ELF MABRUK!
TEACHING TECH COMM IN THE ARABIAN GULF

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Synopsis:

The author applies theory and his own teaching experiences in the region to develop strategies that demystify teaching English in the Arabian Gulf. Understanding cultural differences and using repetition, scaffolding, and collaboration in the classroom are some of the keys to teaching English to Gulf Arabs. Appreciation for local culture and approachability are two other vital components. Methodology can facilitate intrinsic motivation and buy-in for traditional students in the Arabian Gulf.

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Teaching English in the Arabian Gulf

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Practitioner's Takeaway

- In both academia and industry circles, cultural insight about local populations in the Arabian Gulf assists in buy-in for both traditional students and practitioners.
- Although not foolproof, an application of three of Hofstede's cultural dimensions facilitates English instruction in the Arabian Gulf.
- Collaboration, scaffolding, and repetition provide students and practitioners with better learning environments in Gulf Arabian EFL and Tech Comm classrooms.
- Localized activities encourage intrinsic motivation far better than copied and pasted Western-centric activities.
- Reading wait-times should be extended in both academia and industry circles in the Arabian Gulf.
- As in all classrooms, instructors should be sensitive to contentious issues like politics and religious beliefs.
- The English professor can navigate unique Gulf Arabian cultural matters with a few fairly simple rules.

Abstract

Purpose:

Over the past 20 years, educational systems in the Arabian Gulf have undergone a substantial overhaul. Slowly but surely, the static Arabian standard rote memory approach to teaching is waning in exchange for a far more dynamic, student-centered approach that most Arabian Gulf students appreciate. With a new working environment, new cultural environment, and a new student body, teaching local traditional university students and local practitioners in this region can oftentimes be a challenge for the western instructor. This learning curve steepens when also navigating cultural differences and local mores into the overall experience. Nevertheless, teaching local students in the Arabian Gulf can be as rewarding and fulfilling as teaching in the west provided that the educator understands and accepts these new conditions. The author, an American PhD graduate in an Texas Tech University's Technical Communication program, taught EFL and Tech Comm in higher education as well as conducted Tech Comm "crash courses" for those locals in industry in both Qatar and the United Arab Emirates for a total of 17 years. This article attempts to showcase the ins and outs of teaching English and Technical Communication to university-level Arabian Gulf students and adult practitioners; the article also shows how to encourage student buy-in and facilitate the learning of university / industry subject matter.

Method:

The writer applies theory and his own teaching experiences in the region to develop strategies that demystify teaching in the Arabian Gulf.

Results:

Understanding cultural differences and using repetition, scaffolding, and collaboration in the classroom are some of the keys to teaching English to Gulf Arabs. Showing appreciation for local culture and an approachability are two other vital components.

Conclusion:

Learning about cultural values and applying the author's methodology can facilitate intrinsic motivation and buy-in for both traditional students and practitioners in the Arabian Gulf.

Keywords: intercultural communication, Arabian Gulf, teaching methodology, higher education, EFL, technical communication

Introduction

Branch campuses of well-established American universities pepper Arabian Gulf countries such as Qatar and the UAE with the aspiration to create new standards and norms in education for the region. The UAE alone boasts branch campuses of New York University, the Sorbonne, University of Washington, Johns Hopkins' Bloomberg School of Public Health, and Rochester Institute of Technology. Qatar appears to be further ahead with this trend as it features branch campuses of notable universities offering specific programs from Carnegie-Mellon, Cornell, Georgetown, Northwestern, Texas A&M University at Qatar, and Virginia Commonwealth, including a fair share of EFL and Technical Communication courses. Additionally, many local branches of petroleum companies sign up local employees to learn basic Tech Comm skills to improve job performance; these local employees have come from more traditional educational backgrounds, which infers dependence on rote learning, gender-segregated public schools, and basic English skills. My experience of teaching EFL and Technical Communication (TC) at an American branch campus in Qatar for seventeen years, as well as teaching adult practitioners fundamental TC skills, has provided a wealth of knowledge that I intend to share here. However, I also want to impart more than basic teaching knowledge; by acknowledging biases from research as well as those I brought to my teaching experiences, it is my hope that fellow western English teachers will be able to establish deeper connections to their own local student populations and therefore further enrich Gulf Arabian classrooms.

A Regional Perspective

This new arena of overseas university branch campuses beckons for all kinds of research, such as strategies to best instruct a predominantly Gulf Arabian student body. Starting with

Virginia Commonwealth University's branch campus in 1998, branch campuses in Qatar have employed international faculties and staff to deliver Her Highness Sheikha Moza's original mandate: to assist in educating the Qatari people in an overtly western style of education, complete with the work culture found in American universities and companies. However, there is a learning curve; as noted by Bondie et al. (2019), a one-size-fits-all approach does not often garner positive results. Therefore, it is up to TC instructors to adjust classroom practices in order to meet this challenge for their students. "Providing all students with optimal opportunities is among teachers' greatest challenges. *All* students deserve instruction that is clear, accessible, rigorous, and relevant" (p. 357). To that end, there are oftentimes different communication practices that Americans and Gulf Arabs employ (Amara, 2015), which can ultimately morph classroom dynamics in manners that are not entirely western…even if these institutions are American. Additionally, as implied by Hofstede's cultural dimensions (2010), Americans and Gulf Arabs differ culturally and linguistically; hence there is a greater need to proceed with caution in order to fortify teacher-student relationships and ensure message, such as effective teaching strategies in the English classroom.

As professors know, the solution to student buy-in is through careful analysis of audience and execution of teaching methods. This solution is easier said than done. In my own travails in the Arabian Gulf, my local students consisted of co-educational post-high school; all male classrooms at the men's campus of UAE University; all female classrooms at the women's campus of UAE University; mixed classrooms at an American institution in Qatar, and mixed classrooms in TC "crash courses" for local adult practitioners. Oftentimes my local students did not understand what their major entailed; in fact, if one were to ask many of them why they had enrolled in their specific major, the patent reply would be that they "wanted to help their

country." Moreover, the vast majority of them had never had a job. Therefore, fostering intrinsic motivation in the classroom was somewhat formidable.

Indeed, universities worldwide are in dire need of an education overhaul in general. As Hu (2018) notes, "To promote the transformation of college students' thinking, college English teaching should be reformed from three aspects: teaching concept, teaching content, and teaching method." As university professors, we rely far too heavily on tried-and-true lectures and static, endless PowerPoint slides with far too high word counts, what Garr Reynolds (2020) calls "slideuments," and oftentimes our methods are a mismatch to student learning styles. In fact, in a study conducted at UAE University, Chowdhury (2015) noted that "engineering students are predominantly visual, sensing, inductive and active while most engineering educations are auditory, abstract (intuitive), deductive, passive, and sequential" (p. 85). For even the most homogenous of classrooms, each class features students with a plethora of learning styles, such as visual, aural, tactile, or a combination therein. To compound the situation of learning further within my own branch campus student community are speakers of English as a foreign language. In the realm of industry, researchers have inferred that users from different cultures may feature polarizing perceptions and performance for a product (Oliveira et al., 2018; Piccolo & Pereira, 2019). Along with the idea of varying learning strategies are cultural behaviors to anticipate. Rivas et al. (2019) state that "a student from a collectivist society may wait for directions to follow instead of asking questions" (p. 695); therefore, it is imperative for English and Tech Comm faculty to initiate guidance in their Gulf Arabian classrooms.

Due to a difference in cultural lenses and different educational methodologies, simply inserting American subject matter within a frame of American content into an international context is oftentimes a recipe for disaster. Heimgärtner notes that "There is not only a different

comprehension of requirements but also culturally dependent perspectives and views of them.

The developer needs much intercultural knowledge to understand a user from another culture"

(Heimgärtner, 2017, p. 93). Although Heimgärtner refers specifically to designing intercultural

usability products, his research here relates well to teaching English and Tech Comm in a foreign

environment such as the Arabian Gulf. As Diallo (2012) notes:

> Teaching of international languages often encounters difficulties outside Western educational contexts because the epistemic traditions and pedagogies proposed for the teaching of these languages are often incongruent with some learners' cultural and academic traditions. This is particularly so in the case of teaching in the Arab-Muslim context of the Gulf countries, where different cultures, different languages and, above all, opposed scholastic and epistemic traditions find themselves face to face. (p. 211)

Therefore, it would behoove the instructor to adapt to the local context rather than shoehorning

American product into their classroom materials just because "it works well back home." Local

students may not see the point otherwise, and they may also resent what they may view as

cultural imperialism. Conversely, teaching English and Tech Comm in the Arabian Gulf is not

rocket science either; with a bit of preparation, These classes can flourish in a dynamic learning

environment and local students in both academia and industry can thrive.

Considerations for Arabian TCR Students

While not infallible, Geert Hofstede's framework of cultural dimensions (2010) has

demystified many aspects of culture from regions around the globe. Listed below in Table I are

three of Hofstede's cultural dimensions that can influence English classroom behavior in the

Arabian Gulf classroom:

Table I

Hofstede Cultural Dimensions affecting Teaching in Arabian Gulf

American Value	Arabian Value
Individualism	Collectivism
Low Power Distance	High Power Distance
Low Uncertainty Avoidance	High Uncertainty Avoidance

Although this comparison of cultural differences is not exhaustive, I have found that these three factors address the vast majority of intercultural ambiguity. Moreover, it is also important to remember that not every person from a culture acts or reacts the same; therefore, although these cultural factors assist as general guidelines, they are not absolute. To complicate this matter, said factors do not always adequately reflect student populations within the Arabian Gulf; for example, Hodges and Seawright (2019) note "third culture kids," which are individuals "who grow up in a culture different from a culture of their parents" (p. 300), such as an ethnically Lebanese family that has lived in Doha for decades but maintains Canadian citizenship. Nevertheless, these cultural dimensions can help to determine whether the classroom message is lost or understood, hence consideration of cultural differences is paramount to establishing effective lesson plans.

In this section, I briefly discuss each of these cultural dimensions and relate all three to the English and Tech Comm Gulf Arabian classroom experience.

Individualism vs. Collectivism

According to Hofstede (2010):

Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him- or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onward are

>integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. (p. 92)

On one end of the scale, Americans are considered to be the most individualist society in the world. Those who have grown up in American society tend to value independence from others, self-reliance, and individualist success. Opposite to this cultural viewpoint is the collectivist Arab, who values obligation to in-group loyalty and harmony; these traits, along with religious devotion, are more important than most anything else.

In order to succeed in this cultural dimension, student collaborations work particularly well with Arabian Gulf students. Collectivist behavior lends itself well to group work and often situates students into a more comfortable working environment. Conversely, frequently isolating students on projects may work to the detriment of classroom morale and ultimately intrinsic motivation. Local students working on a number of individual assignments may even feel targeted, as though their professor does not like them, hence including collaborative activities boosts class morale immeasurably. Additionally, the concept of cheating is not always considered cheating in Arabian cultures, where students often feel obligated to "help" their longtime friends pass school assignments and exams; therefore, the professor must emphatically and definitively show what kinds of "help" are allowed vs. what kinds will not be tolerated…and the consequences. Specific details and examples would further reiterate this important point. Acknowledging that the instructor understands this facet is a cultural difference that will help students trust their instructor; they may not like the rule, but transparency and policy clarification will facilitate local student buy-in.

Courses for local practitioners vary in several key ways: These students are typically a decade or two older than traditional college students, and practitioners are not graded on their

work, hence oftentimes practitioners come to class with a far more relaxed attitude. Additionally, there is less familiarity with western cultures than those local students who attend American branch campuses. While mixed-gender university student collaboration is a norm at these American institutions in the Arabian Gulf, they are definitely NOT a norm with older generations. Therefore, I would not recommend placing those practitioners in mixed-gender groups; the dynamics of mixed-gender groups are simply too jarring, and such groups may actually deter the learning of subject matter as well as negate class morale. I have noted many a time where conservative older males and females alike become anxious when they are placed in co-educational groups. They most likely attended gender-segregated schools, and the only interactions with those of opposite gender are derived from siblings, cousins, and spouses. Therefore, keeping practitioners in gender-segregated pairs and groups shows a healthy respect for Arabian Gulf religious beliefs / cultural norms and encourages a far more relaxed atmosphere for a crash course Tech Comm or EFL setting.

Low Power Distance vs. High Power Distance

According to Hofstede (2010), Power Distance refers to equality or inequality of societal power and / or wealth: "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (p. 61). This analysis of societal power is another cultural dimension in which the Arabian Gulf and the United States are polar opposites. On one side, the American professor tends to be approachable to students, politicians can be chatty and informal with the public, and even bosses oftentimes schedule office retreats that stress unity and trust. On the other side of the spectrum is the Arabian Gulf, where reigning monarchs are often featured on grand billboards, blue collar workers are banned from entering

shopping malls, and there are designated VIP as well as VVIP parking spaces. Indeed, this high power distance also bleeds into the Arabian Gulf university classroom, where the professor is assumed to be "all-knowing" and whose academic prowess should not be questioned. Consequently in the university classroom, Arabian Gulf students oftentimes do not feel comfortable to request clarification when there is assignment ambiguity or confusion, as they do not want to seem either unintelligent or challenging to authority. To compound matters further, adult practitioners in TC crash courses may not ask any questions at all, since they are adults who do not want to appear unknowledgeable or uninformed. Therefore, during classroom activities, it is crucial for the instructor to approach each group of adults and quietly repeat activity instructions in different wording, asking if they understand in a much smaller group than the larger classroom setting.

Like one of the tenets of TC, it is paramount for the professor to not only make lessons clear and concise, but also to ensure that they are approachable in case there IS need to clarify. Students are far more apt to ask questions after class or during office hours than in many western university settings. I personally liked issuing my mobile number to students so that they could inquire about assignments or schedule a meeting at any time. I would offer up FaceTime, Zoom, or simply chatting out the clarifying message so that students could receive clarification in the mode that they preferred most. This behavior was particularly popular, as impulsive students could send a text message whenever they wanted, and they would receive a reply at my earliest convenience. This mode also allowed me to be a little more personable with students, as I sent brief messages of encouragement, GIFs, or memojis. (As an aside, sending memojis of myself wearing Gulf Arabian headgear have been particularly appreciated.) Approachability is a key ingredient for success in English and Tech Comm classrooms.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Hofstede defines this cultural dimension as "the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations" (2010, p. 191). Ambiguity can induce severe anxiety; hence some societies attempt to circumnavigate or utterly eradicate it. While individuals may react differently to ambiguity, a society employs technology, laws, and religion to allay fears of the unknown and thereby alleviate anxiety (2010, p. 189). Hofstede lists the United States lower on his scale of Uncertainty Avoidance than the Arabian region, the latter of which implies stricter rules, laws, policies, and regulations. The ultimate goal of populations with higher Uncertainty Avoidance is to control aspects of daily life in order to eliminate or avoid the unexpected. As a result of this high Uncertainty Avoidance characteristic, the society does not readily accept change and is very risk adverse. For example, regions in the Arabian Gulf attempt to stamp out issues of uncertainty by requiring all locals to practice Islam; although there is a great deal of religious freedom for expatriates in countries such as Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and the UAE, there is zero tolerance for religious proselytizing to local inhabitants. Another example of Uncertainty Avoidance is the use of cameras on literally every street corner and at every shopping mall, which creates an environment in which everything and everyone are regulated. An expert in terms of architecture and power, Foucault (1997) explores the panopticon, a structure in which the gaze is alert yet fully veiled. "Inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is alert everywhere" (p. 195). From towers above and mirrored windows, "this enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which power is exercised without division" (p. 197). Although Foucault is describing a prison, there are distinct similarities between the prison and a

watched society in general, namely that both intend to condition the minds of its inhabitants. The viewer is veiled and everything can be seen. It does not really matter whether it is seen, since it is the mere implication of 360-degree gaze that keeps the society's inhabitants in line. People simply behave differently when they think that they are being watched.

Due to their society's higher factor of Uncertainty Avoidance and being watched by others, Arabian Gulf student behavior may take unexpected turns. A linguist myself, I once concentrated on a female student's lips in order to study the tricky pronunciations of two gender-specific Arabic names that sound alike to the untrained ear. (I encourage you to TRY to learn the discerning phonetic nuances between the male name Mashael and the female name Mashael – I never managed to grasp the difference.) This bizarrely plausible situation caused the student embarrassment and resulted in her lashing out at me in a classroom. Not only was I mortified for violating a cultural norm, but I was also mortified that I had embarrassed her. In order to avoid the societal-induced panopticon, students may approach their professors alone in their office to ask questions of arts, culture, and life in general in the west; after all, locals are just as curious about us as we are about them. To a lesser extent, student groups may experience anxiety when their data results differ from other student groups or if their final paper is not as long as another group's paper. It is part of the professor's job to ensure that this difference is alright and different results are equally valid. It is also imperative that professors assuage that the world will not end if different groups procure different results. Thirdly, simplifying tasks during a time of change is also appreciated, much like we have attempted to do during the global pandemic. During my final year in the Arabian Gulf, we all experienced the illegal blockade of surrounding countries such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, and the UAE, which finally ceased in early 2021. These students were half of my age and without coping mechanisms for anxiety; therefore, it is

imperative for the instructor to remember this and provide more flexibility during periods of unrest or confusion. Likewise, adult practitioners featured anxiety due to the unknown future: Would Saudi Arabia attempt to invade their country? Would they ever get to see Emirati or Bahraini relatives again? Sometimes everybody simply needs to show a little more kindness rather than adherence to a progress report deadline.

Numerous scholars have shown how Hofstede's cultural dimensions are flawed (McSweeney, 2002), (Sondergaard, 1994), (Myers & Tan, 2003), (Prasad, Pisani, & Prasad, 2008), (Fang, 2003), (Ofori & Toor, 2009), (Ailon, 2008), (Catalin, 2012). Dimitrov alone (2018) methodically compiled a comprehensive list of these critics, some critical assertions of which include:

1. Identified differences may not be treated as an attribute of national culture.

2. Hofstede's observations were derived from just one organization.

3. Appropriateness as a nation-state is questionable.

4. Non-Westernized societies appear to be devalued while Western societies appear to be idolized.

5. Linguistic issues may have been a factor in Hofstede's survey results.

6. Uncertainty avoidance may very well be dominated by political influences at the time of Hofstede's research. (Dimitrov, p. 45-48)

While it is true that Hofstede's cultural dimensions are not airtight, these dimensions assist in demystifying cultural tendencies and clueing us into possible behavior and values of those analyzed. Ultimately however, individuals may act very differently from these cultural dimensions, which serve as basic guidelines. Even those in homogenous populations may respond differently to different contexts.

Differences in Writing Approaches

Partially due to the fact that Arabian Gulf students come from a traditionally oral / aural culture, their reading and writing suffers, sometimes in both Arabic and English. Martin et al. (2010) note that "limited research that has been done in relation to learning styles among Arab students indicates a preference for auditory and visual perceptual styles" (p. 61). In researching online information literacy in the Arabian Gulf region, scholars have noted the less-than-stellar literacy skills among local populations (Martin, 2013), (Ali, 2017), (Pullman, 2016). It is the proverbial elephant-in-the-university-classroom for a great deal of the entire Arabian Gulf, in which "a preference not to read extensively is a common characteristic in Gulf culture" (Martin et al., 2010, p. 65). Heble's research at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman (2007) echoes these sentiments, in which students "did not seem to have a culture of reading outside the course, so their critical / literacy skills were not well developed" (p. 221). Like students at Zayed University and Sultan Qaboos University, local students at American branch campuses display a varied range of English language proficiency skills; those students who attend private schools are far more advanced than those students who attend public schools. Therefore, it is paramount to give Arabian Gulf students in both academia and industry plenty of time to complete the reading of an article or task. It is also a good idea to give these student groups plenty of time to discuss the topics at hand amongst themselves, since more than likely students with higher English skills are informing their student group colleagues in a discreet manner.

Ultimately, more activities provide globalized contexts that allow my Gulf Arabian students to gently aim a critical eye at their writing style so that they communicate effectively in an international arena. After all, many of them will move onward to work in firms outside of the

Middle East, such as Australia, Canada, the UK, and the USA. While my aim is not to tell them that an impressively ornate Arabian writing style is "wrong," to convert them, and to channel them into Western-writing robots, it would only behoove them to be able to effectively write, negotiate, and express themselves within both the West and Middle East. Dexterity and prowess in navigating both worlds of writing would only make them more marketable on the world stage.

Oftentimes studies conducted within a specific Arabian Gulf country, namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, are applied to other countries within the same region; this application is due to the fact that 1) there is still a lot of research to be done in the region; and 2) Arabian Gulf countries, while definitely different in some ways (ex: predominantly Shia vs. Sunni Islam), share a considerable amount of culture, history, and values. Diallo (2012) notes: "Countries that make up the Gulf Council Cooperation share core religious values and practices, one common language (Arabic), the same economic model, and, above all, similar colonial and post-colonial experiences" (p. 211). Indeed, conclusions derived from an Emirati study can infer similar scenarios in Kuwait and Qatar. For example, it could be daunting to take notes effectively during dense lectures, since the idea of taking notes does not come intuitively for Arabian Gulf students and practitioners. Additionally, Helbe (2006) notes the dependence of rote memorization within Arabian learning backgrounds, which can create a steeper learning curve for both the instructor as well as the student / practitioner. "The educational system these students studied within depends largely on rote-learning than encouraging original or critical thinking" (p. 221). Therefore, the instructor should be prepared to introduce and pepper exercises to gently enhance critical thinking skills before they begin learning materials within the English and TC classrooms. In short, there is a bit of "unlearning" to do before learning begins.

To that end, I developed my own coping strategies in order to gain maximum local student investment and show respect for local sensibilities. Shorter writing assignments would increase student buy-in, as well as assigning partnered papers so that students can build on each other's English writing skills repertoire. Giving students a considerable amount of time to read chapters and write assignments is also important; remember that these students are not only reading English in a second, third, or fourth language, but they are also employing a foreign alphabet, too. Adult practitioners, who most likely grew up with rote memory learning strategies in their public schooling, have even a tougher time. Finally, discussing reading assignments in class would help in filling in the blanks. Many classroom practices have garnered a great deal of student and administration enthusiasm, as assignments are tailored to students and their cultural backgrounds. Diallo (2012) writes, "Linguistic and cultural knowledge combined can help reduce considerably reliance on stereotypes and difficulties that arise in connection with communication" (p. 213). Time and again, my university students have demonstrated their enthusiasm and flexed English prowess in both EFL and Technical Communication, at which time I would respond with "Elf Mabruk!" This phrase translates as "1,000 congratulations!" They were thrilled to discover that they could make connections under these various conditions, which led to healthy doses of intrinsic motivation for our classroom.

Regional Classroom Practices

As educators in international classrooms, we need to be vigilant when observing which methodologies work effectively and which do not. Kim (2015) discusses knowledge development among speakers of English language learners (ELLs) and our responsibility to clear the path for their education. "To support ELL students' academic performance, there should be

efforts to understand what they experience during their learning process, recognize any barriers they encounter, and implement instructional strategies to help them overcome the barriers and perform better" (p. 128). Facilitating this ELL student learning process are the often-transformative practices of repetition, scaffolding, and collaborative learning.

Pedagogical Applications

Repetition in various forms assists tremendously in developing new knowledge within an international learning context. Haleem et al (2016) address the role of repetition and reinforcement in education among a South Asian population, which is also solid advice for Gulf Arab learners: "Reinforcement has been shown to increase the likelihood that a newly learned behavior will be repeated in future and on the other hand repetition helps in reinforcing education" (p. 2). How many of us have sat within a foreign language class and NOT understood new vocabulary the first few times around? First, I let students discuss materials with new vocabulary amongst themselves to see if they can work together and assist each other in gleaning understanding. After all, that is how the real world works, and I am hoping that students can take these newfound skills and use them in their own careers. Once students have digested new vocabulary and grasped understanding of journal article subject matter, we move onto the next task.

Scaffolding is another component to successfully introduce key concepts in the Gulf Arabian classroom. Coulson and Harvey (2013) mention that "Without guidance, structure, and support, learners may be overwhelmed by the complexity and struggle to make the most of their learning experience" (p. 403). Additionally, Koukouletsos et al. (2009) explored the effectiveness of patterns and guidelines within the realm of teaching. "Guidelines should be

meaningful for the students, close to their technical level and experience, and appropriate to their particular level of knowledge" (p. 162). Within my TC class units, I provide structure so that most students can follow along; it is these students who hold their other group members by the hand and guide them through the materials and tasks at hand. As scaffolding is slowly removed, I stand by the sidelines or occasionally walk around groups in case there is a team who requires further clarification. The further into the assignment, the more specialty vocabulary students acquire, and the deeper the understanding of what they are doing.

Collaboration, a pillar in Technical Communication, also assists in EFL student understanding and buy-in. Every semester, I emphasize dynamics of group work. Collaboration is not only a powerful method of reinforcing student-centered learning, but it also naturally lends itself to students who hail from collectivist cultures such as Arabian and South Asian cultures. Bosley (1993) addresses classroom bias in terms of intercultural collaborative learning: "The criteria by which students are assessed and the way we tend to structure collaborative projects themselves may represent a Western cultural bias that reflects our universalist assumptions about how people should behave in group situations" (p. 467). Ultimately, we as Western educators have a propensity to judge people from other cultures through our own cultural lens(es). Nevertheless, collaboration has been an effective tool throughout my Technical Communication classrooms in the Middle East. In fact, the group is far more important than the individual in collectivist team dynamics to the point that unmotivated students fear letting down the group and thereby pull their own weight in team projects. As far as mitigating Type-A personalities on the team: There are so many tasks that need to be addressed in my assignment prompts, and there is no way that one person would wish to claim them all. Typically, I have noted that my Arabian Gulf students develop a collectivist we're-all-in-this-together mentality…and this works! If each

team member assumes responsibility for his or her portion of the tasks at hand, the TC project slowly materializes. Active participation in the group's dynamics ensures success for the unit itself. Brief quizzes about individual tasks checks to ensure that team members are pulling their own weight.

As educators, we have to push our students out of their comfort zone, but we cannot punish them if they fail to grasp every component of such a skills-laden set of tasks. Patience, scaffolding, repetition, collaboration, and student feedback all serve to assist in the understanding of course content.

Caveats to Teaching in the Arabian Gulf

In my years as an expatriate in the Arabian Gulf, I have discovered that preparedness streamlines most classroom activity and overcomes the rougher parts to our craft. To that end, I offer up bullet points that may assist those TC instructors who are new to the region:

- One of the toughest challenges for instructors is dealing with *wasta*. The term *wasta* is Arabic for "social connections" more or less. If a student has *wasta* with important people in the institution (such as a dean), then it is best to leave that student alone and pass them along; otherwise, disorder and chaos can erupt. A father from the royal family once threatened me to pass his son in my Technical Communication class even though the student was unfortunately not a good fit for the university; he inferred that if I did not pass his son, I would be deported.

- Due to *wasta*, some students are admitted to programs where they have no skills set. Later, these students are often unable to survive once they entered, and course failure is obviously bad for morale. The ones who deserve to enter the programs, the amount of

which increases annually, would have to fight the stigma of their not deserving to be there because of the others who had been "given" admission.

- Along with religious local males, the instructor will also encounter religious local females, who tend to wear gloves and cover their face as well as their hair. These ladies, who most often are part of Bedouin tribes, tend to be very shy and are reticent to speak out in front of males. To compound matters further, eye contact between those of opposite gender can be construed as a sexual advance. Therefore, a sense of humor, sporadic (not lingering!) eye contact from a male instructor, and a few words in Gulf Arabic go a long way in facilitating an encouraging learning environment.

- The permanent state of temporary / temporary state of permanence can prove to be wearisome on the instructor. Although I ultimately lived in the Arabian Gulf for 17 years, I was always aware that my job could end at any moment if I angered the wrong person – a royal family member or a person with *wasta*. Additionally, a local is perfectly able to lie about an action you did not commit, and you would most likely be sent out of the country. Expat situations in the classroom require thinking before you say and do. This behavior has included showing a movie or using a song within classroom activities, as *medowas* sometimes frown upon both of them.

- Conversely (and most importantly), Arabian Gulf students can be some of the kindest, warmest students, too. They are extremely intuitive, and they can discern whether a western professor has a fondness for the local population or is simply working there for the paycheck. If they feel like the instructor genuinely cares about them, they will be some of the most delightful students to encounter and work with.

- Pick your battles and steer clear from politics. Whatever your stance is on Israel, avoid discussing it. Israel and Arabia have had centuries of animosity between them, and no matter if we "think" we understand the Arab-Israeli situation, we most likely do not. Currently, there appears to be improved relations between Arabian and Israeli worlds, but relations are mercurial. In the classroom, students could easily misconstrue your words, and all of your good intentions would be for naught.

- Gain a sense of local laws before you plan too much for your TC classroom. I had the idea of creating a fundraiser for blue collar workers from developing countries…only to soon discover that this action is illegal. This is because local sensibilities could perceive that you think that the government is not doing enough for these workers. Once again, you could endanger your position and be deported.

- As previously mentioned, cultural awareness goes quite a long way in the Arabian Gulf. Certain innocuous gestures in the West have bad connotations in the Arabian Gulf. And of course there are English words like "Mississippi" or the Spanish name "Juan" which sound like Arabic insults.

- As aforementioned, situate research within a local context. Some immensely popular TC assignments have included the following:
  - I asked different student groups to test the usability of American branch campus websites. As learning about usability requires a steep learning curve, it is imperative to use a substantial amount of scaffolding for this unit. They enjoyed researching their own community, and they confessed they enjoyed learning usability skills.

o I organized a "business trip" to Krispy Kreme, where students learned how donuts were made, took selfies, and ultimately were able to taste the product. Gulf Arabian students typically have never experienced anything like this kind of activity, and the subsequent activities were immensely popular. The trip, which was a great way of breaking routine, culminated in a "business trip" memo.

o Responding to RFPs that pertain to Qatar's well being, a gift to the university, or solving a problem on the university campus are all excellent catalysts for developing and reinforcing TC skills. At the end of each semester, I would showcase their fantastic ideas in a poster presentation, where students could discuss their dynamic projects to faculty, staff, and local media.

o At the end of the semester, ask students what we did and write them on the board. The visual effect of students seeing how far they had come makes them realize how far they have come in their own TC skills.

Concluding Thoughts / Biases Explored

While it is an important life skill to look in the mirror and address issues of bias, this self-reflection is equally important as one considers to plunge into expatriate life. After all, expats unwittingly serve as diplomats whether they like it or not, as they oftentimes represent an entire country in the eyes of their students. When I was a graduate exchange student to Istanbul, Turkish friends demystified Islam for me, and I became enamored with a considerable amount of Islamic principles, virtues, and behavior; I decided that if I could feel at home in a country that marked "the halfway point between east and west," I would do fine in the Arabian Gulf. And I did. I had assumed that the Arabian Gulf was a lot like Turkey but more conservative, which

certainly held true in the early 2000s, when so much of the Arabian Gulf was still considered to be uncharted destinations in the world's eyes. I had no other preconceived notions aside from assuming that much like Turkey, hospitality was a golden rule to locals, and much like my brothers and sisters in the southern US, Gulf Arabs wanted to see me saved and converted to their brand of religion. I was right on both counts, but I thrived and maintained a happy life with a friend base from all corners of the world.

Gulf Arabs have preconceived notions of Americans, too. A dear local friend confessed that many locals thought of Americans as a people predisposed to violence, sex, and alcohol. Therefore, it was my calling to show locals that despite unflattering stereotypes and cultural differences, Americans and Gulf Arabs share more commonalities than we do dissimilarities. I took my role as educator and "diplomat" seriously and cultivated many friendships with people from a number of Arabian nationals who were willing to take a chance of befriending an American. Additionally, university students and practitioners have oftentimes not traveled outside of the Arabian Gulf and are skeptical of western behavior and mores. Therefore, it is up to the Tech Comm professor to dispel any anxieties about cultural imperialism and to meet their students on their own local level, since that is often all they know. The more cultural immersion you're willing to take, such as tasting local foods, drinking Arabian coffee spiked with cardamom, going Bedouin fishing, wearing the national clothes to the office occasionally, and roaming the desert to dunebash in Land Rovers, the more your students will appreciate you.

Shivers-McNair and San Diego write that "localizing communities, goals, communication, and inclusion are at the heart of cross-cultural communication" (2017), and this idea fits perfectly for the instructor in an intercultural context. I wrote this paper to offer my own insight into teaching a student population that has yet to be demystified. The world of Technical

Communication continues to evolve and morph at a rapid pace, and it is up to university professors to strive for the meaningful and the dynamic in order to assert and maintain relevance in the classroom. To learn about burgeoning new or revitalized fields of study and bring them into our classrooms, oftentimes with student populations that have yet to be substantially explored.

To that end, copy-paste classes of previous semesters, from previous universities, from other parts of the world, are tempting, but they are not the answer to educating our varying student populations. I do not teach in the exact same way every semester, and I do not offer all of the same units of topics every semester either. Sometimes student groups have to respond to a Request for Proposal, and other times they have to comprise meaningful Risk Communication or Visual Rhetoric documentation for assignment prompts with a local twist. Whatever the case, we professors need to contemplate the pillars of Technical Communication in order to address our own audience. By researching student populations, taking calculated risks, consulting colleagues with regional experience, and listening to instinct, it is very possible to encourage student-centered dynamism all over the world via Technical Communication.

More research will always be required to thoroughly answer how to teach for YOUR specific sets of student populations. Learning how to navigate around participant skepticism / defensiveness and encouraging stakeholder buy-in would facilitate the research process. Also, learning how to observe and isolate specific examples of regional writing styles, regional websites, regional learning styles would help considerably so that the researcher would be able to quickly glean important, relevant data from trivialities or eccentricities attributed to only specific people – not people as a whole. Reghunath et al (2019) note that globalization in different fields has led to diverse workforces, which in turn requires graduates ready to excel in intercultural

communication (p. 25). Globalization is, of course, a force of nature in itself, and interviewing students who have formerly studied abroad to western institutions could provide immeasurable insight and self-reflection that the subject matter requires.

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