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INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: TRENDS AND INNOVATIONS

Contemporary higher education faces some unprecedented challenges worldwide:

- accelerating competition for new populations of students at home and abroad;
- the opportunities, costs, uncertainties, and uneven distribution and availability of new technology;
- declining state support for public institutions and educational initiatives in general; and
- rising tuition and educational costs.

In response, some critics have called for a more disciplined, but entrepreneurial approach to higher education. These critics argue that colleges face the same fundamental challenges confronted by any business of whatever ilk. Furthermore, the introduction of a more business-oriented approach into the public discourse, quite squarely captured by Bill Gates in a statement about his own avocation: “Information technology and business are becoming inextricably interwoven. I don't think anybody can talk meaningfully about one without the talking about the other”, is now quite evident. We cannot but see that education and business, as well as information technology, are now intertwined to a degree when securing steady revenue streams, covering expenses, using resources well, and planning for an uncertain future are functioning in the academy on a par with the concepts of academic integrity, student assessment, and the achievement gap.

Global demand for higher education has never been stronger, and it is still growing. In the United States, for example, international students comprise a $20 bl. industry [8], making education one of few export sectors where the country remains the undisputed world leader as the recipient of about 20 percent of international students. Francisco Sánchez, under secretary for international trade at the U.S. Commerce Department, said in this regard that educational exports are “a part of a long-term strategy to set America on strong footing in emerging global markets.” [7]. Benefits of this sector are not limited to the economic and political implications, however, as “going global” bolsters colleges and universities’ diversity (these days, some private colleges and universities (including such prominent ones as Harvard) emphasize diversity over raw numbers).

The spotlight now is increasingly focused on the key issues that will ensure the success of international education or cooperation. Prominent among the most compelling issues are: what curricular structures, modes of delivery, partnership patterns are most effective in this arena.

Experts in the U.S. are ever more of the opinion that the most effective instructional delivery system is neither traditional classroom teaching alone, nor exclusively online instruction. They are examining approaches that thoughtfully unite the two approaches (i.e., traditional classroom and online in a blended approach that captures the instructional benefits of each of this systems).

Traditional classroom model, which has dominated our educational paradigm ever since John Amos Comenius’ *Didactica Magna,* is being increasingly challenged by the evident shift to competency-based education from seat-time, the mounting need for convenience and flexibility to a more and more diverse and time-constrained student population, and the daily emergence of communication technologies and capabilities.

One the other hand, despite the inexorable march of technology-based education over the course of the past two decades, we truly remain pioneers in this arena. One such example is the growing popularity of virtual high schools in the U.S. Even with astounding 275,000 secondary school students attending virtual schools in SY 2011 – 2012 [6] and some states, like Florida or Colorado, having pedagogical and quality assurance safeguards for online education in place, many states have not legislated the necessary outcomes-based expectations and measures as of this writing. As a result, the issues of the quality and effectiveness of online learning generally and of specific schools remain quite pressing, leading to some less-than-stellar student outcomes.

The situation on the postsecondary level is even more compelling: the number of students taking at least one online course increased from 3.9 million in Fall 2007 to 4.6 million in Fall 2008, a 17 percent jump, and to 5.6 million in 2009, a 21 percent increase. The percentage of college students taking at least one online course is now almost 30 percent, up from less than 10 percent in 2002 [5]. The reason for such unprecedented growth is not only the flexibility and accessibility of online education, but economies of scale: colleges can deliver more efficiently the same content when utilizing a well-managed cohort model. At that, countless studies show success rates in online courses of only 50 % — as opposed to 70% – 75% for comparable face-to-face classes [5]. As a result, the adoption of online higher education is occurring in roughly inverse proportion to possession of prestige, both at the institutional and disciplinary levels: there is significant growth in for-profit colleges and community colleges and in disciplines like business and education, but far less at elite four-year institutions [5]; some of them, like, for example, Harvard College, do not accept their own online credits, such as those awarded through the Harvard Summer School [2].

International online education can be more vulnerable in this regard, reflecting all of the shortcomings of both the online mode of delivery rehearsed above, as well as those of “educational exports”: absence of unified strategic vision and a lack of coordinated consultation among the key players in this arena (students, education providers, and accreditors). Critical measures of effectiveness, such as students’ receptivity and performance levels, are also influenced by cultural factors and language barriers.

At the same time, traditional classroom models (with their time-tested success rates and more comfortable environment for students coming from emerging markets) often cannot be employed in these markets by virtue of the constraints in resources and personnel, as well as the inability of the majority of students to pay the customary “sticker price” for these courses of study.

In an attempt to address these shortcomings, pioneering institutions and researchers more and more often recognize the necessity to employ a blended approach or a **hybrid online system**, which, if well conceived and delivered, leads to higher learning outcome performance [4; 9]. The reality is that in an increasingly high-tech world students also are demanding that their instruction has the high-touch dimension of human interaction.

Attempting to support the meaningful collaboration and transformational learning, hybrid online environments architects are now rejecting the initial approach that simply replicated traditional classroom pedagogy. The following text details the educational, psychological and social, as well as technological and economic features of an effective hybrid online design and its implementation that has been introduced by the American Academy of Vietnam (http://www.ama.edu.vn/en/) and classified as Active Learning®. But in order to proceed in a meaningful fashion, it is important for us to first provide a wider context describing the development of the educational sector in Vietnam in general.

In 2011, Vietnam represented the 8th top country of origin of foreign students in the U.S. (AY 2010 – 2011 – 15,000 students; although the number is relatively small, it grew 14% compared to the previous year) [8]. (The same source identifies India (now in decline, but expected to regain accelerated numbers of undergraduate students by 2015), Brazil, South Korea, Turkey, and Indonesia among other international locales with strong ties to the U.S., a growing middle-class, a priority and appetite for education, and the lack of a domestic capacity to serve current populations of students at the present time. From the American perspective, the countries identified above have become a primary focal point for recruitment efforts).

Vietnam has experienced some difficulties in its importing of higher education programs from foreign institutions, many of these delivered online. Over the past year, the government has taken necessary steps to regulate and set quality control standards for the delivery of higher education by foreign entities [9]. Prominent among the standards in place is the requirement that twenty-five “contact hours” must accompany any online course instruction for which degree-related credit is awarded. Such a requirement effectively makes the hybrid online mode of delivery the only possible system through which foreign degrees can be granted. Furthermore, for most of these programs to be recognized, a partnership must be established between a foreign university wishing to grant degrees and a Vietnamese university approved by the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam (MOET). Data collected via our own observations and personal interviews suggest that these decisions are not a bureaucratic frolic, but a time-tested necessity, best summarized by one of the students who received an American MBA degree from an online university, quite actively operating in Vietnam: “Online instruction? Never again, it is a waste of time!”

Let us now look in more detail at the Active Learning® model developed in Vietnam specifically to fit the educational profile of the country and, although not presently incorporated in an American degree-program of which we are aware, having, to our mind, universal value and evident potential for extrapolation to other countries, disciplinary areas, and educational levels.

The Active Learning® model combines technology-based independent learning (which can take place in the classroom or outside it) with short (up to 15 minutes) individual sessions with an instructor. This approach is flexible and convenient for students. The classroom, which is fully equipped, has teaching assistants, and functions also as a library, is open from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.; instructors are available for individual sessions within the same time frame. The institutional advantage in adopting this model is evident in terms of resources, classroom space, instructor's time among others.

Students who enroll in the Active Learning course of study come to the Academy's locations either to work in the classroom and, then, meet with the instructor or only to meet with the instructor, if they prefer to work with the content at home. During individual sessions with the instructor, students resolve any questions they may have regarding the learning material, make oral presentations, and receive detailed feedback. As a result of such organization, students do get more focused and personalized time with the instructor when working on *each* unit, whereas during traditional classroom sessions some of them fail to get any personal attention, having to compete for professor's time, or, else, can effectively eschew such attention due to the lack of preparation or dispositional shyness.

Continuous assessment and feedback (through written tests taken by students individually or done during "speaking" sessions with the instructor) are an important part of each unit allowing for the adjustment of the content placed for further work, but retaining, at the same time, the horizontal unity with respect to curricula at a given level and vertical unity in the hierarchy of the stages of education.

The Active Learning® appears to have important psychological and social implications as well. It capitalizes on individual initiative on the part of a student as one of the major determinants of his or her success in mastering the educational content. The Active Learning® works with the entire personality, instead of ignoring some of its facets on the assumption that "education can be reduced to external, verbal and mnemonic transmission of adult knowledge through the teacher's words to the pupil's mind" [10, p. 5]. It, therefore, provides a dynamic, but comfortable learning environment; one, which prevents students from feeling tired in class and simultaneously bolsters their self-study discipline. The personalized approach employed in it reduces the time devoted to reach a certain learning outcome, thus allowing students to accommodate and balance other academic or personal commitments.

We afforded considerable attention to the description of the Active Learning approach to make known what the authors believe to be an effective hybrid model that creates its own methodology rather than simply reproducing traditional system that, for some unfortunate reasons, had to resort to “other means”. This methodology has shown itself to be robust and effective in terms of learning outcomes, defying, if you will, the time and space imperative of traditional educational systems. Students can literally study anywhere and at any time (including the opportunity to come to the school at any time) to receive the training for which they paid their hard earned tuition.

In closing, allow us to outline the areas that the authors believe deserve more attention on the part of both researchers and educational practitioners.

Despite the obvious economic advantages of some models over others, instructional integrity and not finances must ultimately determine the model employed by any educational entity. Many educational initiatives of late, especially those spontaneously developed in response to largely budget-driven challenges that were addressed as a matter of urgency, remain primarily “grass-root” efforts, sometimes disconnected from other parts of the educational system. The result is, more often than we like, promises of immediate savings and hoped-for outcomes unfulfilled, followed by understandable reputational damage.

Secondly, we live in a world milieu where a seemingly permanent global educational anatomy known to us for at least fifty years is being rearranged forever by forces either little understood or nascent at the advent of the 21st Century. Given this reality, the oversight by accreditors or government agencies to ensure adequate quality controls and performance thresholds, both in the distributing countries and in those nations that are on the receiving end, remains essential in keeping the educational focus on student outcomes, as opposed to profits and/or cost savings.

From a strictly student-centered perspective, engagement in virtual learning should not isolate them from the healthy socialization afforded by the traditional school or similar communal settings.

And, finally, the pedagogical training of teachers must change dramatically from how to use a computer and access the power of the Internet, to how to teach and deliver an effective curriculum via electronic means.

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Хагерті Дж. Міжнародне співробітництво у сфері вищої освіти: тенденції та інновації

У статті увагу зосереджено на освітніх інноваціях, які здатні забезпечити успіх міжнародній освіті або співпраці. Виявлено переваги й недоліки і традиційної освітньої моделі, і онлайн-навчання, обґрунтовано доцільність та перспективи введення останньої моделі. Обговорено освітні, психологічні, соціальні та технологічні впливи однієї з гібридних онлайн-систем – Active Learning®. Автор також розкриває більш широкий освітній контекст (і міжнародний, і на рівні окремої країни), який сприяв появі цієї освітньої моделі.

Ключові слова: освітні інновації, міжнародні освітні проекти, гібридна онлайн-система, модель Active Learning®.

Хагерти Дж. Международное сотрудничество в сфере высшего образования: тенденции и инновации

В статье внимание сосредоточено на образовательных инновациях, которые способны обеспечить успех международному образованию или сотрудничеству. Выявлены преимущества и недостатки как традиционной образовательной модели, так и онлайн-обучения, обоснованы целесообразность и перспективы введения последней. Обсуждаются образовательные, психологические, социальные и технологические стороны одной из гибридных онлайн-систем – Active Learning®. Автор также раскрывает более широкий (как международный,

так и на уровне отдельно взятой страны) образовательный контекст, который привел к появлению таких образовательных моделей.

Ключевые слова: образовательные инновации, международные образовательные проекты, гибридная онлайн-система, модель Active Learning®.

Hagerty G. International Cooperation in Higher Education: Trends and Innovations

The article focuses on the educational innovations that can be employed to ensure the success of international education or cooperation. The advantages and disadvantages of both traditional and online learning are distinguished. The suitability and prospects of the introduction of the last one are substantiated. Among various modes of delivery, the authors choose to talk about educational, psychological, social, and technological implications of a hybrid online system, classified as the Active Learning model. Larger educational context that prompted the emergence of such models on the global and country-specific levels is discussed as well.

Key words: educational innovations, international education, hybrid online system, Active Learning model.

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