

Article Critique

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of the study was to probe the extent to which learning is co-constructed among adults with the help of online communication tools. In the present case study, discussion boards were chosen as the interaction medium among MBA graduates. The study concludes with a model wherein four categories of cognitive processes (observation, insight, deliberation, learning from others) are identified as interacting dimensions which help in learning and knowledge construction. Besides, the study suggested that learning in adults should be facilitated using innovative approaches which are experiential and well-suited to the situation in terms of addressing the complexity of the subject-matter concerned.

The purpose of this study was to analyze and measure the quality of learning resulting for students and check if they gaining merely surface learning or deep learning from using an online social constructivist tool, and to adopt e-learning technology in Arab world.

Keywords: .

INTRODUCTION

Bibliography

Abdallah, S., & Albadri, F.A.. Meaningful learning from sustained online communication: A reflection with a group of adults.

Article Summary

The main objective of the study was to probe the extent to which learning is co-constructed among adults with the help of online communication tools. In the present case study, discussion boards were chosen as the interaction medium among MBA graduates. The study concludes with a model wherein four categories of cognitive processes (observation, insight, deliberation, learning from others) are identified as interacting dimensions which help in learning and knowledge construction. Besides, the study suggested that learning in adults should be facilitated using innovative approaches which are experiential and well-suited to the situation in terms of addressing the complexity of the subject-matter concerned.

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Assumption

The main assumption of the research article is that adult learning is facilitated by meaningful discussion and dialogue through online media.

Andragogy can be viewed as the art and science of helping adults learn, or adult learning theory. It builds the students' abilities in problem-solving and the application of the mechanical skills that are learned in a more pedagogical approach. It is in contrast to the pedagogical model as it advocates the self-directed learning concept and the instructor as a facilitator of learning.

Participants

The participants for this study were two groups of MBA graduate students pursuing a course in e-business. There was a criteria for selection of the discussion threads which engaged a large number of students.

Measures

Using a qualitative case study research methodology (Yin, 1984), The study measured inferences drawn from rich data derived from an experimental activity via discussion board which engages the two groups of MBA graduate students to provide their responses in terms of different issues and their personal opinion. The data from the discussion threads was converted into a text file consisting of over 70 pages, which exported into NVivo qualitative analysis software for analysis.

Hypothesis

This research tested hypotheses about evaluating a group of adult students learning resulting from using an online social constructivist tool. The case study sought to address the research question pertaining to the extent to which online interactions through discussion boards facilitate learning in adults. There were three hypotheses for this study. The first: (Knowlton, 2001) hypothesized that discussion boards have the potential to promote deep thinking and can also lead into random chat leading to surface learning and adding little to their learning experience. To motivate adult learners they need to be engaged in activities to make them think, reflect and express their experiences and views. The second hypothesis was that students' learning is strengthened by applying prior knowledge and principles to a new environment resulting in construction of new knowledge (Beaumie, 2001). The final hypothesis was that meaningful learning would be guarantee using suitable assessment tools to measure students learning and performance, and evaluate learning that occurred during knowledge construction and sharing using online discussions.

Comments: The purpose was clearly and concisely stated and agreed with the title. It was limited to the researchers' capabilities and resources.

Design

The study used an experimental design and follows a qualitative case study approach wherein interpretative analysis is conducted from the rich text generated from the content of online discussions where the study created equivalent two groups of MBA graduate students.

Procedure

In the study, each student was assigned to raise one critical thinking question and to answer at least

9 questions, the topics of the critical thinking questions had to be related to the theme of topics discussed in the face-to-face class environment.

Analysis

The content resulting from students' interaction in the discussion boards was interpreted with the help of NVivo qualitative analysis software. The main objective of this analysis was to assess the level of interaction and learning which resulted in useful co-construction of knowledge.

Results

During the online interaction, students engaged in 'observation' first by appreciating and evaluating others' opinions besides gathering information themselves. Thereafter, students gained 'insights' about a topical issue wherein focused understanding is involved. The third process in this sequel is that of 'deliberation' wherein students deploy analytical skills and try to develop a holistic understanding of the topical issue through critical thinking and reflection. Finally, the student engages in learning from others which gets translated in direct or indirect imbibitions of learning from others.

With the help of the aforesaid four processes, a model is proposed in the study wherein interactions between the processes are also provided.

Discussion

The results supported the first and second hypotheses that a meaningful dialogue may result in co-constructive learning with the active participation of the learners. Which can be attributed to the fact that whereas online discussion boards may be useful for such knowledge creation, novel methods may be designed and developed which are appropriate for the situation, resulting in construction of new knowledge. The third hypothesis was not supported by the findings to measure students learning and performance, and to answer the question "how to evaluate students learning through the examination of the knowledge constructed by them to ensure that learning is occurring?" Overall, the whole approach and the use of multiple component programs used to knowledge construction and sharing using online discussions were more effective.

Limitations

The study calls for an empirical analysis to lend credence to the qualitative approach adopted in the present case. There were several limitations discussed in the article; customary traditions of the community must be put into account when discuss sensitive topics, the discuss may be not explicitly. The usage of such discussion boards is not easy and does not always fit the faculty environment, who are primarily interested in measuring the quality of online discussion.

Conclusions

The case study provides a model for assessing the impact of online discussion boards on adult learning. Four key cognitive processes (observation, insights, deliberation and learning from others) were identified to determine the extent to which knowledge co-construction happens in online learning forums. The more students are engaging in noticing, the more becoming aware of information and successful the program will be, and the more assessing learning and knowledge construction using discussion boards the more meaningful learning interacting cognitive.

Article Evaluation

Importance of Problem Investigated

The study aims to see how e-learning technologies curriculums at institutions in the Arab World can help for teaching adult students. The problem of knowledge construction in adults is markedly different from that in children. Therefore, with the emergence of e-technologies in higher education, it becomes pertinent to discuss the merits of online discussion boards as facilitative tools for knowledge generation. At the same time, the linkage of the “title” of the case study with the substance itself was fraught with limitations. Possibly, the “title” of the case study may be amended to reflect the problem. Given that a model was proposed in the case study, the “title” should be able to capture this facet appropriately. The study can be improved to increase the effectiveness of the discussion boards programs.

Comments: The problem statements agreed with the title and seemed to be of educational significance. The problem required several readings to establish why the researchers felt this study needed to be done.

Review of Literature

The review of literature is comprehensive in that it covers all of the components associated with the problem of Meaningful Learning from Sustained Online Communication and the reflection with a Group of Adults. The author first cites using a discussion board can constructing knowledge approach especially for adult students. Then, the author moves into the actual definition and essential elements of adopting e-learning technologies at institutions in the Arab world for teaching adult students. The author identifies online learning

The review concludes with a brief summary of relevant literature and the interacting cognitive dimensions for assessing learning and knowledge construction using discussion boards.

At the same time, the study needs to draw a line between “learning processes” and “use of e-technologies for facilitating learning” in adults. At one place, the difference between “surface processing” and “in-depth processing” in terms of analytical thinking (Henri, 1992) has been provided, whereas, at another place, the utility of online discussion boards is being debated and it is being recommended that novel methods of knowledge creation in adults be introduced. Therefore, clarity is required in the identification of the problem statement and relevant literature associated therewith.

The review of literature gives readers a glimpse into the world of e-learning technologies research and makes it clear why additional research is needed. Several appropriate references were used in the introduction section. These statements contributed to the overall understanding of the subject and to the reasoning for establishing the problem statement. Suggested section titles would have been: (1) competencies vocational education teachers need to use computer technology effectively; (2) effects of discussion board on learning; and (3) measure the meaningful learning occurring online.

Hypotheses

The three hypotheses are clearly labelled and easy to find. Each hypothesis is testable and states the expected relationship to the others. The first hypothesis looks to motivate adult learners and engaged in activities to make them think, reflect and express their experiences and views. The second hypothesis looks at a combination of curriculum, students' learning is strengthened by applying prior knowledge and principles to a new environment resulting in construction of new knowledge (Beaumie, 2001). While the thirds hypothesis looks at the assessment tools to measure students learning and performance, and evaluate learning using the four indicators (Observation, Insights, Deliberation, Learning form others). The term "discussion board" is operationally defined to make it clear what is meant for this study's purposes. The different Interacting cognitive dimensions for assessing learning and knowledge construction using discussion boards are also operationally defined to show readers what is meant by each term. It is slightly confusing whether using discussion boards fit the faculty environment.

Objectives

The objective of the case study was to ascertain if meaningful knowledge creation in adults results from online social constructivist tool. As indicated above, there are two diverging strands which emerge from the case study-utility of the online social constructivist tool and processes involved in adult learning. In my view, both the dimensions require independent analysis and understanding.

Specifically the study sought to determine: (a) learning through social interactions tool (b) the using of discussion board for sharing and constructing knowledge; and (c) whether this method is fit to faculty who are primarily interested in measuring the quality of online discussion.

Comment: The author's objectives were answerable, and they chose to obtain them by testing null hypotheses. These hypotheses were testable and served to help explain the problem.

Participants

The study does not elaborate the sampling design. Therefore, it would be appropriate if sample size and other details are clearly spelt out.

Instruments

It would be worthwhile to spell out the research methodology and method deployed in detail. Reader would be especially interested to know the conditions and procedure adopted while conducting the study among MBA graduate students. For instance, were all the students adept in using online discussion boards and how far were they conversant with these tools.

Procedure and Design

As indicated above, research design and procedure requires elaboration for clarity and replication.

Analysis

The study provides a modular framework and is closed in a few concluding remarks. It would be appropriate if at least three or more examples are drawn for further analysis.

Findings

Personal data by treatment and control group was provided in table form and explained with a short narrative. The findings were well organized, sectioned, and reported objectively. The tables were well organized but, due to the difficulty of the statistical tests employed, would not stand alone to the average reader.

Discussion (Conclusions and Recommendations)

The study leaves the readers in the lurch for want of a suitable section on “discussion”. It would be worthwhile to append the section on “findings” and “analysis” with that of “discussion” wherein the overall relevance of the findings is done at length and the veracity of the research question is established.

A section on “limitations” is required. The study has limitations in that a qualitative case study with two groups was conducted. The number of groups may be increased in subsequent research. Besides, a quantitative study may be conducted to establish the validity and reliability of the study. Since only online discussion boards were used as the medium of deliberation and dialogue among the students, it is pertinent to take into consideration other means of online engagement as well. For instance, a comparative perspective may be drawn using discussion boards versus in-class discussions. Likewise, it may be worthwhile to consider if socially-constructed learning happens faster through role plays and simulations in contrast with online discussion boards.

Furthermore, the study requires a section on “recommendations” to identify the applicability of the model proposed in the study vis-a-vis online social learning in adults.

Overall Critique

The case study was based on the edifice that adult learning has a different trajectory than that of children. Therefore, learning in adults may be better accomplished by social constructivist tools like online discussion boards. However, the linkage of theoretical background with the research design needs to be substantiated. Clarity of the research question is required in line with a more in-depth assessment of literature. The arguments presented in the case study are pertinent; however, a detailed assessment is required. As mentioned aforesaid, the evidentiary support needs to be substantiated and more examples are required. The case study has the potential of throwing more light on the challenges of adult learning in a typical higher educational context. Overall, it was a very interesting, significant contribution to the field of research.

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