluation of Students in History**

Edmonds (2006, p. 5) indicates that there are many challenges that educators in History are confronted with in their formulation of tests that are effective enough in the assessment of history learners. There are many reasons why such challenges confront History teachers; one of the most common reason is the fact that it is often very difficult to recognize the important facts, knowledge that History students are expected to demonstrate as well as what the History students should be able to do after being exposed to instructions and educational content in the History course. In the 21st century a great focus in the educational realms is placed on the evaluation of factual knowledge; it is therefore not an easy task to come up with tests that are effective in evaluating the students’ ability to ‘do history’. It is for this reason that multiple choice questions are perceived as ineffective in the evaluation conducted in an historical course; such options may not offer the educators the information that they seek in the assessments.
An effective History test, be it online or face to face, must be able to assess the standards presented by the National History Standards as demonstrated by the learners. Edmonds (2006, p. 8) further elucidates the 5 standards presented by the National History Standards that are perceived to be the most important components in the demonstration of historical thinking and knowledge. These standards are very important as they guide the History teachers on how to formulate their assessment tests in History. Firstly, successful History students should be able to comprehend the role of time in history; such chronological thinking is effective in understanding historical principles and events. Secondly, learners should be able to depict a high level of historical understanding; this refers to the grasping of and the evaluation of historical documents as well as the motives of those that wrote them. Thirdly, a learner of History should be able to analyses and interpret history; after understanding historical concepts, learners should be able to use the information that they have to scrutinize historical proof. The fourth capacity that history learners are expected to depict, as indicated by Edmonds (2006), is in conducting research and investigative studies which are related to history; this implies that the students have to create historical queries, search for relevant information and interpret it effectively. Lastly, the History learners must possess the ability to make knowledgeable decisions on historical issues based on the historical knowledge of the past and presented that they have acquired.

**Learner Performance in Tests**

Koory (2003), in similar manner to many other scholars in the modern day are convinced that online learners in History tend to perform better in tests that the learners exposed to the traditional face to face form of learning.
It is very interesting to study the manner in which the performance and achievement of students is affected as a result of being exposed to either an online or face to face educational course. For such an elucidation to be made it is important that research and investigative studies be conducted from both the classical methods of teaching history and the online ones. In addition to this similar curriculum and assessment tests and scoring methodologies must be utilized for both categories of learners so as increase the authenticity and credibility of the study (Herman and Bannister, 2007, p. 318). The graduate level of education has always inclined towards an evaluation of the students attainments in educational tasks so as to determine their assessment outcomes. In the History course, learners are usually expected to engage in a variety of educational assessments and their performance in each task evaluated so as to obtain a final score. In most Historical assessment frameworks, the learners are expected to come up with a textbook analysis, a research paper, an assessment of the course of study, a reaction paper and in most cases a field study.

One of the reasons why online learners are said to perform better in History tests than those in the face to face classroom situations is the fact that the online learners are perceived to engage more in critical thinking than those in classroom settings. Many of the educators in the present day, as well as educational policymakers and involved political agencies, insist on the cultivation of creativity and effective critical thinking skills in learners. The cultivation of such skills will not only enable the learners to achieve their scholastic goals, but also make them productive and responsible members of the workforce who can use the skills learnt to bring about sustainable social and economic development in their civilizations.
Despite such need for critical thinking skill, it is unfortunate that as indicated by Reed and Kromney (2001, p. 207) very few learners in the current higher education institutions are perceived as demonstrating this valuable quality.

In addition to this, Kassop (2003) illustrates a number of factors that are believed to cause History online students to perform better in tests than those involved in face to face forms of learning. The first factor is that online learning in the History course is perceived as being more student-centered. In the face to face classrooms, despite the methods used it always seems that the teacher is in charge. There have been many efforts by educational policy makers aimed at making face to face learning more learner-centered but it has not been an easy task. This is due to the fact that despite the method of teaching utilized, for example, small groups, lectures or role playing the instructor is always the point of focus. Online learners perform better in tests because they are empowered to study on their own without the monotony of classrooms; in a manner dissimilar to the face to face classroom learning, the instructor is not very dominant here. This causes the online students to interact, critique and develop educational content and consequently perform better in tests (Kassop, 2003).

Another reason why online students are believed to perform better in history tests as opposed to the face to face learners is the fact that online learning tends to make use of more enriched educational materials as opposed to the face to face method of learning History. As a matter of fact, there are many online course sites in History that allow the learners to “visit” military museums, reconstruction of battles and wars that occurred in the past as well as online
museums which offer photographs of artifacts as well as descriptive elucidations of historical
documentations. This offers the learners a more interactive and interesting form of studying
which leads to their being more knowledgeable and consequently performing better in exams.
Kassop (2003) also claims that online learning of a History course, as in other educational disci-
plines is fashioned in a manner that encourages lifelong learning. Since the online students are
without the teacher presence to direct them on the obtainment of fresh knowledge, the online
History learners find the information on their own. This increases their motivation and self di-
rection in learning placing them a better position to derive pleasure from the learning process
and consequently perform better in tests (Kassop, 2003).

Conclusion

As already indicated in this paper, in the modern day the numbers of learners pursuing
their education courses online has increased drastically. As a matter of fact, the momentum at
which online courses are offered for different levels of educational programs, particularly at the
post secondary level has increased to such high degrees. There have been mixed feelings about
scholars, philosopher, teachers and the general public in different parts of the world as regards
this new development. However, it is important to note that many scholars, particularly Koory
(2003), have depicted clearly that there are certain characteristics that students should demon-
strate if they are to succeed in their pursuit of an online educational course in History as in other
disciplines that require critical thinking. Such online learners must be able to depict the qualities
of independence, self-motivation and direction and an interest in critical thinking and the formu-
lation of solutions for problems.
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