

Chapter 66

What Makes Students to Participate in Online Collaborative Settings through Second Life? Students' Views and Perspectives Based on Adult Participation Theories

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ABSTRACT

Motivational factors that may affect adult participation in educational activities have attracted educators' interests and probably are one of the most discussed topics in the field of adult education. The current study seeks to investigate the students' participation in collaborative online activities based on the interpretive framework of adult participation theories stapling to interpret motivational factors, and recommended by McGivney (1993). A qualitative (comprehensive) research was conducted and a voluntary sample of Higher education by eighty students (n=80) who participated in online collaborative settings through the virtual world of Second Life and wanted to share experiences from their participation. The added value of this effort is to understand the educational community theoretically based on the utilization of adult theories that might motivate adult participation in different aspects and more practically to enunciate the key factors influencing their decisions to participate in team-based activities held in Second Life.

1. INTRODUCTION

The continuous growth of technologically advanced environments in education and especially the social media Web 2.0 transactions that include also three-dimensional (3D) virtual worlds (VWs),

have brought to the front line the urgent need of educators and scholars to understand factors affecting students' participation in collaborative processes (Abbad & Albarghouthi, 2011; Liu, 2010; Persico & Pozzi, 2011). Indeed, all the above researchers set up their concerns for the

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construction of an appropriate teaching framework in order to easily learn and sufficiently acquire all students a variety of learning materials from the Information, Communication Technology and Media Resources (ICT&MR). Even more their inclusion can empower the learning dimension with a socio-constructive framework that met students' needs and the school's requirements entirely, and it should follow a series of uniform methodological and organizational principles (Pellas, 2013).

Many educational researchers seek to effectively use these innovative sources as learning platforms in a situation to prepare students to gain innovative skills according to the 21st century demands. The international changes in social and financial conditions today demand from each student to acquire (e-) skills which can make her/him active participant and able to respond to this contemporary society demands, both in cultural or educational domains. In this postmodern period the technological, financial and social changes have made many areas of the compulsory education implement different projects in flexible course delivery modes (online or blended). Many well-known two-dimensional (2D) learning environments (see Learning Management System-LMS, such as Moodle or Blackboard or Massive Open Online Courses-MOOCs) are being used from Universities or Institutions as "warehousing of knowledge" where students and instructors share educational resources of the Web and communicate mainly asynchronously with type-based applications (messages on a specific forum and exchanging e-mails with other group members). Additionally, most recent "conventional" educational practices with 2D LMS in Higher education were primarily based on the oral or written communication tools and re-presentations of knowledge in different disciplines or answers in theoretical problems were usually delivered by the instructor who acted as an "expert" on the one side, but on the other students could not recall or take the appropriate feedback from their instructor in real

time (Pellas, 2014). Moreover, 2D technologies are not so useful for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) education disciplines and mainly for courses that needed to be done in different laboratories in order to actively be engaged and experimented students to understand practical consequences of their actions.

Several studies in the online learning area by using different 2D (two-dimensional) platforms (Lu et al., 2011; Janssen et al., 2011) have already demonstrated positive results of group comparisons, awareness or effectiveness in academic performances and students' attitudes. Although, there were some other researchers that were not found so sufficient these 2D technologies for practice-based learning tasks due to the identified reality in which students could not share experiences mainly in online settings, due to: (a) the technical problems (Rivera et al., 2002) or feelings of isolation that were provided by other participants (Contreras-Castillo et al., 2004), (b) the lack of previous online learning experiences of students causing satisfaction at low levels (Piccoli et al., 2001), (c) the lack of a persistent workflow where students together can communicate synchronously in real-time and in a common place (Pellas & Kazanidis, 2013), and (d) the absence of interaction between users-content or with students-instructor, while there are few experienced educators knowing how to equally use several communication forms or transactions that 2D technologies can replicate (Kotsilieris & Dimopoulou, 2013).

Most reliable instructional formats online and blended university-level courses have not yet replaced the traditional teaching methods. However, these two novel modes of learning (online and blended course delivery methods) were launched in different (candidate) learning platforms, such as Learning Management Systems (LMS) or Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs), but unfortunately there were emerged several significant limitations. A critical issue is that LMS (like Moodle or Blackboard) was only used as document repositories and these environments cannot easily support the

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