

Chapter 9

Globalization and Localization in Online Settings

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ABSTRACT

In designing online instruction, increasingly educators need to consider cultural aspects of the educational philosophy, concepts, language, resources, teaching strategies, ICT literacy, learning activities, and student interaction. These elements largely depend on the learning outcomes and the learners' situation. While some factors are universal, such as declarative knowledge and basic human needs, others are much more culturally defined, such as "soft" skills and prior educational experience. This chapter focuses on evaluating the need for globalizing or localizing resources and experiences based on needs assessment. It also gives strategies on ways to globalize or localize these resources and experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, people are crossing cultural borders as they access and exchange information and resources globally, travel internationally for pleasure or business, and migrate by choice or necessity.

Globalization impacts people's lives – and the preparation for those life choices. As people migrate, communities and their educational institutions have become more diverse. In other cases, learners are seeking distance education delivery options in order to get the training needed from experts who may reside continents away. This cross-cultural phenomenon occurs especially in professional development because many economic sectors either deal with clientele representing different cultures, or the employees themselves work and come from a variety of cultures.

While pluralistic societies can benefit from diverse experiences and perspectives, all too often people from different cultural backgrounds may instead feel threatened, especially if their knowledge of those cultures is sketchy or ill-informed. Culture clashes may ensue, resulting in polarization and negative outcomes rather than richer dialogue and more effective solutions.

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Therefore, educators need to incorporate cultural competence into the curriculum, not only in terms of providing cultural perspective about the subject matter but also recognizing and leveraging students' cultural realities. Sometimes it may mean trying to find universal ground, globalizing curriculum, and sometimes it requires localizing the learning experience. Particularly as educational philosophies are themselves reflective of social norms and expectations, it behooves educators to address cultural nuances when designing instruction.

This chapter examines cultural frameworks and their implications for learning and teaching, pointing out universal and culturally-defined aspects. Next, cross cultural issues illustrate factors that impact education. Then recommendations are suggested to optimize culturally responsive instructional design, focusing on decisions about globalizing and localizing online resources and learning activities. Continuing issues and emerging trends offer directions for future research.

BACKGROUND

Culture may be defined as “the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group” and “the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization” (Merriam-Webster, 2018). Individuals tend to belong to several cultures: familial, educational, ethnic, racial, national, professional, job-based, economics-based, recreational, social. The Internet itself even may be considered a culture (Insung & Gunawardena, 2014). These cultures may overlap significantly, but they can also conflict with each other. Cultures are complex and dynamic, which adds to the challenge of addressing them; nevertheless, they need to be considered seriously because of their impact. In education, cultural issues apply to the learner, the instructor, the intended learning environment and context, as well the content of learning itself.

Frameworks

Hofstede's 1980 and 2005 models of cultural dimensions, Parrish's and VanBerschoot's 2010 cultural framework for online learning, and Biggs' 1978 3P model of teaching and learning provide useful frameworks for examining culturally responsive instruction implications. Schwartz's 2012 Theory of Basic Values presents an alternative viewpoint, identifying ten basic personal values that cross cultures.

Hofstede's framework is the most well known culturally-based model and serves as the starting point for most scholars of cultural factors. The dimensions follow, with implications for online learning noted by italics. A useful set of world maps marking the countries' status by dimension may be seen at <https://geerthofstede.com/culture-geert-hofstede-gert-jan-hofstede/6d-model-of-national-culture/>.

- **Power distance:** What is the degree of equality between people? How equitable is the power distribution as defined from low-status people? In low-power societies, status is less important. *Power distance impacts teacher-student relations.*
- **Individualism versus collectivism:** People in individualistic societies tend to belong to several groups, each of which is loosely-knit, while collectivist societies tend to have a few, well-defined groups who are highly loyal. In-group refers to a collective in which members are highly interdependent and have a sense of common fate; groups to which they do not belong are out-groups. *For example, collective societies tend to reinforce field dependent and non-linear learning, so instruc-*

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