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Applying e-learning in realization of gender equality in education and promotion of women's psychological security in Iran

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to apply virtual instruction in realization of gender equality in education and promotion of women's psychological security in Iran. Qualitative method along with grounded theory has been used. The subjects are all teachers and students of virtual learning in Iran. Targeted sampling has been done to reach saturation. Grounded approach contains three levels of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding and at last we have grounded theory. The result show that e-learning not only provides the equality of education for both genders but also helps to make the psychological security available for them through providing conditions like eliminating the distance as well as space, and helping in house management.

Key words: E-learning, gender equality, psychological security

1. Statement of the Problem

The concept of humanity has been taken from social life and gets its meaning only if its personality as well as its behavior are both defined and elaborated inside society. If the discrepancy existed among members of a society get initiated based on natural characteristics and be evaluated on the basis of socio-cultural criteria; hence, some will be credited to a high degree while some not. As a result of this, social inequality emerges. A case in point is gender inequality. In most communities, gender is considered as a socio-cultural phenomena related to sex. Gender inequality can be expressed as an imparity between men and women in the use of available facilities. It also refers to every behavior, policy and performance reflecting constant, comprehensive and institutionalized viewpoints of members of the society toward women as an inferior creature in various fields such as occupation, education, etc.

Gender inequality, especially in the field of education, can result in profound disorders in mental, social and living aspects of women's life as well as next generations. One of the main missions of the society is to meet human needs and educational institutions as part of the society can fulfill such needs through different methods namely e-learning. In this article, it has been tried to evaluate this newly arisen matter, e-learning, and to apply its results to provide psychological security for women in a society.

2. The Importance of the Matter

Psychological security as a mental feeling toward belonging, acceptance, being favorite, receiving assistance, and as an emotionally oriented confronting system, has been looked upon by some authors as something to fulfill the emotional needs, satisfaction, and sense of belonging (Rafiei, Ramid, Hoseini, 2001 p: 5-12). This causes being in harmony with the society, recognition and acceptance of realities and adjusting with them, flourishing the intrinsic talents, and at last promotion of a healthy life among societies (Sadeghian, Heidarianpoor, 2010 P: 71-81). Psychological security of women is included in this definition and one of the factors blemishing their security is gender inequality.
A lot of theoreticians agree on this matter that gender inequality is rooted in society. Wollstonecraft believes that the discrepancy existed between two genders derives from the society not the nature. She also states that male-dominated autocracy which is based in family, society, political ideology, and nation and in which individuals learn to humiliate other people, especially women adds to this. Brant et al define gender inequality as having less capability in all activities based on sex, exerting stereotyped behaviors relating to sex, being materialistic, or evaluating the individual as a sex partner or any behavior damaging the relationship between two sexes (Ahmadi and Garoosi, 2007). They seek the source of this inequality in cultural, social, and psychological matters.

De Bouvoir looks for the sources of gender inequality in society and cultural consequences of male-dominated systems. Bourdieu believes in gender taxonomy, symbolic violence, and gender language as social sources to gender inequality. Rich states that such inequality is resulted from discrepancy in family upbringing. Chodorow mentions sexual division at work and McKenon believes in state organizations and institutions as sources of gender inequality.

In Neo-Weberian societies, market determines social level. In order to explain such inequality in gender, Parkinophormy (1984) points out two concepts of market position and social closure from Weberian viewpoint. In their study, Abbitt and Wallace (2002, p: 40-68) discuss the dependency of wives to their husbands and their lack of social mobility as factors influencing gender inequality. Susan Tiano (1987) is on this belief that involving women in economy and life matters in society leads to gender equality (Merging Theory) and being modernized leads to the emergence of some cheap female workforce which causes exploitation of women (Exploitation Theory).

Ann Mary Wolpe (1977) and Micheal Barret also are in accord that family and school make women ready to accept low-income jobs and do mostly the households. Abbitt and Wallace (2000, p: 96), feminist Marxism and socialist, have taken the advantages of open theories on society and culture to analyze gender issues. They believe that education has a direct effect on the creation of workforce in gender inequality.

Studies done on gender all show inequality in education and gender has been defined due to such inequality and such belief that it is mostly related to the life of women and depends on the education system of that society (Jacobs and Jerry, 11996). Women's failure in education, unavailability of academic institutions and higher education along with the outcomes resulting from education all contribute to such inequality in gender.

E-learning, considered to be a novel way of learning, encompasses all learning and teaching ways backed by technology (Leypold, Nolting, and Tavagain, 2004) and includes all definitions related to increasing of the availability of sources, flexibility against the learner, and the expansion of skills as well (Lowenthal, Willson, and Parrish, 2009). In addition, it is considered as the fastest way with the least expense which makes it available for everybody to participate in learning process. Cornelia Weggen states that dynamic e-learning contains up-to-date content available for all learners.

It is completely apparent that such educational system preserves its own culture, rules, programs and gender in such system follows the culture. It has to be mentioned that Iran whose young population are half women seeks to use e-learning to be able to meet all the needs of its people, both men and women. Among those needs, psychological security is of utmost important.

3. Objective
Considering the efficacy of applying e-learning to provide socio-psychological security for women in Iran via giving them equal educational opportunity is the main objective of this study.

4. Methodology
The present research is an applied research. It uses a qualitative approach, and a grounded theory.

The following steps should be taken in carrying out a qualitative research (Naderi and Seif Naraghi, 2010):

- Collecting data (interview, observation, analyzing relevant literature, etc. or sometimes a combination of several methods)
Coding every item of data while collecting
Comparing coded data and classifying them based on their common attributes
Generating concepts

The researcher then endeavours to extend concepts and develop the inchoate theory through reduction, selection, and differentiation

The data gathering process in qualitative studies include common observation, direct and open observation, thorough unstructured interviews, and evaluation of deeds and documents. In current study, thorough unstructured interview (interview with 30 e-learners in Iran) was used to gather the data.

5. Population and Sampling
E-learners in Iran are the population under the study in qualitative part. In grounded theory gathering the data continues until the researcher finds it unnecessary to have interview because it adds no new information to his knowledge. This process is called saturation. The interview was carried out with 20 subjects and saturation was met, yet it continued to get total assurance.

6. Data Analysis
Grounded theory is a method of qualitative research by which the researcher can extract a theory from some data and this theory can determine a process, action, or interaction (Bazargan, 2009 p: 96). Systematic grounded procedure has been used in present research in which first there is coding in three stages of open, axial, and selective and at last codifying the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Open coding
- Pregnancy, childbirth, taking care of children, housekeeping, etc. are among the factors arousing inclination for e-learning.
- Some cultures and communities reject the ideas of co-education as well as women's travelling for education pursuit. They prefer e-learning.
- The insecurity and dangers in travels for female students and those who study at distant universities cause problems that make them choose e-learning.

Axial coding
- Following cultural traditions and beliefs about the Iranian life style as well as valuing special subcultures have caused women to be more inclined toward e-learning
- Women can not only fulfill their own needs but also they can provide more proper psychological security via e-learning.
- Gender equality as well as psychological security is met while taking the advantage of e-learning and this produces more interaction between the people and the society.

Selective (Central) coding
- The effect of using e-learning to find educational opportunity and to meet socio-psychological even physical needs of women.

Grounded theory
Grounded theory is developed based on the three matters namely: interactive, procedural, and consequential, and makes the data understandable to the target audience.
7. Conclusion

The investment on e-learning in Iran and subsequently its expansion would create opportunities for women to recognize and to prove their significant roles in family and society. The expansion of e-learning as the ultimate goal of education paves the way for educational justice and equal educational opportunities that could be made available for all people through appropriate policies. The differences in views on the gender dimension of e-learning would originate from the heterogeneity of people in their socio-cultural attitudes and differences. This causes that some of the interviewees regarded gender as a neutral factor, while others viewed gender as taking various perspectives into account, the provision of mental security for parents and female students, the observance of subcultures and traditions, marital status, etc. The reluctance of some parents to their daughters pursuing their education was merely due to parents' care about their daughters' health and security. Some of the parents were worried about the mental and physical security of their daughters, since girls are more prone to social harms than boys are. Parents also showed reluctance to their daughters' studying at universities in distant cities. The parental sense of responsibility should not be a frustrating factor, but a motivating force to promote and expand e-learning.

The findings of the current research differ from those of Goldin (1995), Curren (1980), and a group of American high school teachers holding that most women, even talented ones, fail to follow their education because of their sex; and concords with those of Jerry and Jacobs (2009). They examined gender and education in three levels, entering higher education, colleges' experience, and post-education processes. They believe that the environment and women’s determination in the pursuit of education are highly influential.

Concerning the presented grounded theory, the followings are suggested:

- Traditions, subcultures, and ethnic matters that are sometimes observed with bias can induct irreparable damage to this class of people, but e-learning can act as a shield to reduce such damage.
- E-learning as an opportunity to simultaneously manage family, occupation, and education should be promoted through media as a national-cultural priority.

References


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