Design Considerations and Implementation of First Cohort of International Partnership in Educational Administration

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership (ICPEL) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.

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This study investigates the experience of the first-year implementation of an international partnership between a university in the United States and one in the Middle East. Through thematic analysis, document analysis, and participant observation as our methods, we offer a detailed description of design elements and instructional strategies used during the partnership, assessing their relevance, responsiveness, and benefits to the partner institutions and their clientele. The findings support the use of hybrid cohort models in cross-national partnerships for educational leadership and are closely aligned with the literature, however, also add specific experiences and perspectives of those directly involved. In conclusion, the study highlights that for optimal outcomes, international university partnerships require not only early planning but also mutual trust, moving beyond paternalistic, reductive, "North-South Global Perspectives" many traditional partnerships promulgate.

As the pace and complexity of the global society continues to increase, national governments, organizations, and institutions across the world need to engage in collaborative efforts. From climate change to international terrorism to food and resource insecurities to political instability to the COVID-19 crisis, the challenges nations face are global and interconnected. Global problems require global solutions, collaborative work achieves more than that remaining siloed.

As incubators of new ideas, innovations, and talent, higher education institutions are gateways to foster global partnerships among students, faculty, and other agencies committed to social, cultural, and economic transformation. Universities' roles as catalyst agents and key partners in the global knowledge economy depend on their ability to transcend their traditional local and national boundaries by developing new infrastructures and entrepreneurial cultures responsive to the demands of international partnerships that an increasingly global system of higher education requires. Such efforts have resulted in a plethora of collaborations.

While the types and models of international university linkages among institutions vary, most partnerships center on student exchange, faculty exchange, research partnerships, and the establishment of satellite campuses (Hamdullahpur, 2020; Knight, 2015; Waterval et al., 2015). The vast differences in needs, designs, and implementation make it impossible to have a clearly defined set of standards for working with partnerships (Helms, 2015). However, institutions can glean from existing partnerships and gain valuable lessons by learning from how others were formed and implemented. The existing research on university partnerships is often focused on the impetus, benefits, and challenges faced through formation (Tekleselassie & Ford, 2019), however, what is not often examined and communicated is the experience involved in the boots on the ground implementation. Much remains unknown regarding the actual rollout of these endeavors, particularly from key agents participating in each step.

This study will fill such a void by examining a partnership between a university in the US and one in the Middle East (ME) that resulted in the creation of a Ph.D. program in educational administration. The focus encompasses the intricacies of the first-year implementation, analyzing the strategies employed to address the needs of all invested stakeholders in this program level partnership. This will include an examination of the hybrid cohort model created and adapted to facilitate instruction, foster student engagement, and leverage the support of involved faculty and staff. The examination will also illuminate course selection; instructor assignment; and student evaluations and grading, including adjustments made to meet students' unique learning styles and prior background and knowledge frameworks; thereby making the partnership responsive to context, institutional priorities, and unique cultural demands. This will add to the growing body of knowledge around cross-national partnerships.

Research Questions

The following two research questions guided the study: *(a) What approaches or design decisions grounded the partnership to accommodate the needs of major clientele? (b) What instructional and learning outcomes emerged through the first-year implementation and how do they inform research, policy, and practice for future university partnerships?*

Significance of the Study

The literature on international university partnerships is growing as this area of work expands. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the rise in partnerships was being felt globally and now with the increased experiences of conducting business online, this upward trajectory is likely to increase as the viability of online learning is being embraced by institutions and governments that were previously skeptical about accepting this modality. Hybrid models in particular, are being employed both within and between

countries because they incorporate elements of both synchronous face-to-face and asynchronous online components (Knight, 2015).

The hybrid cohort partnership being studied was initiated with a first cohort of students during the 2017-2018 academic year. The cohort consisted of eight students from the ME institution, six females and two males. Selection was highly competitive, with over 300 applicants for eight slots. During the first year, the students were enrolled in both universities; working toward a Post Master's Certificate (PMC) at the US institution and the first-year credits of their Ph.D. program at the ME institution. This study will contribute to the conversation and growing body of knowledge on international university partnerships, particularly hybrid cohort models. The next sections will review the literature on international university partnerships, hybrid instruction, and cohort models in educational leadership.

International University Partnerships

International university partnerships are increasing in scope and number to meet the needs of an increasingly globalized society. Partnerships are formed at several levels within institutions of higher education, from the individual level where a couple scholars collaborate on research or publications, to the program or school level, as well as at the top levels of universities. Successful university partnerships can have an impact at any of these levels as well as in individual disciplines both nationally and globally (Hamdullahpur, 2020). On the individual level, students and faculty can benefit, and at the institutional level, the human capacity is increased at the partner institutions. Hamdullaphur (2020) stated, “society and the global economy are best served when our universities and their community of students, scholars and staff members branch out to develop international partners that multiply impact and opportunities to shape a more prosperous future, domestically and globally” (p. 29). Just as the partnerships can be formed at different levels, the goals, designs, and approaches vary based on the needs of the partners and the skills and experiences of those involved in the planning and implementation (Leal Filho et al., 2022).

One thing agreed upon by many scholars is the need for equality and mutuality for all partners (Hamdullahpur, 2020; Leal Filho et al., 2022; Mendoza, 2022). One partner should not be considered superior to the other in perceptions, design, contributions or in the benefits experienced. When one partner is perceived as superior this encourages and perpetuates epistemic injustices by keeping one partner as the giver of knowledge and understanding and one as the receiver (Mendoza, 2022). To have equality between partners it is critical to establish and nurture deep relationships between individuals involved in the partnerships (Mendoza, 2022). Leal Filho et al., (2022) stated, “these individuals (champions of the partnerships) must find common goals with their international partners that guide projects and initiatives, have the cultural and linguistic competencies for successful interactions and relationship building, and have the necessary support and incentives from their institutions” (p. 56).

Many international university partnerships fail to reach implementation, making sound planning critical for success. Planning help avoids anticipated challenges and allows room for flexibility and agility, cushioning against unanticipated challenges. Important planning considerations fall roughly into two categories, administrative or operational aspects and cultural and contextual factors (Helms, 2015). It is critical to establish and maintain transparency for legal, financial, and academic concerns; to continually engage leadership and necessary faculty and staff and to institute an evaluation process to maintain quality (Helms, 2015; Tekleselassie & Ford, 2019).

Institutional culture is one area that formally sanctioned policies, rules, and regulations established during the partnership provide limited ground rules for success. Culture determines unwritten rules that govern gender and race relationships, exposes ethical concerns about who benefits or loses, helps analyze issues of access and equity, and the overall impact of the partnership on institutional and

human capacity (Helms, 2015; Tekleselassie & Ford, 2019). As a result, a successful partnership depends on conscious efforts to accept cultural differences and account for opportunities and challenges unique to the makeup of each institution. Cultural knowledge is cultivated when communication remains open at all stages of the partnership (Tekleselassie & Ford, 2019), building a sense of confidence, inclusivity, and transparency.

Hybrid Models

Details of hybrid models vary widely; however, a brief review will be provided highlighting characteristics of effective design choices. Successfully designed hybrid models tend to pull from the benefits of both synchronous face-to-face and online asynchronous modalities, while often decreasing or avoiding the challenges. Key considerations for hybrid programs include the choice of learning hub or learning management system (LMS), techniques for effective communication, strategies for encouraging and supporting time management, ease of access to digital content, and strategic harnessing of both synchronous and asynchronous pedagogies (O'Byrne & Pytash, 2015).

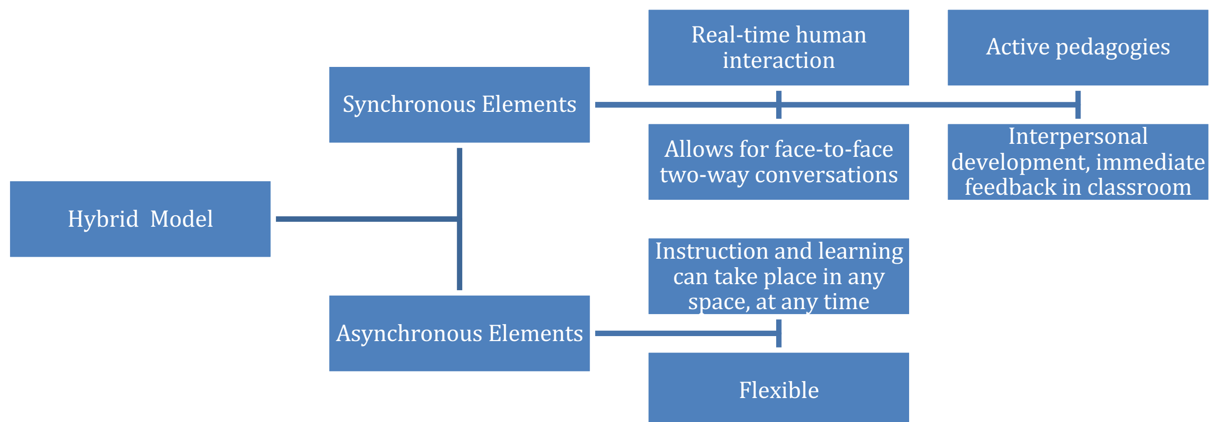
Face-to-face learning, which traditionally took place by meeting in the same physical space allowing for two-way conversations, now includes, synchronized online options such as conference calls, video conference calls, computer-based conference calls, webinars, (Varkonyi, 2012), and online live classroom sessions. The benefits of synchronized modalities include human interaction and verbal exchange of ideas (Varkonyi, 2012), as well as a sense of community that can be built while meeting together.

Asynchronized learning takes place when and where the instructor and students choose. In this modality, students enjoy the flexibility of accessing the learning materials from the comfort of their physical spaces (office, home, etc.), and on their own time, avoiding the need to travel to campus to attend scheduled classes. Asynchronous elements are delivered through discussion boards, group projects, collaborative papers, etc. A major benefit of asynchronized methods is that they are not bound by pace, time, or place (O'Byrne & Pytash, 2015).

Several benefits are experienced when there is a hybrid of both synchronized and asynchronized elements both delivered online. These include reduced financial burden and reduced need for classroom space, equipment, and travel. Hybrid models embrace the benefits of the asynchronous aspects, which include having time to go over materials individually to become more prepared to engage in classwork and discussions (Shea et al., 2015). Having time to think and prepare before interactions can encourage participation in discussions for students who do not feel comfortable when put on the spot in face-to-face courses. This suggests that the asynchronous portion can be more equitable as it allows time for students to work at their own pace and not compete for time in class (Shea et al., 2015). Some students also find it less stressful to work on their own time, when they have more motivation to learn, as opposed to being tied to class schedules. Online hybrid models also allow for students and faculty to gain exposure to scholars from outside of their geographic location, diverse individuals who they may otherwise not have the opportunity to work with (Stephens et al., 2017).

Scholars underscore that while designing hybrid instruction can take a colossal amount of work on the frontend as courses are designed, it provides multiple benefits (Beck, 2010). See Figure 1. Some of the benefits Beck (2010) discussed include (a) the opportunity to have enhanced and highly rigorous instruction, standard curriculum, and access to peer discussion forums; (b) unrestricted access to more enhanced and interactive learning materials such as videos, PowerPoints, and simulated activities; and (c) high student exam performance because of access to the rigorous and standardized curriculum.

Figure 1
Benefits of Hybrid Models



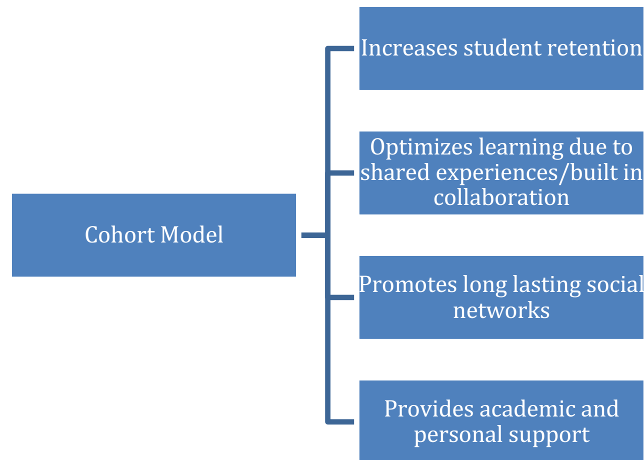
A hybrid modality, however, has its challenges. Technical issues are a common challenge that frustrate both instructors and students. Some of these are difficult to avoid especially when an institution lacks optimal instructional technology or supports (Tekleselassie & Ford, 2019). Other logistic challenges are avoidable through advanced planning; for example, providing clear expectations and a weekly course calendar, as well as detailed information on technologies. Another common challenge is what Shea et al. (2016) call transactional distance, a barrier to creating an active learning environment due the physical distance between the instructor and the students. These authorities advise that using technology in a loose as opposed to tightly structured fashion, the instructors can leverage technology to promote an active learning environment where students feel connected and engaged.

Cohort Model Programs in Educational Leadership

Many educational leadership programs are built on a cohort model, where students take all or most of their courses together throughout their program, promoting "group cohesion" (Bista & Cox, 2014, p. 4). Additional benefits are experienced with this model for students in educational leadership doctoral programs including high student retention; shared optimal experiences and collaborations; creation of social ties; and increased academic and professional support and interaction. Both faculty and students often express appreciation for what is gained using this model (Bista & Cox, 2014; Leland et al., 2020). See Figure 2.

When people learn together, a certain level of power is accessed through shared understanding, experiences, and reflection. Group projects and group discussions are key components of effective cohort models (Leland et al., 2020). Leadership is an applied field, requiring skills of shared learning which helps to make the connections between theory and practice. Therefore, having goals emphasizing collaboration and shared learning as skills enhance takeaways.

Figure 2
Benefits of Cohort Models



Research Design and Methodology

This study used thematic analysis, document analysis, and participant observation for data collection (Kawulich, 2005). Thematically, a close review of the literature was performed examining best practices and norms to investigate and further understand the phenomena of first-year implementation, including classroom dynamics, and unique design aspects. The documents examined included archival and policy documents, the service contract, the design team report, and the program/course curriculum framework. Included as part of the data source are the authors' direct accounts and experiences as participant observers. Meeting reports, personal reflections, journals we collected throughout the partnership served as important sources of data offering an insider's look at the research process (deMunck & Sobo, 1988; Kawulich, 2005). It can be argued that informal conversations are just as valid a method of qualitative data collection as more formal methods, such as interviews and focus groups (Swain & Spire, 2020). It can also be argued that the organic conversations that take place and are used in participant observation may produce more meaningful and robust data than just what is collected through more formal means (Swain & Spire, 2020).

Our personal account captured both planned activities, design elements (included in the original framework of the partnership agreement), as well as unplanned and emergent decisions created in response to immediate and unanticipated opportunities and challenges that occurred during the partnership implementation. By capturing our voices and perspectives as participants intimately involved in both planned and unplanned happenings of this partnership, participant observation served as the most effective method (Kawulich, 2005; Swain & Spire, 2020). We as researchers, however, admit that our perspectives are limited and thus can contain bias, (Kawulich, 2005), a limitation that we attempted to overcome as we reported our findings.

Discussion of Findings

(a) What approaches or design decisions grounded the partnership to accommodate the needs of major clientele?

Design Team

During the planning stage, each institution identified and appointed key Design Team (DT) members who oversaw the day-to-day implementation of the partnership. The first DT member and one of the authors of this article, was the *partnership lead and male representative from the US institution*. He was a part of the partnership discussions from the beginning. Originally from an East African country, he received his Ph.D. from a US institution and had worked in US higher education since 2005. He was a subject matter expert (SME) in Educational Leadership and Administration and an expert on the program offered by the US institution. He was intimately involved in all discussions, deliberations, and decisions made through the first year of implementation and he also designed and taught the first of the six courses.

The next DT member was the *female representative from the US institution.* She was also a part of the DT from the earliest discussions. She was an SME in K-12 Administration and a long-time employee of the US Institution. She retired from her university position immediately prior to implementation, however, remained intimately involved and designed and taught a course for the first year. Her K-12 as well as higher education institutional knowledge and leadership experience uniquely qualified her to fill this role.

The next DT member was that of the *permanent male ME representative*. He was not involved in the initial discussions but joined the ME institution and the partnership during the planning stage and played a critical role in helping get the paperwork signed and passed through the two universities. He was originally from a West African country, however had been educated and employed in the US prior to moving to the ME country. Thus, he was a bridge and cultural ambassador between the US faculty, with their Western perspective, and those he worked directly with at the ME institution.

The next member was that of the *permanent female ME representative.* She joined the partnership during the planning stage. She was the only one on the team originally from the ME country but had obtained her Ph.D. from a European country, strengthening the bridge between the Western perspective and that of the ME country. She was the only DT member who wrote and spoke Arabic, the main language of the students, and thus also contributed heavily to translations. As six of the eight students enrolled in the first cohort were females, she served as an important conduit between the instructors and female students, a cultural norm that had to be accommodated throughout implementation.

The final DT member was the *permanent female US faculty coordinator*, also one of the authors of this article. She was brought onto the team about a year before the first cohort started with the specific purpose of being a full-time overseer of operations between the US and the ME institutions and faculty. She was from the US and educated in the US, however, was equipped with a variety of international cultural experiences that assisted in her role. Another skill she brought was in the area of academic writing, which filled both anticipated and unanticipated needs.

The DT supported the partnership through various activities to ensure that the design and the implementation work proceeded as planned. While all team members worked collaboratively, the DT members at the US institution engaged in four different activities to support the partnership. First, they conducted workshops and training for faculty, university leadership, alumni, and K-12 partners at the ME University. Data and feedback received during the workshops helped customize the Ph.D. curriculum to the unique needs and priorities of the ME University. Second, based on additional input received from the

workshops, the DT offered training for course instructors at the US institution to customize their syllabi, instructional strategies, and expectations for the Ph.D. program. Third, they organized and facilitated meetings between instructors of the two institutions, creating space for direct communication and collaboration. Fourth, they facilitated implementation by leveraging resources within the US university (such as IT, library services, English Language support) to assist both instructors and students.

The DT members in the ME institution supported the partnership in various ways, centering their work on four areas. First, they supported by identifying locally available materials and resources that enhanced student experience, including local education policies, translation of local materials from Arabic to English, and connecting students to locally available data sources. Second, they facilitated internship sites in districts, schools, and higher education institutions, and provided the data US instructors needed to support students. Third, they participated in all classroom sessions as facilitators, providing translation support as needed but also interpreting key concepts, and theories, helping students apply them to the local context. Fourth, and a related role, was that they served as liaisons, supporting US instructors to organize instruction within acceptable norms and practices of the ME university. For example, as most classes were organized in seminar format, involving group activities and active pedagogies, the physical configuration mattered in a culture that disapproves males and females sitting next to each other. As a result, the male and female ME DT members facilitated group activities with their corresponding groups; however, after each group completed their activities, the DT members reported everyone's contributions to the entire class, creating additional space for all students as well as the instructor to probe, internalize, and provide additional perspectives on the activity.

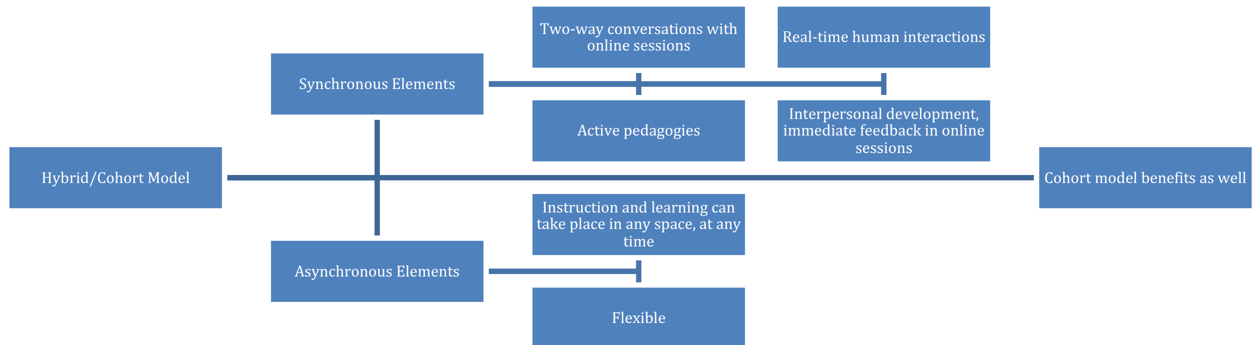
The unique perspectives and strengths of each member of the DT and the positive relationship dynamics between the members were critical at every stage and created an environment of equality and mutuality (Hamdullahpur, 2020; Leal Filho et al., 2022; Mendoza, 2022). On the ME side, each of the permanent faculty representatives primarily dealt with the students of their same sex based on cultural norms, however, they created a cohesive atmosphere and communicated well what each was learning and doing with the students. On the US side, the faculty coordinator also attended all live synchronized sessions of every course and kept the lead male informed at all times on the status of the implementation, as he was not able to be on the project 100% of the time. The faculty coordinator was also able to support the instructors of each course by taking on the responsibility of helping students with the additional writing work necessary for the online elements (Shea et al., 2015), specifically with the language barrier that ended up being more intense than originally anticipated. A successful partnership may not have been as secure had the DT individuals not come to the table with their specific skill sets, perspectives, and backgrounds, and had they not communicated and worked well together (Leal Filho et al., 2022). A great synergy was established creating a "win-win situation" benefiting all parties (Leal Filho et al., 2022, p. 2). The next section will examine the model choices for this partnership.

Approaches to the Hybrid Cohort Model

As the key players engaged in negotiations for years prior to the implementation of the first cohort, one of many areas of discussions included the model that would be used; other discussions surrounded the teaching structure that would be employed including the best order of courses for the program. DT members were aware that the model chosen must be congruent to the values, mission, and cultural tapestry of participating institutions and that of the host country. In addition, as the candidates were to receive educational credentials from both institutions, a Post Master's Certificate from the US university, and Ph.D., from the ME university, much time and effort were invested in creating a model and curricula to meet the standards for both universities.

The model agreed upon was to be hybrid, in that there would be synchronous delivery of instruction via online live sessions, and asynchronous elements to enhance and expand the curriculum. The model was also a cohort, in that there would be one group of students that would move through all of the first six courses together. See Figure 3.

Figure 3
Benefits of Hybrid/Cohort Model

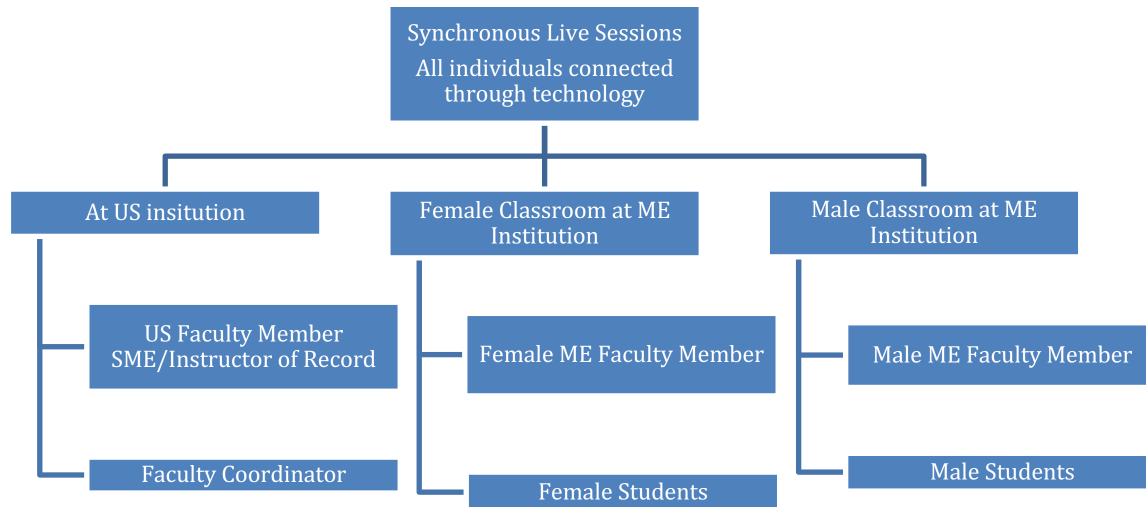


When considering the cohort size, the number had to be high enough to make it financially viable and not too high that the students would not receive high quality instruction. It was determined that eight students with high levels of English skills would be admitted. Over 300 applicants applied, and many were vetted in the process of finalizing those chosen to be admitted.

Teaching Structure

At the time of designing this program, the ME country did not accredit fully online programs or accept them as rigorous educational experiences. This led to the need for ME faculty and students to attend scheduled classes in on campus classrooms. The teaching structure included having both the male and female ME faculty facilitating the class sessions while the US faculty and instructors of record for the courses attended each live session via video streaming using Blackboard Collaborate. The requirement of both a male and female ME faculty enabled the female students to attend in one classroom while the male students attended in another, accommodating the cultural norms of the ME country. Therefore, for every synchronized live session there were two US faculty and two ME faculty involved. On the US side, there was one SME who was also the instructor of record, and the full-time faculty coordinator. On the ME side, there was both a male and a female faculty member to facilitate the classroom activities. See Figure 4.

Figure 4
Online Live Session Structure



The online synchronized sessions allowed the ME students to see their professors in the US and feel more connected to them, allowing them to benefit from strong relationship through the face-to-face component this modality provides. The full-time faculty coordinator working on the US side as well as the two facilitators on the ME side had strong relations that had been established and developed long before the students were admitted (Leal Filho et al., 2022; Mendoza, 2022). These relationships were critical in maintaining the cohesiveness even with the physical distance between faculty and students during live sessions.

The ME faculty were continually available to serve as cultural ambassadors to students and help to diffuse culture shock, especially in the early classes. As was mentioned earlier in the section on the DT, these faculty members were chosen based on their backgrounds that included substantial experience in Western education with both earning their Ph.D.'s in Western countries. The male possessed international working experience and the female had strong local knowledge that was critical to identify and interpret locally relevant instructional resources due to her high level of language proficiency. For example, in the school law course, she assisted in identifying, translating, and interpreting state and national laws, providing the resources and the cultural context the US instructor needed to make the course relevant. These DT members addressed academic as well as personal challenges students faced, removing barriers that could have hindered success. Face-to-face consultations, meetings and advising sessions occurred routinely between the DT members in the ME university and the students; however, between the US instructors and students, they took place during synchronous classes two times a week. As can be seen in the section on the DT, the design was heavy in human capacity.

Since the US institution was to supply the subject matter experts to design the curriculum for each course as well as to teach the first six courses, several regular faculty were involved. To teach the courses and continue with their normal duties at their US institution, the faculty remained in the United States while designing the courses and even while teaching the first year. In order to meet the face-to-face requirement of the ME Ministry of Education, the faculty taught a couple live sessions online each week, while their ME counterparts facilitated in the classroom in the ME country where all of the students attended. See Figure 4. This model tapped into the benefits of both face-to-face and virtual components, even though instruction took place on two continents (O'Byrne & Pytash, 2015). As a result of the design, students were provided with high quality resources, online access to course materials that they could read

on their own pace, while at the same time allowing them to connect face-to-face with the faculty and their peers using classroom activities that allowed for collaboration as a cohort.

In addition to the structure of online sessions, strategic decisions were made in the order of classes. Since the US faculty already carried instructional loads at their home institutions, negotiations included timing that would work for each of them, as well as ensuring the concepts in each course built on and complemented the previous courses. Therefore, the first course taught by the permanent male faculty DT member from the US institution, was on the principalship, and naturally a foundational course for the program. As he was also an integral member of the DT and held a cross-cultural perspective, he was able to facilitate a successful start for the first year. He, the program coordinator, and the ME faculty observed closely during the first course for any areas requiring adjustments in order to create a sustainable partnership course by course.

Utilizing knowledge and experiences as hybrid programs progress is a critical aspect of ongoing improvement and sustainability (Shea et al., 2015). Due to a strong start with the first course and the close relationships within the DT, areas that needed to be smoothed out were done so in a professional and non-threatening manner. The knowledge and experiences gained early on and in subsequent courses, were taken forward allowing for improvements which snowballed, culminating in a much easier experience for the faculty and students with courses that took place near the end of the first year. This knowledge included how to effectively overcome the challenges faced with technology, and the different learning styles and expectations of students as opposed to the teaching styles of the US faculty.

(b) What instructional and learning outcomes emerged through the first-year implementation and how do they inform research, policy, and practice for future university partnerships?

The US institution had SME faculty that were involved in designing and redesigning courses that would be used throughout the Ph.D. program. In addition, the US institution provided the faculty members that taught courses for the first year. Instructors who take on hybrid courses need training or experience to fully utilize the benefits of both the online and the face-to-face elements as well must be willing to overcome the challenges this modality presents (Shea et al., 2015). All the US faculty involved in his partnership had already received such training and had the experience and the willingness to implement the hybrid model of instruction as planned.

During the early courses, however, the faculty members expressed discomfort teaching this cohort, because they were unsure about the level of student readiness and English language proficiency. Those concerns, however, began to subside once the professors came to know and work with the students. As the year progressed, there were fewer questions, the students worked hard, and the instructors adjusted to the learning needs and styles of students.

Faculty did experience philosophical differences and divergence about appropriate instructional strategies in graduate programs. Based on the regional culture, the ME faculty and students were accustomed to high power distance culture, and subscribed to instructional strategies that sanction teacher authority, and limit free interaction between teachers and students (Hofstede, 2001). In comparison, the US faculty came from low power distance culture where power is more equalized between instructors and students. The US faculty advocate for student-centered, active and interactive pedagogies. These philosophical differences impacted classroom participation during the initial phase of implementation as students were accustomed to and desired more instructor dominated instruction, resulting in limited interaction. To overcome these challenges, professors learned not to wait for volunteers but rather called students by name. Professors also began supplying discussion questions to the students ahead of the online sessions to give them time to create answers and more confidently participate in class. This was particularly helpful due to the limited mastery of academic English.

Collaboration was a key element in many of the courses, making particular use of the relationship aspect of the cohort design. Due to cultural norms in the ME country, collaboration is not as encouraged or acceptable between the sexes. Female students were able to glean more benefits from collaboration because there were six of them, however, due to the small number of males (two) they had less of an opportunity to learn through collaboration with peers. An optimal cohort experience would have included more males to allow for further collaboration and increased experiences of group dynamics. This was an area that the academic expectations and cultural norms were at conflict and is something that future cohorts would benefit from planning accordingly for more even distribution of female and male students.

The US professors learned from those that taught before them in the schedule, and as they gained more personal experience, they were better equipped to provide higher quality instruction for the students. The learning experiences that took place for both the professors from the US institution and for the faculty members from the ME were critical and priceless.

Conclusion

Moving into the future, international university partnerships will be increasingly necessary due to globalization, and many such partnerships require colossal effort at various levels, from top university administration to the national education related government entities, to faculty, students, and all groups that can be impacted. Obtaining and considering the input from these groups before implementation is critical to appropriately customize the curriculum for indigenous and local practices, especially those including aspects involving sustained internship and practicum experiences. Second, it is critical to incorporate design features that include local expertise as these offer numerous dividends, connection to local resources, avoiding cultural blind spots, and helping overcome challenges not anticipated in the design.

Third, all parties should benefit from partnerships. For example, in this case, the ME university gained a newly developed Ph.D. program, grew in human capacity and cultural awareness, and the US university benefited not only in terms of tuition revenue, but also gained valuable lessons and cross-cultural experiences as it diversified and enriched courses and instructional strategies. This confirms that successful international partnerships are mutual, and benefit all parties engaged and that this understanding requires moving beyond paternalistic, reductive, "North-South Global Perspectives" many traditional partnerships promulgate.

Implications and Recommendations

The implications from this study include the important need for both partner universities to have a voice in the collaborations for the cohort experience to succeed. The partners needed to collaborate on preferred instructional modalities, cohort size and student composition, internship placements and the nature of the internship experience, access to library and local resources in both countries, and much more. In addition, while the degree granting university in the US may need to decide on the academic qualifications of admitted students, the partner institution must have a voice on secondary criteria such as gender composition, years and types of experience, the geographic region of the candidate, school level of the candidate etc., tailoring the admission criteria to human resource and equity-related needs of the country. Such joint admission processes allowed both partner institutions to provide input on considerations most useful to them. Recommendations for future investigations include studies that examine the perspectives of all stakeholders, all design members, and all faculty involved in curriculum design and instruction of courses. Adding these various perspectives would help to overcome the limitations inherent to participant observation that grounded this study.

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