

Computer-mediated communication –Cross cultural challenges

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Abstract:

Brief review of literature

Collaborative learning is facilitated through the use of computers and such cognitive benefits are realized through verbal exchanges in the form of discussion that occurs during task engagement (Pressley & McCormick, 1995). Such verbal exchanges can be classified as computer-mediated communication which is communication enabled or aided through the use of computers. A socio-cultural perspective of learning would imply social interaction and discourse being at the core of student cognitive development making all knowledge to be socially mediated and grounded in culture (Vygotsky, 1978). On one hand, cross cultural communication have increased in magnitude due to the concept of a global world and technological interventions implicating such cultural issues in computer-mediated communication as well. Previous literature have pointed out such implications, interesting among them being different communication styles across cultures in terms of expansive versus reserved communication between American and Scandinavian college students (Bannon, 1995; Kober, 1998).

Research problem/s and question/s: The main questions addressed in the study was

- a) What are the challenges facing collaborative learning using computer mediated communication in general?
- b) Are there any differences in the way business students from different cultures perceive the challenges facing computer mediated communication?

Research Methodology/Approach

This research conducted a cross-cultural study on 20 undergraduate students enrolled in a third tier communication course of a University in the Middle East and 60 graduate students enrolled in a HR course of a leading business school in India. Within the precincts of a three day experiment of email- interaction over an issue of common interest, internet connectivity in its status quo and the pressures of examination looming large on both ends, some vital observations were made from transcripts provided at the end of the experiment. The issues of discussion and common interest were 1) mixed gender interactions in business school and 2) concept of a woman as leader.

Significance of study

The study is important in identifying challenges related to computer mediated communication in general as well as with relation to cultural differences among business students. Since technology is a main tool of communication in the present business world, this research sets the platform to recognize challenges in communication over latest technologies used in business especially in a cultural dimension. Building up on previous cross- cultural research(Kim,K-J &Bonk,C.J.), preliminary findings point to challenges of differences in time zone, language use and proficiency, consensus on rapport building, avoiding an extreme standpoint with an overall emphasis on gaining ground knowledge of corresponding culture. As much as in oral, face to face communication, it has been noticed in written communication as well that one keeps waiting for the other person to 'break the ice'. Practical implication would be utilization of training interventions to establish common ground early on during the course of their communication interactions. This is critical as it greatly enhances the quality of the communication.