
Editorial

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Biographical notes: Chih-Hsiung Tu, PhD is an Assistant Professor at Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, AZ and an educational/instructional technology consultant with extensive experience in distance education, e-learning, technology training in teacher education, online learning community, learning organisation, and knowledge management. His research interests are distance education, socio-cognitive learning, socio-cultural learning, online learning community, learning organisation, and knowledge management. He has edited one book, and published one book, published many papers, authored many book chapters, submitted numerous book proposals, presented at national and international conferences, and other scholarly activities.

Cherng-Jyh Yen, PhD is an Assistant Professor of quantitative methods at George Washington University, Washington DC. He received his PhD in Educational Research from the University of Virginia. His past research focused on cross-group measurement invariance of cognitive ability, learning behaviour, and academic achievement and cross-group invariance of the relationships among those constructs. In recent years, his research work has concentrated on test validation of a new online learning questionnaire using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). He is also interested in application of regression and various multivariate methods in educational research.

Learning is a social achievement. Online learning has the potential to foster learning community despite the students and teachers being separated by time and place. Many have agreed on the importance of social interaction in the online learning environment. From the socio-cultural perspective of learning, social interaction leads students to effective cognitive development and to higher mental functioning in their learning process. Online learning is a social act where students acquire competence when interacting with peers and teachers to negotiate and generate meaningful sense making in a learning community.

Researchers have been examining how the social environment affects motivation, attitudes, teaching and learning to enhance and improve online social interaction. Online learning relies heavily on advanced computer technologies. Although technology is considered culturally neutral, students of different genders, races, and physical features

may have very different perceptions of educational technologies and their applications. The aim of this special issue focuses on discussions, examinations, and studies that identify critical online socio-cultural learning factors and examine how these factors impact online learning and teaching.

This special issue concentrates on identifying critical online socio-cultural learning factors, examining their impact on online learning, and suggesting effective instructional strategies to enhance and improve social interaction. Manuscript selection criteria depended upon the quality of the comprehensive literature review, strong research design, valid research results, and effective research implications.

The purpose of this special issue in “Online Socio-Cultural Learning” was to collect research studies of excellent quality that identify critical factors which impact online socio-cultural learning. The topics in this special issue have included: social interaction, online discussions, cultural factors, online social relationships, gender communication issues, social awareness, self efficacy, online collaborative learning, cultural learning tools, linguistic learning tools, etc.

The theme of this special issue is “Online socio-cultural learning”. One common theme shared by all of the papers presented is ‘social interaction’. These papers suggest different interactive instructional strategies, designs, technologies, and tools to promote effective online socio-cultural learning. These papers have merged six important characteristics of online socio-cultural learning:

- meaningful activity
- learner uniqueness
- process and development
- relations
- metacognition reflection
- cultural tools.

It is not necessary that an effective online socio-cultural learning instruction should include all six components. In fact, each paper in this special issue addresses and implements a few of these components and possesses the potential to result in effective online learning.

All presentations in this special edition were refereed by exposure to a doubly blinded review procedure before being accepted for publication. Each manuscript submitted was reviewed by three to four invited reviewers. The review criteria were:

- originality of the work
- scholarly relevance
- professional/industrial relevance
- completeness of the work
- acknowledgement of the work of others by references
- organisation of the manuscript
- clarity in writing, tables, graphs and illustrations
- likelihood of passing the ‘test of time’.