Midlands State University visiting music students' experiences of using netnography to learn marimba performance

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Abstract

This paper builds upon the uptake of digital learning platforms as a method of tutoring visiting music students taking music practical courses. Evaluating the development and spread of netnography, this paper explores the experiences of a new scientific method in disseminating/learning practical musical instrument playing skills from a distance. This qualitative study examines lecturer-student interactions to investigate digital technology mediated interaction as a platform for enhancing visiting music students' marimba performance competencies away from campus. The study employs an Afro-centric framework of Digital Unhu (digital humanism) and netnographic accounts of student-lecturer interaction within a resource-constrained African context to enable a more nuanced description of practice. The study demonstrates the central role of netnography in facilitating student-lecturer exchanges in the unique cultural setting of Midlands State University where visiting learners spend a considerable part of the semester away from campus, situated at their home and work environments. Visiting music students were interviewed to solicit their experiences of learning practical subjects online, coupled with observations and document analysis. Findings show that WhatsApp interaction, Google classroom sessions, and video assisted instruction provided a dynamic and highly personal environment in which the lecturer can coach students to play marimba. The experiences reveal the challenges and prospects of adopting netnography for musical instrument instruction.

Keywords: digital technology, lecturer-student interaction, netnography, marimba performance, visiting students