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***Developing Cultural Awareness through Online
Collaboration: the Case of Global Understanding
Project***

**Dissertation submitted in candidacy for the degree of Master in Language
studies**

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Statement of Originality

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution. I also certify that the present work contains no plagiarism and is the result of my own investigation, except where due acknowledgement is made.

Mis. EL-OUALI Fatima Zohra

DEDICATIONS

To my parents,

My sisters, my brothers,

and all those who support me.

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Abstract

The present research work is devoted to examine how global understanding project, through online virtual exchange program would help students to develop their cultural awareness. It undertakes a virtual classroom investigation in the department of English at the University of Tlemcen. This study aims first to investigate students' attitudes towards this virtual exchange program, and then, examine their performances to see whether they display are culturally aware when interacting with people from different cultural affiliations. Accordingly, this dissertation is divided into two main chapters; the first one provides a theoretical framework about the related concepts to this research. The second chapter concretises the practical work. Data were collected by means of two main instruments which are classroom observation and semi-structured interview of twenty Algerian students. Findings and conclusions were drawn from the analysis of the data collected through these instruments. In this vein, the results confirmed what was hypothesized in which global understanding project help students to build cultural awareness and it has a positive impact on their attitudes. It also shows that it helps students to be interculturally competent that would help them to cope with different situations.

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List of Acronyms/ Abbreviations

GU: Global Understanding

GVC: Global Virtual Classroom

UABT: university of Abou Bakr-belkaid Tlemcen

ECU: East Carolina University

CA: Cultural Awareness

IC: Intercultural Competence

IA: Intercultural Awareness

ICTs: Information Communication Technologies

UK: The United Kingdom

USA: United States of America

General Introduction

Recent technology developments have made the world a small society which is composed of different cultures. Due to the increased use of technological devices, communication tools, people have become more interconnected than ever before. Thus, it has become a necessity to develop persons' abilities to well interact in today's multicultural world. In fact, it is important to be ready to mix with other cultures as the world has become and continue to become more interconnected. Ways of connection may vary, but they all lead to the same target which is bringing into contact people from different cultural affiliations. They may meet in real-situation to share knowledge, ideas, and thoughts or they just interact virtually.

Virtual exchange programs are basically designed to expand knowledge and increase students' awareness through a cross-cultural learning experience; and this latter provides an opportunity to achieve a global understanding and global awareness which is considered as one of the main abilities that 21st century students should develop.

The emergence of these cross-cultural exchange programs which are basically done in virtual spaces is due to the fact that almost students' knowledge about different cultures is shaped by what is seen in media in general since they do not all have the chance to go and study abroad and experience different setting. Therefore this virtual exchange programs have emerged to provide students with the opportunity to virtually experience these different cultures. The significance of these cultural exchange programs relies on increasing cultural sensitivity and awareness, communication skills, curiosity and interest in various subjects.

Most of the time, students do not have the chance to study abroad. Hence their cultural knowledge would be shaped by what is seen in television and movies. Therefore, cross-cultural communication programs were made to enable students to have a deep look on different cultures, and make them aware of cultural differences. Such programs help students to develop many skills and abilities such as; enhancing

cultural sensitivity and awareness, development of communication skills, curiosity and interest in various subjects.

Cultural exchange programs, in its turn, expose students to people from different cultural, religious, geographical, and linguistic backgrounds. Hence, this cross-cultural exchange program provides students with a platform where they will learn about other cultures without travelling. In doing so, they will achieve a global understanding through sharing knowledge with people who have different cultural affiliations.

Cultural exchange programs have considerable impact on students' behaviours, as it helps them to develop positive skills and attitudes. In the same respect, (Matveev & Nelson2004) found that the focus of cross cultural training has evolved from exploring and highlighting static differences between representatives of different cultures, to fostering mutual interest and appreciation of differences, to developing collaboration methods to minimize the negative effects and take the advantage of cultural differences.

In the current study, the virtual exchange program is called “global understanding” (GU). This course is mainly lunched by East Carolina University at United States of America. Currently, there are more than 50 international institutions participating in the GU course from more than 30 countries around the world. University of UABT is also a participant as partner country. Students from these different universities will learn about different cultural aspects by discussing different topics like college life, family, cultural traditions, stereotypes and prejudices and by the end they will do collaboratively a report of what has been learned during the links. Therefore, they will share knowledge and achieve a global awareness, in the same vein; Stager (2005) suggests that knowledge is better constructed if shared by participants in a social context.

In this respect, this qualitative investigation aims at exploring whether this cross-cultural program helps students to develop their cultural awareness and sensitivity toward different cultures.

Accordingly, three main sub-questions were formulated in order to attain valuable, reliable, and valid answers:

- 1- What are the skills that students may improve in the global understanding course?
- 2- Why is it important for students to be aware of cultural differences?
- 3- Are students able to manage cultural conflictive situations?

On the basis of the research questions, the following hypotheses were put forward:

1- In the global understanding course students are exposed to a new way of learning which is totally different from the traditional ones. They are directly exposed to target culture. In doing so, students may develop many abilities and skills, namely, cross cultural interaction, communication, cultural awareness and sensitivity as well.

2- Students should be aware and sensitive towards other cultures in order to overcome judging other people's behaviours and beliefs, and the awareness of cultural differences as well might help them to achieve better cross- cultural understanding.

3- Global understanding project may help students to be interculturally competent which mean that they will be flexible and tolerant enough to avoid cultural conflicts.

In an attempt to tackle research problematic, a case study is implemented along with two research instruments, namely, classroom observation and semi-structured interview with twenty students of GVC at Tlemcen University in Algeria. The data collected will be analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively, to get results satisfactory answers for research problematic.

In this vein, the current study embodied two main chapters; the first one is going to be a review of literature that will define the related concepts to this investigation. It will, further, highlights the importance of GU course in promoting students cultural awareness (CA). The second chapter is a case study which starts by a detailed description of GVC in which students' and teacher's profile analysis is provided. Also there is a brief description of research instrumentation used in this

research. Then, data will be analysed and interpreted followed by research conclusion and recommendations for further research.

Chapter one

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1.1 Introduction

This introductory chapter is a review of literature which defines the related concepts to this investigation “cultural awareness”, and analyse it in terms of observable behaviours, “intercultural competence”, “intercultural awareness”, and “intercultural sensitivity”. This chapter also demonstrates the role of global understanding project in promoting students’ cultural awareness.

1.2 Culture

Before investigating the importance of developing cultural awareness, it is pertinent to shed light on the concept of culture as the core or source from which intercultural studies have emerged.

Culture as substantial element in various theoretical discussions of intercultural studies is notoriously term to define. It basically represents people’s way and style of thinking, in the meantime, it includes a whole set of beliefs, customs, language, traditions and values. Various scholars have attempted to define the notion of culture. In Sapir’s words (1992:12) culture may be defined as what a society does and think”. It is mainly acquired by individuals as members of society. Hence, culture is socially learned and shared. In this respect, Hall (1976:16) confirms that “culture is not genetically inherited and cannot exist on its own but it is always shared by members of society.” Culture, then, is transmitted from one generation to another. In the same vein, Down states that: “... a culture is a system of symbols shared by a group of humans and transmitted to upcoming generations.”

There are two main sides of culture that one should recognize. One is called big ‘C’ which refers to those aspects which go beyond the visible one, as for instance civilization and the role of a given society in the world by different realizations (Christian1976). Small ‘c’, however, includes surface aspects such as knowledge, beliefs, art moral, law, customs...etc. (Taylor 1971). Thus, any given culture encompasses of system of values, beliefs and material products.

Culture has a large impact on people's way of thinking, perceiving, communicating, learning, teaching and even the use of technology. Not all people are aware of the influence of culture on their behaviours and attitudes. In fact, Learning about culture will only be truly meaningful if the learners will be exposed to a new set of values, meanings and symbols, i.e., putting the learner in cultural context to provide better understanding of such culture, thus, they will develop their sensitivity while interacting with people belonging to that culture. Then it follows that these new criteria can only be understood in the light of learners' existing cultural experience. By and large, the comparison and contrast process will lead not only to a better appraisal of the target culture but also to a greater understanding of learner's own culture. That is the reason behind the great importance of global understanding programme highlighted in this work.

1.3 Cultural Awareness

The term cultural awareness is not easily to define; it is often used comparably in literature with constructs such as, cultural sensitivity, cross-cultural competence and cross-cultural effectiveness (Ridley, et al. 1994). Frequently the difficulty surrounding the use of this concept inheres in the term awareness, which is roughly by definition lead to varying and even conflicting interpretations. Yet, CA can be discussed more precisely if some of the used terms are defined, conceptualized, interpreted, and applied to intercultural interaction.

Moreover, CA has been defined by Tomalin & Stempleski (1993:05) as: "*sensitivity to the impact of culturally induced behaviour on language use and communication*". In another words, it is the foundation of communication as it includes the ability of standing back from one's self and becoming aware of the cultural values, beliefs and perceptions. Thus, CA is based on the cultural knowledge of other and one's own culture.

In the same vein, Tomalin and stempleski add that cultural awareness includes three main abilities which are: the awareness of one's own culturally induced behaviour, awareness of culturally induced behaviour of others, and lastly,

an ability to explain one's own cultural stand point. In a similar vein, Byram (1997: 60) explains more thoroughly what abilities are involved in CA, according to him, it may be seen as an ability to reflect on one's own cultural identity, questions taken for granted, values and beliefs and compare one's own culture with that one of the interlocutor's. Consequently, comparison forms as the bases for understanding and helps learners to "perceive and cope with differences" (p.04).

Following what is stated before; the concept of cultural awareness becomes central when two people from different cultural affiliations do interact with each other. It is obvious that people observe, analyse, interpret, and evaluate in different ways. Sometimes, what is considered as an appropriate behaviour in one culture is frequently inappropriate in another. Consequently, cultural awareness arises when people do recognize that there are cultural differences which distinguish them. Misunderstanding, in its turn, arise when there is lack of cultural knowledge about the target culture and when someone uses his own meanings to make sense of his reality. For this reason cultural awareness must be enriched in order to avoid such conflicts.

Consequently, CA is considered as an ability that should be developed by promoting cultural understanding through either learning or even personal experiences because increasing CA lead to achieve successful interactions with people from different culture. In the same vein, Hadley (1993) asserts that cultural understanding must be promoted in various ways so that students are sensitive to other cultures and prepared to live more in harmoniously in the target language community". Moreover, Tomlinson (2001) holds that CA involves gradually developing inner sense of the quality of cultures, an increased understanding of your own and other people's culture, and a positive interest in how both culture connect and differ. More precisely, an increased CA helps learners to broaden the mind, increase tolerance and achieve cultural empathy (Tomalin and Musuhara 2004).

As it was mentioned before, cultural awareness becomes the key element when interaction occurs between people who have different cultural backgrounds; hence, it is substantial element to avoid any misunderstanding or misinterpretation.

Since it happens within the process of interaction, it requires at least development of intercultural competence, sensitivity, and awareness as well.

1.4 Aspects of Intercultural Situation

Actually, there are many abilities that one may develop through intercultural interactions. In this investigation the researcher focused on three main aspects which are intercultural awareness, intercultural competence and intercultural sensitivity.

1.4.1 Intercultural competence

As it was mentioned before, in a simple word, culture would refer to the shared values, norms, customs traditions, and so on. It is specific to one group of people as it is transmitted from one generation to another. However, when a specific group across another different culturally group, culture will be reflected in their behaviours. Moreover, both terms “cross-cultural” and “intercultural” do exist in the field of cultural studies. Sometimes, they are used interchangeably though there is a prominent distinction between the two concepts. In his words, Dr. Mouhadjir (2010) views that cross-cultural apply to something which is covers separate comparison of chosen aspects of different culture with no interactive analysis between them. However, intercultural implies interaction. Based on this clarification, the term “intercultural interaction” will be used in this research work rather than “cross-cultural”.

According to Mouhadjer (2010) taking part in online chat rooms, discussion boards and videoconferences will help learners to develop intercultural competence(IC). Accordingly, Deardorff (2006) defines intercultural competence as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes.” (p.247). she further appends a model of IC where she explains the importance of creating a continuous process of working on attitudes, knowledge, internal outcomes and external outcomes related to intercultural competence. More likely, “components of IC can

be broken down into attitudes, knowledge and understanding, skills and actions” (Huber 2014).

In addition, intercultural speaker needs to have some knowledge about cultures, as well as s/he needs awareness that is more to be known from the other person’s perspective, that are skills, attitudes and values which are crucial to understanding intercultural human relationships (Byram et al. 2002). On the other hand, researchers gave the intercultural speaker a clear definition, just like Byram & Zarate (1997:11) who defined intercultural speaker as someone who ‘crosses frontiers’ and could be considered as “specialist in the transit of cultural property and symbolic values”. Actually, learning IC is never perfect but it can be enriched through continuous interaction. Culturally competent speaker, then, serves as a mediator between two or more cultural identifications as he can negotiate understanding of their own identifications and those of others. In addition to this, becoming interculturally competent help students to “capture and understand, in interaction with people from foreign cultures, their specific concepts in perception, thinking, feeling and acting , free from prejudices, s/he will be interested and motivated to continue the interaction” (Mouhadjer 2010:32).

Besides the already mentioned components of IC, a model of IC was presented by Chen and Starosta (1996). It is based on three constructs, involving intercultural sensitivity, intercultural awareness and intercultural adroitness. According to them, the first component covers four basic elements: self-concept, open mindedness, non judgmental attitudes and social relaxation. The second refers to the ability to comprehend and explain other cultures. Then, the third represents the behavioural component of IC.

The present research work will analyse the role that Global understanding project displays in promoting students’ intercultural competence with an intense emphasis on cognitive component and abilities that are developed through this intercultural exchange course.

1.4.2 Intercultural awareness

Intercultural awareness can be regarded as the foundation of communication. It involves two main qualities: the awareness of one's own culture and the awareness of another culture. Cultural awareness becomes an essential point when people from different cultural backgrounds meet because people see, think and behave in different ways and what is appropriate in one culture is likely to be inappropriate in another one (Byram 2002). In order to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations one should be aware of his own behavioural rules as well as those in other cultures.

Many scholars dealt with cultural awareness (CA) and state its importance mainly when teaching a foreign language. Other researchers, however, move to define intercultural awareness (IA) mainly in today's globalized world. Intercultural awareness, then, emphasises more on the intercultural dimensions mainly interacting with culturally different people. According to Baker (2011:63) cultural awareness is a part of communicative competence can be defined as "a conscious understanding of the role of culture plays in language learning and communication (both first and foreign languages). Yet, CA is no longer helpful to provide international communication. For this reason Barker (2011) argues that not just the development of CA but also the intercultural awareness is crucial to communication in the expanding circle. Moreover, in Tomalin and Stempleski's words (1993:05) awareness of culture may refer to "sensitivity to the impact of culturally-induced behaviour on language use and communication" moreover, cross cultural awareness, sometimes also intercultural awareness "covers beliefs, values, attitudes and feelings conveyed not only by language but paralinguistic features such as dress, gesture, facial expressions, stance and movement".(ibid.)

Furthermore, in common European framework for languages (2002) IA is explained as a product of the relation between knowledge, awareness, and understanding of the 'the world of origin' and 'the world of the target'. Intercultural awareness further includes awareness of regional and social diversity of both

cultures and how culture appears from the perspectives of other culture; often in the form of national stereotypes.

The intercultural awareness, then, is very important in order to conduct a cross cultural interaction effectively as well as to understand intercultural human relationships. In fact, the main goal of IA is to increase international and cross cultural understanding (Yassine, 2006). For this reason, developing IA has become the critical issue in the last decades; its importance has embodied in increasing the number of projects, intercultural trainings, cultural exchanging programs which help the individuals to enrich their awareness by directly experiencing how people act, interact, and communicate from their perspectives. Intercultural awareness basically requires individuals' consciousness and understanding of their own cultural perspectives and representations as well as using this understanding to identify others' perspectives. Hence, intercultural awareness gives individuals the chance to develop understanding toward different cultures. At the same time, such awareness can develop positive attitudes and empathy towards different cultures, tolerance of ambiguity and appreciating cultural differences and diversities as well.

1.4.3 Intercultural Sensitivity

Many researchers have investigated the concept of intercultural sensitivity as a key component of intercultural situations. According to Bennett (1984) intercultural sensitivity is conceived as a developmental process in which one is able to change oneself affectively, cognitively, and behaviourally from ethnocentric phases to ethno relative phases. Other researchers, nevertheless, argued that intercultural sensitivity deals with affective; it is concerned with emotions, intercultural awareness (cognitive) which, in turn, will lead to intercultural competence (behavioural) (chen1990). Consequently, intercultural sensitivity can be conceptualized as *“individual's ability to develop a positional emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promotes an appropriate and affective behaviour in intercultural communication”* (p.09). In another words, intercultural persons must possess a desire to motivate themselves to understand,

appreciate, and accept cultural differences while producing a highly positive results from intercultural interaction.

Furthermore, it is held that intercultural trainings have a common goal which is developing intercultural sensitivity by increasing awareness of cultural differences and attempt to develop one's communication skills and abilities to avoid intercultural misunderstandings (Cargile & Giles 1996). Seidel (1981) further argued that the main aim of intercultural training programs: "develop an appreciation and understanding of cross-cultural differences and to acquire some of the necessary abilities such as, an increased awareness and sensitivity to cultural stimuli and better human relation skills" (p.184)

1.4.3.1 Empathy

Empathy has been long considered as the substantial element for developing intercultural sensitivity. In this respect, Adler and Towne (1987: 95) stated that "empathy refers to the process of projecting into another person's point view, so momentarily to think the same thought and feel the same emotions as the other person". Hence, empathy allows persons to sense what is inside other's mind or to step into another person's shoes to have a better understanding.

Additionally, Barnlund (1988) found that interculturally sensitive persons tend to look for communication symbols that will enable them to share other's experiences. In another words, they will not take the same role without regard to situation (Hart, Carlson, & Edie, 1980). On the other hand, empathic persons are also judged to be more selfless as well as possessing more attention to other interactant's feelings and emotions (Davis, 1983).

As a result, empathy permits persons to demonstrate reciprocity of affect displays, active listening and verbal responses that demonstrate understanding. It also develops mutual understanding that will produce a solid intercultural connection (Barnlund 1988).

1.4.3.2 Non-judgment

Being non-judgmental person refers to an attitude that permits persons to really listen carefully to the others during intercultural communication. Yet, non-sensitive persons tend to skip to conclusion without even having the adequate data in interaction (Hart& Burks 1972). Thus, developing intercultural sensitivity helps persons to avoid rash judgments on the valuable inputs of others.

Accordingly, when an intercultural interaction is far from being judgmental, it tends to raise a feeling of enjoyment towards cultural differences. Intercultural sensitive persons do acknowledge and accept cultural differences as well.

1.5 Global virtual classroom:

Before dealing with the concept of global understanding project one should define first what is meant by global virtual classroom in order to provide better understanding.

Virtual classes have the potential to be quite different from traditional classrooms. They basically require the use of technological devices that allow teachers and learners to meet in a virtual space. In this vein, *Derni (2007:02)* states that: *“the GVC project is basically a computerised learning environment”*. In other words, virtual classrooms are considered as a shift away from the norm of having teacher and group of students all in the same place at one time. In this virtual classroom, however, students may be in different geographical locations from their teacher. Moreover, Virtual classroom substantially requires the use of ICTs in order to facilitate learning and collaboration in a way that is totally different from the conventional classroom. In the same vein, *Turoff(1995:01)* states in an international conference on computer assisted instruction(ICCAI’95) that: *“The GVC is a teaching and learning environment located within a computer-mediated system.”*

According to Akhras (2012) VC has quite benefits that enhance the learning process, and develop learners’ skills as well, according to her, the online teaching is “a powerful medium for promoting higher-order thinking skills” (p.56) . In another

words, it provides a platform which can independently support education through creating, sharing, and distributing knowledge (Luo 2013).

Furthermore, this virtual space is considered as highly complex situation because it goes beyond acquiring knowledge, in which, learning highlights meaningful activities that help in achieving a deep understanding through reflection, inquiry, analysis and synthesis. VC is thought to have an ongoing process that is active, constructive, collaborative, complex, contextual and conversational. In this respect, Salvin (2001) asserts that the collaborative environment is a dynamic and effective social process built on shared awareness and understanding. Moreover, it is held that virtual classroom promotes collaboration; and this latter can improve the development of thoughts, ideas, and concepts through discussion, debate, and negotiation (Roshelles 1992).

The concept of virtual classroom has been the subject study of many scholars and researchers, although there are various definitions; yet they do agree on the fact that establishing virtual spaces basically requires availability of technological and communication tools(discussion board, chat rooms, virtual classrooms, and white board) that allow participants and teachers to meet virtually. There are many virtual experiences, each one is characterized by its own purposes; it could be teacher to students, student to other students and so on.

1.6 Global Understanding Project

One of the virtual experiences is called “global understanding”. It is a cross cultural program launched by East Carolina University (ECU) for promoting peace and understanding in different parts of the world. Moreover, this project is fundamentally based on using up a set of on-line pedagogical activities that promote communication, understanding and collaboration of different students around the world. According to what was mentioned in the online description of this program (cited in the official website of ECU): this project is a world cultures course taught in a shared virtual classroom with students and faculty from 50 universities in 30 countries in Africa, the middle east, Asia, south America and Europe . Real-time

video conferencing, chat, email, on a daily basis among students partners provide a direct personal experience, internet tools allow for partner countries anywhere in the world.

In other words, this course exposes students to a new learning environment experience in which web tools are integrated as a part of virtual classroom, it has been established for the cultural exchanges purposes conducted in English. The term “virtual classroom” is used to describe such online environment where the students engage in synchronous virtual meetings and communicate using multimedia services such as video conferencing, instant chat and so on.

It is obvious that any project is based on specific purposes. Global understanding project, also, involves a set of purposes and they are listed as follows:

In fact, the main purpose of this virtual classroom is related to cross cultural communication in which it aims to enhance students’ ability to create knowledge and develop understanding though they have different cultural backgrounds. Thus, this advanced learning environment gives participants from all over the opportunities for flexibility, collaboration and interaction, as they may build a friendship based on mutual respect and knowledge sharing.

Global understanding program aims at bringing different cultures into contact in order to provide better understanding since they share knowledge about each one’s culture in order to provide better understanding. Through this programme they will realize the importance of understanding other cultures

According to Matveev & Nelson (2004) The focus of cross cultural training has evolved from exploring and highlighting static differences between representatives of different cultures, to fostering mutual interest and appreciation of differences, to developing collaboration methods to minimize the negative effects and take advantage of cultural differences. Therefore, this classroom provides a platform for students to learn about other cultures without travelling, class sessions are conducted in real time using internet based video and chat with continuity protocols in place using guided questions, students work collaboratively in order to

share understanding. They discuss topics that include college life, cultural tradition, family, the meaning of life, and stereotypes and prejudices.

As a result of this cross cultural communication, students learn to express themselves effectively. They must consider carefully not only what they say but also how to say it. They also learn how to listen so they understand the nuanced meaning of words. Moreover students in this program will develop such abilities and skills to interact effectively in multicultural situations.

1.7 Global Understanding Project and Intercultural Awareness

The global understanding course is meant to permit cultural exchange between students from all over the world; these students who have different cultures will meet in virtual space to share ideas, thoughts, values and knowledge. In addition to this, it provides participants with the opportunity to experience a new way of learning, this classroom has many benefits play a substantial role in enhancing participants' cultural awareness and promoting their abilities to well interact with foreigners in an effective way, i.e., promoting their intercultural competence.

As mentioned before, the best way to increase students' intercultural awareness is to make them directly involved in culture based project in which he will experience learning culture in real settings. According to Huber (2004) intercultural competence cannot be acquired spontaneously by individuals or even exposure and encounters with people with other cultural backgrounds. Intercultural competence, however, can be enhanced through a range of intercultural experiences, projects, education and even trainings.

Culture teaching helps students to be aware of the target culture as well as achieving proficiency in its language. Yet the learners have to study culture in its context to develop their intercultural competence; once developing such competence they will have the capability to serve as mediators between native culture and the target one. The global understanding programme offers students the opportunity to learn culture in different setting where they will be exposed to a new

way of learning culture. In this intercultural training students will develop many competencies such as knowledge about either one's or others' culture, empathy and attitudes towards people who have different cultural backgrounds; it will enhance self confidence and cultural identity as well. On the other hand, GU project is prepared to create an environment of curiosity and inquiry in order to guide students toward intercultural competence

Moreover, Byram and Morgan (1994:50) stressed that learners need to be actively engaged in the interpretations of the world and to compare and contrast the shared meanings of both culture of the native language culture and the target culture. Learners should have access to routine and conscious knowledge held by members of other cultures, so they have opportunity to adjust to routine behaviours and ways of communication. Intercultural speaker, furthermore, implies developing a solid intercultural awareness. This latter must be developed through an ongoing process; which means a process of observation, analysis and comparison.

Establishing intercultural competence through cross cultural exchange program, helps students to understand, analyse, interpret, and interact with people from different cultural affiliations. They may develop critical reflective thinking by training them to develop the ability to examine and interpret intercultural interactions and communications as well. In addition to this, it enables participants to achieve an effective global understanding through collaboration and knowledge sharing and implementing communication strategies such as active listening, flexibility, awareness and sensitivity.

This cultural exchange program gives students an opportunity to be reflective about their own culture and sensitive towards other cultures. While recognizing that each ones view is shaped by his culture, they will gradually change their behaviours; and since they will interact with each other they develop cultural competence in intercultural competence.

Cultural exchange programs, in its turn, expose students to people from different cultural, religions, geographical, and linguistic backgrounds. Hence, this

cross-cultural exchange program provides students with a platform where they will learn about other cultures without travelling. In doing so, they will achieve a global understanding through sharing knowledge with people who have different cultural affiliations. Additionally, cultural exchange programs have considerable effect on students' behaviour. Where they build cultural awareness and they develop the ability to interact cross culturally. Hence, GU course put students on the road of being good intercultural speakers.

It is held that cross-cultural exchange programs promote self-confidence, flexibility, open mindedness. They also tend to change their minds about some ideas held before. In this respect, Meziane & Mitchel (2014) assert that “in a tele-teaching classroom, being sociable is of considerable importance to help students gain self confidence in this new environment and cope with their stress.” (p.76)

According to Romanowski the development of intercultural competence help learners in noticing the existing similarities and differences between cultures. This, in turn make them more tolerant, open minded, empathic and flexible towards different cultures. In the same vein, he asserts that cultural based project work undoubtedly makes learners “more aware of their own native language culture, which is unprecedented advantage, since learners start to appreciate their national culture and heritage and become more” (p.55).

The role of GU project in developing cultural and intercultural awareness is embodied in the opportunity offered to learners where they will get knowledge about their colleagues, their interest and more importantly they can discover new spheres of personal interest; often culturally oriented where they will discuss topics such as, traditions and customs, families, religions and so on. Since they have the opportunity to discover the unknown and never discussed before topics about cultural issues, they will develop a higher sensitivity and awareness towards different cultures as well as they will appreciate the differences. This classroom is highly dependent on the use of technological tools, which in its turn, increase learners autonomy.

Consequently, this programme requires students to go through the process of comparing and contrasting i.e. being familiar with similarities and differences. While comparing and contrasting learners will not only discover the other culture but they will reflect about their own culture.

In nutshell, intercultural exchange programs become a necessity, in today's global world, in order to help students to be resilient, open minded, and more tolerant towards people from different cultural, religious, racial and ethnic backgrounds.

1.8 Conclusion

In this chapter the concept of culture, cultural awareness, and global understanding program have been defined taking into consideration works of previous researchers and scholars in this field. On the other hand, the importance of global understanding program in promoting cultural awareness has been discussed in an attempt to shed light on the substantial role of these programs in putting students on the road of being good global communicators in a multicultural world.

Chapter two

CHAPTER TWO : Research Methodology

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2.1 Introduction:

The present chapter attempts to reveal the impact of online collaboration on students' cultural and intercultural awareness. Accordingly, it provides a general description of the global virtual classroom, students' profile and teacher's profile as well. Later on, a brief presentation about research design and instrumentation was done. Then, it will move to data analysis, results, and interpretation. The chapter will end with a discussion and recommendations for further research about the importance of global understanding program in enhancing students' culture awareness.

2.2 Situation Description

As it was mentioned before, the global understanding project is one of the experiences that are basically done in a virtual classroom. It is considered as a high technical place for interaction between students from all over the world. The global understanding project has started from the summer of 2005 when the sponsor of the project namely, American university (ECU) who chosen Abou-Bakr Belkaid University to be a member of this global project. An instructor has been appointed to guide a group of students which is made up of 20 students.

The GVC is composed of technical tools adopted for the class links. Eight personal computers are available for eight students communicating with their partners in the chat room. Also one PC is used for the video conferencing when the rest of students are standing in front of camera that is provided by a data show to speak with their partners using a microphone. On the other hand, it is quite important to shed light on the role of computer technician who is taking charge of all kinds of technical work organizations in the G.V.C., he is responsible for the network maintenance. During the links he adapts the video conference and the sound, as he lunches the instant chat for the students, and whenever there is a technical problem he will solve it.

2.2.1 Students' Profile:

The present research is concerned with a group of students made up of 20 students from Tlemcen University. Eighteen (18) are from the department of English and only two are from biology department. The group was not chosen randomly, before the links session started, the instructor organizes a test, all students from all department have the chance to get tested, in this test the teacher will ask them orally to evaluate their level of proficiency in the English language, since it is the main medium of connection as well as he will assess their cultural knowledge and attitudes towards this virtual programme. Based on these criteria, 20 students will be selected.

2.2.2 Teacher's Role:

The virtual classroom is totally different from the conventional one, not only in terms of technological acquaintance but also in teacher's role.

In this classroom, setting is managed and controlled by the teacher. According to Hartmaan(2007) (cited in Meziane and Sari-Mitchel 2014:69) “ in no case technology is meant to replace the teacher, but to put him in the midst of designing the new learning environment and develop professionally conjointly with his partner teacher(s) abroad, in the process of intercultural projects”. Legutke et al., 2006 further present the roles of the teacher in virtual space. Accordingly, “the literature about teacher role in tele-collaborative projects is innovating and ever changing but best practice that have been recently fixed as successfully fixed experiments have flourished in many parts of the world”. In addition to this, teacher has many roles in this virtual environment; he can be a facilitator, manager, controller, and so on.

In this experience the teacher is expected to be the first facilitator in order to be followed. He is supposed to minimize the difficulties of learning in such different environment, he explains all the steps related to this new experience and answers all the questions as a way to organise and monitor the classroom. Moreover, he will introduce the partner country and guides the on sensitive topic to

be better avoided or fundamental point to be tackled. Concerning mistakes made by students, he will clarify them after each link; as he will highlight the quality of the performance made by each one during the interactions, the main errors encountered, and correct them together with the students.

2.3 Research Design:

In an attempt to collect reliable and valid data, each researcher is required to follow a research methodology to carry out his/her research work. The research methodology chosen for the present investigation was a case study. It is defined by Yin (1993:11) as “*it refers to an event, an entity, an individual, or even a unit of analysis. It’s an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence*”. Hence, it is thought to help researchers as well as readers to understand the processes of events project and programmes as it gives a clear illustration and it help them to explore characteristics that will shed light on a specific issue or object (Sanders 1981). Besides, the current research work is an exploratory descriptive case study; it aims at studying a given subject matter in order to look for ways through which the existing situation can be proved. On the other hand, the major concern of this case study is to which extent the online collaboration promotes students’ cultural awareness. Moreover, it comprises two phases one for the data collection and the other for data interpretations.

2.3.1 Instrumentation:

In the current investigation the researcher used two main research instruments, namely, classroom observation and the semi-structured interview for the GVC participants, in an attempt to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. The first instrument was used to observe students’ behaviour while interacting with people who have different cultural affiliations. Then, the second tool of data collection was used to see to which extent students are culturally aware.

2.3.2 Classroom Observation:

In an attempt to have a clear image about students' behaviour which is reflected through their performances, and to investigate students' attitudes towards global understanding course; the researcher used classroom observation as a useful tool for collecting realistic and reliable data. In this respect, Dorenyei (2007:178) points out that "classroom observation provides direct information and it is one of the three basic sources for empirical research". Hence, it enables the research to be involved in the situation s/he is studying.

The classroom observation used in this study took place in the department of English at university of Tlemcen. The research conducted this observation in separate sessions. They had two links per week, one is done in Monday and the other in Wednesday. The session took about 45minutes. When observing, the researcher used grid of observation (see appendix A) and note taking based on observing students behaviours, classroom setting.

The goal of this research instruments was to obtain information about students while collaborating in a virtual classroom. It does not aim at evaluating students' performances but rather determining if they are culturally aware. Besides, it takes into consideration defining teacher's role as well as the difficulties that the students may encounter.

2.3.3 Semi-structured interview:

Interviews present another type of data collection method often used by investigators. It is a conversation between interviewer and interviewee to yield a reliable and valid data. The literature of research methodology identifies a number of different interview types; it can be structured, semi-structured and unstructured.

In the present investigation, the type that the researcher opted for was a semi structured interview. It requires the researcher to use a written list of questions as a guide but, s/he still has the freedom to raise different questions. In this respect, Dorenyei (2007) argued that although there are guiding questions list, but the format

is open ended as it encourages the interviewee to elaborate an issue raised in an exploratory manner. Besides, the interviewer can ask for clarifications or examples.

Therefore, the interview has been used in this investigation because it helped researcher to have a direct contact with the interviewees, as she could explain the unfamiliar concepts, ambiguity, and difficult words. Even the informants would have the chance to ask for more clarification and then responding rather than escaping the question. Moreover, the semi-structured interview was used because it gives the students the chance to elaborate the subject matter where they are more encouraged to add more information. Also, this research instrument provides the researcher with qualitative data as well as the interviewees will provide the researcher with answers expressed by their own words.

The semi structured interview was given to 20 students; they are all participants in the GVC programme at that period (see appendixB). They were kindly asked to answer the interview as well as the researcher did ask for the permission to record answers in order to analyse them carefully later on. The semi structured interview was divided into three parts, each part aimed at gathering specific data about the current investigation. Besides, the aim of the interview was to enhance the information gathered during the classroom observation process. Thus, the questions were classified as follows:

Part one:

Question1 and 2: this questions aims at determining students' attitudes towards GVC programme and the reasons that push them to participate in.

Questions 3: seeks to determine students' awareness about their main task in this cultural exchange project

Question4: this question aims at exploring the skills that the students have learned and developed through this cultural exchange project.

Question5: this question was asked to point out students' difficulties when performing

Question 6&7&8: these questions aim at first to determine students' motivation towards the online discussion, second, to evaluate developed skills during this training. Thirdly, evaluate students' collaboration.

Question 9: the last question in the first part was asked to have a deep look at students' impressions about this programme.

Part two:

The major aim of this part is to see if the awareness of one's own and target culture helps in overcoming value judgments and stereotyping.

Questions 1&2: the goal behind this question is to each students' answer about the first place that one may learn and get his culture, also to see if the students are aware about the factors that may influence one's own culture.

Question 3: this question aims at defining whether students are aware of cultural diversity or not.

Question 4&5&6: the goal of these questions is to illustrate students' awareness of their own culture by defining specific traditions that are unique to it, then, to see the reasons that push them learning other cultures; the desire to learn about specific culture as well.

Question 7: aims at defining the methods that the students use when learning about culture

Question 8: aims at demonstrating students' attitudes towards other cultures, do they respect, or they have the feeling of superiority.

Part three:

The third part aims at defining students abilities developed in this programme; if they are able to manage cultural conflicts or misunderstandings if any.

Question 1: aims at determining students' attitudes towards cultural diversity.

Question 2&3: to see if the students consider learning one's own culture as the first step in developing cultural awareness and knowledge about others' culture or not; to see where they do comparison between target and home culture and why.

Question 4: it aims at evaluate students' behaviours after being involved in this programme, have they developed sense of tolerance, flexibility, understanding cultural differences or not.

Question 5&6: the two questions try to identify the causes of pragmatic failure according to the students, and to see how could they manage misunderstanding and clear the idea in the mind of the interlocutor.

Question 7: This question opens the section for students' suggestions to avoid misunderstandings and cultural conflict situations.

2.4 Data Analysis and Interpretations:

In the current research work, the investigator implement two research instruments, namely, classroom observation and a semi-structured interview for the G.V.C participants which are analysed and interpreted qualitatively and quantitatively.

2.4.1 Classroom Observation Results Analysis:

During observation sessions, the researcher observed that students were highly motivated to interact with people who have different cultures. In the first session they started introducing themselves each one to his partner. There was, then, a presentation of each country. After this, they discussed a free topic. Some students

seemed to be stressed, but their performance was good. They demonstrate a desire for building new relations and having international friends. In the next session students were more organized than the first one. They were prepared for the discussion; they prepared questions and answers as well. Furthermore, in this global understanding project students share and discuss common topics, thus, they keep comparing between one's own culture and the target one. Students, sometimes, referred to their culture in order to explain concepts or even when asking questions for more clarification. After two or three sessions students got familiar with the discussion, there was a great progress concerning self-confidence especially when performing. Speaking about collaboration, approximately most of students do collaborate before the link started, they came half an hour and share the ideas they found as team before they share it with their partners, otherwise, they collaborate during the link where they encourage each other to speak, ask questions, and correct when necessary. On the other hand, they were able to explain the concepts related to their cultures as well as they try to understand target culture rather than judging others' behaviour as well as appreciating cultural diversity. While interacting, they were comfortable; they answer questions respectfully even when they are asked about stereotypes in their culture. Furthermore, when ideas are contradicted they respect and avoid engaging in a debate.

The researcher observed the role of the teacher as well. Foremost, it was observed that the teacher acted as controller, he did insist on students to do research and gather information about the target culture, search for strategies to facilitate understanding when discussing. During the link, he kept observing students' behaviour and even correcting them when necessary. On the other hand, the teacher did encourage students to develop their abilities to well cross-culturally communicate with people from different cultures. After the link, he corrected and put emphasis on the importance of being aware of strategies that help them to avoid any misunderstanding or communication breakdowns. He even brought concrete examples from his own experience for more illustration and increasing students' motivation as well.

The third part of observation was devoted to classroom settings. The classroom was not crowded. There were about 20 students; these students were divided into two sub groups 'A&B'. Additionally, this classroom basically requires the use of ICTs. The students were well organized, in each session one group was having video conferencing and the others were having chat and they change the next session. The settings of this virtual classroom were totally different from traditional one.

Moreover, researcher has observed the difficulties and problems faced during the online discussion. Students, sometimes, feel like they did not well transmit their messages mainly in video conferencing sessions due to the quality of connection; they even do not understand what was said by their partners. Hence, technical problems were the only obstacle faced by students during the discussion; otherwise, everything went in a normal way.

2.4.2 Analysis of students' semi-structured interview:

Part #1:

Q1: why did you want to participate in the GVC programme?

This question was asked to see the motives that push the students to participate in this new programme. Although all the students mentioned their need for the certificate delivered by this training; yet, some of them 10% also put emphasis on the importance of developing their communication skills since this latter is somehow limited in the traditional classes. On the other hand, some students seem (20) to be more interested to speak with native speakers of the English language and consider this training as a good experience to practice their already acquired knowledge. However, majority of students 70% said that they want more to broaden their cultural knowledge and develop their abilities to communicate with people from different cultures.

Q2: As a member of this program, you have probably recognized the context, content, and purpose of the project, can you describe it?

This question was asked to evaluate students' expectations after being selected. The result was not surprising, all the students have recognized the content and context of this program; they all mentioned the topics that have been discussed with a full description. They also spoke about the purpose of this project where they displayed high positive attitudes about the new way of learning provided by this project. Some students even mentioned their satisfactory about this program where they have recognized how to effectively conduct an interaction without including personal questions or getting out of the topic which may cause communication breakdowns.

Q3: In this virtual classroom, a new way of teaching is used where the students learn from each other through various discussions and so on, what is your most important task in this global understanding project?

This question includes asking students about their task in this project in order to evaluate their awareness about their tasks in this project. The results were reasonable, some students consider themselves as representatives of their culture in settings where different cultures are presented; they emphasized on the fact of delivering a good image about their society and their culture as well. Other students consider their main task as sharing knowledge not only with foreigners but also with their teammates; they have emphasized on the importance of understanding cultural differences rather than taking it as negative point as well as working collaboratively in order to share global understanding.

Q4: Have you learned something new in these sessions? What is it?

This question was asked to see if the students really appreciate learning about different cultures, they mentioned many things they have learned, they have also mentioned what was discovered concerning different cultures, traditions, customs, food and so on. On the other hand, majority of students have spoken about teacher's role in this program. According to their answers he gave them some strategies and kept controlling them in order to conduct discussions effectively mainly with people who have different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Others

said that they have learned how to well deliver messages without showing any kind of biases and criticism; they have recognized importance of being tolerant persons.

Q5: Do you find some difficulties when performing?

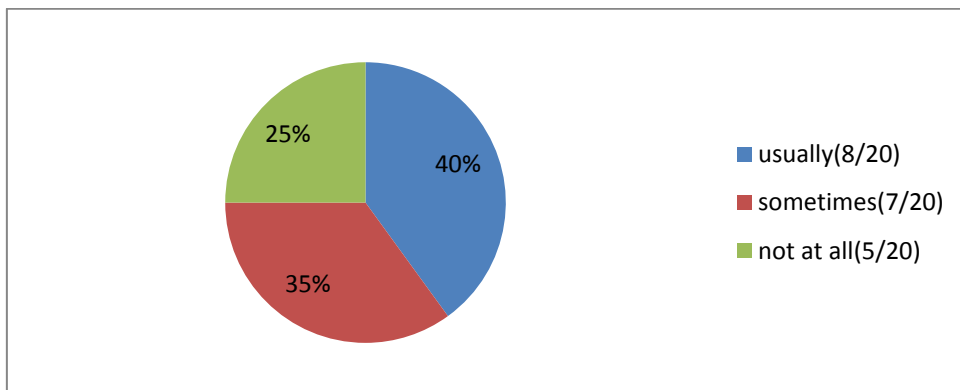


Figure 2.1: Students' Difficulties when Performing

From the above figure, the majority of students 40% seem to have difficulties when speaking to foreigners mainly when speaking to native speakers of English, they may have anxiety, fear of making mistakes, being judged by native speakers and so on. On the other hand, some students 35% have mentioned that they have stress only in each first link with new university and sometimes when they do not prepare something before the discussion. The rest of students 25% said that they don't have any difficulties when performing even when they are not well prepared; for them everything is relied on self-confidence.

Q6: When speaking about your culture, do you feel that your comments and suggestions are understood and appreciated?

In any normal discussion there is an exchange of ideas, thoughts, and knowledge, the positive attitudes and desire for understanding displayed by the persons who interact have a big role in increasing person's motivation. Therefore, the question was asked to see students' attitudes and motivation concerning this intercultural exchange project. Nearly all the students described their experience with Americans and show high motivation when studying with them. Although there were technical problems which sometimes make understanding difficult but in

general they well transmitted their messages and saw the passion and curiosity of Americans to learn about Algerian culture. Some students said that although this global understanding is an obligatory module for Americans but they keep showing us their understanding and appreciation of our comments and suggestions whether it is in or outside the class. Unexpectedly, with Indians they were less motivated because of technical problems mainly when having videoconferencing; others mentioned that they didn't get in touch with their partners outside the class.

Q7: Do you think that this course would help you to develop your communication and interpersonal skills?

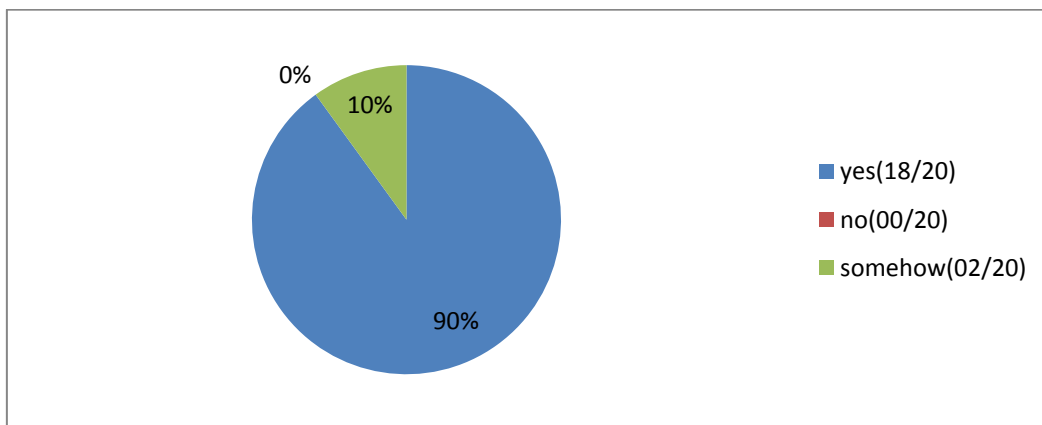


Figure 2.2: developing interpersonal and communication skills

The results above show that the majority of students could use their knowledge and skills no one said no. According to them, if not all their skills are used at least they delivered what they know about their culture in a clear way. For students who said somehow, the actually said yes but the sessions need to be extended in order to make these skills more effective.

Q8: how often you and your classmates collaborate with each other?

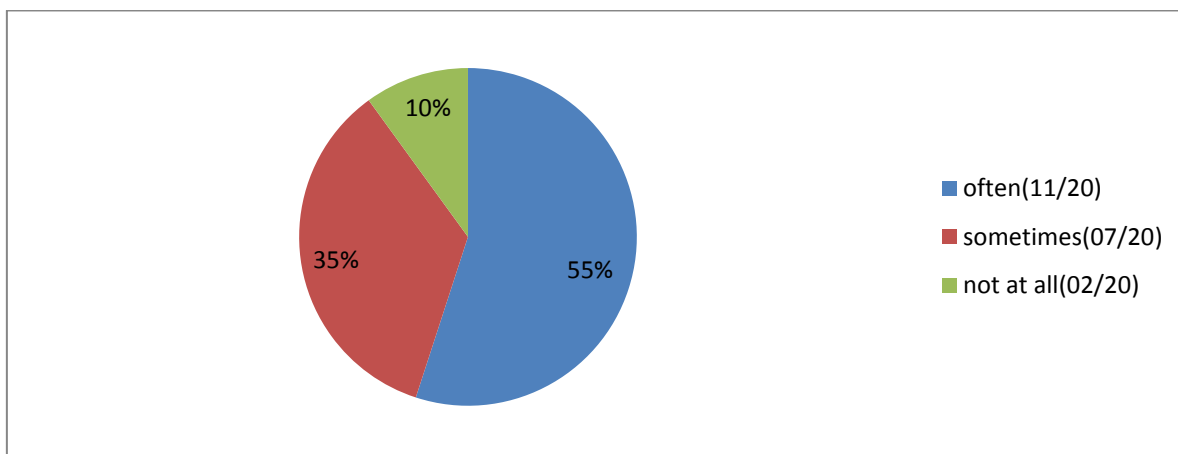
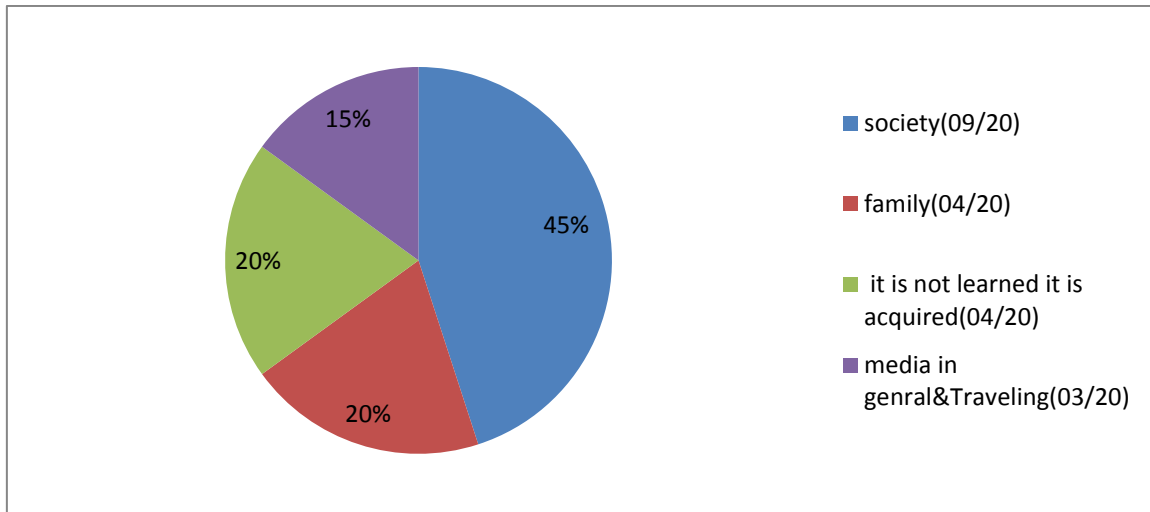


Figure2.3: Students' Collaboration

According to the results shown in the above figure, one may notice diversity in students' answer. 55% of students do collaborate with each other, they said that come before session starts and share what they found with their teammates. However, 35% of students do collaborate but not all the time because they may have classes before the link but they may meet each other in GVC and share ideas even in days when there is no link. While only (10%) do not collaborate at all they study in other departments and they could not even meet when there is no link.

Q9: what are the things that impressed you in this programme?

The GVC is based on a new way of teaching and learning which the students have never experienced before. This question was asked to know students' impressions and attitudes towards this new environment of learning. The answers vary from one students to another they all took the GU project as a different and good experience that helped them lot in improving their language, skills, being more tolerant, open minded, and sensitive towards other culture. The noticeable thing in students' answers is they all appreciate the teacher's effort in this classroom. They were all impressed by his role; he always gave the strategies to interact with others effectively.

Part#2:**Q1:** According to you where do we learn/ get culture?**Figure 2.4:** Learning Culture

This question was asked to see students' awareness concerning learning culture in general. 45% said that culture is imposed by society. However, 20% said that though there is main culture which represents the whole society as one community. Yet, they get culture from their families since within one society there are many subcultures. On the other hand, 20% of students give precise answers where they mentioned that home culture is not learned, it is rather acquired from ancestors, parents, and environment; as it is transmitted from one generation to another. While others said that if it is a target culture they may learn it by either traveling or using media in general.

Q2: What are the factors that may influence culture?

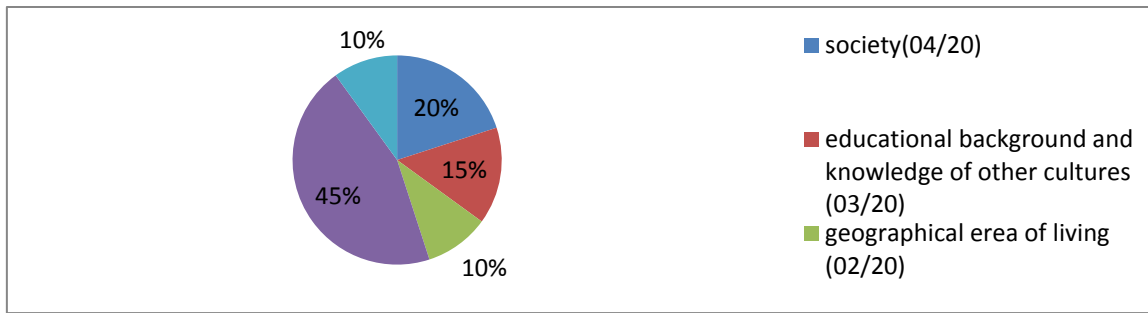


Figure 2.5: Factors that Influence one's Culture

There are many factors that may influence one's own culture by either internal or external factors. This question was asked to evaluate students' answers about the factors that influence their culture. Some students picked up just one answer and other picked up more than one. 20% consider society as the only factor that influences their culture. In addition, 15% chose educational background and knowledge of other culture. While only 10% select the geographical area of living and consider mainly the borders as factor that strongly affect their culture. On the other hand, most of students 45% said that both society and educational background and knowledge of other culture affect their culture; the first is imposed while the second is done by choice. Only (10%) of students mentioned other reasons besides society and spoke about religion as the main factor that influences their culture.

Q3: Do you think that cultural differences occur only in different societies?

They all (100%) answered by 'No'. they said that cultural differences occur also within one society; they even gave some notions to conceptualize this phenomena. They gave examples from their society where there are many subcultures and sometimes the differences occur even with one region, cities families and so on.

Q4: Are there some traditions that are unique to your culture?

The aim of this question was to know about students' awareness about their own culture. Each student gave many traditions that are unique to Algerian culture; others they give even traditions that are unique to his own environment, i.e., region.

They made comparison between many traditions in Algeria between east west for instance. There was diversity even among the team members.

Q5: Do you have that passion to learn about other cultures? What reasons push you to do so?

Some students may not appreciate learning about other cultures until they go abroad and face many challenges or even conflicts. This question was asked to see if the students are aware about the significance of learning other cultures and have the passion to do so. Although there are different reasons but they seem all to have the passion to learn about other cultures. Some students (10%) said that curiosity and love of knowledge may push them to learn other cultures. Others (25%) mentioned that they are passionate about traveling, so, learning other culture will help them to avoid cultural shock and to adapt themselves easily to the new culture. While majority (65%) consider learning and having knowledge about other cultures help them to better understand and interact effectively with other as it helps them to be tolerant, open minded and flexible as well. In general they consider learning about other culture as the key element to avoid any misunderstanding and conflicts.

Q6: Do you prefer learning about any specific culture?

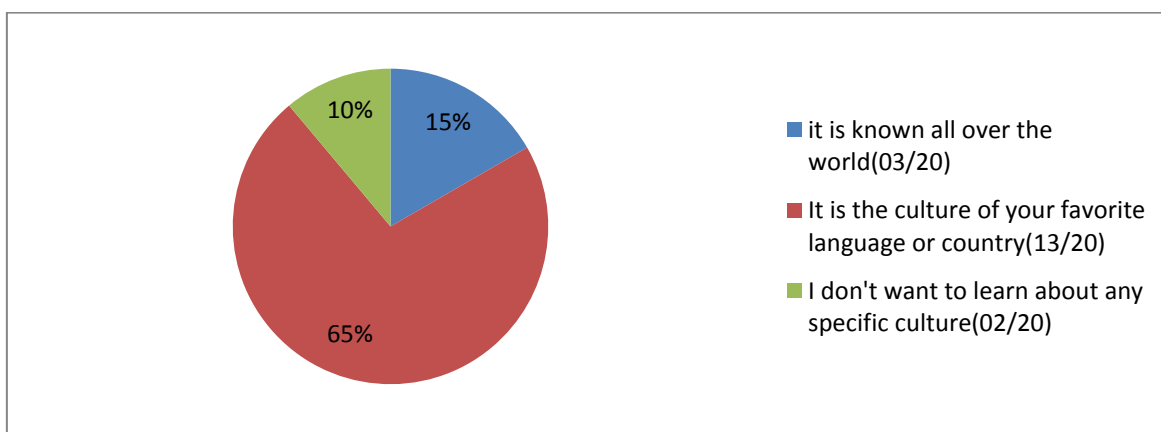


Figure 2.6: Students Desire to Learn about Specific Culture

From the above figure, it is observed that most of students (65%) prefer learning about a specific culture such as UK and USA and they are their favorite countries and the English as their favourite language as well. while Others

mentioned different languages such as Turkish, Russian and Japanese. However, only (10%) of students said that they do not have any specific culture to learn about as they do not want to limit their knowledge.

Q7: what are the methods that you use when learning about other cultures?

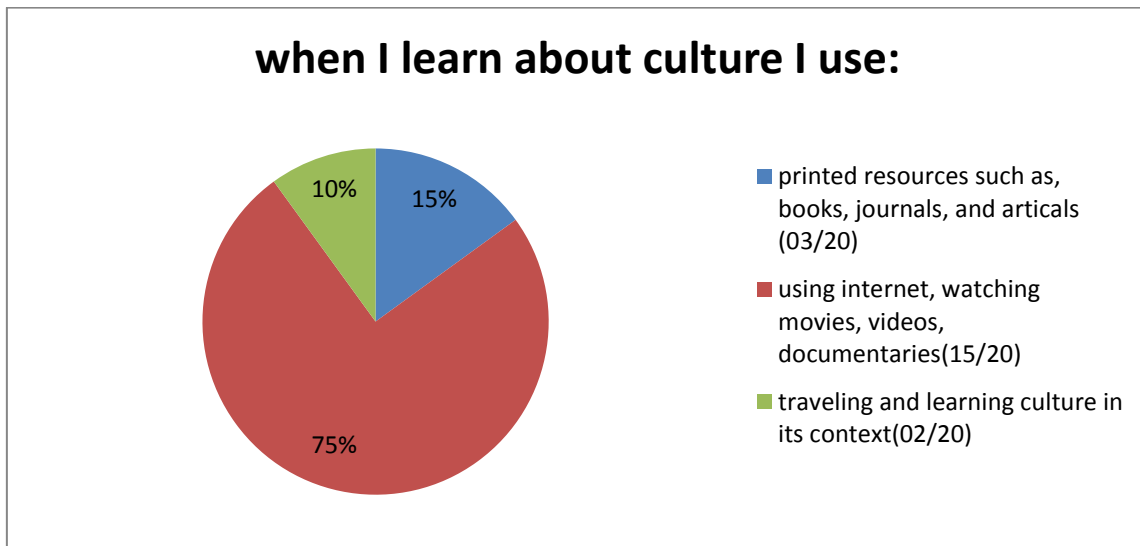


Figure 2.7: Methods Used when Learning Culture

The figure above shows that (75%) of the students learn about different culture using internet, TV shows, documentaries and so on. However, (15%) use printed sources such as magazines books articles, and so on. While only (10%) who travel and learning culture in its context.

Q8: Do you have that feeling of superiority as you consider your culture as the best one among all cultures?

It is clear that anyone has attitudes toward his culture and other culture, when asking this question. Students all (100%) answered that they don't have the feeling of superiority and they should respect all culture because they see the advantages and qualities of their cultures as the best ones, other persons who do belong to another culture do the same. Thus, the respect and understanding is the key element to avoid any conflict.

Part#3:

Q1: Do you consider cultural differences as basis for biases and criticism?

All the students answer by 'No' although they see as a fact where some people may do. According to them one must be sensitive to other cultures; s/he has to understand these differences before giving value judgments or criticizing others' behaviours. They all mentioned the significance of respect, tolerance, open mindedness, and flexibility in order to conduct an effective and successful interaction.

Q2: Learning about your culture is the first step to learn about others' culture. Do you agree?

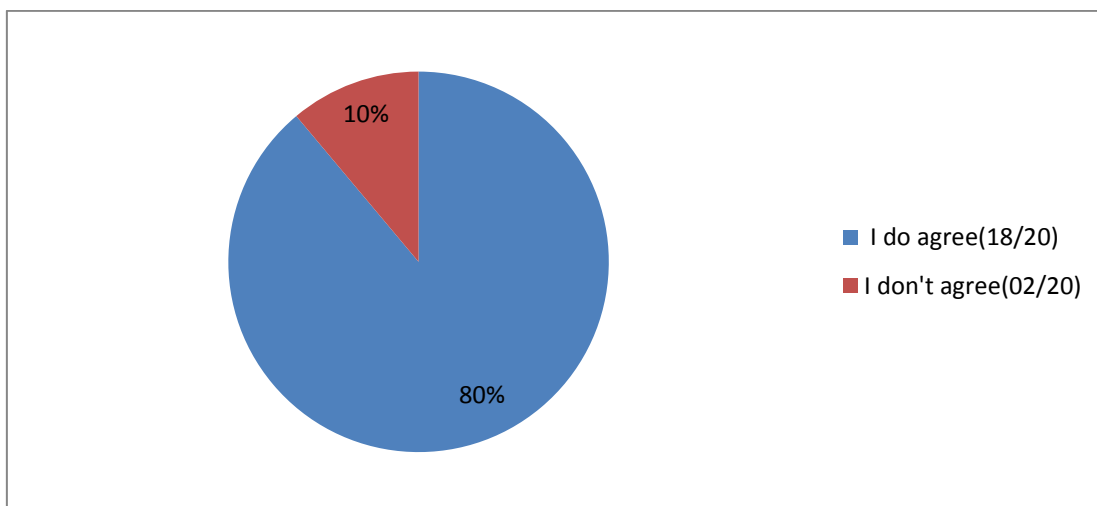


Figure 2.8: Learning about One's own Culture is the First step when learning other Cultures

The figure above demonstrates that most of students (80%) do agree with the fact that learning a new culture requires learning first about one's own culture. They said if they do not dig deep in their culture they cannot make similarities and differences between the two cultures, or even answered the received question about their culture. However, only (10%) of students do not agree on this. They said that learning a foreign culture makes them reflective about their own culture.

Q4: Have you tried to make comparison between your culture and the target culture? Under which parameters? Why?

It was found that all informants make comparison between their culture and the target culture. Some of them do it when they are in GVC, others they always do it since they are EFL learners so each time they learn a new thing about target culture they make comparison between the native culture and the target one. Sometimes, they do it unconsciously, when watching a TV show, documentary, and reading. Thus, discovering new things make the reflective about their culture.

Q5: Speaking about prejudices and stereotypes, i.e., the peculiar characteristic of a given culture; if someone asks about bad/ negative stereotypes in your culture, what will your answer be?

Whenever there is a conversation between people who do belong to different cultures, the persons avoid speaking about stereotypes and prejudices as they may be the main reason for communication breakdowns. The global understanding project gives students opportunity to experience the discussion about stereotypes and prejudices. This question was asked to know students' reaction when they are asked about stereotypes and prejudices concerning their culture. Nearly all the students prefer explaining rather than breaking down communication. They said that if it is true they may explain why or just admire. If not they may correct the wrong ideas.

Q6: According to you, what are the main factors that may cause communication breakdowns/ pragmatic failure?

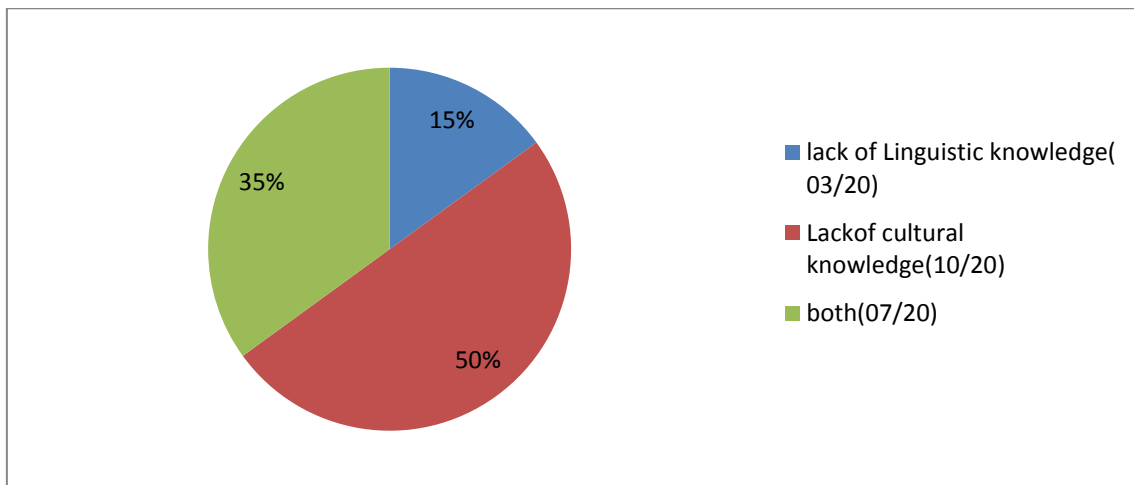


Figure 2.8: Causes of Pragmatic Failure

The figure above reveals that half of students (50%) rely the pragmatic failure on the lack of cultural knowledge. However, (35%) of students rely it on the lack of linguistic knowledge. While only (15%) who choose both answers.

Q7: What would you do if any misunderstanding or misinterpretation occurs during a conversation?

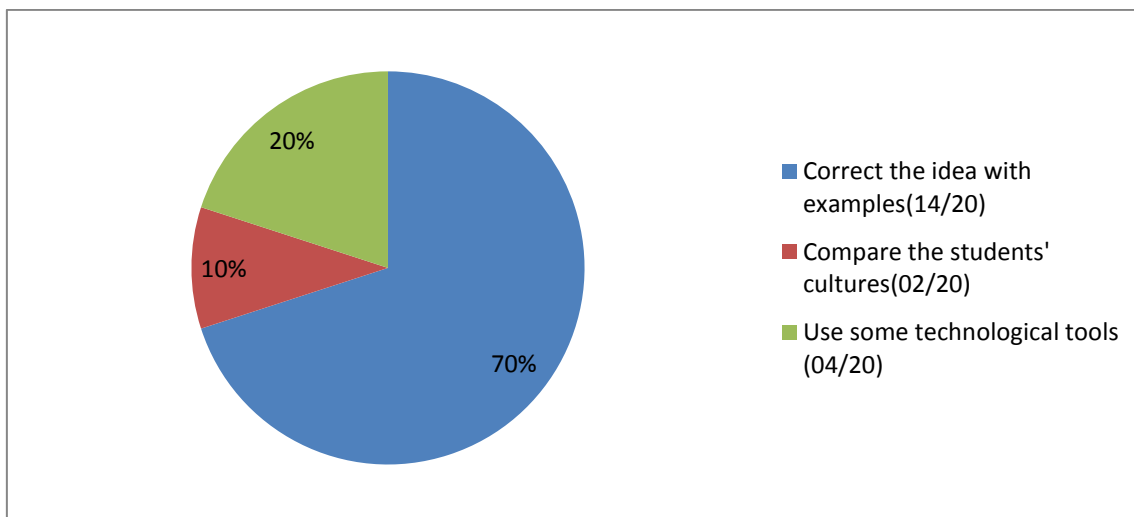


Figure 2.10: Managing Cultural Misunderstandings

The results above shows that when dealing with a misunderstanding or interpretation during conversation, majority of students (70%) use example to clarify things, they also said that it is useful in any situation and everywhere

sometimes there are not other tools but bringing clear examples to explain. Others (20%) may use the comparison between the two cultures in order to clear the ambiguity. While only 10% who moved to use technological tools.

Q8: Do you have any suggestion that may help to avoid misunderstandings or communication breakdowns?

The question was asked to give students a chance to propose some strategies that can help them to be good communicators, and avoid any cultural conflict or manage it in a reasonable way. Most of them (80%) said that knowing cultural differences is not enough one should know how to make this knowledge in practice, they should have develop the ability to effectively interact with foreigners. That is why this kind of training should be extended. While (20%) suggested reading a lot about other cultures as the key element in a successful cross cultural communication, by reading about that culture one can predict others' behaviours and avoid any conflict.

2.5 Summary and discussion of the main results

What has been collected from classroom observation and semi structured interview will result in discussing the following

2.5.1 Discussion of Classroom observation results

During classroom observation, the researcher controlled everything found in this virtual classroom. Approximately, all students were participating, highly motivated, and did pay attention to their behaviour when speaking to people who are culturally different them. They displayed a great collaboration in learning and sharing knowledge as well. Moreover, students did interact in respectful way and demonstrate a desire to understand other cultures.

It was clearly stated that this global understanding project is done virtually. It is based on cultural exchange between four different universities. Students have recognized the importance of cultural diversity; they tend to strategies to conduct discussion effectively. They show a high respect for cultural differences and try to

understand rather than giving assigning values or imposing one's point of view on the other.

2.5.2 Discussion of the interview's results

Form the analysis of semi structured interview, it has been shown that the present study relied on a sample population of 20 students. Most of them (18) are EFL learners, while only (02) study in another departments 'biology and technical sciences'.

a) Part one: awareness of global understanding project purpose, and its role in promoting students' cultural awareness

In the first part of this semi-structured interview the researcher wanted to define students' desire of participating in GVC program. The results show that a high percentage of students want to broaden their cultural knowledge and others want to develop the ability to communicate cross culturally, since GVC is based only on practice. According to their answers, they all recognized the purpose of this project, and they tend to present their culture as well as understand others' culture. Concerning difficulties, most of students (45%) have difficulties when performing such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes in front of native speakers, but in general they were satisfied about their performances as they could transmit messages in a clear way by also the help of their teammates. Others (35%) mentioned the help of online discussion in getting rid of the stress and developing high self-confidence. Furthermore, the course helped students to develop their communication and interpersonal skills. These have been shown in their answers, as the rate for this answer went from 10% to 90% which reflect that the students have recognize the importance of developing knowledge about other culture and developing communication skills that put them on the road of being good communicators. Students' responses concerning the matters they have learned in this programme shows their move from taking cultural differences as an issue to try to understand these differences in order to minimise value judgments and stereotypes. They rather learned to be tolerant, flexible and open minded in order to well conduct a cross cultural communication

- b) Part two:** awareness of one's own culture and the target culture helps in overcoming judging other people's behaviour and beliefs.

When a student is aware of his own culture and others' culture he may start appreciating cultural differences and instead of giving judgments he will try to understand such behaviours. The responses provided by students show that they have made a great progress concerning their ability to communicate cross culturally and nearly overcoming value judgments. Their answers about the question concerning learning culture were divided into two parts; in the first one majority of students (45%) said that home culture is imposed by society which may explain that each one is influenced by his society. Other (20%) said that culture is rather acquired from ancestors, families, and environment which reflect the existence of subcultures within one society. The rest of students (15%) spoke about using technological tools in order to learn target culture and even travelling it reflects students use technological tools to develop their cultural knowledge. also results show that all students have the passion to learn about different cultures; majority of students 65% consider learning as a key element to avoid any misunderstanding and to be more sensitive and tolerant towards other cultures. On the other hand, responses show that approximately all students 65% have the desire to learn about specific cultures as they consider it as the culture of their favourite language or country using different methods such as books, TV shows, and media. However, few of them consider the best way to learn about culture is travelling and living the experience. The students do appreciate cultural differences rather than judging people's behaviour and beliefs. This has been show in their answers where they don't have the feeling of superiority as they consider their culture as the best one. They all said that each culture has its own qualities; therefore, one must see from others' perspectives in order to facilitate understanding and avoid value judgments.

- c) Part three: students' intercultural awareness, and the ability to manage the cultural conflicts.**

Whenever there is a contact between two or more different cultures, there are cultural or communication barriers that may cause misunderstanding or break down

communication as well. The questions asked in this part aim at evaluating students' ability to avoid biases and manage any misunderstanding they may encounter. According to students' answers they tend to respect and cultural diversity as well. Results show that 90% of students do agree on the fact that learning about one's culture is the first step to learn about other cultures. They consider it as main fact to carry on discussion and make comparison for more understanding. However, only 10% did not agree, they said that learning new cultures make them reflective about their own culture. Furthermore, half of students 50% tend to develop their cultural knowledge in order to avoid communication breakdowns. Moreover, the responses of the question about answering or explaining stereotypes about one's own culture show students' willingness explain and correct stereotypes if any rather than breaking down communication. They also tend to use simple ways to explain ambiguity or unclear concepts during conversation. According to students' answers, 70% prefer the use of examples for more clarification, since the technological tools may not be always available. Concerning the last question, it aimed at making students contributing in avoiding any conflict and to evaluate what they have learned from this project. The answers show students' awareness of having knowledge about other cultures in order to understand the differences rather than being bias to one's own culture. They also suggest developing one's ability to interact with people who have different cultures. They said that one have to be tolerant, flexible, and open minded in order to avoid cultural barriers and to well manage cross cultural communication.

2.6 Interpretations of the results

The main aim of this exploratory research was to identify the role of global understanding course in promoting students' cultural and intercultural awareness. The findings revealed that this cultural exchange programme has a considerable impact on students' behaviours, as they have learned and developed many cognitive skills and capacities through the process of cultural exchange. Besides, the results show that they achieve enormous progress after being involved in this cross cultural training.

The data collected also confirmed what has already been expected in the sense that the respondents developed many skills such as, interaction, communicative and interpersonal skills. According to the findings, students are aware of the purpose of this project which is achieving global understanding through online collaboration. The majority consider themselves as representatives of their culture in a multicultural situation. On the other hand, this cross-cultural training offers students the opportunity to learn about culture in a real context through direct speaking with the holders of that culture. Therefore, passing through this process of exchange, i.e., explaining, observing, understanding, analysing, and interpreting will enhance their intercultural competence and make them good intercultural speakers as well. As a result, from what has been observed, students' cultural awareness raised in this training and this latter is reflected through their behaviours, because it has been observed that they have developed the ability to could translate, analyse, interpret and explain. Hence, they serve as mediators between the home and target culture.

In the same vein with research hypothesis, most of informants believe that culture is imposed as well as they consider society as the main factor that may influence culture. Thus, this may explain the reasons behind cultural conflicts, each one would be restricted to his beliefs and perspectives and judging others' behaviours without even trying to understand others' perspectives. On the other hand, students' answers show that they are conscious of cultural diversity; they dropped totally judging other people's behaviour or beliefs, they rather try to understand such differences. From what has been observed, students' awareness rises when they received information which is totally contradicting to their beliefs and logic they dropped totally the possibility of getting engaged in a debate or trying to correct others' ideas with the correctness of their own beliefs, they rather show a high respect for others behaviour. Consequently, students' awareness raised at the point where they demonstrate a high respect for their partners thought they have different cultural affiliations from them, they were open, curious and willing to learn from and about people who have different cultural orientations and perspectives.

Whenever there is a contact between two different people from different cultures there is a possibility of facing misunderstanding or pragmatic failure, sometimes, the misunderstanding happens unconsciously just because the lack of awareness of others' behaviours and perspectives. Therefore, this cross cultural training motivates and impels students about the significance of having cultural knowledge and being aware of cultural differences. Accordingly the findings confirmed that the GVC participants witnessed remarkable developments in terms of behaviour, they become more tolerant, flexible, and open minded. This clearly appeared when discussing the topic of stereotypes. They totally dropped the possibility of breaking down communication, they rather choose to clarify and explain when necessary. Also when they asked others about stereotypes they ask in quite respectful way without touching in others beliefs. Besides, the results confirm research expectations in the sense that through this cross cultural training students develop strategies when delivering messages, when asking about others' culture in order to avoid misunderstandings; if any misinterpretation happens they tend to use different methods to solve the situation.

The findings of the last question in the third section revealed that the majority of students recommend the extension of this kind of cross cultural training so they can adopt to today's world. The suggestions also include reading in order to develop cultural knowledge which helps them to predict others' behaviours and avoid misunderstanding when interacting. Moreover, responses disclose that there should be such programmes that expose students directly to the target culture in order to be good communicators in real life international experiences.

As a research conclusion, data interpretation shown that students in this cross cultural training have developed many cognitive skills and abilities, namely, understanding and acceptance of cultural differences as well as they developed the ability to identify and use a variety of strategies to communicate with those different people. Moreover, they could serve as cultural mediators, and developed the competence to overcome stereotypes and prejudices.

In nutshell, this online collaboration helps students to develop their cultural knowledge since they are exposed directly to the target culture. In this respect, Tomalin and Masuhara (2004: 06) assert that “while cultural knowledge is mostly gained from other people, cultural awareness is also gained from personal experience either directly through visits to foreign countries or indirectly through music, films, and literature”. In addition, Byram (1998) confirmed that cultural knowledge will lead to cultural awareness. He pointed out that cultural knowledge helps learners to “perceive and cope with differences” (p.04)

2.7 Implications:

Cross-cultural experiences have long been considered as a powerful technique for developing interpersonal skills, cultural intelligence, intercultural competence sensitivity, and awareness as well (Mintzberg and Gosling 2002). Moreover the focus of such experiences has evolved from exploring static differences between holders of different cultures, to fostering mutual understanding and knowledge sharing (Matveev& Nelson 2004).

The present research paper focused more on the possibility and importance of establishing an intercultural interaction through exposing students to a new environment where different cultures meet. Such project helps students to develop many abilities and skills that make them tolerating cultural differences, appreciating similarities and change attitudes to collaborate with people from different cultures. It was reported that students enrolled in GU program developed their cognitive abilities through interaction and this was reflected through their behaviours where they demonstrate high respect and appreciation for different cultures.

The findings of the present study shows that GU project significantly contribute to the preparation of students by putting them on the road of being good global communicators, to function effectively in a multicultural world and to promote cultural awareness. Moreover, the variation in students’ behaviour that has been illustrated through this investigation suggest that students taking part in this

program have increased their abilities to well interact with people from different cultures, to deal with differences in cross cultural experience, and developed cultural awareness and respect for different cultures.

It is true that cross cultural training helps students to develop such strategies and abilities to cope with different situation, but students cannot be exposed to such situation and expect from them to well behave and interact. Accordingly some suggestions recommended for both, teachers of foreign language and students as well. Teaching culture should emphasise on promoting students' intercultural competence in order to well interact with people who have different cultural affiliations. Students, then, should be encouraged to connect globally; and they should be taught to be aware of the home culture and assess it with the target one. Moreover, teaching students should include making students aware about the importance of accepting foreign way of thinking and behaving and listening before giving judgments on others' behaviours and beliefs to overcome any cultural conflicts.

2.8 Conclusion

The second chapter was about the research methodology, it started with a full description of the program, and students' profile and teacher's profile were analysed too. Another part of this chapter was devoted for research design and instrumentation; it was followed by analysis, and interpretation. The research conclusions and interpretations highlighted the role of global understanding project in promoting students' cultural awareness. It ended with suggestions for further research about extending these kinds of cross-cultural trainings as means for enhancing students' abilities to interact effectively in a multicultural world.

General Conclusion

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The trend of globalization has let many people to live in a global village, and see their cultures intermingled in varied ways. In fact, the rapid development of technology and communication around the world encouraged people to get in touch with those who are different from them. Sometimes they are obliged to go through the process of interacting with different people by travelling, working, studying abroad and so on. As a result, intercultural communication has become a crucial challenge for people as they belong to a multicultural society.

Cross-cultural contact is raising at a rapid pace. This is in part due to developments in transportations, communication technologies, emergence of international corporations, and movements of manufacturing. Another area of increased intercultural exposure is the ever growing number of educational exchange programs. Hence, to be as effective as possible in the present century, it is quite important that individuals develop their abilities to successfully communicate and interact with the culturally diverse individuals they will encounter within and outside their home countries, no matter the purpose of the interaction. Having the culturally appropriate skills, behaviours, and attitudes, i.e., intercultural competence, intercultural awareness, sensitivity are necessary to effectively fulfil the interactional role in today's world.

In the present continuously globalizing world, education is moving forward and serving the people living in the cultural world of today and tomorrow through becoming increasingly international with universities welcoming more students from around the globe. The universities, educational exchange programs, forum, and international conferences give birth to a cultural diversity that provides many benefits as well as potential challenges (pragmatic failures, cultural misunderstandings...). The differences in values, norms, and behaviours became apparent in various ways through communication styles, learning beliefs, and the way of working and collaborating. The differences and similarities arising from diversity could be managed through

developing a cultural awareness involving intercultural competence and sensitivity about cultures different than ours.

This study emphasized on the role of global understanding project in developing students' cultural awareness and its effect on their behaviours as they will act as intercultural competent persons.

The first chapter provided a theoretical background by virtue of a set of definitions and illustrations about: cultural awareness and aspects of intercultural situation. It also highlighted the role of the GU program in promoting cultural awareness.

However, the second chapter is a case study which started by description of the global virtual classroom and then, students' and teacher's profile analysis was provided. It also included a description of research design and instrumentation. Data collected have been analysed and interpreted followed by a discussion and recommendations for further research.

This research shows that one of the main fundamental factors to develop students' cultural awareness is to expose them to real situations through global understanding project. This program, in turn, is thought to promote peace and global understanding among students. Hence acquiring a global knowledge will help students to be good global citizens and to adjust to the multicultural society.

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Appendices

Appendices

Appendix A:

Grid of observation

subject	Behaviours			comments
	Low	moderate	high	
Individual attention				
They do correct each other when necessary.				
They encourage each other to speak.				
They are stressed when performing				
They feel comfortable when sharing ideas, questions, and needs.				
They consider carefully what they are speaking; as well they pay attention to how to say it.				
	Skills and abilities			
They do interact without giving negative assigning values.				
They are able to express themselves freely.				
They are able to well express concepts related to their culture				
They do restate questions and answers when necessary				
They do ask for clarification				

They do collaborate when answering/ asking questions.				
They share responsibility when answering.				
They try to understand cultural differences rather than judging others' beliefs and behaviours				
	awareness			
They are aware of cultural differences				
They are aware about the way they should ask and deliver messages				
They keep ask question about the target culture				
They well explain their culture and related concepts to it.				
	attitudes			
They demonstrate motivation to learn new items though they are different.				
Fun and excitement.				
Showing respect for target culture.				
Understanding cultural differences and appreciating cultural				

similarities.				
Demonstrate desire to learn about others' culture				

APPENDIX B

Semi-structured interview:

Developing Cultural Awareness through Online Collaboration:

This semi-structured interview is designed to check whether the students are aware of cultural differences or not. It is divided into three parts, the first one aims at seeing if the students recognize the purpose of GVC program; the second is devoted to see their awareness about the native and the target culture; and the third is devoted to analyze the students' ability to deal with cultural conflicts. This interview is a part of research work in cultural studies; you are kindly requested to answer the following questions. Your answers and identity will remain anonymous and confidential. Thank you for your cooperation.

Student's profile:

Level of proficiency:

Specialty:

Part one:

- 1) Why did you want to participate in the GVC project?
- 2) As a member of this program, you have probably recognized the context, content, and purpose of the project, can you describe it?
- 3) In this virtual classroom, a new way of teaching is used where the students learn from each other through various discussions and so on, what is your most important task in this global understanding project?
- 4) Have you learned something new in these sessions? What is it?

- 5) Do you find some difficulties when performing? If any, what are these difficulties?
- 6) When speaking about your culture, do you feel that your comments and suggestions are understood and appreciated?
- 7) Do you feel that you had the opportunity to fully use your knowledge and skills in this program?
- 8) Do you think that this course would help you to develop your interpersonal and communicative skills?
- 9) How well and much time you and your classmates collaborate with one another?
- 10) What are the things that impressed you in this program?

Part two:

- 1) The global understanding project is based on cultural exchange; so, what do you know about culture in general?
- 2) According to you where do we learn/ get culture?
- 3) What are the factors that influence our culture?
 - a. Society
 - b. Educational background and our knowledge of other cultures
 - c. Geographical area of living
 - d. Other things
- 4) Do you think that cultural differences occur only in different societies? How?
- 5) Are there some traditions that are unique to your culture? What are they?
- 6) Why don't all people think, behave and act in the same way though they belong to the same socio-cultural origin/ background?
- 7) Do you have that passion to learn about different cultures? What reasons push you to do so?

8) Do you prefer learning about any specific culture? Is that because:

a. It is known all over the world; or

b. It is simply the culture of your favorite language or country;

or c. There are other reasons.

9) What are the methods that you use when learning about other cultures?

Part three:

1) Do you consider cultural difference as basis for criticism and biases? How?

2) Learning about your culture is the first step to learn other's culture, do you agree? Why?

3) Do you have that feeling of superiority as you consider your culture as the best one among all cultures?

4) Have you tried to make comparison between your culture and the target culture? Under which parameters? and Why?

5) Speaking about prejudices and stereotypes, i.e., the peculiar characteristic of a given culture; if someone asks about bad/ negative stereotypes in your culture, what will your answer be?

6) According to you, what are the main factors that may cause communication breakdowns/ pragmatic failure?

a. Lack of linguistic knowledge

b. Lack of cultural knowledge

c. Other reasons

7) What would you do if any misunderstanding or misinterpretation occurs during the conversation?

a. Correct the idea with examples

b. Compare the students' cultures

c. Use some technological tools (including videos, pictures, illustrations, etc.) for more valid evidence

8) Do you have any suggestions that may help to avoid that misunderstanding and communication breakdowns?