

**When the “Cultural Other” Becomes Socially Close during the COVID-19
Pandemic:
An Afghani (American University of Afghanistan)-Lebanese (Phoenicia
University) Intercultural Communication Initiative**

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has—beyond a reasonable doubt—united the world as never before into the one human community.

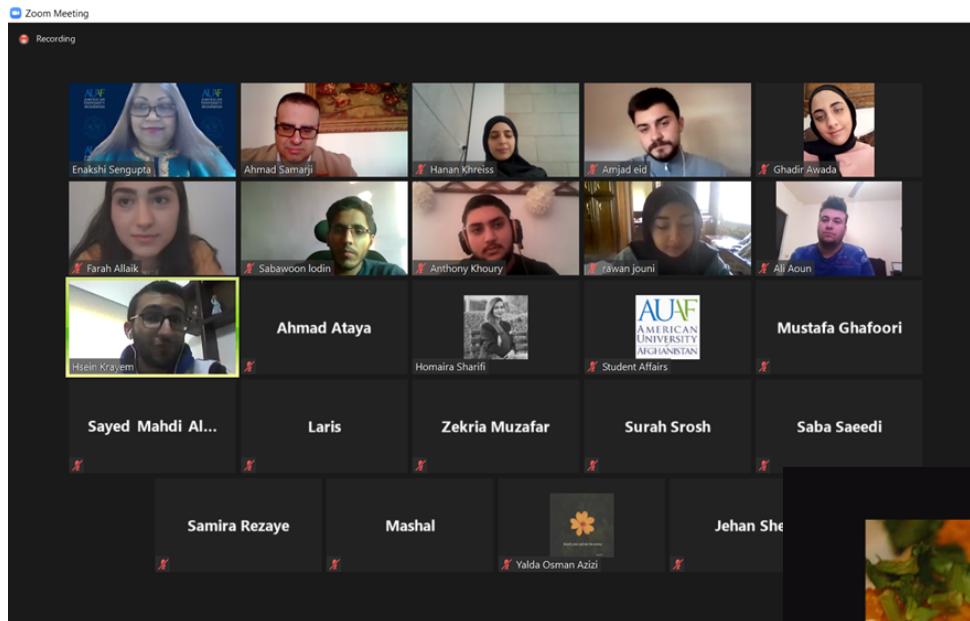
Educationally, the crisis urged for effective approaches, initiatives, and program that would promote and prompt intercultural citizenship and global citizenship for students.

The American University of Afghanistan (AUAF) and Phoenicia University (PU), Lebanon, planned and implemented a joint intercultural program: The Global Cultural Village.

The Village connected and brought together ***20 students (10 Afghani and 10 Lebanese)*** from two different cultures at a time of social and physical distancing all over the world.

Over a period of five months, virtual, fortnightly meetings (discussions and presentations) were led by the students themselves and facilitated by conveners from both universities.

Presentations



Aim of the Study

Study the pre- and post- intercultural perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of both the Afghani and Lebanese students

Evaluate the effectiveness of the Global Cultural Village in prompting intercultural communication, skills, and knowledge and contributing to global citizenship skills and capabilities

Internationalization & Intercultural Exchange in curriculum

Theoretical Framework



Intercultural Communication and Competencies

Adler, 2002; Barnlund, 2013; Bennett, 2013; Hall, 2013; UNESCO, 2013

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Intercultural Citizenship

Baker & Fang, 2021; Byram, 2008; Killick, 2013

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Global Citizenship: Concept & Education

Banks, 2004; 2012; Stewart, 2008; Sullivan & Pashb, 2008; Rapoport, 2020, UNESCO, 2014

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Methodology: Mixed Methods

01

Pre-test questionnaire

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02

Observational virtual
field notes

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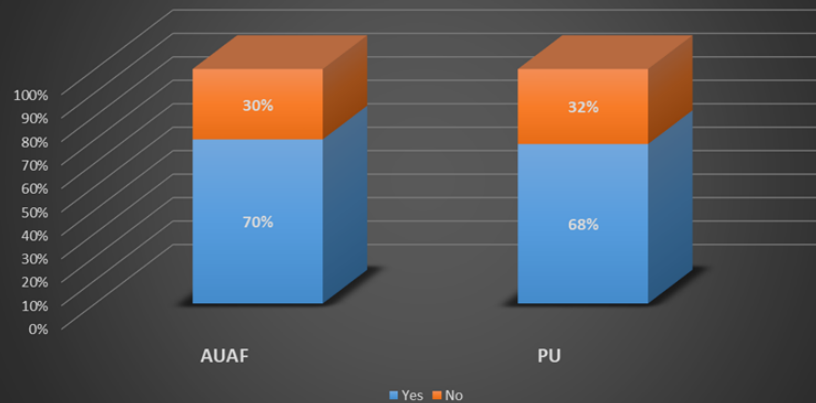
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Post-test semi-structured
interviews

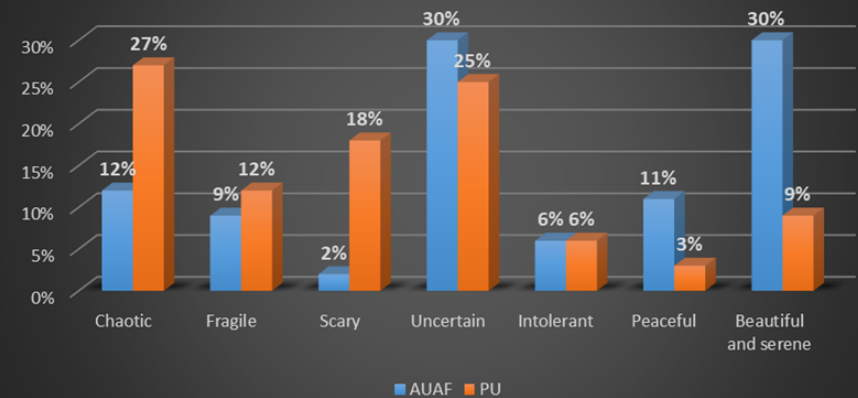
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Pre-Test Questionnaire (76 Applicants)

Candidates' Response to Worrying or Not about the Future



Candidates' Perception of the Current World



Pre-Test Questionnaire: Axial Codes-Benefiting from the Program

- ✍ Making friends from a different culture
- ✍ Learning about and understanding a different culture
- ✍ Personal growth by becoming more culturally aware and being able to see things from a different perspective
- ✍ Building a collaborative network to address common challenges and issues
- ✍ Developing communication skills with individuals from a different culture
 - ✍ Without technically naming “intercultural communication” or even being aware that there is a devoted discipline in this context.

Post-Test Semi-Structured Interviews

✍ In your own words and as you currently perceive it, how do you define global citizenship?

✍ As we approach the end of the program, how do you describe your experience with the Global Cultural Village? Please elaborate with examples.

Post-Test Semi-Structured Interviews: Axial Coding-Question 1

- ✍ Enjoying richer global identity that goes beyond a local identity
- ✍ Valuing similarities and embracing and respecting differences as
- ✍ Becoming more socially committed to understanding and addressing their challenges
- ✍ Knowing the world in a better way
- ✍ Building global connections

Post-Test Semi-Structured Interviews: Axial Coding-Question 2

- ✍ Sharing and learning about the other culture and own culture
- ✍ Curiosity and eagerness to learn about the cultural other
- ✍ Improving communication skills
- ✍ Boosting self-confidence

Observational Virtual Field Notes

 Conveners' fortnightly observations

 Conveners' overall evaluation

Observational Virtual Field Notes: Evaluation

- ✍ Everyone involved left with a definite level of safety and lifelong friends. This program has ensured an inclusive, safe, and positive environment, where each team extracted their own diverse voices, collective life experiences, and backgrounds.*
- ✍ The program went above my expectations—the students have bonded well; the exchange of experiences and opinions has been culturally enriching, and one could almost feel the positive vibes and air of friendliness that prevailed during the sessions.*
- ✍ The Village started with two culturally different and distinct groups who were very foreign and strange to one another [...] the more the two groups conversed with one another about their experiences, dreams, and expectations [...] the more the cultural boundaries blurred, resulting in one diverse group of friends.*

Observational Virtual Field Notes: Findings

- ✍ Initial discrepancy in expressiveness between the two groups which started diminishing as the program progressed
- ✍ Mutual interest and curiosity to learn about the other culture
- ✍ Making plans for having joint ventures in eateries and restaurants—although knowing it may be a remote possibility
- ✍ Authentically connected through happy and sad moments/experiences (COVID-19)

✍ Three major intercultural competencies subconstructs:

✍ Knowledge of the culture

✍ Curiosity

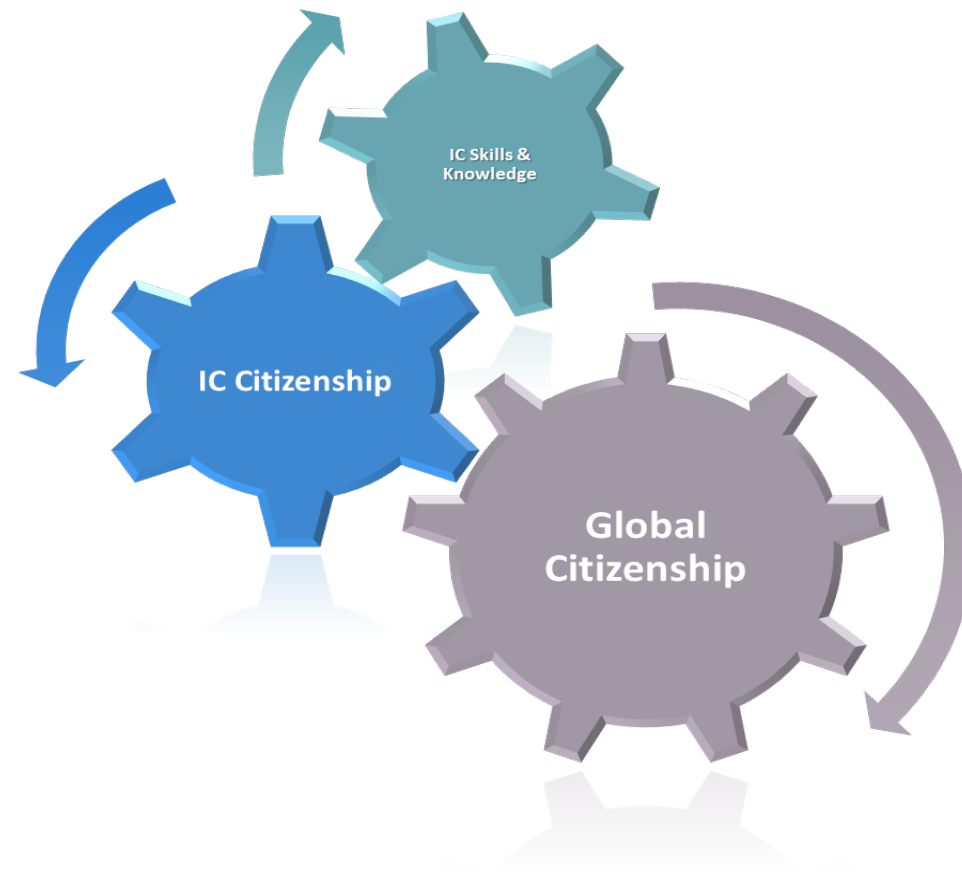
✍ Eagerness to know, interact, and share more

✍ Intercultural communication skills

✍ Verbal communication

✍ Non-verbal communication

Findings



Culmination



THANK YOU !!

QUESTIONS??



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