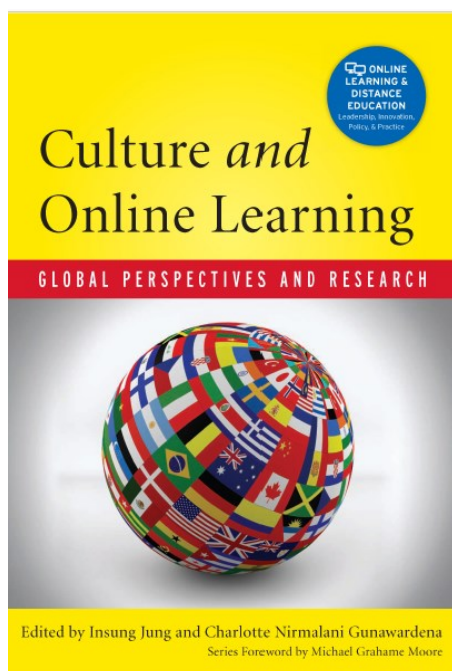


BOOK REVIEW
CULTURE AND ONLINE LEARNING:
GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES AND RESEARCH
Edited by Insung Jung and Charlotte Nirmalani Gunawardena

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INTRODUCTION

As distance education and online learning applications remove numerous borders such as place, time, teacher in the process of learning-teaching, and provide participants with flexible learning environment and opportunities, the learners/teachers having many different characteristics can find opportunity to make communication and interaction with each other and can share the same learning environment. This situation sets forth the fact that culture is an important factor required to be taken into account while designing, developing, presenting, planning and researching online learning and distance education processes. Furthermore, the case in point rises in importance by massive open online courses (MOOCs), open course materials, international or local distance education applications of the companies or institutions that ever increase, in particular in recent years. For this reason, the issues regarding culture in the field of distance education are required to be examined more in detail, to be discussed within a

holistic view and to be reflected on online learning/teaching processes by evaluation. In this context, the book *Culture and Online Learning* provides many different people from researchers to online learning designers, from support staff to administrators and to learners with important and useful information regarding cultural issues in online learning.

REVIEW OF THE BOOK

In the first chapter of the book, *Perspectives on Culture and Online Learning*, Gunawardena and Jung mention about the importance of complex, abstract and variable structure of culture and inform reader briefly about each perspective, study findings and landmarks regarding cultural issues having an influence on online learning processes, to

be also discussed in further chapters. In other words, it could be suggested that the chapter is a useful introductory that can address readers having different knowledge levels who want to obtain information or make researches about cultural issues, and that highlights both the issues discussed in the book and the points required to be considered about culture.

In the second chapter, *Cultural Influences on Online Learning*, Jung scrutinizes and presents to the reader the different cultural contexts and learning-teaching approaches that will clarify the cultural factors affecting both learning and online learning. Jung, in the chapters on relation of culture with learning and online learning, mentions about the influences of cultural and multicultural experiences and subcultures, and lays emphasis on the gender factor, giving coverage to the findings of the study conducted by different researchers. Besides, touching upon the relation of culture with the learning context and mentioning socially constructed culture of learning that was developed depending on the technological applications, Jung attracts attention to the fact that culture should be studied from different viewpoints other than those determined in online learning.

In the third chapter, *Culture and Technology*, Jung handles online learning as a new and innovative technology, and states about the influences of culture, which is a significant factor on the acceptance and use of such new technology. While framing the subject, he mentions the diffusion of innovation theory and the technology acceptance model relating to this theory. Besides, making reference to The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology that unifies these theories and models, some factors that are closely in relation with culture for the acceptance of technology are emphasized. Likewise, the studies concerning the acceptance and the use of technology are comparatively referred and recommendations are made in the light of all these information specifying the points that are worthy of notice concerning easier acceptance and use of online learning in different cultures in terms of teachers and learners.

In the fourth chapter, *Online Identity and Interaction*, Gunawardena examines the informal use of the medium in different cultural contexts (Morocco and Sri Lanka) and refers to the study that discusses the question of how identity creation takes place in such mediums and the sociocultural factors concerning identity creation, and makes implications for designing social environments regarding online learning communities, in line with the findings obtained from the study. In the study conducted in two different cultures, the expression and formation of identity as a major theme that shaped the online informal interactions are studied under three subthemes associated with this major theme as "trust building, self-disclosure, and face negotiation". Also, the relation of gender in terms of identity and major theme and subthemes are mentioned and discussed within the context of literature. In line with the findings obtained from the study, it is stated that the study could help determination of the communication models for virtual culture and online identity formation, by making implications for designing the social environment in the international online learning.

In the fifth chapter, *Emerging Visual Culture in Online Learning Environments*, Rha mentions about online visual culture that emerge during the use of digital technologies as supplementary by both teachers and learners. Rha defines online visual culture as "the meaning-making process of visual objects that are presented online or on digital devices and its resulting ideas and behavioral patterns, digital technologies have become an essential basis for online visual culture" (p. 46). Online visual culture is a participatory culture where both learners and teachers can actively participate in both the consumption of and the creation of visual data (p. 48). A text as visual object is also examined in the chapter, and the attention is drawn on the use of characters, abbreviations, pictograms and phonogram that are used as a mixture of spoken and written languages in the online environment. In the light of all these information, some suggestions were offered to online educators in terms of culture for designing and developing online learning.

In the sixth chapter, *Accounting for Culture in Instructional Design*, Frechette, Layne and Gunawardena suggest online learning and online design models that take culture into consideration, and mention about WisCom model that is named as a culturally sensitive instructional model developed by researchers. The instructional models mentioned in the chapter include the culture-based model (CBM) consisting of eight interrelated processes developed by Young (2008, 2009) as well as cross-cultural learning experience design model developed by Chen et al. (2006) focusing on teachers, students and the interaction between such two groups. It was also stated that Chen et al. identified three kinds of support systems (technical support, learning support, and social support) and three kinds of resources (language, culture and context).

The instructional design models are examined in this chapter as result of the literature survey, and they are divided into four levels in terms of cultural inclusivity. These are;

Level 1: The model doesn't directly address cultural factors, but it implicitly caters to the cultural values of its creator(s).

Level 2: The model is explicitly designed for a particular culture, which may or may not match the model creator's culture(s).

Level 3: The model is designed for different cultural contexts, though not multiple contexts within a single course or learning experience that has been designed with the model.

Level 4: The model is designed to create multicultural learning experiences) (p. 57).

Besides all those, Wisdom Communities instructional design model that is developed for collaborative online learning experiences was also mentioned in the chapter, and in line with the findings obtained as result of the study, recommendations were made for designing culturally inclusive online courses.

In the seventh chapter, *Facilitating Online Learning and Cross-Cultural E-Mentoring*, it is mentioned that Gunawardena and Jayatilleke conducted activities based on online collaborative learning (OCL) between two different cultures (American and Sri Lankan) alongside a study covering knowledge building processes. The role of e-mentoring, the cultural issues that emerged during the process of e-mentoring and challenges to cross-cultural e-mentoring are examined in the study and the implications are made for designing cross-cultural e-mentoring depending on the findings obtained. The social presence, help-seeking behaviors and silence factors that have an impact on the sociocultural environment for OCL are also explored in this chapter.

In the eighth chapter, *Supporting Diverse Online Learners*, Gunawardena explore the provision of learner support in the online learning environments where learners from different cultures take place. In this chapter, the learner support concerning various learner needs was explored in terms of educational expectations, learner preferences, online interaction and knowledge construction, gender, language and second-language speakers, learners with disabilities, and is discussed through findings of the study conducted on these issues. In this chapter, four support types are mentioned by Dillon and Blanchard (1991) that are required to be taken into consideration in the learner support system for distance learners. These types are expressed as:

- 1. learner support that addresses learner needs (such as cultural background, expectations, learning styles, motivation, confidence, self-concept, self-efficacy, belonging, and financial needs),*
- 2. learner support that addresses the needs of the content (such as support for learning activities and laboratory experiences),*
- 3. learner support related to the institutional context (such as enrollment, library access, use of facilities), and*

4. learner support related to technology and communication (such as orientation programs in the use of technology and communication protocols) (p.85)

A framework for addressing diverse learner needs in an online course developed by Gunawardena, Kulasekara, and Fernando is introduced. In addition to this, recommendations are made for the design and integration of learner support into online learning.

In the ninth chapter, *Diversity in Expectations of Quality and Assessment*, the quality issues in online learning are discussed. Defining quality in different ways states also that it would change depending on different evaluations and expectations. In this context, Sangrà, Porto and Jung discuss in different sociocultural contexts (Asian, European and American context) the quality factors that become prominent in online learning. In this process, the online quality assessment approach that was suggested by Harvey and Knight (1996) and is consisting of three dimensions (institutional, stakeholders and quality assessment approaches) is taken into consideration. The third dimension of quality assessment approaches are comprised of four subdimensions, namely "(a) a *technological approach*, which focuses on the whole set of technical requirements, devices, and software being used for online learning; (b) *an economic approach*, which looks into cost-benefit and financial results of online learning; (c) *an educational approach*, which values learning progress and the performance of online learners; and finally (d) *a global approach*, which aims at striking a balance between the aforementioned approaches." (p.91) and each context in the chapter is discussed also in terms of those sub-dimensions. In each context, various studies conducted in the literature are compiled and presented.

In the tenth chapter, *Developing Global Digital Citizens - A Professional Development Model*, Chih-Hsiung Tu and Marina Stock McIsaac introduce "a model for online teaching and learning that can be used as a conceptual framework to identify strategies that would support educators to develop global digital citizens (GDCs)", depending on the technologies of which influence we increasingly feel today (p. 102). The model is comprised of five dimensions, namely individual digital learner, social collaborator, cultural constructivist, community collaborator and global digital citizenship. The online learner completes each dimension, and thereafter proceeds to the next level and achieves the aimed global digital citizenship dimension as a final dimension. Tu and McIsaac explain what each dimension covers, and what an educator can do in order to take learner to such dimensions. They also handle six different processes (personalizing, networking, creating, sharing, mobilizing, and managing) that both facilitate learner to proceed to the next level and make the influence on the learning processes in each dimension. And also, they give useful recommendations to the educators concerning each learning process. Besides, three catalyst tools are mentioned where learners from different cultures take place and that accelerate digital sociocultural teaching and learning: digital devices, digital communication applications and digital management practices. Examples on the purpose of each tool to be used for learners were discussed.

In eleventh chapter, *Leadership Challenges in Transcultural Online Education*, Michael F. Beaudoin touches upon the cultural challenges between individuals or institutions having different sociocultural contexts, depending on institutional partnerships and student and lecturer exchange in online learning, and the points required to be considered in order to ensure a more efficient leadership within these conditions. Moreover, at the end of the chapter, some useful guidelines are provided for individuals and institutions in transnational online education.

In the twelfth chapter, *Gender Issues in Online Learning*, as mentioned in previous chapters (second and fourth chapters), Colin Latchem examines to the gender issue in online learning. He compiles and presents the findings of various studies conducted on gender in the field of online learning to the reader in a comparative manner. Different

issues such as barriers, opportunities, equalities/inequalities, current status, access to internet, needs, priorities and circumstances observed in online learning and teaching are dealt and discussed in terms of gender. In line with all those information, useful recommendations are provided to the readers at the end of the chapter in order to ensure gender equality and flexibility in the online learning environment.

In the thirteenth chapter, *Transformative Learning Through Cultural Exchanges in Online Foreign Language Teaching*, Barrett discusses social dynamics in multi-cultural learning-teaching environment, where American teachers and Taiwanese teaching assistants teach English to Chinese and Taiwanese students as a foreign language, using computer-mediated communication (CMC), in order to improve language skills, by means of simultaneous Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP). She states that the transformational learning in an intercultural online community is the major theme besides handling the language learning, intercultural competency, and perspective transformation associated with transformational learning. Based on the findings obtained from a grounded theory study, practical recommendations are given to the instructors, learners and support staff in an online EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teaching includes cultural diversity.

In fourteenth chapter, *International Interpretations of Icons and Images Used in North American Academic Websites*, some information are given about a study conducted by Knight, Gunawardena, Barberà, and Aydın on how the participants from four different cultures, genders, age groups and education levels understand and interpret the icons and images used on North American academic websites, and that aims to determine the factors having influence on such interpretations. Thereby, significant inferences were obtained concerning the perceptions, sociocultural contexts and perspectives of online learners on the interface design that is a significant factor of instructional design. In line with the findings obtained, some important recommendations are made to the designers for adaptation of culturally appropriate visual elements.

In fifteenth chapter, *An Analysis of Culture-Focused Articles in Open, Distance, and Online Education Journals*, Al-Harhi examines, using content analysis, the studies focusing on cultural issues that were published between 2001-2011 in three magazines prominent in the fields of open and distance education and e-learning. She classifies the findings she obtained, by the research type, authors' gender and work-country affiliation. She also examines the culture-based studies in terms of research type and method of culture studies and lists them in four different categories: cultural types, cultural components, cultural impact and cultural approaches. Alongside the topics becoming prominent under each category, there are also recommendations at the end of the chapter for future researches. It can be suggested that the study conducted is substantially useful in order to be informed about the status of cultural studies and to provide a guideline for the further studies.

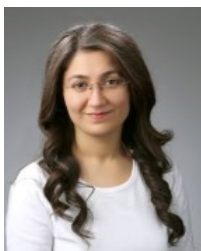
In sixteenth chapter, *Many Faces of Confucian Culture - Asian Learners' Perceptions of Quality Distance Education*, a comparative study is presented, that was conducted by Chen, Shen, Fukuda, and Jung in order to determine the quality perceptions for distance education of learners from three Asian countries, namely China, Japan and Korea. Even though "to many Westerners, China, Japan, and Korea may appear to have much in common, as they have inherited Confucianism" (p. 184), the findings of the study reveal that there is a difference among the quality perceptions of learners for distance education, depending on the sociocultural differences. Alongside the dimension differences of the quality assessment perception of learners from China, Japan and Korea for distance education, it was stated there are also similarities of some dimensions such as "course development," "information and publicity," and "faculty support". Furthermore, the reasons concerning sociocultural differences and similarities obtained are discussed in detail in this chapter and useful recommendations are given to the distance educators and researchers. Given that this chapter provides findings on different sociocultural values and the quality perception for distance education concerning those

three countries not but what it contributes in general to the literature, it can be asserted that it is a useful study.

In seventeenth chapter, *Looking Ahead - A Cultural Approach to Research and Practice in Online Learning*, Jung and Gunawardena reconsider the cultural approaches contained in the book, assess them from different aspects, and compile and summarize the important information contained in the chapters by providing individuals or educators who will make researches on culture with a holistic approach. They discuss key issues that will ensure a better understanding of cultural approaches concerning online learning applications and contexts, under topics of research types, gathering and interpreting data, design, guidance and support, and provide readers with seven significant key messages concerning culture.

As a conclusion, it can be denoted that the book deals with many themes and concepts concerning culture in online learning and teaching processes, within the contexts of researches, perspectives and assessments, and from this aspect is a useful resource that must be read brimming with important information and assessments that would guide both online educators, designers and researchers as well as the researchers working in the field of culture.

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Gulden KARTAL is a PhD student in Department of Distance Education, Anadolu University and is an educational technologist. She has gained her Masters Degree in the same department and BS degree in Computer Education and Instructional Technology Department at Ege University in 2006. Since then, she has constantly been working as an educational technologist in several public schools of Ministry of National Education. Her research interests are cultural issues, social presence and instructional design in open and distance learning.

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