

CROSS-CULTURAL APPROACH TO ENTREPRENEURIAL TRAINING OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Introduction

Culture is the constellation of shared beliefs, mores, values, and traditions that define the behavior of people and it is unique to each community at local and national levels. Culture determines the languages spoken by the people, their attitude towards others, and their behavior. While the family is the immediate point through which culture is learned by children, socialization at institutions such as religious organizations, places of worship, schools, and the society's dispute resolution system reinforce culture. Unlike the Internet, traditional media in the forms of local and national print and audio-visual content tend to reinforce cultural beliefs, values, and practices of specific communities. The uniqueness of culture creates market penetration challenges to entrepreneurs in international markets. Therefore, intercultural communication is a necessary skill for reducing cultural liability and increasing the success of entrepreneurial ventures.

The intercultural communication skill was built through the virtual connection of students from three different continents under the auspices of the German-African partnership platform for the development of entrepreneurs and small/medium enterprises. This was a four-year project involving Hochschule Bonn-Rhein-Sieg, University of Applied Sciences (H-BRS), the University of Cape Coast (UCC), and the University of Nairobi (UoN). In the spirit of cultural diversity, the intercultural communication project component brought on board the Coastal Carolina University in America. The project broadly aimed at creating and transferring entrepreneurial skills by encouraging linkages between universities and industry; and promoting collaboration between universities in Africa and Germany. Through the collaborations, university teaching staff undertook applied research that generates solutions for industry and creates and shares knowledge in entrepreneurship. In addition, the project was aimed at indirectly facilitating trade across continents by creating cross-cultural awareness and strengthening capacities of students to stretch their abilities beyond the scope of their home countries. Project activities included students and faculty exchange, business plan competition, joint research, and setting up incubation centers. The cross-cultural approaches used to train students on entrepreneurship included virtual meetings, collaborative research, expert coaching, international exchange visits, and participation in conferences. These approaches are briefly described below.

Virtual Interviews and Meetings

Communication is the means through which cultural content is passed. Although various tools can be used to connect people across nations, we chose communication tools that are effective and less costly in managing communications across nations and continents. While

students were encouraged to use digital tools like wiki and email for managing communication with documents, social media like Facebook were used to exchange cultural information through short videos and brief information posts. The videos were developed by the students themselves using portable digital devices like mobile phones and alternative video recorders. The video recordings were done in English at the beginning of the project and contained rich cultural content. The videos kicked off interactive sessions among students and facilitated learning about other cultures. Virtual meetings were held via Skype.



Figure 7: Cultural Interview via Skype (Kenyan and German student)

Project coordinators, who are faculty members in respective universities, jointly held regular meetings on Skype to educate each other on the cultural values in each country, monitor project activities, resolve emerging issues, and to virtually interact. Students used project guidelines with predetermined meeting dates to hold meetings where issues relating to project tasks and cultural information were discussed. While students used emails and Facebook as first contact tools, they were followed by initial cultural interviews via Skype.

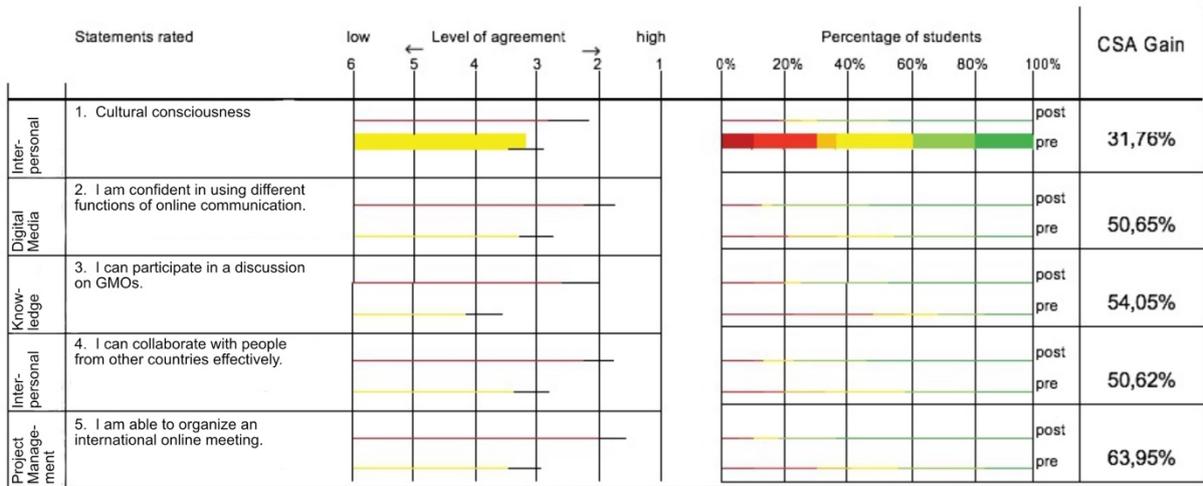
The cultural interviews were paired conversations whereby all students from one country interviewed their project peers in other countries one at a time. For instance, a German student interviewed one student from the USA, one student from Kenya, and similarly one student from Ghana. The cultural interviews focused on explaining the essential elements of one's culture, avoiding prejudice and encouraging open-mindedness, and using international English to communicate with non-native English speakers. Unlike the coordinator's Skype meetings, students' meetings were recorded by the students themselves in an alternating format. The recordings were uploaded to the wiki for retrieval by all students in the project as well as authorized project coordinators. Our analysis reveals that a cultural interview on Skype was the most effective method for passing cultural information to people from different cultures. Unlike videos uploaded by students on Facebook, cultural interviews via Skype encouraged interactive and inquisitive conversations which created the environment for appreciating different cultural contexts. Nonetheless, we observed that developing countries with poor Internet connectivity faced considerable challenges in consistently sustaining online calls. Poor Internet connectivity was a threat to cost-effective cultural awareness creation mainly where online calls were used.

Collaborative Research

The research took the form of collaborative, multidisciplinary and applied. Research dealt with social issues that cut across societies, but upon which people hold different perceptions that are backed by society's cultural orientation. Some of the research topics tackled by students include 'genetically modified organisms' and 'entrepreneurship'. As a starting point, project coordinators developed project guidelines containing detailed instructions with specific timelines. The second step involved coordinators selecting between six and twelve students from each university. The students were then divided into six groups with at least one but no more than two students from each country. The coordinators in the respective countries organized an orientation that entailed introducing students to communication tools, training on wiki, and sensitization about project guidelines. Thereafter, the students were asked to contact their group members in the different countries. After initial contacts were made, the students were encouraged to manage the research process with minimal support from the coordinators. However, the coordinators continuously monitored student progress through scheduled meetings, wiki postings, and project Facebook inspection.

The collaborative research created cultural awareness by grouping people from different cultures and tasking them to work on a common problem where the output largely depended on continuous engagement, commitment, and continuous communication within and across cultures. In the process, students learned cultural information through continuous interactions, assigning roles among others. Critical cultural lessons learned included the cultural meaning of time, task orientation, and managing relations with each other. Analysis of project results over time consistently revealed that African students had a different cultural understanding of time whereby little respect is pegged on keeping deadlines; this could be a liability in managing international business contacts. German students were intent on strictly keeping deadlines while American students were equally committed to keeping time. Nevertheless, Germans were perceived as goal-directed, Americans were task-oriented, and Africans were competent in managing relations by displaying traits such as concern for each other, sociability, and happiness. Other cultural lessons include variations in moral attributes such as sincerity, honesty, fairness across continents. Through collaboration, students learned how to work with other students from different cultural backgrounds separated by thousands of miles. The project demonstrated that collaborative engagement creates an avenue for continuous communication thus facilitating cultural awareness.

Outcome-based evaluation



Data presentation adapted from Raupach et al. Med Teach 2011; 33: e446-ee453. Error bars indicate standard errors of the mean.

Table 5: Student Project 2017 Exit Survey

Expert Coaching

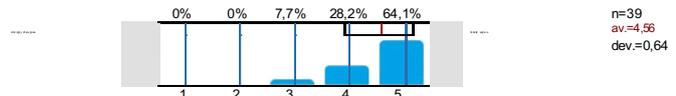
Coaching of the students by internationally exposed faculty members was an inevitable exercise to accelerate the students’ understanding of different cultures. Faculty members are playing the roles of project coordinators in each country, psychologically preparing students for cultural differences in different continents by sharing their own experience with cultural encounters. The faculty members made students understand that doing business internationally is an illusion whenever one ignores other people’s culture or deems the own culture to be superior to others. Coaching was done informally and addressed students’ questions relating to stereotype, cultural myths, communication, perceptions, and attitude. Although making people appreciate the culture that they are not exposed to is not a walk in the park, coaching is helpful in breaking down real and perceived cultural barriers, eliminates the fear of communicating with people of different cultural backgrounds, and builds students’ confidence to freely engage with others. Also, coaching helped lower the cultural shock and shaped first impressions that students developed about people from other cultures. From our experience, coaching helped minimize cultural paranoia and relieve any cultural superiority-inferiority complex. It helped students know that despite differences, all cultures are equally important. Effective coaching demands that the coach must be knowledgeable, flexible, open-minded, and objective.

Knowledge, Skills and Competencies Acquired

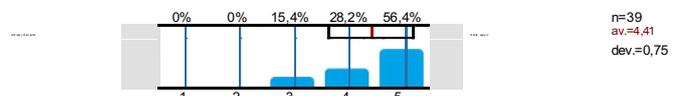
Please express your view by rating the following questions.

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

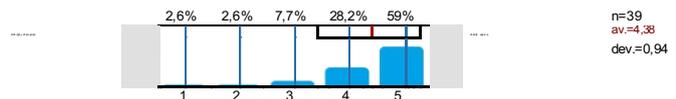
I can communicate with different people from other countries.



I am able to negotiate with people from different countries.



I am more aware about different cultures due to the meetings I had.



I am able to communicate with native/non-native speakers of English language.

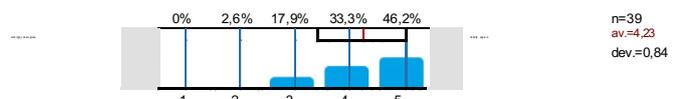


Figure 8: Intercultural Competencies

International Exchange Visits

Exchange visits involving both faculty and students to countries hosting the project are excellent for creating cultural exposure because of the direct physical interactions between visiting and host faculty members on the one side and visiting faculty members and students at the host university. During the faculty exchange visits, the host university developed a program of engagement which included interacting with staff of the host university and interacting with both undergraduate and postgraduate students in classrooms by delivering guest lectures. At Hochschule Bonn-Rhein-Sieg, University of Applied Sciences, the interaction with visiting lecturers was enriched by organizing public lectures where the university-wide community and members of the public were allowed to attend. This kind of involvement was fruitful in understanding the dimensions of society from different perspectives.



Figure 9: Lecture of Prof. Daniel Agyapong at H-BRS



Figure 10: Lecture of Dr. Joseph Owino at H-BRS

A few students were selected to take part in an exchange program on merit basis and traveled to the foreign host university where they stayed for one complete semester. During their stay, the students were integrated into the host university student community. They attended classes, participated in group discussions, completed assignments, worked on projects assigned by the lecturers and professors, and were questioned both during and at the end of the semester. Depending on the host institution, students also participated in fieldwork activities and socialized with other students in the host institution outside the classroom. The whole idea of the exchange program was to learn by seeing and experiencing the other environment directly by being exposed to educational and social settings. Thus the project promoted the cross-fertilization of different cultures. In the latter part of this *Handbook of Applied Teaching and Learning*, there are a few case studies with details on these student and faculty exchanges.

Conference Participation

The joint research was initiated by creating research teams under specific thematic areas. The research teams were formed by grouping together at least one faculty member from each of the three universities in each thematic area. Six thematic joint research teams were established during the November 2015 conference hosted by the University of Cape Coast in Ghana. The teams comprised intercultural and business English, accounting and finance, consumer behavior, business simulation, sustainable agriculture, strategic management & supply chain management.

Research projects undertaken by students and faculty members culminated in a paper presented at the annual conference which was alternately organized and hosted by participating universities. Students were encouraged to participate in the conference by presenting the results of their research. However, due to financial constraints, only project

students in the host university presented their research work on behalf of the other team members from other countries. Student presentations were done through posters, but the presenters were available to answer questions ranging from methodology, working with people from different continents, developing survey tool, data collection, and analytical procedures.

Apart from the students, faculty members participating in the project presented their papers in the conference highlighting the approach used among themselves to work with each other, objectives of the study, methodology, selection of students to take part in the project, student coaching, the challenges they faced and how they overcame them. In addition, the faculty members who played the role of project coordinators in respective countries shared the results of their study, interpreted their findings, and discussed the outcomes as well as insights from the study.

The connections and collaborations developed by Germany, Ghana, Kenya, and the USA through the Building Bridges project have created cultural awareness and appreciation of the different cultural values in different societies. Both faculty members and students have improved their communication skills in different cultural contexts. Our collaboration has changed our approach to teaching with emphasis on training students to fit into the global marketplace by building competencies in digital media literacy, interpersonal communication, international collaboration, and project management. The project has reduced culture-bound challenges that make it difficult for people from different backgrounds to work together.

Appendix

BBAC Student Guidelines 2017

Cultural Interviews to Build Rapport
- One-on-One Skype Interview -
Week 39 (25 September – 1 October)

- A) Read the *Cultural Categories* to prepare for your interview.
- B) Contact your interview partner.
- C) Familiarize yourself with the time differences.
- D) Agree on a time and date to meet online using Skype.
- E) Meet online using Skype and the Skype recording app.
- F) Learn about the culture of your interview partner.
- G) Listen and get acquainted with the different accents.
- H) Reflect on your first encounter and write a short message on Facebook to share your thoughts with all participants.

Cultural diversity: Learning about new cultures, languages, ideas, and values is the first step of working internationally with members of different countries or ethnic groups. We need to understand the way others view the world to be able to communicate and work across cultures. Intercultural communication plays an important part in this process.

Before working together on a joint research project, you will be asked to interview some of your team members. This interview assignment gives you an opportunity to learn about the cultural aspects of the other team members and to share your insights into some of the differences or similarities to your own culture.

Interview assignment: The Skype interview should last at least 30–45 minutes and address at least one cultural category. You can use the questions as a guideline but can also ask your own questions or some other questions from another category. However, you should stay focused on one specific category which you will then reflect upon and compare to your own culture in the Facebook post. First, look at the instructions in **Section 06 – Cultural Categories** for details on the five cultural categories and select one that you would like to focus on in your interview. Second, print the interview form (see the wiki sidebar under “Forms”). Note down some key points about your interview partner’s comments).

Role as interviewer / role as interviewee:

In general, there are two teammates assigned to your international team from each country (i.e. two Germans, two Ghanaians, two Kenyans, and two Americans*). In total, you will arrange three short interviews of around 30–45 minutes where you will spend about half the time interviewing a person and being interviewed as well.

*Americans are often used to refer to citizens of the United States of America, but can also refer to all citizens of North and South America. In some countries, citizens from the US are referred to as citizens of the United States and not as Americans. In German, the correct wording is US American. In these guidelines, we will refer to Americans as those representing the international team for the US.

Skype: If you have never skyped before, practice with a friend. Also, please make sure you have a [headset and a webcam!](#) Before meeting on Skype, conduct a soundcheck by using the Skype Echo (sound test service) to check your audio settings. This is very important as you can record and see how you sound to others. Do not meet in any public area but find a quiet place without further noise distractions. You should use a video to enhance face-to-face contact. If you do not have a webcam, either use another computer or ask your country coordinator. If you are unsure, ask your coordinator for help. The feedback of previous student projects showed that participants without headsets were often difficult to understand or noise levels so high in the background that it made communication very difficult.

Record your findings: You will need to record the interview using the MP3 Skype Recorder to document your findings. For details on the app, see Section 11, Digital Tools and Joint Platforms. Be sure to practice once or twice before you record your interview.

Time differences: Find out about the time difference in each country and then figure out what time frame is feasible for conducting your interview. Not only are you going to deal with different time zones, but also completely different schedules. In some countries, students are in class the entire day and can only meet in the late afternoon or evening. Also, respect time differences and do not suggest meeting at a time when people are usually sleeping.

Connectivity issues: Connecting between Europe and the USA is often very good, but it can be possible that the connection breaks down. This happens more easily when connecting to Africa. In the past, students sometimes faced challenges when using Wi-Fi during peak hours. You may find that the connection is not excellent. Then, it is important to disable the video transmission or to switch from Wi-Fi to a cable Internet connection. In most cases, the connection to Kenya is stable whereas Ghana is the most challenging. When skyping with Ghana, it is advisable to enable the video for a very short time to see each other; however, in most cases it is best to switch off the webcam and just work with audio transmission as this helps connectivity.

Getting connected: Go to the project wiki and find a list of the interview partners on the sidebar link. Contact the person via email. Look into your email account and answer incoming emails at least **24 hours** after receiving them.

Before working together, you will need to establish rapport within your team. Furthermore, you need to establish trust which is done by getting to know each other. Arrange to meet one person from each country to start this process of rapport building. Look at the team list on the wiki. Write an email to get in contact with your interview partner and arrange a time and date to meet. Keep in mind that there are time differences. Finally, the German students will be coming on board once their term starts in October and will contact you as soon as they have started their semester.

Cultural categories: personal interview**Building rapport: similarities and differences**

Culture is difficult to define as we are all individuals with different ideas. However there are common beliefs and practices that some groups of individuals adhere to that are distinctive to other groups. In general, what makes you the person you are and how can you explain your values and customs to someone from a different country or even a different continent?

This assignment is a short cultural orientation and gives you an opportunity to think about your own cultural values. What do you know about the culture in Ghana, Kenya, Germany, or the US? Have you been to any of the countries? How do young people view their country and culture?

Each team member meets online with one person from each country in his/her team. Afterwards a short message is posted on Facebook to share their thoughts on the interview. Take one of the cultural topics and focus on this during your interview. You can also ask questions about any other category. When you post on the Facebook group, you should reflect on just one of the categories and explain the differences and similarities.

Category Family:

1. How do you define your family?
2. Who has the most say or status in your family?
3. Do you live with extended family such as your aunt, cousins, or grandparents?
4. How important is an education in your family and how is it paid for?
5. Do you wish to get married and/or have children? If yes, how many and when?

Category Religion:

1. What role does religion play in your family?
2. What role does religion play in your region/area?
3. What role does religion play in your life?
4. Will you pass on your religious beliefs to others like your children?
5. How is physical contact viewed in your country?

Category Food

1. What is the most important meal of the day?
2. Do you have special rituals and festivals involving special meals that you plan to continue cooking yourself when you get older?
3. What food is particularly special in your country?
4. Who cooks in your family and who helps out?
5. Do you prepare your food or go out to eat in restaurants?

Category Country:

1. What defines you as German/Ghanaian/Kenyan/US American or another nationality?
2. Do you consider your country a good place to live? Why?
3. What is good about your country? What is wrong in your country?
4. Do you feel that your country is a safe place to live?
5. Do you feel that politicians are trying to run the country to their own benefit?

Category Education:

1. Introduce your university and show a classroom and some facilities etc.
2. Can you briefly explain the education system of your country? Does it differ from the other countries in the project?
3. Is education free at secondary and postsecondary schools?
4. Do you consider your education to be poor, satisfactory, good, or excellent? Explain?
5. Is there any funding/aid that you can apply for to get a higher education?
6. What are current education issues in your country?

Category Values & happiness:

1. Do you consider yourself a happy person? Why?
2. What do you consider to be the most widely misconception of your culture/country?
3. What is the most disrespectful and respectful behavior in your culture?
4. Is corruption in business and politics an issue in your country? If yes, explain.
5. Do you feel that you need to contribute to the welfare of your people?
6. Have you ever experienced racism? If so, explain.

Student reflection homework

Posted by students in the Facebook Group BBAC 2017 – Building Bridges Across Continents

Example of a German student (12. October 2017):

“I have chosen the subject of religion and I have learned that in all our participating countries, Christianity is the predominant religion, although other beliefs like the Muslim religion are part of the countries too. For some people in the US and in Germany, it plays an important role, but in general practicing religion is not a big part of everyday life for the majority. In Ghana, religion seems to be a bigger part of the whole culture and everyday life. Praying and feeling guided with the help of God is very important. I learned that on Ghanaian Independence Day, all religions come together to pray and feel united. I'm impressed by the respect, tolerance, and interest that the different religions have for each other.”

Example of a Ghanaian student (5 October 2017):

“During my interviews, I noticed some important facts about foods across all the four countries. All the four countries (Ghana, USA, Germany, and Kenya) have local meals. Among the lot found at Kenya are Ugali, Wali wa Nazi and Chimachoma. In Germany, there is a local food known as Spatzle and in USA there are pizzas and chicken sandwiches. Here in Ghana, we also have local meals like Fufu with light soup and Ampese with Kontombire stew. I also noticed that in all countries, with the exception of USA, people do prepare most of their meals at home. This is slightly different in the USA where people usually go to restaurants. When it comes to the cost of preparing meals, those prepared at home are slightly less expensive than those bought at the restaurant. It also runs across all the countries that people do not have any special meal of the day, but this is individual. That is, it depends on the individual to consider a particular meal of the day to be important or not. Again, all countries have a festival that involves special meals. One example is Germany where most families come together to cook for the whole family during Easter night. Comparing this to that of Ghana, during festivals like Homowo and Bakatue peoples, families (mostly extended families) come together and cook yam and also fry fish respectively. It is common in Kenya and Ghana that it is the major responsibility of the mother to cook for the family. But this is a little bit different in the USA and Germany where everybody in the family can cook. But in all the countries, mostly children are expected to help out during the preparation of meals.

I particularly thank all my interview partners for all these facts.

Thank you all.”

Example of a Kenyan student (12 October 2017):

“I've had very exciting interviews with my team mates, and so far I have learned a lot with regard to the cultural differences among the participating countries.

I like how deeply rooted Ghanaians are to the religions they subscribe to (Christianity taking up the majority). Regarding education, I got to learn that Germany provides free education for high school as well as universities for their undergraduate studies (Except for the small fee that covers administration costs). It is amazing how in the USA, families and friends come together during holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas to prepare and share food with love.”