

Global Partner’s Intellectual Disclosure

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Abstract

Fatima Jinnah is a public university for women in Pakistan which is providing a quality education to its students. In 2014, the students of this university were given an opportunity to take the Global Understanding course with the students of two foreign universities: East Carolina University (ECU), USA and the University of Abou Bekar Belkaid Tlemcen (UABT), Algeria. Our experiences in global education and interaction with global partners were very good. It was not only the opportunity to interact with international students through video-conferencing, but also provided us a forum to share each other’s culture. This was a unique course for our course of study which is not based on any lecture or handouts. It is based on personal interaction with our international partners during which we learned extensively about other cultures.

Introduction

According to the great philosopher and thinker Aristotle, “Education is the creation of a sound mind in a sound body”. This statement clearly stresses education which is the need of the hour. Today, education is no more restricted within a specific geographical area. This means that a person has not been bound within a specific region or part of the world in order to acquire knowledge or to learn about other cultures that exist around the world as it is spreading across the globe at a fast rate. So, that is why e-learning or the learning through the use of technology is also increasing nowadays. Now, technology is involved in the whole education system and as seen in the context of higher education, the use of technology is much higher at this level than previously. As Haythornthwaite and Andrews (2011) argue that within a short period of time, the use of technology in education has gained a great importance or value. So the increased uses of the internet and other technologies have amalgamated e-learning and education within an institution in a formal way at the higher education level.

A study by Hartnett (2015) shows that the trend of online learning is increasing rapidly with the passage of time. However, this way of learning is not equally beneficial for all learners because of the following factors: the lack of interaction and communication with fellow students and partners in addition to unsatisfactory supervision and lack of feedback from the teacher. So these factors can reduce the motivation of the learners to work more competently. So, if it is to be viewed in the context of those countries that are using English as a second language, some of the students face difficulty in understanding

English and in communicating with their global partners because of having no fluency in English. They are unable to understand the discussions among the students and sometime they understand the question but they do not know how to explain the answer in English. This leads them towards losing their interest in the discussions made within the class and the motivation to learn is also reduced.

Grinager (*Education Issues*, 2006) argues that today technology is becoming a valuable channel or way of addressing educational requirements. The educators have also shown a healthy relationship between the use of technology and higher achievements. It has been said by the experts that the use of technology has enhanced effectiveness of students in the everyday jobs of class administration and student performance within the classroom. If it is to be viewed in the context of the higher education system both in developed and developing countries, the teachers at universities use the internet and social media to share readings that they assigned and they also receive assignments from students through the internet. Similarly the students are also directed to prepare the assignments through using technology. As a result, assignments are also prepared on computers through using software. In addition, the role of faculty is also very important in making sure that the online courses are a success. The support of faculty involves the design of the course outline, training the students and providing technological support. For the success of an institution that is taking part in online courses, the role of faculty is fundamental and crucial (Miller et al., 2014). So we can say that both the technology within the classroom and the use of technology for distance learning have positive effects on high achievements. However it cannot be generalized that the use of technology is positively related to high achievements only. There are also some issues related to the use of technology that have been mentioned above.

Organization of the Global Understanding Course

Students from various universities within a country or from different countries collaborate with each other in order to enhance their education skills and institutional capabilities. They offer different online courses to students belonging to different cultures and countries. In this way, we were offered the Global Understanding course at Fatima Jinnah Women University, a public university in Pakistan which provides a quality education for women.

During this course, we participated in videoconference sessions with two universities: East Carolina University (ECU), USA and the University of Abou Bekar Belkaid Tlemcen (UABT), Algeria. The interaction between the students or global partners was conducted through video conferencing discussions, e-mail and other Social Media. We the students of FJWU completed joint projects with our partners on cultural issues. With those projects, our global partner presented their own slides that were on their US perspective about a particular cultural practice and then we presented the Pakistani perspective on some cultural practice. The interaction with our global partners and learning experience of global education was very good.

My learning experience of Global education and interaction with global partners was successful. It has changed my thought patterns in many ways as it made me think about something “outside the box”. Because of working with diverse cultures, we learned much more about their society and socio-cultural practices. Here in Pakistan, we are using

English as a second language. So our partners were so surprised to see that we were speaking English with great fluency and we were appreciated by our global partners. The course Global Understanding was not only a unique learning experience for us but it was equally important for our global partners as they came to know about our culture and traditions that were new for them. They showed great interest while hearing about our culture and raised a number of questions about different socio-cultural traditions and values being practiced in Pakistan.

Teaching Methodology

From a teaching perspective, it was a new experience for us. The course outline was quite simple and well-structured. The sessions for this course took place through video conferencing and in chat rooms on a computer. The participants on both sides were divided into two groups (i.e., Group A and Group B) so that they could easily communicate and interact with each other. In one class, Group “A” attended the session through video-conferencing while Group “B” participants were communicating with their partners in chat rooms on individual computers for the duration of the class. Similarly, during the next class, Group A and B switched places (i.e., Group A participants were in chat rooms and Group B was in video-conference with their partners). We had five sessions or class meetings with the students at ECU (USA) and five sessions with the students of the UABT (Algeria). During four sessions, we were given different topics about socio-cultural practices of both regions. While in the fifth and final session, the collaborative projects were presented by the participants of Global Understanding Course.

Role of the Instructor

For the success of an institution that is taking part in the online courses, the role of faculty is fundamental and crucial (Miller et al., 2014). The role of the instructor is the most important aspect for this course “Global Understanding” as it has been argued that the role of faculty is also very important in making sure the online courses is a success. The support of faculty involves the designing of the course outline, training the students and providing the technological support. Dr. Rehman gave us guidance about how to interact and communicate with people from other cultures. She also gave us a brief description about the course outline. Other class related issues were also resolved by her. For example, some of the students complained that their global partners were not responding to the e-mails sent by them. So she resolved these issues in a timely manner.

Technical Support

The technical support is considered to be essential for any online course. As Haythornthwaite and Andrews (2011) argue that within a short period of time, the use of technology in education has gained a great importance or value. So the increased use of internet and other technologies has amalgamated the e-learning and education within an institution in a formal way at the higher education level. So without the technological support provided by the Information Technology & Communication (ITC) lab of Fatima

Jinnah Women University, this opportunity could not have been possible for us to complete the “Global Understanding” course.

The Global Understanding Experience Between Students in Pakistan (FJWU), Algeria (UABT), and the United States (ECU) in 2014

The Global Understanding course provided an opportunity for the students from FJWU (Pakistan), UABT (Algeria) and ECU (USA) to interact with each other in a friendly environment. This provided a platform for having productive and an educated learning exposure. Although the interaction was focused on specific topics, it was also based on informal discussions on different aspects of each other’s personal life.

The following topics were discussed during the initial four sessions:

- Family Systems
- Education Systems
- Religion and Religious Practices
- Stereotypes and Prejudices

Family Systems in Pakistan, Algeria, and the United States

Our first topic focused on the family system or the structure of family with the students of both universities. Firstly when we were introduced to our Global Partners from East Carolina University, our partners were surprised to see that the majority of our class were wearing head coverings which is called “Sacarf or Stoll” in our local language. Our Global partners asked about our head coverings. We explained that it was because we are Muslim and we cover our heads because of some socio-cultural norms which make us feel comfortable and this does not disturb us. Within the topic of family systems we discussed birth and marriage ceremonies and death rituals as well.

Both countries have a patriarchal model of family structure in which the head of the family is a male. Although suggestions from other family members are also taken into account regarding family matters, the final decision is made by the male member of the family. One of our Global partners at ECU told us that “All the decisions of the family are done by my Mom” while the majority said that all the decisions are made by father. When I asked whether their farther takes the opinion of their mother into account, they said that the suggestions and opinions of their mothers are also considered while making decisions about family matters. While we told them that that the decisions about the domestic responsibilities and household chores are made by our mothers (e.g. what will be cooked today and when to go to the market for shopping), the major issues like decisions about education, marriages for children and the use of assets like land and property are made by the males in consultation with the females (mother and wife) of the family. Our Global Partners at UABT told us that all the decisions are made by males in consultation with the females. The opinion of their mothers are also taken into consideration while making any decision.

We asked from our Global partners at East Carolina University about homes for the elderly. They told us that elderly relatives are sent to nursing homes and that they regularly go to meet with their grandparents. Some of them told us that “Our Grandparents

live in separate homes and we to meet them on every weekend.” While answering the same questions by our partners at ECU (East Carolina University), we explained that our grandparents live with us since they are respected by their children and grandchildren. One of our class fellows said that their grandparents live in a village and that they see them during holidays and on Eid. Similarly, our Algerian Global Partners at UABT told us that “we respect and take care of our parents and grandparents because it is the order of Allah to respect our elders.”

Education Systems in Pakistan, Algeria, and the United States

The education system in the USA is very advanced and educational institutions are well-equipped with advanced technologies. For example, they use Information Technology for teaching and learning. During the project presentations, they had laptops with them. Research is the main component of their educational system. The criteria for assessing a student (grade point average or GPA and Semester System) were almost the same as we have here in Pakistan. A student’s performance is assessed by taking exams, preparing assignments, and delivering presentations and they are given grades according to their performance. Another noticeable thing is that the students at ECU and UABT were from different disciplines. Some of them were majoring in the natural sciences while others were majoring in the social sciences. In contrast, students in our class were all from the same discipline. They were majoring in Gender Studies. Overall, the education system in both countries were good and to some extent unbiased towards both genders as both genders have the freedom to choose any discipline related to a non-traditional field.

The students from ECU also explained that they had jobs to help with their educational expenses and some of them told us that their parents pay their tuition and fees so they have a job to make extra money for having fun and participating in other activities. When we told them that we have no need for a job because all of our educational expenses and needs are paid for by our parents, they were very surprised to learn about this. Similarly, they asked us to what extent there is the use of technology in our education system. We told them that the use of technology is very common at the higher education level. I also told them that the government has taken an initiative to distribute laptops among exceptional students. This has really promoted the use of technology at the higher education level. There are also a number of computer labs in each university for students which are available and widely accessible for every student.

While during the discussion with the students from UABT they asked us why there were no male student in our class. They asked whether this is gender biasness. We explained to them that it is a women’s university where men cannot attend. We told them that because of conservatives in our country and socio-cultural norms, some families do not allow their daughters to attend co-ed institutions. Therefore, there are a few women’s universities which have been established by our government to increase women’s literacy rate and to bring gender equality in order to empower women. They were so impressed to learn this.

Religion in Pakistan, Algeria, and the United States

During the discussion about religion and religious rituals, the religions of both countries were discussed. There was great variation in the religious practices of both countries because of having a diverse religious background. In the United States of America, a number of religions are being practiced. For example, they practice Christianity, Judaism, Islam and many other religions. My partner, Olivia Costello, was a follower of Christianity and more specifically, she was Catholic. She also told me “I regularly visit Church on every Sunday and recite the Holy Bible”. She told me about the different rituals practiced in Christianity. For example, she told me about Baptism, one of the Christian’s religious rites of sprinkling water over a person’s forehead or of plunging them in water. This symbolizes purification or regeneration and admission to the Christian church. In many denominations, Baptism is performed on young children and accompanied by name-giving. She told that Baptism takes place in church. Similarly, I also told her about the different religious beliefs of mine as a Muslim. For example, I told her that I offer my prayers regularly five time in a day and do recitation of the Holy Quran. When asked about the childbirth rituals of Islam, I told her that in Islam, the newborn baby is welcomed warmly. And on seventh day, the circumcision of the baby boy is performed and a name giving ceremony takes place. The circumcision of girls is not allowed in our religion.

While in the country of Algeria, the main religion is Islam. So because of having the same religion, there were greater similarities in the religious practices of both of our cultures. Most of the students at UABT were Muslim. So the discussions focused on Islamic perspectives on the different cultural issues like divorce and marriage, etc. Both countries have the same practice of celebrating marriage starting from performing “Nikkah” (a legal agreement between men and women to be husband and wife) followed by “Rukhsati” (departure of the girl from her parent’s home to her new husband’s home) and then “Walima” (reception). As far as other issues are concerned, such as divorce and other family related matters, these are also performed following Islamic Principles.

Stereotypes and Prejudices in Pakistan, Algeria, and the United States

Stereotypes and prejudices are a part of every society and are often linked with culture. So this was the last and final topic that was discussed by the students of all three Universities. The students of East Carolina University (USA) exposed some of the stereotypes and prejudices that exist in US society about the different racial and ethnic groups and minorities living in the USA. The most common stereotype in US society was about Islam which viewed Islam as an extremist religion which promotes extremism. We made it clear before them that this is an incorrect generalization. On the whole, extremists exist in every society and in every religion but this not due to the influence of religion. It is all about one’s own thinking and depends upon the socio-cultural environment in which he/she has been brought up and socialized. Another prejudice persisting in US society was the discrimination on the basis of skin color. The whites were considered superior to blacks.

While we discussed this topic with our partners in Algeria, there was a perception that in Pakistan, women face violence because of being females. So we made it clear to them that unfortunately, this is happening in our society but it cannot be generalized for all the Pakistani women. We also told them that here in Pakistan, we are working on proper

legislation to protect women rights (e.g. Sexual Harassment Bill 2010 was passed by the national assembly of Pakistan with the efforts of Dr. Fozia Saeed who is an activist and working for women's rights in Pakistan). There are also many governmental organizations working towards the same goals, for example, there is The Population Council (<http://www.popcouncil.org>) which has worked in Pakistan since 1957 and established an office in Islamabad in 1991 initially to serve as headquarters for the USAID-funded Asia and Near East operations research and technical assistance project. Today, the Council contributes high-quality research to inform policy dialogue. It is regarded as a premier social science and public health research organization and an influential development partner, working closely with the Ministries of Population Welfare and Health, as well as with non-governmental organizations.

The non-governmental organization Aurat Foundation (AF) (<http://www.af.org.pk>) was established in 1986 and since then has been working to promote women's empowerment, steps to prevent violence against women, and citizens' participation in governance in order to create a socially just, democratic and humane society. Its Head Office is in Islamabad and four regional offices in the provincial capitals (Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar and Quetta). Furthermore, AF has a countrywide network of voluntary citizens' groups and individual activists. Similarly Bedari (www.bedari.org.pk) is another example of a non-governmental organization which is voluntarily working in Pakistan. It works with women and girls for the promotion and protection of their rights as human beings. It started its activities around awareness raising and self-growth in 1991 with a community conference on violence against women and eventually set up Pakistan's first crisis center. It has developed expertise on issues of gender empowerment, addressing violence and abuse against Pakistani women and girls. It is also working to bring attitudinal change in the society. All these organizations are working to eradicate violence from Pakistani society.

On the part of Pakistani students, when they were asked what type of stereotypes and prejudices exist in Pakistan, we explained that there are some prejudices on the basis of ethnicity based on religion. For example, the disputes on the basis of sectarianism are very common. Similarly, the Caste System in Pakistani society creates and promotes prejudices among people. People consider themselves superior to others on the basis of their caste. The most common stereotypes are about women (e.g. women are very talkative, they lack wisdom and reasoning, etc.). These are all social and cultural practices which vary in different areas of Pakistan based on different tribal characteristics. However, these all are myths and there is no sound scientific basis for these stereotypes and prejudices.

During our discussions with the students from UABT, we discovered that there were great similarities between both of our cultures because we have the same religious background. For example, we are similar in our way of worshiping God (e.g., offering prayer, reciting the Holy Quran and donating charity to the needy people). The respect for elderly people was also similar along with the concept of marriage (e.g., opinion of both girl and boy is taken into consideration at the time of marriage and money which is called "Haq-e-Mehr" is also given to the girl by her spouse at the time of marriage which is an Islamic concept understood in both cultures). However, it was observed that gender roles were different

in Algeria in comparison with Pakistan. The women's literacy rate was higher in Algeria. A UNICEF 2013 report indicated that the literacy rate for females was 89.1% in the time period from 2008-12, (http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/algeria_statistics.html) as compared to the World Bank which reported a 40.08% female literacy in Pakistan (<http://www.tradingeconomics.com/pakistan/literacy-rate-adult-female-percent-of-females-ages-15-and-above-wb-data.html>). In addition, a large number of women worked in managerial positions in Algeria and it was told by our Global Partners from UABT that discrimination on the basis of gender was lower in Algeria.

Collaborative Projects Between Students at FJWU, UABT, and ECU

At the end of these sessions, we the students of FJWU completed joint projects with the students of ECU and UABT concerning cultural issues and different cultural practices in each country. During the project presentations, our global partner presented their own Power Point slides that were based on their perspectives (i.e., US or Algerian) about a particular cultural practice. Next, we presented the Pakistani perspective on some cultural practice or issue. For these projects, a topic was suggested by the instructor and we also had the option to select a topic of our own choice. There were two group members in each project: one from our class and one from the global partner class. For example, my Global Understanding partners Olivia Costello and Sahim Bensaad and I completed our project on "Attitudes of Pakistani, Algerian and US Society Towards the Old and Retired People in Pakistan, Algeria and USA". My partner, Olivia Costello from ECU, presented her work on the same topic from a US perspective and my other partner, Sahim Bensaad from UABT presented the Algerian perspective. The projects of my other classmates were on cultural festivals, traditional foods, famous national personalities, and ways of celebrating child births and marriages, etc. All the projects were very interesting and informative.

Discussion and Conclusions

In the end, I would like to say that this Global Understanding course was a source of our global partner's intellectual disclosure because it was a different way of gaining knowledge and education. The students from three different cultures came together to learn about their cultures through video conferencing. To interact or communicate with foreign students resulted in a confidence in us for communicating with the people from both cultures. Communicational skills were increased through this course. Similarly, it gave us an opportunity to build friendly relationships with foreign students from the United States and Algeria.

Being part of these sessions was a unique and interesting experience for me. So I can say that the course of Global Understanding was truly a means of "intellectual disclosure" for me, my global partners, and other fellow students who were part of this course at FJWU. We disseminated our knowledge before our global partners and they also learned about their cultures, cultural beliefs and practices as well. The students from different cultures came together to know about each other's cultures through video conferencing. To interact or communicate with the foreign students developed a confidence in us to communicate with the people from these cultures. Therefore, communicational skills were increased.

At the end, I would like to thank to our course instructor Dr. Adeela Rehman who guided us at every moment and treated us with kindness. Without her humble guidance it would not have been possible for us to complete this course. She did her best in order to create cohesion between us and our global partners. May Allah succeed her in every walk of life.

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