Opportunities and Challenges in inter-country educational collaboration: United States and Philippines

With increasing global business opportunities, it is advantageous for students to be exposed to working with other students in other countries. Doing so influences knowledge sharing and enhances the learning process. Based on the technologies of the countries involved, the approach to teaching and learning/collaboration changes (Thigpen, 2015). With the continued advancement of technologies, interaction among professors and students can take place without the necessity of being present in the same place at the same time. However, absence of effective communication or poor coordination can result in failed projects (Darling-Hamilton et al., 2014). The inclusion of technology-based learning into school curriculum in the United States along with the integration of the Internet into the learning process has helped students attain far reaching improvements (Thigpen, 2015). Pew Research Center and Elon University predict that in 2025, the Internet will be "like electricity:" pervasive yet imperceptible (Anderson, 2014). Internet technologies provide the opportunity to facilitate communication, interaction, and collaboration among users, and has become prevalent in educational environments around the world (Barjaktarović, L., Stanković, JS, Gavrilović, JM., 2014). Countries that have been able to include technology-based learning, as well as providing internet access to their students, have seen similar success. However, not all countries have had the luxury of the same level of technology. Internet access is limited in some countries, inhibiting students from having access to educational opportunities. The Philippines is a country where education is limited by the access to technology and the limitation and reliability of the Internet.

Currently, students in the Philippines have very limited access to the internet. Based on internet speed, the Philippines ranks 122nd in the World, averaging 3.52 Mb/s (download speed) and 1.46 mb/s upload speeds. Compare that to the US, which ranks 21st in the world with 32.14 mb/s (download speed) and 9.54 mb/s (upload speed) (Forbes, 2016). Among the faculty and administrators in schools throughout the Philippines, there is an interest and willingness to adopt new technology-based learning methods. But they cite as a continuing challenge of how to foster this type of innovative teaching because of the limitations of technological infrastructures at their schools (Arinto, 2016).

The further investigate the opportunities and challenges, a project is underway between Texas Southern University (TSU) and Southern Leyte State University-Thomas Opus (SLSU-TO). SLSU-TO is located in the southern Philippines on the island of Leyte. SLSU-TO has over 8,000 students, with degree programs in business administration (management, marketing, accounting, and MIS) and education. The majority of the island is rural and has very limited internet access, even below the average internet speed of the Philippines. The project will consist of collaboration among MIS students at TSU and SLSU-TO to design and create a web site. Challenges that must be addressed, in addition to internet speed, include the web design

knowledge level of the MIS students at the different schools, the availability of technology tools, the teaching methods used at each school, and basic cultural issues.

Web design is a subject taught both at TSU and SLSU-TO. For the successful collaboration, students need to have a similar level of understand of web design languages; therefore faculty at both universities need to be aware of the different teaching methods and level of instruction at each university. There are many technologies available for web design, but consideration must be given to the cost and availability of technology tools. For this reason, free web design software that is available over the Internet is the most appropriate solution. However, the reliability of the internet connection at SLSU-TO may prove to be a challenge.

The schools in the Philippines (K-12 and university) are taught in English, so students tend to understand English; however English is typically not spoken at home so the students have limited speaking skills. Because of this, the Filipino students tend to be shy when communicating with native English speakers. The culture in the Philippines is also very casual when it comes to time. If a meeting is scheduled for 3:00pm it cannot be expected that students will be on time. Therefore, synchronous meetings via communication technologies can be frustrating for those waiting for attendees to join. Asynchronous communication may be a more appropriate method.

While other challenges are apparent, this is an opportunity for students of TSU and of SLSU-TO to bridge the gap between two countries and cultures to work toward a common goal. Using technology tools makes this type of experiential learning possible, and becomes the foundation to expand the knowledge base of students of both countries.

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