



The Teaching and Learning on Online Collaborative Platforms: Issues and Implications

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Abstract

The ubiquitous nature of growth of technology and its immersion to digital generation makes the students to become technologically literate than ever which necessitates the effective integration of latest technological development in to educational practices. Collaborative learning is burgeoning trend as a learning strategy especially in the scenario of education for digital generation. Online collaborative learning as a teaching and learning strategy enables the students to work together in groups to achieve a common learning goal. It enhances learning exposure of students with different perspectives that can be acquired through the active engagement and interaction among students. The integration of collaborative learning activities in instructional practices leads to students effective academic performances as well. The interactions in collaborative groups greatly boosts active engagement in teaching and learning process by sharing knowledge, and promoting social interaction in digital learning community. The critical mode of knowledge processing in online collaborative learning are by inventing, exploring to innovate, and by seeking the conceptual knowledge needed to solve problems in specifically designed social webs that are pivotal in working together in groups with similar interests or common goals.

Key Words: *Collaborative Learning, Online Collaboration, Educational Implications*

Introduction

The skill of collaboration is major skill among four C's of 21st century skills. The teaching and learning in collaborative platforms highly supports learning in groups and social networks that can enhance the learning engagement as more sophisticated and challenging activity. The social webs are pivotal in working together in groups with similar interests or common goals by facilitating collaboration in various communities of education that leads to the learners to experience new learning landscapes. The students are highly interested in using social media and other the internet resources since the student generation of current epoch are rightly Google generation or digital natives as Prensky (2001) referred to them. The ubiquitous nature of growth of technology and its immersion to digital generation makes the students to become technologically literate than ever which necessitates the effective integration of latest technological development in to educational practices.

Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning in online platforms is burgeoning as a learning method especially in the scenario of digital generation. The learning theories related to constructivism and connectivism greatly advocates the collaboration in learning which can be integrated in technology mediated teaching and learning process. Online collaborative learning can be defined as using web based technologies for learning in

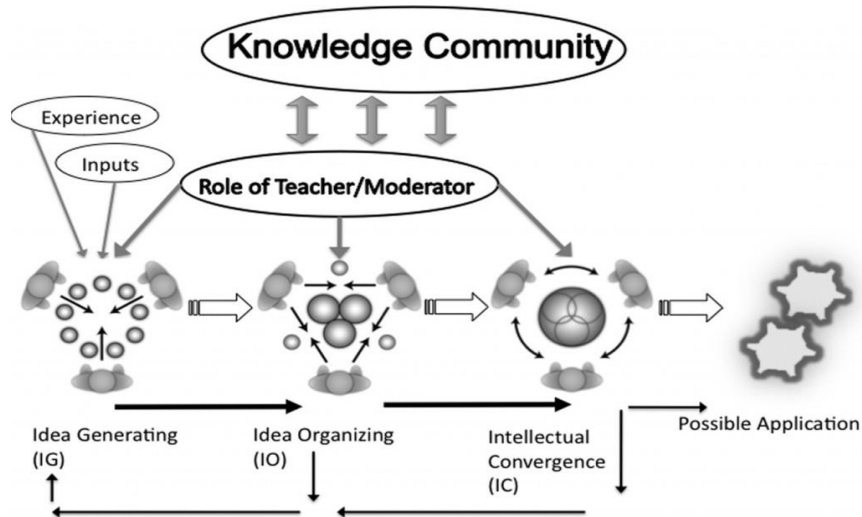
collaboration. Collaborative learning as a teaching and learning strategy enables the students to work together in groups to achieve a common learning goal. It enhances learning exposure of students with different perspectives and conceptualisations that can be acquired through the active engagement and interaction among students. Online synchronous or asynchronous discussion platforms are potential tool for online collaborative learning that can maximise the opportunity for learners to interact and collaborate in online communities. These web based discussion forums are pivotal for sharing the thoughts among learners and instructors that can greatly bring idea generation and its reflection among students.

Siemens (2002) points out that learner-learner interaction in a digital environment can be described with a four stage continuum:

1. Communication
2. Collaboration
3. Cooperation
4. Community

Siemens (2005) advocates connectivism as learning theory that greatly facilitates the impact of technological development on society and teaching and learning process by providing an outline and framework that are very pivotal in understanding collaborative learning in an online platform. Learning in the scenario of digital culture is no longer dependent on acquisition of individual knowledge, storage, and retrieval but it is greatly depend on the connectedness of learning exposure that comes through interaction with different sources of knowledge either offline or online mode and strengthened through participation in communities with common interest, social group and other common networks. Siemen's (2005) learning theory not only combines the individuals with each other but also blend the learning landscape with technology.

The Online Collaborative Learning theory (OCL) proposed by Harasim (2012) is basically developed based on computer-mediated communication (CMC), or networked learning which was a blend of constructivist approaches to learning and the development of the digital mode of learning. According to Harasim (2012) in Online Collaborative Learning theory, students are motivated and encouraged to work together in a group to process knowledge. The critical mode of knowledge processing are by inventing, exploring to innovate, and by seeking the conceptual knowledge needed to solve problems instead of reciting what the learners think as the correct responses. It is also important in Online Collaborative Learning that learners are considered to be actively engaged in teaching and learning process while teachers occupy a pivotal role not only as a fellow-learner, but mainly as a potential link to the knowledge of community or being in the state of the art in that specific discipline.



Harasim's pedagogy of group discussion (Harasim, 2012, p. 95)

Collaborative Activities

Group activities in collaborative platforms ranges from informal talks and discussions to highly systematized collaborative group activities. Group learning in collaborative platforms is potential for learners to engage in academic communication with peers and teachers as a part of instructional process. The effective collaborative group learning activities facilitate the learners to feel the diffusion with community and give the learners an active position in knowledge generation that is shared among these formed groups.

The integration of collaborative learning activities in instructional practices leads to students effective academic performances. The interactions in collaborative groups greatly boosts active engagement in teaching and learning process by sharing knowledge, and promoting social interaction in digital learning community. The collaborative learning activities are greatly helpful to equip the learners to meet the needs of current workplace especially learning how to share ideas and opinions in collective platforms.

Group Discussions

There are ample opportunities for knowledge retention and creation when learners are engaged with discussions in collaborative learning environment with peers instead of with teachers only as in traditional classroom. Collaborative learning exposure gives the learners immense opportunities to share and reflect thoughts and ideas that may lead to sophisticated and highly structured discussions for idea creations by listening attentively to each other and value the efforts of shared knowledge and input process in the community. The teaching and learning through collaborative online discussion forums is mainly reciprocal that greatly help the instructors to assess the performance through online. It is also helpful for learners to respond, participate, and evaluate peer performance regarding the sharing of new information. Successful discussion groups include learners who are actively engaged in the accountability and responsibility undertaken by the members in the group determine the level of effectiveness of academic engagement of the online community since the needed discussion between learners brings logical connections and facilitates the members to draw proper conclusions.

Common learning goals are important in a collaborative learning environment, since knowledge is shared or processed among learners as they targeting common goals to be achieved. It is also pivotal that in a collaborative learning environment, the role of learners are not as passive listeners but are actively engaged in their processing of knowledge acquisition by participating in collaboration and discussions, search for information, and sharing of opinions with their peer learners. The individual learners are expected to co-create and share the knowledge among peer learners in group. Each other's engagement and contribution to the discussion is crucial in this collective learning process which creates a bond between or among the learners based on their knowledge construction. Collaborative learning can greatly help students to develop their cognitive skills such as reasoning and higher order thinking skills and to engage with knowledge acquisition and generation through shared common goals, searches, and knowledge of exploration (Palloff & Pratt, 2005).

The online collaborative learning is not to substitute the teacher, but to utilise the technology primarily to improve communication for teaching and learning among teachers and learners. It generally necessitates specific approach and strategies for the development of instructional process based on knowledge acquisition and construction assisted and supported through web based digital technologies. Online collaborative learning approach may vary from the more objectivist instructional approaches found in computer-mediated learning, teaching machines, and artificial intelligence based teaching and learning, which basically anticipate utilising technological devices as surrogate to human teachers at least in some of the activities.

Implications of Online Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning can positively effect on student's learning especially for slow-achieving learners (Lai 2011). It can also potentially enhance motivation in students because working together in groups can often maximise interest and curiosity among learners. It is pivotal in facilitating to explain student understanding which helps elaborate and reorganize knowledge construction in collaborating community. active engagement in collaborative learning activities helps not only to learn best and more comparing with conventional teaching practices but also depicts more satisfied with classes room environment and improved performance (Dillenbourg 1999). Increased levels of critical thinking skills are also an important advantage of collaborative learning environment (Lai 2011).

Online collaborative learning can enhance deep learning or transformative learning and asynchronously recorded multimedia archives for online learning greatly compensate for the lack of physical cues and other features of face-to-face discussion in teaching and learning process. It is also substantial in facilitating the development of high level intellectual competencies and skills which are pivotal requirements for learners in digital learning scenario. Collaborative learning greatly supports both working in teams and learning through networks which makes learning process as an immediate, challenging and engaging performance since it has ample time for construction and reflection of knowledge experiences (McAlpine (2000). The major benefits of online collaborative learning are such as development of critical thinking skills, co-creation of knowledge, reflection and transformative learning (Brindley and Walti 2009). Some other pedagogical advantages of collaborative learning are that

teachers can direct the monitoring of what all students are thinking, mainstreaming the shy students, ensuring participation of all learners, ensuring more student-centeredness etc. (Klemm, 1997).

Issues related to Online Collaborative Learning

The learning in collaborative platforms mostly fails due to lack of proper structured integration among teams as one reason is learners or instructors may not be properly trained how to collaborate effectively in community (Yazici 2009). Bringing the learners merely in groups and directing them to collaborate online platforms may not likely to be successful. The teachers or course directors need to make aware and foster the student's group efforts and maximise the challenge of the activities from time to time. The role of scaffolding techniques is very potential in building students confidence and ensure active engagement in learning process. The great challenge of the implementation of online collaborative learning is that it necessitates requirements of high level digitally knowledgeable and skilled instructors and learners in its effective implementation.

Assessment is a challenge for instructors in collaborative learning environment since the tasks are carried out in groups. There are mainly four techniques of assessment in online collaborative learning such as assessment based on individual performance, self-assessment, assessment by peers and group performance assessment. The assessment of both the group and the individual members pose some practical constraints in a collaborative learning environment. The free rider effect is also a threat to the assessment of collaborative learning since which minimises the potential and effectiveness of the group work in collaborative platforms. The sucker effect (Kerr 1983) is also an important issue with the assessment of collaborative learning as the sucker effect happens if a limited one or more of talented students in the group dominate and perform the most part of the task. The factors such as lack of shared goals among members, practical constraints related to group monitoring and organization, level of commitment of team members, contributions of group members and issues related to group communication (Capdeferro and Romero 2012).

Conclusion

In the current scenario of global village, group work occupies substantial role to equip the individuals with needed skills and knowledge to improve their performance in workplaces. The collaborative and other social skills are crucial in making the employees to meet the needs of current trends of job market. The implementation of online collaborative learning techniques is not simple since which requires a different approach to pedagogical perspectives. Instructors are greatly expected to take advantage of the modern technological devices and digital tools that can effectively be integrated to monitor student interactions and learning engagements. Online collaborative learning can greatly support collective teaching and learning process as it is more flexible model to delivery to meet the needs of a more diverse body of student in a digital era.

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