Global Awareness Interest of College Students

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ABSTRACT

Professional skills are expected from college students; however, assessing students’ professional skill development is challenging. In order to better prepare students for a career in today’s global business environment, it is essential students develop interest and knowledge toward global awareness. This research is primarily concerned with the understanding of college students’ interest toward global awareness. In order to unveil what factors affect students’ interest toward global awareness, a survey was developed and data collected. Analyses of survey results suggested that gender, ethnicity and high involvement activities might positively affect interest toward global awareness.

KEYWORDS
Assessment, Empirical Study, Global Awareness, Interest, Student Demographics

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The phrases “global citizen,” “global economy,” and “increasingly interconnected world” have been frequently used (Parker, 2011). Businesses in today’s technologically advanced society are searching and recruiting talent from the global workforce. Markets are continuously expanding across nations, and it is imperative that students are prepared to enter an international society. Today, young professionals face complex issues and problems that are national, international, and global in scope, shaped by our interconnected world. In order to analytically counter these challenges, undergraduates must be able to analyse problems from multiple perspectives. Global awareness is a complex construct that involves much more than one component, and it cannot necessarily be achieved just by having knowledge and a foreign language. The development of the components of global awareness needs to be addressed in order for the strategic growth of internationalization to occur among students. Clarke (2004) found out that students had mixed beliefs about the United States’ involvement with other countries and cultures. Zappe et al. (2010) surveyed freshman college students and found that approximately one-third of the freshmen felt that global awareness was very important to them personally while over one-half believed global awareness to be very important to them professionally.

Reimers (2009) defines a globally aware student as a student who (a) uses 21st century skills to understand and address global issues, (b) works collaboratively with individuals representing diverse cultures, religions, and lifestyles in the spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue in personal, work and community contexts, and (c) understands other nations and cultures, including the use of non-English languages. Andreotti et al. (2015) proposed global-mindedness as a multidimensional concept that is concerned with the ways in which individuals act in different contexts.
Global awareness is a multidimensional construct, and developing an instrument to measure global awareness is challenging. Merryfield (2008) describes global awareness as a mindset that students need in order to survive in a world “increasingly characterized by economic, political, cultural, environmental, and technological interconnectedness.” As such, Merryfield (2008) identified three traits: open-mindedness, mastery of multi-disciplinary, global body of knowledge about how the world works and the ability to apply knowledge to authentic relevant problems. Merryfield (2008) also asserts that global awareness is gained through multiple perspectives as well as when students collaborate to address problems for the common good. Cultural values and practices influence interactions (Javidan & Bowen, 2013). Knowledge of and curiosity about other cultures, and the ability to connect, communicate, and collaborate with people from other countries are key identifiers of global awareness. Besterfield-Sacre et al. (2013) defined the expected traits for engineering students’ global proficiency and preparedness by surveying the experts in the field, regarding the knowledge and professional skills essential to global engineers. Responses from the experts included (a) the ability to interact with engineers from different cultures, cultural awareness (e.g. awareness of how national differences are important in defining and solving technical problems), (b) the ability to understand global markets, business, politics, and trade, and (c) the knowledge of global engineering practices. Although the study focused on engineering, the results can be generalized to other Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines. Demand for globally aware students will continue to increase; and therefore, the need for the assessment of culturally aware individuals will be even more crucial.

One of the challenges of assessing global awareness is that it is fairly extensive in scope. Doscher (2012) developed two rubrics for the measurement of students’ global awareness and also conducted a study among administrators to determine what constitutes global awareness. Three common elements were noted in the responses: (a) awareness, valuing, and understanding of cultural differences, (b) experiencing other cultures, and (c) the self-awareness of one’s own culture.

In this paper, interest proposed as a construct to track students’ development of global awareness. Interest plays a critical role in learning. Researchers have begun to collect evidence that demonstrates the impact of interest on student learning (Krapp et al., 1992). In their review of early interest research, Schraw & Lehman (2001) concluded that any increase in student interest always results in increased student learning. Educational researchers distinguish between two types of interest, situational and personal (Krapp et al., 1992). When students are introduced to a new domain, their interest is usually situational interest, which is spontaneous and temporary due to a new and exciting topic. On the other hand, individual interest is a long lasting interest that motivates students to gain deeper knowledge in a domain. Individual interest develops over time by repetitively engaging in a subject (Hidi, 2006). Eventually, individual interest indicates how much students are willing to immerse themselves into a subject. Individual interest is also a precursor for sustaining long-term learning. According to Krapp et al. (1992), it is important to transfer situational interest into individual interest for educating students as life-long learners. They note that both types of interests of the learner play an important role in this transformation. Hence, interest is a promising construct in concert with determining global awareness development. That being said, there is no previously published research that focuses exclusively on global awareness interest. This paper is the first empirical research that addresses the feasibility of using interest in assessing global awareness.

Alexander et al. (1997) explained that interest changes as one excels from novice to proficiency in a domain. In the competency stage, one develops their interest further through an increased commitment to their field of study. In the proficiency stage, individual interest is defined as the strong desire to invest more into the field of study in a long-term and personal manner. With this in mind the objectives for this research are threefold:

1. Ascertain how certain student characteristics affect global awareness interest,
2. Determine the extent student engagement impacts global awareness interest,
3. Further demonstrate the utility of the global awareness interest survey.
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