# Chapter 8
# E-Learning and Teaching:
## The Need for Clear Pedagogy

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## ABSTRACT

*The last three decades have witnessed the phenomenal growth of the Internet as a medium for teaching and learning in higher education. Yet educational systems have done little to gain a better understanding of how these methods affect the nature and level of student engagement. Although there is a rapidly growing literature on the use of the Internet for teaching and learning purposes, there is relatively little literature and associated research on effective Pedagogical approaches to web-based instruction. This chapter starts by outlining the advantages and disadvantages of using the web for teaching in the context of higher education. One aspect of the disadvantages that is addressed in this chapter is the dilemma that Online learning and teaching pose for decision-makers, educators and students with regard to the implementation of Pedagogical approaches aimed at enhancing critical thinking and metacognitive skills.*

## INTRODUCTION

With the rapid growth of e-learning over the past three decades and the phenomenal expansion of the Internet as a medium for teaching and learning in higher education, there is an increasingly pressing need for highlighting, assessing and understanding the pedagogy of e-learning. Educational systems have done little to gain a better understanding of how e-learning courses and programs affect the nature and level of student engagement as well as students' critical thinking and metacognitive skills. Although there is a rapidly growing literature on the use of the Internet for teaching and learning purposes, there is relatively little literature and associated research on effective Pedagogical approaches to web-based instruction. As indicated in the literature, one of the challenges for Online learning is "to continue to develop theoretical models for Online learning that will imagine its potential applications; however, of paramount importance is to understand how we can use Online learning to

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support and facilitate critical thinking and higher order learning-outcomes" (Garrison & Archer, 2007, p. 84). Garrison and Archer (2007) rightly emphasize that "without clear cognitive map within which students learn, how to learn and become self-directed, cognitively autonomous learner learners" (p. 85) there is no ascertainable benefit flowing from Online learning.

In this chapter I argue that "Online learning could be a catalyst to transform educational practices for the better" (Garrison & Archer, 2007, p. 82) if it is supported by educational pedagogies that enhance critical thinking and metacognitive learning skills. However, if Online learning is merely provided superficially to follow a new industrial trend then it will only be a burden on students, teachers and educational institutions. It particularly matters because for Online learning because it could draw more advantages and be more effective than what we see today. Moving Online learning to the centre of the learning process requires a comprehensive understanding of how to utilize it properly.

My aim is to explore Pedagogical strategies that could be implemented in Online courses and programs for enhancing students' learning experience. This is especially important given the fact that the new trend in Online education is not only to offer individual Online courses but also to offer entire Online degree programs in a variety of subjects and from credible Western educational institutions (i.e. American and British).

In this chapter, I will present my views – as an educator and as a curriculum theorist – of Online education and its advantages and disadvantages, as well as how Online education can complement traditional approaches to education. I will highlight the need for a clear pedagogy of Online learning. I start with the definition and meaning of Online or e-learning

## BACKGROUND

Before I delve into the discussion of Online learning and its Pedagogical challenges, I will define and explain the term "e-learning." Given the fact that this term has a variety of definitions, it is necessary to define its meaning in the context of this paper. Zemsky and Massy (2004) define e-learning as distance education, as electronically mediated learning and as facilitated transactions software. E-learning is arguably best defined as a field of education that focuses on

*...pedagogy/andragogy, technology, and instructional systems design that are effectively incorporated in delivering education to students who are not physically "on site" to receive their education. Instead teachers and students may communicate asynchronously (at times of their own choosing) by exchanging printed or electronic media, or through technology that allows them to communicate in real time (synchronously). (Morales, 2007, p. 3)*

I employ the following definitions as my main referenced understanding and the core meaning of e-learning which will be discussed in this chapter.

- **E-learning as distance education:** This refers to courses that are delivered entirely or almost entirely on the Internet. This is the most common understating of e-learning, but increasingly e-learning is not seen as distance education but as any teaching that involves technology, which is the second type of e-learning.
- **E-learning as electronically mediated learning:** This category includes any teaching or learning that is mediated by technology. Hence products like computerized test preparation courses that prepare students to take the SAT or GRE; complex, integrated learning packages such as Maple or Mathematica that teach elementary calculus; learning objects that stimulate and