

Chapter 91

Cultural Diversity and Its Implications in Online Networked Learning Spaces

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ABSTRACT

The open nature of online networked spaces enables diverse participation from all around the globe, raising cultural diversity as a paramount issue within the learning perspective. In this context, the purpose of this research is to examine participation and engagement patterns in online networked learning spaces in terms of cultural dimensions. The findings of this research have demonstrated that there is diversity in both time and space. The geographical distribution demonstrates that most of the participation originates from developed, Western, Anglo-Saxon cultures. Diversity in time creates its own loop, in which interactions were fed continuously and terms, such as day and night, sync and async have blurred borders. The English language is dominant over other languages and learners predominantly participate from those countries where English is spoken as a native or official language. In terms of cultural perspectives, the findings indicate that there is cultural dominancy as well as cultural diversity in online networked learning spaces.

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INTRODUCTION

Culture has power that goes beyond its defined meanings. It is the collective identity of a society, systems of shared knowledge that are socially transmitted; a complex whole, which is acquired by the individuals as a member of a society in which the culture exists. It is defined and shaped by a set of factors and in turn it reshapes and redefines those factors that shape it. Cultural origins provide individuals with a lens to see and interpret life, which results in many implications for many aspects of life. Therefore it is, implicitly or explicitly, a determiner of the various individual or collective behaviors in many dimensions of our lives, including learning.

The advent of the online networked spaces provided numerous opportunities and challenges. Cultural diversity emerges both as an opportunity and a challenge. Cultural diversity can be an opportunity if it harnessed well in online networked spaces. For instance, it can be used as a tool to enrich ideas, promote social exchange, benefit from a broader perspective, and encourage out-of-the box thinking. Nevertheless, if it is not well understood it can create communication problems, negative relationships, social conflicts, resistance to change and integration issues.

Individuals from around the globe can access and be present in online networked learning spaces, which means that learners originate from a diverse array of backgrounds. This requires cultural diversity in online networked learning spaces to be taken into consideration, in order to provide effective, efficient, engaging, and enduring learning experiences.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The main purpose of the research is to examine cultural diversity in networked online learning spaces. For this purpose, the research seeks answers to the following research questions:

- How diverse are networked online learners in time and space?
- How diverse are cultures in networked online spaces?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The definition of culture has many meanings and can be interpreted very broadly. It emerges and is shaped by the context in which it exists; thus, it is a complex and problematic concept to define (Gunawardena, Wilson and Nolla, 2003; Alabdullaziz, 2015). This research adopts the following definition: Culture is “the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next” (Matsumoto, 1996, p. 16).

Learners from around the globe with different cultural backgrounds use online networked spaces because of the wide availability and cost effectiveness of Information and Communication technologies (ICT) (Cakir, Bichelmeyer and Cagiltay, 2005). Empowered by developments in ICT, online networked practices become more pervasive and therefore cultural issues have become more important (Chang and Lim, 2002).

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