Investigating Individual Growth and Change as a Result of International Professional Learning in Pakistani Higher Education

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In the context of a rapidly changing world landscape, universities in the United States and abroad are internationalizing their curricula and engaging in faculty and student international exchanges. Because professors are the ones who are largely responsible for translating and implementing global perspectives to the local university, it is important to understand how those participating in international experiences might be influenced and come to transfer new knowledge post-project. Using a phenomenological approach to capture the voices of faculty, this study explored how three professors at a private university in Pakistan experienced internationalization during a three-year funded project. Richly nuanced data share professors’ responses upon return to Pakistan, presenting a window into individual experiences and their “transadaption” of global thinking to the local.

**Keywords:** faculty professional development, internationalization in higher education, Muslim education, Pakistan

**INTRODUCTION**

The current world job market is far different from that of just a few short decades ago, now calling for citizens who have greater global competence and the ability to navigate and work interculturally (Monash University, 2018; Nelson et al., 2019; Perales Franco & McCowan, 2021). In response, there is an increasing trend in universities in the U.S. and abroad calling for the internationalization of curricula and engagement in international faculty and student exchanges (Perales Franco & McCowan, 2021). The quest for greater international mindedness, research of consequence that transcends national borders for faculty seeking a place in international scholarly discourse, and coursework that calls students to think both globally and locally are all part of the dialogue.

To this end, a growing number of educational exchanges and internationalization projects receive funding yearly from Western organizations, foundations, and governmental or government-related agencies, and many of these are in Muslim countries. While the goal of such funded projects involves improvement of many kinds in the partnering locale, aid intended to update or reform education systems in several Muslim countries, such as K-12 schools in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan, may not have achieved intended positive results or show anticipated improvements (Colclough et
al., 2010; Nasser et al., 2019). Poor results of such projects may be attributed to multiple factors, including implementers who may not take into consideration local religious beliefs, cultural practices, or in the case of Pakistan, educational structures and local views, or the educational landscape as it exists in urban and rural areas of the country (Bilal, 2019).

There is a paucity of empirical research on the sustained results of externally funded educational reform initiatives, particularly those in Muslim contexts, and “the few existing studies do not provide an in-depth look at the local and global factors at play in reform” (Nasser et al., 2019, p. 5). While required program evaluations have been designed to meet contractual goals, these largely address gains from implementation, outcomes, and impact results. Capturing these results is important, certainly, but there is little room within program evaluations to drill down and consider more nuanced results, such as those involving the challenges faced or project sustainability involved in the application of new practices in personal, school, and community contexts (Durlak et al., 2011), or individual and sociocultural responses (Nasser et al., 2019). Furthermore, the importance of understanding the implementation and results of internationalization efforts has heightened given the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, making visible to the world long existing, yet unsolved, societal inequities, racial and ethnic injustice, and educational disparities.

It is timely that internationalization programs in higher education engage in an in-depth, critical examination of the processes and results of internationalization efforts. This will enable programs, funders, and partnering institutions to better understand the sustaining results and challenges that extend beyond program evaluation to ensure that the impact of international programs not be merely assumed or raised as representing “the epitome of justice and equity,” but representative of the actuality of the experiences themselves (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011, p. 16). Researchers must look beyond program results, positive though they may be, to consider local traditions and beliefs and not merely promote ideas or changes from the West that may not be viable in that context (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002). Ongoing critique of global initiatives in education warns against presenting an idealized reform package of outcomes imported from a funding body (Adamson et al., 2016). To provide an authentic voice to the results of this and other projects and tell the story about the varied educational responses, rich, nuanced research should surface realities and actualities, allowing stakeholders to consider the influences and results through multiple lenses. This will also push forward much-needed contextual research.
The purpose of this study was to explore the ways that three professors from a university in Pakistan experienced and responded to a three-year internationalization project that included professional experiences in the United States and applied their new understandings upon their return home. The overall project involved a total of 40 Pakistani faculty from a single university and focused on developing and expanding educational practice while also building research capacity through professional partnerships and collaboration with faculty at a large university in the eastern United States. Understanding how professors experience internationalization, as well as how changing experiences are navigated between the global and the local in the rapidly changing environment that is Pakistan today, is important for understanding the effects that such collaborations might have on the professors. One purpose of grants and projects of this nature is to build intercultural relationships and to create opportunities for the meaningful application of new knowledge. It is essential that we also develop ways to deeply understand experiences and not merely push a Western status quo into any internationalization endeavor.

Using a phenomenological approach to allow the authentic voices of the participants to emerge, the following research questions led the investigation:

- How do three Pakistani faculty members portray their learning and experiences, and what aspects of the internationalization project do they consider as being the most influential on them, individually and institutionally?
- What are the overarching themes that emerged from interview data collected during the program, and one year post-program, that capture their lived experiences and the influences of this internationalization project?

Pakistani University Context

The context of the study is provided by a two-year university partnership program, with an added no-cost extension (NCE) the third year. The Collaboration for Faculty Excellence in Teaching and Research (CFETR) was funded by the U.S.-Pakistan University Partnerships Program of the U.S.-Pakistan Academic Linkages Program, U.S. Department of State Public Affairs Section, U.S. Embassy, Islamabad. The overarching goal of the CFETR was to foster collaboration and strengthen person-to-person ties between U.S. and Pakistani higher education faculty to further our collective understandings of effective pedagogical practices and expand the research competencies of our university faculties. The project was actualized through experiences within the educational communities of
both institutions aiming to strengthen peaceful relationships and increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and Pakistan. The project sought to empower university faculty to enhance their current educational pedagogy and practices and expand their research capacity. Collaborative research opportunities that are bidirectional in scope have the potential to positively impact both universities’ communities with deeper global understanding.

Pakistan is a Muslim-majority country with dual national languages, English and Urdu, and yet students may speak or have been schooled in any one of 74 regional languages and dialects before beginning their university coursework (Rafi & Fox, 2020). As part of the higher education context in Pakistan, students acquire their first language, or mother tongue, as members of a cultural group with expanded language instruction only sparsely available in some regions. Although Pakistan is a language-rich nation, English plays an exceedingly important role (Bilal, 2019), first established during the period of colonial influence, and now remaining a language of power influenced by its place of heritage and its promise of economic and symbolic capital for Pakistan’s voice in a global space. Thus, increasing demands are being placed on university students to be able to communicate and conduct business effectively in English (Rafi & Fox, 2021).

RELATED LITERATURE

Within the setting presented above, two principal areas of research have informed the current study, as well as the overall project. First, internationalization as situated in higher education addresses the importance of having a deep understanding of context and institutional goal setting. Second, faculty agency presents research supporting the need to look carefully and critically at the agentive role that individual faculty play in the outcomes and application of project content in their contexts.

Internationalization in Higher Education

Defining internationalization calls for broad understanding. Recent literature addresses many varying perspectives surrounding what internationalization means and how it is applied within the higher education sector. Knight (2006) has defined it as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of post-secondary education” (p. 214). This provides a broad and
general definition that attempts to capture a wide range of experiences and coursework for universities and their students (Knight, 2006). Cushner (2015) defines “inter-national” as being between nations, thus recognizing the importance of nation-states while emphasizing the interconnectedness of the world. The concept of international can also include global competence and international mindedness, which means being knowledgeable, as well as being open, able, and willing to engage with the broader world (Cushner, 2015; Hill, 2015).

Building upon the views above, Tate (2012) characterizes the opening years of the 21st century as being “post-international.” But what exactly does this mean for schools and institutions of higher education? What does this mean for Muslim countries? According to Ferguson and Mansbach (2007), the post-international world reflects a reality where there are many actors with power that would have at one time been the sole purview of the nation-state, which is still a powerful entity, but its situation remains unique in countries around the world; furthermore, power can take on multiple forms. Universities’ missions have also changed with the transition to the post-international world scene. Universities want their faculty to have an increasingly global outlook as they are now called to compete globally and prepare their students to be world players (Zhao, 2010). Universities are also encouraged to support their nations by developing human capital, often turning tertiary education into a technical model to support economic development (Loomis et al., 2008; Naidoo, 2010; Zhao, 2010). For many, there is an additional quest to make a more visible name for their institutions and their faculty’s work, to hold a spot among the international rankings of universities, ultimately for recognition, and even to support further research funding. The race for an expanded reputation and status continues to impact the higher education landscape globally and nationally, where ranking can also drive policy choices and institutional decisions (Hazelkorn, 2014). Additionally, universities are also inspired by philosophical reasons, endeavoring to develop the intercultural competence of their stakeholders (Cushner, 2015; Lumby & Foskett, 2016). Consequently, universities frequently engage in various pathways toward greater internationalization as they strive to actualize this mission (Knight, 2006). What role does this backdrop play for Muslim-majority countries, such as Pakistan?

In addition, it is important to account for institutional perspectives that involve differing positions of economic and political power. We must also acknowledge the full context of a region and consider the reality that
the global playing field where we are working is actually inherently uneven (Altbach et al., 2009). This is particularly relevant where a “convenient connection” occurs within a global higher education project, such as the one in this study. “At a minimum, ethical internationalization requires a commitment to such fundamental values as transparency, quality in academic programming, academic freedom, fair treatment of partners and stakeholders, respect for local cultures, and thoughtful allocation of resources” (Rumbley et al., 2012, p. 6).

For example, for project implementers of a higher education university partnership such as this one, it is essential to understand the role that education and culture play in Pakistan and the influence of the Muslim faith on the daily lives of its citizens and education. It is also important to understand the complexities in the educational system itself so that we understand the backgrounds of both the faculty and the student body of this university. “Opinion regarding the nature of education and its place in Islamic religious traditions has customarily been divided between two conflicting discourses” (Bilal, 2019, p. 1525). On the one hand, many families feel strongly that education must maintain fidelity to their traditional religious beliefs, and schooling as a priority usually occurs in the madrasah, where strong value-oriented education focuses on morals and strong faith. On the other hand, many Pakistanis also believe that an expanded world-oriented education will provide the foundation for a competitive future (Bilal, 2019). These influences play a role in the type of education that university students have received before entry into tertiary contexts; they also have a role in a faculty’s outlook on their teaching practice and research. Taking into consideration and respecting the tenets of the Muslim faith and acknowledgment of the diversity in the faith-based lives of Pakistanis have been at the core of the project leaders involved in the current study. We believe that genuine regard and respect for others must be the approach for all aspects of any international project, from inception through implementation.

Internationalization also involves the exchange of ideas and culture, it can take the form of policy and practice borrowing, or it can be adopting a hybrid culture of globalization. In the context of this project, one goal was to ensure existing cultural identity while expanding thinking and action to incorporate expanded practices with the voices and successes of the existing ones (Pearce, 2015). If the global subsumes the local, the full context is lost. When the local social/cultural lens is maintained and respected, the global can be viewed from a humanist perspective where universalizing
involves global citizenship and international mindedness, a concern for social justice, and a call to global civic responsibility (Cushner, 2015; Luke, 2010; Stromquist & Monkman, 2014). Internationalization should purposefully comprise the global and the local in bidirectional dialogue; however, within any higher education institution, no matter its location, it is the professor who plays a crucial and direct role in the intellectual growth of its members and the transmission of knowledge to students.

**Faculty Agency**

Faculty agency plays an essential role in this project in that it provides a lens through which we might understand the ways in which faculty responded to and came to implement new understandings and expanded educational practices in their Pakistani university. In the case of the current research on how Pakistani faculty responded to an international program, faculty agency provides insight into the project impact. We align with the definition of faculty agency as taking intentional actions or perspectives toward goals that matter to oneself (Campbell & O’Meara, 2014; O’Meara & Campbell, 2011; O’Meara et al., 2008). This definition is further informed by Marshall’s (2005) review of the agency literature from multiple disciplines. It offers four distinguishing characteristics to define agency: “(1) the human capacity to make a choice, that is, to be intentional; (2) the resources within the individual or at the command of the individual that can be brought to bear in intentional or agentic behavior; (3) individuals’ behavior that reflects intention; and (4) the social and physical structuring of choices” (p. 67). These characteristics provide a broad range of influences that might be revealed by participants, from power structures that exist within a culture, an institution, or a nation (including expectations explicitly articulated for internationalization or implicitly regarding gender roles), to even the role that engaging in critical reflection might play as a link to actions. While institutional and societal expectations, as well as power balances, are intertwined with the individuals engaged in any change process, Marshall’s (2005) framework focuses particularly on individuals and their actions. In order to better address challenges and experience personal change, Neumann et al. (2006) assert that agency also involves perspectives, where individuals are called to change themselves, rather than feeling as if they must change their environments first.

Faculty agency can be informed by individual factors, organizational contexts, or institutions (Campbell & O’Meara, 2014; Cerecer et al., 2011; Gonzales, 2014). Similarly, individuals use agency based on their social
and political capital in a given setting (Terosky et al., 2014). That is, while faculty may have multiple personal attributes and experiences that inform their agency, other factors are also at play, including contextual external factors. Faculty agency in higher education “is entwined with social structure, as acting freely takes place in structures that present various opportunities and constraints” (O’Meara et al., 2008, p. 29). This study uses the agency framework to better understand the ways in which faculty have responded to and acted upon their agency to shape new approaches in their classrooms (O’Meara et al., 2008).

This study also purposefully supported faculty in the development of critical reflective practice (Brookfield, 2010) to provide an additional lens through which the faculty participants might consider their learning, develop deep cultural insights, and engage in new pedagogical approaches and research experienced during this program. This project aimed to support the development of purposeful faculty reflection leading to engagement.

METHODOLOGY

A phenomenological approach was used to explore the human experiences of participants because “it is particularly well suited for exploring human experiences and the meanings human beings attribute to those experiences” (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012, p. 255). To see the effects of a phenomenon on organizations, it is essential to consider how it was experienced by individuals within those systems or organizations (Gibbs, 2010). Therefore, this approach was selected to understand the influences of internationalization efforts through the lived experiences of the participants in the international program.

Researcher positionality is critical in qualitative studies because the researchers are the instruments that engage in and interpret the collected data (Hammersely & Atkinson, 1995). A researcher’s position can significantly contribute to the data analysis interpretation process to reach depth in understanding and enrich the findings (Maxwell, 2013). The three researchers for this study are university educators who are involved in international research. Two are female and one male. One is a university professor and two are doctoral candidates. The professor is native to the United States but has extensive international experience; one doctoral candidate is an immigrant to the United States and the other is an international student. They hold different religious faiths and have immersive experiences in multiple cultures. Each represents diversity, with multicultural heritage,
linguistic backgrounds, and upbringing. They brought in their unique and shared knowledge, experience, and perspectives that contributed to the understanding and insights into this study, and all hold a critical perspective toward educational equity and access.

Context and Participants

This study occurred during a three-year grant-funded project between a large public university in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States and an independent private university in Lahore, Pakistan. The university’s student body comes principally from Punjab but also draws from 100 districts across Pakistan and 18 countries around the globe.

Through thoughtful and purposeful sampling (Patton, 2015), three from among 40 Pakistani faculty fellows participating in the project were selected because of their interest in all aspects of the project and their own learning, as well as several individual qualities that emerged during the program. The three stood out from the group as being highly interested in all aspects of the project, as individuals who were simultaneously unique in their situations and highly representative of the collective experiences; they were each actively reflective and sought out opportunities to discuss and make connections between what they were learning and their plans for what they would like to accomplish upon return to Pakistan. All regulations of the university’s Human Subjects Review Board were followed, and pseudonyms are used throughout to maintain participant anonymity.

Data Collection and Analysis

The primary data sources are focus group discussions and extended individual interviews. The focus group discussions occurred at the beginning of a two-week on-site seminar at the U.S. institution, in order to gain a general sense of the individual’s professional expectations and goals through the program. Interviews were conducted at specified points during the project: (1) at the end of the on-site U.S. seminars, and (2) in a post-program, in-depth semi-structured interview lasting at least 60 minutes. For example, questions probe the interviewees about pivotal experiences and changes as a result of program participation (see Appendix A). English was used to conduct the interviews, which were audio recorded and then transcribed.

Individual and group discussions were intentional in the data analysis process in order to uphold the findings’ inter-rater reliability and quality. Open and axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) was employed to review
and analyze the data. Working separately, each of the three researchers first coded for emergent themes in a single participant’s interview data, seeking emerging themes that could provide a deeper understanding of each participant’s responses to program experiences and their own learning. Emic codes emerged from the participants’ own words depicting their experiences and any concepts gleaned; the codes were also based on the three researchers’ understanding and interpretation of what appeared to be happening in the interview data (Maxwell, 2013). Over several sessions involving multiple discussions to seek understanding of the individual participants, we collectively analyzed the data to determine and categorize crossover themes. This constant comparative approach (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) continued until the research team agreed on the emergent themes across data sources.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The findings and results presented in this section are reported by research question. Specifically, in response to Research Question One, which asked how the three faculty participants portrayed their own learning and experiences during the program, results are presented through mini portraits so that the three faculty’s unique experiences could “come alive” for the reader. Following the individual portraits, we address Research Question Two through two clusters of themes. The first theme cluster, *lived project experiences*, has six sub-themes: *collaboration, learner-centeredness, engagement, culture, critical reflection*, and *empowerment*. The second theme cluster addresses a five-phase *process* that the participants experienced across the program: *awareness, new experiences (input), internalization (heightened through critical reflection), transadaptation (of new thinking adapted to their Pakistani context)*, and *application/activation/implementation (both personally and professionally)*.

Participant Portraits

Three portraits capture the uniquely personal ways in which each participant came to embrace new knowledge, personal change, and implement new thinking in their Pakistani context as a result of their participation in the project. While both personal and professional *change* is a broad theme that emerged across the three participants, these three portraits present the three participants’ personal response to and activation of the new knowledge they gained as they lived their new experiences and saw them come
to life upon their return to Pakistan. As a result of their experiences in the program the three are presented, as follows: Professor Sanzida, “Change Is First Within You and Then the Possibilities Come”; Professor Ayesha, “Vision for Collaboration Affects Change”; and Professor Amir, “Action and Enactment of Change.”

Professor Sanzida: Change Is First Within You and Then the Possibilities Come

Prior to the project, Professor Sanzida, associate professor and department leader, had never traveled outside Pakistan. While she was confident and deeply knowledgeable in her scholarship and teaching, she wondered how she was “going to manage all this, how I am going to survive two weeks with these strangers whom I don’t know actually.” As an unmarried Pakistani woman, she lived with her family and pursued her academic career. She spoke of herself as feeling very anxious when she was nominated by her director to participate in this grant because “being a female you have less opportunity” and was surprised to have been selected.

Change was a theme that appeared across all her interview data and remained salient upon her return to Pakistan. She specifically talked about change needing to be first within herself and projected possibilities for many changes in teaching practice and research, with students and colleagues, and in her program’s outreach. She shared the following about change in her teaching practice:

When I came back as a teacher . . . I thought that if anything is going to change, that is going to be me first. . . . My students are going to evaluate a change in me if they are going to see. . . . It improved my teaching. I think it improved my relationship with my students.

Change also manifested itself in her research approaches. As a psychologist, she mentioned, “I am a quantitative person, and I like to play with numbers. But when I was here, I was introduced to action research.” She came out of her comfort zone, changed her perceptions about “[qualitative] is this and quantitative is this. I’ve seen this debate; qualitative people will always criticize quantitative and quantitative people will always criticize.” However, she found that there were new dimensions available to her through qualitative approaches. Her experiences came to exemplify the realization that the change has to be within you:

I think a new [Sanzida] won. An independent [Sanzida] with confidence, who acknowledges her abilities, who acknowledges being autonomous, who knows how to handle money, who knows how to . . . account each and every thing. . . . So we always have this two-way process of learning how to do things and how not to do things makes us who we are.
And in her opinion, change is both personal and extended to a broader population because “being a Pakistani, we have a different concept of America and America has a different concept [of us], and this is because of our media,” but “Pakistan is ready for change,” and she believes that it may need to come from personal spaces first.

**Professor Ayesha: Vision for Collaboration Affects Change**

Professor Ayesha serves as Director of the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) and is also a teaching and research faculty; she spoke at length during all three interviews about how change might come about through her vision for collaboration. Despite having previously traveled outside Pakistan, she saw herself in a traditional female space in her society yet was open to new experiences. From the initial focus group interviews, she voiced ideas of “cultivating a culture of collaboration.” During the on-site program, she shared that she saw collaboration in action by the project faculty where “all the faculty are actually collaborating. Different schools, different colleges” across the university are “collaborating to deliver these different seminars.” While in the United States, she said she explicitly sought opportunities to collaborate, learn, and expand the center’s capacities and realized that its professional offerings aimed at changes in teaching and research practice could be better achieved in collaboration, rather than doing everything herself.

After returning to Pakistan, Professor Ayesha moved her vision into reality by collaborating with colleagues to create and facilitate 124 hours of professional workshops for all 250 faculty that year, meeting for her university a newly adopted standard by the Pakistan Higher Education Commission’s mandate. She attributed adapting content and pulling through this challenge as a result of her before-and-after experience from the program. Before, she said that she would have attempted to do these workshops herself but wouldn’t have been able to handle five straight days of workshops alone. However, through collaboration among all the faculty, change happened, and the project faculty fellows were very happy because “they were doing their own part . . . and they all knew we were enacting what we observed and learned from the U.S. program experience.”

Furthermore, Professor Ayesha also found opportunities to collaborate in her teaching and research. For example, one of her Pakistani Special Education faculty participating in the U.S.-based program invited her to collaborate on the topic of language learning. They considered together how to collaborate across departments to “help [the students] and see what the stages are they actually go through, and what are the things they will be
learning first, and . . . know that there is somebody who can actually rescue us whenever we are stuck somewhere.” This change in practice by reaching out across programs to collaborate was a new mindset for Professor Ayesha.

Based on Professor Ayesha’s interviews, she actualized her goal of collaboration when she applied her professional development experience from abroad to her local context. She made significant changes in her approach as center director. She also pushed herself to think differently, to expand her previous beliefs of what she thought her role should be as a Pakistani woman, and as a woman faculty member, to be someone who was a colleague who used her voice and exercised her ideas. She could also model collaboration in order to spearhead work across departments with both her male and female colleagues.

Professor Amir: Action and Enactment for Change

Professor Amir had previously spent time during university and graduate school in the United States and presented himself as a doer. All three interviews included robust evidence of the ways his vision for change through action and enactment came alive upon his return to Pakistan in his classes, his program, at the university. Although Professor Amir had spent time in the United States, he reported that he experienced this program through new lenses as a faculty member. Seminars and active discussions advanced his thinking on local and international dynamics; he reflected on many cultural challenges and triumphs, as well as the institutional and social mindset present in his local context.

He reported that he was constantly thinking and reflecting and believed that the exchange experience helped him translate his vision into reality while working more closely with his colleagues: “When we went back to Pakistan, it was more like we became a community.” When he saw how professors in international settings worked together during the U.S.-based program, this encouraged him to collaborate with his own Pakistani colleagues. After the exchange, he published two research papers and was working on two more at the time of the final interview. He approached a senior faculty fellow to conduct research together; they not only completed their study but also presented at an international conference. He shared newfound confidence and reported that he was also moving ahead toward completion of his Ph.D.

Professor Amir’s vision called him to action by integrating the international and the local with his students and his fellow faculty. He expressed his intention to find international and local research partners, as well as
program partnerships with international institutions, in order to provide students with the opportunity to experience a global MBA program where they (students) would spend one semester at collaborating universities.

He saw higher education through different lenses than those he had possessed as a student, and his interviews contained much self-reflection on his own culture, sharing his belief in the importance of cross-cultural collaboration and faculty engagement in research, which led him to focus his activation for change on student engagement and through enacting new teaching practices. He asked regularly for student feedback to get them engaged: “Got to take it to the next level where the students are involved. . . . They need to see if this is the university of the world then let the world come in.”

Lived Project Experiences

Six themes emerged across the data to provide deeper understandings of the participants’ lived project experiences: collaboration, learner-centeredness, engagement, culture, critical reflection, and empowerment. Participants expressed collaboration in multiple ways: faculty-to-faculty, faculty-student, student-student, and international faculty-local faculty. As seen in their portraits, Professors Sanzida, Ayesha, and Amir acknowledged that this international experience forged the development of a mindset toward collaboration through teamwork, not previously a natural part of the culture at their university. These collaborations were with program colleagues, faculty at the U.S. host university, and students upon their return to Pakistan. As shared through their portraits, the faculty experienced and activated collaboration as a prevailing aspect of their overall learning.

Learner-centeredness emerged as a newly discovered focus for the faculty, who talked extensively about how they can achieve learner-centered approaches to teaching and learning in their classes. They discussed new approaches and ways of creating interactive learning environments. In particular, Professor Sanzida talked at length about how it wasn’t enough to merely “try out” these new practices and declared that her Pakistani students needed to understand what she was doing so they could give her feedback. Drawing students into the teaching and learning process proved to be a powerful focus of many conversations among participants during the program. These conversations appeared pivotal in supporting the development of insights into how they would activate these new practices successfully upon return to Pakistan. Participants also saw themselves as part of a learner-centered environment as faculty in the program, engaging
deeply in their learning. This was a spark that they wished to transfer to their own classrooms and students back home.

*Engagement* stood out as a distinct theme indicating how the faculty came to interact with a new input of all kinds, from seminar content to cultural experiences. All three faculty viewed themselves as being *engaged* in the program in multiple ways, such as faculty-as-learners and genuine “questioners” as they turned over ideas in their heads trying to imagine, for example, how a new teaching approach might work in their classroom. They were engaged as researchers with their U.S. faculty partners. Upon return home, all three talked about how different their engagement with their students was becoming.

*Culture* was a prevalent theme that emerged in the data from across all their experiences. All three faculty reflected that the international experience enabled them to now “see” more clearly complex cultural aspects about the United States, its people, and a higher education institution; they also spoke about understanding aspects of their own culture that they had not realized previously. They saw elements of shared culture across U.S. and Pakistani higher education contexts and their research; they also came to see the unique features inherent in the two cultures and articulated that reflection helped them to view these as being “unique” rather than hard lines of difference. They came to understand that some of their earlier thoughts about culture in the United States had been based on stereotypes and media representations. We would like to add that the U.S. faculty also had many of the same “aha” moments.

*Critical reflection* was a completely new concept for the Pakistani faculty. Its purposeful incorporation in their work, teaching, and research became part of their daily discussions and debriefings, as well as their future action planning. Because it was new as part of program input, they did not mention reflection during focus groups, but it appeared robustly in the data emerging in post-seminar and final interviews. Participants’ reflections led to conversations about the global-to-local and the local-to-global, surfacing new perspectives about the possibilities within their own environment. They also reported introducing critical reflection to their colleagues and students upon return to Pakistan.

The sixth theme, *empowerment*, also appeared abundantly throughout the data. Empowerment to act with and on their new learning was linked to the activation of new knowledge. The faculty reported that they “felt empowered” to reach out to colleagues, something they had not done previously. Just as faculty research-partner relationships were forged
between the host university and the Pakistani faculty, returning home the participants reported that they now felt empowered to acknowledge their commitment to new beliefs about the possibilities of collaboration, reaching out to share with colleagues within and across departments. The faculty realized their readiness to be doers who were empowered to “wake up” and create the changes they wanted to see. Professor Sanzida believed it started within her, while Professor Amir saw this empowerment as action, and Professor Ayesha activated collaboration to achieve some long sought-after goals for the CTL.

Process Themes

In addition to the themes that captured participants’ lived experiences, a process also emerged from the data that revealed the ways in which the participants experienced and were changed through the project. This process began with awareness and proceeded to new knowledge/experiences (input), then to internalization (heightened through critical reflection), to transadaptation (of their new thinking from the United States to their Pakistani context), and finally to application and activation/implementation of new knowledge to their Pakistani context, in both personal and professional ways.

First, awareness surfaced in the focus interviews, when participants articulated ideas about what they wanted to accomplish. They had thoughts about what they might like to change and were aware of differences that existed between the two countries, including religion, government, teaching practices, and roles. Their awareness also included notions of similarities, particularly as we were all university faculty, but at the outset of the project, they couldn’t quite articulate what those might be.

Second, new knowledge/experiences (input), educational approaches, and added pedagogical knowledge appeared in the content seminars addressing new teaching approaches such as learner-centered instruction, diversity, student engagement, formative and summative assessment practices, and action research; experiences outside the university provided additional cultural insights, and the regularly scheduled university courses they selected in their disciplines and attended as guests. Participants actively discussed the content and remarked on what this might mean for them upon return to Pakistan. Discussing seminar content and new knowledge was rather new to them because they reported the normal approach to knowledge transfer in Pakistani classrooms was for the professor to tell about or present a new topic and students memorized the facts. When the participants observed
teaching practices in our classes and experienced what we called “engaged teaching and learning approaches” as part of learner-centered instruction, this was new to them. The dialogic approach modeled during the seminars called for them to not only take in the new content knowledge as “engaged learners,” but also led them to reflect on it.

Third, internalization (heightened through critical reflection) was a phase in their experience of being exposed to new knowledge when they came to really understand a particular topic or approach. This step revealed itself as the participants talked through the ways that they came to understand and see new content knowledge being applied in their classrooms. Whether in a seminar on interactive learning strategies, curriculum development through backward design, or formative and summative assessment, the participants worked to understand the new concepts, then discussed them. During interviews, they talked about the importance of understanding first through reading and then by seeing a practice in action. They shared that they had to think critically about what this might mean for them, their classrooms and students, and finally their colleagues. They came to realize that they would need to “scaffold these new practices” for their students, not implement them solely in their Western form.

Fourth, “transadaptation” (Gambier, 2003) (of new thinking from the West to its new Pakistani setting) emerged as a very important part of this set of processes. The participants did not merely take in new knowledge for direct replication. As they internalized information and used critical reflection to question and consider application to their faculty lives back in Pakistan, they did so through their growing lenses of expanded understanding. They talked about using action research and inquiry to explore changes in the new pedagogical approaches so that they might be made visible to the students. When the Center for Teaching and Learning conducted its pedagogical workshops, faculty realized they needed to adapt the materials to meet their faculty colleagues in spaces where they could understand what was explained. When they tried out new approaches in their own classes, they realized that they and their students would both need to each adapt a little in order to meet halfway. For example, when Pakistani students were expecting a lecture format (“sage on the stage”), such as Dr. Sanzida shared or the faculty expected during the PD seminars run by Dr. Ayesha’s Center for Teaching Excellence, the attendees didn’t understand what was happening at first. They even pushed back in some cases until the new practices were explained and adapted. This realization that Western practice required transference and thoughtful adaptation
to its new setting was an essential aspect in arriving at a stage of viable application, the final step in this process, enabling the faculty to fulfill their ownership and experience the “change that was within.”

The fifth, or final phase of the process experienced by the participants led to their activation, application, and implementation of new practices and knowledge. This phase occurred for them both personally and professionally and was discussed multiple times by all three participants. Participants’ intentional thinking and awareness appeared to pave the way for activating their renewed personal and professional goals. Figure 1 represents the relationship between these two sets of themes and depicts how participants’ lived experiences and the process-related themes relate to the overarching program outcomes.

**DISCUSSION**

Findings emerging from this research speak to the importance of stepping back after a program’s completion to take an extended, critical approach to the implementation of international projects, such as
this one, and consider their impact on the individuals and institutions involved. As pointed out by Adamson et al. (2016), international partnership grants and other similar initiatives must create programs that call for genuine consideration of the culture, local traditions, and contexts of their partnering institutions. Results from this study provide insight into program experiences by three purposefully selected participants. Not only should projects take a justice-oriented approach in their design, content, and implementation, but critical reflection should be part of participants’ engagement where reflection aims toward answering contextual questions of consequence. Thus, it is essential that project organizers not merely promote Western ideologies that may not be viable (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002) or that do not respect and honor the strengths and cultural practices of the country; more importantly, the program lead needs to create ways to activate and build upon the partner institution’s core beliefs. By building new experiences on program participants’ existing schema and knowledge, possibilities are born.

In addition to the contexts of partnering institutions, individual faculty situations, characteristics, and roles must also be taken into consideration. Through this post-program qualitative investigation of three faculty participants, ideas surrounding collaboration, implementation of learner-centered instruction, culture, critical reflection, and empowerment all emerged to tell the story of how the faculty responded individually and collectively to the project content and experiences. The process arc that emerged for all three spoke to the way that faculty were able to move beyond awareness or being merely the receivers of new knowledge to spaces of internalization deepened through critical reflection, to transadaption when they moved their new thinking from a U.S.-based context to a newly carved home in a Pakistani context, and finally to personal and professional application and activation/implementation of adapted knowledge. The three participants also reveal characteristics of activating faculty agency, as reviewed by Marshall (2005). Professors Sanzida, Ayesha, and Amir all made intentional choices in the ways they wanted to try out and implement new pedagogical and collaborative practices with their colleagues and students. As voiced by Professor Sanzida in several places across her interviews, the power first had to be within her, and then change could happen. According to Marshall (2005) and as shared through the three portraits, resources within the individuals were brought to bear in intentional or agentic behavior that allowed them to adapt new practices in their Pakistani context.
Critical reflection emerged as being salient across the data and pivotal in the participants’ thinking as they brought together and translated program knowledge and experiences to new and “transadapted” application in Pakistan. Participant action plans accompanied not only by their own reflections but also by action research projects they conducted in their classes helped participants consider the results of their work and gauge next steps with their students and colleagues. Collegial conversations and dialogue initiated as part of embedded program reflections helped participants to activate new thinking. These experiences provided opportunities for others’ lenses to inform their own thinking while also helping participants engage in understanding the perspectives of others as part of the development of critical reflection (Brookfield, 2010).

As researchers, moving beyond program evaluation helped us also dig below the surface to understand our university partners more deeply. When we say partners, we do mean that in the sense of collegial partnership. Although our grant team served as implementers, those of us at the U.S. university believe we have been the greater recipients of new knowledge. As a result, we have embedded deeper understandings about international project implementation into our coursework, into new grant applications and project opportunities, as well as ongoing research. For example, discussions about international project implementation, power dynamics and cultural considerations, the importance of seeking to deeply understand the contexts of both sets of partners, scaffolding the application of new classroom approaches such as learner-centered instruction have all become part of our active work with international program planning. This expanded information serves to develop capacity among faculty, doctoral students, and the institution to inform future grant work that embraces the tenets of social justice and incorporates critical pedagogy.

Studying and considering both impact and sustainability of such projects, understanding the challenges and working to solve those challenges as partners, and understanding individual participant responses to program components help to inform differentiation for future partners and institutions. This type of research can enable international project implementers to study their results in ways that extend beyond required program evaluations and consider outcomes as they are viewed through the lenses of the participants and their institutions and programs. In this way, international programs in higher education can also engage in an in-depth examination that represents the actual, lived experiences themselves (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011) of both sets of partners. Ethnographic approaches to
research provided nuanced responses that have enabled us to study our implementation and consider the expanded realities of our work through multiple lenses.

All three professors experienced great change both professionally and personally after their international experience. The individual change was particularly prominent for the two female faculty fellows, but the change was also part of Professor Amir’s outcome. Their personal experiences reflect the process that emerged from the program, and expanded cultural insights rang true for all three. The need to understand how internationalization affects professors is an important aspect of conducting work in the international education sector, particularly in those universities outside the United States partnering with U.S. institutions to engage in initiatives whose desired “results” are guided by project objectives and goals. Because the professor is the individual who is largely responsible for the translation and implementation of global dimensions and expanded perspectives to students and the local university community, it is important to understand how those participating in such international experiences might be affected and potentially transformed. Understanding the ways that faculty respond to new experiences upon return to their home country becomes part of a project’s living legacy as institutions move forward. How experiences sustain meaning is part of an institution’s response to internationalization; if a project is meaningful, then sustainability propels forward in new and culturally responsive ways—in a new space where interactions between the global and the local occur in such a way that they intersect and propel stakeholders forward. In addition, research that shares insights into such projects can then also bring local responses and transadaptations (Gambier, 2003) to the global space for further study and deeper understanding.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Results drawn from the current study might fit the Head-Heart-Hand (“3Hs”) model, which suggests that transformation of ideas and practices must take the whole person into account and deserve further investigation (Nasser et al., 2019). For Muslim societies, and particularly in Pakistan where state and religion are strongly intertwined, Western project implementers and researchers must not only acknowledge but also come to understand and hold deep regard for the full context within which they are working (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011; Nasser et al., 2019). A final salient message emerging from this study that is worthy of further exploration is the role that
critical reflection played in the way in which participants came to apply their new thinking and knowledge to their Pakistani context. Did critical reflection serve to foster transadaptation, and if so, in what ways? The next steps might further investigate the intersection of these findings with other ongoing research and consider the notion of “transadaptation” to inform future projects and their implementation, capturing critical reflection in practice. As Dr. Sanzida said, “The change is first within you, and then the possibilities come.”

References


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APPENDIX A

Interview Guide: Final Interview One Year Post-Program

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me. I am interested in international experiences and their impact and effects on the participants. I am familiar with the grant in which you have been participating as a U.S. Department of State Fellow for the past two years. One of the grant’s goals has been to promote faculty development and expansion of research and teaching approaches. This is the third year in that grant, and I would be most grateful if you would share some of your thoughts and learning experiences with me as they have emerged over the past 2 ½ years. Here we go.

1. Would you please tell me about any of the ways that your participation in the grant may have changed you, both professionally and personally? Please comment on each of the following three areas:
   a. Teaching
   b. Research
   c. Place in the academic community

2. Please tell me about any specific experiences you’ve had during the grant that were pivotal or that you might view as transformational?

1. Do you believe you have experienced any changes or shifts in your identity as a result of your participation in the grant?
2. Have you had any changes in your research capacity or researcher identity?
3. What were your motivations for participating in the grant? Were they different from your University’s motivations to internationalize?
4. As a woman/man, do you feel that you have experienced internationalization and/or the grant differently than your male/female counterparts?
5. Have you experienced any friction or tension between the local context and the global expansion during the grant? In what ways have you addressed or dealt with it?
6. To the best of your knowledge, have others at XXX experienced any tensions during the grant period that have called on them to cope with frictions between the local and the global? How have they expressed this, and have they been resolved or not?
7. What do you see as your role with regard to internationalization as it applies to:
   a. your students?
   b. your coursework?
   c. The role of English? Global citizenship?
8. In what ways have you been able to take new knowledge and transfer new practices learned here to XXX upon return to Pakistan? In what ways are you approaching these changes, and how have you found the students in accepting these adjustments and changes?
   a. Have you been able to share new practices or insights with your colleagues? How are you and they/will you and they adjust things?
9. What are your future goals? How do they fit in with XXX, your country, the world?
10. Is there anything else you would like to add or share with me regarding the grant and its impact on you?