

Expatriate faculty and student perspectives on teaching and learning in a United Arab Emirates university

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The higher education system in the United Arab Emirates is loosely based on models developed in many Western countries. Expatriate faculty members trained in Western universities are often times recruited to teach at government or public universities. Confusion often arises when faculty members expect similar learning patterns and values which they encountered as faculty members in other contexts. A qualitative approach was used to explore how students and non-UAE faculty members perceive aspects of teaching and learning. It was found that both had diverging views. Faculty needed to use more active teaching strategies and more attention needed to be paid to students' language skills and cultural concerns. The study concludes with recommendations for how expectations can be bridged by incorporating pedagogies that are culturally relevant and responsive to Emirati students.

Introduction

The United Arab Emirates aims to create and maintain a public higher education system that meets and exceeds international standards as outlined in the UAE National Agenda 2021 (UAE Ministry of Education, n.d.). In order to achieve this goal, highly qualified faculty have been recruited from other countries as the number of local qualified persons is limited (Badry & Willoughby, 2016). Due to international recruitment, expatriate faculty often relocate from cultures that differ from those of the Emirati student population (Chapman, Austin, Farah, Wilson & Ridge, 2014). A number of studies have found that these teachers bring expectations and understandings of higher education from their personal experience which they try to replicate with their Emirati students, who often have divergent educational backgrounds and belief systems (Rapanta, 2014; Russell, 2004; Halawah, 2011; Freimuth, 2014; Sonleitner & Khelifa, 2005; Engin & McKeown, 2012). The primary purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of what UAE students and expatriate faculty members believe to be engaging classroom teaching and learning practices.

Literature review

Theoretical underpinning: Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy

Since many of the faculty in the UAE are expatriates, there is a need for culturally responsive teaching. This is especially true when students have different cultural backgrounds than those of their instructors (Paris & Alim, 2014). Faculty at the subject university are mainly expatriates whose degrees were awarded outside of the UAE. In 2019, according to QS Top Universities, 488 international faculty and 48 UAE faculty and staff were working across the two campuses (QS Top Universities, 2020). A culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) that is responsive is one way to bridge such a gap. We draw

upon the work of key scholars and teacher educators who helped shape the concept and approach of weaving together rigour and relevance, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Geneva Gay, and Django Paris.

Work by Ladson-Billings (1995, 2014) on CRP focused on how learners' varied identities and experiences are identified, honoured, and used to bridge into rigorous new learning. Further to her initial research in 1995, Ladson-Billings (2014) noted that CRP is an actual undertaking of educators to ensure that they implement a culturally informed pedagogy. CRP is the interplay of three characteristics. The first is focusing on high achievement through a curriculum that adds to students' strengths. The second characteristic is to provide a curriculum that implements aspects of the students' culture(s) and linguistic traditions, to engage students and to help build confident individuals. The third aspect of CRP is to help students understand and appreciate their social position and context within the world around them. These aspects of CRP were central to the study as the ultimate goal was to ensure that the student population is successful in any future endeavours.

Gay (2010) developed a framework that builds on the work of Ladson-Billings. Gay advocated for teachers to focus on and be cognisant of their strategies, approaches and practices. Gay noted that culturally responsive teaching is an approach that emphasises using cultural knowledge, previous learning experiences and students' learning styles to make learning more relevant for them. Practitioners should make positive changes in their instructional methods, and processes, as well as differentiation in classroom learning environments. Gay contended that a teacher's self-awareness and perspectives are critical to improving learning for students. Gay maintained that teaching is more powerful for students when filtered through students' cultural experiences and frames of reference. Gay argued that an asset-based view (thought process and perception) of students is imperative for meaningful learning to happen.

Asset-based thinking and teaching vs. deficit based-thinking and teaching

Asset-based thinking is when teachers support students' cognition by focusing on their abilities and not on perceived deficits. Asset-based thinking can lend itself to asset-based pedagogy. Gay (2010) suggested that this type of teaching can occur by teaching to and via students' personal and cultural strengths. Asset-based pedagogy is a combination of frameworks that strives to ensure that teaching approaches and content focus on the cultural strengths of learners which may have been traditionally viewed as deficits (Jackson & Boutte, 2018; Dudley-Marling, 2015). In order to make sure that teachers are able to incorporate aspects of culture into their pedagogy, Pohan and Aguilar (2001) argued that teachers first need to be aware of the culture and any misconceptions that they may have.

Implementing an asset-based approach involves faculty demonstrating asset-based thinking and teaching. It requires that faculty, if necessary, shift their thinking and perception about student strengths, culture, and traits to being positive assets. Teachers and students are both valued for what they bring to the classroom rather than being characterised by what they lack or need to work on. Thus asset-based teaching seeks to

unlock students' potential by focusing on their differences, strength, insights, and talents (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014).

Teaching and learning

In addition to exploring pedagogy, in terms of how content is delivered, one should consider what is the actual content that is being delivered and learned. Freire and Valdez (2017) argued that a “culturally relevant curriculum, culturally relevant materials and books, and culturally relevant conversations need to reflect these tenets” (p. 57). In order to achieve culturally relevant pedagogy, a certain amount of praxis is required. According to the research of Freire and Macedo (2017), praxis may be defined as the dialectics of teacher reflection and action. Torris and Mercado (2004) interpreted praxis as an informed action in which university faculty move beyond theory and ordinary practice. Faculty reflect on how they teach, why they teach the way they teach, and how their teaching impacts student learning, the local society, and the world at large.

Faculty who are truly immersed in praxis bring their theoretical ideas, perspectives, perceptions, belief and thoughts to the table in considering decisions they make about teaching and learning. They adapt their approaches to ensure they continue to encourage student learning and academic progression (Macedo, 2017). Preferred learning patterns of students is a strong consideration for faculty immersed in praxis. Russell (2004) claimed that UAE students are familiar with a passive mode of learning in their high schools, such as rote learning with a high level of teacher input and scaffolding. Faculty immersed in praxis would contemplate if, or how might these expectations be transferred to the higher education environment. Thus, students may have an expectation that higher education classrooms will continue to be hierarchical with the teacher as the primary giver of information. For example, students may prefer to be given slideshow summaries of required material rather than engage in their own active reading for information (Freimuth, 2014). Students have a preference for collaborative, oral activities such as group presentations rather than written assignments and also have an expectation and a preference for infrequent, high stakes testing (Rapanta, 2014; Russell, 2004; Halawah, 2011; Freimuth, 2014; Sonleitner & Khelifa, 2005; Engin & McKeown, 2012).

Another area of contemplation and consideration for faculty immersed in praxis is how English can have a subtractive effect on the Arabic skills of Emiratis (Hopkyns, 2014). Therefore, the task for many expatriate university faculty members in the UAE is to teach content that is additive to the UAE society both linguistically and culturally, and is not a subtractive force. A number of challenges have been identified that UAE students face in the higher education classroom. One of these is that their academic language and literacies are lower than needed to understand and utilise required classroom materials and are also lower than faculty have been accustomed to in their previous institutions. This results in teachers having to present information in a reduced, simplified form, frequently producing an outcome of surface learning for students (Sonleitner & Khalifa, 2005; Raven, 2011; Russell, 2004).

Cultural challenges have also been found. For example, while students believe that it is acceptable for more than one activity or conversation to occur in the classroom at the same time, faculty do not, and will halt instruction until it ceases (Sonleitner & Khelifa, 2005). Another example is that students prefer to visit faculty offices in groups of two or more with the result that students and teachers may not be completely honest with each other, out of concern for appearing disrespectful in front of a third party (Sonleitner & Khelifa, 2005). Additionally, a further issue is that students have a fear that their local culture is being weakened. The use of English can be perceived as bringing Western cultural traits that subtract from local norms, at least linguistically (Gallagher, 2011). Therefore, it is important that teachers are cognisant that they may bring cultural habits that are subtractive rather than additive (Ashencaen-Crabtree, 2010; Dailo, 2014; Hopkyns, 2014).

Students' motivation has also been studied. Motivation tends to be extrinsic, driven primarily by duty to family, country, and attainment of a high-income position. Students expect to graduate with a high grade-point average, made achievable by lessons that are manageable, delivered by teachers whose personal qualities are rated more highly than their teaching methods or classroom management (James & Shamma, 2018; Engin & McKeown, 2012; Halawah, 2011).

Emirati culture

Emiratis are currently part of a group-oriented culture that has transitioned from a collectivist culture moving toward that of a more individualistic society (Alteneiji-Ebtesam, 2015; Buda & Elsayed-Elkhouly, 1998). However, Emirati society continues to demonstrate several collectivist characteristics such as perceptions of self as part of the larger group, and an emphasis on the interplay of fate and behaviour (Iacoviello & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2019; Alteneiji-Ebtesam, 2015). The cultures of the West, often referred to as individualistic cultures, can have the characteristics of self-directedness, autonomy, individualism and individual control of personal destiny (Iacoviello & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2019). Alteneiji-Ebtesam found that Emirati society has traits from both, but continues to focus on the needs of the group.

In the UAE, collectivist traits can also be seen through a strong sense of service to country, society, and family (Findlow, 2006). Therefore, as expatriate faculty members interact with their students, it is important to note that while the UAE is a very modern society, Emirati students still value the importance of the needs of the group but with an increasing focus on the needs of the individual. Also, as noted by Hopkyns (2014), culture is a fluid idea. The ever-changing landscape of any culture needs to be accounted for as well.

Research questions

This study examined the following research questions:

1. What are expatriate faculty perceptions of teaching and learning in higher education in the UAE?

2. What are Emirati student perceptions of teaching and learning in higher education in the UAE?
3. How do expatriate faculty engage Emirati learners in higher education?

Method

Context

The research was carried out at a government university in the UAE from March 2016 to October 2018. The student population is predominantly female UAE nationals, but a small percentage of Emirati males and international students are also enrolled. With the exception of Islamic and Arabic studies, all subjects are taught through the medium of English, although the first language of most of the students is Arabic. The majority of students attended government high schools that follow a standard national curriculum (Freimuth, 2014).

Participants

For the purpose of this study, ten faculty members who had been in the Emirates for less than two years and ten female students who had been at the university for less than one year agreed to participate on a voluntary basis. The fear was that participants who had been at the university for a longer period of time may have become fossilised in the environment and would not be able to describe their perspectives of past experiences without interference. Hopkyns (2014) argued that culture is fluid, and past studies indicate that there are some discrepancies between how expatriate faculty members and students approach teaching and learning in this context (Rapanta, 2014; Russell, 2004; Austin, Chapman, Farah, Wilson & Ridge, 2014; Sonleitner & Khelifa, 2005; Diallo, 2014; Freimuth, 2014). Therefore, a study that respected this fluidity while investigating possible differences was needed.

Student volunteers were recruited when visiting student advising courses. Neither researcher knew any of the student participants before the study. Instructors were recruited by word of mouth and through email. All the faculty who participated in the study and the two researchers gained their degrees in the United States or United Kingdom. Subjects taught by the faculty interviewed for the study included education, life skills, art history, computer science, and media. Table 1 provides details about the participants. Student participants were UAE nationals aged 18+ who had been educated at government, private and international schools. Arabic was the first language of all students interviewed. Their level of English was within the range of the University's IELTS average of 5 and 5.5.

Table 1 describes the types of pedagogical training that faculty members completed before their appointment at the University. Some of the faculty members were education scholars while other faculty members had taught content without any educational training. Others had some training in terms of in-house courses, but were not scholars of pedagogy. Table 1 also provides information on the depth of experience that students had with Western

educational systems. Five had attended only Western private schools in the UAE, one had been to both Western private schools and government schools, and four had attended only government schools during their K-12 years.

Table 1: Participants' backgrounds

	Experience with teaching and learning	Pseudonyms	Evidence
Faculty participants	Trained educators	Dr Jodi, Dr Jeff, Dr Margaret, Dr Abigail, Ms. Leah	Obtained a degree in education
	Some teaching and learning experience	Dr Melanie, Dr Anne	Received a certificate in teaching and learning, involved with educational centres and/or K-12
	Pure content specialists	Dr Melanie, Dr Anne	No previous training in teaching and learning
	Previous experience with Western-trained faculty	Pseudonyms	Evidence
Student participants	Lots of interaction with expatriate teachers who were trained in countries with an individualistic culture	Moza, Mai, Leila, Sara, Faria	Went to a British or American private school in the UAE and/or attended an international university previously
	Some interaction with expatriate teachers who were trained in countries with an individualistic culture	Salama	Attended a British or American school at some point but finished schooling at an Arabic-centered school
	Limited interaction with expatriate teachers who were trained in countries with an individualistic culture	Asma, Alia, Zam Zam, Rana	Went to a government school

Research design

Researchers used a case study approach through a constructivist lens (Creswell, 2014) and analysed the pedagogical perceptions of effective characteristics of teaching and learning as described by students and higher education faculty members. Data were collected through conversations based around questions constructed from the literature (Yin 2018) and presented in the Appendix. One researcher asked the questions while the other researcher transcribed participant responses. The interviews were in English and lasted from 30 minutes to 2 hours depending on the participant(s). Students were unwilling to be interviewed alone but were happy to participate in pairs. This is a cultural norm as highlighted in the literature by Sonleitner and Khelifa (2005). The only issue with conducting participant interviews in pairs could be that the participants may influence one

another when answering questions. However, we were not able to recruit student participants without this caveat.

Qualitative data from the interviews were analysed using inductive content analysis. The researchers independently and collectively identified categories and sub themes that emerged from responses to the interview questions. Both researchers analysed the data separately and together to ensure reliability (Creswell, 2014).

Limitations

One limitation to this study was the students' apprehension of being interviewed alone. At the beginning of the study, students were asked to come individually but would not volunteer. Emirati students coming in groups to visit faculty members is documented in a study conducted by Sonleitner and Khelifa (2005). In the end, students would only volunteer if they could be interviewed in pairs. This could be an issue as it is difficult to determine if students' answers were due to pressure from the other student. However, as the focus of this study was to determine how to best support our students and the guiding tenet was CRP, some leniency was provided. Rarely, though, did students seem to provide answers based on the other student's comments.

Another limitation to this study is due to the dynamic nature of faculty members at the university. Only a few faculty members qualified as relatively new to the region. Therefore, we were limited to a small number of faculty participants. However, an attempt was made to get a mixture of faculty members from different departments with diverse specialisations.

Findings

Faculty members and students interviewed during the study often perceived teaching and learning through divergent lenses. Both identified collaborative learning as an effective teaching and learning strategy. However, faculty members indicated that while they believed that collaborative learning was important, their focus was on what the individual pupil could bring to the learning experience. Conversely, students approached collaboration through the lens of a group-orientated society. Their goal was to work together as a unit to create a shared product. In general, faculty and students approached teaching and learning from their cultural and/or academic backgrounds. Western-trained faculty members were grounded in individual responsibility and a belief in the importance of intrinsic motivation (Shapiro, 2009), while many Emirati students viewed teaching and learning as a means to strengthen the collective and not just the individual. Several of the students' comments indicated that their view toward teaching and learning is shifting away from traditional views of education.

As outlined by the Ministry of Education *Vision 2021*, one of the educational values of the UAE is to incorporate both local and international best practices in the classroom. The UAE government places importance on combining the strengths of the local population (collaboration and society building) with the strengths of global best pedagogical practices.

Finding 1: The importance of collaboration

Using collaborative learning as a teaching strategy is important in the UAE context (Halawah, 2011). Halawah (2011) stated that Emirati students work better in an educational environment when they are in groups than they do individually. Faculty members pointed out the importance of incorporating collaboration into their lessons. It seems though that many faculty members incorporated collaborative learning in their classroom practice because they believe it is considered best teaching practice. However, they also valued collaborative learning because it is a strategy that the students deemed important.

Dr Jeff, a trained educator, emphasised the importance of encouraging Emirati students to work collaboratively, albeit with an emphasis on individual exploration. He stated:

Teaching strategies include project-based learning, group theory, group work, collaboration and student-centred topics. Letting students explore their own interests is effective in innovation, coming up with an innovation in UAE society that they can develop.

Dr Jeff's comment is especially important as it represents a merging of the two approaches. He emphasised individualism, but also focused on the importance of building the UAE society as a collective, a well-researched Emirati characteristic (Engin & McKeown, 2012). Another faculty member, Dr Margarit, echoed the importance of collaboration when teaching Emirati students by saying, "Competition does not work. Here girls see any competition as wrong. We are supposed to work together."

One faculty member noted that the students perhaps are more autonomous when permitted to take classes they enjoy. Dr Melanie stated:

I think I'm lucky that a lot of the classes that I teach are what they want to take. Projects that interest them. Autonomy, flexibility, choice of assignments.

Students also echoed the possible increase in autonomy when students study based on their preference. Salama stated:

When you choose your major, it is what you want to do. Your major helps you get deeper. It's the only thing you want to do.

Collaborative work as seen by Emirati students is not necessarily negative and has many positive attributes and outcomes. However, as the broader UAE society is multicultural and as the world becomes increasingly globalised, graduates need to be able to work effectively with individuals from diverse backgrounds who may work better from an individualistic perspective. While students did not mention collaborative learning strategies specifically, they focused on the need for students to help one another. Rana stated that the role of peers in the classroom should be:

Respect and communicate with each other in a good way. Try to help in other ways than the teachers' way of learning.

However, the focus for students is not necessarily to help each other to think differently, more critically, or individually, but to help the group move forward and succeed.

Finding 2: Effective teaching and learning strategies for differentiation

Faculty members often discussed the importance of differentiating instruction. For example, Dr Jodi stated:

If you have a strong teaching strategy, it probably works. Connect to lives, prior knowledge, technology, multi-modal teaching, ways of engaging the learner.

Recognising that students do not have a deeply ingrained habit of reading, faculty reported having to slow down and “chunk information” so that students could keep up to speed with the curriculum. Ms Leah stated:

Slowing down even more, chunking. Not a robust reading culture here. So teaching slows it down. Activating previous knowledge.

Freimuth (2014) also found that there was not a strong reading culture in Gulf countries, rather Emirati culture is rooted in oral story-telling.

Dr Jodi, Dr Jeff and Ms Leah are experienced educators and therefore have been trained to adapt teaching strategies based on the needs of individual students. However, pure content specialists described how difficult it was to upskill in order to incorporate pedagogical strategies that suited this student population. Dr Madeline stated:

Straight out lecture where you just talk to the girls and explain everything on slides which they rely on. They don't read anything else. I had to adapt enormously... They asked me definitions of simple words like 'adhere' so I realised that their English level was much worse than I thought. Now I stop when I see a word they don't know and I ask them the root or prefix of the word so I stop to define vocabulary. Also, I have had to stop classes to run reading circles. I never did this before. The pace that I worked elsewhere is not acceptable here. My prep load is high. I'm not trained to be an English teacher. I know my subject. I don't know how to simplify to students without sacrificing content.

Dr Madeline further stated:

... here if I give too many concepts, they can't get this. Learning in a language other than their own — it's harder for them. Ironically, if I ask them to do more work, they like it better. They seem to think it will increase their grades so I give them an extra quiz. I really want to assess them, but I tell them it will help them. Second, when I break them into groups, I try to engage with the less extraverted students so I can get the less verbal students to present their ideas.

It is difficult to pinpoint where students' learning challenges originate or come from. From these comments, it was not always apparent whether the need for differentiated learning came from students' struggles with learning in a second language. One might

wonder if it derived from their classroom experiences of teaching models based on traditional models of schooling, where rote learning was the norm (Ashencaen-Crabtree, 2010), or if it came from actual learning differences among students. Many of the current students at the university level were educated during their formative years before 2010 and therefore experienced an education system that had changed very little since the country's inception. However, current studies such as Gallagher (2011; 2019), emphasised there have now been many developments and improvements in the education system, especially since 2010. Salama provided some insight into this issue when she stated:

... all of them talk fast and always read in a monotone. In life skills there are lots of activities and I lose track of time.

Salama wanted an interactive classroom with different activities, but she also wanted to be in a class where she can follow the professor's English when giving lectures.

Finding 3: Movement away from banking models to teaching that focuses on integrated models

Many faculty members stated that students relied on memorisation as a primary learning strategy. For example, Dr Madaline emphasised this point when she said:

Actively engaged - does not happen here. They read the day before, memorise, spew back, and then forget.

However, she further explained that this may change: "It will change. Anytime I have a complaint, I just look at how far the country has come." She went on to provide an example of an innovative activity that she had used successfully with the students: "Made them do a two-minute silent movie, but it had to tell a story silently. A couple were screamingly funny."

Some students also want a more interactive and diverse learning experience. Moza stated:

They (teachers at K-12 schools) liked to give us activities, I learned more from activities than from things written on board.

However she continued to describe how the faculty members at the university compared with her K-12 teachers:

More presentation and explaining ... there is a *PowerPoint* ... the teacher explains ... I review the *PowerPoint*. It works for me, but for some of my friends, it doesn't. It would be better if there were more activities.

Moza had a lot of experience with learning at Western, English-medium schools under the tutelage of Western teachers, and therefore had greater exposure to English during her K-12 background. The university population is made up of students who come from both government and private schools. Government schools have the reputation of teaching using 'banking model' approaches to learning, although this is changing, while many of the

private schools incorporate modern standards of best practices. Therefore, while Moza may prefer more activities and active learning, her classmates may prefer different patterns of learning rooted in rote learning.

It is difficult to know the reasons why the faculty members used *PowerPoints* as a central component in class instruction. It might be that the faculty members prefer to employ active learning; however, given the diverse levels of students in their classes, they aim for a simplified strategy to support the students who need simplified language. However, this is problematic, at least for students with weak reading skills in English who need to increase their reading levels, which a *PowerPoint* presentation may not be successful in achieving.

This simplified approach was also highlighted in a comment made by Mai:

We get information (at the university) in a way that we understand. In private school it was so hard. Even when we asked a question, we had to find everything out ourselves. Responsibility was on the student. The teacher only told us the main info. Here it is much easier.

This appreciation for easy classes was also highlighted by Leila who had also attended English-speaking private schools. She stated that:

The curriculum is easier than (private) school. Teachers are professional. Everything is easier than school — even the exams.

What makes a class easy is not always clear. Is it because the faculty members at the university actively tried to simplify the course or is it because Mai and Laila had teachers who were trained on or had experience with teaching and learning in an Emirati context, thereby providing them with the ability to adapt and differentiate classes? Dr Madaline addressed this by saying:

They switch between English and Arabic. If it was all in English, I would catch what was going on. I know students anywhere in the world will be distracted. Here I have to say are you asking for clarification in Arabic Another time I had to stop, but one girl looked like she had got it and offered to explain in Arabic. I've never done that before. Here I also do group work. I never did this before. But here if I give too many concepts, they can't get it. Learning in a language other than their own. It's harder for them. Ironically, if I ask them to do more work, they like it better. They seem to think it will increase their grades so I give them an extra quiz, When I break them into groups, I try to engage with the less extroverted students so I can get the less verbal students to present their ideas.

It is possible that faculty members are having to motivate some students to move away from traditional approaches to teaching and learning that stem from 'banking models' of schooling. The students in Madaline's classes took quizzes on material they could study, and while they wanted to work collaboratively, they often took on passive roles. This includes a distinct shift from rote learning to more robust notions of teaching and learning in the classroom, such as active-learning, tapping into students' prior knowledge and other appropriate student centred learning (Freimuth, 2014).

Discussion and recommendations

The study examined three research questions.

RQ1: What are expatriate faculty perceptions of teaching and learning in higher education in the UAE?

Faculty members indicated overwhelmingly that they were willing to adapt their lessons for the local Emirati population. However, there were several areas that they identified as problematic when teaching this specific population, including active learning, reading, second language issues, individual contributions to activities, and competition. As opposed to being actively involved, students often presented themselves as passive learners. A faculty member also suggested that some students prefer quizzes and memorisation and often focus on grades. However, this comment was made by a faculty member who specialises in content but did not have any pedagogical training.

According to Torres and Mercado (2004), faculty at the university should revisit their praxis on a continuous basis. As a result, faculty would be able to continuously bridge any gaps between theory and practice, and adapt their teaching in ways that improve their pedagogical practices and their understanding of those practices. Reflecting on praxis would hopefully lead to culturally responsive pedagogies that would ultimately yield positive impacts on student learning.

Aside from the traditional teaching methods described, one faculty member trained in pedagogy pointed out that students did well when given activities that incorporated creativity. One reason for this could be that during creative activities students are able to freely express their uniqueness and aspects of their cultural and linguistic traditions. However, based on the tenets of CRP as outlined by Ladson-Billings (2006), classroom endeavours that allow for creativity with an allowance for students to explore and affirm their own culture should be encouraged, with a focus on high achievement that builds on the strengths of the culture and the individual.

A perspective arising from these observations is that implementing a culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching could allow teaching and learning processes to become more active. Learning would be better connected to who the students are as learners, building upon their strengths and utilising local concepts. This includes reflective teaching practices and learning about the students' lived experiences. As part of this direction, faculty members could reflect on their own views of how they perceive deficits in their students and determine if there is a way to turn deficits into assets, or to better understand how students approach learning. Asset-based teaching provides different learning pathways so that students are motivated to meet high expectations. By creating these pathways, faculty members move away from a linear approach to instruction, to a more culturally inclusive and responsive learning experience.

RQ2: What are Emirati students' perceptions of teaching and learning in higher education in the UAE?

Many of the issues discussed by the faculty members seem to be in stark contrast to what the students stated they perceived as a successful learning environment. Several students stated that they wanted a level of active learning to be incorporated, but students suggested that they struggled with language in the classes. Students who had been to private schools emphasised that university was easier than the schools they had attended for K-12. This might suggest that what teachers may perceive as an unwillingness to engage in higher level activities is mostly a language issue, or an issue with learning habits. This is supported by a study conducted by Russell (2004) who found that final-year university students could engage with meaningful activities when writing.

Faculty made several recommendations for supporting students until they improved their level of learning habits. For one, concepts need to be presented at the level of the students. Some faculty members may not be aware of various ways to scaffold concepts and activities. Education specialists seem to be more cognisant of these tools and therefore may be used as a resource university-wide when delivering professional development. In addition, concepts could be taught in a meaningful way for students using culturally relevant information and bringing in local concepts.

RQ3: How do expatriate faculty engage Emirati learners in higher education?

Faculty members with an academic and professional background in pedagogy mentioned implementing strategies such as multiple modalities to provide differentiation of learning. This can benefit students in two ways. For one, it can reinforce how students learn concepts and faculty members teach content (Tomlinson, 2014). Secondly, it can provide faculty with another avenue to engage with students and better understand their needs. In addition, students have greater opportunities to engage with their own learning journey.

Faculty members also highlighted that group work was beneficial. This aligns with the research conducted by Alteneiji-Ebtesam (2015) who stated that the UAE is a group-oriented society. Faculty members mention that often they create learning groups to support students who may struggle with language and concepts. One faculty member mentioned that he incorporated a lot of collaboration into his lessons in order to engage students through their group orientation. He was trying to tap into group goals such as building society rather than the needs of the individuals. In group-oriented societies, the individual is stronger when the collective succeeds. This is an example of implementing CRP. CRP states that educators should build on aspects of the culture that are strengths. Again, this needs to be accomplished with a focus on high academic achievement. The idea of engaging students with real life experiences was also identified in a study conducted by Halawah (2011).

Conclusion

The UAE is increasingly multicultural, as is most of the world and, as Hopkyns (2014) argued, culture is increasingly becoming fluid. This study shows that students may be moving toward a preference for active learning instead of passive learning. However, the

reluctance that students show faculty members could be due to their struggle with language and a lack of concepts that connect to their lived experiences with culture and traditions.

Numerous aspects of both CRP and asset-based pedagogy can be applied to teaching and learning in the Gulf region. Faculty members indicated that they were keen to support students, but were not quite sure how to bridge the gap. Perhaps implementing a university-wide program that supports faculty members learning to teach using best practices supported by organisations such as the Higher Education Association (HEA) would be beneficial. However, this probably does not go far enough. Faculty members across the university would benefit from professional development programs that include information on how to teach second language learners as well as concepts related to the local environment.

Future studies

Larger mixed methods and quantitative studies should follow. This limited study identified three major areas which require further study: the impact of K-12 schooling on Emirati higher education success, specifically comparing government schools, private schools, and a combination of school experiences; determining which pedagogical strategies match with the cultural learning needs of Emirati students; and which courses are most impacted by varying levels of English of skills.

A unique opportunity exists in the multicultural environment of the higher education system in the United Arab Emirates to compare the differences in pedagogical styles of various nationalities and their training in education. This study would hopefully determine if there is a core set of pedagogical skills that every professor, regardless of origin, should know and be able to implement in the classroom of any group of students.

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Appendix: Interview questions

Questions for faculty members

- What did you know about the ZU before you joined the faculty here?
- What teaching strategies have you brought with you from other teaching contexts that have worked well here and what have you had to adapt?
- What strategies have you used to motivate students at ZU?
- How do you view mistakes in the classroom?
- How do you respond when a student makes a mistake in the classroom?
- What do you define as learning and how do you know when learning has happened?
- What are the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom?
- What are the roles of students to students in the classroom?
- What messages do you think you may unconsciously convey in the classroom?
- What messages do you think you may consciously convey in the classroom?
- What is the purpose of an exam?
- What is the purpose of a university?
- What is a university in the UAE?

Questions for students

- What did you know about ZU before you joined the University?
- What teaching strategies/methods are you used to? How do these compare to those you have encountered at ZU?
- What motivates you to learn at ZU?
- What do teachers do that motivates you?
- How do you view mistakes in the classroom?
- How do you feel when you make a mistake in the classroom?
- What do you define as learning and how do you know when learning has happened?
- What are the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom?
- What are the roles of students to students in the classroom?
- What messages do you think you may unconsciously convey in the classroom?
- What messages do you think you may consciously convey in the classroom?
- What is the purpose of an exam?
- What is the purpose of a university?
- What is a University in the west?

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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Please cite as: Eppard, J., Bailey, F., McKeown, K. & Singh, H. (2021). Expatriate faculty and student perspectives on teaching and learning in a United Arab Emirates university. *Issues in Educational Research*, 31(2), 458-475.
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