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Three Strategies for International Higher Education: Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Inclusive Online Design, and Coteaching

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Introduction

As the increasing globalization and interconnectivity of the 21st century continue to affect higher education institutions (HEIs) and their operations, it is imperative to consider the quality of education provided. More diverse learners and instructors indicate the need for varied experiences and backgrounds to be examined throughout the educational process, from curriculum design to classroom spaces. Learning is not a neutral act, and both the types and ways information is shared have cultural implications that must be examined to ensure an insightful and effective learning experience for all students.

Educational Context

My interest in internationalized higher education—which I am operationalizing as higher education courses with instructors and/or students of distinctive cultural backgrounds in the same course—arose from my current work as the Global Curriculum Program Coordinator for Arizona Global at the University of Arizona. In this role, I coordinate the microcampus program among administrators, faculty, and staff across multiple higher education institutions. The microcampus program, launched in 2018, allows international students to earn two degrees—one from UArizona and one from their home institution—within the same time frame. Students take several courses at their home university that map onto our program paths alongside UArizona-offered courses. At the time of this writing, there are 1,091 students enrolled in 19 unique programs (6 of which are masters-level) across 13 campuses. Program offerings differ by campus, and several new programs and partnerships are currently in the pipeline.

The program most often uses a flipped, cotaught pedagogical model where the UArizona faculty member and the assigned co-instructor (known as a global lecturer) share course development and delivery. Generally, the UArizona professor creates the online course materials,

and the global lecturer provides in-classroom support. However, the relationship among instructors varies. For example, China's Ministry of Education strongly prefers in-person education, so the China courses are taught by a present UArizona instructor. As another example, the Masters in Cellular and Molecular Microbiology in Kochi, India, has global lecturers who serve more as a resource for students, while the UArizona instructors offer synchronous online lectures. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased departmental demand to offer online or hybrid programs, thus requiring more careful thought about lecturer assignments. Across all programs in the academic year 2021-2022, there were 116 UA instructors and 92 global lecturers. Some instructors and global lecturers have been involved since their respective programs launched, while others for only a semester.

Finally, the student's unique pedagogical and personal backgrounds lend themselves to significant considerations in course design, delivery, and access. Due to U.S. accreditation requirements surrounding English proficiency, all students must take their UArizona courses in English. English proficiency varies widely, and all undergraduate students begin their experience by taking mandatory English classes. Students are also offered an online student success course to help acclimatize them to the expectations of American HEIs. This context provides the impetus for the following research.

Rationale

By examining the ways instructors from different institutions can combine collaboration with inclusive and culturally relevant course design, student experience and learning outcomes may be improved. Debates surrounding the efficacy and quality of internationalized higher education have existed alongside increased popularity since the 1980s (Knight, 2013). Critics argue that cross-institution and cross-border partnerships provide low-tier education in the

pursuit of higher rankings, whereas proponents believe there is the potential for knowledge co-sharing, collaboration, and improved curriculum (Knight, 2013). As evidenced by the increasing number of global or international arms of HEIs, it is worth examining the methods instructors can use to develop quality education.

As globalization continues, there is an increased desire for cross-boundary, technical partnerships (De Wit, 2019). Therefore, many programs offered by these international arms mirror this technicality, recruiting instructors who may lack "softer" skills, like cultural competency. At the UArizona microcampuses, the most popular programs are engineering, business, and law. These courses often have their own unique vernacular and concepts that may be difficult to communicate to international students from different linguistic backgrounds. Compounding this language barrier are cultural expectations of the higher education classroom. For example, Chinese students often do not understand plagiarism the same way an American student might, so additional support is needed to ensure student success for students joining new educational systems. Furthermore, North American schools "are the most advanced in implementing relatively new areas of internationalization, such as on-line and distance learning, and joint degrees (Marinoni, 2019)." While the following research review was not geographically targeted, it is important to recognize that course modalities are in flux due to improved technology and the global case study of online courses during COVID-19.

As enrollment in higher education has increased to over 50% in many parts of the world, and as higher education institutions struggle for a piece of the pie, there has been an increase in competition across institutions (De Wit, 2019). This is unlikely to decline as over 90% of higher education institutions examined specifically address internationalization in guiding documentation, like mission statements (Marinoni, 2019). Thus, these questions have important

implications for education policy and programmatic design. In the short term, an analysis of instructional strategies can be quickly implemented in existing programs, whereas the long-term benefits of these "best practices" can be included throughout the partnership process from agreements to matriculation, improving the quality of education throughout the process.

Purpose

Drawing from the existing microcampus model and contemporary research, the purpose of the following literature review is to examine the effects of using culturally relevant pedagogies, inclusive online design, and coteaching on the quality of education in internationalized higher education.

Literature Review

Strategy One: Culturally Relevant Pedagogies

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) is a pedagogical model that values and affirms the identity and knowledge held by students of diverse backgrounds to ensure their participation and engagement in class (Heringer, 2018). Two major elements of CRP are instructor reflexivity, requiring the ability of the instructor to reflect on personal bias to avoid recreating reductive understandings, and instructional design, requiring intentional selection of course content (Ray, 2019). By including materials or examples that reflect the lived experiences of students, instructors can create an avenue into understanding that may be easier for students to recognize than choosing distant examples. For example, the global lecturer for the Peruvian microcampus collected materials on indigenous activism to locally contextualize the classroom content in his course on environmental ethics.

Teachers are overall willing to incorporate a culturally responsive pedagogy but may fall victim to stereotypes when addressing other cultures without intentional cultural training

(Heringer, 2018, O'Leary et al., 2020). While training and ongoing dialogue can increase instructor awareness of the complexity inherent in identity (O'Leary et al., 2020), the research located for this paper appears to lack solid suggestions regarding the implementation of CRP in the higher education classroom. Instructors support the core essential of validating lived experiences but lacked clear reports on how that was happening in sample sizes ranging from 10 (Heringer, 2018) to 115 (O'Leary et al., 2020). Interestingly, one study found that Western teachers who taught in person at a South Korean university more frequently used the local teaching style earlier in their career (Ghazarian & Youhne, 2015). While it may be due to increased comfort or more teaching skills (Ghazarian & Youhne, 2015), it also proves that teaching style can change in response to culture and context.

Students, on the other hand, recognized classroom cultural differences but did not necessarily believe these differences were problematic (Liu et al., 2010). For example, Chinese MBA students recognized a difference between US student-centered pedagogy and the Chinese emphasis on exams and assessment (Liu et al., 2010). This awareness is necessary when designing a course for learners as they have different cultural understandings of not the way HEI classrooms operate. In his efforts to examine CRP regarding Pacific Islander Students, University of the South Pacific geographical lecturer Tolu Muliaina noted that the cultural preferences of dialogical co-creation and consultation were a significant component in the development of the SICK (Student Innovative Contribution to Knowledge) assessment strategy (2018). Despite a marked increase in student ownership and more meaningful student-teacher relationships, some students still deferred to "traditional" assessment. Muliaina (2018) believes this may be due to time management, which indicates an additional structural issue. With the

largest sample size of 417 students, Muliaina concludes that poor performance in HEI classrooms results from a "mismatch between the home and school cultures" (2018, p. 530).

Due to the personal nature of culture and the need for insider expertise, most of the research focused on qualitative interviews, focus groups, and self-reported surveys. The research had small sample sizes, particularly when investigating the relationship of instructors with CRP (Heringer, 2018), and most studies focused on one location, potentially pointing to the use of only one homogenous institutional perspective (Heringer, 2018). Still, there is evidence that intentional understanding of student culture through CRP is a vital element of a diverse classroom.

Strategy Two: Inclusive Online Design

Inclusive design is understood as course design that considers the diverse needs of all students, generally relating to disability (Navarro et al., 2016). However, much can be borrowed when addressing other forms of diversity relevant to international students, such as cultural and linguistic. Learning design is the pedagogically focused way courses and associated activities are organized with appropriate resources to ensure positive learner outcomes (Mittelmeier et al., 2018). Thus, inclusive online design considers these design needs in tandem to ensure course design mitigates barriers and improves student outcomes. To go a step further, bell hooks' engaged pedagogy indicates that design should be "transformative and emancipatory… involv[ing] (re)configuring not only structure and practice, but also self and spirit in the pursuit of relational respectful and caring teaching (Baker et al., 2022, p. 4)." Therefore, including CRP in efforts to create inclusive online spaces can positively affect student outcomes and develop a positive instructor-learner dynamic.

Instructors can benefit from intentional training and professional development (Navarro et al., 2016; Mittelmeier et al., 2018; Gunawardena, 2020), but technical literacy can still be a barrier to successful implementation (Navarro et al., 2016; Baker et al., 2022). Instructors also note that it can be difficult to monitor student engagement and understanding in an online course (Baker et al., 2022). Although occurring outside of an HEI, Gunawardena's (2020) work with online education to improve capacity development programs in Sri Lanka and Ghana revealed several important facets of diverse online education, including: the conflux of identity and social presence; the development of a supportive and interactive online community; the shared construction of knowledge and reckoning with resultant changes in perspective; and the complex battle of working in a second language. They emphasized the use of various perspectives, collaboration, and the exploration of potential solutions, recognizing course design is not culturally neutral and that improved educational outcomes can result from that understanding (Gunawardena, 2020). Following their UK-South African workshop, Mittelmeier et al., (2018) proposed ten suggestions for improved online course modules that included the use of data to determine student demographics and needs (and subsequent pairing of appropriate teachers) alongside more flexible, culturally sensitive operations, learning methods, and activities. Students also referenced difficulties in their ability to engage confidently with materials and in their preparedness for assessments and the rigor of online coursework (Baker et al., 2022, Zhang et al., 2017; Reedy, 2019); cultural relevancy and subsequent understanding of certain materials (Reedy, 2019; Gunawardena, 2020); and the need to make online connections, particularly with members of their own group (Reedy, 2019; Gunawardena, 2020; Zhang et al., 2017). Reedy (2019) interviewed 19 Australian Aboriginal students enrolled in online courses to determine barriers to student success. Although she notes that her student's specific culture limits the

generalizability of her results, the issues raised were echoed in other student-centered investigations (Baker et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2017). Additional insights drawn from her interviews were the difficulties students faced regarding campus support, questions of digital equity, and the varied quality of teachers (Reedy, 2019). In sum, the need for connection and celebration of culture is desirable.

Power dynamics of online courses between and among students and educators are more in flux than traditional course design (Baker et al., 2022). This can be problematic due to a lack of authority and clarity in how the course is running but can also be leveraged to develop new involvement and engagement in the online sphere (Baker et al., 2022). For instance, students indicated the importance of instructor recognition of their life circumstances (Baker et al., 2022; Reedy, 2019). As student demographics shift, built-in flexibility may become more prominent.

Although there has historically been limited research on diverse student experience with online course offerings (Baker et al., 2020), inclusive online worlds could be an interesting avenue to pursue. In an effort to better assist international Chinese students attending University College Dublin in Ireland, Zhang et al., (2017) assessed the needs of thirty students and created a virtual world in response. Students indicated they wanted to improve language skills, logistically prepare for the new university, create social networks, and access information about the new culture (Zhang et al., 2017). Thus, the online world included elements such as a model of the campus, example materials of an Irish classroom, and language-learning word games (Zhang et al., 2017). Research has been done on the ways games and virtual worlds can lead to identity negotiation; this may be a way to increase the human element of online courses.

Once more, much of the research focused on self-reported qualitative data. Students shared their firsthand experiences via surveys and interviews (Baker et al., 2022; Reedy, 2019;

Zhang et al., 2017). Instructors experienced pre and post-test and deliverables (Navarro et al., 2016) alongside observation, group evaluation, and interviews (Mittelmeier et al., 2018, Gunawardena, 2020) in group training or learning environments, such as an online professional development program (Navarro et al., 2016) and an in-person cross-institution workshop (Mittelmeier et al., 2018). Across the board, there was a lack of follow-up regarding student reaction and outcomes following the implementation of better-trained instructors and more inclusively designed courses.

Strategy Three: Instructor Coteaching

There are many definitions for coteaching in its most used realm of K-12, but the lack of clear operationalization in higher education is an ongoing issue (Pinzón-Ulloa et al., 2021). In general, it is understood as the partnership of two more teachers responsible for the same course at the same time. More specifically, models include: one teach-one observe, one teach-one assist, parallel teaching, alternate teaching, and team teaching (Salifu, 2021; Ferguson and Wilson, 2011). Team teaching, where instructors intentionally divide labor for a shared course and students, was the most common model in this literature review. Studies show the benefits of effective coteaching are: improved teacher knowledge; increased dialogue; better student engagement, achievement, and support; the expression of deeper critical thinking and interest; and beneficial instructor co-learning (Lock et al., 2016; Ferguson and Wilson, 2011; Minett-Smith & Davis, 2020).

Elements that contribute to successful coteaching partnerships are positive relationships—including strong and ongoing communication, trust, respect, and dedication—and subsequent instructor compatibility and collaboration (Salifu, 2021; Lock et al., 2016; Rooks et al., 2022; Pinzón-Ulloa et al., 2021). As part of this beneficial relationship, instructors should intentionally

determine their communication patterns and ensure commitment and follow-through (Rooks et al., 2022). This strong partnership can lead to instructor reflexivity in their own role in the classroom, furthering the benefits of coteaching and co-learning (Ferguson & Wilson, 2011; Pinzón-Ulloa et al., 2021). Overall, students in a cotaught classroom appreciated the multitude of perspectives and increased access to instructor insight (Ferguson & Wilson, 2011; Rooks et al., 2022).

Potential challenges, such as commitment levels, timelines, classroom space, division of duties, expertise, and actual teaching, should be recognized and addressed quickly and often to support the positive instructor dynamic (Lock et al., 2016; Ferguson & Wilson, 2011; Rooks et al., 2022; Pinzón-Ulloa et al., 2021; Salifu, 2021). One major conflict to avoid is power dynamics between instructors. Uneven power dynamics can make it difficult for coteachers to effectively organize and deliver their courses, which can affect students who may lack clarity on whom to go to for what and an overall confusion over class expectations, such as with assignments and grading methods (Ferguson & Wilson, 2011; Rooks et al., 2022). Synchronicity between instructor teaching style and learner interpretation improves learning outcomes; international faculty need to be cognizant of partner university classroom expectations for educational success (Ghazarian and Youhne, 2015). In addition, instructors need to have a holistic view of the course and recognize that they cannot engage in selective teaching, where they only teach what they know best (Salifu, 2021). As a main benefit of this model is varied experience, efforts should be made to ensure this is centered.

Due to the qualitative nature of the work and the minor usage of coteaching in higher education, many sample sizes were small and selected based on convenience or within a certain geographical or institutional sphere. The research examined for this paper explored the responses

of 10 teachers from Ghana (Salifu, 2021), 3 from Canada (Lock et al., 2016), 2 from Texas (Ferguson & Wilson, 2011), 4 instructors/2 TAs from Colorado (Rooks et al., 2022), and 16 instructors attending the 2016 Teaching Colloquium on Coteaching at the Universidad de Los Andes (Pinzón-Ulloa et al., 2021). Student sample sizes, if included, were also focused on the single classroom (Ferguson & Wilson, 2011; Rooks et al., 2022). Within these small samples, the most popular instruments were qualitative self-reported interviews, questionnaires, and surveys (Salifu, 2021; Lock et al., 2016; Rooks et al., 2022; Pinzón-Ulloa et al., 2021), alongside classroom observation (Salifu, 2021; Ferguson & Wilson, 2011; Rooks et al., 2022). Again, there was a limited follow-up on student outcomes. Pinzón-Ulloa and her colleagues (2021) also noted that the concept of coteaching is not clearly defined in higher education, so it is possible slightly different phenomena were discussed in each study.

Implications

Most of the reviewed studies came from a constructivist perspective, which recognizes that culture and reality are created by those involved and varies based on individual perspective (Mertens, 2020). Accepting multiple true realities through the lived experiences of global learners and instructors is a necessary first step, but future research should include the voice of the student and/or emphasize minority teachers working within a dominant system in this type of research to achieve a transformative paradigm that allows the beneficial cross-learning between teacher and student to blossom. The classroom is a site of complex power dynamics, as noted in several studies, and intentionally drawing attention to this can more radically shift and prepare a classroom to hold multiple realities. Regardless, the qualitative research investigated in this paper reveals several key implications for an internationalized higher education classroom.

For instructors, CRP and coteaching can work together to promote reflexivity and a more culturally prepared classroom. By reckoning with an alternate perspective as an instructor, coteachers can carry on that process of self-reflection to mitigate stereotypes and become more open to the value of alternate perspectives. In diverse classrooms with a large population of a certain minority group, it may be beneficial to ensure one of the coteachers is of that cultural background to guarantee CRP in all elements of course delivery and design. Several case studies (Muliana, 2018; Baker et al., 2022; Gunawardena, 2020; Reedy, 2019) noted the desire of students to engage with people of their in-group in online courses, so coteachers that align with those students can also become more available for those students and serve as a safer alternative when seeking clarification. Future research should utilize more classroom observation (to determine micro-aggressions and additional hostilities) rather than surveys and other self-reported data to ensure the classroom is using effective CRP.

Students benefit from the recognition of their diverse cultural needs, particularly in fragmented and complex online learning environments. The inclusion of CRP and a culturally similar coteacher (such as revealed in Mittelmeier et al.'s 2018 suggestion of correlating teacher profiles to student profiles) can be a huge benefit. Gunawardena (2020) used an example of the replacement of a photo of a Western ICU with that of a Ghanaian mother and child. While the designer of a course may think an image, video, assignment, or even deadline is culturally neutral, that is not always the case, and the coteacher can help further student success by mitigating this. Future research should examine the ways student outcomes change when their online courses include CRP through classroom observation (for example, monitoring discussion boards), self-reported data, and student assignments. It would be interesting to see if there is any

negative correlation between students not tied to the culture represented or those who were formerly dominant.

Due to the potential for mutual learning among coteachers, additional professional development regarding ongoing learning can improve the use of technology in course design and delivery. Instructors exhibited success in formal training avenues (Navarro et al., 2016; Mittelmeier et al., 2018; Gunawardena, 2020), but could continue to develop their technical literacy with their coteacher. An oft-mentioned benefit of coteaching is that students can benefit from the differing expertise of the instructors and that instructors can learn from each other, so an analysis of how this could transfer to the technical sphere would be worthwhile. A professional development workshop that has ongoing “assignments” and online course development that would allow the instructors to learn together may prove helpful.

Despite the valuable implications of this literature review, the major weakness overall is the lack of data—due to the small study size—and subsequent practical strategies. While constructivist approaches emphasize the use of personal narrative in data collection, increased use of primary source data, such as through assignment observation or course reviews, would help determine the elements needed to successfully implement any of these elements.

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