



Chapter IV

African Education Perspectives on Culture and E-Learning Convergence

Wanjira Kinuthia
Georgia State University, USA

Abstract

Culture affects individuals' responses to learning and instruction. It also influences the acceptance, use, and impact of e-learning environments because instructional approaches are entrenched in a context of beliefs, expectations, and values within the context of its application. Advances in e-learning are prompting a debate as to whether or not the tools and technologies are culturally neutral, inclusive, and representative. The aim of this chapter is to provide a background for understanding the links between cultural content and context and e-learning. The discussion relates instruction to technology in the face of dynamic socio-cultural issues and changing instructional systems. In doing so, challenges and exemplars from the African perspective are presented.

Introduction

One of the purposes of e-learning is to emerge learners into a culture where they are introduced to technology in order to understand it and to be able to participate in it at some level. Technology stands alongside ways that culture is represented, and with recent and rapid advancements in e-learning technologies and paradigms, the debate on culturally-appropriate instructional development continues. One argument proposes that e-learning tools are all encompassing, while another perspective maintains that there are many unresolved cultural issues in the design and delivery of instruction. For example, the delivery medium shapes the meaning of the message depending on where it is conveyed (Chen, Mashhadi, Ang, & Harkrider, 2000).

The discussion that follows provides an introspective of Africa's complex cultural structures, instructional implications of e-learning, and challenges faced when integrating e-learning within culturally-specific content and nuances. It is not the intent of this chapter to discount the role of inherited or formal instructional models in Africa. Rather, the purpose is twofold: (1) to provide a conceptual framework for understanding the links between different cultural contents and contexts and the development of e-learning; and (2) to rationalize the relevance of e-learning in these socio-cultural contexts.

The chapter is organized thus: First, the concepts of culture and e-learning are presented based on their usage herein. Next, a theoretical base for e-learning is presented followed by a discussion of relevance, complexities, and applications in both general and specific socio-cultural contexts. This forms a basis for the section on recommendations and trends. The chapter is written from the perspective that culture is dynamic and that there is no single all-encompassing model that ensures design of total culturally-inclusive and sensitive learning environments. It should be noted that while a persuasive argument for convergence of e-learning in cultural contexts is presented, it is conceded that doing so is not a seamless process. It is, however, argued that increasing awareness of diverse cultural aspects is crucial to making instructional decisions. Moreover, given that culture is a dynamic phenomenon, it is important to approach this chapter from both historical and current situational perspectives.

Culture and E-Learning: Definitions and Complexities

Defining Culture in Instruction

Culture as noted by Collis (1999) influences the acceptance, use of, and impact on instructional resources. From anthropological, sociological, and educational perspectives, the term "culture" is broadly viewed as the beliefs, philosophies, traditions, values, perceptions, norms, customs, arts, history, experiences, and patterns by individuals and groups (Chen et al., 2000, p. 200; Collis, 1999, p. 204). The groups may be identified by

12 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/africa-education-perspectives-culture-learning/19294

Related Content

Reflections on Personal Experiences of Staff Training and Continuing Professional Development for Academic Staff in the Development of High Quality Support for Disabled Students in Higher Education

Alan Hurst (2012). *Disabled Students in Education: Technology, Transition, and Inclusivity* (pp. 288-304).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/reflections-personal-experiences-staff-training/60678

Collaboratively Designing and Building a Digital Entomology Lab at K-State

Shalin Hai-Jew (2013). *Cases on E-Learning Management: Development and Implementation* (pp. 240-267).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/collaboratively-designing-building-digital-entomology/68103

Learning in a Virtual World: Student Perceptions and Outcomes

Sue Gregory (2012). *Student Reactions to Learning with Technologies: Perceptions and Outcomes* (pp. 91-116).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/learning-virtual-world/58758

Learning Sport Management through Interaction with the Real World

Alistair Inglis, Matthew Nicholson and Clare Hanlon (2007). *Cases on Global E-Learning Practices: Successes and Pitfalls* (pp. 150-160).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/learning-sport-management-through-interaction/6250

An Elusive Formula: The IT Role in Behavior Change in Public Health

Shalin Hai-Jew (2010). *Transformative Learning and Online Education: Aesthetics, Dimensions and Concepts* (pp. 347-373).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/elusive-formula-role-behavior-change/44217