WEB 2.0-BASED LEARNING AND THE CHALLENGES OF CULTURE SHOCK AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN CYPRUS

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Abstract

With the emergence of new communication technologies, learning has been transformed digitally through Web 2.0 tools, in which digital devices are used to blend the learning system. Some students of tertiary institutions, especially international students who migrate to study out of their community or country, have different cultures of learning, thereby lacking skills and awareness on how to use the new learning system. This study, therefore, aims to investigate the use of web 2.0-based learning facilities and culture shock among international students at the Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU), North Cyprus. The data were collected from a purposive sample of 15 Nigerian students using a semi-structured interview as a data collection instrument. The data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. The study reveals that even though some Nigerian students face difficulties in managing Web2.0-based learning facilities like student portal and Moodle, their computer literacy helped them from the initial stage. The findings also indicate that some participants suggest adequate orientation to be organized for international students on the use of learning facilities in the institution. The study suggests that there is a need for further research on digital learning culture from the African perspective.

Keywords: Culture shock, international students, digital learning, Web 2.0 tools

INTRODUCTION

With the emergence of new communication technologies, learning has been transformed digitally through web 2.0 technologies, in which digital devices are being used to blend the learning system. The emergence of these new technologies resulted in using a learning management system like student portals, or content management systems like Moodle, MOOCs, Blackboard, and Muse. However, to use these web 2.0-based learning support facilities, the learner should have the knowledge and skills on how to use it; the digital literacy. Some students of tertiary institutions, especially the international students who migrate to study out of their community or country, have a different culture of learning from that of their host institutions, thereby lacking skills and awareness on how to use the new learning system.

This study, therefore, tends to find out the situation of the international students in the Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU), North Cyprus, regarding the use of digital learning facilities and how they manage culture shock. The study is an Ethnographic research approach where the researcher will serve as participant-observer since he is among the International students of the University.

Learners of the digital age have been considered as different species in education compared to their parents and other past generation learners since these students are more of learning through technologies. This learning process is being mediated by computer and blended with technologies, as a result of which learners or children were termed "digital native" as their brain always changed towards accommodating new communication technologies that they spend more of their time (Prensky, 2003).

The future of the learning environment today is on the hands of the emerging communication technologies (web 2.0 platforms) and those who design them; hence educational institutions and organizations computerized to the extent that learning can be done virtually, on a distance space, online and offline via technologies. With this, therefore, learning becomes a flexible commodity that one can obtain at his quiet time. These technologies, however, have transformed learning with a positive impact in which the paradigm of teaching and learning are shifting by enhancing learning outcome, just as what printing press did to literacy during the Gutenberg revolution (Warschaver, 2007; Lee & Mcloughlin, 2011; Lee & Woods, 2010).

The transition within learning stages from the past generation to the present digital age has witnessed that the future of the 21st century. The learning process will be a complex one since educationists are struggling towards managing the post-industrial forms of knowledge acquisition around the globe as well as the production of the learning tools (Warschaver, 2007). In this situation, therefore, there is a need to consider the needs of learners from every angle; ranging from the classroom settings and that of online or distance space, as well as the use of learning management systems like portals and content management system, like Blackboard and Moodle, (Warschaver, 2007).

International students of various educational institutions like the EMU may experience some difficulties resulting from environmental change, culture, and socialization. Therefore, the 21st-century environment where societies are becoming more and more multicultural, and some are being acculturated, in which some members of these societies experience a lot of culture shock in unfamiliar or subcultural settings, they found themselves as the case of international students or immigrants (Winkelman, 1994). Therefore, those students should have culture shock counseling to help them manage it. Of course, EMU has more than 2000 international students from almost
100 different countries around the world, and these students should, in one way or the other, experience a certain level of culture shock, ranging from food, socialization, learning, and relationship. Thus, therefore, encourage and motivate the researcher to study how these students manage the challenges of culture shock concerning a web 2.0-based learning system.

This research titled “Web 2.0-based Learning and the Challenges of Culture Shock among the International Students of the EMU” aimed at observing the situation of the Nigerian students using web 2.0-based learning environments, such as the learning management systems like Student portal or content management system like Moodle or blackboard. This will be achieved by investigating how these differ from their culture back home, how they manage this strange culture, and whether the technologies are appropriate for them concerning their studies.

Even though technologies have transformed the learning process worldwide, there are still some issues to consider while adopting the use of these emerging technologies in learning. These issues have to do with the individual access to the technologies, technological know-how, and the appropriateness of the technologies. Therefore, researching different cultures regarding digital learning is very significant for digital learning designers, educationists, and leaders or school administrators. Besides, this research will be a helping hand for the school management to put more effort into culture shock awareness and technological use orientation at the faculties' level.

This study's greater limitation is the time frame since it is a term paper research where time given to complete the study may not be enough, and the study is limited to international students from Nigeria. The participants were selected conveniently using a snowball sampling technique.

**Digital Learning and its Challenges**

The emergence of new communication technologies has transformed very significantly how individuals, groups, communities, and organizations learn, communicate, and govern their people. Indeed, for a group of people or individual wishing to use these technologies and manage it, particularly those in the learning environment like universities, should not only require the skills to operate or use the technologies but also need to know the norms and practices of the appropriate use, (Meyers, Erickson, & Small, 2013).

Even though new communication technologies or emerging technologies in education has transformed the learning process, there is a very significant relationship between the new learning system and that of the traditional approach of classroom and paper-oriented reading and writing, and that, one's competency in using the conventional system will serve as a gateway for him to use the blended learning system, (Meyers, Erickson, & Small, 2013; Warschaver, 2007). The wisdom behind digital learning is how students learn through the digital environment and manipulate digital platforms like the learning management system and content management system (Meyers, Erickson, & Small, 2013).

Indeed, the digital learning process can be useful, especially with the instructional designers; educational technologists; this process entails the material designing, production, and consumption of knowledge. Besides, the method also involves political strategies, technical and tactical activities that were engaged in solving the issues attached to the planning, structuring, and process of the materials which are student-centered instructional (Ozad & Barkan, 2004; Hoic-Bozic, Holenko Dlab, & Mornar, 2016; Ru-Chu, 2011). Therefore, with the instructional design, the issue of technology appropriateness will be solved, as the case in some institutions of higher learning accommodating students from different angles across the world from different educational cultures and
Institutions have the responsibility of managing learning materials for their students and deliver it to them when necessary, in which international students received learning materials from their respective institutions, faculties, and departments via interactive learning materials; learning management system LMS or content management system CMS (Ozad & Barkan, 2004). In this situation where technology-based learning is being used, the institutions play the role of the course instructors, partially where the teacher acts as a facilitator. Still, learners should have the avenue of interacting with the course tutor to some extent (Ozad & Barkan, 2004). Indeed, using digital learning facilities, course notes, and materials being uploaded on the web are being considered to have limited use. However, some students can use the letters as additional reading materials, while others with different cultures may see it as a distortion to their learning process (Ozad & Barkan, 2004). However, digital learning provides an avenue for creating strategies to overcome the learning issues, help understanding complex systems through experiments through the use of technologies, in which some parents complained about the harmful side of the technology in learning from the other angle (Prensky, 2003). Of course, digital learning has gone beyond research and development issues and early adaptors of the technology towards occupying the mainstream learning environment like the Universities and some institutes of higher education (Prensky, 2003). Indeed, the use of new communication technologies in learning has brought about the competition by institutions of higher learning; for them to succeed, should equip learners with the technical know-how of the facilities to move ahead and learn faster since digital learning bring unfiltered information for the learners available on the net (Warschaver, 2007).

It has been considered that learners' ability to transform information to knowledge with the use of new communication technologies is a critical factor that contributed towards wealth and power, in which digital literacy becomes paramount to know how to interpret, design, and create content that makes use of image, sound, and text. Thus, therefore, indicated how the predominant multimedia portals and blackboards within universities had a high demand in digital literacy (Warschaver, 2007; Meyers, Erickson, & Small, 2013; Eshet-Alkalai, 2004; Hoic-Bozic, Holenko Dlab, & Mornar, 2016).

Culture Shock and its Effects on Learning
Culture can be defined as a concept that involves how life is being organized or thinking of the underlying hypothesis of the significant human institutions and how to relate with other intelligent human beings, which makes the world a complex environment for human beings. Also, culture can be understood as a network of shared meanings that people take for granted as part of the real members of the network society with the help of some essential elements that include; ability to construct and build as well as use language to understand or embrace forms of a sign system, (Zapf, 1991; Edger & Sedgwick, 2008).

When people move to form their own culture to another, as the case of international students or immigrants, they take things for granted, thinking that things are the same as their home culture, in which students from the third world like Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean whose educational system is not fully digitalized may find things difficult to interpret their culture educationally into their host communities, or institutions, (Zapf, 1991). Therefore, culture shock can be seen as distortion or absence of the familiar culture one has at home, and the substitutions for him of the other strange cues, and also can be perceived as an expression introduced by Anthropologist Kalervo Oberg in the 1950s depicting that cultural shock is a mental illness. The cultural shock is
a set of emotional reactions to the loss of perceptual buttressing from somebody's own culture to the new one with a little meaning for him (Hall, 1959; Adler, 1975; Zapf, 1991; Taft, 1977). However, this situation can be managed through the provision of nature and condition of the causes of the shock or by improving intercultural adaptation as well as communication strategies in addition to programs that help in the management such as cross-cultural training programs aiming at social learning principle such as behavioral transformation, (Taft, 1977).

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative approach in which semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from a sample of 15 Nigerian students at the Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU) in Cyprus. The interviews were conducted to explore the challenges faced by international students in using Web-based learning tools for study purposes. The data were collected using face-to-face interviews with one of the co-authors of this study, who is also an international PhD candidate at EMU. The data were collected using a purposive sampling technique. This sampling technique allows researchers to have direct contact with a small group relevant to the research (Bryman, 2012, pp. 201-204).

Interviews are an effective method of studying a phenomenon in its naturalistic setting (O'Reilly, 2005). The interviews consist of predetermined questions on the challenges of Web-based learning and culture shock among the students. The same questions were asked to all interviewees. The data collected from 15 Nigerian students at EMU were gathered and analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. To assemble the findings of the research that the names of the participants should be identified here. However, for anonymity, the participants' names were coded using numbers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main focus of this study is the challenges caused by a culture shock in the learning process using web 2.0-based learning facilities (LMS & CMS) among international students. These challenges were categorized based on themes to provide an abstract understanding of the findings and how they contribute to knowledge. The emerging themes from the interview data were categorized in Table 1 as follows.

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<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Themes</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Students from Nigeria have basic knowledge of using students’ portal culturally but with the difference from their host universities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The challenges include inadequate technological skills, use of a password to log on to the student portal</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The portal and the Moodle are appropriate for the international students</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>There is a need for more orientation programs for international students on the use of web 2.0-based learning culture</td>
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Table 1 shows the challenges of culture shock as they affect Web 2.0-based learning among international students. The themes are compared with the findings obtained from previous research reviewed. However, the use of web2.0-based learning system is making an effort in unifying the learning culture, as a result of which adopting such by an individual in a different culture may cause issues, as the case for Nigerian students in the EMU, as indicated by the findings of this study, and confirmed by (Warschaver, 2007).

1. The challenge of basic knowledge of using students' portal culturally but with a difference from that of their host universities

This research aimed at investigating the web 2.0-based learning and the challenges of culture shock among Nigerian students in the EMU, in which the finding revealed that some students faced difficulties from the initial stages because they don't have background knowledge of using such system back home, one of the participants said "I can say no because back home during my secondary school we don't have student portal" (P1), as technology, nowadays support learning. (Ozad & Barkan, 2004; Prensky, 2003), and some before coming to the EMU they have background knowledge of digital learning culture, according to one of the participants "Yes, of course, I do use students' portal during my undergraduate studies, where I normally access all my study materials and some vital information from the school; we also used knowledge of the same portal for continuous assessment" (P3, P14, P15). Although Nigerian students come from different learning environments where digital technologies are not integrated into the system or having issues like poor internet connectivity, non-adequate electricity supply, according to the result, they can still manage the learning culture found themselves in with their host institution, stated by one participant as indicated in Table 3, "Yeah, it was not that problematic because I have already had prior information, prior computer knowledge already, so I am adopting, the digital environment was not that hard, I had technological skills back home" (P 8) and confirmed by (Edger & Sedgwick, 2008; Eshet-Alkalai, 2004). This can also be justified in a study conducted on the use of web 2.0 tools in learning, which reveals that there is a significant improvement in learning outcomes, particularly for students with low initial knowledge on how to use the tools (Altanopoulou, Katsanos, & Tselios, 2014).

The study, which was aimed at investigating learning gain from the students after using wiki activities, reveals that web 2.0 based learning facilities are useful in educational institutions (Altanopoulou, Katsanos, & Tselios, 2014; Vesisenaho, Valtonen, Kukkenen, & Anu, 2010) and one of the respondents affirmed that, "It is indeed useful, I love it very informative and makes me feel like a mobile learner" (P14).

2. The challenge of technological skills, such as using a password to log on to the student portal

Technology, mostly educational, can communicate with the learners rather than direct face-to-face or personal contact. It is, therefore, the use of tools and equipment to support teachers delivery of content, either by software, programs, and networks, such as the projector, computers, and other related technologies; however, to use these technologies, there is a need to develop specific skills on how to manipulate the devices effectively, (Bate & Poole, 2003). Thus, can be traced within responses of the participants, some of them have this to say as shown in table 3, "Yes, the challenge I experienced was password issue, sometimes for you to access your portal the password created for you will suddenly refuse to work, this happened to me this semester until I want back to the administrator and get it right for me" (P3, P14) and "I had one problem, concerning library remote access" (P8).

The findings of this study indicate that most of the participants had issues with passwords as part of their challenges, which can be attributed to the technical skills needed for them as users of web 2.0-based learning facilities. Even though some of them have prior knowledge of the usage, there is a need for technological
competencies that might influence their use of the facilities at their host institutions as international students (Suarez-Rodriguez, Almerich, Oreliana, & Diaz-Garcia, 2018). The researcher observed that some Nigerian students, primarily when new, used to forget their password, just because they are naïve in the system lacking skills to use the technology.

3. The challenge of facilities’ appropriateness for international students
Web 2.0-based learning, otherwise known as digital learning, was in existence since when digital communication technologies were engaged in the learning process, using learning management systems (LSM) like student portal and content management system (CSM) like Moodle, Blackboard was introduced. Thus, it has drastically changed the learning culture across the learning environments in the world, whereby every nation, country, state, and region has its own learning culture.

The above issue can be confirmed from the findings of this study as shown in Table 5, where some participants indicated that the use of web2.0-based learning culture like students' portal is appropriate for international students since there is similar technology-based learning in their home country, "The digital facilities used for learning here in the EMU, are appropriate because it makes learning easy for international students especially the new ones, since they are acquainted with the facilities back home, and with course, Moodle students get things easier than back home" (P7, P15) as confirmed by (Ozad & Barkan, 2004) and justified by (Bate & Poole, 2003, p. 6) that technology should be appropriate for effective learning within the higher education system. The issue of the appropriateness of technology-based learning makes learning more flexible, as indicated by some participants, that; "...I have challenges although our learning culture is different, here in EMU it is flexible, and a lot of things one can access online" (P6) and this issue has been confirmed by (Bate & Poole, 2003, p. 153).

The findings of the study reveal that most of the respondents stated that the university web 2.0-based learning facilities like students' portal or content management system are appropriate for international students since they contributed to improving their learning skill and became part of their daily activities. Of course, being an observer also the researcher found that Nigerian students use the portal and other related webpages to navigate within University services and facilities, which they may not visit physically, such as the university public relations unit and their exam timetable notice boards as stated by one respondent "Of course, it is appropriate, we the international students, it serves as a guide for us since we can use it even during a holiday back home to access information related to the university" (P11). Thus, therefore, justified the appropriateness of the facilities used as learning technology, which has become a global trend in education or learning process (Vesisenaho, Valtonen, Kukkenen, & Anu, 2010).

4. There is a need for more orientation programs for international students on the use of web 2.0-based learning culture
To overcome some of the challenges, some of the students suggested that the management of the EMU should be organizing orientation programs for new international students on the use of the web2.0-based learning facilities, like the students' portal and the Moodle for them to have basic knowledge of using the facilities as indicated in table 6, a participant of this study stated; "As a student, my advice to both the international student and management of the university is that the university should be organized enough orientation on how to manage learning-support facilities within the university web site, because of cultural difference in learning" (P1, P11, P12, P14) as also confirmed by (Meyers, Erickson, & Small, 2013; Warschaver, 2007; Zapf, 1991).
Consequently, the international students, particularly those from the developing nations, need to be oriented adequately on how to use technology-based learning facilities without considering their generation since digital divide issues is affecting most of the developing countries across the world (Suarez-Rodriguez, Almerich, Oreliana, & Diaz-Garcia, 2018). Therefore, as suggested by some participants that there should be a proper and adequate orientation program for international students, it has been confirmed that there is a need to build specific orientation for technology users in a learning environment like a university (Inan & Lowther, 2010).

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to explore the challenges of Web-based learning among international students, particularly Nigerian students, at EMU, Cyprus. According to the findings, even though some Nigerian students face difficulties in managing Web2.0-based learning facilities, their computer literacy helped them at the initial stage. Web 2.0-based learning has a global outlook as institutions across the globe have turned to digital learning. As such, students' academic performance is now assessed based on this approach. Therefore, the management of Web 2.0-based learning is crucial as students and institutions are involved in the digital learning process.

This study could advance our understanding of the challenges of Web-based learning among international students. Research on the use of web 2.0-based learning within the educational environment, especially higher institutions of learning, has been the focus of many previous studies. However, research into this area, particularly from the African perspective, is inadequate. Therefore, there is a need for more research on digital learning culture, especially in Nigeria. Also, since this study is limited to a small sample of international students, further research may use a deductive approach with a relatively larger sample to produce more generalizable research outcomes.

REFERENCES


