

## **The Opportunities and Challenges of Online Instruction in Transnational Education and Learning<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

*This study reports on the opportunities and challenges of online instruction in transnational education and learning. The purpose of the study was to reconsider the opportunities the online teaching/learning mode provides learners and instructors and identify and analyze challenges faced by both learners and instructors using the online option in higher education. The article argued that the quest to make more strategic gains from online education programs comes with challenges to both learners and instructors as teaching/learning are likely to suffer in the online instruction mode. Although the online mode provides learners the opportunities for higher education they may otherwise not have and employment for instructors, the article claims that high teaching/learning standards and effectiveness seem to be compromised in online instruction considering that relationships play a key role in optimizing an individual's intelligence (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Marzano et al., 2005; Fonkem, 2012) and consequently the individual's ability to perform teaching and learning tasks.*

**Keywords:** distance education, international education, online learning, transcultural learning, transnational education

### **Introduction**

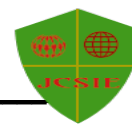
Online instruction is today an integral part of education and learning across the world. Over the past several years, learning or knowledge creation is changing drastically with the proliferation of online programs as there is an ever-growing desire and demand for increased online education

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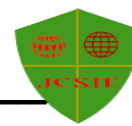


opportunities. While some prospective students prefer online or distance learning over the traditional educational environment, often these students are working adults who want online options as they attempt to complete a degree while still working, either full or part-time, and while maintaining a family (Rehfuss, Kirk-Jenkins, & Milliken, 2015). As a distance mode of teaching and/or learning, the online model takes place within nation-states as well as across international and cultural boundaries. Although many universities consider online instruction as an alternative to traditional faced-to-face classroom instruction, students and instructors may not always see the online instructional process in the same light when it comes to the instructional process in online courses. This study identifies and analyzes some of the challenges that students and instructors face in online instruction. The arguments in the study are supported by data collected from students and instructors. In addition to the literature reviewed, e-mail and telephone interviews were conducted with a group of online students and instructors to further explore the challenges of online instruction in a transnational and may be trans-cultural context in this study.

## **Background**

This author's experience with transnational education and learning is longstanding. He grew up in Cameroon, Africa in the 1960s and 1970s. At the time, the country had only one university in Yaounde and so opportunities for higher education were very limited particularly to the people of British Cameroons also known as the people of English-speaking Cameroons. These people did not have much of a chance in the lone University of Yaounde, Cameroon which was, to state the obvious, a French-speaking institution akin to those in France and other French-speaking countries. At the time, many citizens of British Cameroons who wished to earn university-level qualifications had to travel to the United Kingdom, the U.S., Nigeria, Ghana, India, Uganda or Sierra Leone to have access to higher education opportunities. These opportunities were, however, not open to many of the people of British Cameroons because of a number of reasons. Some of these reasons included financial inabilities as well as political handicaps. Many families were not wealthy enough to send their children abroad for university education. In addition, the government of the Republic of Cameroon, for its own reasons and needs, used the passport as a tool to hold back many prospective students who wished to study abroad. In many cases, only a few who had government scholarships were issued passports to travel abroad for educational purposes. In other words, the majority of those citizens who were either financially unable or those who were financially capable, but were not issued passports, and still desired higher education resorted to transnational education in the form of correspondence courses. The brief background narrated so far provides the historical foundation of transnational education in the author's home country and the author's incursion into the world of transnational education. For purposes of the discussion in this article, transnational education refers to:

[A]ll types of higher education study programmes, or sets of courses of study, or educational services (including those of distance education) in which the learners

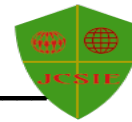


are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based. Such programmes may belong to the educational system of a State different from the State in which it operates, or may operate independently of any national education system. (Council of Europe, 2002, para. 28)

Many of the individuals who did not want to end their educational pursuits because of government policies or because of the inability to travel abroad for higher education, invested in transnational education in the form of correspondence courses provided by educational institutions in Britain. Jean-Francois (2016) considered correspondence education as that type of transnational education whereby “a providing institution from a provider country provides instructions to students in a host country via printed, audio, or visual materials” (p. 8). Some of the best-known providing institutions used by learners in Cameroon until the 1990s led the Rapid Results College (RRC), Wolsey Hall, Oxford University and the London College of Preceptors (LCP). These different institutions provided instruction mainly via printed materials. Those students who invested in correspondence education programs then paid exorbitantly for lectures shipped to them in bulky envelopes. In a few cases, audio materials were also available especially following the availability of the tape recorder technology in the 1970s.

Today, in the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the current ease of online communication, the tradition has shifted greatly from courses by correspondence using bulky printed materials to courses via the Internet on computers and hand phones. However, whether by correspondence or online, the instructor and the student in this model of transnational education remain vastly unknown to each other. Even when we consider the recent technological advances that bridge the physical divide in online instruction by providing two-way video-related opportunities such as Skype, illuminate, and others that help reduce the distance between the instructor and the learner, we can argue that both the instructor and the student remain faceless to a large extent. Most often, they are near strangers to each other and it becomes extremely difficult for each party to get beyond imagining what cultures they may belong to and above all, what expectations of each other may always be.

These unknowns were the experiences of this author recently. He teaches a course, HSL 727 – Applied Research Methods course in the Transnational Master’s Degree program at a reputable American University. At a meeting with a technology trainer, it became very clear to the author how far apart the instructor and the student could truly be in a typical Internet-mediated classroom though connected on a computer screen. In his planning with the technician, she made him aware that “*the students were truly somewhere else, not just at unknown locations with different geographical times and cultures, but also and above all, far apart in their mind set about the course and its instructional processes* (Personal communication). It became very clear to this author as instructor how difficult it can be to create and sustain a teaching/learning community with the student(s) in such a faceless transnational and sometimes trans-cultural education setting. In the course of the dialogue with the technology expert, this author thought of the important place of the instructor-student relationship as a major component of effective teaching and student learning. Marzano et al. (2005), Arbaugh (2010), Fonkem (2012), and



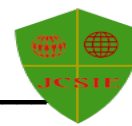
Preston (2014) are among those scholars who consider instructor-student relationships as primordial in effective instructional practice. With particular reference to the online instruction mode, Preston (2014) made the strong point that a sense of trust must be established between the instructor and the learner that promotes honest communication through reinforcing participation, collaboration, and knowledge transfer in online instruction. This article emphasizes the learning climate and instructor-learner relationships in its examination of the opportunities and challenges of online instruction in transnational and trans-cultural education and questions the teaching/learning effectiveness in online education in the context of instructor/learner understanding of the perceptions and expectations of each other.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Effective relationship building and maintenance is an essential component of effective teaching and learning. Relationships between instructors and learners as a way of enhancing student learning are important not only for student learning, as noted by Marzano et al. (2005), but also for the instructor from the perspective of the learning climate. “Effective relationship building means discovering and incorporating students’ interests into class goals, noticing individual accomplishments and events in students’ lives, and interacting with each student as an individual” (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 59). In addition, writing about the importance of relationships in the classroom, Fonkem (2012) emphasized the need to plan with the students in mind as an important component of instructional practice. The reality is that teachers can be as ready as they can be to teach, have the best differentiated lesson plans for varied learning styles, but if they do not meet the respective needs of the students, the students will not learn. In the area of neurobiology, Siegle (1999) in his studies on cognitive functions of adults also emphasized that relationships play a key role in optimizing an individual’s intelligence and consequently their ability to be resilient.

Besides, in post-industrialized Western societies and notably in the U.S., instructors need students’ feedback to retain their job and to gain promotion too. In the home country, professors were never accountable to students as their promotions depended on a hierarchical relationship in and out of the university, and even with political connections in the ruling regime. In my host society, professor-student relationships are conditioned by the fact that professors exist because there are students to be taught. Students are consequently at the center of everything that happens in the classroom.

When we explore any ideas in class, the policy is *no participant left behind*. And referring to questions, every question is important not only to the student who may have posed the question, but more importantly, every question is a contribution to the knowledge base of the class. Since students who come to the class come from a variety of experiences, backgrounds, and needs, the approach in my classes is that as a class we are made up of unique individuals. As a consequence, I am very aware of the needs of different students and try to accommodate the individual needs in the learning activities and processes. Referring to the place of relationships in

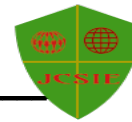


the classroom in student learning, Marzano et al. (2005) have asserted that “the relationship between teacher and student is the starting place for a good classroom experience” (p. 56). Emphasizing the relationship component of the instructional practice, Fonkem (2012) noted that most often because of the need to meet the required curricula expectations, teachers find themselves engrossed in teaching students they do not know because they do not believe in building these relationships but more because they do not have the time to artfully teach and socialize.

Part of this author’s learning especially in the U.S. has been that in order to make progress in human relationships, we need to give up seeking to control others. In previous teaching experience in a less democratic setting, he did not realize that the only behavior one can control is one’s own; that no one can make people do anything they do not want to do. The desire to control student behaviors was hurtful to students as student behaviors were anchored by fear more than on friendships. Relationships with students in that setting were between an all-knowing powerful professor and little-knowing powerless students. This type of relationship embodies what Freire (2004) termed “banking or domesticating” education in which the educator comes across as an oppressor and the students are the oppressed. According to Freire, the capability of banking education to minimize or annul the student’s creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors (educators)...” (p. 73).

This professor-student relationship theme in the narratives stands out in post-industrial American culture within a learner-centered context. In the home country context, the professor was the center of learning. However, the teacher taught, the student had to adapt to his/her teaching style. It did not matter whether an entire class failed. The story was told of a certain Mathematics professor who did not care about his students and might not have had any relationship with them. In fact, the professor had set his/her exams from material that he/she had not even taught and knew that no student would understand the questions. He/she was happy that no student would pass. At the same time, he/she knew that his/her job was not in jeopardy whether anyone passed or not. Besides, the students – the oppressed – are in Freire’s (2004) words, regarded as the “pathology of the healthy society” who are “incompetent and lazy” (p. 74).

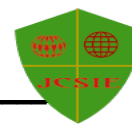
Although research has revealed that the actual presence of an instructor in the room is unnecessary in fostering critical thinking, deep learning, and engaging communities of interaction (Redpath, 2012), some of the participants in the study leading to this article indicated their frustration with the learning they were getting via online instruction. As Jane, one of the learners, indicated, “*I came into this program without a good understanding of how it works. I need an instructor in the room.*” Emphasizing the place of interaction and deep learning in instructional practice, Preston (2014, p. 40) made the pertinent point that a sense of trust must be established that promotes honest communication through reinforcing participation, collaboration, and knowledge transfer. In all, relationships between instructors and learners can be experienced differently in the two worlds of transnational educators and learners. In a corporate race-to-the-top culture higher education institutions compete for students as they struggle to make strategic gains especially considering the climate of acute budget cuts experienced by many institutions.



## **Research Method**

In order to adequately explore the subject of opportunities and challenges of online instruction in Transnational Education and Learning, this study used a combination of data collection approaches to capture the underlying reasons for online instruction in transnational teaching/learning context. This approach was important for this study because a study involving understanding issues of schooling in cross-national settings or contexts can be complex particularly when the researcher would like to include different perspectives to counterbalance individualistic biases from informants (Brennan, 2005; Malin et al., 2011). The method included asking 10 graduate students at a mid-sized university in the Midwest who were taking courses in Universities abroad on specific University to University arrangements. The assignment was for the 10 students to write essays about their opinions of their transnational education instruction experiences. The students did not receive any concrete questions to answer, except encouragement to write honestly about any experiences they had with transnational education instruction. Prior to contacting the students for this project, they had already taken three other courses from three different professors using the same instructional medium. The students were encouraged to comment about whatever experiences they had as they took one course after another. The 10 essays received were analyzed (to assess how often a certain topic was brought up) and qualitatively (to get a better understanding of the individual experiences of the students). To be sure students would be honest with their answers, the instrument did not ask them to provide any information that might reveal their identity or the identity of the instructors. As such, it was impossible to distinguish among students based on characteristics such as gender, class status or location of the student and instructor in the analysis. Anonymity of participants was therefore totally secured in spite of the researcher's interactions with them.

In addition to gathering data from students involved in degree programs, completely implemented online, a dozen professors teaching transnationally through the Internet were interviewed. In total, 13 different professors were represented. Three main questions were asked and then followed up on the interviewees' answers. The first core question inquired what kind of comments—positive or negative—instructors had received from students about their courses. The second question asked instructors to provide concrete examples of challenges they faced as online instructors in a transnational setting. The third question asked the instructors what kind of support from colleagues or institutions they would find helpful to address these challenges. While the researcher talked to 5 of these instructors in person, eight responded to the questions by email. For reasons of confidentiality, the instructors were listed only by pseudonyms and did not include any information about their courses or institutions. In analyzing the collected data, I proceeded with cross-tabulation to draw inferences in the data as the responses had some connections with each other. The analysis employed a narrative approach to reconcile the different opinions of the respondents and highlight any tensions and challenges considered as opportunities for improvement. In trying to understand the experience of learners and instructors in or with how they engaged in the courses taken online I looked for themes in the stories the told through the essays.

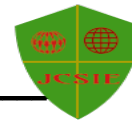


## Challenges

Athanase Gahungu (2011) recognized that “being a faculty member is a journey full of challenges and opportunities” (p. 7). In terms of challenges, the issue of power and authority in instructional practice and the relationships with students are evident for transnational and oftentimes trans-cultural instructors. From a programmatic perspective, for instance, Gahungu pointed out how foreign-born and foreign-educated academics bring with them a heavy baggage of not only being born and raised in another culture, but also of a limited familiarity with the US higher education system (p. 7). This perception of the challenges before the instructor comes from the face-to-face classroom situation. It does not even include the challenges that confront instructors in transnational and trans-cultural online cases. The different cultural worlds of instructors and learners for Collins (2008) may make it difficult for transnational instructors to relate to students adequately in a general sense. At the same time, it may also be difficult for students of a different culture to relate to instructional models and contents from another culture. As individual learners and instructors, limited familiarity in terms of cultural systems may constitute a challenge or be a limiting factor for transnational/trans-cultural educators and learners alike. In this regard, transnational/trans-cultural instructors will need to work hard and fast to adjust to faceless learners spread across unknown geographical locations and cultural backgrounds.

Some of these cultural differences in teaching and learning have been highlighted in the experiences of immigrant professors in the American college and university classrooms (Hutchinson, 2015). In *Experiences of immigrant professors: challenges, cross-cultural differences, and lessons for success*, the example is provided that many cultures have different education systems and ways of teaching, and students may have a hard time adapting to these foreign concepts and ideas. If the dimension is this great in face-to-face classroom situations, such cultural differences will be all the more extensive in faceless classrooms of the digital model. In this regard, it is evident that the trans-cultural context of transnational education presents its own challenges for both instructors and learners.

Teaching and learning are high communication or interaction events. Arbaugh (2010) recognized that learning is optimal when a high level of interaction and collaboration exists. Fonkem (2012) and Marzano et al. (2005) had, in a similar vein, emphasized the importance of relationships in instructional practice. Communication is at its best when instructor and learner are in the presence of each other considering the non-verbal elements in every communication event. When instructors teach live classes, they can realize that some students are not getting the point just by noticing the look on the learner’s face or that some learners are grasping the concepts being communicated by the nod of the head. In online instruction as faceless instructional meetings, it is very difficult for the instructor to notice who is grasping the concepts being communicated and who is not. Even in examples of notetaking, many instructors know of cases of students in face-to-face classrooms who need the instructor up-close to indicate what they may be doing incorrectly. In my experience teaching distance education classes using



compressed video, the instructor may never know the level of accuracy in notetaking. When students do not take notes accurately, the weakness influences students' learning considerably.

Other major challenges at the level of the transnational education context include the unpredictability of computers, electricity supply, unreliability of signals, the pressures of life, lack of direct supervision, and the commitment of students to their assignments, etc. Let us discuss some of these factors consecutively. First, computers as machines, break down periodically. Some students complained that they were unable to work on assignments and/or submit them in time "because their computers had crashed" or failed to function somehow. Whether true or false, the instructor is not in a position to verify such realities. We know the suitability of online education is premised on the assurance that the Internet will be readily available. This situation may be valid in the developed world, but it is not a given in many developing countries where the Internet is not always "readily available." Another problem or challenge with the availability of the Internet is the fact that many learners in the developing world continue to rely on Internet cafés, which are very unreliable because most of them use old computers that function with low capacity. These old computers are known to break down constantly and frustrate users.

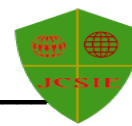
Where the computers work efficiently, there could be yet another major challenge. Electricity supply is inconsistent in many parts of the world. Some students complained that they were used to *constant electricity cuts* some of these cuts could *last for an entire week*. Whenever that happened, the cuts hampered the ability of transnational learners to contribute to online class discussions or chats, and also hamper their ability to submit assignments to the instructors. Similarly, this situation also hampers the ability of the instructor to post assignments or follow up on different discussions.

Considering that many online education students are working adults who desire online options as they attempt to complete their education while also working, and while maintaining a family (Reh fuss, Kirk-Jenkins, & Milliken, 2015), we must understand that such students are under so many pressures of life even when they prefer learning online learning. As students (full time or part time), as individuals managing a family, and also as individuals working in a world where the work environment is increasingly very competitive, it is not difficult to envision the pressures under which these students attempt to learn. Functioning under such pressures, the student is unable to give the best of him or herself to the learning content and process.

Power imbalance is one area of challenge in online instruction. Bekele and Menchaca (2008) noted that students in online courses have more power concerning their learning activities, and this imbalance requires the instructor to encourage more collaboration, self-directed discovery, and uncovering meaning. Many of the instructors surveyed for this study indicated that in spite of the efforts they made to encourage student collaboration, they were not always successful in enforcing such student collaborations and felt that they were weakened in this regard especially when they relied on positive student evaluations to retain their contracts.

From this author's perspective, every academic who chooses a teaching career faces many real challenges as he or she is continually evaluated on his/her ability to teach, conduct research, publish, and perform other duties within and around campus. The challenges are more





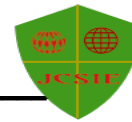
daunting in distance education where the instructor and the student are virtually unknown to each other. Subscribing to this viewpoint, Ngwainmbi (2006) pointed out how the challenges grow even more difficult for foreign-born faculty. As Ngwainmbi noted, “[T]hough highly qualified, many say they are overworked, underpaid, underappreciated and face discrimination from other American professors, students and staff” (p. 28). Moody (2004) also indicated that the transition for foreign-born instructors, who have to adjust to a different classroom culture, is even more difficult. Unfortunately, it would appear that many transnational/trans-cultural educators have to make this transition without institutional support as many of the institutions may not even know the locations of the transnational learners let alone understand the education systems of student origins.

The result of these different challenges in online learning that some refer to as computer-mediated learning has been that higher education administrators and faculty have tended to minimize online education rating it as inferior to face-to-face offerings (Allen & Seaman, 2009). Others, including Noble (2003) and Angulo (2016) have described online degree programs as *diploma mills* in their reference to institutions or organizations that grant large numbers of educational degrees based on inadequate or inferior education and assessment of the recipients. Some of these critics of online learning argue that if digital education becomes just another fast-food commodity, students and teachers will lose, while higher education becomes further entrenched in corporate big business. Arguing in similar light, Paulson (2016) indicated that the messages of convenience in online education sadly prey on desperate, vulnerable adult learners who are not always informed consumers and who are only looking to improve their lives and their circumstances. According to Paulson (2016), some advertising slogans for these institutions are now promising credit for life experience, seeming to imply that a college education does not really offer anything new or of value and that individuals already know what they need.

## **Opportunities and Benefits**

Whether in the 1960s and 1970s with correspondence courses or in a 21<sup>st</sup> century environment of exploding online instruction, transnational education presented and continues to present many opportunities not only to many students across the world who may not otherwise have access to higher education, but also to a good many instructors and higher educational institutions. For each of these categories or groups, the opportunities of online instruction are numerous.

Beginning with students in both the developed and developing worlds, online instruction provides an opportunity for many working adults to access higher education while working and living with their families. Husbands and wives who take advantage of online instruction as students do not need to be away from their family and children, and also do not need to be away from their communities. Many researchers including Coltrane (1997); Zimmerman, Haddock, Current & Ziemba, (2003); and Saginak and Saginak (2005) have indicated that husbands and wives are increasingly juggling family responsibilities in order to create a sense of balance in the midst of enormous family responsibilities, trade-offs, and sacrifices. Many adult learners who

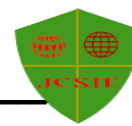


already have families have mainly sought to further their education through one form or other of distance education. For them, it is very cost effective on the one hand and on the other hand, online instruction keeps families together in a world in which family members are increasingly trying to find a balance in their lives. In particular, Saginak and Saginak (2005) point out how “fathers are changing more diapers, cooking more meals, and reprioritizing the demands of work, increasingly adding more family responsibilities to their daily activities” (p. 162). In brief, online education gives most people the opportunity to acquire higher education while working. It is cheaper and learners live in their own environment thereby avoiding rents and other expenses as well as the costs and risks of commuting to a campus environment.

For instructors in the online approach, they have the opportunity of securing jobs that would otherwise not be there for them. In an increasingly difficult economic time when many families live from paycheck to paycheck, the possibility of online instruction provides added income to many families. Neil, one instructor in the study, mentioned how he still had to struggle to teach online in spite of the challenges because if [he] did not take the job, his institution would find someone else to do it. In other words, some online instructors are on the job because it is for them an opportunity to survive the hardships posed by an economic crunch in which people are working much harder and for less. Some of the instructors interviewed indicated that they taught for online institutions only to supplement their income and that very few of their students accepted their efforts to connect, engage, and mentor their learning and development. Others considered online students as lacking in critical analysis and synthesis skills and also as lacking any sincere interest in research. Additionally, the instructors in the study considered the writing of online students as poorly developed as most of the students remain distant, disconnected and seemingly uninterested in doing more than the minimum required of them. Although some instructors recognized the fact that a few of the students do fit with the online learning environment and are generally mature, highly motivated and possess advanced skills, the instructors indicated that the students generally preferred to summarize and write as little as possible. This increasingly changing nature of how education is delivered is forcing all colleges and programs to adapt and to reconsider what they offer and how they offer it. Yet another participant in the study stated that he taught an online class only because he knew his institution would give the course to a different instructor if [he] did not teach it. These developments should be a cause for pause; inherent to any assets are also liabilities.

In all, online education provides several opportunities to both instructors and learners. It provides many people the opportunity to acquire higher education while working and living with their families. The option is more cost effective and allows participants to live in their own environment and countries in many cases. Students do not need to leave home or to travel abroad to new cultures and expensive and sometimes risky living conditions.

We have discussed the fact that in a world where an expanding array of working adults and others desire access to higher education programs there is a need for institutions to offer degree programs and courses for such students. However, in a drastically changing classroom within a larger context of higher education becoming further and further entrenched in corporate



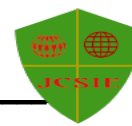
big business, we may seek to understand who benefits more from the proliferation of online degree programs: the student, the instructor or the institution?

Paulson's (2016) characterization of the universe of online degree programs is poignant. He indicates that the proliferation of online programs over the past several years have seemed to create an unfortunate race to the bottom, as many programs feel increased pressure from either their institution or external sources, like federal financial aid, to not only make sure that students graduate but that they graduate within defined timeframes. John Paul adds that "the pressure to successfully and timely graduate people, coupled with an expanding competitive variety of online degree options with aggressive marketing campaigns, has seemed to skew expectations about higher education." (p.3). He further argues that

A current prevailing message seems to be that it does not really matter what degree one obtains or from where they obtain it, only that they complete their degree and in as short of a time as possible. This places an overemphasis on simply obtaining the degree and not the quality of the knowledge or skills that are gained (p. 3).

In this climate, the institutions rather than the students and instructors appear to be the beneficiaries. Although it is true that students have the opportunities for higher education and instructors have employment opportunities through online degree programs, high teaching/learning standards and effectiveness seem to be compromised. In this case, Paulson (2016) may be right in advocating for *a cause for pause as inherent to any assets are also liabilities*.

It would appear the proponents of the increase in online programs focus on the skills and abilities of students and instructors involved in these programs. Very much in the tradition of Jordan (1992) and those scholars who consider relationships as important in teaching and learning, including Fonkem (2012) and Marzano et al. (2005), this author argues that it is needless to overemphasize the place of relationships in the deeper examination of the relational dynamics that promote growth. According to Jordan, "complex factors are involved in those relationships which not only protect people from stress but promote positive and creative growth" of individuals (p. 3). On the connection between the intellect and relational development other researchers, including Siegle (1999) already observed that "Interpersonal experience plays a special organizing role in determining the development of brain structure early in life and the ongoing emergence of brain function throughout the life-span" (p. 24). Siegle (1999) emphasized that interpersonal relationships are the central source of experience that influence the brain's development. Neural pathways in the brain are activated by experiential opportunities provided to children through relational engagement, which results in "strengthening existing connections or creating new connections" (p.13). For Siegel (1999), "human connections create neuronal connections" (p. 85). Human connections viewed from the standpoint of online instruction are therefore primordial in ensuring instruction and learning quality. In arguing this point, it is important to note the emphasis higher educational institutions would like to place on the training of instructors to provide them with the strategies, techniques, and tools needed to narrow the gap



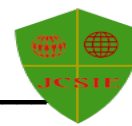
between learners and instructors in online teaching and learning. Increasingly, the need for meeting the goals of making online learning more engaging with the online community of learners and creating a highly interactive learning environment is being felt as the years go by.

## **Conclusion**

Online instruction is here to stay not only because of the opportunities it provides students who may otherwise not have the opportunities for higher education, and jobs for instructors, but more importantly, it is a way for academic institutions to make financial profits. This article argued that the quest to make more strategic gains from online programs comes with challenges to both students and instructors as teaching/learning is likely to suffer in this instructional mode. The backdrop to this study was always the question as to how we achieve greater effectiveness in instructional practice in the online mode of instruction when we know that instructor and students' interaction and expectations influence the instructional effectiveness. The study argued in agreement with Paulson (2016) that "the message of online education increasingly communicates to potential students, either blatantly or inadvertently, that they can expect to get an advanced, post-secondary degree in their spare time with little to no disruption to their lives, at a time, place, and in a format that is completely convenient to them and meets their preferences, and all with little to no effort or sacrifice on their part" (p. 3) leaves room for concerns of rigor, academic dishonesty, and students commitment to quality education. It is still uncertain how instructors and students in online transnational education succeed or not considering the difficulties involved in understanding the perceptions and expectations of each other as well as the challenges of adjustment required to meet such expectations both ways. As we witness the proliferation of online degree programs, how higher education institutions involved in online education in general are forced to reconsider what they offer and how they offer it remains to be seen. From an analysis of the data, this author continues to think higher education institutions rather than the students and instructors appear to be the greater beneficiaries of online education from the perspective of their strategic gains. Although it is true that students have the opportunities for higher education and instructors have employment opportunities through online degree programs, high teaching and learning standards and effectiveness seem to be compromised in online learning and teaching considering that relationships play a key role in optimizing an individual's intelligence (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Marzano et al., 2005; Fonkem, 2012) and consequently his or her ability to perform teaching or learning tasks.

## **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The authors declared that they had no conflicts of interests with respect to their authorship or the publication of this article.

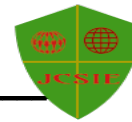


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