

Knowledge Construction and Gender in online Debates

Ines Khalsi

The higher institute of Studies applied to Humanities
Tunisia

Abstract

This study investigated knowledge construction in two online debates using the Gunawardena et al.'s Interaction Analysis Model (1997). On the one hand, it aimed at assessing the relationship between knowledge construction and participation. On the other hand, it investigated the variation of constructed knowledge by gender. Results revealed that most of the postings were coded phase II in debate A whereas most of the postings were coded phase I in debate B. Few postings were coded phase IV and no posting was coded phase V. Statistical analysis yield that knowledge construction and participation are significantly and positively correlated. Besides, there was no disparity in the variation of constructed knowledge by gender which implies that CMC may have an equalizing effect on men and women's conversational behavior. Findings demonstrated that online debates may be appropriate media for learners to perform higher-order thinking and achieve knowledge construction but limited in fostering the higher mental phases (IV and V). The study confirmed the effectiveness of asynchronous online environment in supporting online learning. Some actions could be done to stimulate participation in order to foster knowledge building such as assigning roles or tasks to online debaters.

Keywords: Knowledge construction; online participation; gender; phases of interaction