

Role of Cultural Process and Power Relations in Understanding E-Learning in the Era of Globalization

Dr. Amandeep Rana

Assistant Professor in English, JC DAV College Dasuya Distt. Hoshiarpur PB-144205

ABSTRACT

The present paper is an attempt to understand eLearning in the light of cultural process and power relations in India. Cultural process profoundly impinges on how people observe and understand the world and this, of course, has a noteworthy impression on the perception of e-Learning in modern times. Teaching learning process in India has always been a cultural construction; diversity of Indian culture, in terms of different dimensions: social, economic, gender, education, linguistic, access, motivation and guidance, has always led to changes in learning processes. Learners across the cultures have greatly invited the policy-makers to design e-Learning framework. Cost, content and business, however, remain the main goals of such policymakers and, as such, education becomes secondary. Organizational demands are continuously changing with the coming of new corporate segments. Continuous promotion of e-Learning resources by Euro-American imperialistic forces, at the name of globalization, is indubitably a question of discourse in India. Resistance to adoption of e-Learning technologies is often designated orthodox and outdated culture. It is the issue of the perception of e-Learning that needs to be addressed.

Key-words: Culture, Power-relations, globalization, imperial forces, corporate world, e-Learning technologies

America's leadership and prestige depend, not merely upon our unmatched material progress, riches, and military strength, but on how we use our power in the interests of world peace and human betterment.

—Eisenhower, "Farewell Address to the Nation"

We are living in a global world which, nowadays, owing to the means of communication and transportation, seems more like a small village than a big world. Material and scientific developments, over the years, have brought about significant changes in the outlook of human beings. Life has significantly changed with the coming of mass media and gadgetry. Cultures of the world, and so also within nation states, have undergone profound transformation. Relations of cultures to one another are also varying rapidly and new cultures are coming into being. During the last couple of decades, we have observed a significant shift from paper-pen clerical culture of the Babus to hi-tech computer operators and data operators. Work-culture of the multinational companies in India has altogether transformed the office culture of the 90s. Teaching-learning process is not an exception and the blackboard teaching has already given place to the use of multimedia projectors and smart boards. Students are already handy with the search engines over the internet and this

has left teacher more confused with respect to the learning content and teaching methodologies. Classroom culture has undergone a profound change and the western imperial forces are further distancing this towards e-Learning. There is nothing detrimental in this turn but one needs to understand the cultural practices and the power relations in context of e-Learning in India and the vice versa.

Cultural process profoundly affects how people see, observe and understand the world around them and this, of course, has a significant impact on their learning process. E-Learning, too, is not an exception. Learning process is determined by the cultural practices, and in return, cultural practices are gradually reshaped and reframed by learning. Culture stands for the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular group of people or society; for example, Indian culture, Afro-American culture and EuroAmerican culture. Within a nation state, say India, there are no homogeneous cultures, and what we observe are South/North Indian cultures and within that sphere, Punjabi and Sikh cultures, further divided into cultures of Majha, Doaba and Malwa. In order to recognize the Indian culture, one must comprehend all these cultures within cultures and subcultures, and most importantly the power relations therein along with external influences and relations.

Teaching learning process in India has always been a cultural construction. Diversity of Indian culture, in terms of different dimensions – social, economic, gender, education, linguistic, access, motivation and guidance – has always led to changes in learning processes in the past. We have evolved from several educational policies and teaching methodologies and strategies, including distance and open -earning systems, catering to the needs of time and space. Learning societies, in a cultural frame, have four dimensions: futuristic, planned, reflexive and market (Jarvis). The learning society as futuristic is promoted through the use of technological advanced tools, such as computers, to provide equal opportunities for all individuals to receive as much education as they are believed to be capable of. In a futuristic sense, the learning society approach is aimed at the central goal of allowing individuals to develop to their maximum potentials. The overarching goal of the planned learning society is to prepare employees for increasing national and/or global market competitiveness, competencies, widening participation, and lifelong learning. Put in differently, the planned learning approach focuses on the promotion of the learning so that learners can participate in the democratic processes within societies. Every society needs to change with the time, and as such, cultures must be altered to give way to progress. As society changes, everyone in it is required to learn new ideas to keep up. The fourth approach to learning involves learning as a product of the market which subscribes to the assumption that learning can be commoditized or packaged in a way that helps foster the goal of customer satisfaction. This approach assumes that people, generally, do not want to learn because it is not fun. Thus, there is the need to make people learn by making learning a fun process. Contemporary efforts, on raising the standard of education, are all focused on the last dimension. We need to analyze the whole educational set up in the light of above description of the fourth dimension, namely market, in order to understand how education, in India, is being used as a commodity to the customers' satisfaction by continuously alluring him/her through repeatedly embarked advertisements and its presentation as the most authentic and urgent need of the hour.

E-learning involves a process whereby learning or knowledge acquisition and dissemination occurs within the confines of information communication technologies or electronic media, or more precisely, through online internet set up. In this globalized world, learners across the cultures have greatly invited the policy-makers to design e-Learning framework. Education is designed to provide specified learning opportunities and is institutionalized, either as state institutions (public) or as corporate ones (private). This distinction is important in current Indian education scenario. Educational policies of the state, by cutting short the grants to public sector institutions and allowing corporate players to commodify education, are instrumental in fostering a new type of culture in India, namely the e-Learning culture.

Demands of the modern organizations in the global world are high and so are the standards. They need increased work efficiency and for this, they keep on offering incentives to the more efficient workers. The better you perform, the more money you receive as incentive. This 'incentive culture' has put an extra pressure on the employee and has turned out a benefit mechanism for the employer. Some organizations have made it mandatory for their employees to pursue certain courses for promotion and/or hike in salary. Consequently, what is sought by the employee is flexibility in learning and knowledge acquisition. Under such circumstances, e-Learning has come out as a helping hand, rather a boon, to the in-service people and also to the students who wish to join such organizations. In the corporate culture, it has been very successful and there is no doubt about its role and significance therein. What is alarming, however, is its penetration into academic spheres and its efforts to replace classroom and formal teaching at secondary and university levels. Teaching-learning process in India has been a cultural phenomenon. Rapid availability and accessibility of e-Learning content among Indian masses has selfish objectives of Euro-American imperial forces. At the name of globalization, what is being served by the western world is a different type of culture, completely alien to Indian masses. The west, as cultural centre, is shaping the cultural rebirth of other areas, more particularly the third world countries. Successfully creating the conditions, required for their own renaissance and inclusion in the process, they are leading the third world cultures towards a world culture. Their study of users' cultural perspectives and learning preferences enables them to create congenial environment for a market. Readily made available over the internet by various agencies, these courses are primarily designed not to educate the Indian masses; the cost, content and business remain the chief objective of such courses and respective policymakers. Several organizations in India have turned to e-Learning to facilitate this process of learning and to a development in a more time-efficient and cost-effective manner.

There is no denying the fact that international division of labour has placed different demands on education and learning, along with how e-Learning is structured to address the needs of the work-force. Imitation of what is happening in the US and Europe, without completely understanding Indian cultural set up, is more like 'colonial following of the white skin' without using heads. If observed through magnifying glasses, this seems more identical to producing of babu culture of pre-independence India. The British produced what they desired, without even letting Indians know the motives behind that. Occurring on similar lines, we are stepping in to an educational set-up where we are more concerned with producing the workers for their organizations than in an education based on our cultural and societal processes and progress. This power

relation of the East and the West is discernible in Indian e-Learning structure. To their plus point, they use globalization as a tool to reshape the established structures and cultures altogether, at the name of which, they have already succeeded in producing an ideology which focuses more on imitating their teaching-learning set up as if it is for the national betterment.

Relation between traditional learning and e-Learning can also be observed in terms of the concept of dominant-emergent cultures. Coming of the new e-Learning culture in India, as emergent culture, is developing as an alternative culture. Classrooms have already changed into rooms equipped with ICT tools, but there is nothing in this that can be seen much challenging; however, the coming of e-courses is an attempt to completely replace the classroom education structure and this is a fast-growing phenomenon. Traditional learning process, like the classroom teaching and the active participation and role of teacher, is transforming into an altogether new shape. Resistance to the adoption of e-Learning technologies is often termed as orthodox and outdated culture. It is generally believed that e-Learning is an essential field, or rather, the only field, in the national development.

It is, at the end, the perception, that is how we look at e-Learning and how important do we regard it in our cultural fabric that matters the most. There are several cultural barriers that need to be addressed before we begin following it. Its scope in cultural context and the power relations, more precisely the relations between the developed and the developing countries around the globe, in the light of all historical perspectives and contexts, like how the West has always seen the East as a marketplace and has dominated and exploited its manpower and resources, should be studied and discoursed before making and implementing educational policies in the country. It is, in fact, the issue of the perception of e-Learning that needs to be addressed first.

References:

Jarvis, P. Globalisation, the learning society and comparative education. *Comparative Education*. 2000. 36 (3), 343-355.