Chapter 73
Multicultural Considerations for Curriculum Developers of Online Courses

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ABSTRACT

Grounded in the dimensional model of national culture, the purpose of this literature review was to investigate (a) the cultural impact of globalization on online instruction (in particular Eastern and Western beliefs and values), (b) the knowledge needed by curriculum developers (i.e., instructional designers and online instructors) to create multicultural appropriate content, (c) the identification of appropriate design strategies to promote cultural inclusion; and (d) cultural and functional priorities in the global workplace. Findings from the review of pertinent literature were used to create six guidelines appropriate for curriculum developers who design content for multicultural audiences. These guidelines are intended for online curriculum developers as they design coursework using multicultural design strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization impacts today's multicultural society. The need for different cultures to effectively communicate and to cooperate in diverse settings is commonplace. There is a growing demand for effective design of online learning, as noted by Allen and Seaman (2014) the number of students enrolled in online courses has grown to 7.1 million. Enrollment in online courses indicates that 33.5 percent of high education students are enrolled in at least one online course. Research focusing on the impact of globalization in multicultural learning environments offers a range of effective practices (Alessi & Trollip, 2000; Beamer & Varner, 2001; Vatrapu, 2008). Curriculum

developers of online courses (i.e., instructional designers (ID) and online instructors) should be aware of their own cultural biases and use sound judgment when designing instructional content (Alessi & Trollip, 2000). A lack of knowledge about the cultural needs of audiences encumbers the design process (Vatrapu, 2008).

This research addresses the five dimensions of national culture as defined by Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkow (2005). Particular attention is given to each dimension to demonstrate the connection to curriculum development in online courses. After the dimensions are discussed, multicultural design strategies and cultural inclusion in online learning are detailed. The researchers then provide a list of six recommendations and implications for future research based up on the literature synthesis and review. For the purposes of this work, an online course is defined as a course taught through a learning management system. This course is one that does not require face-to-face meetings by students and faculty. All instruction, either synchronous or asynchronous, occurs in the online learning format.

DIMENSIONAL MODEL OF NATIONAL CULTURE

In the dimensional model of national culture, cultures are divided into five dimensions: power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long term orientation versus short-term orientation (Hofstede et al., 2005). As defined by Hofstede et al. (2005), power distance refers to social hierarchy and an individual's perceived place among the hierarchy. Collectivism is related to group dynamics and belonging to a group. In contrast, individualism refers to an individual or immediate family identity. Masculinity relates to success through the attainment of money and power, whereas femininity is related to caring and

the quality of life. Uncertainty avoidance is the way people feel about changes and innovation, and the avoidance of new or unfamiliar situations. Dimension five, long-term orientation, is when societies place value on the future. In contrast short-term orientation is when value is placed on the past and present.

These cultural dimensions may be of importance to online course development. Subsequently, the foci are applied as the theoretical foundation for this literature review and the multicultural course design recommendations that follow.

CULTURAL IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON COURSE DESIGN

Curriculum developers face unique challenges when attempting to design courses addressing multicultural audience needs and promoting cultural sensitivity. Several researchers investigated the contrast between Eastern and Western cultures (Ellsworth, 1994; Hofstede et al., 2005; Imada & Ellsworth, 2011; Kim, Pan, & Park, 1998; Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001; Perkins, 2008; Walsham, 2002; Yang, 1993). Respect between cultures was emphasized by Walsham (2002), who noted the need to understand, to feel empathy, and to show respect in an outwardly manner. Walsham (2002) believed empathy and understanding would create a copacetic environment where multiple cultures could work together. In contrast to Hofstede et al.'s (2005) belief in a national culture, Walsham (2002) noted many national cultures are heterogeneous encompassing various religious, social, and racial backgrounds. In determining the importance structure analysis had on cultural heterogeneity, Walsham (2002) described the viewing of cultures as homogenous as unimportant and "one should be looking for a measure of systemness or homogeneity within particular social groupings," (p. 375). Although

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