

Title:

**Studying International Cross-Cultural Communication
Through Distance Education — the Moroccan case.**

By

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Abstract

Is collaboration between U.S. and Moroccan university-students to study intercultural communication together through distance education feasible? This study focussed on determining the needs of students, educators and administrators in Morocco's higher education system in order to learn how to address those needs in the design of a proposed distance education project. Moroccan culture in general and the Moroccan system of higher education were studied. Four different universities were investigated.

The study uncovered a wealth of contrast cultural resources, essential for the program. It also found existing cultural and technological barriers but nonetheless concluded that the project may be feasible under proper conditions.

Introduction

In today's fast-shrinking world, linked by communication and transportation technologies, cultural differences take on new implications. The educational system of our colleges and universities is presently being asked to prepare a generation of active citizens of this global village to be ready to undertake its challenges and to respond to its stimulations and to become world citizens in the truest sense of the word.

As the borders of our global village expand, different cultures encounter each other in new ways. The technology responsible for this expansion develops much faster than the human ability to adapt their cultures to the resulting changes. Cross-cultural education and understanding is essential and must acquire an international dimension. Without sufficient cultural understanding, existing cultural and ethnic conflicts can rise to new and more dangerous heights precisely because of the available technological possibilities. The cultural diversity within the United States, unique and so widespread, together with our technological abilities, creates both the opportunity and the possibility for students in the United States to

profit from this diversity for mutually exploring, with students in other countries, global cross-cultural education. To learn about other cultures, students must first understand their own. They must recognize how what they perceive as reality might be both culturally determined and relative. In addition, the existence of cultural paradigms, present to different degrees in all cultures, needs to be addressed in order to create the possibility of true cross-cultural exchange between peers.

Distance education technology is a powerful tool that can and should be used to link cultures internationally. Distance education has been used primarily within more technically developed countries to reach larger groups of students and for conferencing. But, at a time of increased need for education in the field of cross-cultural communication, the same rapidly developing DE technology can be put to use in other ways. Students can develop cultural awareness by collaboration at a distance with students of a contrasting culture. In exploring this other possible use of DE, the Linking Cultures through Distance Education (LCTDE) project was proposed and it was aimed to develop, demonstrate, and facilitate international cross-cultural and cultural education through collaboration between classrooms in North American universities with corresponding classrooms in the Arab world. As a prototype, it proposed to connect, through distance education technology, a class at the University of New Mexico (UNM) with a class at a Moroccan university for a semester of collaborative learning about global cross-cultural diversity by using these two specific cultures as examples.

I chose Morocco and the Arab world because in the global village we inhabit, we find the culture of the Arab world in a situation that makes it uniquely attractive for this cross-cultural project. The Arab world, defined as a "critical culture" by the U.S. government, is rapidly growing in strategic and political importance. Interest in business and economic markets in both the Arab world and in Africa is growing, and the distinct difference in cultures in these areas makes them ideal for cross-cultural research in education. Recent global events concerning the Muslim world makes this subject more prevalent.

Morocco is not only the Arab country closest geographically to the West; it is also a country friendly to the U.S. and with open telecommunication borders to the Internet. Although Morocco's modern culture has traditionally been influenced most by the French (due to colonialism), Morocco, only recently opened its first American-style university, Al-Akhawayn University (AUI). There is a growing awareness in Morocco of the importance of opening to American influences. This is balanced by wariness of Western influence rooted in Morocco's culture and history.

Historically, Morocco is not only linked to European history but also has connections to the history of New Mexico. Historical facts that are only now coming to our attention indicate that possibly a significant amount of New Mexican art, architecture, language, and music may be traced through the conversos of Moorish and Jewish roots back to Muslim Spain and to Morocco.

Theoretical outline of the LCTDE project

Unlike most international cross-cultural education programs that are offered in our universities, the LCTDE work attempts to address the needs of both Moroccan and American students and to give both

types of participants equal weight. Usually such programs are tailored for the American student, who is presented with a variety of target countries to choose from. The student, individually or in a group, will travel to one or more of these countries to learn about their cultures. These are American-student-centered programs where the American student is the customer, to put it bluntly. The target countries and the target universities are service providers in those cases. The premise, which the LCTDE project is based on, is that in order for students in two different cultures to truly benefit from an international cross-cultural communication experience, both cultures have to be acknowledged, respected, and equally considered.

The LCTDE project advocates the possibility of balanced collaboration between students based in two internationally different cultures. In this case, it is a group of Moroccan students and their faculty and a group of American students and their faculty. The focus is to collaborate and to study together with the purpose of cultural self-development and the development of cultural understanding for all concerned. It is a picture of American students collaborating with their Moroccan peers. It is a picture of American and Moroccan faculty collaborating in design and facilitation of learning. It is a picture of students in each respective country collaborating with each other and with their faculty to reach out, through the available technology, to their counterparts. In order to achieve this goal, the LCTDE program design has to equally address the goals, the needs, the perspectives, the viewpoints rooted in both cultures. The program must be considered, examined, researched, and evaluated with both cultures in mind.

Investigating the possibilities for the LCTDE project and assessing its feasibility in Morocco was the first stage of work on the project. For a balanced, efficient, and effective assessment to determine whether this project is desirable and feasible, it was appropriate to begin the research and investigation on the Moroccan side. The Moroccan research lasted nearly three years (since the end of 1997) and was presented in a study titled: "Investigating the Feasibility of Studying Cross-Cultural Communication Through Distance Education in Morocco" The purpose of the present paper is twofold: First, it is designed to introduce scholars in the field of intercultural communication to possible benefits in using distance education (DE) methods in the international arena for teaching intercultural communication in higher education. Second, it is intended to introduce scholars to the cultural-specific lessons learned from the present Moroccan study.

Methodology

The present research was based on an open-ended and flexible plan in order to allow the qualitative research work to unfold and seek its own course. As participants shared needed information, they simultaneously directed the research to its goals. While participants were educated and instructed about the variables of the research at hand, they (more importantly) educated the present researcher in how to conduct this type of research in their country and how to redesign the LCTDE project so it will be better suited to the Moroccan higher education environment. The intentions for the Moroccan study were twofold. To set out to collect the necessary data for this research and, at the same time, to create allies and partners for a project. Although the first part of this research work was completed, the outcome of the second part is still in process.

The issues addressed by the present research and the questions it was designed to answer were divided into three categories: educational, technical, and questions dealing with administration and organization. There were no specific questions relating to cultural issues and issues of cultural differences. Rather, these issues were a common denominator throughout this research and were treated as such. The following questions, open-ended and broad as they were, guided this research to a useful and a coherent conclusion. In the process of this study, some questions were answered more fully than others were while new questions were raised.

Research questions

Educational

1. What is the response in Moroccan higher education to DE in general and to LCTDE in particular – by faculty, by other educators and by students there?
2. To what extent can and will both the faculty and students at Moroccan higher education institutions commit their time and energy to a cross-cultural course such as described by LCTDE? To what extent are they willing and available to be trained in using DE technology?
3. What educational content of such a course is desired by Moroccan faculty and other higher education people? (If the LCTDE format will be used, then how should it be modified to suit Moroccan needs?)
4. To what extent are higher education faculty in Morocco willing and available to collaborate with American faculty at a distance, to design and execute a cross-cultural course?
5. Which higher educational institution(s) in Morocco can commit to undertake this kind of project and in what capacity?
6. What is the English language level of students and faculty at those institutions?

Technological

1. What DE technologies are presently used in Moroccan education, and what are the future goals for DE in the Moroccan education system?
2. What DE technologies could be successfully used and are they the appropriate technologies in regards to the LCTDE project?
3. What is the existing communications infrastructure in Morocco and what future developments are planned there?
4. What equipment is available in Moroccan universities and what additional technology is needed in order to accommodate the LCTDE project?
5. How technologically oriented are Moroccan students and faculty members in higher education regarding the equipment they presently have and how able are they to be trained in using new technologies?

Administration

1. To what extent is there support for international DE and for international cross-cultural studies by administrators and government officials who are responsible for higher education in Morocco?
2. What is the response of Moroccan higher education administrators to LCTDE? What is their response to using DE internationally and to introducing international cross-cultural curriculum to Moroccan students? Are they willing to commit time, training, learning, and funding?
3. What influential individuals and organizations in Morocco might wish to aid projects such as LCTDE, and do they have the ability to do that?
4. What resources such as funds, equipment, and classroom space can be made available by administrations of higher education in Morocco?
5. What are possible obstacles when working with the administrations of higher education in Morocco?

Research Methods

The nature of this research was essentially qualitative, where the researcher was also the instrument of research. Due to lack of funds and since this research was at best a feasibility study, it was a one-person operation. As the researcher, I had to both experience the field and collect data, while at the same time analyzing, synthesizing, interpreting, and drawing conclusions from the experiential data. At each stage, I used the results derived from the data in order to make decisions about how to continue the process. This resulted in an inductive analysis where the collected data guided and organized the analysis process. Data collection in this type of research lead to an organic process that reveals itself and takes shape as more data are collected. New findings point the research to new sources of information, new participants, and new insights. Even in some cases of gathering data which are generally considered quantitative in nature, (topics such as obtaining information about available technology in Morocco, evaluating students' proficiency of English, and obtaining information about what the available resources that existed in the country were), data often had to be obtained by means of qualitative methods.

The following methods of data collection were used:

1. In-depth, open ended interviews. Most of the interviews were recorded on audiotape. Some interviews were conducted with more than one person. Interviewees were given a four page "LCTDE project proposal summary" prior to the meeting. Translated summaries in French or Arabic were used when needed. Interviewees were given ample time to study the summary and prepare their reaction. Interviews in a snowball pattern were the major design format used throughout this study. The snowball pattern meant that from the content of the interviews and through the advice and guidance of the interviewees new possibilities for additional interviews arose. New directions to conduct the study were perceived. New participants were contacted. New material and observations developed.
2. Direct observations were conducted in universities, in other institutions, and at various social events. In addition, studies about Moroccan culture in general and about how Moroccan cultures operate were aided by observations.
3. One-on-one meetings and group meetings were conducted.
4. Related documentation, academic literature, and other records (academic, technical, and

governmental) were collected.

5. Follow-up correspondence for nearly another two years.

Limitations to the study

Being an American researcher might have both certain advantages and disadvantages that must be taken into account. The following generalizations were noted and can be used as examples here:

1. Western values are affecting Morocco through the introduction of technology and media from the West. These values might be perceived as threatening to Moroccan culture and social structure. Moroccans, who love and value their culture, might be cautious about participating in this research. At the same time, foreigners, especially if they are not French, might be trusted precisely because they are not part of the existing power structure.
2. In addition, Moroccans might have tendencies to look at situations involving an American as possible opportunities – possibly in an unrealistic way. In many cases, an American might represent the materialistic opportunities that are not available in Morocco, regardless of context, and probably in an exaggerated way. On the one hand, I was able to use this fact in my favor. I was able to meet with people and interest them in the project. On the other hand, the question of how valid such responses and other results were must be considered.

Eight other research issues and constraints were identified: 1. Possible conflict of interest on the part of the researcher. 2. Validity issues, including data validity and the lack of investigator triangulation. 3. Fiscal responsibility. 4. Language constraints. 5. Cultural constraints. 6. Ethical constraints. 7. Temporal constraints. 8. Political and power issues.

The cultural factor

As I stated before, although the category of cultural issues was not specifically mentioned in the research questions, cultural issues are a major and all-pervasive subject in the present paper. Cultural differences that exist between Morocco and the U.S., and specific characteristics of the Moroccan culture were of major importance in the research design as well as being key elements in the design and set-up of the LCTDE project.

Moroccan culture is uniquely different from the culture in the U.S. and operates according to different social and cultural rules. It was important for the present research work that these different rules were not to be compared or judged, but simply identified, understood, and accounted for. It was not automatically assumed that the same research methods that are applicable in the West could be utilized successfully across cultures. The ways data were collected as well as the ways this data were analyzed and interpreted had to take into account cultural differences and cultural limitations.

Morocco is primarily a collectivist society based on strong family ties, tribal and local affiliations and a hierarchical power structure. Its monarchy is popular with, and supported by, a large percentage of the

population. This, in turn, affects how authority is delineated and how information is exchanged and shared. All this had to be understood and taken into account in order to conduct this research and interpret its findings. The existing Moroccan protocols for interpersonal and social transactions had to be respected and adhered to.

It can be assumed that any research, merely by being conducted, affects and therefore distorts the field and hence distorts the collected data (the uncertainty effect). In this particular case, where an American researcher from an American university conducted a study in a Moroccan environment, this distortion was probably amplified. Regardless of personality, the presence of an American is likely to invoke a change of behaviors, a change of responses and a change of attitudes in Moroccans. This likelihood should not be overlooked.

I should mention several observed cultural characteristics that are important in understanding how research methods were employed. Three important aspects of Moroccan culture (among others) had to be considered while collecting data there. Those aspects were:

1. The hierarchical nature of power structures in Morocco. Decisions, directives, and initiatives tend to come from the top down – from the "higher-ups" down the hierarchical ladder.
2. Sharing of information in Morocco is sometimes done very carefully and discreetly. Information of any sort is regarded as power not to be shared without a reason or without authority. Information is also regarded as having an intrinsic value to its possessor.
3. The cultural importance given to maintaining dignity for all concerned had to be taken into account while collecting data. Hyperbole and self-aggrandizement are cultural traits that might confuse a non-Moroccan evaluator. A participant might express good will through extravagant promises without either the intent or the ability to fulfill them. Such expressions of sincere interest and support might possibly carry little real commitment.

Units of research in Morocco's higher education

From the initial stages of this feasibility study, it seemed that AUI was the most obvious candidate for the LCTDE project. At the same time, other higher education institutions in Morocco emerged as possible candidates. Consequently, this study was conducted in four different units for research, four different higher educational institutions in Morocco:

1. Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane (AUI).
2. Muhammed V University in Rabat (MVU).
3. The National Institute for Post and Telecommunications (INPT).
4. The American Language Center (ALC) in Marrakesh together with the University of Marrakesh, Cadi Ayyad University (CAU).

Participants from these four institutions were all presented with a four-page LCTDE Project Proposal Summary. They were all asked whether they might be interested to participate in such a project in the

event that it actually manifested. They were also invited to comment about how to make such a project more attractive to Moroccans. The fact that the other institutions were also approached was common knowledge. A discussion about how LCTDE might work in the other locations was commonly entertained.

Research RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Concerning issues and questions explored in this study

Education

RQE-1. Response to DE and to the LCTDE proposal: The first research question is composed of two dimensions, and the relationship between these two is the main focus of this study. The two dimensions are technology and methodology of distance education on the one hand, and international education in cross-cultural communication on the other. The feasibility of a "marriage" between the two within the Moroccan environment is indeed the subject of this study.

The term distance education is becoming increasingly familiar within the Moroccan higher education community. On the one hand, Moroccan educators, teachers, and students had heard about DE and discussed it mainly in theoretical terms. On the other hand, in general they had not experienced or witnessed DE technology in use; nor did they have much, if any, information or knowledge about the inherent possibilities and constraints associated with DE. At the same time, many of the interviewees expressed a sense of hope and a faith that DE technology could solve problems that existed within the Moroccan education system.

A number of the interviewees voiced the idea that international DE could provide Moroccan students with an inexpensive access to education in the West without the need to travel. In particular, there was the hope that DE could help Moroccan learners obtain degrees and credentials from higher education institutions in the West while studying in Morocco. Educators voiced hope concerning the possibility of cooperation between Moroccan schools and schools in the U.S. where students could study in a local educational institution while taking some distance courses in order to receive a degree from the foreign institution.

A different educational niche for DE may exist at AUI, where non-Moroccan professors, mainly from the U.S., are presently hired to come and teach in the university. Whether for economic reasons or to supply lacking expertise, DE methods could be utilized, whereby professors teach students at AUI from remote international campuses.

There were also voices of mistrust and caution concerning opening doors to more Western influence in Morocco and into the Moroccan educational system. Concerns and questions about the political and economic motives behind bringing distance education into Morocco were raised.

Locally, interviewees expressed hopes that DE technology could be utilized to narrow the large gap that exists between education in cities and the education available in rural Morocco. The hope was expressed that DE would be used, as it is used by open universities around the world, to provide continuing education. Continuing education, while not available in Morocco is badly needed there.

As to the question of the feasibility of employing DE technologies for cross-cultural education in Morocco similar to what is proposed in the LCTDE project, the responses were varied and provided a wealth of information. Here, one needs to first examine what participants in this study had to say about cross-cultural education in Morocco, and only then to assess their responses to the question of being involved and collaborating with non-Moroccans. Then, finally, can the question about the use of DE technologies for international cross-cultural communications be entertained.

The varieties of educational methods used to teach cross-cultural communication in the U.S. are little known in Morocco. Although one hears the call of Moroccan educators to import and use some of these methods as part of reforming higher education in the country, this probably will take time. In addition, if these methods will be used, they will have to be adapted to the Moroccan culture and to the needs of the education system there.

Interviewees who spoke about cross-cultural programs and cross-cultural studies mainly referred to programs that target foreign students who come to Morocco to learn about the culture there. Moroccan universities conduct such programs (AUI, MVU, and CAU) in order to bring in additional revenues as well as for international and national recognition. Such cross-cultural programs are also conducted by other entities such as the "Center for Cross-Cultural Learning" in Rabat, "Global Involvement Through Education" in Casablanca and the Marrakesh ALC. Two educational institutions included in this study, AUI and the INPT, send their own students abroad for the purpose of cross-cultural experience.

To the students, the subject of cross-cultural communications by itself is vague and abstract. Students wanted answers to more concrete questions such as: How does taking this course relate to the job market? How would it be credited and evaluated? How much of a workload is involved? How does it fit into the rest of their academic path? One of the participants said that with the students, the need, which does not exist yet, must be created. The students are attracted to learning new technologies. They are hungry for new forms of knowledge that will open doors to new opportunities in a global reality. An international cross-cultural communication program must be designed and packaged in ways that fulfill Moroccan students' needs.

RQE-2. Level of commitment by faculty and students to DE and to the LCTDE: The extent of commitment of faculty and students can only be based on circumstantial knowledge gathered from the present study. The reason for this is that there was no specific proposed project planned at that time to which participants could commit. This, in fact, is one of the constraints and a weakness of this feasibility study: that there is no concrete project proposal to back it. A "what if" situation cannot evoke commitment.

A number of qualified Moroccan faculty members expressed a willingness and interest to participate and involve their classes, if a project similar to the LCTDE takes place. Professors in public universities report that they are required to abide by the strictly imposed law of higher education and to follow the same state-dictated curricula from year to year, and that this is a boring and uninspiring process. Interviewees indicated that many faculty members are hungry for new challenges in their job and that minimal incentives such as inviting Moroccan faculty for training in the U.S. and training them in new technologies might be sufficient to ensure commitment on their behalf. Moroccan professors are required to teach 10 hours per week and therefore could have the time to participate in a DE project. At the same time, since these same professors are paid low salaries, many hold second jobs that take their energies away from teaching. In order to get committed faculty for a DE project, sufficient financial compensation must be provided to them.

Interview data indicate that the students also would be willing to commit their energies to a DE cross-cultural studies course if the benefits, as well as the requirements, are presented to them correctly. The attraction of hands-on experience with new technology as well as the international implications at the workplace of the said DE course would appeal to Moroccan students. The course must be designed in a way to accommodate to students' needs such as time constraints that they experience during examinations, for example, and to consider their general workload needs.

At AUI, the parameters just discussed change somewhat, but also there, the indications are that both faculty and students will want to commit their energies to such a proposed DE project. The isolated life at Ifrane leave students and faculty with time on their hands, which some reported as boring or unexciting. Many of the students spend hours in virtual chat-rooms for this very reason. The energies for commitment are available at AUI for a challenging and exciting project.

RQE-3. Educational need of Moroccans for a DE course in cross-cultural communication: The focus here is the need on the Moroccan side. The needs of the Moroccan learners and the needs of the Moroccan higher education system are different enough from the needs on the U.S. side to consider this constraint as one of the major problems, if not the major problem, that needs to be addressed and solved in advance. The difference in needs on the two cultural sides must be incorporated into the program design. This constraint was expected, since Morocco was chosen to participate in this type of project precisely for being, in so many ways, a contrast culture to that of the U.S. In order for such a collaborative DE project to have a chance and to be successful, a middle way must be negotiated where each side needs to make compromises that it can live with. If, and when, this balance would be achieved, the compromises themselves would be translated into cultural learning experiences for all participants, that is, if the differences are assimilated in a sensitive and conscious manner.

Interview material suggests that in Morocco, one finds a very rigid social structure compared to the loosely woven society of the U.S. This rigidity makes it difficult to change existing social patterns. Generally, Moroccan students are more reserved in their speech and are less spontaneous than their American counterparts. They want to prepare what they will say in advance after study and reflection. "They have not been encouraged throughout their educational experience to talk spontaneously and freely" . At the same time, one might find, at first, Moroccan students to be very rigid about their point of

view. The need to be right and in charge in an adversarial manner is strong and might be perceived as a barrier to collaboration. This type of strong, non-renting attitude could be especially present when it comes to political, national and religious subjects. In general, students on each side will have different choices of topics for discussion. Moroccan students also feel that they know much more about American culture than Americans know about Moroccan culture. These barriers will be strong only initially. Moroccan students will relax as they get to know their counterparts.

The differences between the two educational systems must also be considered in the program design. Moroccan higher education is a highly teacher-centered, lecture-based system. Students seem to be more specialized in their academic direction and have increased interest in achieving their academic goals since the consequence of failing their exams is not being permitted to continue with university studies. Students also are not allowed to change the academic path they have started. For example, English students will have little education and knowledge in other fields. Also, there is disparity in the academic calendars on the two sides and the different time zones must be considered.

The data collected in this study indicate that educational parameters and needs in Morocco are different than those in the academic U.S. At the same time, there are not enough data necessary for a complete program design; nor was that the study's intention. The conclusion of this present study is that the program design and the ensuing course curricula would have to be a collaborative design process done by the faculty members who will be teaching the course.

RQE-4. Faculty members' willingness to collaborate with American counterparts: As in the response to question two (RQE-2) of this section, it is not possible to assess real commitment given the conditions of this present research. In general, data indicate that Moroccan faculty members are willing to take part, even enthusiastically at times, in such a DE project design. At the same time, data about communicating with Moroccan faculty revealed some interesting and relevant findings. Moroccan culture is an oral culture that was just beginning to transform into a written culture as it was swept into the culture of the image, says Dr. Barada. There is also a strong influence from traditional Islam where the written word and the writing process are taken very seriously. Usually, when a Moroccan is asked to relate a specific topic, even informally, s/he will probably try to prepare a detailed, well cognized and rehearsed, written presentation rather than to jot down an outline or be ready to give a spontaneous oral response.

In the U.S.'s academic reality, working together at a distance in collaboration and design usually implies many e-mail messages going forwards and backwards and in many directions; maybe short telephone conversations, and possibly some computer-aided conferencing (CMC). Moroccans are not quite used to this type of working format. In this kind of relationship, the Moroccan counterparts might seem unresponsive and uncooperative. Here, it is not suggested that the communication method just described would not work, but rather that this is not the way to start the working relationship among faculty members from the two cultures.

A face-to-face meeting to initiate the collaborative effort will be appropriate. The meeting should not only involve discussions about the subject at hand, but also focus on developing personal relationships

among the members to form friendships and trust. At this point, the group has to decide together how to continue the communication process at a distance. Methods of communication and technologies that will allow more oral contacts among group members, contacts that can be repeated and without excessive time constraints might be needed.

RQE-5. Potential partnerships with institutions of higher education: Here again it must be reiterated that since one must meet a commitment with a commitment and since this study was a preliminary study without any authority behind it, a concrete commitment on the Moroccan side was not possible at the time of the study. Three higher education institutions indicated a desire to host a DE project involving international cross-cultural communication studies. The three were Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Muhammed V University in Agdal, and in Marrakesh, Cadi Ayyad University in conjunction with the American Language Center there.

RQE-6. English language proficiency at Moroccan universities: Arabic is the first and official language of Morocco. French is considered to be the second language of the country, and for the last century it was considered by Moroccan elite and by Western-educated academia there as the language of high culture and as the door to Europe and the West. Since now it seems that English has become the unofficial language of the Western world and of what is known as the global community, many Moroccan students now see English as a door to the world. Many Moroccans are already bilingual or trilingual and have a talent for acquiring foreign languages. Learning very basic English is compulsory in most secondary schools, but the results are minimal. All Moroccan universities have large English departments as part of the Faculty of Letters where the language is taught on a much higher level. Some of the other faculties and private higher education schools teach their students the technical English they might need in their particular field. Many Moroccan students also attend one of the many ALCs found in all major cities, in order to excel in their knowledge of the language. Moroccan culture is an oral culture and consequently students are stronger in their oral command of English in comparison with writing and reading it. At the same time, since excellence in oral expression is so vital in Moroccan culture, students might perceive the need to express themselves, orally, in English, as a handicap and a challenge. A detailed discussion about English language proficiency among students and faculty in each of the institutions can be found in the thesis .

Technology

RQT-1. DE projects in Morocco: Historically, radio and television technologies were used for DE in the sixties, right after Moroccan independence. At the time when data were collected for this study, Morocco had two DE programs that were in different developmental stages, neither of which had been deployed at the time of data collection. These were the MARWAN (MARocco's Wide Area Network) project and the DE Pilot project for training teachers in rural Morocco. Both these projects are described in the thesis. Other possible uses for DE in Morocco were mentioned, but these were in the conceptual stages only.

RQT-2. Possible appropriate DE technologies: The following DE technologies could possibly be used with reasonable success in Morocco:

1. Video-conferencing; via ISDN, leased line or satellite.
2. Desktop video-conferencing; via Internet or ISDN.
3. Web-based DE; via Internet.
4. E-mail communication and CMC technologies; via Internet.
5. Interactive television and audio; via satellite or terrestrial cable.
6. Videotape and audiotape production; via Internet-based streaming media or via conventional mail.

Choosing the technology or technologies to be used in the suggested project must be part of the DE program design process. One of the conclusions of the present study is that future facilitators of the DE program would also be its designers. Faculty members from Morocco and the U.S. selected to be trained as program facilitators would collaborate in designing the program as part of their training. Educational objectives and cultural parameters as well as technical constraints present in the field and budgetary limitations would have to be considered as part of the design, which includes selecting appropriate technologies.

The discussions associated with the next two research questions, RQT-3; about communication infrastructure in Morocco and RQT-4, about the existing and the needed technology in Moroccan universities, were omitted from the present paper due to lack of space and their technical nature. One major point that needs to be understood is that the level of technology available for Moroccan higher education, compared to that in the U.S., will probably always be a few "generations" old at best. The available technology for higher education is rapidly changing in the U.S., in Morocco and everywhere else, as everyone is trying to catch up. At the same time, the technological gap may be growing between the richer and poorer countries. Service, maintenance and repair in Morocco may always be a much bigger problem than what one expects in the U.S. Technological inequality will be a problem in need of a solution for true distance collaboration to be possible. One must look at the possible results on a cross-cultural collaboration program where one culture is assumed dominant. In such a case, not only would the language of communication be arbitrarily chosen to be English; technical domination may also be imposed as a given.

A possible way to deal with the problem of technological inequality is to ensure that the equipment used by both sides is the same. Additional needed technology could be supplied to the Moroccan collaborators while the American side would be restricted to the same technology that is available to the Moroccan counterparts.

RQT-5. Technological orientation of faculty members and students: To understand the relationship that existed between the human factor and technology in Morocco, one must first look at the relationship between culture and technology there. How does being a Moroccan influence one's ability to use various technologies? Another issue is how does the availability of and the accessibility to different technologies affects one's ability to successfully use these technologies? One also must ask, how does previous experience with using technology, or the lack of it, affect one's training with new technology? Of course, these issues just mentioned are very broad and cover more ground than what this study can encompass. Nevertheless, these issues are relevant and can provide material for future research.

Many students had their first hands-on experience with computers in their current educational establishment. Would students experience difficulties using computers due to having minimal previous experience? Study results show that Moroccans were eager to use computers and showed no fear of technology. It seemed that the limited availability of computers and the relative high cost of technology forced young people to collaborate and share these available limited resources. At the same time, when enough machines are available, research showed that most students would choose to work alone.

Culture-specific issues must be considered when one examines how people relate to and use the technology. These considerations must be addressed in any future training. The present study indicates that Morocco is basically an oral culture and this fact must be anticipated and incorporated into any DE training. The fact that the academic culture in Morocco is highly teacher-centered also needs attention. How the age of participants affect their ability to be trained and to use technology must be considered. Some of the younger students may excel over their older teachers in such areas as mastering the use of technologies or in their command of the keyboard. Such a situation may become a problem in a teacher-centered classroom. The model of student-centered learning with the teacher as a facilitator may be introduced, but again with cultural sensitivity.

Administration

RQA-1&2. Administration's response and support: The king of Morocco, in a 1997 address to his nation, declared that Morocco's goal is to open to global trade and that technology is the means and the key for bringing Morocco into the twentieth century's global reality. Government officials, who are to implement such directives, represent the stable and rigid hierarchy of the Moroccan kingdom on the one hand and at the same time they are part of the volatile Moroccan political structure. An important lesson learned from interacting with administrators in the Moroccan higher education system and with officials and administrators in general was the need to acknowledge and embrace the existing hierarchy of power. The rules and protocols of power relationships and hierarchical realities are rigid and commonly accepted in Moroccan culture. It is important to correctly assess, before actions are taken, the hierarchical level at which decisions can be made. If negotiations are not made on a high enough level, they probably will fail. After the fact of choosing the initial contact level, it might not be possible to seek another approach. Much of the unspoken code has to do with politeness to the hierarchy by paying appropriate respect to those in authority by coming to them first.

Once an appropriate liaison is assigned who has a direct channel to where decisions can be made, a meaningful relationship must developed with that person. This relationship must be professional as well as personal. The liaison must understand all aspects of the proposed project as well as how s/he personally might benefit from a successful outcome. Benefits might include professional interest in a new field, learning possibilities, future participation in the proposed project or a new personal relationship. The liaison functions not only as a go-between person but also more importantly as an advocate, an ally, and a lobbyist for the project to the higher authorities.

For an international DE project to occur, final negotiations and agreements must be performed with

proper respect for the appropriate protocols. The proceedings must be negotiated by those in authority in Morocco, together with their power equivalents on the U.S. side. Moroccan officials would like to deal with someone in the U.S. who is at least on their own hierarchical level. For example, a dean of a faculty would deal with an American dean, or better, with the president of a university. Agreements need to be in writing and personally signed by those in power on both sides, possibly in some ceremonial fashion.

RQA-4. Available resources: Additional monetary funds would not be easy to generate within a Moroccan education system already financially depleted and strictly controlled by the law of higher education. Only in-kind participation of faculty time and the already existing institutional resources could be expected.

RQA-5. Possible barriers on the administration level:

1. Administrations on both sides must be able to work together. The cultures of educational administrations in general are known to be rigid and slow to change. In the case of Morocco and the U.S., the large gap that exists between the cultures of the two administrations may indeed prove to be a challenge.
2. Policy changes in the administration of higher education in Morocco and personnel changes of the administrators themselves may alter the level of administrative support for the program.
3. There may be a language barrier since most Moroccan administrators speak only Arabic and French while Americans often speak only English.
4. The difference between the academic calendars in the two countries may prove to be a scheduling challenge.
5. Time-zone differences may present a scheduling challenge and an obstacle to smooth communication between the two administrations.
6. Program maintenance, service and technical support in Moroccan institutions can be challenging.

Suggestions for future research

Further research and study is needed. There is still a need for a feasibility study to be conducted on the U.S. side. Any future research must involve Moroccans' active participation in order to look at the issues from a Moroccan point of view. Detailed training programs for faculty members and for students must be designed. If indeed research and design work on this project is to continue in some fashion, it must involve a number of participants on both sides to allow true collaboration at a distance.

Future research is also needed in the areas of:

1. Issues of cultural equality, domination and inferiority in cross-cultural collaboration.
2. Cultural biases inherent in various technologies.
3. Ways of leveling the technological field when it is involving collaboration among partners who are unequal economically.
4. Issues of language domination and language equality in collaborative situations where some

members must use solely a foreign language for communication.

Concluding discussion concerning "units of research"

One possible approach, as one looks at the three available units of research in Ifrane, Rabat, and Marrakesh, is to compare findings and to choose the highest scoring institution for a specific application. As was mentioned before, AUI is the most likely candidate as far as technology is concerned. It possesses the most suitable and available equipment, the necessary infrastructure and sound technical support. With respect to language, working with AUI students and faculty would be easier than working with the other schools. AUI's administration might also be easier to work with since their academic calendar is more compatible with and similar to that of the U.S., and their officials are accustomed to working with American faculty members and institutions. Many other universities in the U.S. seeking joint academic ventures have taken this approach and knocked on AUI's doors.

Another approach, which is also recommended here, is to keep the options open and to deal with each individual case of possible international cooperation with Moroccan universities as a unique case. In each case, at least the initial contacts could be made with more than one institution, and assessment could be made according to the possibilities at that time. One opinion that some Moroccans had concerning AUI was that it does not represent the real Morocco. The real Moroccan students and the real Moroccan culture, they said, are in its public universities. They said that AUI is a school for the children of the Moroccan elite who are very much Americanized already and are isolated in their Ifrane mountain palace, far from the reality of Moroccan cities. This situation may be equated to that of an American tourist who takes an organized tour to some exotic country, stays in the Holiday Inn there, eats only American food, travels in an American Express tour bus, snaps a few pictures in the local markets, and goes back home without ever leaving his culture.

In the cases of CAU and MVU, both the invitation to participate in the LCTDE project and their interest seemed genuine. Especially in the case of Marrakesh (CAU) it seemed that a DE program could realistically be implemented there. It would probably be more of an organizational and a cultural challenge to collaborate with a Moroccan public university than with the AUI or even the Marrakesh ALC. It would also be more costly. The resources that would be available on the U.S. side and the nature of the needs on the Moroccan side may determine whether such a challenge is warranted.

Summary

Investigating the Feasibility of Studying Cross-cultural Communication Through Distance Education in Morocco was a qualitative study that resulted in a substantial amount of information, collection of many people's points of view, and analysis. The material presented in that present study can be used not only to establish the feasibility of specific DE programs but also in a much broader manner. Educators and program managers may find relevant information in these pages to determine answers to questions on feasibility.

In conclusion, the possibilities are many and broad, and the field is open. The actual decision-making process of how to use the information presented here would be left in the hands of the educators and the administrators in relationship to the specific course design at hand. This type of open-ended approach accords with the general nature of this study, which was conducted in relationship to a specific situation, uniquely oriented. Also, working in Morocco or in countries with similar cultural characteristics requires increased personal involvement, from a Westerner's point of view, on behalf of the international collaborating educator. It may require a good deal of personal relationships in the spirit of collaboration and good will on both sides. This again makes every case unique and every decision specific.

At the same time, educating students in cross-cultural communication is increasing in importance not only in the U.S. but worldwide. Existing international cultural diversity is an educational resource. Collaborating while using tools and technologies of distance education is quickly becoming an extension of the traditional classroom on campuses all over the globe. The educational possibilities that presented themselves to me in Morocco during this research work by far outweighed the barriers and constraints that exist. I felt as though I were a prospector who discovered a resource of educational wealth that can be exploited for the benefit of Western students of cross-cultural communication. However, the analogy of a prospector discovering some rich ore must stop here. In the present scenario, the ore has to realize equal benefits for itself if it is to take part in the prospector's plan. In this case, Moroccan culture, Moroccan students and teachers could become an educational resource only if, simultaneously, Moroccans see American students and teachers and their culture as a useful educational resource for themselves. Similar educational needs must exist on both sides.

Those needs might be similar but not necessarily the same. The findings of the present research uncovered only some of the various needs that exist on the Moroccan side. At the same time, the results of the present research led me to conclude that the real needs that exist on both sides and the way to find a balance between them can only be discovered and implemented through true and equal collaboration between Moroccan and American educators. Only by allowing Moroccan educators to enter as equals into the next stage of this research process, can a workable feasibility assessment be made.

References