EXAMINING INTERCULTURAL EXPERIENCES OF SAUDI STUDENTS PARTICIPATION IN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING PROGRAMS AT AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study is to investigate Saudi student's academic, cultural, and social benefits gained through their involvement in experiential learning programs (ELPs) at higher institutions in the US.

Methodology: The study employed an interpretive qualitative design. Data collection comprised 16 individual semi-structured interviews with junior and senior Saudi male and female students enrolled in the colleges of business and engineering.

Main Findings: Findings revealed an overall level of satisfaction among participants, especially with respect to gains in academic knowledge, personal growth, and leadership skills. ELP workplace challenges largely related to the educational, social, and cultural backgrounds of the study participants. Sociocultural benefits were inconsistent, most notably regarding gender and group interactions between Saudi and American members.

Implications: Involving in such experiential Learning Programs increased potential participation in such practices for Saudi students when they go back to work in their home country after completing their study abroad.

Novelty: The study addresses ways to improve the ELP experience for Saudi students, improve EL programs for organizers, and other prospective Saudi students who decide to study in the west.

Keywords: Experiential Learning, Intercultural, International Students, Saudi Students, American University.

INTRODUCTION

Experiential learning programs (ELPs)aimed at equipping students to face the complex challenges of the workplace have been expanding for years (Wilson et al., 2016). Colleges and universities in the U.S. currently provide experiential learning opportunities for fostering students' knowledge and vocational skills that will prepare them for future career pathways (Hunter, Laursen, & Seymour, 2007; Lilia, 2017). These programs offer a diversity of experiential and career-related objectives to expand students' capabilities in adapting to cultural and workplace complexities (McFadden, Maahs-Fladung, & Mallett, 2012). By 2006, for instance, more than 40% of American universities had broadened their visions to include programs that allowed students to share their academic experiences in various settings locally and abroad, compared to 28% in 2001 (Green, Luu, & Burris, 2008). Such programs typically involve students from different cultural and social backgrounds hoping to attain practical knowledge and experiences that will be transferable to other settings and places (Hayter & Cahoy, 2016). In particular, experiential learning programs (ELPs) can be instrumental in helping students from different backgrounds learn about and prosper in work cultures that are dissimilar to those they already know (Wilson et al., 2016).

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Experiential learning is a meaningful approach that practical skill plays a central role in the learning process. In terms of student benefits, ELPs increase their personal growth, academic achievement, and workplace readiness (Jackson, Caffarella, & Jackson, 1994). Such pedagogical activities allow students to apply their academic experience in cooperative environments for developing personal skills and workplace accountability. In this study, ELPs are defined as course-related activities and projects that occur outside the traditional classroom. This range of settings includes non-profit or for-profit institutions, community organizations, governmental or non-governmental organizations, and businesses.

Although a variety of benefits and advantages may accrue to students through ELP participation (Gill, 2007; Ibrahim, 2012; Valentine & Cheney, 2001), benefits are not guaranteed. Saudi student's participation in ELPs prior to coming to the U.S. was limited because such an approach is not a common practice in Saudi Arabian educational institutions (Alfares, Al-Haboubi, & Al-Zahrani, 2013). This could result in Saudi students acquiring fewer beneficial outcomes than their non-Saudi peers and returning home with few new educational, cultural, and social experiences and insights to put into practice in Saudi society and workplaces.

In this study, Social Exchange Theory (SET) provides a theoretical lens for interpreting the nature of ELPs from the perspectives of Saudi students. Experiential learning programs have social interactions frequently generate beneficial elements for all involved parties. The maximization of personal benefits while minimizing personal costs is a key component of SET. In social interactions that occur during ELPs, Thibaut and Kelley(1959) observed the rewards gained by one individual or group directly affected the costs shouldered by the other participating individual or group. They referred to this reciprocal relationship between individuals or groups as a zero-sum game and expressed its variables in the equation, A (rewards) + B (costs) = 0. In this equation, individual or group A derive rewards that increase the costs for individual or group B. Thibaut and Kelley concluded that a relationship is likely to remain stable over time when the rewards and costs for each party are more or less equitable. When social and cultural differences are present in a relationship, as, with Saudi and American participants, the parties involved are assumed to be in a largely equivalent position to receive from and provide valuable life experiences to the other.

The Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The study aimed to investigate Saudi student's academic, cultural, and social benefits and by provide an interpretive analysis of their participation in ELPs. The outcomes of this study can improve the quality of the ELPs by guiding program facilitators in designing more efficient and effective ways of encouraging international student engagement in globalized work environments.

To achieve study purposes, there were two questions guiding this study;

1. How do Saudi students describe the benefits associated with their ELP participation?

2. How do Saudi students describe the challenges associated with their ELP participation?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical View of Experiential learning

Experiential learning as a form of education has been acknowledged since the 1930s. Proponents of human learning theories, notably John Dewey and David Kolb, gave experiential learning an essential role in student academic development and personal growth. They considered experiential learning an ideal way for students to share their thoughts and ideas where knowledge was not limited to what was learned in the classroom (Dewey, 1938; Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

According to Kolb's model, a person cannot learn effectively by passively reading about or observing an activity. This holistic approach is also referred to as learning by doing because participation is fundamental to experiential learning. Kolb laid out the principles underlying experiential learning in a four-part process. In the first stage of the cycle, students have or participate in a concrete experience. Second, through reflection and sensemaking from a variety of standpoints, students come to deeply understand the experience before progressing to the third step, which is the abstraction of meaning from the new experience. Finally, students attempt to apply what they have learned through a process of active experimentation (Cowan, 2006; Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

Anticipated Benefits of ELPs

Global Perceptions

The immersion experience provided by ELPs has the potential to promote cultural exchange that can help international students address their concerns about understanding global norms (Crabtree, 2008; Leong, 2015). In this regard, the American university and college campuses are highly attractive to international students (Institute of International Education, 2017) and international students look to them as exciting places to gain global skills and multicultural awareness (Kretovics, 2011).

Experiential learning appears to be a viable method for international students to develop globally beneficial perspectives such as the acceptance of new ideas, willingness to change, and the flexibility to learn. These experiences do not rely solely on academic courses delivered solely in classrooms but on cultural and social interactions within workplace settings (Wilson et al., 2016). International student engagement in projects relevant to their majors fosters their identity regarding globalization (Crabtree, 2008). Coryell, Stewart, Wubbena, Valverde-Poenie, and Spence (2016) pointed out that engagement in active learning and social programs played a prominent role in increasing students' internationalization. By uniting study abroad purposes with an experiential learning component and community program engagements, Parker and Altman Dautoff (2007) indicated that international students can become global and mindful persons by increasing their social engagements.

Workplace Skills and Knowledge

A primary concern of students is to master the content of a specific major. These students desire to attain high proficiency in workplace skills that will prepare them to compete for future careers (Collins, Hannon, & Smith, 2004). Experiential learning

activities typically include learning strategies that allow students to gain occupational knowledge in real-world workplace settings (DeGiacomo, 2002; Kiely, 2005; Lewis & Williams, 1994). Experiential learning that occurs in a work setting affirms students in their chosen academic discipline in a relevant industry arena. The essential purpose of these programs is to equip students with the knowledge and practical skills for innovation in a future career. The benefits of ELPs when they include work-integrated learning objectives were clarified by Clements and Cord (2013) as follows: encouraging students to practice activities relevant to their academic knowledge, engaging students in sociocultural issues within workplace domains, and demonstrating work and vocational skills through completion of project activities.

International students have a desire to share experiences that deepen their knowledge in diverse workplace environments. The National Survey of Student Engagement (2018) reported that students who participated in study abroad programs showed a strong willingness to join groups and engage in activities that increased their knowledge about varied cultural, social, and racial perspectives. International students' satisfaction regarding their academic performance has been linked to the quality of outside classroom projects that enabled them to better understand complex workplace environments (Zhao, Kuh, and Carini ,2005).

Personal Growth and Leadership

College students need to improve soft skills such as communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving that qualify them for 21st-century marketplaces and jobs (Green, Comer, Elliott, & Neubrander, 2011). Contemporary workplaces are knowledge-intensive and increasingly require the development of interpersonal skills such as influencing group members, technology usage, and creativity (Dorasamy, 2009). There is a demonstrable need to involve students in applied learning practices that equip them to handle the realities of the workplace and international students who participate in ELPs have an opportunity to broaden their perceptions about working in professional environments (Fontaine & Todd, 2011). Structured work-integrated projects allow these students to gain new insights and workplace experiences, especially rapid adaptation to diverse groups, teamwork, and improved communication skills (Ogden, 2010). Glass (2012) asserted that experiential learning was a powerful tool to encompass intergroup communications that yielded positive impacts on campus diversity and student career development. ELPs provide opportunities for international students to practice decision-making by weighing all positive and negative aspects of their options and comparing alternative career paths (Glass, 2012; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002).

Experiential learning as an alternative learning method reinforces students' connection with course objectives and prepares them for varying practical leadership experiences (Ladd & Ruby Jr, 1999). During ELPs, international students are directly exposed to domestic peers, their course instructor, and organization or business members where the experience is taking place. Kampman (2011) asserted that participation in active learning programs strengthens the connection of students with their instructors, which helps international students address their educational concerns and broaden their understanding of the concept of leadership. Leadership attributes potentially acquired in the workplace include interdependency, responsibility, and the ability to share thoughts with team members (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000).

Influential Factors on International Student Engagement

Unfamiliarity with American Teaching and Learning Patterns

American learning and teaching patterns are different than what is routinely practiced in Mideast countries. Eland, Greenblatt, Smithee, and Eland (2009) reported that higher education pedagogy in the U.S. is focused on the student as an independent learner. For instance, it is common for American college students to employ study groups, online Blackboard discussion forums, and other forms of technology as sources of learning. These methods are new to most Saudi students who have learned in a traditional education system reliant on two key information sources: what the instructor and textbooks offer. Aubrey (1991) studied the academic habits of international students and observed that most Middle Eastern college students sit silently in classroom discussions. They have been trained not to question the wisdom of their professors or express their own perspectives but to write verbatim notes that enable them to memorize and prepare for final exams.

In collaborative learning programs such as ELPs, student-student interactions and those that occur between students and instructors are necessary to achieve quality outcomes and well-educated graduates. Participation in American coeducational learning environments can be a significant change for Saudi students. The Saudi education system imposes gender separation across all education levels — elementary and secondary schools and institutions of higher education. To achieve constructive interactions on American campuses, Saudi students must rapidly adjust to opposite gender instructors and colleagues

Individualism versus Collectivism

Collectivism embraces a set of beliefs, values, and conceptions that tie groups of people together and shape their relationships. Students from collectivist cultures are generally interested in fulfilling the social concerns of their group. Individualistic students, on the other hand, are primarily interested in accomplishing their personal goals and care most strongly about themselves and close family members (Darwish & Huber, 2003; Ma & Schoeneman, 1997). In a collectivist

society, knowledge, and experience are mostly passed down from older generations. Students in this kind of society do not attempt to verify their own insights and unique interpretations because they feel the opinions and experiences of their elders are fundamental and unchangeable (Auyeung & Sands, 1996).

Saudi students with a collectivist approach most likely encounter psychological challenges and difficulties through engagement in American society. These individuals mostly resist pressure to alter their own social environment and behaviors and adapt to an unfamiliar lifestyle (Youn, 2000). In a comparative study about American and Saudi college students regarding their collectivist and individualistic attributes, Al-Zahrani and Kaplowitz (1993) emphasized that Saudi students showed a high degree of intergroup bias and less out-group involvement. Most Saudi students coexist within closed social circles instead of adjusting to new variables (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998). Saudis also attempt to maintain their original attitudes and traditions as cultural touchstones, even when they live for long periods outside of their native society (Obeidat & Alkhazalah,2019; Alalwi, 2016). Alhazmi and Nyland (2010) noted many aspects related to entrenched attitudes and traditions that could limit Saudi students' overseas social engagements. One such insulating attitude is a commitment to study in the U.S. for only a certain length of time before returning home (Alalwi, 2016).

Intercultural Communication

The concept of intercultural communication is defined as a two-way interaction between two or more persons from different cultures (Hinchcliff-Pelias & Greer, 2004). The benefits gained from intercultural communication vary but generally include increases in student confidence, satisfaction, and handling of their cultural and social concerns (Gareis, 2012; Gresham & Clayton, 2011). International students who participate in community programs find it beneficial to their cultural understanding because they communicate directly with domestic students and community members (Trice, 2004).

One of the essential factors that facilitate intercultural communication is linguistic competence. Previous studies confirm that language proficiency has a critical influence on intercultural communication between students (Unruh & Obeidat, 2015; Harrison, 2012; Trice, 2004; Ying, 2002). Kao and Gansneder (1995) affirmed that foreign students who have insufficient English language proficiency interact less with local students in academic activities, which influences their benefits and satisfaction with their studies (Gareis, 2012). Hinchcliff-Pelias and Greer (2004) reported that some international students unwittingly put themselves in an embarrassing situation due to the limitation of their language proficiency and knowledge about the host culture. Consequently, language skills mostly form obstacles that are negatively correlated with Saudi student educational and social engagements.

The Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to understand the workplace experiences of Saudi undergraduate students who participated in courses that integrated with the workplace at an urban, public university in the American Midwest. The study adds to the body of experiential learning research by examining the perspectives of Saudi undergraduate students, an ethnic population increasingly prevalent on American university campuses but one that remains largely understudied.

METHODOLOGY

The current study was conducted using an interpretive qualitative methodology. Interpretive qualitative study is a meaningful way to understand student benefits and challenges that occur in ELP's participation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Study participants were assigned by utilizing a purposeful sampling approach for identifying participants who could inform the study questions and best achieve the study purposes. This study was conducted at Water Falls University (WFU), a pseudonym for an urban public university located in America that has approximately 15,000 students. International students comprised 11% of the student population. Between those students were about 270 Saudi students. They were the second-largest population after Indian students and represented 19% of the total international student population. Study participants were assigned from Saudi male and female students who completed at least one experiential learning project while enrolled at RFU. For this study, the sample size was 16 Saudi participants; 12 males and four females, and the data were collocated until the participants started to replicate information from prior interviews and no new data were gained.

Data Collection and Analysis Process

The study data were collected by individual semi-structured interviews. This type of interview allowed the researcher to ask open-ended questions and offered quite flexibility for Saudi students to share their thoughts and experiences and provide important information regarding experiential learning programs. About eleven protocol questions were assigned to loosely guide interview discussions by prompting participants to share ideas that could enrich the study data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Study data were unitized into segments where each segment contained one idea and concept. Then, they were entered into an Excel spreadsheet to organize the data and begin the coding process. Data were carefully coded based on the similarity of emergent ideas and concepts related to the study purposes and questions. A constant-comparison technique was used to

connect similarities and compare differences within the ELP data. This technique used for identifying possible categories to investigate (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). After sorting the data into reasonable and manageable categories, a Microsoft Word graphic organizer was used to synthesize and sort findings into major and minor concepts. Once the content had been placed into coherent categories, the categories were sorted into preliminary themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

DISCUSSION

During the data coding process, data were categorized into two themes based on study questions. The first theme, Multiplied Benefits, represents ELPs as a learning method and the practical experiences that reflect on student personal developments. The second theme, Core Challenges Faced by Saudi Students, illustrates pervasive issues that hinder or limit student benefits in the ELP workplace.

Multiplied Benefits of ELPs

The Hands-On Learning Context of an ELP

There was a range of perspectives regarding the intersection between ELPs and classroom learning. As a type of instructional technology, ELPs aimed to interconnect with primary course concepts, a structural similarity they share with problem-based learning. Projects due at the end of the semester usually summarized the concepts taught in class. "Whatever you have learned, you should apply to the project," said a student. Projects included whole class concepts and project topics tended to be highly relevant to the course. However, when ELPs did not directly align with coursework, students needed additional time and effort to find resources and mentors that could address those specific problems. The unfamiliar space between ELPs and classroom objectives provided an opportunity for students to broaden their knowledge and increase their problem-solving abilities. One participant summarized his satisfaction when solving a project problem: "Compared to my doubts when I started, I had a great impression by the time I finished the project."

Projects enabled Saudi students to directly feel the value of practical knowledge. In this regard, participants appreciated how ELPs encouraged them to employ methods and locate informational resources outside of textbooks. This process enriched and thickened the learning experience. Two students shared similar statements: "The projects taught me how I can learn and was an opportunity to broaden his reading, research, and learning patterns".

Additional benefits came from workplace colleagues themselves, a benefit for students who were uncomfortable contributing their ideas in a classroom. Through direct exposure to colleagues in group and workplace settings. However, a few students struggled to successfully employ ELPs as a learning method. Some had been more successful in their previous studies because they were mostly theoretical. The additional time and effort needed to find solutions for project assignments did not necessarily connect to achieving high educational benefits.

Leadership Development

Participants described different opportunities for practicing leadership skills such as delegating project tasks and personal and group time management. They characterized ELP workplaces as attractive environments for sharpening employment skills such as respect for time, increasing responsibility, and accountability.

Project engagements helped Saudi students gain insights into their own strengths and weaknesses. Several students reported ELPs required them to learn how to handle different perspectives because, in the projects, Saudis students met people from different places with different perceptions and backgrounds. ELPs were a mechanism that pushed Saudi students to increase their consciousness regarding the perspectives of others. Students' self-awareness and appreciation of others were also affected.

The level of responsibility expected of students grew faster and larger through the ELP experience than with individual work or classroom courses. Participation in an ELP led some students to give more priority to project tasks. One student changed her weekly routine at the time she enrolled in a project: "I remember the project meeting time was Tuesdays and I started the next day with my project assignment. I could think about my individual homework later." The added responsibility of project tasks intensified the concerns and pressure for Saudi students because they wanted to contribute to the success of the project by completing their work perfectly.

Some study participants learned to better manage their time around project tasks and meetings. One student explained how his drive to copy the American style altered his daily schedule: "During business days, I concentrated on doing school tasks. Weekends, I practiced my hobby personally." Some students expressed high satisfaction with the skills they developed. For a few, however, time constraints formed an unmovable obstacle that increased their anxiety levels.

Some empirical evidence of practicing leadership appeared throw student interviews. More than half of study participants reflected their ability and willingness to practice leadership through ELP projects. They mentioned how ELPs encouraged students to volunteer to be a group leader and recognized the differences in tasks between leaders and members of the group.

One student commented, "I fight to be a leader even though assigning the work for group members means doubling my responsibilities." These opportunities to practice leadership had affected students' attitudes positively and their self-confidence improved whenever they worked as group leaders.

Based on the assignment, a leader's responsibilities came with certain restrictions as one experienced: "Teamwork included three or four students, but leaders did not do any work outside the group. Basically, their role included determining the location and time of meetings." However, a few students indirectly learned a valuable lesson: they disliked being a leader. They preferred to be members. These students preferred concentrating on acquiring personal benefits rather than practicing leadership in ELPs.

Core Challenges Faced by Saudi Students

Group Dynamics and Public Participation

To increase the benefits to Saudi students enrolled in ELP classes, the participants suggested changing student attitudes and behaviors while participating in group projects and workplace interactions. For example, a student said, "Love what you do until you do what you love." His love of participating in the ELP drove him to high performance and enabled him to accrue benefits from the experience. Another emphasized that students should push themselves to participate more in ELPs and they should positively interact with workplace environments. Because American businesses do not treat you as a Saudi. Some students reflected on their ELP journey by noting that although it was never easy, their efforts were rewarded in the end. Their collective message focused on one piece of advice: cultural differences naturally influence the quality of interactions in a workplace and students should be patient because it could increase their benefits.

For ELP facilitators, many students observed inadequate supervision of group members. One student blamed a program facilitator for implementing a project without proper follow up, creating a big gap between the instructor and the students. To avoid this problem, the student recommended that program facilitators assign a group leader.

Creating academic and cultural diversity among group members was seen as a program facilitator's responsibility. Course instructors typically divided students into groups based on their academic performance, cultures, and nationalities. In this regard, some study participants asked program facilitators to encourage American students to volunteer as mentors for international students. With their limited experience in the U.S workplace, Saudi students needed time to properly understand workplace basics.

Saudi students expressed a need for additional layers of support and guidance, especially when interacting with different cultural surroundings. Students noted that their lack of prior knowledge about ELPs made it incumbent on coordinators to guide them through a successful and meaningful project in the U.S. workplace.

Linguistic Issues

Language ability and skills varied among study participants, especially among those who relied on their previous preparedness. For instance, some described having weak reading skills. One commented, "The English language formed a challenge for me and gave privilege to American students in ELPs." A number of other participants affirmed needing additional time and effort to formulate and deliver their ideas.

Delivering thoughts and ideas orally to teammates and program facilitators was a daunting task for a number of Saudi students. One participant described coming up with a good idea in the project meeting but taking a long time to explain it adequately. Another participant reported difficulty explaining a question well and being misunderstood. As a result, the answer he received "could be wrong or about something else."

Because students usually did not practice their presentations in front of colleagues during project meetings, public speaking could be a big problem for Saudi students. When the time came to present, they were unprepared to speak in front of a large audience. Another consequence of the language issue was missed opportunities. Students who encountered difficulty receiving and delivering project ideas thought they missed out on ELP benefits that others received. Still, the majority of participants managed to overcome these issues and complete their ELP projects satisfactorily.

Gender Integrated Workplaces

Tensions existed for students participating for the first time in a gender-integrated workplace. A male student recounted his difficulty dealing with female peers, "I am not accustomed to treating female students like male students." This student was shy asking female teammates certain questions or discussing certain project ideas because he believed it was inappropriate to talk about certain topics with females. A female student also asserted feeling uncomfortable dealing with male project members due to traditional Saudi gender norms. She indicated, "Saudi females do not deal directly with unrelated males. I am expected to bow my head when I talk or avert my eyes, which means no eye contact." Such behaviors influenced how Saudi females treat male teammates in the workplace. A female student described her first ELP participation with group

members--all of whom were Saudi males. She stated, "I was mostly silent through the meetings and did not contribute. I felt shy about speaking up, but they chose not to talk to me."

It was actually less tense for male and female Saudis to meet students with different customs, such as Americans. A male student described the value of having an American female student on his project team: "I saw females as more professional in art and design than males. We needed her assistance. So, gender diversity in our project was significant." Overall, Saudi males found their American female peers to be friendly and hardworking and learned that a gender-integrated workplace could be beneficial for Saudi students who gradually became comfortable with it.

CONCLUSION

Experiential learning programs allowed students to collaborate with each other as a team and with program facilitators in workplace settings. According to SET, maximizing the benefits and minimizing the costs is key in social interactions and relationships (Roloff, 1981). Most study participants appeared to recognize this balance. However, some educational and sociocultural obstacles played an influential role in their ELP outcomes. The study concluded Saudi student's ELP participation by the lens of benefits versus costs.

Capturing Benefits

Saudi students described ELPs as a smart and valuable learning method that allowed them to practice what they learned in classrooms. Unsurprisingly, an opportunity for capturing academic benefits was a significant factor for participants because a basic design feature of an ELP is the expansion of academic learning (Lewis & Williams, 1994). Participants reported different attitudes about the value of the academic benefits they gained based on their ability to employ theoretical knowledge in the workplace. Most of the time, ELP objectives contributed to broadening their reading, research skills, and problem-solving abilities in order to become familiar with experiential learning projects. These findings support Hicks (2012) study that highlighted international students having opportunities to expand their learning perceptions and develop their own academic knowledge by participating in ELP group projects.

The vast majority of study participants admitted personal growth in terms of responsibility, respect for meeting times, and commitment to assignments. They reported an increase in responsibility by giving top priority to project tasks compared to personal tasks. Study findings identified an increase in Saudis' independence when making their own life and school decisions. More than half of study participants saw their enthusiasm increase for becoming independent adults versus receiving assistance by living with close family members. These findings are supported by DeGiacomo's (2002) study that found international students find meaning in new experiences by reflecting on their personal traits. These students opened their minds to new life challenges.

Prominent Costs

The more insular backgrounds of Saudi students presented prominent challenges in ELP workplaces. ELP participation was diminished by predictable difficulties related to linguistic ability and unfamiliarity with western culture. In this context, there were common challenges identified in ELP project settings such as incorporating new learning methods, limited workplace experiences, and communication skills. However, dealing with mistakes, cultural misconceptions, and gender-integrated workplaces inspired Saudi student performance in different ways. Study findings showed some students successfully converted these potential costs into ELP benefits.

Students entered into ELP classes with minimal applied learning experiences because ELP practices are not common in the Saudi secondary education system (Alfares, Al-Haboubi, & Al-Zahrani, 2013). In the beginning, students encountered a set of core challenges such as the fear of making a mistake and the potential of academic failure. Saudi students experienced disappointments and anxieties in applying theoretical knowledge in practical situations. They thought mistakes in the workplace were not acceptable, particularly when they were dealing with sensitive tools and equipment. Such concerns often resulted in confusion regarding their behaviors and actions. Students responded by attempting to overcome the initial project ambiguity by asking their colleagues for help whereas others spent extra time and effort in looking up additional resources to support their workplace experiences. These practices negatively influenced Saudi students' workplace performance and align with the Jackson's (2011) study that found international students often think of themselves as observers rather than participants, which limits meaningful engagement with local community members.

In general, Saudi participants reported being satisfied with the benefits they gained from their ELP involvement. Through their workplace participation, they attempted to learn new knowledge, acquire new skills, and grow their intercultural competence. Most students acknowledged that ELPs were valuable in enhancing their academic experience, personal growth, and leadership skills. In short, they appreciated having an opportunity not to memorize but to learn how to learn. Participants identified the ELP experience as necessary in helping them overcome workplace challenges that stood to diminish the acquisition of benefits. Because of their workplace experiences, students became more confident in discussing their thoughts and experienced less fear of making a mistake.

In SET, satisfaction is tied to an individual's sense of the benefits they accrue (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The interactions during ELPs shaped the positive and negative impressions of Saudi students. Some students were challenged to connect what they had learned in the classroom to a broader appreciation of social responsibility. Others were challenged to overcome difficult intercultural communications, misunderstandings of local attitudes, and perplexing workplace cultures (Hinck & Brandell, 2000). In weighing benefits against costs, a few students described an acceptable level of educational gains; a few students found workplace challenges an opportunity for reinforcing their benefits; while others found workplace challenges detracted from their overall satisfaction of their ELP experience. In sum, Saudi students believed the benefits of participating in an ELP outweighed the costs, gaining more than they gave up (e.g., cultural norms, language, learning styles, and expectations).

FUTURE RESEARCH

Studies aimed at exploring international student workplace engagements are likely to be insightful because ELP classes are becoming more commonplace. Systematic inquiries could also examine the perceptions of ELP facilitators, both at WFU and local participating organizations, regarding ways to maximize international student benefits. Since this study examined ELP issues from Saudi student perspectives, conducting a study of counter perspectives could help stakeholders better understand and verify this study's findings. For example, a study could investigative the ELP experiences of American students including their interactions and relationships with group members from non-Western cultures. A comparative study of ELP intercultural experiences between Arabs, who pursue learning in American universities and Arab American students who have already transitioned to the West, would be fascinating.

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