Interactive Tutoring in Blended Studies:
Hindrances and Solutions

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Abstract

This paper distinguishes between traditional teaching known as lecturing (the teacher centered approach); and tutoring (the contemporary technology-oriented interactive teaching/learning approach). It is based on the implementation of tutoring strategies of 'blended studies' at the Arab Open University. It investigates the application of modern interactive teaching/learning strategies, specifying some hindering factors in the AOU-Jordan Branch context. The factors include four variables: tutors, students, course material and assessment. The paper is based on qualitative research in terms of a real teaching/leaning context, using both observation and conversation with learners, besides the use of some quantitative data retrieved from a questionnaire in which learners' views are sought regarding a number of relevant matters. A number of suggested solutions related to each of the hindering factors are presented, which if applied, may secure shifting the balance of the teaching/learning process to a more interactive technology-based tutoring level, which in turn will enhance learners' opportunities for the attainment of better academic standards, and secure a higher degree of achievement of the shared educational goals of learners and the educational institution they study in.

Keywords: blended studies, interactional teaching, lecturing, tutoring, course material, English language skills

1. Introduction

Traditional teaching/learning models view teachers as the sole source of knowledge, while students are no more than passive receivers of that knowledge. Lecturing usually takes place in a large class, and learners' progress feedback is mainly through exams. Such a traditional teaching model, which is a teacher-centered literacy practice (sometimes called 'transmission' or 'nutritionist' approach, conveys facts and explanations to learners in a mechanical manner, with little interaction on the part of learners. In terms of quantity, a large amount of information may be passed from teachers to learners, but in terms of quality and practical life knowledge, little real learning is achieved. Freire (2005:202) sums up the negative outcomes of traditional transmission strategies in which a learner is:

> a passive being, the object of the process of learning to read and write, and not its subject. As object his task is to 'study' the so-called reading lessons, which in fact are almost completely alienating and alienated, having so little, if anything, to do with the student's socio-cultural reality.

Many researchers express dissatisfaction with the traditional lecturing methods of teaching/learning, and support interactive strategies (Slavin 1987; Bloom,1984; Michelene Chi *et al.*, 2001; Lepper and Wolverton, 2002; Maybin, 2005; Graffe, 2005; Freire, 2005; Tanner and Allen, 2007; Handelsman, Miller, & Pfund, 2007; Crowe *et al.*, 2008; Schinske, 2011; Tanner, 2011 among others.) Internet and digital technology has greatly influenced the roles, skills and activities of both teachers and students in relation to classroom and ex-curricular activities, in which learners are interactive, creative and skillful users of technology affordances. On the other hand, technology has also created new inevitable challenges that teachers have to cope with in the classroom such as the use of helpful software programmes, participation management, time management, teamwork. Starbuck (2008:2-3) says that creative teaching enhances the development pupils' creativity. Rockhill (2005) states that "literacy is power". Such technology-oriented interactive learning environment can turn learning into a more creative, effective, and practical one, producing cognitive, experiential, and attitudinal change on the part of both learners and teachers. Creative learning according to Prakash (2009:28) is a type of learning that empowers learners to think in a new creative manner.

In this paper, interactive tutoring will be discussed in the context of blended study in general and at the AOU in particular.

1.1 Interactive Tutoring

The term 'tutoring' has been associated with teaching fewer numbers of learners at universities, in which a class is divided into a number of groups for tutoring purposes. In this paper, 'tutoring' is not restricted to small numbers of learners, since modern technology can facilitate the process of teaching/learning even with large groups. Tutoring is associated with the quality of the teaching/learning process. Tutoring is seen as a matter of interactive, teaching/learning that aims at providing learners with life-long knowledge and experience rather than a matter of fewer numbers of learners. Even in the case of a small class, the type of teaching practiced can be traditional lecturing, in which the learner is a passive receiver of knowledge; whereas competent tutors with the help of modern technology can shift the teaching process into tutoring even when a class consists of larger numbers.

1.2 Pre-requisites of Successful Interactive Tutoring

Achieving the highly aspired goals of interactive tutoring requires proper application and implementation of modern teaching strategies in relation to four essential parameters which are dynamic components of the teaching/learning process: tutor, student, course material, and assessment. Taken together, these parameters can create a successful interactive tutoring environment that is capable of achieving highly aspired academic and educational goals even with large groups of learners.

1.2.1 Tutors

A competent tutor is a dynamic component and important factor in the teaching/learning process. In order to succeed in their feat, tutors have to meet a number of essential prerequisites in relation to their skills, knowledge, and experience:

1.2.1.1 Tutors ought to have adequate pedagogical knowledge to make the best of the non- conventional interactive class environment, utilizing technology and the learners' knowledge and experiences.

1.2.1.2 Tutors should form a general picture of tutees' levels of understanding and skills in order to be able to diagnose potential difficulties, overcome them and find out how to proceed to more challenging work.

1.2.1.3 Tutors ought to be confident, organized, and provided with excellent knowledge of the subject matter they are entrusted to teach, besides being skillful in the use of printed, audio-visual and electronic resources, so as to   be able to give clear explanations and answers to any relevant questions.

1.2.1.4 Tutors do not have to present direct explanations or answers to students, but can elicit answers through questions, to help learners acquire independent thinking, learn problem solving strategies and encourage their active participation in class activities. When tutees are unable to answer, tutors can provide hints. When tutors enhance interactive dialogue, and delay giving explanations, students learn just as effectively (Chi, Siler, Jeong, Yamauchi, and Hausmann, 2001). If the instructor's explanation follows a students' attempt to solve a problem, it substantially enhances students' understanding and learning (Smith, Wood, Krauter , and Knight, 2011). Classes provide excellent interaction opportunities for teachers and learners (Woodand Tanner, 2013).

1.2.1.5 Tutors ought to encourage peer discussion of course topics to help learners acquire better understanding (Smith, Wood, Krauter, Knight, 2011). Tutors ought to encourage tutees to articulate & generalize their understanding to real situations to acquire critical thinking skill that can be retained and used in contexts of life. This process of reflection (meta- cognition) is crucial to learning, awareness, development and change. Frequent interaction attracts students' attention and enhances learning as students try to construct their own explanations, instead of being mere passive listeners (Wood and Tanner, 2012)*.*

1.2.1.6 Tutors ought to act enthusiastically, maintain a pleasant demeanor and establish rapport with their students to enhance their self-confidence, and turn learning activity into fun by using a number of helpful measures:

a. treating students with respect and friendliness,

b. learning their names, and addressing them by name in the class activities, and when writing feedback on their assignments,

c. listening to their views and sharing the learning goals with them,

d. treating students fairly and equitably in assessment,

e. being approachable for consultation,

f. being punctual in attending tutorials,

g. being strict as to compliance with assignment deadlines and in curbing plagiarism.

h. Tutors ought to be supportive and avoid criticizing tutees directly, balancing   any negative comment, such as saying, "Good attempt, but can you think of a better answer?"

1.2.2 Students

Learners are a dynamic and essential component in the interactive teaching/learning process, if not the most important one. Learners have to meet certain prerequisites to create a successful and healthy learning environment.

1.2.2.1 A learner's linguistic and communicative skills are very important to his learning and progress. Students with such good skills are more confident and active in their academic activities, and achieve faster learning and academic progress. Learners also need analytical, and critical skills that enable them to make the best of their academic career.

1.2.2.2 A learner's attitude and degree of interest in learning and acquisition of knowledge is a major factor in the teaching/learning process. When learners are interested in their study, they are better prepared to exert serious efforts. They will also concentrate and be more attentive in tutorials, participate more in class activities which would positively reflect on his acquisition of knowledge.

1.2.2.3 A learner's amount of time/effort put in the process of learning is another important factor that would affect the interactive learning process. When some students fail to do that, it negatively reflects on their learning and academic progress.

1.2.3 Course Material

The availability and accessibility of Course Material such as adequate printed material, besides audio-visual and electronic resources can influence the teaching/learning process to a high extent, especially in open and blended studies. Such resources can enhance creative and self- learning, and help students develop independent thinking (Moravec, Williams, Aguilar-Roca and O'Dowd, 2010).

1.2.4 Assessment

Assessment too is an important tool for safeguarding the proper direction of the teaching/learning process. Objective assessment can be indicative of the degree of learning achieved and the type of theoretical and practical knowledge acquired. Good assessment ought to be objective, on-going and comprehensive.

2. Tutoring at the AOU (Jordan Branch)

The Arab Open University (AOU) was established in October, 2002 under the umbrella of the Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND), with three branches in Kuwait, Lebanon, and Jordan. Now it has expanded to nine branches in: Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait, Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Oman, the Sudan, and Palestine. The university branches are accredited by the British Open University Validation Service (CICP), besides the local government accreditation authorities in the countries of the branches. Its main mission is to provide educational opportunities to a wide spectrum of learners, regardless of age (18-60), nationality, creed, or gender, who missed the chance to pursue their studies at traditional universities for various reasons, including those with special needs. It offers BA in a number of disciplines, and has MA programmes in Business, Information Technology, Education, and English Language and Literature.

The nature of teaching/learning at the AOU is that of blended studies. The term 'blended learning' has been given more than one interpretation in the literature (Oliver & Trigwell, 2005). In one sense, it was used as a synonym for e-learning (classroom-based courses in an electronic version), but later models seem to combine more than one delivery mode so that blended learning would offer more choices and become more effective (Singh:51-54). Blended learning at the AOU refers to a system of teaching/learning which is neither fully teacher-centered, nor fully student-centered, but a combination of direct tutor-student face-to-face class meetings, office hours on a weekly basis, independent self-learning, and e-learning (via online Course Forums, News Forums, and 2 weekly on-line scheduled hours for tutor-student on-line interaction, via the University's Learning Management System (LMS).

The British OU is associated with distance learning in which sometimes students finish their BA study without meeting their tutors, and some learners live in distant parts that do not afford libraries or internet connection. This explains why course designers and text compilers try to put any useful material into the module and text which consequently become a sort of practical micro library. The situation in the AOU, however, is somehow different since 25% of the credits of all courses are class meetings with tutors. The AOU students are not native speakers of English, and some of them suffer from poor English language skills.

Despite many challenges, the AOU has achieved high academic esteem and distinctive feats over a short period , yet for any institution to achieve its aspired goals, it has to review its status continually to overcome any hindrances and difficulties. As an insider tutor for many years at the AOU, (Jordan Branch, department of English language and literature), I have been able to observe a number of negative factors that affect tutoring within the teaching/learning context.

The main parameters associated with the application of tutoring strategies, and the difficulties that have been observed at the AOU (the case of Jordan Branch) will be discussed below. To verify the observations made, the results of a questionnaire in which 65 students took part shall be referred to later.

2.1 Tutors at the AOU

The academic staff structure at the AOU consists of two main categories: full time tutors, and part-time ones, who are supervised by the programme coordinator (PC) and the Branch Course Coordinator (BCC) both of whom closely work with the General Course Coordinator (GCC) and relevant Dean at the Headquarters (in Kuwait). Besides teaching, tutors have office-hour meetings with students, do academic advising, attend workshops and training sessions, and have two online hours to interact with students weekly. Tutors' performance is appraised by the relevant PC, BCC, peer monitoring, and student online feedback at the termination of every semester. This many-channeled appraisal has proved quite successful in selecting high quality academic staff, as it reveals their points of strength (to be reinforced)

and weakness (to be attended to). In response to a question about full time tutors' competence, 55 students out of 65 said they are very good, 9 students said they are good, and 1 student said they are fair.

Part-time tutors, who usually come from conventional universities, face some difficulty in getting adapted to the blended model of teaching/learning. They also find the syllabus they teach (which usually is endorsed by the British Open University) very challenging compared with the material they teach at their universities. The AOU administration annually holds an orientation session at the beginning of the first semester for its tutors in general and part time ones in particular, in an attempt to overcome the problem, but some part-timers continue to find difficulty in coping with the blended system and online requirements.

Suggested Solution:

a. The university ought to appoint more full-time tutors to reduce relying on part time ones in order to achieve a better standard of tutoring.

b. Newly appointed and part-time teachers need a more dense theoretical orientation and practical training in relation to the e-learning study systems in use (LMS, SIS, Online Communication, Online Assignment Marking, entering marks, etc.)

c. The BCC should help the part time teacher by directly supervising his online activities to overcome any difficulty encountered, and make him more aware of the nature of the AOU academic context.

2.2 Students' Difficulties

2.2.1 Students at the AOU face some difficulties in relation to poor English language skills. The majority of AOU students are not only non-native speakers of English, but also come from heterogeneous literacy backgrounds, and many of them (especially the elderly ones) had left secondary school decades before joining the AOU, and had forgotten much of their previous knowledge of English. They also come from various types of employment; and many female students had been busy for years with their house wife duties and bringing up children. In fact, the majority lack some main language skills. With time, they regain a good amount of their forgotten English and build on it that facilitates their learning but many continue to face difficulty, which negatively affects their participation in class activities and performance in exams. In fact some of them graduate with a high degree of specialized knowledge, but have poor skills in English; and this may negatively affect their future careers as English "is considered essential for employment and survival in the marketplace" (Majdoubeh: 142). In response to a question about their English language skills, 24 out of 65 students who responded to the questionnaire said they were weak in more than one skill. In fact, 22 of them said their weakness was in more than one skill. Another question was about the reasons behind refraining from participation in class activities, to which 23 students out of 65 said the reason was lack of confidence in their language and communicative skills, whereas 14 students said the reason was shyness.

Suggested Solution:

a. Remedial training sessions in English can be arranged for students who have weak skills, with special focus special focus on writing and self expression.

b. A remedial on-line English club supervised by an efficient staff tutor may be established for the purpose, in which learners would receive intensive language training in relation to vocabulary, grammar, and writing.

c. Tutors ought to diagnose the students who refrain from participating in class activities by asking those simple questions in the first stage, and providing them with reinforcing complements so as to help them regain self confidence.

2.2.2. The other main difficulty encountered by AOU students is associated with writing Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs). In response to a question about whether students had experienced some difficulties in submitting E301 course assignments, 40 students out of 65 said they had experienced some difficulty in writing and submitting TMAs online, due to lack of previous e-learning experience; 20 out of them said they had experienced some difficulty in relation to TMA topics, and 59 out of 65 students said they had faced difficulty in writing TMAs because of time shortage, whereas only 6 out of 65 students said they usually allocate adequate time to their study. In fact, it has been a common observation among tutors that a large number of students do not read their textbooks and mainly rely on the tutors' explanation.

Suggested Solution:

a. Students, especially new ones, need further remedial training sessions to become fully acquainted with using the University's e-learning systems, on-line communication, the LMS, and e-library.

b. Regarding the difficulty associated with TMAs, GCCs ought to choose topics that are clear, and suit the learners' level of academic level, so as learners would benefit from their assignments, instead of developing some negative feelings of frustration, that might encourage plagiarism tendencies among some of them, by trying to get ready-made TMAs that can escape anti-plagiarism programmes such as the 'Turn-It-In'.

c. As for student's problem with time shortage, tutors, counseling committees, and the Students Affairs Office can help students with time management, to make the best of their time through better awareness and organization of their tasks and responsibilities.

d. To resolve or at least reduce the negative impact of students' lack of pre-class preparation and in order to encourage student's in-class participation, 10 marks may be allocated to students' in-class participation, which requires redistribution of assessment marks. Ten marks may be taken from the marks allocated to MTAs and TMAs.

2.3 *Course Package Material*

The course study package endorsed by the British Open University has excellent merits, and very rich material content, but not without some negative aspects observed in some courses. For practical reasons, a discussion of such negative aspects of course content will focus on the courses I teach (The art of English) which consists of two parts: E301A, *The art of English: everyday creativity*, by Maybin and Swann and E301B, by Goodman and O'Halloran .

2.3.1 Bulky Content

The feature of bulky content seems to have come from the British Open University context, where designers and text compilers try to put any useful material into the text which becomes a sort of micro library for learners in distant rural areas, with no access to libraries or internet. They mainly rely on the rich and varied content of courses. Where English is not the mother tongue, such Bulky content becomes a source of difficulty for students in terms of comprehension and time management. It also becomes challenging for tutors in blended studies within a semester of practically 15 face to face tutorials (a total of 30 class-hours). In the Final exams that are centralized for all branches, GCCs sometimes include obligatory questions, which mean tutors cannot skip any content material. This makes tutors shift focus from quality of teaching/learning to quantity of text to be covered, and from interactive tutoring to lecturing. The E301A package includes three books with a total of 768 pages (*The art of English everyday creativity* 455 pages, Ronald Carter's book: *Language and Creativity* 230 pages and a study guide 83 pages). The E301B package includes two books with a total of 545 pages (*The art of English literary creativity* 462 pages, and a study guide 83 pages). Both E301A and E301B parts contain a total of 1313 pages, all of which are about *creativity*. In response to a question about the difficulty encountered in covering the bulky material of the E301 course, 40 students out of 65 said it was 'difficult'.

Suggested Solutions:

a. Tutors can use the LMS for on-line interaction before tutorials by emailing a number of questions related   to the course material (pages) to be covered in face to face tutorials. Some questions may be followed by simple hints that would facilitate understanding or connect essential notions. Tutors can discuss the questions previously emailed to students in detail with adequate explanations, and practical exemplification relating some main points to real life contexts, so as to turn learning into a practical life experience and knowledge. At the end of the tutorial, they can present a summary, followed by some main questions to assess the level of the learners.

b. Course Chairs ought to avoid imposing obligatory questions. In some cases, the obligatory question has been avoided in the E301A and E301B courses.

 c. It will also be quite good if students were given more question options such as answering 3 out of six questions, instead of answering three out of five questions (which is often the case in the final exams). Questions should focus on the more important topics. This will reduce content coverage pressure on both tutors and learners, as attention will be diverted from quantity coverage to better quality. Increasing the scope of curriculum, however, does not necessarily imply an increase in learning opportunities (Brophy: 13).

 d. A good solution could be revising the material and omitting some unimportant or somehow redundant   sections from the textbooks.

2.3.2 Inconsistent Technical Terminology

There is inconsistency in the use of some terms in the two parts of the same course, which could be due to being written by different authors. For example, in E301A (p.162), the term 'affective function' is used, but in E301B, the terms 'phatic function' (p.7), and 'interpersonal function' (p.314) are used. The term 'dialogicality' is used in E301A (p.419), while in E301B (p.436), the term 'addressivity' is used. In E301A (412), the term 'multi-voiced' is used, while in E301B (p.369), the term 'hetroglossia'is used. In E301B (p.7), the language 'referential' and 'phatic' functions are listed within Jacobson's six language functions; and Halliday's corresponding functions 'ideational' and 'interpersonal' are mentioned (p.314) without commenting on the overlap that withholds between such counterpart terms.

Suggested Solution:

a. Tutors ought to explain cases of overlap between such technical terms in different parts of the course.

b. To avoid inconsistencies, it would be better if both parts of a text are written by the same author, who will also keep in mind the line of consistent content development.

2.3.3 Lack of balance in the space given to the topics covered:

In E301A (Maybin & Swann, 2006) , 12 pages are allocated to the topic of crossing gender and bisexuals' language and gay identity (119-122 ; 140-148); but one paragraph is given to the Speech Act Theory of both Austin and Searl (E301A: 117). In E301B (by Goodman & O'Halloran:394) 1 line only is found to explain the term'collocation'. Many important topics, with which students are not familiar, are tackled in a very brief and inadequate manner, and tutors have the double task of explaining these theories and applying them to text analysis at the same time, which is very demanding in terms of time and efforts: (sociolinguistics, formalism, psycholinguistics, pragmatics, structuralism, Cognitive Poetics, Schema theories, intertextuality, dialogicality, heteroglossia, etc.)

Suggested Solution:

a. The space allocated to each topic and sub-topic ought to be balanced in accordance with its importance and relevance.

b. Course chairs can balance the focus they put on topics within the course study calendar, according to their importance and relevance, in coordination with tutors regardless of the space such topics occupy in the textbook.

2.3.4 Lack of Content Development

In some cases, lack of content development has been observed not only from one course to another, but also between parts A & B of the same course. The explanation of technical terms is supposed to be simpler and more detailed or exemplified in part 'A' of the course, which usually pre-cedes part 'B'; but the contrary is observed in certain cases. For example, the term 'affordance' is given a specialized and brief explanation in E301A (p.17): "affordance refers to what English makes available to its users by virtue of its structure". It is given a simpler explanation in E301B (p.305), which should be the other way round:

"Affordances are properties of the relationship between organism and the material environment…a tree affords shade to a lion and perching to an eagle, for example, as well as climbing to a child."

Suggested Solution

a. Course content ought to have a line of planned development.

b. It would be better to let both parts of specialized advanced courses be taught by the same tutor, who will be in a better position to connect their various notions and use examples from both parts for better explanation.

2.3.5. Content Material Repetition:

In some courses, much of the content material in the first part (A) is repeated in the second part (B) with different details, which can be due to having been written by different authors. For example, in Ch.1, E301A, and Ch.1, E301B, Carter's three models of literariness: (inherency, socio-cultural, and cognitive models) are discussed with different details. In Ch.2, E301A, and Ch.3, E301B, narrative is tackled in different details.

Suggested Solutions

a. Tutors can relate the content of similar chapters in both parts (A & B) of some courses and tackle them as one unit to enhance a better and more comprehensive understanding of relevant topics.   b. In future new editions of the text, similar content dispersed in different chapters of part 'A' and 'B' of some courses would better be merged into one unit or chapter. It would be more useful for learners to have similar topics in different chapters or parts merged. This will not only present a more consistent and comprehensive topic to the learners, but also reduce the bulky amount of material, saving time and space for other important topics.

2.3.6. Odd Cultural Content

Some texts contain topics that are not welcome within the Arab-Islamic cultural context, such as sexual taboos. For example, in E30A, seven pages (149-156) are about gay language and eight pages (140-148) about bisexual language).

Suggested Solution:

Tutors in coordination with GCCs can suggest skipping any culturally annoying material, as a short term solution, and considering the omission of such material in future revisions of the textbook.

2.3.7. Unnecessary Repetition

There is a lot of unnecessary repetition in many chapters of the two parts of some courses, and between different courses within the same programme. The following are some such examples:

a. Ch.1 in E301A tackles Carter's three models of literariness: inherency, socio-cultural, and cognitive.

b. Ch. 1. In E301B tackles the same 3 models with additional details.

c. Ch.2 in E301A is about narrative structure and types of stories, while Ch. 3 in E301B is about plot and characterization in narrative.

d. Ch.5 (Making Connections with Technology) and Ch.8 (The19th century Communication Revolution) in E301A, and Ch.7 (Literature and Technology) in E301B tackle the relation between technology and language creativity.

Suggested Solution:

Some chapters that contain related and similar content can be merged to save space for some more important topics, and curbed unnecessary repetition.

2. 4 Assessment at AOU

The AOU endeavours to achieve objective assessment that is essential to creating a healthy academic learning environment in which learners feel being equally treated. Assessment at AOU consists of a written Mid-term exam (of 30 marks), a written final examination (of 50 marks), and one or more written assignments (TMA of 20 marks). The course chair nominated by the dean of the faculty is responsible for unified exams and TMAs, in which students in all AOU branches answer the same questions. Centralized and unified exam policy at the AOU aims at achieving homogenous assessment in different Branches in the relevant Arab countries. A tutor who deals fairly and objectively with his students creates a positive self-image and promotes positive feelings and trust among learners.

Some negative aspects, however, have been observed in relation to MTAs and Final Exam questions. In some cases, the same set of questions used in a previous semester was used again in a subsequent semester, which may give advantage to students familiar with such previous questions. In other cases, questions focused more on a certain chapter or on

secondary issues in the textbook to the negligence of other parts. Questions sometimes were too long, or included some repetition in different wording.

Suggested Solution:

a. GCCs ought to invite BCCs to seriously participate in exam sets.

b. Questions ought to focus on the more important issues in the text.

c. Questions ought to take into consideration the time limit available to students for answering and should not include a direct or indirect repetition of another question within the same set.

d. Due to the bulkiness of content, obligatory questions ought to be avoided.

e. Increasing answer options would be a positive factor in shifting focus from quantity of material (to be covered) to quality of learning to be achieved.

f. In order to encourage student's preparation and in-class participation, 10 marks may be allocated to students' in-class participation (leaving the MTA and TMA with 40 marks instead of 50 marks.)

3. Conclusions

1. Interactive tutoring is not a matter of student numbers in a classroom, as much as the teaching/learning approach being used. It is also not a matter of polarity, but rather a continuum in which the teaching/learning process may become increasingly oriented towards interactive tutoring or towards traditional lecturing.

2. The degree of overcoming hindrances that hider proper teaching/learning will decide the degree of shift from traditional lecturing to interactive tutoring.

3. Some practical measures that can be taken to shift the teaching/learning process to successful Interactive tutoring are:

a. More full-time tutors should be appointed to reduce relying on part-timers, in order to achieve a better standard of tutoring. Newly appointed and part-timers need more dense theoretical orientation and practical training in relation to the e-learning study systems in use, such as the LMS, online communication, online assignment marking and entering marks into the Student Information System (SIS).

b. The BCC should help the part-timers to overcome any difficulty encountered, and make them more aware of the nature of the AOU technology-oriented teaching/learning context.

c. Remedial training sessions in English can be arranged for students with weak skills in English. A remedial on-line English club supervised by an efficient staff tutor may be established for the purpose, in which learners would receive intensive language feedback in relation to vocabulary, grammar, and writing. Tutors ought to diagnose the students who refrain from participating in class activities and address them with reinforcing complements so as to help them regain self confidence.

d. Students, especially freshmen, need further training sessions to become fully acquainted with e-learning systems (on-line communication, LMS, SIS, and e-library).

e. GCCs ought to choose topics that are clear, and help students develop research skills and curb plagiarism tendencies. Tutors' guidelines about TMAs can also be of much help to learners.

f. Tutors, counseling committees, and the Students Affairs Office can help students with time management, to make the best of their time in performing their tasks and responsibilities.

g. To overcome the problem of bulky content material, tutors can use the LMS for on-line interaction before tutorials.

h. GCCs ought to avoid imposing obligatory questions, give more question options, and focus on the more important topics to shift efforts from quantity coverage to better learning quality. They should invite BC to seriously participate in suggesting exam questions.

i. Redistribution of assessment marks by allocating some marks to students' oral skills and in-class participation will positively reflect on their in-class preparation, acquisition of knowledge, skills and better achievement.

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