Role Transformation of Online Learners in Network Times

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Abstract. Online learning in the context of the network has fundamentally changed the learning way of the educatee. Compared with traditional classroom of face-to-face learning styles, the learning method, learning environment and other factors of learners in online learning have changed, and the changes will inevitably lead to the conversion of learner roles. Online learners must move from a relatively passive classroom role to an active participant to improve their self-learning level and self-management ability. Meanwhile, online learners should also increase the network technology of knowledge acquisition, selection and test, and establish a large number of new network models of the information communication with teachers, managers and other learners, thus completing the role identity and construction.

Introduction

The document entitled “Ten Years Development Plan of Educational Informatization (2011-2020)” issued by the China’s Ministry of Education pointed out that the development of education informatization should take educational idea innovation as the guide, take quality educational resources and informatization learning environment construction as the foundation, and take learning methods and educational model innovation as the core [1]. In the information age, the open network platform provides educatee with technical conditions with no space-time restrictions, and the educatee can study anytime and anywhere. Since 2012, MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) has emerged worldwide, and the online learning has become popular all over the world. As a result, the learning model of educatee has undergone profound changes that the educatee has become self-paced learners and make independent choices on study time, study location and learning content. Under the technical support of personalized online learning, the role of students in teaching activities has undergone fundamental changes, and the role transformation of educatee is completed consciously from traditional classroom learning to online learning during the learning activities.

Implication of Online Learning in Internet Age

In 1997, Don Tapscott pointed out that the “Internet generation” was a group of people born between January 1977 and December 1997, and the advent of computer network and other digital media had a significant impact on their lives and behaviour styles. He believed that the learning attitude and learning style of the educatee of “Internet generation” were changed, and they relied on information and communication technologies. Meanwhile, they liked to use new media to quickly accept information and had fragmented learning, while the active learning style and high level of social interaction were also preferred instead of boring classroom indoctrination. Therefore, he advocated that the educational methods need to be transformed from a teacher-centred class to a student-centred class. While highlighting the effect of teachers’ classroom promotion, the important role of students’ individual behaviours in the learning process should also be emphasized, as well as the promotion effect of cooperation for learning [2].

Online learning has become a new model of the “network generation” of student learning. The various tools and platforms (Wiki, Blog, Wechat, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, social networking sites, various forums, virtual classrooms, online communities, video conferencing systems) are
adopted to participate in learning by learners with different identities and ages, different educational and cultural backgrounds and different knowledge structures and levels, according to their own habits and preferences. Meanwhile, more and more knowledge is continuously gained by discussing, organizing activities, thinking and communicating on the topic (or theme) in a particular field [3]. Online learning is characterized by the participation of educatee in asynchronous education environments, and access information and create information by using network communication technology. The asynchronous collaborative learning is a flexible and open system that requires educatee to study initiatively and reflect continuously on their own. Meanwhile, the educatee also need a new learning protocol and the conscious expectation of learning outcomes. The complexity of interaction between educatee and self, other learners, teaching organizations and managements represents a learning element structure that is different from traditional classroom learning, such as self-perception, learning group and pedagogical management. Meanwhile, the role adjustment and conversion are needed to carry out appropriately and consciously by educatee.

Online learning requires a qualitative shift in communication and interaction, which determines the inevitability of the role adjustment of educatee. Compared with traditional face-to-face classroom learning, there is a fundamental change in online learning, that is, the interaction between the flexible control of learning time and the multiple-dimension (voice, text, pictures) of learning medium. Therefore, the multiple perspectives and further understanding of textual knowledge are greatly facilitated from educatee by online learning. Additionally, a learning community must be established and sustained from online learning experience to ultimately realizing educational purpose. In this respect, the “learning ecology” of new online learning is builded with continuous feedback by students, and the communication and interaction of personal freedom and equal are realized through the communication network under public view. It can be said that the way of communication and collaboration helps to arouse the discourse of educatee critical introspection and the generated thinking mode, so as to obtain the results of the final high-level learning.

The educational process of educatee is reconstructed by online learning, and the students’ learning styles are also changed fundamentally to increase the interaction and personalized communication between students and teachers. The students’ initiative is fully developed and the teaching effectiveness is greatly improved. The spatial and temporal advantages and flexible characteristics have become the development trend and tide in current educational reform.

**Influence Factors of Online Learning and Necessity of Learner Role Adjustment**

Although the advantages of online learning are obvious, the effect of online learning in real life is not very satisfactory. There are many problems in the autonomy of online learning, such as the insufficient learning time management ability, the weak initiative learning skills and learning motivation [4]. The important roots of these problems lie in the lack of the clear and accurate role cognition and orientation of educatee in online learning.

In the traditional classroom teaching, teachers are treated as the center and their role is to impart knowledge, supervise and manage the learning activities of students. The relationship between teacher and student are the direct transmission and acceptance, and the students are just passive recipients. However, teachers are not only the learning organizers and managers of students, but also the learning partners, counselors, researchers and learners, in the network age. In the network learning, students have the right to autonomous learning, and each learner can be a student, but also can be other learners’ teacher at the same time. That is, there is no distinction between students and teachers, in the internet world. Each learner has multiple identities of not only as a learner of knowledge and information, but also as a provider and sharer of knowledge and information. When educatee become online learners, the conscious adjustment of their learning roles is inevitable, and the role adjustment needs to be finished in designing and delivering meaningful online learning experiences.

A comparative study of face-to-face learning and online learning was conducted to examine the differences in the importance ranking of above two learning effect influencing factors [5], and the results provided the basis and direction of conscious role adjustment for online learners.
The experimental results show that the three key factors which influencing the learning effectiveness are self-learning cognitive factor, learning group influential factor, teaching organization and management factor, whether in face-to-face classroom learning or online learning. However, the influential order of the importance of above three factors on learning outcomes is different, in the two learning modes. In the analysis of online learning effectiveness, self-learning cognitive factor ranks first, and then followed by the factors of teaching organization management and learning group impact. The top cognitive factor includes three variables of self-examination, understanding expectation and responsibility undertaking, and above-mentioned three aspects are considered to be able to reflect the core structure of educatee self-learning cognitive education. That is, learners know how to participate in learning activities, and consciously aware of their accountable role responsibility which becomes the primary factor affecting the online learning effectiveness. When online learners have less self-learning initiative and less motivation for internal learning, the ability of time management is also weakened. Therefore, in the absence of supervision, they are easily attracted by things unrelated to learning and the learning objectives are blurred, resulting in bad learning effectiveness.

The second influential factor of learning effect in online learning is learning group factor, and it involves the purpose of each individual participation in group learning. The variable includes the exchange of ideas between learners, the preliminary generated solutions to learning problems, and the discussion and interaction with comfortable feelings. The third-ranked influencing factor is teaching organization and management.

For face-to-face educatee, the most important factor is identified as the impact of the management of classroom groups and teaching organizations, followed by cognitive factor. The study assesses and contrasts the role change among students in two learning styles, as well as the role differences between face-to-face learning experiencers and abundant perception experienced online learners. The comparisons reveal the same structure of learning effect factors, that is, the self-cognition, learning group and teaching management of educatee. In different learning modes, face-to-face learning is the first influencing factor of learning group and teaching management, while the order of importance and degree of face-to-face learning and online learning are different.

The sequence of the various influencing factors of learning effect shows that the online learning and face-to-face learning are different learning processes, and their roles are needed to be adjusted accordingly. Additionally, it also shows that the face-to-face learning experiences are seen as the influence factors of outer orientation, such as the presence of learning group influence and teaching organization management. However, online learning is mainly influenced with factors of cognition and introversion, therefore, online learning has a greater demand for the voluntary accountability of personal responsibility. Traditional classroom shows that the educational information is transmitted unidirectionally by teachers, whereas the online learning provides a separate experience with individual process independent of face-to-face teaching. This is the learning process that contrasts sharply with online learning and face-to-face learning. Therefore, online learning needs to increase one’s awareness of learning content, that is, the intrinsic learning responsibility.

The quality of learning outcomes can be affected by inherent learning responsibility, and the enhancement of inherent learning responsibility is an important prerequisite of changing study methods and improving learning efficiency for online learning. In short, the different perceptions of the face-to-face learning and online learning of educatee presuppose the requirement of the role adjustment of online learners in network age, and the role adjustment will be an important challenge for students to participate in online learning.

Role Onstruction of Educatee in Online Learning under the Network Environment

In the context of educational big data, strengthening the focus on the learning analytics which centred on learning process, using the data mining technology to analyse the multiple levels of massive data generated in learning process, and putting forward specific learning advice strategies. So as to find out the necessity and regularity of the role adjustment of online learners, compared with traditional face-to-face learning model.
According to the above analysis and disclosure of the influence factor structure of online learning effect, the online learning model is established by three influence factors of cognitive, learning group and teaching organizational management. It is used to diagnose online learning transaction and measure the degree of learner's role adjustment, so as to optimize the teaching intervention measures. Since the role identity adjustments of online learners cannot be ignored and inevitable, then the students must assume greater responsibility for the increase of online learning control. The requirements of online learners with accurate communication skills and the master ability of comprehensive knowledge, simultaneously combined with the effective use of space and the conscious ascending of information technology, the participants must move from a relatively passive classroom audiences to a more active participant role.

Cognitive factors are the understanding and confirmation that the online learners have constructive significance to the content and problems they have learned. Learning group factors include the ability of all participants, the common purpose of learning groups, and the interaction between students. Teaching organizational management factors include the management implementation, monitoring students' awareness, grasping learning dynamics and creating an expected educational goal. Above three factors represent the basic structure of a real online educational experience.

The educatee should become more independent and learn to study during the learning, which is the primary factor of the role reversal for online learners. If the students want to go beyond their learning content, they must assume a new role identity. As a sociological category, the role used here is defined as a group of related behaviours in a group, organization and society, and it needs to have a certain role orientation. The most basic role expectation is realized by the appropriate role transition in the process of the social interaction with social teaching guidance and individual participation. The socialization process is the process of adaptation from characteristics, attitudes, values and behaviour ideas of learning groups to individual learning [6], and it also the process of role identity of the educatee. During above processes, three types of interaction should be completed: the first is the interaction between learners and learning content; the second is the interaction between learners and teachers and the third is the interaction between learners and learners.

The role skills of online learners are added by capturing and imitating the examples in learning community, such as the technology of knowledge acquisition, selection, processing and test, the establishment of a large number of new models of the information communication with teachers, peers, and managers, the enhancement of the autonomic level and ability of learners, and the management capabilities of learning time and space utilization. So that the new roles can achieve the role commitment, complete the individual role construction, and practice the role behaviours of individual active participation.

Entering the role of online learners will need a “role formation” process, and the individual must assume the corresponding role responsibility to complete the self-construction of learning meaning. The asynchronous nature of online learning is consistent with the control of online community and the free characteristics of network, and it makes the learners’ autonomous participation is more obvious. The process of role creation is far beyond the adjustment requirement of the technical skills of online learners. In the absence of a face-to-face visual cue, the online students must learn to communicate and familiarize with other community members to increase their awareness of expectations and needs of online learning content, and provide their advice on learning content and share their thoughts. This is the process of role formation.

The students will be explicit and conscious of the role requirements of online learning when the cognitive level is improved. The transformation is the adjustment process of achieving the recognition of others’ core role of by comparing their behaviour changes. The online learning managers conduct cognitive strategy elaboration by carrying out capacity training of learning objectives through the learners. The use of big data analysis to play its predictability and accuracy advantages, so that the students’ online learning possesses planning, monitoring, evaluation and direction. According to the psychological characteristics of different online learners, the
corresponding individualized tutoring measures are adopted to comprehensively improve the self-learning, self-control and self-management ability of online learners, and guide the completion of the role conversion of online learning.

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