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Culture and Motivation: The Globalised Learning Paradigm from a Regional Perspective

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Abstract: The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is one of the most diverse nations in the world, with over one hundred nationalities living in an area no larger than the US state of Texas. In such an envorinment, where citizens amount to only one fifth of the country's population, supported by an expatriate population with an assortment of cultures, the development of a university education system to accommodate the needs of the inhabitants could never be 'one-size-fits-all.' This paper explores the influence of globalisation on higher education and its impact on citizens of the United Arab Emirates. The paper further investigates the challenges they face in learning in English, a second language to them; motivational problems ensuing from experiencing a paradigm shift in the classroom; cultural challenges they experience in, for example, having to learn from imported textbooks resulting in difficulty in content contextualisation; dealing with differences in values and morals, between, for example, foreign educators and indigenous students.

Keywords: Globalisation, United Arab Emirates, Higher Education

Introduction

BEFORE DECEMBER 1971, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were known as the Trucial States or Trucial Oman, in reference to a nineteenth-century truce between Britain and regional Arab leaders. Since then, the country has expanded rapidly, with development of a large oil industry whose revenue funds the broader diversification into tourism, commerce and agriculture. The human resource to service this growth relies on foreign workers entering into the country over the last three decades. The Emirates are thus now settled by a diversity of cultural groups with, in addition to UAE citizens, various Arab groups as well as Iranians, Filipinos, Indians and large numbers of Europeans and Americans residing in the country. These are all known as expatriates or abbreviated at expats (Gaad, 2006: Randeree and Chaudhry, 2007).

An official estimate of the countries population showed the number of inhabitants as over 4 million residing in the UAE in 2003 (Tedad, 2003), 3 million of whom lived in the major cities of Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah. The population growth rate currently exceeds 7 percent, currently the highest in the world (Randeree, June 2006) with only 12 percent of residents being Emiratis (local Arabs). Workers from the Indian subcontinent (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) account for over half the population. Over 90 percent of these expatriates are male, employed as labourers on limited contracts, with a steadily increasing

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number being educated and resident with their families. The remainder of the population is made up of Westerners and east Asians.

Examining this population from the perspective of higher education, it can be seen that the pool for higher education is relatively limited. A drive by the late president of the UAE, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, to educate the new generation of local Emiratis resulted in the establishment of several universities around the country, notably UAE University based in the city of Al Ain and Zayed University in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Organisations from abroad have also established themselves as private universities, catering to the growing expatriate communities. These have campuses of limited size and are required to meet the Ministry of Education's stringent accreditation requirements in order to have the degrees they offer to being fully licenced. A distinction can thus be drawn between the local and foreign universities. Table 1 summarises the main institutions of higher education in the UAE.

Table 1: Universities and Higher Education Establishments in the UAE (Emirates Network, 2007)

Abu Dhabi Petroleum University	University setup for the training of students in the petroleum industry
Ajman University Of Science & Technology	Local university with campuses in Ajman, Abu Dhabi, Al Ain and Fujairah
Al Ghurair University	Division of the Al Ghurair group. A non-profit university in Dubai affiliated with universities in India, Pakistan and America.
American University in Dubai	Branch of the American InterContinental University,
American University of Sharjah	Co-education institution of higher education following the American model
British University in Dubai	University affiliated with UK institutions such as the University of Manchester and the University of Birmingham offering only postgraduate programs
University of Dubai	Institute of higher education setup by the Dubai Chamber of Commerce & Industry
George Mason University, in Ras Al Khaimah	Branch of the US-based university, offering undergraduate degree programs in engineering and information technology, business administration, and biology.
Higher Colleges of Technology	A non-coeducation institution for UAE nationals
Ittihad University	Unaccredited university in Ras Al Khaimah
Preston University	UAE branch of the american Preston University located in Ajman
Petroleum Institute	Based in Abu Dhabi

UAE University	Federal educational institution with faculties of arts, sciences, education and shari'ah & law. The largest university in the country. Gender segregated education for UAE nationals only.
University of Law	Shari'ah and Law institute in Arabic
University Of Sharjah	A non-coeducation institution, affiliated with the American University of Beirut
University Of Wollongong – Dubai	Associated with the Australian university
Zayed University – Abu Dhabi and Dubai	University for UAE national women offering BA and MA programs in business sciences, IT and education

Other than the locally or federally established universities reserved almost exclusively for UAE citizens, universities have affiliations with India, USA, Britain and Australia. The international organisations are often based on a co-education system. There are, however, a number of single gender campuses. The majority of students in the UAE are female as culturally it is less acceptable for women (especially young women) to go abroad. Thus, the majority of students enrolling at federal universities is female, with a 3:1 female to male ratio at UAE University (Semmar, 2006). Most universities teach in English with educators employed from many countries and regions, notably, other Arab countries, USA, Europe, Australia and India. There is, however, a great need for educators at all levels whose origin and heritage is local. This is recognised by the students themselves. Harold (2003) stated: "Given the relatively young age of this nation, the developing nature of the education system... belief statements centre on ideals related to the future development of the country and its citizens."

Case Study: UAE University

The potential for Emirati nationals to gain employment successfully upon graduating university is high. The country boasts a program, known as Emiratisation, similar to affirmative action, aimed at encouraging employers to hire local citizens in preference to other non-nationals for given positions. A quota based system also operates within organisations. These advantages translate to most students having an excellent chance of employment after completing their studies (Randeree, 2008).

UAE University has an annual intake of over 3,000 students, with over 20,000 students enrolled at any given time, making it the largest university in the country. It can be seen that the majority of students come from small towns and have limited or no proficiency in English and come from schooling systems requiring limited skills in independent study. During their high school years, 65 percent of these students lived in small communities having fewer than 200,000 inhabitants. A small minority of freshman students are placed in the highest English Proficiency level class (level 3), with the vast majority commencing English tuition at level 1. With such an intake of students, some methodologies and rules which have arisen and are currently implemented:

- There is an absence recording system. One of the first rules that an instructor is likely to explain to students is that of absence recording. Absence recording is also used for lateness recording. For some instructors this is "any student arriving later than 10 minutes after the class start time will be marked absent. They then have the option to attend the class or leave." Another has the rule "arriving 5 minutes after class starts counts as a late. Every two "lates" count as an absence." This is not monitored by the system, so a mental note or a paper-based system is added to the existing electronic absence recording. A further rule of exclusion from the class is enforced, should the number of absences exceed a certain percentage.
- There are frequent assignments. Many instructors will give assignments on a regular basis, requiring these to be submitted and then graded. Frequent quizzes, tests and other in-class assessments are performed on a regular basis to ensure students are keeping up with the work.
- Reading time. Some instructors allow reading time during the sessions for students to go through the material. Others implemented a pre-quiz or 'pop quiz' which tests the students knowledge of the documentation at the beginning of a new topic, to ensure that it had been read before the class.
- Participation score. As part of the overall grade for a course, a percentage is held for scoring the student's participation during class.

It can be seen that much of these motivators could be classified as pedagogical, being grade related or are a risk for the student's attendance on a course. The majority of the students are financially well off and have good job prospects at the end of their studies aided by the Emiratisation program, thus financial progress does not stand out as a motivator.

Motivation

A study of English students at UAE University by Semmar (2006) stated: "Students are more likely to be motivated to learn and succeed … when they possess both extrinsic and intrinsic goals [and] experienced low levels of anxiety…" In terms of extrinsic goals, some of these are aspiration for a higher social status as well as wanting to show ability to family members, teachers and friends. Intrinsic orientation is identified as the satisfaction that is attained from being involved. Along with this, anxiety was an important factor in the motivation of students, such that, conversely to extrinsic factors, there was a fear that the teacher will think that students are weak or incompetent or a fear of being ridiculed by fellow students. Also, anxiety felt from approaching tests was a factor, where students experienced apprehension from imminent assessment situations. Furthermore, the study refers to differences in motivation based on gender. There is a need to understand the motivations of students to learn, thus developing a basis upon which to build effective teaching pedagogy. In higher education, Blake and Mouton's Synergogy could be suggested as the most apt, as it makes the most of expert knowledge as well as encouraging active learning (Coles, 2004). The indigenous population of the UAE are very patriotic, moreso than many other nations, and regard highly the nation and its culture. This is perhaps due in part to the fact that they are a minority in their own land, although this trait is found predominantly in Arab countriesd. As would be expected this comes out in the words of the national anthem: "Live my country, the unity of our Emirates lives, you have lived for a nation…" The short history of the country and

the long heritage are important themes for many students. Although the UAE is not religiously as orthodox as other Islamic nations, such as the Islamic Republic of Iran or the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, for example, there is still a strong focus on religion and way of life defined by Islamic tradition. Again, this is mentioned in the national anthem, which states: "Whose religion is Islam and guide is the Qur'an, I made you stronger in God's name, O homeland!" Islamic culture is further evident in gender segregation, demeanour as well as conservative rules.

This paper highlights five key areas important for the motivation of students from the described atypical cultural background, namely, relating education to status and positions of responsibility; relating education to national development; relating education to heritage; relating education to religious duty and; engagement through contextualisation.

In relating education to status and positions of responsibility in the classroom environment, teachers used encouragement relating to status and responsibility. Examples of such phrases were "You are the leaders of the future", "You will have many people working for you", "Maybe you will be my manager" and "When you become the head of the university, remember me!" Thus the instructor constantly reinforces the relationship between professional advancement and academic success in a manner that is comprehended in this diaspora.

Similarly, ideas relating to the growth of a nation were also used to motivate students, with the use of phrases like "Your country needs you." This was observed to be further utilised with modifications linking the statement to the field of study or specialisation the student was engaged in. For example, in an engineering discipline, instructors were noted as saying "There is a need for engineers to develop the infrastructure of the country."

The relationship between education and heritage often involves linguistic techniques. An example here is the use of Arabic during classes, which is often used given many instructors are of Arab origin, although the official language of teaching is English in most faculties (the exception being the Faculty of Islamic Law and Shariah). Furthermore, text references are often translated, for example, in a computer programming class, a textbook example which used variable names "hourlyrate", "nom" (to represent name) and "message" was modified to use variable names of the same meaning in Arabic, '*FuloosKulSaa'*, '*Ism'* and '*Risala'*, respectively, which clarified the problem and gave a local context to the problem. Similarly, a problem to program the computer to toss an imaginary coin incorporated the use of the words '*Dirham'* and '*Dalla'* instead of 'Heads' and 'Tails'. In another programming class, the concept of 'text strings' (being a collection of characters) was compared to a string of pearls and noting that "The ancient pearling industry provided the only real income for the people of what is now the UAE" (History, 2006), the reference to pearls being an analogy related to the heritage of pearl diving (pearling) common to the region of the Arabian Peninsula. Notes in Arabic on a specific topic were sometimes made available to students. They were directed to sources, both in English and Arabic, either on the internet or in the library. One teacher, who was not Arabic speaking, set an assignment to find useful related information sources in Arabic on the internet. These were then collated and checked by an Arabic-speaking assistant and made available to other students through electronic distribution. Use of transliterated Arabic words into English is commonplace for students, and can be assimilated relatively easily as it is becoming more common in marketing material and it is used as the *lingua franca* in mobile text and internet chat messaging. Transliterated Arabic is, possibly, symbolic of the amalgamation of an international, commerce-based environment with the need to preserve traditional linguistic heritage amongst non-Arabic speakers based

in the region. Evidence suggests that students are not perturbed by English being the language of instruction as they perform demonstrably well on tests in English and additional English support is always available in the form of language support services or optional study skills classes. However, this argument holds more true for non-verbal communication as the language issue does gain in importance during class time when, for example, the need to ask questions for clarification conflicts with the anxiety of asking in a foreign language. The usual way of dealing with such a problem by instructors who have Arabic as a first language, is to take questions in Arabic.

The history and culture of Arabs and references to the 'golden age' of Arab and Islamic civilisation is also a useful motivator and metaphor for students where instructors and teachers highlight Arab and Muslim contributions to society through the centuries. Examples used in science, mathematics and engineering courses include the first organised hospital, which was built in Cairo, Egypt (the Ahmad ibn Tûlûn Hospital) which treated and gave free medicine to all patients and provided separate bath houses for men and women and a rich library; Al-Jazari, who developed a device for lifting large amounts of water (Mansour, 2002); zero and the decimal numbering system, which has Chinese and Indian origins but was developed into useful purposes by Arab mathematicians; Jabir Ibn Hayyan, who obtained Sulphuric Acid through the distillation of Alum, devising and perfecting chemical processes such as 'sublimation', 'crystallisation', 'distillation', 'evaporation', and 'filtration'; and very commonly cited are the origins of English words from the Arabic language in common usage, such as 'Algorithm', 'Chemistry' and 'Algebra' (1001 Inventions, 2006).

In relating teaching with religion, students generally have a strong awareness and empathy with their beliefs and this can be used as a mechanism for relating learning and faith with the view to motivate the students. Finally, engagement through context is directed at motivating through existing student interests. Examples are the use of words found in the local dialect being used in instruction, images which are both familiar and of local interest being used for art and design classes, such as falcons, Arabian coffee pots or famous landmarks. Expanding on this, instructors are aware of the impact of globalisation in terms of media, culture and the social penetration the English language has made. Thus, examples based on Hollywood movies, current affairs, pop culture and sports are also commonly found.

Conclusion

Though identification of culture as a motivator has to be treated with sensitivity (Coombe and Shinnock, 1993), this paper suggests a four step approach for improving motivation of a group, summarised as:

1. Identify the grouping (social, educational and literary contexts; interests and hobbies, role models)
2. Identify drivers for that group, including heritage, religion, language and culture
3. Research related motivators, linking drivers to education or to the subject taught
4. Incorporate ideas into the teaching

The aim is to move the education functions within what is a traditional educational establishment from purely pedagogical methods to incorporating synergogistic approaches. This has to be built on personal teaching characteristics which make it easy for the student to adapt

to higher education and improve behaviour and motivation for learning. Kauchak & Eggen (2005) mention four areas for development, personal teaching efficacy, caring, modeling and enthusiasm and expectations. There may be some applicability of this approach at a further education level, for example in ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) learning, where there is a large proportion of a particular ethnic minority group, often adult learners, in the class. The drivers for the individual groupings can be identified and incorporated. Again, students can be engaged through contexts with which they are familiar, or which are important to them in their culture. There is however a risk of over-simplifying and stereotyping a group. There should at the same time be an awareness that, in the global context, students are often comfortable with contemporary issues from a broader milieu.

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