

# Social phenomenon of Community on Online Learning: Digital Interaction and Collaborative Learning Experience

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*Abstract:* - Digital interaction in e-learning offers great opportunities for education quality improvement in both - the classical teaching combined with e-learning, and distance learning. Zagreb School of Economics & Management (ZSEM) is one of the few higher education institutions in Croatia that systematically uses e-learning in teaching. Systematically means that all courses are developed combined with e-learning and all these courses use the same LMS (Learning Management System). Discussions are very important part of each e-learning system. The study focuses on the importance of the social phenomenon of community on online learning. The phenomenon of digital environments and social experience in education is examined through discussion boards of two different freshmen courses offered at ZSEM. Effectiveness and communication dynamics of discussion boards is analyzed through comparison of students' participation rates according to the topic, discussion type and quality of discussion. The goal of the study is to analyze the potential of online communication tools in creating student-centered digital communities of inquiry. However, the focus is not on the individual student learning and achievement outcomes, but on the collaborative learning and student digital interaction from a pedagogical perspective. Based on social constructivist principle and the assumption that knowledge creation is a shared, rather than individual experience, the study examines how and why digital environments enhance online collaborative learning experience.

*Key-Words:* - discussion boards, e-learning, quality, collaborative learning, online communities of inquiry, communities of learners, information and communication technologies, sociology

## 1 Online Discussion Practice

*I believe that all education proceeds by the participation of the individual in the social consciousness of the race... I believe that the only true education comes through the stimulation of the child's powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself. [1]*

Effectiveness of online learning primarily depends on interactivity.[2] Many authors dealing with online learning environments [3]-[8] frequently point out that discussion boards are an important part of every e-learning system, since an effective online communication is „at the heart of all forms of educational interaction.“ [9]. Social component, besides cognitive and teaching presence, is one of the key factors that need to be taken into consideration when evaluating an online learning experience.

Unlike the traditional, teacher-led classroom discussions which are limited in terms of time and number of participants, online asynchronous discussions enable all the students to be active and choose the conditions that best fit them. [10, 11] Besides managing their own time which helps students to create better work habits and attitudes toward learning, discussion boards provide opportunity for collaboration. Students can work together in their own artifact construction with the goal to understand and explain what they are learning. Based on long-term, interdisciplinary and student-centered activities, online discussion practices create an inquiry-based environment in which teachers are facilitators of learning rather than “vessels of knowledge.” Therefore, discussion boards are valuable tools that promote understanding over knowledge and enable teachers to help students in the process of discovering knowledge themselves.

















