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Making Virtual Global Learning Transformative and Inclusive: A Critical Reflective Study on High-Impact Practices in Higher Education

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Article abstract

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Making Virtual Global Learning Transformative and Inclusive: A Critical Reflective Study on High-Impact Practices in Higher Education

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of global competence, agility, empathy, and innovation in managing opportunities, crises, and problems. Global learning and engagement in higher education is the pathway towards developing learners' intercultural competence, fostering an appreciation of diversity, inclusion, and equity, and empowering individual agency towards collective wellbeing and sustainability. Digital transformation and available tools have expanded the scope and depth of global learning in virtual environments. This article reports a critical reflective study on virtual global learning and shares high-impact, evidenced-based strategies to make virtual global learning more equitable, inclusive, meaningful, and relevant to all learners in higher education.

Introduction

Local and international organizations in public, private, and non-profit sectors are experiencing increasingly complex relationships within and outside national borders through various social, cultural, technological, economic, environmental, and political channels. Diversity, characterized by perspective, experience, race, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, gender, ability, age, religion, and nationality, has become salient in many individuals' socio-cultural and professional lives. The COVID-19 global pandemic and the increasing digitalization in our personal and professional lives have brought an uncertain future to all organizations and individuals, including higher education systems and institutions.

In public, private, and non-profit organizations, leaders and employees need cultural competency to effectively collaborate with people from diverse backgrounds,



solve problems innovatively, make democratic decisions, and advance organizational inclusion and sustainability (Likhotal, 2020). Higher education institutions' public responsibility in preparing globally competent individuals who can manage the opportunities and risks associated with the ever-changing political, social, economic, technological, and ecological environment is more critical than ever (Kaplan, 2021). A globally competent individual

understands the complexity and interdependence of global issues or forces that affect their lives, professions, and organizations, who know how to tackle the equity and inclusion issues associated with the diversity of workplaces and communities, who are open-minded for different perspectives and experiences in collaborative problem-solving, and who are committed to more significant equity and justice through responsible citizenship and leadership in both local and global contexts. (Guo-Brennan, 2020, p. 128)

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of global competence in managing opportunities and crises, understanding different cultural perspectives in problem-solving, demonstrating empathy towards others, and stimulating innovation that transcends cultural boundaries (Alvarez et al., 2020; Jackson, 2019; Stryjek, 2021). As the critical sources of new ideas and discoveries, technological advances, and cultural and creative talents and the engines of local, national, and global economic development, higher education institutions (HEIs) have the public responsibility to meet the societal and organizational needs of globally competent human capital through global learning for all learners. Global learning refers to "the process of diverse people collaboratively analyzing and addressing complex problems that transcend borders" (Landorf et al., 2018, p. 32) and is the pathway for developing global competence (Clinton, 2014; Kim & Maloney, 2020; Li & Liu, 2021; Matolay et al., 2021). However, access to global learning has been uneven and limited in higher education, as most global learning and engagement opportunities occur in a few international programs, which excludes most learners (Helms & Brajkovic, 2017; Helms et al., 2017; Leask, 2016).

The emerging opportunities and challenges in the twenty-first century require all learners to develop global competence and citizenship through expanding their knowledge of significant global issues and trends, fostering global perspectives in disciplinary and professional learning, practicing informed decision making, and learning to take responsible actions in their personal and professional lives (Alida, 2019; Banks & Banks, 2016; Guo, 2014; UNESCO, 2018). Developing globally competent citizens, professionals, and leaders in a holistic, authentic, and cost-effective approach remains a critical consideration in professional programs in higher education. However, the predetermined national standards for professional programs and the practical requirements for professional licensure greatly limit professionals' global learning and engagement opportunities. In addition, it may be difficult for program developers to add additional degree requirements, particularly as core courses. In such cases, course content and the teaching and learning process must intentionally include global and multiple perspectives and contexts relevant to learners' backgrounds.

Global learning is the pathway of preparing globally competent citizens, professionals, and leaders for inclusive and sustainable organizations and societies (Whitehead, 2015). It should be transformative and accessible to all learners. The

opportunities to examine the significant issues in the twenty-first century and foster appreciation towards sustainability, human rights, peace, equity, and inclusion are critical for advancing the collective wellbeing of shared humanity and building inclusive cultures in organizations and communities (de Aquino et al., 2017).

Transformative Global Learning: A Literature Review

Global learning refers to educational practices that enable people to understand and address persistent transnational challenges such as hunger, poverty, conflict, energy insecurity, and ethical dilemmas associated with advances in science and technology. Global learning does not equal internationalization, motivated by academic, economic, or socio-cultural rationales. It is a mindful educational process that helps learners develop global awareness and knowledge of the world's complexity and interconnectedness within the context of diversity and disparity. In global learning, learners are encouraged to analyze the complexity of issues by examining their causes and consequences, being exposed to diverse perspectives and experiences, developing competencies in promoting sustainable development (Nordén & Avery, 2021), and engaging with others to advance innovation and wellbeing in local and global communities (Cronin et al., 2016; Fuertes-Camacho et al., 2019; Richardson, 2017; Tuitt et al., 2016; Whitehead, 2015).

Global learning is different from intercultural learning, one of the objectives of language studies, area studies, and education abroad programs. Intercultural learning disorients learners' own cultural identities and existing worldviews in authentic intercultural interactions. When experiencing intercultural learning in education abroad programs, learners have much less control over the situations. They may encounter significant disorienting dilemmas and challenges associated with specific historical, socio-cultural, and economic contexts. Without purposeful facilitation and reflection, learners may not understand dominant beliefs, social habits, and normative practices that sustain inequities, conflicts, and challenges (Gómez-Parra, 2020; Markey et al., 2020; O'Neill et al., 2019; VanLeeuwen et al., 2019). They may also experience injustice and discrimination in the settings of intercultural learning, which is a growing ethical concern in international higher education.

Intercultural learning can occur in all culturally diverse learning contexts when intentionally structured and facilitated. In such settings, learners could interact and spend time with people from different cultures, ask questions related to cultures, reflect on cultural learning, and compare the similarities and differences among various cultures (Otten, 2016). Through establishing an open and safe learning environment, instructors can purposely integrate intercultural understanding into the mainstream teaching and learning process by facilitating meaningful cross-cultural interactions, assigning readings from different cultural contexts, and engaging learners in activities in classrooms and communities. This type of intercultural learning helps learners critically examine their cherished cultural beliefs, understandings, or behaviors (Markey et al., 2020). These opportunities and experiences enable all learners to become more mindful of assumptions and biases and develop critical thinking and literacy through reflective learning. Intercultural experiences built into teaching and learning also lead to global perspectives on disciplinary knowledge, enhanced professional skills in complex thinking and problem-

solving, reduced cultural stereotypes and discrimination, and strengthened attributes towards cross-cultural collaboration and innovation (Shugurova, 2021).

Informed by Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 2009), transformative global learning (TGL) reconstructs one's frames of reference in cognitive, socioemotional, and behavioral dimensions of global citizenship and leadership. Global issues, diversity, inclusion, collaboration, and reflection are critical components in TGL. These components provide space and opportunities for individuals to develop global competencies in understanding the political, economic, and social conditions impacting their communities and lives. Global learning can be effective intercultural learning through the *pedagogy of difference* (Allport, 1954; Trifonas, 2005), the intentional approach to reduce prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination towards other cultures and peoples through meaningful and reflective encounters with disagreements.

Global identity refers to an interdependency construct of relational belonging that transcends geography and cultures in finding creative solutions (Bamber et al., 2018; Guo-Brennan, 2020). It enables individuals to make decisions and take actions through understanding and influencing a range of internal and external constituents from multiple national cultures and jurisdictions in a context characterized by significant levels of relationship complexity. Global identity is developed through four equally essential phases, as shown in Figure 1.

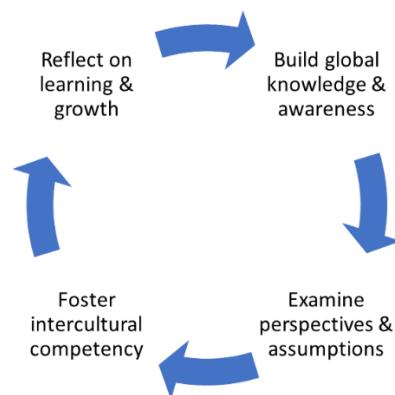


Figure 1: Global identity formation cycle (adapted from Guo-Brennan, 2020).

This process contains four steps: a) developing global knowledge and awareness; b) examining perspectives and assumptions; c) developing cultural competency; and d) conducting critical reflection. When global identity development is intentional in the educational process, learners have opportunities to repeat the cycles regularly, and each cycle further develops the cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral dimensions of global citizenship as described in Table 1 (World Economic Forum, 2021).

Table 1: Dimensions of global citizenship (UNESCO, 2021).

Cognitive
Knowledge, understanding, and critical thinking about global, regional, national, and local issues and the interconnectedness and interdependency of different countries and populations.
Socio-emotional
A sense of belonging to common humanity, sharing values and responsibilities, empathy, solidarity, and respect for differences and diversity.
Behavioral
Effective and responsible actions at local, national, and global levels for a more peaceful and sustainable world.

Diversity: A Condition of Global Learning

Diversity has become a salient feature of organizations, communities, and societies in an interconnected world and has implications for individuals' personal and professional lives. It refers to different perspectives, experiences, races, ethnicities, languages, socioeconomic statuses, gender identifications, abilities, ages, religions, and worldviews. Diversity requires citizens, professionals, and leaders to understand different cultural perspectives in problem solving, demonstrate respect and empathy towards others, and engage in collaboration for innovation through constructing relational belonging that transcends cultural boundaries (Clarke & Drudy, 2006; Morency et al., 2017; Otten, 2016; Solomon & Singer, 2011).

Diversity is a prominent issue affecting the policy, leadership, and practices in higher education, a system significantly influenced by globalization, migration, geopolitical relations, and the massification of global higher education (Sairsingh et al., 2020). Diversity requires higher education policies, leadership, and processes to address inequity and exclusion affecting all individuals (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2019). It cannot be merely the responsibility of an office or an administrative position. When diversity is indispensable to institutional governance, policy, and practices, diversity becomes the condition of an inclusive and equitable education process and enhances institutional reputation and excellence towards a more just and sustainable world (Hoffman & Spangehl, 2012; Matolay et al., 2021; Tsai et al., 2011).

Compared to learning in homogeneous groups, learners in diverse socio-cultural groups have access to different cognitive tools, various perspectives, and more opportunities to engage in critical thinking, problem-solving, interpretation, and predictions to understand the world around them (de Aquino et al., 2017; Whitehead, 2015). This type of learning experience generates more creative ideas and innovative solutions. In addition, learners' identities, as demonstrated in ethnicity, culture, language, gender, religion, ability, socioeconomic status, and nationalities, affect their education experiences, socio-cultural norms, and worldviews. Explicitly, diversity offers learners rich opportunities to

- Build cross-cultural relationships.
- Develop appreciation towards different perspectives, worldviews, beliefs, and experiences.
- Increase knowledge and awareness about other cultures through readings, observation, and interacting with members of different cultures.

- Cope with ambiguity, uncertainty, risks, and opportunities associated with more significant learning responsibility and intercultural experiences.
- Synthesize and translate culturally and contextually relevant information.
- Develop interpersonal and intercultural communication skills.
- Balance the individual and collective cultural dimensions.
- Serve as the leader and resource of cultural learning.

Learning engagement and social interactions in a diverse environment require all learners, consciously or unconsciously, to adjust perceptions, understandings, and behaviors to effectively communicate and collaborate with peers from different backgrounds. Diversity allows learners to foster intercultural competency: the capability to shift cultural perspectives and adapt behavior to cultural differences. It is the condition for an individual to cultivate skills to relate with people from other cultural backgrounds and include them in decision making. This attribute is a distinctive dimension of globally competent citizens, professionals, and leaders.

Attending to diversity, equity, and inclusion issues in teaching and learning in higher education ensures all learners have the opportunity to connect learning with their identities in a meaningful way. They have sustained opportunities to examine their worldviews, beliefs, values, and behaviors, practice cross-cultural communication and collaboration, and conduct informed decision making and knowledge translation. This type of global learning advances institutional excellence, equity, and inclusion, as it is more effective, meaningful, inclusive, and engaging for all learners (de Aquino et al., 2017; Georgetown Institute for Women, 2019).

Research Design and Methods

Critical reflection is a process of examining assumptions, beliefs, values, traditions, histories, and power and their impact on relations and practices (Ng et al., 2019). In education, this process involves the examination of educational, socio-cultural, political, and environmental spheres to enable alternative actions by practitioners and to understand the needs of learners alongside dominant knowledge and perspectives inherent in educational systems, policies, curriculum, and practices (Dosser, 2016; Mathieson, 2016; Pockett, 2018). When used as a research methodology, critical reflection emphasizes reflexivity: the influence of the researcher and the impact of a researcher's positioning in conducting the research (Morley, 2008). In education, critical reflection is a way of knowing, which involves identifying and questioning dominant discourses, identifying different perspectives, and uncovering how a system maintains its dominant cultures, powers, values, relationships, and practices (Ng et al., 2019). Critical reflection is adopted to guide research design, data collection, and data interpretation.

The author has been engaged in international and global education research, teaching, and educational services for three decades. Critical global learning is a focused topic of her scholarly efforts and an integral component of all courses she has designed and delivered in higher education. Critical reflection and reflexivity are focused on documenting the achievements, complexities, tensions, and struggles of teaching and learning global education. Participants of this study include 85 in-service educators and international students enrolled in a Master of Education graduate program and 120 pre-service educators enrolled in a Bachelor of Education program at a Canadian university.

Data were collected between January 2020 and Fall 2021. In this period, the global pandemic forced all teachers and learners to swiftly shift to online teaching and learning, thus creating opportunities for international graduate learners and pre-service educators to participate in online learning. This new teaching scenario allowed the author to integrate critical global learning objectives and outcomes into course design, content materials selection, learning activities, and assignments to meet learners' diverse learning needs.

Data was collected from course syllabi, teaching observation and reflection, and participants' weekly online discussions and course reflections. The author has obtained informed consent from all course participants to use their forum discussions and learning reflections for research and publication purposes. This article uses pseudonyms and pseudo-genders to protect participants' identities.

Findings and Discussions

Education technology has changed how people learn, interact, and collaborate in the digital age and provided more opportunities for learners to develop intercultural competence and digital literacy. Virtual global learning can be delivered through a combination of asynchronous technologies such as course management systems (CMS), discussion forums, blogs, and emails and synchronous technologies such as web-conferencing, chats, and videoconferencing. These technologies can create authentic cross-cultural learning, broaden understanding and perspectives on materials and content, provide opportunities for all learners to connect learning with their prior knowledge, and improve skills in cross-cultural collaboration and communication (de Aquino et al., 2017; Deardorff, 2020; Elsie et al., 2009; Greene, 2003; O'Neill et al., 2019). Virtual global learning can be more inclusive because it allows the instructor to adopt a wide range of curriculum materials, provides opportunities for all learners to deepen their understanding of critical issues collaboratively, and demonstrate learning outcomes in a tangible way (MacDonald & Sheppard-LeMoine, 2018; Remy et al., 2017; Seitan et al., 2020). Data collected from learners' reflections indicated four major themes essential to transformative and inclusive global learning in a virtual environment.

Flexibility in teaching and learning

Flexibility and adaptability are two important personal traits of globally competent people. When most workplaces, businesses, schools, and universities had to close during the global health crisis, the ability to remain flexible and adaptable became critical for individuals and organizations to manage the risks, stress, uncertainty, and opportunities that resulted. Virtual global learning requires educators to adapt to learners' needs for a flexible learning engagement process. As more and more learners in higher education are working professionals pursuing professional learning and development on a part-time basis, they need a more flexible learning environment to balance the demands of learning, working, and family. This changing student demographic requires educators to plan for and maintain flexibility in learning objectives, personalized assessment strategies, and demonstrating learning outcomes (Ali, 2020; Avery et al., 2021; Dolighan & Owen, 2021; Hergüner et al., 2021; Kamble et al., 2021). Reflecting on his experiences with asynchronous online learning, Kevin commented:

As a father of three young girls, I appreciated the flexibility and freedom to work on the modules as our lives permitted. I also really enjoyed the forum discussions. I admit I was hesitant about them at first. Still, I now see such value in sharing with peers, especially when everyone has time to formulate their ideas clearly and concisely, which doesn't always happen on the spot in a classroom. (Course reflection, September 2021).

Ben, an international graduate student, shared his very first online global learning experiences by saying:

This is the first online course I have taken. At first, it was a big challenge. After a couple of modules, I gradually got used to it. I think that sharing with classmates is a hidden course. The different experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives triggered my deep thinking about learning from others. The course design and delivery reflected the diversity and helped me understand the importance of flexibility in curriculum and teaching. (Course reflection, June 2020).

Collaborative intercultural learning

The student population in higher education classrooms is becoming increasingly diverse, as learners from varying ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic, and national backgrounds take the same courses. This diversity is an authentic global learning context where all learners can engage in intercultural understanding, interaction, communication, co-knowledge creation, self-regulation, and negotiation with peers and instructors (Viana & Peralta, 2021). Conversations and discussions are a dialectic dialogue process of questioning and answering, giving and taking, sharing with cross-purposes, and developing multiple perspectives on a shared topic. Online discussions and conversations allow all learners to share cultural experiences and interpretations, deepen understanding of issues significant to the disciplines and professions, and explore the implications of ideas in contexts of their personal and professional interests.

When facilitated to critically engage with complex issues relevant to various contexts and cultures, online conversations become the venue for learners to examine the imbalanced power and relationships that cause inequity and exclusion in workplaces, communities, and societies. Diverse online learning environments help all learners to develop critical literacy, global perspectives of disciplinary knowledge and practices, skills and attributes in creating inclusive organizational cultures and practices, and the capacity to respect and include people from different backgrounds in decision-making (Shultz et al., 2017). Al, an international student from South Asia, made the following comments on developing global citizenship through global learning:

I have always been interested in being a global citizen but didn't receive any formal education on this topic. Coming to Canada as an international student helped me merge with diversity, learn new cultures, mix with people from different cultures and sexual orientations, and respect all human opinions. My cultural and religious view was the biggest challenge for me to overcome as our culture stereotypes Western culture and shapes us not to accept Western culture and opinions. Issues such as the rights of the LGBTQ people are restricted in classrooms. I realized that

human rights should be at the highest priority through global learning. I learned a great deal from other people's experiences and enjoyed the opportunities to share my experience and understanding. (Weekly learning reflection, March 2020)

Global learning in a virtual environment gives all learners, particularly international students, equal opportunities to share perspectives and ideas on the socio-cultural, political, economic, and cultural dimensions of an issue/topic; therefore, the learning process is more inclusive and equitable than traditional global learning. The unique perspective shared by each learner contributes to developing an understanding of diversity, decision making informed by multiple perspectives, critical thinking, and increased self-awareness—the key attributes of global citizens and leaders.

Encouraging the fusion of horizon

Global competence entails understanding how an issue can be examined and solved from a different perspective, as well as the skills to translate multiple perspectives into innovative problem solving (Hilt, 2021). Global learning in the virtual environment offers a structured space and process for learners to express and exchange different views and how their perspectives and positionality affect their values and actions as citizens, professionals, and leaders (Leask, 2013). Mary, an in-service educator, shared the following reflection:

Online learning furthers my skillset in numerous ways. It forces me to step out of my comfort zone regarding my knowledge of technology and the use of different programs. It allows people from all over the world to come and learn together. It also allows me to gain new perspectives on topics I would not have thought of on my own. (Mary, course reflection, June 2020)

Global learning helps all learners reach a "fusion of horizon": the process of gaining fundamental insight into one's positionality and prejudice through learning about the perspectives of other people and cultures (Gadamer, 1989, p. 276). In this process, learners are neither in competitive positions nor attempting to convince others that their thinking or perspectives are true, right, or better; instead, they interact with other ideas, expand their mindsets, and learn from differences and similarities. Bound by the common subject of global learning and a shared interest in the topic, all learners can reach a fusion of horizons through valuing, examining, and transcending their current lived experiences. This global learning process enables all learners to advance their wellbeing and collaborative skills by respecting and interpreting other peoples' views and perspectives (Guo-Brennan, et al., 2020). Julie, a school principal, made the following comment on her deepened understanding of solidarity in tackling global challenges:

The biggest takeaway for me is that it [global learning] starts with tolerance and respect for others and inspires many more to follow. An issue is not just the neighbors' problem; it is a problem for all of us to solve. Working together in our local, national, and global communities is the key to fostering a healthy society. We need to think holistically about every aspect of life. Otherwise, we will face more significant problems like the Covid-19 pandemic. (Julie, course reflection, April 2020)

Curriculum content and resources with global perspectives are curators that maximizes learners' success and performance in authentic global learning experiences in classrooms or online. In a virtual environment, faculty have more space to integrate cultural diversity in course design based on learners' diverse backgrounds, needs, personal values, preferences, expectations, and areas of strength. To maximize global learning outcomes, educators need to internationalize the curriculum to foster global awareness and perspectives towards the field of study or a professional discipline. Curriculum internationalization involves incorporating an international and intercultural dimension into the curriculum, teaching, learning, assessment, and student support. An internationalized curriculum has two key characteristics. First, it reflects the context of different cultures and practices of knowing, doing, and being in the disciplines. Second, it has clear global learning objectives and measurable outcomes for learners (Leask, 2016).

Participatory and learner-centered process

In an environment oriented toward global learning, faculty facilitate and provide opportunities, resources, encouragement, and support to all learners in developing cross-cultural awareness, communication skills, and global perspectives on disciplinary knowledge and professional practices. This role is highly demanding, as faculty need to apply principles of equity and inclusion to create an open, safe and welcoming learning environment for all, have a good understanding of all learners' socio-cultural backgrounds, provide content and activities that connect to learners' prior knowledge and skills, know how to engage all learners through culturally responsive instruction, and effectively monitor the learning process and outcomes in a formative approach (de Aquino et al., 2017)

In a virtual global learning environment, every participant, including the course instructor, plays a unique role in contributing to intercultural learning outcomes. Faculty play a leadership role in facilitating and monitoring the openness of global learning and engagement by sharing their own experiences, scaffolding the growth of learners' perspectives and experiences, and bringing forth new perspectives and ideas. Learners can practice leadership skills through self-directed learning, sharing knowledge based on practical wisdom and experiences, cross-cultural communication, and identifying ideas and innovative solutions. This type of global learning and engagement is meaningful, participatory, learner-centered, and inquiry-oriented. Knowing how to facilitate this learning process is particularly important for pre-service educators, who need to help their learners develop twenty-first-century skills in self-directed learning and self-awareness (UNESCO, 2018). A pre-service educator specifically pointed this out in her reflection:

I have learned new ways to make classrooms more welcoming, safe, engaging, and student-centered in this course. I aspire to incorporate many of these new ideas into my future teaching practice. (Kate, course reflection, September 2021)

High-impact strategies to transform virtual global learning

Over the past decade, the author has researched, applied, and reflected on various instructional strategies to make global learning in the virtual environment more inclusive, impactful, and relevant. This section summarizes several high-impact, evidence-based strategies consistently commented on and appreciated by adult learners in higher education.

Creating an open and safe learning environment

Virtual learning in an asynchronous format has more advantages in making global learning more inclusive than are available in a face-to-face environment. Online discussion-based activities provide learners with more opportunities to express and dialogue with diverse perspectives and experiences in written and multimedia communications (Wilton & Brett, 2020). This engagement with different perspectives, identities, and experiences is authentic and establishes a critical condition for the development of critical literacy, the ability to analyse the social, cultural, economic, and political factors influencing people's views and actions (Freire, 1970). Effective global learning requires diversity, as an organic source for understanding and appreciating global interdependence and the complexities of global challenges from broader perspectives. Respecting and appreciating diversity require a safe and inclusive environment that values all learners' ways of knowing, identities, worldviews, experiences, and cultural traditions. This environment is particularly important for exploring global issues, such as inequality and human rights. These topics and issues are understood and experienced differently by students from different socio-cultural, geopolitical, and economic backgrounds.

When learners feel safe in a learning environment, they are more open and respectful to different perspectives, motivated to learning different cultures, and engaged in collaborative problem-solving, and they can develop skills in self-regulation and shared leadership (Chu et al., 2017). The instructor plays a critical role in guiding and supporting learners as they develop cross-cultural awareness, communication skills, and global perspectives of disciplinary knowledge and professional practices. This role can be highly demanding because creating an inclusive and welcoming learning environment for all learners demands strong commitment to inclusion and equity. A good understanding of learners' backgrounds, prior knowledge and skills, and learning needs and styles allows an instructor to effectively assess and monitor learners' intercultural learning outcomes in a constructive approach. The following evidence-based strategies can be used to create an inclusive virtual global learning environment for all learners:

- Creating a professional learning community for building open and trustful personal and professional relationships amongst learners.
- Designing activities that require learners to gather information about unfamiliar cultures or from different sources.
- Encouraging openness to new ideas.
- Establishing suitable cross-cultural communication protocols and networks.
- Modelling cross-cultural communication approaches and protocols.
- Encouraging new perspectives and ways of understanding issues.
- Playing the devil's advocate to challenge conventional thinking.
- Encouraging thinking beyond one's own field of knowledge.
- Monitoring opinions and communication in the light of new information or evidence.

Inclusive global learning supports all learners' participation, success, and needs. Learners are also diverse in their full-time and part-time status, age, goals, and preferred modes of learning participation. Flexibility and adaptability are not only the critical personal traits of interculturally competent people but essential for managing innovation, opportunities, stress, risks, and uncertainty (Wanner & Palmer, 2015). Instructors can increase openness and flexibility in global learning through the following strategies:

- Giving learners more opportunities to access, collaborate, and share work amongst one another through physical and digital spaces.
- Giving learners' readings and pre-recorded lectures before the class time to work through content at their own pace.
- Giving learners options to demonstrate their learning outcomes.
- Providing personalized assessment and evaluation when it is possible.
- Using content and materials with global perspectives

Integrating intercultural learning into curriculum

Culture is a broad concept and refers to the shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs, and understanding learned by socialization (Haijun & Bo, 2016). Culture can be visible through behaviors, customs, traditions, and institutions or hidden through beliefs, values, and worldviews. Cultural learning involves interacting with one's environment rather than through the genetic process (Leung et al., 2013). People from all cultures learn different cultural content (ideas, values, and behavior patterns) but tend to be ethnocentric (the tendency to evaluate other cultural phenomena and behaviors by the standards of their own culture). The ability to conceptualize culture leads to an individual's greater tolerance for cultural differences. This is a prerequisite for intercultural learning as a process of becoming respectful, flexible, adaptive, collaborative, and innovative in unfamiliar and cross-cultural situations. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of these intercultural competencies

The profound, less visible aspects of culture—the shared interpretations about beliefs, values, norms, and socio-cultural practices—affect many people (Koester & Lustig, 2015). Meaningful learning and consistent interaction with knowledge and people from different cultural contexts are necessary to facilitate authentic cross-cultural communication and interaction. Active reflection on cross-cultural experiences can also lead to effective intercultural learning (Guo-Brennan, 2020). Therefore, curriculum planning for global education needs to consider practical strategies in four curriculum components: context, content, faculty, and learners (Leask, 2013; Viana & Peralta, 2021). The questions in four curriculum domains, as shown in Table 2, can be used to guide the curriculum preparation and development for intercultural learning.

Table 2: Curriculum questions promoting intercultural learning (Guo-Brennan, 2022).

Common Location	Curriculum Questions Related to Intercultural Learning
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What social and political forces influence the curriculum and discipline? - What ideologies (philosophical, theoretical, and cultural) underpin the curriculum? - What contexts are included or excluded? Why? - Can all learners relate to these forces? In what ways?
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What experiences lead to the cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral domains? - What are the essential intercultural learning goals and outcomes? - What intercultural learning experiences are critical for achieving these objectives? - What global knowledge is relevant to learners? - How can the intercultural learning experiences and activities be effectively organized? - What intercultural skills are reflected and emphasized in the process of teaching and learning (diverse cultural perspectives, cross-cultural communication, collaboration, appreciation of different views/perspectives) - How do learners demonstrate the intercultural learning outcomes and actions?
Instructor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the qualifications, roles, and responsibilities of faculty and learners? - What are faculty's cultural competence and strength? - How will faculty organize cross-cultural activities for effective instruction? - Who else can support faculty's work in curriculum internationalization? - Does the curriculum reflect the faculty's political and cultural biases? - How will faculty deal with conflicts in perspectives or controversial topics? - Are curriculum content and instructional methods culturally appropriate? - How will faculty determine whether the intercultural learning outcomes are achieved? - How will faculty evaluate the effectiveness of intercultural learning?
Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who are the learners using this curriculum (backgrounds, prior knowledge, experiences, age, etc.)? - Do all learners have opportunities to connect the learning to their backgrounds, prior knowledge and experiences, and expectations through this curriculum? - In what ways are learners supporting each other's intercultural development? - In what ways do all learners contribute to cross-cultural learning? - Are there language learning opportunities for all learners?

Integrating international and intercultural dimensions into curriculum content, teaching, learning, assessment, evaluation, and student support services needs to be core to curriculum planning for global education. Faculty can adopt the following strategies:

- 1) Including intercultural learning objectives and outcomes in the course syllabus.
- 2) Incorporating readings, materials, professional issues, case studies, and references from different countries and diverse cultural perspectives, particularly those relevant to learners' national, cultural, and professional backgrounds.
- 3) Including intercultural activities or assignments that can bring together international and domestic learners through group work and collaborative projects.
- 4) Giving learners opportunities to present, reflect, and self-evaluate on the cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral growth in intercultural competence.
- 5) Encouraging learners to clarify intercultural issues or phenomena from peers or instructors with experiences of relevant cultures and contexts.

Connecting global learning with sustainable development goals

Global learning involves understanding and analyzing global issues and developing the competencies and commitment towards solving authentic problems. In 2015, member states of the United Nations endorsed the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. Global education is not only the goal specified in SDG 4.7, but also a global platform to protect the right to education during the unprecedented education disruption since the breaking out of the COVID-19 pandemic (UNESCO, 2021). Situating global learning within the framework and topics of SDGs allows learners to connect the socio-cultural, economic, geopolitical, and environmental dimensions of a complex issue or an action. Many teaching and learning resources have been developed around the SDGs globally. The virtual environment allows educators and learners to take advantage of the readily available digital resources and make global learning authentic and relevant.

Practicing critical reflexivity

Critical reflexivity is the capacity to see one's perspective and assumptions and understand how one's worldview and identity are socially constructed. Critical reflexivity allows individuals to trace and disrupt common assumptions about cultures and societies, generate ideas and solutions from different perspectives, and tackle discrimination and inequities in workplaces and communities. Through critical reflexivity, individuals learn to probe notions of perspective and privilege, engage more deeply with their own identities, and realize the importance of communication and dialogue within and across social identities and political and economic boundaries.

Critical reflection is essential for productive adult learning and global identity formation. In virtual global learning and engagement, learners' diverse socio-cultural contexts and backgrounds allow meaningful exchanges and authentic reflections on colonial and racist relations and power hierarchies of workplaces and societies. Diverse perspectives and experiences with global issues create a space for learners to practice critical reflexivity. Virtual global learning conducted through critical reflexivity enables individuals to understand the interplay between the personal and professional, as well as between the local and the global in personal and professional lives.

Focusing on formative assessment in global learning

The global learning process is a three-step cycle, as shown in Figure 2. These steps are equally important and should be given equal weight in the assessment. In the exploration phase, learners develop cognitive skills through obtaining, synthesizing, and analyzing new information about a topic. In the responding stage, learners connect the knowledge, issues, examples, situations, and stories they encounter to their positions and foster a sense of shared humanity and empathy. In the acting phase, learners envision future outcomes and apply cognitive and socioemotional skills in authentic actions.

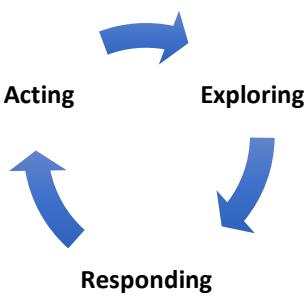


Figure 2: Global learning cycle.

Assessment is an integral component of the global learning cycle. Effectively planned assessment should help learners form a global identity, improve practices, develop intercultural competency, and increase commitment to sustainability and inclusion. The global learning cycle requires assessment and evaluation strategies that focus on motivating learning autonomy, examining perspectives, developing intercultural competence, and fostering a sense of agency in transforming leadership and practice. Therefore, formative strategies that are supportive and non-judgmental are essential for motivating self-directed global learning, critical examination of different perspectives and assumptions, and meeting learners' diverse learning needs and styles. Involving learners in identifying learning goals and outcomes, considering their inputs in developing assessment tools, and encouraging them to assess their work are excellent ways to monitor their global competence development. For instance, learners can conduct a weekly assessment of their global learning based on the following guiding statements:

- Being willing to take other people's goals into account and to balance own and other's goals when needed.
- Sharing different perspectives about a problem or issue.
- Facilitating group members in different approaches.
- Attending to the choice of languages for effective communication and collaboration.
- Taking steps to deal with communication problems.
- Learning and paying attention to other languages (speed, idioms, colloquialism, dialects, etc.) when opportunities arise.
- Practicing active listening.
- Clarifying and negotiating meanings with peers.
- Learning to observe and interpret indirect signals in different cultural and communicative contexts.
- Considering social/professional relationship building the important learning outcome.
- Actively seeking understanding of how relationships operate in different contexts and the rights and obligations associated with them.
- Paying attention to people's sensitivities.
- Deepening understanding of their own identity, beliefs, and experiences.

- Positively accepting behavior and ideas that are very different from their own.
- Being willing to learn a wide range of behavior and communication patterns.
- Developing self-confidence to handle criticism or negative feedback
- Copying other people's behavior/communication to fit in or make others feel more comfortable.

Virtual global learning engagement can be assessed through self-reflection, peer assessment, or instructor evaluations. The rubric, as shown in Table 3, is an example of assessing and guiding learners' online discussions in global learning and engagement. The criterion regarding content refers to learners' cognitive development in global knowledge and awareness. The standard regarding relevance asks learners to expand views and perspectives through discussions. The application criterion asks learners to connect learning and understanding to relevant context and real situations. The resource criterion requires learners to support discussions/conversations in creditable resources and literature. Through the weekly reflection in courses with multiple modules, learners have the opportunity to repeat global learning cycles on different topics.

Table 3: Rubric for assessing online discussions.

Expectations	Not Met	Met	Exceptional
Content	Does not explain relevant course concepts, theories, or materials. No citation of sources.	Summarizes relevant course concepts, theories, or materials. Provides citation of partial sources.	Evaluates and synthesizes course concepts, theories, or materials correctly; critical personal reflection is evident; uses example or supporting evidence to support key ideas. Always provides citations of sources.
Relevance	Does not respond to peers.	Responds to peers with little relevance to course concepts; feedback is provided but not substantive.	Responds to peers, relates the discussion to relevant course concepts, and consistently extends the dialogue through substantive feedback.
Application	Does not include professional, personal, or other real-world experiences.	Contributes professional, personal, or other real-world experiences that may or may not relate to course content.	Applies relevant professional, personal, or other real-world experiences and extends the dialogue by responding to the examples of peers.

Resource/ Evidence	Does not establish relevant position.	Establishes relevant position but demonstrates minimal research.	Validates position with valuable resources; supports the learning of others through the contribution of additional resources and ideas.
Frequency per topic	Participants	Once	Twice or more
	Facilitator	2–3 times	Three times or more

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of global competence in managing opportunities and crises, understanding different cultural perspectives in problem-solving, demonstrating empathy towards others, and stimulating innovation that transcends cultural boundaries. Higher education institutions are responsible for preparing global citizens and leaders ready to engage in democratic civic engagement, , cooperate for the public common good, and create knowledge to advance the human condition. This task is salient and urgent for universities to play a leadership role in shaping the post-COVID-19 world.

Global learning is critical for gaining knowledge and perspectives on significant issues affecting all individuals and societies in the twenty-first century, developing intercultural competence and digital literacy for effective collaboration in physical and digital spaces, and fostering global citizenship and leadership for building sustainable development and a peaceful world. Virtual environments and available digital tools offer new possibilities to enhance equity and inclusion in higher education. In sharing learners' global learning experiences and high-impact global education practices in a virtual environment, the author invites robust academic conversations and collaboration in addressing the ethical concern about inequality and exclusion in international and global higher education. The global learning perspectives, objectives, curriculum considerations, and evidence-based practices introduced in this article present a more equitable and inclusive approach towards global competence for all learners in higher education.

Author Bio

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