



A Study of Learners' Reflection on Andragogical Skills of Distance Education Tutors

Irshad Hussain

Assoc. Prof., The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan
irshad.hussain@iub.edu.pk

The researcher conducted present study with the objectives to a). evaluate attitude of learners towards academic and tutoring skills of distance education tutors, b). assess the opinion of distance learners about assessment and evaluation skills of their tutors and c). examine reflection of learners on scaffolding skills of distance education tutors. The population of the study consisted of learners of pre-service teacher education (B.Ed semester spring 2010) programme of Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad. The sample of the study was taken through the convenient sampling technique from three regions of Allama Iqbal Open University situated in the Punjab Province. A questionnaire was designed using a five-point (rating/Likert) scale to elicit the reflection of (600) learners. However, the response rate was 78% (468) of the total sample. Interview schedule was also used as a research tool for collecting qualitative data from (50) respondents in five groups. The researcher analysed data quantitatively and qualitatively. The study concluded that the overall reflection of distance learners on andragogical skills of their tutors was positive. Apparently they were satisfied with andragogical skills of their tutors. They asserted that their tutors had academic and tutoring skills (consisting of encouraging, guiding & facilitating –emboldening and enabling skills), assessment & evaluation skills, and technical and social skills. However, tutors needed training to use social websites, Skype and mobile phone conferences and online discussion. Keeping in view the conclusion of the study, the researcher recommended short and long term training of tutors to use information and communication technologies appropriately.

Key Words: Andragogy, Andragogical Skills, Distance Education, Study Centre, Tutors

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the fundamental human rights but due to scarce opportunities, fewer resources and innovations and trends, the traditional or formal system calls for an alternate to guarantee it appropriately. Therefore, distance education emerged to address the issue and it was (and is) recognized as an alternative to the formal system of education and imperative because of its flexible nature. According to Hussain, Adeeb, Rahmani & Safdar (2008) distance education appears to be eliminating gender

inequalities and social discrimination particularly in developing countries like Pakistan. It is generally observed that it provides wider access to all irrespective of gender, age and caste & creed. It promotes opportunities of continuing education by providing second chance to those who left after completing certain level of education and/or dropped out at any stage (Hussain, 2005; Rashid, 2003). In knowledge society of 21st century, it has become a viable source of imparting knowledge, professional skills and attitudes to live and work in the competitive world. Therefore, it seems necessary for distance education institutions to ensure quality education. According to Rashid (2003) different factors are said to have an impact on quality of distance education –self instructional material, student support services, tutor and tutors' training, media and technology, learners' profile & needs and socio-cultural and economic conditions of the country.

However, quality of education appears to be directly linked with the quality of instruction. In distance education, the quality of instruction generally depends upon tutors and tutors' training. Hussain (2008; 1999) asserted that a trained tutor exploits innovative strategies and techniques for effective instructional delivery for success of learners and ultimately a distance education programme. Tutoring in distance education is a skilful activity aiming at coaching distance learners to achieve higher grades. According to him a good tutor develops academic liaison with learners to addresses learning problems and issues. The learners feel pleasure and academic satisfaction; they value efforts of their tutors and may idealize to follow them. Therefore, a tutor is regarded as one of the basic components and backbone of distance education system. Therefore, all efforts and activities for making a distance education programme successful depend upon professional skills of tutors –helping distance learners to learn.

Characteristics of Distance Learners and Andragogical Skills

Distance learners seem to be unique with their diverse potential, intellectual capacities, mental faculties and experience of life. They have their own concept of and about learning. Nevertheless, different researchers (Hussain, 2005; Merriam, 2001; and Rashid, 2000) assumed distance learners to be adults who are self-regulated, self-directed and self-motivated to learning. Adults are assumed to be mature intellectually and socially having their own concept and experience of life and learning formally or informally. They play different roles in the society. Therefore, they need to be treated as adults in instructional process. A distance education tutor must consider their traits and needs for developing a healthy professional and productive relationship with them. That's why it seems necessary for a tutor to be equipped with certain professional skills and competencies called andragogical skills to help adults learn. Andragogical skills may be regarded as professional competencies and ethics to help adults learn (Rachal, 2002).

Andragogical skills, as the term indicates, stem from the basic principles of andragogy and its assumptions. Knowles (1970, p. 51) coined the term andragogy and asserted that "truly artistic teacher [tutor] conscientiously suppresses what he knows his students ought to learn in favor of helping his students learn for themselves what they want to learn." Similarly, Van Gent (1996) advocated for selecting an appropriate approach to

teach adults and Zmeyov (1998) viewed andragogy to be a suitable approach as it determined basic activities for learners and teachers in planning, realizing, evaluating and correcting adult learning appropriately.

Likewise, Bellamio (2006) affirmed the significant benefits of a workshop based on Malcolm Knowles' andragogy by stating that it helped Italian human resource development professionals in improving their influence within their corporations. Being adults, distance learners have their unique traits and learning styles. A successful tutor always addresses their personal traits and learning styles in instructional process at a distance.

Adults learn through involvement and hands-on practice with some assistance by their tutors. Kearsley (1996) explained the term andragogy and stated that instruction for adults needs to focus more on process and less on the content being taught. Therefore, different techniques and strategies which involve adults in learning process are said to be useful and significantly effective. These strategies along with others include case studies, role play, simulations, and preparing portfolios. Tutor or adult educator thus assumes a role of mentor and facilitator to help them learn. It is necessary for a tutor to know (having a tutoring skill) how to help (facilitate) distance learners (who are adults). O'Rourke (2003) identified three core skill groups required for effective tutoring in Open and Distance Learning (ODL). These groups include academic (consisting of guiding and enabling skills), supportive and administrative skills of a tutor.

Similarly, the study conducted by Suanmali (1981) suggested some skills for adult educator/ tutor. A tutor must be capable of making [distance] learners independent. For this purpose s/he should help them by (i) using learning resources appropriately, (ii) defining their learning needs, (iii) taking responsibility for their learning, (iv) organizing [academic resources] for their own learning, fostering learners' decision-making and choices; encouraging them for judgment and integration, facilitating them in posing problem and finding its solution, providing supportive to learning environment, and exploiting experiential methods.

In the same way, Bragar & Johnson (1993) identified five principles of adult learning – learning is a transformation and it takes time to occur; it follows a continuous cycle of action and reflection of the learners; effective learning takes place by addressing learners' issues; it becomes significantly effective through interactive techniques; and, it becomes most significantly effective in supportive and competitive learning environments. Morland (2003) added that business trainers, coaches, and instructional designers needed to understand the dynamics of andragogical model and /or principles of adult learning.

Review of Related Studies

Different researchers and practitioners of adult and distance education conducted studies on various aspects of andragogical approach and revealed interesting results. Some of the related studies were reviewed and are given below.

The study conducted by Cassity (2005) on non-traditional college students explained that respondents reflected their experiences thoughtfully in their academic writings. According to Henschke (2008) these findings reflected the framework of "theories of Malcolm Knowles' andragogy concept and Timothy Quinnan's articulation of the nontraditional student as postmodern phenomenon with process, post-process, and feminist composition theory, as well as with the critical theories of Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, and Bell Hooks" (p. 63).

The study of Nelson (2005) revealed that five African American women empowered themselves even with lack of traditional learning environments/venues. It concluded that women were self-taught and supported Malcolm Knowles' theory of andragogy. Gross (2006) found (at the University of Bamberg, Germany) that respondents were interested to exploit andragogy in their advanced studies for the reason of social learning and development. Henschke (2006) found it to be a key factor compelling learners and higher education institutions to focus more on lifelong learning. The learners of higher education institutions are adults and objective oriented which makes them aware of their learning and success. Likewise, Wie (2003) believed that andragogical principles guaranteed learners' success and quality of adult education.

Akande and Jegede (2004) used andragogical methods to improve adult computer literacy skills in Nigeria. The experience revealed that adults participated actively and these methods were significantly appropriate for promoting computer literacy among adults. It is also used in other areas as well. Isenberg (2005, 2007) developed and tested a 'Virtual Health Coach' Internet program based on andragogical principles related with Internet technology. The experience was quite successful as participants reported their satisfaction in dealing with their health issues. Such skills can also be used successfully to help individuals in some disastrous and other problematic situations of practical life. Likewise, the study of Toman (2005) found andragogical approach more effective than those consisting of one-way information flow in crisis situations like severe wildfire etc.

Rationale of the Study

A tutor, in system of distance education is the person who guides and directs learners to improve their knowledge and learning skills. S/he is regarded as a pillar of study contacts between subject matter and learners which is usually lacking in pre-packed courses. Apparently, a tutor communicates with a diverse community of learners who learn through self-directed study. Self-directed learners need assistance and mentoring to set right pace of their learning. Tutor provides support and guidance to them by developing academic liaison. It helps them achieve higher grades and motivation to further learning.

However, tutors need feedback for improving and re-designing andragogical strategies to address individual differences and intellectual diversity of learners. Being direct beneficiaries, the distance learners can provide right information about their tutors' andragogical skills. They can help in selecting appropriate tutoring experiences

according to their diverse potential. The available studies appear limited in their nature and scope to address the phenomenon under study. Therefore, learners' reflection on tutors' andragogical skills seems appropriate to be studied.

Objectives of the Study

The present study was conducted with following main objectives:

- To evaluate learners' attitude towards academic and tutoring skills of distance education tutors
- To assess distance learners' opinion about assessment & evaluation skills of their tutors and
- To examine learners' reflection on scaffolding and emboldening skills of distance education tutors

METHOD

The present study was descriptive in nature and conducted with the purpose of studying learners' reflection on andragogical skills of distance education tutors. It was a mixed-methods study and explored different dimensions of the problem qualitatively as well as quantitatively. The researcher considered survey approach to be appropriate and adopted it collect the data from respective respondents. The study was delimited to the pre-service teacher education programme (B.Ed semester spring 2010) of Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad. Therefore, the population of the study was comprised of learners from the above mentioned programme. The sample of the study consisted of 600 learners who were conveniently from three regional campuses situated in Punjab Province. A questionnaire was designed using a five-point (rating/Likert) scale to collect quantitative data. However, an interview schedule was used to collect qualitative data from the respondents. For interview, the focus group technique was used. The quantitative data were collected with help of data collectors and the response rate was 78% (468) of the 600 total learners. However, the researcher himself collected qualitative data from 50 learners. The interviews were conducted in groups each consisting of ten learners. He analysed the data quantitatively and qualitatively as given below.

Data Analysis and Results of the Study

Analysis and Results of Quantitative Data

The quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire prepared on a five-point (rating/Likert) scale. The data were coded to analyse in terms of percentages through Ms Excel Programme. The values with their respective percentages are presented in tabular form given below.

Table 1: Learners' reflection on tutoring and academic skills of tutors

Andragogical Area	Responses (Percentage is given in parentheses)				
	SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA
Tutors help learners to develop Knowledge	211 (45.1)	167 (35.7)	3 (0.6)	36 (7.7)	51 (10.9)
Tutors help learners to apply knowledge	188 (40.2)	139 (29.7)	0 (0.0)	65 (13.9)	76 (16.2)

Tutors have subject knowledge	191 (40.8)	203 (43.4)	2 (0.4)	32 (6.8)	40 (8.5)
Tutors communicate in an effective manner	141 (30.1)	234 (50.0)	4 (0.9)	56 (12.0)	33 (7.1)
Tutors provide feedback in proper way	82 (17.5)	102 (21.8)	2 (0.4)	159 (34.0)	123 (26.3)
Tutors know academic criteria	124 (26.5)	167 (35.7)	4 (0.9)	97 (20.7)	76 (16.2)
Tutors ensure available resources	99 (21.2)	161 (34.4)	3 (0.6)	118 (25.2)	87 (18.6)
Tutors assist learners in self-directed learning	199 (42.5)	187 (40.0)	3 (0.6)	53 (11.3)	26 (5.6)
Tutors counsel with learners	136 (29.1)	203 (43.4)	4 (0.9)	68 (14.5)	57 (12.2)

The data given in table 1 explains learners' reflection on academic and tutoring skills of their tutors including mastery in their respective subject areas. According to the data majority of distance learners (80.8%) were of the opinion that their tutors helped them in developing new knowledge through different activities. The respondents (70.9%) also affirmed that tutors assisted them to apply the new knowledge in practical situations by blending information. with situations.

It is necessary for distance education tutors to have mastery over the subject area. It is regarded indispensable for instructional effectiveness. Distance education tutors were competent in their respective subjects as 84.2% of the respondents affirmed it. Similarly, Communication is an art and one of the basic components of instructional process. The respondents (80.1%) were of the opinion that their tutors were good in communicating the contents in an effective manner by using its innovative approaches.

They (62.2%) acclaimed that their tutors were aware of academic criteria of the varsity and they (as reported by 55.6% of the learners) ensured available resources to meet academic standards. The learners (82.5%) also affirmed that their tutors assisted them to learn through self-directed study by providing counselling services to them. They (72.5%) were of the opinion that tutors did so for blending information with their life experiences. However, 60.3% of the learners wished for feedback of their tutors on their academic work properly, which was reported by data to be lacking.

Table 2: Learners' reflection on skills of tutors to encourage and facilitate them developing learning skills

Andragogical Area	Responses (Percentage is given in parentheses)				
	SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA
Tutors enable learners to make their own learning choices	102 (21.8)	168 (35.9)	2 (0.4)	101 (21.6)	95 (20.3)
Tutors promote supportive learning environments	213 (45.5)	188 (40.2)	2 (0.4)	39 (8.3)	26 (5.6)
Tutors encourage problem-based learning	171 (36.5)	221 (47.2)	3 (0.6)	26 (5.6)	47 (10.0)
Tutors assign learning activities and group work to their learners	117 (25.0)	196 (41.9)	2 (0.4)	91 (19.4)	62 (13.2)
Tutors encourage students' reflection on learning	167 (35.7)	141 (30.1)	0 (0.0)	89 (19.0)	71 (15.2)

Table 2 points out the reflection of distance learners on emboldening skills of their tutors. According to the data 57.5% of the respondents were of the opinion that their tutors enabled them to make their own learning choices. They (85.7%) appreciated the democratic attitude of their tutors by stating that they enjoyed academic freedom and their tutors promoted supportive learning environments.

Majority of the respondents (83.7%) asserted that their tutors encouraged problem-based learning by exploiting constructivist approach. Knowledge is constructed by active involvement of the learners. The respondents (66.9%) apprised that their tutors offered earning activities and assigned group work to them for knowledge construction. The learners (65.8%) affirmed that their tutors encouraged their reflection for developing communication skills and confidence among them.

Table 3: Learners' reflection on tutors' attitude helping them make learning meaningful

Andragogical Area	Responses				
	SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA
Tutors relate learning activities with learners' experience	189 (40.4)	156 (33.3)	4 (0.9)	70 (15.0)	49 (10.5)
Tutors help learners to identify relevant resources	164 (35.0)	199 (42.5)	0 (0.0)	84 (17.9)	21 (4.5)
Tutors encourage interest groups	103 (22.0)	178 (38.0)	4 (0.9)	94 (20.1)	89 (19.0)
Tutors guide learners to use resources appropriately	187 (40.0)	234 (50.0)	0 (0.0)	47 (10.0)	0 (0.0)
Tutors exemplify concepts from real life	131 (28.0)	192 (41.0)	4 (0.9)	79 (16.9)	62 (13.2)
Tutors associate new knowledge with previous one of learners	108 (23.1)	201 (42.9)	2 (0.4)	85 (18.2)	72 (15.4)

Table 3 expresses learners' reflection on their tutors' attitude in helping them make learning meaningful. Relevance of prior academic experience with learning activities leads toward new knowledge. The data indicated that 73.7% of the respondents were of the opinion that their tutors linked learning activities with their prior academic experiences and it helped them to construct new knowledge. Similarly, 77.5% of them affirmed that tutors helped them in identifying the relevant academic resources required by them.

In academic settings interest groups are considered necessary for sharing learning activities with group members. It was asserted by 60% of the respondents that their tutors encouraged interest groups to discuss and share study plans and achievements in broader perspective. The data also reflected appreciative attitude of distance learners towards counselling skills of their tutors as 90% of them affirmed academic the guidance of their tutors in using educational resources appropriately. They (69%) appreciated the professional expertise of their tutors as they explained difficult concepts and themes with examples from real life situations. Likewise, 66% of the responses indicated that tutors associated new knowledge with previous one of the learners for their maximum understanding & comprehension.

Table 4: Learners' reflection on tutors' assistance in removing their learning difficulties

Andragogical Area	Responses (Percentage is given in parentheses)				
	SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA
Tutors probe into learners' academic difficulties	127 (27.1)	215 (45.9)	0 0.0	78 (16.7)	48 (10.3)
Tutors are keen to listen their students	112 (23.9)	187 (40.0)	3 (0.6)	101 (21.6)	65 (13.9)
Tutors discuss learners' difficulties openly	116 (24.8)	202 (43.2)	4 (0.9)	77 (16.5)	69 (14.7)
Tutors use questioning technique	126 (26.9)	159 (34.0)	2 (0.4)	86 (18.4)	95 (20.3)
Tutors summarize concepts comprehensively	127 (27.1)	155 (33.1)	5 (1.1)	97 (20.7)	84 (17.9)
Tutors get learners' feedback	75 (16.0)	89 (19.0)	4 (0.9)	187 (40.0)	113 (24.1)

Table 4 reveals learners' attitude towards assistance provided by their tutors in eliminating their learning difficulties. According to the data, the distance learners agreed to state that tutors were positive to eliminate their academic difficulties. The respondents (63.9%) were of the opinion that distance education tutors welcomed learners' queries for quenching their academic thirst. Similarly, 83% of the learners asserted that their tutors showed keenness to listen to them and probe into their learning difficulties. The learners (68%) reported that tutors discussed their difficulties openly to find the solutions.

Questioning is considered as one of effective investigative techniques. The respondents (60.9%) reported that their tutors used questioning technique in identifying and removing learning difficulties of the learners. They (60.2%) appreciated the efforts of their tutors to make them understand difficult concepts by summarizing them comprehensively. However, learners (64.1%) wished their tutors to get their feedback on tutoring skills, methods of instructional delivery and scaffolding techniques.

Table 5: Learners reflection on their tutors' assessment and evaluation skills

Andragogical Area	Responses (Percentage is given in parentheses)				
	SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA
Tutors mark assignments and return within due time	204 (43.6)	234 (50.0)	0 0.0	18 (3.8)	12 (2.6)
Tutors give comments on assignments	166 (35.5)	187 (40.0)	4 (0.9)	87 (18.6)	24 (5.1)
Tutors indicate strong parts in assignments	166 (35.5)	187 (40.0)	4 (0.9)	87 (18.6)	24 (5.1)
Tutors indicate weaker parts in assignments	173 (37.0)	112 (23.9)	0 0.0	99 (21.2)	84 (17.9)
Tutors adopt problem-based assessment style	199 (42.5)	122 (26.1)	0 0.0	83 (17.7)	64 (13.7)
Tutors direct learners towards academic activities	131 (28.0)	168 (35.9)	4 (0.9)	93 (19.9)	72 (15.4)
Tutors' comments support learners to improve learning	147 (31.4)	164 (35.0)	0 0.0	68 (14.5)	89 (19.0)

Assessment and evaluation are considered to be basic components of any educational endeavour. The data given in table-5 indicates the reflection of distance learners on assessment and evaluation skills of their tutors. The learners (93.6%) affirmed that their tutors marked and returned the assignments within due roundabout time duration. The respondents (68.6%) further asserted that tutors adopted problem-based assessment style.

Tutor marked assignments are considered to be the basic components of students' level of learning and its reflection. The respondents (85.5%) were of the opinion that tutors helped them to improve the work by giving comments on tutor marked assignments. The learners (75.5%) stated that tutors mentioned strong parts of assignments and 60.9% of them stated that they also indicated the weaker parts of the assignments to improve their academic writing and communication skills. The learners (66.5%) viewed comments on tutor marked assignments to be supportive in enhancing their learning and they (63.9%) appreciated tutors' attitude of directing them towards academic activities.

Table 6: Learners' reflection on technical skills of their tutors

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

Table-6 shows reflection of distance learners on technical skills of their tutors. The data appraised the opinion of distance learners by asserting that their tutors were computer literate. The learners (68.6%) stated that tutors used computerized/composed handouts in tutoring through distance education. A small number of respondents (27.8%) asserted that tutors used Internet –electronic mail. Similarly, 35.2% of the respondents reflected that tutors use social networking websites like face-book, LinkedIn, web blog and Google groups for communication with learners.

Technology is used to initiate and maintain group interaction at a distance. The learners (30.1%) affirmed that their tutors promoted group interaction through conference call facility on mobile phones. Modern technologies are also be used for enhancing group interaction and communication. Skype is one of such technologies and 24.3% of the respondents stated that tutors used Skype for communication. Likewise, 20.1% of them affirmed that their tutors used web blogs and 13.3% appraised the online discussion

initiated by their tutors. It was evident that tutors had lower expertise, interest and/or access to the technology.

Table 7: Learners' reflection on social skills of their tutors

Andragogical Area	Responses (Percentage is given in parentheses)				
	SA	A	UNC	DA	SDA
Tutors develop academic relationships	127 (27.1)	206 (44.0)	4 (0.9)	76 (16.2)	55 (11.8)
Tutors observe to promote courtesy among learners	155 (33.1)	187 (40.0)	4 (0.9)	76 (16.2)	46 (9.8)
Tutors practice professional honesty	113 (24.1)	196 (41.9)	8 (1.7)	69 (14.7)	82 (17.5)
Tutors adopt accepted social norms	204 (43.6)	234 (50.0)	0 (0.0)	18 (3.8)	12 (2.6)
Tutors have respect for others	127 (27.1)	192 (41.0)	3 (0.6)	66 (14.1)	80 (17.1)
Tutors are positive towards others	140 (29.9)	173 (37.0)	5 (1.1)	75 (16.0)	75 (16.0)

Table 7 indicates the opinion of distance learners towards social skills of their tutors. Social skills are considered essential for smooth and successful life. The learners (71.1%) asserted that their tutors developed academic relationships with them and advised to promote the same in their community.

The respondents reported different social skills of their tutors with some degree of variation. The learners (73.1%) asserted that tutors observed courtesy, 66% described professional honesty of their tutors. Likewise, majority (93.6%) of the respondents stated that tutors adopted accepted social norms and values, 68.1% revealed the respect of tutors which they had for others and 66.9% commended their positive attitude towards others to inculcate these traits among learners.

Analysis and Results of Qualitative Data

The researcher collected qualitative data by using focus group interview technique. An interview schedule (prepared on the same parameters as that of the questionnaire) was used to collect relevant information from the respondents (total 50 learners). The respondents expressed their reflections and opinions freely on different aspects of tutoring and andragogical skills of their tutors. The interview/qualitative data revealed remarkable and factual information which is summarized below.

i. Academic and Andragogical Skills

The learners' reflected on academic and tutoring skills of their tutors in an elaborative and professional manner. They spoke high about their mastery in their respective subject areas. A prominent majority of distance learners acclaimed, "Our tutors helped us develop new knowledge and applying it practically –blending new information with our life experiences. They use latest and innovative communication approaches for effective learning. They help us to overcome learning difficulties and how to consult self-instructional materials for self-directed study".

The distance learners appeared to be satisfied with available resources to meet their academic demands and learning needs according to the varsity standards. The learners asserted that their tutors provided counselling services to them but they wished to have proper feedback on their academic work from their tutors.

ii. Encouraging and facilitating learners to develop their learning skills

The distance learners reflected on emboldening skills of their tutors in an appreciating way. They were of the view that their tutors enabled them to make their own learning choices. They asserted, *“Our tutors are true professionals and they believe in academic freedom and independent choices of study. However, they assist us in developing learning skills –by appreciating our academic achievements and helping us to overcome major shortcomings. They involve us in learning activities and advise us to share academic work with others”*.

The learners asserted that their tutors encouraged problem-based learning by offering learning activities & assigning group work to them. They also affirmed that their tutors encouraged them to reflect on different aspects of distance learning for developing communication skills and confidence among them.

iii. Helping and facilitating learners to make their learning meaningful

Meaningful learning makes learners capable enough to make its appropriate use practically. The distance learners' explained that their tutors were keen on helping and facilitating them making their learning effective and meaningful. They helped them draw conclusions and inferences from precedents and examples. They stated, *“Our tutors help us relate learning activities with our academic experience and assisted us to identify relevant resources. Our tutors adopt humanistic approach and keep in view our personal profiles. They help us associate new knowledge with previous one. They encourage us to formulate interest groups to discuss and share study plans and achievements in broader perspective”*.

The learners were of the view that their tutors facilitated them in locating and using educational resources appropriately. Apparently, the distance learners were satisfied with academic coaching and facilitation endeavour of their tutors.

iv. Enabling and helping learners to deal with and remove obstacles

The qualitative data reported positive attitude of distance learners towards their tutors' assistance in eliminating their learning difficulties and scaffolding them. A group of the respondents was of the voice, *“Our tutors welcome us and listen to solve our learning difficulties and academic problems. They discuss our study problems openly and guide us to overcome these problems in an effective way. They try to explore our problems in different ways and usually they use questioning technique”*.

In spite of all above, the distance learners asserted that tutors rarely considered it necessary to have feedback on their tutoring and mentoring skills & styles for appropriate instructional delivery and scaffolding. The learners wished if their tutors

took into account constructive criticism and comments on andragogical skills for their improvement and perfection.

v. Assessment & Evaluation Skills

Assessment and evaluation are considered to be basic the components of all educational endeavours. Assessment and evaluation are assumed to be the art of measuring learning and learning achievements of learners in educational institutions. The more a tutor is adept in assessing and measuring learning achievement the more accurately learning is measured. The learners appeared to be praising for assessment and evaluation skills of their tutors by asserting, *"Tutors specify the parts of our assignments where we achieve and/or loose marks. Our tutors help us to improve and re-submit the weak assignments. Tutors involve us in activities and evaluate through problem-based assessment approach. The comments of tutors on our work encourage us and create motivation to learn"*.

The learners appreciated their tutors' helpful and facilitating attitudes which lead them towards academic activities. Seemingly, learners were appraising their tutors' ability of evaluating and reporting the strengths and weaknesses in learners' academic work. However, learners wished to have positive response of their tutors to addressing their queries related with their studies and academic demands.

vi. Technical Skills

Technical skills of educational practitioners are considered to be an integral part of one's professional competencies. Distance learners apparently agreed that their tutors were computer literate. A reasonable number of learners asserted, *"Our tutors used computers for presentation in the classroom. They also provided us computerized handouts. They used electronic mail and face-book for communicating with us. However, they rarely used other technology-based communication systems like conference call through mobile phones and Skype, web blogs and online discussions"*.

Obviously, distance learners were less satisfied with expertise of their tutors to use latest information and communication technologies to promote and enhance communication and group interaction. Their assertion indicated lower expertise of tutors, their interest and/or availability of the technology. It might have created problems for innovative learners. They wished their tutors to be equipped properly with such skills of using latest communication technologies in distance education.

vii. Social Skills

The learners pointed out that their tutors practiced accepted social values. They appreciated and commended their mannerism and behaviour. They were of the voice, *"Tutors are welcoming and positive to us. They feel pleasure to discuss academic issues and problems with us. They are always kind to us and meet with smiling face. They accommodate us even when they are busy"*.

It was evident from the opinion of distance learners that their tutors observed social skills satisfactorily. The learners explained that tutors observed courtesy, practiced

professional honesty, adopted social norms and values with respect for others. They advised learners to develop and observe the same social traits in their lives.

DISCUSSION ON RESULTS OF THE STUDY

It was a unique study with its distinctive nature. It revealed interesting and some remarkable results by addressing andragogical skills of distance education tutors. The study affirmed that learners were satisfied with academic and tutoring skills of distance education tutors as their reflection on such competencies including mastery in their respective subject areas was reported to be positive (table-1 &i). It coincides with the assertion of O'Rourke (2003) who identified three core skill groups required for effective tutoring in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) including academic, supportive and administrative skills of a tutor. Similarly, learners valued the emboldening and facilitating skills of their tutors. The learners reported that tutors enabled them to make their own learning choices and enjoy academic autonomy by promoting supportive and conducive to learning environments. The learners affirmed that their tutors encouraged their reflection for developing communication skills and confidence among them (table-2 &ii). The distance learners' explained that their tutors were keen on helping and facilitating them making their learning effective and meaningful. They helped them draw conclusions and inferences from precedents and examples (Table-3 &iii). These results correspond to the recommendations of Suanmali's (1981) study that a tutor must have the ability of minimizing dependency of learners, helping them use learning resources, defining their learning needs, taking responsibility for learning, organizing for their own learning, fostering their decision-making and choices, encouraging them for judgment and integration, facilitating them in posing problem and finding its solution, providing supportive to learning environment, and exploiting experiential methods.

The quantitative and qualitative data reported positive attitude of distance learners towards their tutors' assistance in eliminating their learning difficulties. In spite of all above, the distance learners stated that their feedback on tutoring skills was gives less importance rather it would be useful for tutors. (table-4 & iv). These results relate to the third of the five principles of adult learning identified by Bragar & Johnson (1993) that effective learning takes place by addressing learners' issues.

Assessment and evaluation are considered to be the basic parameters of quality education and all educational endeavours depend upon them. Apparently, learners reported (quantitatively as well as qualitatively) that their tutors were capable of assessing and evaluating their learning and learning achievements (table-5 &v). These results partially relate to the assessment skills of a distance education tutor as suggested by Mitra (2008) that a distance education tutor should have the ability to assess and convey the strengths and weaknesses in learners' work.

The present time is the age of information and communication technologies (ICTs). The educational professionals using ICTs are aware of innovations and latest developments in their subject area or area of specialization. They can access to use right information at the right time. Distance education tutors need to be equipped with technical skills of

using ICTs properly. Distance learners apparently agreed that their tutors were computer literate, but they rarely promoted group interaction through conference calls on mobile phones, Skype, web-blogs, and online discussions indicating their lower expertise of using these technologies and/or less interest. The learners wished if their tutors were equipped properly with skills of using latest communication technologies in distance education (table-6 & vi). These results also partially coincide with recommendations of Hussain (2005) and Mitra (2008) indicating that distance education tutors may be capable enough to exploit ICTs in teaching learning process.

It was evident from the opinion of distance learners that their tutors practiced social skills satisfactorily. They advised learners to develop and practice social skills like courtesy, professional honesty and accepted social norms and values in their lives (table-7 & vii). These findings relate to the aspirations of Adeeb, Rahmani, Hussain and Nadeem (2009) that a university teacher should be equipped with appropriate social norms & values and behave like an educational leader to inculcate the same among learners and to bring about positive change in the society.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the overall reflection of distance learners on andragogical skills of their tutors was positive. Apparently they were satisfied with andragogical skills of their tutors. They affirmed that their tutors had academic and tutoring skills (consisting of encouraging, guiding & facilitating –emboldening and enabling skills), assessment & evaluation skills, technical, and social skills. However, tutors need training in developing skills of using social websites, Skype and mobile phone conference, and online discussions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The researcher recommended that proper short term and long term training of distance education tutors may be organized to equip them with technical skills of using Information and communication technologies in distance education
- Tutors' manual may be developed by distance education institutions for newly registered tutors.
- A large scale study may be conducted to evaluate learners' reflection on andragogical skills of their tutors and find out their training needs

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