Chapter 81

Learning Styles and Cultural Differences in Online Learning Environments in the Twenty–First Century

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ABSTRACT

The nature of learning is changing, especially learning in the twenty-first century. It's increasingly becoming more to do with student-centered learning. It emphasizes digital literacy, critical thinking, and interpersonal skills. This chapter revisited online learning environments in terms of differences in the learning styles of Nigerian university students according to their cultural backgrounds. The author also reviewed past research that focused on culturally different learning styles in online learning environments. Of specific interest are the studies that examined the same issue in the twenty-first century. This chapter concluded based on the review of literature that a person's learning style could affect how they react to any learning situation, including learning online; therefore, knowledge of learning styles could help in the selection of appropriate instructional designs and teaching strategies for courses. In the case of the students at the University of Lagos, it was found that students with different learning styles have different responses to online learning within their culture.

INTRODUCTION

The nature of learning is changing; especially learning in the 21st Century. It emphasises digital literacy which includes using communication, information processing, and digital research tools (email, presentation software, the Internet). Critical thinking and interpersonal skills entail using personal development and productivity tools to enhance one's life (e-learners, time managers, and collaboration tools) (Jackson, 2012). The 21st Century classroom combines old content with new skills to create more rigour and

relevance for students. Learners are encouraged to take creative risks in this environment while teachers are provided with more opportunities to foster creativity in their instruction. When students look at core knowledge through real-world examples, they are being prepared to compete globally by developing interpersonal communication skills while learning content (Jackson, 2012).

To improve the performance of our students, it is imperative we know how they learn and this can be done by looking at what 21st-century learning style looks like. Sole (2015), in a blog post on Edutopia, highlighted the different attributes that enhance learning styles in the 21st century as collaboration, digital literacy, critical thinking, and problem-solving. The roles of cultural differences are essential when it comes to collaboration, digital literacy, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

There are differences among different countries which influence the learning styles of everyone as (Hofstede cited in Joy & Kolb's study) that "there is a reason to believe that the differences in cultural socialisation tend to influence learning preference and produces difference learning styles" (p. 9). Bol-linger's study (as cited in Romanelli, Bird &Ryan's study, 2009) that "The diversity of students engaged in higher education continues to expand. Students come to colleges with varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds, from a multitude of training programs and institutions, and with differing learning styles" (p. 1). De Vita's explained (as quoted in Romanelli et al., 2009) the role cultural difference played in "conditioning and reinforcing learning styles and partially explains why teaching methods used in certain parts of the world may be ineffective or less effective when blindly transplanted to another locale" (p. 3).

According to Dr Gay in the video titled, "More on Culturally Responsive Teaching" (2012), Dr Gay states that the cultural responsive teacher knows that we teach diversity because "We are all culturally socialized, culture shapes our behaviors and culture is a filter" In the same vein, Uzuner (2009) states that "online teaching methods still adhere to the same, if not worse cultural differences". This is indeed very true as students today do not communicate the same way we as adults do. They have created a new form of communication and learning. They often use a combination of texting, browsing, and emailing when learning (Uzuner, 2009).

Previous Studies

Adeoye (2011) examined culturally different learning styles in online learning environments. A case study of Nigerian University Students was conducted with a focus on culturally different learning styles in online learning environments. The study focused specifically on the University of Lagos students. Since Adeoye (2011) and Joy & Kolb (2011)'s studies, time and learning environment have changed. It is important to explore how the learning style looks like in the 21st Century. Adeoye (2011) study took place at the University of Lagos, Nigeria. The students' population was approximately 39,000. The University had three e-Learning systems which include - Moodle, Blackboard, and MAKAU e-Learning Management Systems. The University purchased the licensees for the learning management systems, and the University Centre is managing them for Information Technology & Systems (CITS) (Adeoye, 2011).

At the time Adeoye conducted the study in 2011, certain challenges could not be overlooked. Among these difficulties is the theoretical basis upon which online designs are based and the misuse of technol-ogy and culturally different learning styles in online learning environments; however, Adeoye (2011) focused was on culturally different learning styles in online learning environments. Even in the 21st century, we noticed that the issue is still relevant. Technology has become very important in our daily lives. It is almost impossible for anyone to function effectively without using computers, ICT, laptops, and iPads. Also, students are bombarded with educational technology tools such as video games, cell

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