

The Challenges of Hyper-Textual Learning Approach for Religious Education

Elham Shirvani-Ghadikolaei, Seyed Mahdi Sajjadi

Abstract—State of the art technology has the tremendous impact on our life, in this situation education system have been influenced as well as. In this paper, tried to compare two space of learning text and hypertext with each other, and some challenges of using hypertext in religious education. Regarding the fact that, hypertext is an undeniable part of learning in this world and it has highly beneficial for the education process from class to office and home. In this paper tried to solve this question: the consequences and challenges of applying hypertext in religious education. Also, the consequences of this survey demonstrate the role of curriculum designer and planner of education to solve this problem.

Keywords: Hyper-textual, education, religious text, religious education.

I. INTRODUCTION

STATE of the art technology has a tremendous impact on the people's lives. Today, education has been influenced by technological innovation. Technological innovation means to enhance the functional and communicative contexts into which it is placed. Although technology innovation is an undeniable part of the education system, the planner should try to form of our culture, society, political and particularly education practices. So, culture plays an essential role rather than other factors such as developing investment or productivity at work. In other words, information technology with an appeal to hypersexuality contexts alters our educational programs and behaviors. Because, in hypertextual space, the information and atmosphere need more knowledge and experience. But in religious education, these processes are really different since the materials are fixed without any modifying. Now the main question of this paper is what are the consequences and challenges of appealing to the hypertextual in the fixed text-based religious education process. These consequences and challenges also will be explained in comparative prospects (a comparative study of consequences of appeal to textuality and hypertextual in religious education).

II. TEXT AND HYPERTEXT

Due to technological changes and developments, the concept, nature, and function of text are altered. Today the reader is not limited by written, hard and fixed (book) texts; because hypertexts are also another space that reader is related

to them. Of course, there is much more difference between text and hypertext.

The text is based on the sequential method of reading. Landow and Delany (1991) refer to the printed text as linear, bounded, structured in certain logic, and fixed [1, p. 23]. According to Wills (1999); the text has a particular focus, a clearly defined audience, and a single voice. Another tenet of the print medium has been the creation of the canon: the chosen texts are assumed to contain the central authoritative truth of a discipline. By staying available in print, these retain their central role [2, p. 134] Based on distinctions outlined by Barthes (1977) between 'work and text' [3, p. 32], text is a methodological field....a social space that decants the work from its consumption and gathers it up as play, activity, production and practice [3, p. 51], [4, p. 633]. In Berg and Watt's view, the most standard text documents are constructed to be read linearly, from beginning page to ending page [5, p. 124].

Today, hypertext also is an undeniable part of learning and teaching processes. Hypertext refers to a wide variety of reading /writing and discursive activities that are activated via the World Wide Web through HTML. It will increasingly become the method of future classroom research, reading, and writing practices.

The term of hypertext was first advanced by Ted Nelson in 1960. According to his vision; "hypertext would be a dynamic and interactive environment that allowed the user to customize the process of retrieving and organizing information, facilitating instantaneous traversals of divergent textual materials across and through disciplinary boundaries [6, p. 41]. It is based on the non-sequential method of reading, an active and generative mode of interpretative production, and at the same time would provide a reversible media in which reading and writing would be integrated into a single, mutually-constitutive digital format [7, p. 29]. The prefix hyper' usually means 'more than' so we may begin by asking what is it that hypertext has that makes it more than text [4, p. 622].

Contrary to printed text, hypertext is interactive, non-linear, associative, non-fixed, modular, and not necessarily owned by an identified single author [2, p-142]. In Landow's view:

"hypertext is composed of blocks of words (or images) linked electronically by multiple paths, chains or trails in an open-ended, perpetually unfinished textuality described by the terms link, node, network, web or path" [7, p. 32].

Some thinkers tried to compare the hypertext to a constructivist learning environment which is predicated in 'the

Elham Shirvani-Ghadikolaei is a PhD Candidate at Technische Universität Berlin (e-mail: shirvanel@gmail.com).

Seyed Mahdi Sajjadi is an associate professor at Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran (e-mail: sajadism@modares.ac.ir).

ways...knowledge is mediated, interpreted, and created through individuals' interaction with their environment [8, p. 81]. Hypertext is based on its relational matrices of connectivity and in the experimental, divergent, and contingent condition in which that connectivity is caught up. Some other thinkers such as Poster [9, p. 121]. Moulthrop (1994) also tries to compare hypertext to Deleuze and Guattari's advocacy of a 'rhizomatic' (anti)epistemology. [10, p. 41]. According to him, hypertext seems to closely parallel Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome in its decentralization of networks of information and knowledge, its shift from textuality to an accelerated intertextuality and multi-textuality. Landow (1992) argues that hypertext enables a paradigm shift; a move toward a new epistemology and a move toward poststructuralist. Hypertext system mimic Derrida's emphasis on discontinuity [7, p. 9]. Staninger (1994) believes that:

"To understand the text of a book, the reader must try to comprehend the ego and intentions of the author. In hypertext, the roles are reversed, and this is the essential intellectual challenges for the authors. The logic and organization are created by the user as he or she reads and interacts with the database" [11, p-51].

Hypertext gives permission to readers to insert themselves into the meaning construction process since this method of reading try to create own meaning that it results is more creativity for readers. Birkerts (1994) believes that "electronic text, and hypertext, in particular, is killing the author" [12, p. 19]. Hypertext readers, however, can challenges a text immediately or as immediately as the reader can write a response and link that response to the author's text. Foucault (1977) emphasis on the loosening of the "author's constraint over text" [13, p. 61] and hypertext seems to be one way in which this can happen. Following are the main characteristics of hypertext - according to its comparison with the text:

A. Contrary to Text, Hypertext Has No Center, Beginning or Ending

In a hypertext network, there is no any limitation to read in different part of the text, in fact, the readers have more freedom [14, p. 87]. When one electronic text is linked to another text, or when one text is copied and pasted into another, the notion of a separation of or a distinction between texts simply evaporates [15, p. 112].

B. Hypertext Blurs the Distinction Between Author and Reader

In "exploratory hypertext" [16, p. 41], the reader must pick and choose her way from node to node, thus determining the text to be read. In other words, the readers could insert to text such as revise, edit or rearrangement, so there is not the strong boundary between readers and author [15, p. 6].

C. Hypertext is Changing and Fluid, Not Fixed or Single

Bolter says, "there is no single story of which each reading is a version because each reading determines the story as it goes. We could say that there is no story at all; there are only readings" [14, p. 10]. Lanham also believes that the electronic

text is "fundamentally unstable, restless, prone to change and likely to disappear" [15, p. 16]. Contrary to hypertext, the linear language of the printed page encourages a single and clear point of view.

D. Hypertext Is Collaborative

Hypertext can put teacher and student closer to the same level, and encourage readers to do more research and scholar. In fact, within a hypertext environment, all writing becomes collaborative writing, doubly so.

"The first element of collaboration appears when one compares the roles of writer and reader since the active reader necessarily collaboration with the author in producing a text by the choices he or she makes. The second aspects of collaboration appear when one compares the writer with other writers that are the author who is writing now with the virtual presence of all writers 'on the system' who wrote then but whose writings are still present." [1, p. 88].

E. Hypertext Is Democratic and Anti-Hierarchical

The history of information technology from writing to hypertext reveals an increasing democratization or dissemination of power. Writing begins this process, for by exteriorizing memory it converts knowledge from the possession of one of the possession of more than one. Writing can belong to anyone; it puts an end to the ownership of self-identical property that speech signaled. The democratic thrust of information technologies derives from their diffusing information and the power that such diffusion can produce" [1, p. 174]. The electronic media with putting power into the hands of ordinary people; are proving to be a surprising force for democracy, rather than the ultimate nightmare of totalitarian control [14, p. 86]. In Gerald's view, hypertext can provide the arena in which ethical and political arguments can take place. The wisest response to the canon wars raging in literary studies today is to 'teach the conflicts [17, p.113]. As divers, multilinear network, hypertext can readily incorporate conflicting arguments and interpretation; it can "encompass conflicting possibilities" [14, p. 169].

III. CHALLENGES OF HYPERTEXT FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The development of new technologies and their application in an educational setting is bound to bring about a whole new set of possibilities and problems. One of the new technologies to currently challenges philosophers of education can be found in the rise of electronic text or hypertext [18, p. 132]. Hypertext is finding its way into many different aspects of our lives from the classroom to home, to work. This new mode of presenting information promises to change the way we read as well as the way we pursue and understand knowledge, and because it is becoming increasingly used for educational purposes, it seems imperative that we carefully consider some of these epistemological changes.

Hypertext systems and hypertextual learning challenge conventional/traditional assumptions about the role and status of teacher, the authority of the content, the methods of

teaching/learning, the value and positionality of knowledge, and the positionality of the practitioner/subject in relation to knowledge, information, and practice. Information technology challenges and reshapes the contours of the institutions where pedagogical activities take place. These challenges also similarly extend to traditional conceptions and values surrounding textual and canonical authority. The conventional methodologies and techniques involved in distilling desired outcomes, and the reified distinctions of autonomous disciplines or content areas. Among them, hypertext also encounters the religious fixed text –that enjoys the status of reflecting an authoritative, divine and canonical truth, with challenges. While printed and fixed religious texts direct the believers to look inward into the community, and to foster the preservation of the textual tradition, technological innovations enable intensive interactions that cross the rigid boundaries of the community itself. Wills (1999) believes that:

Hypertext links information through associations and not sequentially and is powered by hyperlinks, which allow the reader to skip to another location on the web. Hypertext, therefore, breaks traditional hierarchy among texts and seems to confirm the critical notions about the elusive boundaries between texts and the questionable authority of authors [2, p. 135].

Based on Landow's vision of hypertext (hypertext is composed by trail, paths...), the sequential, vertical or hierarchical process of reading a book is no longer (necessarily) involved [1, p. 42]. However, hypertext tends to eliminate hierarchical dualistic distinctions and leads students away from the narrow and essentialist view of knowledge. Hypertext blurs the distinction between authors and readers; it moves the focus away from the authority of the author, suggesting instead that multiple interpretations are equally possible and viable. [18, p. 142]. It does seem as though the focus away from narrative forms and the move toward multiple voices will lead to a kind of 'death of author' in which more emphasis will be placed on readers, and also it moves us toward relativistic epistemological positions. [19, p. 343]

While we began with the idea of a root, or 'primary text,' from which all other references were merely extensions, we found that very quickly the multidimensional structure of hypertext puts all references and text at a common level [20, p. 34].

Weakening the role and status of the teacher as transmitter of knowledge and information is the other challenges of hypertext. In Duncan's vision (1997), the blurring of clear lines between authors and readers lessens the impact of years of traditional means of education the idea that education is simply the transmission of information [18, p. 32]. Some hypertexts critics believe that the hypertext reader might flit between the trees with greater ease and yet still not perceive the shape of the wood any better than before [21, p. 17].

Going to beyond of text and escape from its power and control, also is the other challenges of hypertext. Hypertext allows and enables students to make their own meaning, to

find their own way into, through sending out of a text [7, p. 62].

Based on above characteristics and challenges of hypertext for education, religious education also is subject to some challenges. Because there are some contradictions between the principles of religious education and hypertext (hyper-textuality). One principle of religious education is the authority of religious text (such as Bible, Koran...) or what God said or sent to human (by Prophet). In this principle, the value surrounding textual and canonical authority must be respected. Because what are in the religious text are divine, canonical truth, and derived from the Almighty (God). In hypertext (hyper-textuality) the authority of content(text) is broken and meaningless.

The other principle of religious education is that religious education program is based on "root/arborescence model" [22, p. 72], and according to the idea of root/arborescence, there are prior centrality, central authoritative role, and totalitarian control of author/teller (God, Pious, elites) on religious text, or in the other word, there are beginning and ending for all text. But in hypertextual space, there is no beginning, ending up and down for text, and all text is "unstable, restless and prone" [10, p. 61]. In hypertext space, there are more possibilities for the reader for "meaning making" [7, p. 86] and one can have one's "own meaning" [21, p. 41] for all text. Therefore, the method of reading is non-sequential, and the mode of interpretative production is active and generative. Based on the rule of 'meaning making and own meaning,' knowledge also is mediated, interpreted, and created through individuals' interaction with their environment. According to the interpretation rule, there may be too multiple interpretations and multiple voices about one text, and it is what counts as 'relativistic epistemological positions of a text. But in religious text, according to central authority of content, or "primary text" [20, p. 39], the process of reading, is sequential, logical, vertical or hierarchical, and the reader (teacher/students) cannot escape from the power of content, author's intentions or can not find their own way into, through sending out of a religious text/content.

In religious education the teacher trying to make the close relation between readers (students) and the intentions and aims of the author of the text. Because the religious text is based on meta-narratives forms, divine recommends/prescriptions and rituals, and these also are fixed, not changing and fluid, or what Deleuze named as "smooth" [23, p. 121]. One of the main aims of the religious education process is helping to students for comprehending the ego and intentions of the author of the text. Contrary to the hypertext's feature blurring the distinction between reader and author or "killing the author" [12, p. 83]; the author has a powerful role in text-based religious education. Because, the most religious text is written based on a view of religious elites and foundations (God, prophet, pious), not based on collaborative and deconstructive mode.

Beside the text, the teacher also has important role and status in religious education. Hypertext space with emphasis on the role of reader (student) and meaning making, fading

distinction/gap between reader and author, weakens the idea of transmission of knowledge and information, emphasis on the collaborative /interpretive vision of knowledge, and “put student and teacher at the same level” [1, p. 69], in fact weakens the role of teacher in education. While, in religious education, the teacher is both interpreter and transmitter. There are more texts that need to transfer/ transmit through teacher or others, and those texts are not interpretable by the student and not reducible at individual/personal interpretation level. Furthermore, in religious education, the teacher is a model for students that should be followed by students. Hypertext space provides possibilities of “teach conflict and contradiction” [17, p. 25] for student/reader in the education process, and it consequently makes some divergences and differences/diversities in views of learner about everything; such as religion. While one of the main aims of the religious education process is an enhancement of convergent and compatibility trend in thought and action of students about religious issues.

IV. CONCLUSION

Hypertext is a new space in the education process, particularly in the religious education process, bringing about some challenges; as explicated through the paper. Attention to the hypertext for making a new space and possibility in education for solving some problems that makes by fixed and single text; such as absolutely mind-dependence of student to teacher/author, domination and hegemony of text on educational process and method, unchangeable the text content to changeable/flexible environment circumstances, and so on, is very important for religious curriculum designers. In the meantime, survey of threatening aspects of propagation of hypertext for religious education; such as weakening the role and status of teacher - teacher as a model and transmitter of religious knowledge and information, circulating the relativistic epistemology about religion, weakening the role of religious meta-narratives is text developing -by killing the author, and so on, also is so important that all educational practitioner should pay attention to them. Making usable the text and hypertext in religious education and decreasing its threatening challenges, is the main responsibility of educational practitioners (teacher, curriculum designer, and educational planners).

REFERENCES:

- [1] Landow, G. and Delany, P. (1991). *Hypertext, Hypermedia and Literacy Studies: The State of Art*. MIT Press. Cambridge.
- [2] Wills, D. (1999) . the Nature of Hypertext: Background and Implication for Librarians. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*.Vol. 25.No.2.
- [3] Barthes, R. (1977). *From Work to Text*.Image, Music, Text.Trans.S.Heath, Hill and Wang.New York.
- [4] McKnight, C, Dillion, A, and Richardson, J. (1996) . *User Centered Design of Hypertext and Hypermedia for Education*. Handbook of Research on Educational Communications and Technology. Macmillan. New York.
- [5] Berg, S and Watt, J.H. (1001) *Effects of Educational Setting on Student Response to Structured Hypertext*.Journal of Computer-Badsed Instruction.New York.
- [6] Nielsen, J. (1990) .*Hypertext and Hypermedia*. Academic Press. Copenhagen. Denmark.
- [7] Landow, G. (1992). *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*. John Hopkins University Press. Boltimore.
- [8] Popkewitz, T. (1991). *A Political Sociology of Educational Reform*. Teacher College Press. New York.
- [9] Poster, M. (1995) . *the Second Media Age*. Polity Press. Oxford.
- [10] Moulthrop, S. (1994) .*Rhizome and Resistance: Hypertext and the Dream of a New Culture*, in *Hyper/Text/Theory*. John Hopkins Press. Baltimore.
- [11] Staninger, S.W. (1994). *Hypertext Technology: Educational Consequences*”.*Journal of Educational Technology* .Vol.July/Aug.
- [12] Birkerts, S. (1994) . *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in the electronic Age*.New York.
- [13] Foucault.M. (1977). *What Is an Author*”.*Language, counter-Memory, Practice*.Ed. Donald F.Bouchard.Cornell University Press.
- [14] Bolter, J.(1993)”*Hypertext and the Classical Commentary*.”*The University of Arizona Press*. Tucson and London.
- [15] Lanham, R. (1993) .*the Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology, and the Arts*.University of Chicago Press.Chicago and London.
- [16] Joyce, M.(1988.)”*Siren Shapes: Exploratory and Constructive Hypertext*”. *Academic Computing* .London.
- [17] Gerald, G. (1992). *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education*. New York and London.
- [18] Duncan, B. (1997). “*Hypertext and Education (Post?) Dstructural Transformations*”.*Philosophy of Education*.University of Illinois Press.
- [19] Pagano, A.(1995). “*Matters of the Mind*”.*Critical Conversation in Philosophy of Education*.ed.Wendy Kohli.Routledge.New York.
- [20] Burbules, C and Callister, T .(1996)”*Knowledge at the Crossroads: Some Alternative Futures of Hypertext Learning Environments*”.*Educational Theory*.Vol.47.No.1.
- [21] Whalley, P. (1990). “*Models of Hypertext Structure and Learning*”.*Designing Hypermedia for Learning*.New York.
- [22] Deleuze, G, and Guattari, F. (1987) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.Trans.Brian Massumi.Minneapolis.University of Minnesota Press.
- [23] Roy.C. (2003). *Teacher in Nomadic Space: Deleuze and Curriculum*.New York.