An Online Collaboration experience showing sustainability

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Abstract- Higher Education (HE) is the need of modern societies to transform, evolve and create wealth. In recent decades, globalisation has put pressure on Universities to develop multicultural and interpersonal skills to interact with people from all over the world. Students are not easily prone to travel and live multicultural experiences, therefore, Universities have fostered programs and courses that use technology to surpass the mobility issue. This paper reports and experience between a team from Universidad La Salle and one from SUNY Ulster that launched an online collaboration course during 2015. Results showed that success is based on the concordance of final perceptions and initial expectations; furthermore, sustainability is based in the savings associated to technology combined with the success of the course.

Keywords- Expectations, Online Collaboration, Satisfaction Virtual Environments.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to the report of (Duke, 2005) HE is the way individuals put added value to their daily economic activities and also are able to transform society as inclusion and human capital in the long run is well observed.

Since Industrial Revolution sparked the idea of specialisation in processes and machines to make efficient all activities, HE found a way where everybody can design and improve methods; hence, developed countries created public institutions to give HE.

Then, it was expensive and elitist but the results were shown in economic performance; in these days, it has become easier to attend specialised courses as governments have invested huge amounts of money and encouraged companies to participate in education.

Globalisation in late 20th Century set the necessity of management across countries, the understanding of Supply Chains and Logistics Chains as well. (Ayala-Cordero, 2016)

Moreover, the needs of intercultural skills to manage human capital and collaborate to achieve desired goals by any organisation have stimulated universities to set exchange programs and make partnerships around the globe. (Vincent-Lancrin, 2009).

II. BACKGROUND

Universidad La Salle and The State University of New York participate in the Center for Collaborative Online International Learning, an organisation that aims to foster interaction among students from different countries based in different Universities across the world.

This is done through the development of learning environments and programs designed to effectively encourage participation and exchange of ideas, participants are able to expand their perception of the world and how to interact with others by listening to experiences and sharing own.

PhD. Monika Espinasa from SUNY Ulster in New York, USA was looking for a partner in the genomic and biological areas in the COIL® program, PhD. Laura Martino from Universidad La Salle Mexico City in Mexico was the perfect match, during late 2014 both lecturers agreed in the terms and learnt from COIL® guidance the best way to launch the course.

Both lecturers shaped a multidisciplinary team, to set the pace of the collaboration and keep in touch with students.

III. ARRANGEMENT

The course was organised around a single topic, in this case Genetically Modified Organisms, a syllabus was designed with activities for twelve weeks running from early February until late April.

The platforms chosen were Facebook Groups® to share ideas, exchange opinions and grow as group, Skype® for synchronous sessions, one at the beginning of the course and one at the end, and Moodle® to upload assignments and distribute learning material.

12 students were selected from each University, the age of participants from La Salle were around 20 years old, meanwhile Ulster students’ ranged from 20 to 26.

La Salle students were required to write a formal letter asking to join the course, it was aimed to check the English level and the level of interest in the participation, Espinasa’s students were the Genetics class, whom were not asked on the desire to participate, although they were free to leave at any moment.

The learning material were readings, videos, and articles from various authors which gave students different perceptions about this controversial topic.

The final evaluation was the make of a video giving an explanation from the scientific point of view, an interview of
farmers, researchers and people directly involved in the topic, with the possibility of addressing an own perception.

IV. EVOLUTION

In the first synchronous session participants, students and staff, briefly introduced themselves and six teams of four members, two from each country, were made; also, the objective of the course was clearly explained and the pace of the course was clarified.

The first week was an integration activity, an icebreaker where participants opened their cultural background and received some feedback, the next four weeks, readings and assignments were left in Moodle® and trough Facebook Groups® interaction was checked, but also participants started interactions in their personal profiles.

Another icebreaker was waiting in line to keep the willingness of participants and avoid saturation; then four weeks with articles and small team assignments before two free weeks to make their videos, which had to be uploaded in Moodle® or YouTube® whatever would be easier for students.

Videos were evaluated by participants of the course and invitees from other areas, in the final synchronous session results of the evaluation and grades were unveiled.

Participants answered a survey to check initial and final perception of the course.

V. RESULTS

The overall participation rate from Mexican students was 100%, the satisfaction scored 95 and the final perception surpassed initial expectations. Fig.1 & Fig. 3. (Martino-Roaro, 2016)

Fig. 1. Participation behaviour. 
Own construction with data from the course.

On the other side, SUNY Ulster students reported a participation rate of 75% as three students dropped out for lack of interest, and the overall satisfaction marked 75 with a wide range, some were very pleased and others not really. (Martino-Roaro, 2016)

On the economic side, this type of exchanges costs around 14,000 USD to every Mexican student traveling to New York, and 8,000 USD for every American student going to Mexico. (Sánchez-Carrillo, 2015)

Additionally, the costs related to stop all other activities are very high, especially for most American participants who work to cover the fees of University. (Sánchez-Carrillo, 2015)

All these expenses are mitigated by the use of technology, although the traveling experience offers the possibility of developing self-security, economic management and language skills, the disruption costs are too high to do this.

VI. DISCUSSION

Several papers and readings discuss the benefits of studying abroad and how students change perceptions, are encouraged to surpass insecurities, manage own budgets, even find jobs, change residence and many other advantages.

But this action needs a strong economic background, say own savings, angels, governments or scholarships, in addition to the social absence that people fears; hence, studying abroad intrinsically carries disruptions in all activities of students.

Technology has evolved at a very fast pace that allows virtual meetings, collaborations using social media platforms and many other interactions that not a long time ago were not easy; therefore, it has become an effective tool in society.

As stated in the introduction of this paper, Universities are urged to guide students across a globalised world that
requires professionals able to manage and cooperate with people from any nationality and using all technological tools available.

There is a lack of time and security to encourage long term traveling (mobility), thus, institutions as COIL® have emerged in several countries and have signed contracts with Universities to foster programs and courses that address the issue of mobility.

The perception of participants is the main success driver, meeting or surpassing the initial expectations is essential for individuals to recommend or dissuade later generations of students.

In this project, the Mexican team reached a glorious point, the request of a formal letter asking for the opportunity to participate, as stated before, the second purpose was to make evident the willingness of students, something that the American team did not do.

Satisfaction was much closer in the first team, as the desire of joining was present, on the other hand, students randomly selected showed the lack of full interest, then some expectations were made, and judgments were very hard on all activities; in short, prone to failure.

Satisfaction surveys demonstrated that expectations were met and surpassed easier when participants had a clear idea or expectation of the course, in consequence applying to join rather than being required to do it.

OECD defines sustainable development as the concurrence of three pillars, economic growth, evolution within society and a friendly relationship with environment. (OECD, 2008)

Observing the process of any student exchange there are many and deep expenses directly and indirectly related which only in the long make the exchange profitable; therefore, any efficiency in short term makes evident economic growth as resources are well used.

Technology constrains expenditures making resources better used and allocated, in addition to the fact that American participants worked to pay the tuition fees; in consequence, this was their only available option to have an international learning experience, covering the economic growth aspect.

Environment regards to nature and societies as well, which cover the other two aspects of the definition of sustainability.

The multicultural, communication, comprehension and openness skills developed in collaborations make participants more conscious of the variety within own and neighbouring societies.

(Atenas et al, 2014) argues that these skills are seen in the understanding of the world through both electronic usage and face to face interaction, encouraging values; hence, a more stable and valuable society emerges overtime.

Looking at nature, (OECD, 2008) calls to make efficient mobility and the use of transports to reduce direct and indirect costs associated to pollution.

(OECD, 2014) reminds that the main sources of pollution are those associated to transportation, in consequence a reduce in its non-necessary use is better for the whole environment.

The use of technology has an intrinsic contaminant factor, nonetheless, its impact on nature is less compared to the personal conveyance on long distances and even in commuting.

Online collaborations aim to overcome all of these challenges seen in traditional education, thus, sustainability is one of its driving factors across the world, and results tend to be perceived immediately.

Another contributor for success in this course was the match in personalities of the lecturers, and their reliance on assistants, with this in mind there were more eyes observing and managing the direction of the collaboration.

Delegation relieved the lecturers of the stress related to their regular classes and administrative tasks in their Universities.

As a whole, the team succeeded in this endeavour and later they were able to prepare another collaboration.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Online collaborations surged to solve the needs of developing multicultural and openness skills, using the available tools such as social media platforms and others specific for education.

As earlier said, several Universities have launched specialised courses but few have attained further, to shape the multicultural skills demanded by globalisation.

Furthermore, the success in collaborations is also confirmed with satisfaction among participants, which is easier when students are eager to participate in the experience and the staff sets openness and compatibility; in this regards, students that asked to join the collaboration affirmed superior satisfaction compared to those that didn’t ask.

We have to keep in mind that the use of technology smashes costs as resources are efficiently used, making online collaborations sustainable, as long as results achieved are in line the initial goals and objectives. Economic growth and savings are evident, the transformation of participants’ behaviour is seen overtime and environment is less impacted.

In sum, this excise was truly successful and set the standard for later courses among the staff.

REFERENCES


