Chapter VIII

Building Powerful Online Synchronous Communications: A Framework for Lifelong Learning in Distance Education

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Abstract

Digital citizens have been using online synchronous communications (OSCs)-based milieus since the last decade. OSCs can provide these online communities with new and challenging opportunities via instant interactions, which are OSCs’ dominant nature, in lifelong learning. OSCs, therefore, help online learners, as lifelong learners, and communication workers (online communication designers, media coordinators, online managers, technology-support staff, multimedia designers, etc.) understand this milieu better to have more benefits. In this study, media richness theory and four cultural issues (biases, stereotypes, ethics and values) are discussed together to highlight the communicational characters of the OSCs. To utilize the communicational prospects of OSCs, this communication theory provides communication
workers with useful guidelines related to cultural issues, which expand on future directions for OSCs. Finally, the researchers develop a framework according to the strategies of media richness theory, which declares that there must be a fit between technology and communication structures to reduce task-related ambiguity.

**Introduction**

Online synchronous communications (OSCs) in distance education have the potential to deliver global knowledge around the world. The location independent communication opportunities become a consequence of the philosophy of dynamic and democratic lifelong learning. OSCs are therefore powerful means to generate logical online possibilities and flexible contents. In order to build appropriate flexible lifelong content for OSCs, professionals and learning communities must focus on methods, techniques, and principles, as well as barriers to share and exchange knowledge in distance education. According to the philosophy of lifelong learning, a framework can design and maintain effective OSCs thus providing professionals and community with flexible collaboration contents in distance education. Besides, this framework can help them become engaged citizens, informed individuals, and dynamic members in their online society to improve their communication styles and abilities with each other. However, there are limited research studies and theoretical articles about online learners’ communication styles and abilities to assist lifelong learning with real-life experiences through OSCs. Therefore, this topic will bring a new ground by addressing key questions about learners’ communication styles and abilities, as well as about OSCs and real-life experiences. Based on the main purpose of this chapter and the concerns discussed above, the key inquiries in the study reported in the present chapter are as follows:

1. To what extent do online learners’ skills continue to improve their communication styles and abilities with OSCs?
2. What kind of online learning experiences are associated with developing communication styles and abilities with OSCs?
3. What are online learners’ patterns of participation in communication styles and abilities with OSCs in distance education?
4. What is the impact of communication styles and abilities with OSCs on their lifelong learning outcomes?

The authors will build a framework based on the constructivist OSCs approach to improve the learners’ communication styles and abilities related with real-world
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