

TRANSNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION: TEACHING CROSS-CULTURALLY

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Abstract This small scale of study looks into the cultural competence of the university faculty members for their teaching at offshore programs. The participants in this study are the faculty members at one private university, Tree U, in Taiwan, offering their master degree master programs in English in cooperating with the local universities in Vietnam since 2007. Seven informants were selected as of their direct teaching experiences in at least one of these offshore programs in different regions of Vietnam. The four components of cultural intelligence (CQ), metacognitive, cognitive, motivational and behavioral, developed by Earley and Ang (2003), are adopted as the framework for semi-structure interview design and analysis. Through self-reflections upon their cultural intelligences (CQ) during the in-depth interviews, it has found that the informants have various levels of cultural competence due to their personality, backgrounds, training as well as experiences. However, it reveals that motivational cultural intelligence has an overwhelming influence on their cultural adoption and the success as well as satisfactions of the offshore teaching experiences.

Keywords: Cultural competence, cultural intelligence (CQ), transnational education, offshore teaching.

Introduction

Globalization is driving universities, notably those in the developed and developing countries, to set up international program through market competition (Chen, 2013). As observed and recognized by, many universities

around the world, especially those from the major English speaking countries, have engaged in the internationalization of higher education through transnational education initiatives (Altach and Knight, 2007). This model of international cooperation involves institutions moving forward into the export channel and establishing a presence in the international market through twinning programs or offshore degree courses and training. (Smart, 1988).

Transnational education is to describe the programs and courses “in which the learners are located in a county that is different from where the awarding institution is based” (UNESCO and Council of Europe, 2000; Ziguras, 2003). Against the international background of competing initiatives by universities of developing and developed nations, in the meantime as an echo to the ever increasing demand from local universities to formulate legal frameworks supporting their initiatives of reaching out to foreign countries, Ministry of Education in Taiwan has introduced a series of encouraging measures for university’s internationalization in general, offshore program establishment in particular over the past decade. As a result, dozens of Taiwan universities have presented themselves possessing the capability of offering competitive and quality offshore higher education programs abroad, especially in the countries of South-east Asia.

With the growth of transnational education, more and more faculty members are engaged in international teaching activities, interacting with multicultural populations and creating international learning/teaching experiences in the cultural contexts that

are different from their own. Thus, preparing faculty members to teach effectively in these programs is believed to be not only essential but also critically important.

It is observed that many have written on the topics of government regulations and policy in education service (GATE, 2000; McBurine and Ziguras, 2001, Gu, 2009), strategic planning of the universities' transnational expansions (Poole,

2001; Chen, 2013a), quality control and assurance for transnational provisions (van Damme, 2000; Ziguras, 2001), as well as the implementation and management of those programs (Chen, 2014) in the field. Despite a growing body of literature dealing with transnational higher education, however, it is surprising to see little has been written about teaching and learning in these international cooperative programs that reveals the patterns of experiences or cultural reflections (Gribble and Ziguras, 2003). In addition, the majority of the research and reports in the field focus on the players in the English-speaking countries; very few studies have been on the practical challenges and experiences in the offshore programs provided by non-English-speaking countries such as Taiwan.

This small scale of study looks into the cultural competence of the university faculty members for their teaching in offshore programs. The informants in this study are the faculty members at one private university, Tree U, in Taiwan, offering programs in English offshore. Seven informants were selected as of their direct teaching experiences in at least one of these offshore programs in Vietnam. Through in-depth interview, it is seeking to reveal how these faculty members reflect upon the cultural intelligence after teaching offshore and how their cultural competence actually affect on the overall offshore teaching experiences.

Institutional Context

Tree U is a private university of 12,000 local students including around 422 international students, with 220 are

studying locally and the majority enrolled in the offshore programs in 2013. According to MOE, Taiwan, the share of Tree U's enrollment in offshore programs to all the 163 universities is 57.3% in 2011, reaching a historical height, and still maintains 53.6% in 2013 (Ministry of Education, <http://www.edu.tw/statistics/index.aspx>).

Under the pressure for its survival, Tree U is motivated to engage in international entrepreneurial activities with an aim to recruit international students through different channels and forms. Several approaches were adopted, including recruiting foreign students to study onshore, students exchange programs, offshore programs and so on. Despite its limited experiences and resources for transnational expansions, however, delivering offshore programs appear to be the 'blue ocean strategy' (Chen, 2013b) for Tree U due to its restrictions in available English programs onshore.

Tree U's projects in Vietnam started off in 2005 and an offshore office attached to one of its partner in Hanoi, Vietnam was subsequently established in 2007. With joint efforts from the partners, several offshore programs, all at the postgraduate levels, including MBA, MBA in Finance, and MIS, have been launched from the north (Hanoi) to central (Da Nang) and onto southern (Ho Chi Minh City) Vietnam. In addition to its recruitment records in Vietnam indicated above, Tree U at the present still stays as the first and only university from Taiwan offering offshore programs in English, geographically covering the three main regions in Vietnam.

The offshore office is important not only as the bridging role among Tree U, its respective partners, and off course its local students, but also as the "base" for Tree U's faculty members during their teaching offshore. In addition to the necessary support for teaching and class management, the local staffs, with both English and Chinese speaking backgrounds, are the main 'care takers' to ensure the faculty members are attended with the local assistance when needed.

Cultural Competence, Intercultural Competence and Cultural Intelligence

According to Cross, et al (1989), cultural competence is a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable that system, agency or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations (p,28). They further created a continuum of cultural competence covering six stages, including (1) cultural destructiveness, (2) cultural incapacity, (3) cultural blindness, (4) cultural pre-competence, (5) cultural competency and (6) cultural proficiency, for an individual and organization to develop their cultural competence along with.

Cultural competence is seen as the ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures and socio-economic backgrounds, to understand and respect values, attitudes, beliefs and mores that differ across cultures, and to consider and respond appropriately to these differences. Campinha-Becote and Munoz (2001) reported that the development of cultural competence is an ongoing process that involves the incorporation of cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural skills, cultural encounters and cultural desire.

Similarly, Deardorff (2009) adopted the term of '**intercultural competence**' and proposed the process model of intercultural competence. Deardorff (2009) defined intercultural competence as a person's ability to interact effectively and appropriately in cross-cultural situations based on one's intercultural attitudes, knowledge and comprehensions, and skills. In the process model, she further argues that one can enter the process of developing intercultural competence at any point at the same time address that attitude is a significant starting point for the whole process.

Cultural Intelligence, CQ, is similar to **cross-cultural competence** in concept, which describe the capabilities to interact effectively with culturally different others (Wang et al., 2013). While cross-cultural

competence focuses more on workplace performance in the international business context, CQ addresses the abilities to shape the cross-cultural interaction context by acquiring new knowledge, being mindful about alternative perspectives and assumptions, and accommodation and assimilation of new knowledge into behavioral ability (Thomas, 2006). In this study, the four dimensions identified by Earley and Ang (2003) as the key components of CQ, metacognitive, cognitive, motivational and behavioral, are adopted as the framework for interview questions design.

Data collection

The four key components of CQ are adopted to form the semi-structure questions for the in-depth interview. Seven faculty members took part in this small study through face to face discussion in informal setting. Data was gathered through individual in depth interview. Since the four terms, metacognitive, cognitive, motivational and behavioral, are rather abstract, therefore, the researcher used the 20 items for measurement of cultural intelligence developed by Ang. et al (2007) as the 'hints' for guiding the interviewees to reflect competence upon these four elements in CQ with their own awareness, understanding and experiences accordingly during the discussion.

Finding and Discussion

This small scale of study looks into the faculty members' cultural competence through their self-reflections upon the four cultural intelligences during the face to face interviews. From the gathered and analyzed data, it reveals the following:

First, even most of the faculty members showed less confident in their metacognitive and cognitive cultural intelligence, the motivational cultural intelligence appear to be overwhelmingly high and that seem to be a critical factor determining their success and satisfaction of their offshore teaching experiences. In other words, the readiness, willingness and efforts for dealing with the cultural difference along with necessary

adjustments or even adoptions found in some faculty members have helped them to overcome the absent of their cultural knowledge. Through direct interactions, they were able to acquire cultural knowledge and understand the context and its people with their openness to other cultures in their motivational cultural intelligence.

Second, the supporting measures from Tree U and its offshore office have however contributed greatly on faculty members' cultural adoption as well as coping with cultural shocks. There are sets of SOPs and measures designed for the local staffs to take care of the faculty members during their teaching visits. Even the local staffs only could provide their hands in person when professors are in the north since the office is based in Hanoi, the supports are also delivered through the networking with partners, assistants, students from different regions along with providing local SIM card as the main communication channel.

Lastly, the cultural similarities and geographical closeness between Taiwan and Vietnam turn out to be as 'plus' for Tree U's faculty members in their cultural adjustment. Regardless their own assessment on the levels of these four cultural intelligences, most participants feel easier and more relaxed when being able to identify the cultural similarities and the shared values between the two sides. In the same way, that brought them more confidence in applying different communications skills, such as body languages, when needed.

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