

GLOBALIZATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: Development of an International Master's Program

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ABSTRACT: Creating an international program is a challenging endeavor. It involves understanding cultural and linguistic differences as well as an appreciation of university policies and philosophy in education. This paper focuses on the establishment of a hybrid master's program in Instructional Technology at a Central American university. Cross-cultural challenges, multicultural issues in program implementation, and the need to develop viable international programs to build economic opportunities in global economies will be discussed.

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Introduction

A bilingual, technologically driven master's program was developed in collaboration between a Central American University (CAU) and a Northern American University (NAU). There was a high need for the program since there was no other instructional technology degree or project of this nature available in the Central American country. This online hybrid-learning program consisted of an innovative curriculum that increased the future potential for globalization of the host country significantly since graduates of the program would then have the knowledge base to contribute to the standardization process that is needed to bring the country into the international market.

Globalization refers to the force of commerce, one that brings about an increased standard of living, not only in terms of prosperity to developing countries, but also further wealth to industrialized countries (Sklair, 1999; Waters, 2001). Although there is considerable debate about the effects of globalization, proponents of globalization suggest that this process stresses interdependence of countries around the globe through increasing the exchange of goods across borders, flow of international capital, and rapid diffusion of technology (Mann & Kirkegaard, 2006). In order to be competitive in an international market, countries need to have access to technology as well as to workers skilled in using information technology. Thus, recently there has been a push for institutions of higher education to move into other countries in virtual mode and to provide an educational service to help these countries participate in a more global economy (Larsson, Boud, Dahlgren, Walters, & Sork, 2005).

Technology is making it much easier to provide learning across national borders and help countries train more skilled workers (Carnoy, 2000; Mok, 2005). Consequently, this master's program was designed to increase globalization in two ways. First, the collaborators of this program wanted to help students develop strategies for participating in an international market. This development involved instruction in terminology and discourse on globalization and, perhaps more importantly, instruction in telecommunications and networking (both hardware and software needs). Second, the host institution wanted to train educators to be able to create a larger technology workforce to expand the country's international market. Thus there was direct instruction provided to students to enable them to instruct others in the use of technology to expand the country's economy (i.e., it increased the country's future potential since students were given additional skills to instruct others in technology).

Currently, the host country does not have a systematized management approach or Total Quality Management (TQM) to provide customers with products and services. With a TQM approach, the culture of the company would require "quality in all aspects of the company's operations, with processes being done right the first time and defects and waste eradicated from operations" (Padhi, 2006, ¶ 1). Overall, the TQM approach would systematize products and services thereby allowing the country to gain International Organization for Standardization (ISO) certification or defining characteristics that products and services are expected to meet on export markets (ISO, 2006). In other words, ISO certification would allow the country to be able to compete on the international market and could eventually lead to economic globalization.

Instructional technology is critical for standardized training; technological literacy is vital in assisting countries in their transition from a rural economy to one dependent on information literacy. By combining technology with teaching, individuals from various social economic backgrounds have access and opportunities to play leadership roles in their local and international communities. This innovative program builds the capacity to integrate technology into teaching

and learning while providing avenues to empower and prepare students for the 21st century.

Background of the Country

There are approximately 6.8 million people in the country (Index Mundi, 2006). The population consists of 90% mestizo (individuals with a mixed biological ancestry who follow a wide variety of indigenous and Hispanic customs and habits that over the centuries have come to constitute Spanish-American cultural patterns), 9% White, and 1% Amerindian (All Expert, 2006; Index Mundi, 2006). The land has limited productive territory and very limited areas available for people to live. Approximately 4 of every 1000 people migrate to another country (All Expert, 2006; Index Mundi, 2006). In addition, the country consistently has a very high population density within the cities, making it the most crowded country within Central America (Ribando, 2005).

Approximately 25% of the gross national product and 40% of the workforce is agriculturally based (Fact Monster, 2006). There are marked imbalances in income distribution which result in lifestyles based on extremes of great wealth and abject poverty (Ribando, 2005). These inequalities have created serious rifts in society that effectively divided the population into distinctive subcultural groups.

Of the small percentage of individuals who utilize the internet, the majority are a part of the higher educational system (Rock & Valdez, 2001). Only 0.65% of the total population or approximately 40,000 people currently have access to the Internet (Rock & Valdez, 2001). The number of individuals with personal computers is too small to be accounted for according to the World Bank's World Development Report 2000/2001. The Internet bandwidth is very limited and barely supports the current 3,000-4,000 users.

The collaboration was initiated by the CAU who contacted the NAU in order to begin negotiations to create the partnership that would support an Instructional Technology degree. The CAU is a private, religious university (one of many in the country that serves over 115,000 students). It is important to note that as a private school, students were paying tuition as compared to other local free public institutions. Representatives from both universities, including faculty and administrators, negotiated the proposed program. This collaboration involved 60 key persons and used a distributed team format (team members communicate from different locations and through different modes of communication; Haywood, 1998).

The Ministry of Education (MINED) in this Central American country accredits all universities, both public and private, within the country. In addition, MINED funds and guides several educational programs within the country such as adult education and academic testing (to access basic education). The curricula are

also centralized in this country, so any new curricula must be approved by MINED prior to use. In sum, MINED monitors many aspects of learning in the country's institutions of higher education, including training of faculty, training of students, access to education, and content of what is learned.

The intentions of all parties involved (the CAU, NAU, and MINED) were to foster this program as there was no other instructional technology degree or project of this nature available in the country. From the MINED perspective, the administrators believed that this project would be attractive to other institutions and individuals in the region involved in instructional technology since the program was focused on increasing technological access within the country and with other countries. Thus, they eventually planned to expand this program to other institutions of higher education. Furthermore, MINED administrators were deeply committed to this program as was evidenced by their financial commitment to the universities and to the students (i.e., they paid for students' tuitions, books, transportation costs, additional faculty meetings and some supplies needed for program development). Thus, all of the collaborators were dedicated to the success of the program and the students within the program.

Background of Collaboration

In the summer of 2002, the CAU contacted the NAU in order to begin negotiations to create a cultural partnership. Both institutions identified the necessary departments and university administration equipped to direct the collaboration. At the NAU, the Provost's office managed the formal contract between the two organizations, International Education Services managed the coordination of the courses to be delivered in Central America, the Department of Instructional Technology provided course content and its faculty delivered the courses, and the Central American Academic Programs office served as a liaison between the two institutions. The CAU's Office of Graduate Studies and Department of Education were direct contacts within the Central American country.

By November 2002, a Memorandum of Agreement preceding a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was drafted between the two universities. This MOU required a lot of translation not only of languages but also of cultural differences in the context of educational settings (e.g., semester schedules, hierarchies of power, etc.). In the final MOU, developed in 2005, it was noted that the agreement could be revisited on an annual basis, then modified, and revised according to the needs of the participants. The partnership would support a: 1) Professional Instructional Technology Certificate that would be awarded by the Instructional Technology Department at the NAU, 2) Master's degree in Education to all qualifying students completing the approved program of studies that would be awarded by the NAU, and 3) Master's degree in Education to be awarded by the CAU for students not able to pass the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

It was the wish of both universities that the CAU through its Office of Graduate Studies and Department of Education ultimately offer an Instructional Technology degree solely from the CAU in its own country. Therefore, capacity building (or the fostering of autonomous competence) was an integral piece of the program design. Developing culturally sensitive material was also critical so that eventually NAU would transfer the program to CAU. In the end, all course materials will be turned over to CAU faculty for management and project continuance. It should also be noted that all negotiations were conducted in English.

Program Design and Development

This joint master's degree program was modeled after the University of Queensland Rapid Prototypes Model (Darch & Szeto, 1999). Existing course materials from the NAU were translated and modified to meet the goals of the newly developed program. Following a rapid prototype model allowed the CAU to benefit immediately from the success of the NAU's program and then use the experience of each cohort to make any needed modifications and improvements to the overall program. Initially, an educational needs assessment to identify the characteristics of the students and the needs of the country was conducted. Data from the CAU visits to the NAU and a site visit to the Central American country were incorporated into the needs assessment. Information on existing coursework in the Central American country, telecommunications facilities, available hardware and software, and faculty background and expertise was gathered. The assessment included evaluations of existing sites to meet the needs of the target audience, facilities analysis, infrastructure analysis, and research into procedures to be used to design the educational materials.

A focus group, which included representatives from the Central American country, the Ministry of Education, CAU, and NAU, was then convened to identify the scope of the project, benchmarks, and the product(s) to be developed. A prototype with extensive web support was developed with a side-by-side translation model. All course materials were translated into Spanish, and both English and Spanish appeared on each course handout, PowerPoint lecture, and web page. Materials were continuously refined as courses were offered. Only students who completed assignments in English and were able to score above 550 (or 213 on the electronic analog version) on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) would be awarded a degree from the NAU. Students not proficient in English would be awarded a degree from the CAU.

Program development involved several steps. First, it involved an assessment. The initial assessment was an educational needs assessment to learn about the characteristics of students (to create better tools for learning) and to learn about the needs of the country. In addition, information about existing coursework and existing telecommunication facilities (hardware and software) was gathered. The assessment also included evaluations of the MINED's procedures to design

educational materials. Next, it involved implementation and formative evaluation. Implementation involved translation of all course materials into both English and Spanish. Specifically, a prototype (of a class course) was created using a side-by-side translation (with extensive web support). This prototype was then evaluated using standard formative evaluation procedures where developed materials were field tested in a series of one-on-one meetings and small group tests. The final step was a performance evaluation. Performance evaluation was conducted by using a hybrid course evaluation tool where students responded online to questions about course implementation, instruction/instructor characteristics, quality of course content, and electronic communication tools. After both the formative evaluations and a series of performance evaluations, materials were continuously refined as courses were offered throughout the program.

Team members at each step participated in constructive learning such that the faculty and administrators created a supportive environment that involved opportunities to engage in reflection, analysis, and evaluation (Dangel & Guyton, 2003; Sammons, 2003). In the context of this supportive environment, joint decisions were made about the types of courses, number of student cohorts, and course schedule. The bulk of this process was completed through e-mail communication. Consequently, team members were able to work simultaneously on several pieces of program development.

Overview of Project and Cohorts

The MINED and the CAU felt that in order to be competitive and part of an international market that would lead to globalization, there was a need for some reform within the host country's educational system. That is, the faculty of the CAU and administrators in the Ministry of Education wanted a more technologically skilled workforce that would help the country in networking with other countries and wanted to expand their economy by meeting international standards of product development and marketing through technology. The joint project between CAU and NAU intended to provide educators with a professional technology certificate from the host country institution or a master's degree in Instructional Technology from the NAU (which is a valuable commodity). Since the field of Instructional Technology has successfully impacted both the educational arena and the business and industry sector, the integration of the technology is expected to empower educators. Two cohorts of educators were created, with NAU providing the foundation of the program.

There are currently two cohorts that meet on the CAU campus for classes. The first cohort has been active since July 2004, with 37 students enrolled. A second cohort started in July 2005 with 32 students, and is scheduled to graduate in June 2007. Cohorts also completed practicum experience and had the opportunity to apply theory to practice. The practicum projects were all related to educational reform either within the Ministry of Education or within their own

school districts. The program utilized a hybrid learning approach where students had all course materials provided in an online format, as well as on a compact disc (CD), and had face-to-face meetings with faculty. Students communicated with the instructor via email or blogs. NAU faculty made at least three trips per semester to the CAU. Since all courses were provided in both Spanish and English, faculty who did not speak Spanish utilized the service of a translator.

Cultural Differences

The set-up of the NAU program is prescribed by departmental, college, university, and state requirements. Various levels within the NAU system dictate how the master's program needs to be delivered. As a result, the master's program has an ethnocentric monocultural perspective; it is strongly influenced by European-American culture and includes an ideology that is very systematic and somewhat rigid. There are definite values and beliefs that can be described as specific to the European-American worldview such as rugged individualism, mastery and control over nature, and a unitary and static conception of time (Katz, 1985).

Due to the current set-up of the program at the NAU, NAU faculty came into the CAU with certain expectations of the CAU students and had to make adjustments and learn the CAU culture. Initially, CAU students were expected to act and perform exactly like NAU students. After meeting the CAU students and learning about their resources and circumstances, changes were made so expectations were more culturally appropriate yet still met the rigor of the NAU program.

There were also language differences. Spanish in one country is not the same as Spanish in another country since there are many dialects and slang words used in everyday language. Local nuances were sometimes missed during communication and within the translations. Misunderstandings were inevitable and happened despite efforts made in communication and translation. Language can convey a wealth of information other than the primary content of the message (Sue & Sue, 2003). Sometimes, communication complications impacted team building and the progress of the negotiations. For example, multiple electronic messages were sent back and forth only to discover that both sides had the same concept in mind to begin with. This was definitely a misunderstanding due to language differences and possibly cultural dissimilarity since each party had distinct ways of communicating their ideas (i.e., a general concept vs. a specific idea).

Additionally, power distribution was quite different between the two countries and cultures. In the Central American country, the Ministry of Education controls all universities. This lack of freedom was difficult for visiting NAU faculty. Another cultural issue was the students' perspective of time and due dates. CAU

students were not used to firm deadlines for assignments and projects in the middle of the semester and would often let them pass since assignments for CAU courses were usually due at the end of the course. It appeared to NAU faculty that CAU students subscribed to a more “relaxed” educational system and this was reflected in “academic haggling,” or students trying to negotiate with the NAU instructor on an individual basis. In reality, CAU students were used to a different academic culture. The final cultural issue was the concept of students’ motivation towards grades. For example, NAU students are expected to maintain a GPA of 3.0 to stay in graduate school. For CAU students, any grade (except an “F”) is acceptable. Again, there is an academic cultural perspective that is different from that of the NAU. This systemic difference was sometimes incorrectly subscribed to individual CAU students as a lack of academic motivation rather than a cultural difference that is widely accepted, expected, and practiced at the CAU.

These examples were ultimately understood in the context of the culture. That is, several of the practices that these students exhibited were common and accepted practices of the academic culture of the CAU, but were unfamiliar to NAU faculty. After considerable discussion of cultural perspectives amongst faculty coordinators of both NAU and CAU, NAU faculty recognized that many of the students were struggling to meet the demands of online learning within the context of their everyday lives. For example, it was a challenge for some students to even access the technology within their home (they could not personally afford the equipment or costs to connect to the Internet from home). Consequently, it was difficult for them to complete some of the assignments. CAU faculty had a more comprehensive awareness of the lives of their students and knew that grades did not necessarily reflect a lack of motivation; thus they were more flexible in deadlines. NAU faculty had a shift in their perspective and adjusted some of their teaching techniques (e.g., allowing incompletes in classes until coursework was complete) as a result of better consciousness of students’ needs and an expansion of their own cultural understanding.

Challenges

Online learning can be an expensive and costly enterprise (Jewett & Henderson, 2003). There are several essential components and factors that make online learning successful that are critical when developing an online program (Meyer, 2005). The elements include *development* (resources for creating the program), *delivery* (how the courses are designed and implemented), and *administration* (web site development and maintenance of equipment). When creating the international master’s program, CAU and NAU experienced several challenges within each of these elements.

Program Development.

Insufficient team-building prior to the development of the program led to confusion about funding, equipment, and teacher training. A communication lag between administrators and faculty resulted in NAU faculty never receiving materials sent by CAU students. Translation of materials had to be accurate and culturally-sensitive. Some technological terms had no direct translation and having an entire textbook translated was not cost-effective. Faculty developed alternative materials and paid some one-time fees. Finding faculty who were well trained at both sites who had content area expertise was especially difficult in the Central American country since it did not have any technology training. Meeting graduation requirements at both universities was another challenge since courses needed to be transferable and residency requirements needed to be met. As each of these challenges developed, it was clear that the relationships between the faculty of the CAU and the NAU were of critical importance for program development. That is, faculties at both sites were willing and motivated to help each other resolve issues. For example, in terms of CAU faculty training, NAU faculty traveled to the country to provide additional training for CAU faculty and were also consistent with email response when CAU faculty requested help.

Program Delivery

Poor bandwidth was an issue, and the Central American country could only support a limited number of users at one time. Students had difficulty downloading class documents when they did have access to the Internet. CAU students also had poor accessibility to computers. Few CAU students had computers at home and traveled quite a distance to get access, only to find broken or missing equipment at satellite labs. There were also unanticipated power outages. Sometimes, weather difficulties, such as hurricanes, caused class cancellation and limited computer access. One thing that NAU faculty did to help with access was that a computer lab site was set up at the CAU and a generator was purchased to ensure stability of power. In addition, course instructors burned (or copied) all of the lectures onto compact disc, so that students could access all course materials to study and learn from at any time throughout the course session (as well as after completion of courses).

Program Administration

There were difficulties with course registration and with students knowing how to use the student identification numbers that were needed to register for NAU classes. Also, CAU students only register for classes one time during their first semester whereas NAU students must register every semester. Website maintenance was an issue. Broken links occurred and needed to be monitored every semester. Again, some of these issues needed to be viewed from the perspective of the academic culture at each university. That is, CAU students were generally given more support during initial registration and throughout their programs at the CAU. Thus, NAU faculty recognized the need to provide this additional support as needed (usually through quick email response and increased faculty-student contact). In addition, some website maintenance was

taken over by CAU faculty which not only facilitated their eventual progress towards managing the entire program, but also fostered CAU faculty understanding of the technology used to implement the program.

Implementation Obstacles

CAU students' beliefs about learning and homework assignments were different. CAU students were never given homework assignments since all assignments were completed in class, so they were unfamiliar with the NAU concept of taking an assignment home, completing it, then bringing it back to turn into the instructor for grading. Therefore, NAU faculty adopted the added task of increasing the CAU students' academic cultural perspectives and orienting them to NAU graduate life. Thus, both CAU students and NAU faculty learned the different systematic practices of education from both cultures which helped NAU faculty understand CAU student success. There were also infrastructure issues such as the costs of building an intranet, adding servers, and building networks. Finally, there was the issue of deciding who would continue funding for software, hardware, and equipment upgrades. These were challenges that were renegotiated with MINED as the program and specific courses were improved.

Overall, as these challenges illustrate, the learning taking place within this program was not a one-sided process (from teacher to learner), but instead was bidirectional. This was an unanticipated by-product for NAU faculty who reported not only enjoying some of these challenges, but also having a better awareness of the vital importance of this program in their CAU students' lives. In addition, NAU faculty were able to overcome these challenges with the help of the CAU faculty; thus the relationships within the team of faculty contributed to the success of the program, and both sides benefited and increased their cultural awareness and repertoires.

Conclusion

The development of an international, bilingual distance learning program involved many challenges. There were issues related to insufficient communication, clarity of goals, and timeliness of negotiations. In addition, culture, linguistics, and perspective of administrative power were very different between the two countries. However, both countries and institutions were very much committed to creating and facilitating this innovative collaboration since it would provide much support to existing professionals, teachers, and students, provide the foundation for a future Instructional Technology program, and therefore impact the educational system of the Central American country.

At first, the Rapid Prototypes Model (Darch & Szeto, 1999) was used as an example for how to initiate set-up of the program. This model was integrated and expanded upon, thus allowing the Central American country to benefit from the collaboration in a timely fashion, and it provided the NAU with a successful intervention and the ability to evaluate its effectiveness across international

borders. The use of the Rapid Prototypes Model as a starting point also permitted enough flexibility so that changes and improvements could be made to the program during and after each cohort. This was also the case with the challenges presented within this paper. Though many were unexpected, they were resolved accordingly.

The impact of this program on the educational system and marketplace of the Central American country is worthy of future research. For example, a longitudinal study tracking the graduates from each cohort would likely yield very interesting data. This case study could also serve as a model for future international programs and collaborations. If all parties involved are aware of their own cultural biases from the beginning of the partnership, then students will benefit throughout the collaboration. It is clear that in order for these joint ventures to be successful, there needs to be better cultural awareness of the students and their needs, and there needs to be strong coordination across faculty implementing the programs. However, this program was a first step in helping a country move forward in its effort towards globalization by providing students with skills in technology and instruction which can be utilized to advance the country into an international market. Joint ventures that promote international exchange should be encouraged, especially with countries that have been greatly challenged in acquiring the knowledge and expertise needed for a global economy.

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