

## *Voices From The Glass Box: Student Responses from Virtual Exchange on Gender*

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### **ABSTRACT**

Gender discrimination, the gender pay gap, and the glass ceiling exist throughout the world but are perceived differently. Often times without a personal experience people move through life in bliss, blind to discrimination. This study focuses on language students in the U.S. interacting with international peers in Japan and Uzbekistan through virtual exchanges (VE) discussing gender discrimination and the gender pay gap.

Students in the Uzbek/U.S. VE completed a pre-survey and post-survey in Google forms and participated in an online discussion in Canvas, where the data was collected. Students in the Japanese/U.S. VE only completed the Google form pre-survey. The pre-survey asked questions about gender discrimination, and the post-survey asked the students about the course format and technology tools. Students in the Japanese/U.S. VE were scheduled to use Moodle discussions for three weeks. The Uzbek/U.S. VE piloted an 8-week exchange using Canvas and synchronous Zoom meetings that eliminated virtual walls between the countries.

During the 8-week Uzbek/U.S. virtual exchanges most of the students (25 out of 39) believed in a gender pay gap, and most (27 out of 39) believed in the glass ceiling. Before the exchange students expected more differences than similarities between their international peers. The Uzbek/US students completed a post-survey asking them if they wanted a new course dedicated to virtual exchanges. The consensus was that the students wanted a new course for virtual exchanges and that they would want it blended or online. This project created virtual educational bridges through Virtual Mobility (VM) as the Uzbek students received additional institutional credit for the interaction beyond their Uzbek course credit for connecting with their U.S. peers.

**Keywords:** Gender discrimination, virtual exchanges (VE), gender pay gap, glass ceiling, online intercultural exchange (OIE)

### **INTRODUCTION**

Digital technologies are changing language education; "...globalisation and technological revolutions such as the Internet and mobile communication are having effects on nations, workforces and educational systems<sup>1</sup> (Signorini et al., 2009)." By 2023 it is projected that: "...the highest growth rate (in global online education) will be in Asia at 17.3%, followed by Eastern Europe, Africa, and Latin America at 16.9%, 15.2%, and 14.6%, respectively<sup>2</sup> (Docebo, 2014, p. 8)." Virtual Mobility (VM) is a virtual replacement for physical exchanges of students where students receive a badge or credit for their work while Online Intercultural Exchange (OIE) are

where students in one country connect with students in another country through interactions and projects<sup>3</sup> (O’Dowd, 2013). Both OIE and VM can be for credit or non-credit. For these reasons, the OIE and VM could help support the growth by reducing costs of physical exchanges for students and allowing further growth in the online education market.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many names for virtual exchanges as these projects are often grass root efforts initially. According to Godwin-Jones<sup>4</sup> (2013), OIE offers potential in language learning and can increase cultural knowledge. Julie A. Belz loosely defines telecollaboration by defining the students and the process of what students do to involve the: “...use of Internet communication tools by internationally dispersed students of language in institutionalized settings to promote the development of (a) foreign language (FL) linguistic competence and (b) intercultural competence... (2003, p. 68)<sup>5</sup>”. Telecollaboration, as described by O’Dowd, involves class interactions and projects in one country connecting with a course in another country<sup>3</sup> (2013). Telecollaboration is not always included in the syllabus or integrated into the coursework. Global Network Learning Environments are telecollaboration efforts at the university level involving collaborative activities<sup>3</sup> (O’Dowd, 2013). Virtual exchange is a general umbrella term not limited to the university level, to collaborative activities, or facilitated dialogue.

OIE can be broken down into two forms: e-tandem, tandem learning, or teletandem and Blended Intercultural Exchanges O’Dowd<sup>6</sup> (2011). According to Godwin-Jones (2013), teletandem is most similar to in-person conversations, as it involves more synchronous interactions<sup>4</sup>. The Blended Intercultural Exchanges fall under virtual exchanges as described by O’Dowd<sup>6</sup> (2011) and these exchanges have three categories or stages: Information Exchanges Tasks, Comparison, and Analysis Tasks, and Collaborative Tasks. Many telecollaboration projects fall into the initial first two categories. Collaborative Tasks can benefit the local communities through service learning, experiential learning, global competence, and intercultural citizenship.

Language education has been one of the last fields to move into fully online courses. Higher education though has a much faster rate of change than language education alone as it must attract diverse student populations and isn’t restricted to in-person courses<sup>1</sup> (Signorini et al. 2009). VIEs are similar to telecollaboration and have made progress in VM. Robert

O'Dowd describes telecollaboration as:

"The application of online communication tools to bring together classes of language learners in geographically distant locations to develop their foreign language skills and intercultural competence through collaborative tasks and project work<sup>7</sup>." (O'Dowd, 2006).

Telecollaboration thus has paved the way for VM, beyond the language education field.

The virtual exchanges in this study focused on the similarities and differences surrounding the topic of gender discrimination and the gender pay gap. Although research suggests that improving gender parity could result in improved economies, the global gender pay gap remains at 32%<sup>8</sup>. As of 2017, all but 3 out of the top 10 countries have only 20% left of a gender pay gap<sup>5</sup>. The Nordic countries lead the world in reducing the gender pay gap with Western Europe having only a 25% gap slightly above Northern America (28%), similar to Eastern Europe and Central Asia (29%) and Latin America and the Caribbean (29.8%)<sup>8</sup>. East Asia (31.7%), the Pacific areas (32.4%), South Asia (34%), and the Middle East and North Africa (40%) trail behind<sup>8</sup>. In 2016 and 2017, the Netherlands and United Kingdom outperformed the U.S., Japan, and Turkey in Gender Equality according to the Global Index Ranking shown in the table below<sup>8</sup> (World Economic Forum, 2017).

Table 1 – Global Rankings, 2017<sup>8</sup> (World Economic Forum 2017, p. 10-11)

Country	Global Index Rank	Global Index Score
Iceland	1	0.878
Norway	2	0.830
Finland	3	0.823
Rwanda	4	0.822
Sweden	5	0.816
Nicaragua	6	0.814
Slovenia	7	0.805
Ireland	8	0.794
New Zealand	9	0.791
Philippines	10	0.790
France	11	0.778
Germany	12	0.778
Namibia	13	0.777
Denmark	14	0.776
United Kingdom	15	0.770
Canada	16	0.769
Bolivia	17	0.758
Bulgaria	18	0.756
South Africa	19	0.756

Latvia	20	0.756
Switzerland	21	0.755
Burundi	22	0.755
Barbados	23	0.750
Spain	24	0.746
Cuba	25	0.745
Belarus	26	0.744
Bahamas	27	0.743
Lithuania	28	0.742
Mozambique	29	0.741
Moldova	30	0.740
Belgium	31	0.739
Netherlands	32	0.737
Portugal	33	0.734
Argentina	34	0.732
Australia	35	0.731
Colombia	36	0.731
Estonia	37	0.731
Albania	38	0.728
Poland	39	0.728
Serbia	40	0.727
Costa Rica	41	0.727
Ecuador	42	0.724
Panama	43	0.722
Israel	44	0.721
Uganda	45	0.721
Botswana	46	0.720
Bangladesh	47	0.719
Peru	48	0.719
United States	49	0.718
Japan	114	0.657
Turkey	131	0.625

The project had an English focus due to one of the courses being in the U.S., but also because English has become a lingua franca in online open education. Firssova, Brouns, & Kalz present English as a lingua franca in academia and business<sup>9</sup> (2015). Additionally, most open online courses in Europe have content delivered in English. “According to data of the European MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) Monitor from September 2014, 346 from 770 open online courses (45%) in Europe are delivered in English<sup>9</sup>... (Firssova et al., 2015).”

### **PRELIMINARY VIE STUDIES**

The OIEs in this study are of grassroots origin and have been called Virtual Intercultural Exchanges (VIE) where a course in one country interacts via online discussions, course spaces, or social media with another course in another country for 3-8 weeks. Students typically need three weeks to interact to engage with their peers<sup>10</sup> (Wahls, Breirley, Méndez-Betancor, Matsunaga, Ariza Pinzón, Bocanegra, & Burns, 2017). Due to semester date differences, it is often challenging

to find more corresponding times beyond eight weeks. Goals of the VIEs are typically to gain intercultural competence through exploring cultures and languages. Part of the VIE is connecting at least two university courses informally for short virtual exchanges lead by the instructors. Content for the VIE is typically reading materials or videos that one of the courses require within their current course, and the international partnering course could benefit from. This has lead instructors in VIEs to begin to seek virtual pre-packaged content accessible to both courses with easy registration options.

Since 2010 there have been VIE pilot studies performed with central Mexico in language education. “Language and culture are closely linked. One implies the other, and separation of one from the other may not be as simple as Hofstede insinuates<sup>1</sup> (Signorini et al. 2009).” The first VIE piloted was in 2010 between three universities using Google Wave (a beta tool) for a 2-week online discussion. In that pilot, it was determined that students needed more time to warm up to one another. Google Wave was discontinued during the pilot, and the research moved to Edmodo. These pilots continued until 2015. In 2016 and 2017, IRB approved VIE studies were run between Mexico, Japan, Peru, and the U.S.

In the preliminary VIEs, the first-week students introduced themselves in their target language. Instructors provided an article or video each week and students discuss the materials in the online course. Interviews took place after the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of interaction. Students were given questions to ask during Skype interviews. Then students submitted a reflection paper about their experiences. The research since 2009 has focused on the similarities and differences that students perceive, which found that students perceive more similarities than differences.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This research was active research<sup>11</sup> (Koshy, 2010) of an Uzbek/U.S. VIE and a Japanese/U.S. VIE.

#### *Search Questions*

The following terms were used to guide the literature review search:

- Online Intercultural Exchange (OIE)
- Virtual Exchange

- Gender Pay Gap

### *Current Study*

Before the virtual exchanges, students were surveyed about gender discrimination issues in their home country and their peer's country. Two groups of students completed the pre-surveys: a Japanese course in the U.S. with an English course (Japan/US) in Japan and a Russian Business course in the U.S. with an English course in Uzbekistan (Uzbek/US). The Japan/US did not interact in a Virtual International Exchange (VIE) but did complete the pre-surveys.

Through the U.S./Uzbek VIE, students met peers abroad and had online discussions on various topics. Because of the sensitivity of gender topics, there was a delay of 2 weeks in the project when gender topics in the discussions were introduced to the students. The VIE was scheduled for three weeks in the Fall of 2017, but the VIE continued for an additional five weeks. Students from both countries talked about their experiences and knowledge of gender discrimination, the gender pay gap, and the glass ceiling in their country. The Uzbek/U.S. VIE lasted eight weeks in Canvas, WhatsApp, Coursera, and Zoom. Lessons for the virtual exchange were in a MOOC in Coursera, and the online discussions were in the Learning Management System (LMS) Canvas. Facilitated synchronous meetings through Zoom included gender topics.

### *The surveys*

Before the virtual exchanges, students were asked to identify their gender and complete a pre-survey with various questions regarding intercultural competency, similarities and differences, and gender discrimination. The survey asks them on a Likert scale about gender in the workplace and how they perceive their country to be different or similar to the other country. The students from Japan, the U.S., and Uzbekistan responded to the pre-surveys.

### *Significance*

This project collaborated with the World Languages University in Uzbekistan in the Fall of 2017. Another VIE was scheduled to take place between Japan and the U.S., but the students in the U.S. did not join due to time zone differences and administration. The Uzbekistan university gave its students additional credit for the VIE as a stand-alone course for eight weeks, separate from their

course that connected with the U.S. university, making it the first English VM course in Uzbekistan.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher had access to the data and documented all findings to address data *confirmability*<sup>12</sup> (Stringer, 2007). The viewpoints of the participants were considered equal creating a *diverse case analysis* as described by Stringer<sup>12</sup> (Stringer, 2007). The data consisted of:

- Pre and Post surveys in Google forms
- Online Discussions in Canvas
- Facilitated Zoom meetings

The data was collected from the surveys through Google forms. Notes were taken during the zoom meetings, and one of the meetings was recorded. The online discussions in Canvas were extracted and reviewed. The literature review findings from prior studies were reviewed to satisfy *triangulation* as described by Stringer<sup>12</sup> (Stringer, 2007). *Persistent observation* was used to analyze the findings not just from memory, but from the notes, and from the student work<sup>12</sup> (Stringer, 2007). This study looked at what is *transferable* to future studies<sup>12</sup> (Stringer, 2007).

### **Results**

There were 23 students at CU Boulder and nine students from Uzbekistan. Seven students from the Japan/U.S. VIE also completed the pre-surveys. Out of all of the students, 20 were females, 17 males, one transgender (on the U.S. side), and one didn't say (on the U.S. side). The Uzbek/U.S. VIE lasted eight weeks and consisted of online discussions, WhatsApp messaging, and Zoom meetings. The Zoom meetings piloted facilitated dialogues to provide a safe place for discussion.

On the [pre-survey](#), students were asked if they believe in a pay gap and 25 students said that they do, five did not, and nine were not sure. Before the virtual exchange, 27 out of 39 students believed in the glass ceiling, two did not, and 12 were not sure. The students were asked if they believe gender discrimination issues are exclusive to women. Six believed that they are exclusive to women, 14 believe that gender discrimination affects men, and 19 students were not sure. Additionally, students were asked if they expected differences in cultural competency. Twenty-three students expected differences, two did not expect

differences, and 14 were not sure. Students were asked if they expected to find similarities. Seventeen expected to find similarities between themselves and their peers, 0 did not expect similarities, and 22 were not sure.

### **PRE-SURVEY COMMENTS FROM THE VIE WITH JAPAN**

The pre-survey results for the VIE between Japan and the midwestern U.S. included the following comments about gender discrimination: “In theory, gender roles are expanding and breaking through traditional normals in my country more so than what my experiences in Japan led to me believe.” The assumptions so that there is belief that there is more equality in the U.S. than in Japan. “There is more conversation about gender differences in the US than in Japan. I think that there are differences between genders, but it's not all necessarily bad in Japan (women getting discounts for movies on certain days, etc.)” However, a student in the U.S. stated, “I perc(ei)ve gender to be much more important in Japan.”

### **PRE AND POST SURVEY COMMENTS FROM THE VIE WITH UZBEKISTAN**

The comments before the VIE with Uzbekistan reflected similar assumptions as those in Japan. It seems that students in all three countries assumed that gender equality is better in the other country. For example, a student in Uzbekistan stated: “I think women are probably treated inferior, but that's the same in the United States.” One student stated an opposite assumption: “I feel like gender differences are pretty similar throughout many countries (student in Uzbekistan).” Similarly, another student saw little differences: “I feel today there are not as many gender differences between countries, but I could be wrong.”

Other comments from the U.S. included: “Gender differences in other countries might be more significant than in the US. Women and men are very similar, if not equal in the US”, and “I'm assuming they're a lot different, I'm hoping there's not a significant gender gap, but I'd love to learn what it's like.” Comments from Uzbek students included “We are Muslims and have some rules and regulations in our lifestyle” and “I'm for the equal rights.”

One of the Uzbek students posted in the discussion that they “do not believe that women need different presentation skills in the workplace. If some workplace requires women to have any particular capabilities than men, it is unfair. In terms of business, both men and women should have the same level of skills. However, in some countries, a woman is still seen as only a secretary, not capable to do a serious job. This fallacy can prevent the

productivity of a company. So, it is important to perceive women as equal to men. Only this way company can create pleasant working environment and achieve success.”

A student in the U.S. posted in the discussion that: “Women should not need different presentation skills than men in the workplace, however that is not always the case. Many corporations and companies fixate their workforce around male dominance because female equality is a new and sort of up and coming movement. In the past, women were seen as housewives and nothing else. Times have changed and women are becoming just as common in the workplace as men. It isn't fair for women to need different skills because they are just as valuable to the workforce as men. Women provide new and different ideas that men sometimes lack. Asking women for more presentation skills has caused unnecessary turmoil within societies. I believe women should not need extra skills, but other people and corporations may not agree.”

Students in the U.S. expressed unfamiliarity with the country of Uzbekistan, such as this U.S. student: “I had no clue about where Uzbekistan was, or what it was like to live there. This fueled some curiosity to learn more about Uzbekistan, which I may have never happened without this course we took as a class”. Students were concerned about respecting one another “The virtual exchange with the class in Uzbekistan was my first experience interacting with a group of students in another country... my hope would be for the future of virtual exchanges like the one that our class participated in to find a way to talk about these touchy subjects in a respectful way for them (student in the U.S.)” A student in the U.S. assumed that Uzbeks would be more conservative. “I think ideas of gender roles may differ greatly; I expect Uzbek(i) culture to be more conservative.” Students learned culture from one another: “Overall, I really enjoyed talking with the Uzbekistan students and learning about their culture. I found it amazing how women are expected to get married so young! (student in the U.S.)”

A student noted that their perception changed, “My perception of myself and my culture has definitely changed throughout this experience. This international exchange was very eye-opening to me, interacting with another country that is less fortunate and doesn't have the resource that we do here in the United States was something very different and something we don't see every day (student in the U.S.)”. Students were excited to interact

with international peers and valued the VIE experience in the post-survey: "...this experience has softened my heart to yearn for those less fortunate than us. I would definitely recommend doing this experience again because it wasn't just an assignment, it was an interaction that allowed us to gain friends all the way in Uzbekistan (student in the U.S.)." Another student expressed value in the experience as well: "This was a great overall experience, and would love to keep doing this sort of thing with future classes. I hope this spreads to other departments on campus. This was a very enlightening experience for better understanding other cultures (student in the U.S.)"

Students felt that intercultural competence "...provides a means for gaining new perspectives on the world", that it is "...a very useful tool to get another perspective on the world", and students wondered if their "...understanding of intercultural competency is the same as there's." A comment from an Uzbek student included: "I feel like Americans as a whole aren't used to jumping between cultures." This is interesting as Americans are not always seen as bicultural.

VIE present technology challenges as this student reflects, but the experience is viewed as valuable: "It was a bit of a hassle to try to be able to get the chance to talk with the students from Uzbekistan but when we did it was worthwhile.... This enriched my academic experience because it opened my eyes to other students around the world and their experiences. It helps me not to take advantage of my education and for me to understand that it is so easy for me to learn any and everything (student in the U.S.)."

### **DISCUSSION**

This study found administrative challenges in registration and policy, and it noted that technological improvements of the course structure and format could provide parents, particularly women further opportunities. There are opportunities for future studies and could include the UNESCO framework to attain intercultural competency.

### **CHALLENGES**

The current challenges of virtual exchanges for faculty and administration heavily involve the initial stages of setting up virtual exchange and the integration of technology. "The challenge, of course, is for researchers and educators to look for ways of making the normalisation of online intercultural exchange a more seamless and fluid process <sup>6</sup> (O'Dowd, 2011.)"

Additionally, this study attempted to include a MOOC for the lesson delivery, but due to administration difficulties, the study was unable to provide interaction for students within the MOOC or retrieve data from the MOOC<sup>13</sup> (Wahls, Siergieczyk, & Ogay, 2017). Due to registration issues with the MOOC, students were forced into multiple platforms or spaces: MOOC, Canvas, and social media spaces, causing some students to likely drop in participation. The perceived complications were:

- Restricted access to data for course improvement and user analytics
- Registration of MOOC could have been included in local students of the MOOC but not included in tuition for foreign students
- Even when requested, the local students did not receive free registration to the MOOC

Instructors of MOOC decided not to allow the study participants into the MOOC

If access is established for all students, MOOCs provide a robust educational setting for virtual exchanges. This, however, may take time to set up for the courses that plan to use the MOOC as content for the virtual exchanges.

Technology difficulties will occur and can add to the experience of how cultures make agreements and interact. Schedules and time difference affect everyone. The VIE occurred during a daylight savings time shift, and students in Uzbekistan waited an hour to meet with students in the U.S. Similarly, students in the U.S. waited for students in Uzbekistan for a different meeting where the scheduling was not fully settled. In this way, both student bodies were interested in interacting with international peers and waited for peers.

### **DISCUSSION RELATED TO GENDER**

The 2017 report from the World Economic Forum showed the connection between the gender pay gap and the country's economic performance<sup>8</sup> (World Economic Forum 2017, p. 36). The conclusion of the report suggests that if a country wishes to remain competitive with other countries, then gender equality needs to become a central development goal for that country and in order to close the gender gap, "countries and public-private cooperation" is essential<sup>8</sup> (World Economic Forum 2017, p. 36).

### **NEXT STEPS**

Students were asked if they would like a new course format. Five said that they wanted a new course dedicated to VIEs in an online format with a 1-2 week study abroad in another country. Four preferred a blended online, and in person VIE course, similar to their experience, 2 wanted a VIE 100% online. The students were asked if they would like to take a course dedicated to a VIE. Nine said yes, two said maybe, and there were 0 that said no. A new course devoted to virtual exchanges may be a good fit for the Uzbekistan students, such as the Erasmus + virtual exchange MOOC.

Finding a partner and developing a long-term relationship is a critical component of VIE. “It is essential to find a partner with similar aims, able to adapt programs to different institutional expectations (amount of homework done by students for example), willing to adapt to technical disturbances (network disturbances, computer crashes), and to some extent lose or share control of class dynamics. The partners must build a program that satisfies needs, levels, and interests of both classes<sup>7</sup> (O’Dowd, 2013).” For this reason, the Uzbekistan group will continue to seek new partners and work with prior partners through Unicollaboration. This Fall 2018, a three week VIE will take place focused on intercultural learning for the American students and practicing English and intercultural learning for students in other countries. The study will include material from an open course as part of the lesson delivery. The VIE may include another university group, which would make the VIE a tri-university effort.

The facilitated synchronous meetings lead towards a further structured, facilitated dialogue virtual exchange utilizing Soliya software in either Erasmus + Virtual Exchange (EVE) based in Italy, EVOLVE based in Groningen, or SUNY COIL based in New York. Uzbekistan and other countries could benefit from exploring the structured, facilitated dialogue virtual exchange once the virtual exchange partner is established or once an institute joins one of the established programs connected to facilitated dialogue.

In 2018, Delft University of Technology (TU Delft) released Virtual Exchange Program (VEP) which holds potential for future courses for Uzbekistan and other countries. The Uzbek university has been encouraged to consider allowing students to take courses in the TU Delft VEP, particularly for the English educators. The students could benefit from a

VIE within an open course in the VEP to practice oral English with others.

### **FUTURE FRAMEWORK**

The framework includes concepts of attaining intercultural competency as described by [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization \(UNESCO\)](#). Deardorff (2011) finalized a list of requirements to reach intercultural competency: Respect (‘valuing of others’); Self-awareness/identity (‘understanding the lens through which we each view the world’); Seeing from other perspectives/worldviews (‘both how these perspectives are similar and different’); Listening (‘engaging in authentic intercultural dialogue’); Adaptation (‘being able to shift temporarily into another perspective’); Relationship building (forging lasting cross-cultural personal bonds); (and) Cultural humility (‘combines respect with self awareness’)<sup>14</sup>.”

Equal access to education is an important part of this project. Therefore, the framework for the future VIEs will look at human rights as defined by UNESCO as part of the essentials of intercultural competence and technologies involved in this project. The data collected will be evaluated to ensure equality for students, individual rights of self-development, availability, accessibility, adaptability, acceptability, quality, universality, interrelatedness, interdependence, and appropriateness for the education:

Intercultural competences complement human rights as a catalyst for promoting a culture of peaceful and harmonious coexistence. Human rights include: 1. Civil and political rights (life, security, integrity, fundamental freedoms, access to justice); 2. Economic, social and cultural rights (education, health, work, food, housing, participation in economic, social and cultural life); 3. Fundamental principles such as: universality and inalienability; indivisibility, interrelatedness and interdependence, equality and non-discrimination (women’s rights, rights of indigenous people, children’s rights, rights of persons with disabilities, rights of migrant workers), participation and inclusion, accountability and the rule of law; 4. Individual and collective rights (free determination, development, environment, rights belonging to such groups as indigenous peoples; freedom of religious expression); 5. Elements and dimensions such as: availability, accessibility, adaptability, acceptability, quality, and appropriateness<sup>15</sup> (UNESCO 2013, p. 8).

### **CONCLUSION**

The initial VIE in Uzbekistan brought Uzbekistan opportunities to further their English programs to include another VIE in the future. Instructors in the U.S. and Uzbekistan gained new perspectives on internationalization of education. Students in both countries gained interest in international perspectives. Students in both countries suggest that there is still work to be done in gender equality and that the topic can be addressed respectfully. By using pre-packaged content

such as from the MOOC, structure was added to the VIE and provided flexibility with assignments and improved discussions. Structure programs for virtual exchanges were released in 2018 that could help move grassroots efforts to become sustainable programs.

VIE interactions move student interactions into experiential learning. In fact, students reported that the VIE was a highlight for students in the courses. Women and frankly most parents need new course formats and new degree formats that enable them to interact with other peers while also supporting their family. A new online course format that includes podcasts with badges for completion or credit connected to their home university such as TU Delft's VEP offers a realistic educational solution.

All groups that participated in the pre-survey identified potential differences between men and women in their culture or their international peer's culture. For some women, religious beliefs or cultural customs prevent them from leaving their family duties and studying in traditional course formats to complete a degree by requiring them to stay home with the family or not study in public universities with men. Participants felt hopeful for equality. Women today may receive discriminatory comments or treatment from peers or even supervisors, but women can ignore the negativity and instead pursue their dreams and change the world, improving the environment for all.

## NOTES

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### **APPENDICES**

Appendix A - PreVIE survey for students

[Google form](#)

Appendix B- PostVIE survey for students

[Google form](#)