



Accreditation and assessment of learning in the UAE

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to focus on the successful efforts made at a university business school in the Gulf region to develop an assessment tool to evaluate the communication skills of undergraduate students as part of satisfying the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accreditation requirements. We do not consider the validity of establishing learning outcomes or meeting these according to AACSB criteria. Rather, we address ourselves solely to the design of a testing instrument that can measure the degree of student learning within the parameters of university-established learning outcomes.

Design/methodology/approach – The testing of communication skills, as opposed to language, is notoriously complex, and we describe our identification of constituent items that make up the corpus of knowledge that business students need to attain. We discuss our development of a testing instrument which reflects the learning process of knowledge, comprehension and application.

Findings – Our work acted as a valid indicator of the effectiveness of teaching and learning as well as a component of accreditation requirements.

Originality/value – The challenge to obtain accreditation, supported by appropriate assessment procedures, is now a high priority for more and more universities in emerging, as well as in developed, economies. For business schools, the accreditation provided by AACSB remains perhaps the most sought after global quality assurance program, and our work illustrates how the required plotting and assessment of learning objectives can be accomplished.

Keywords Middle East, Assessment, Accreditation, Communication, AACSB, Learning outcomes

Paper type Case study

AACSB accreditation and the assurance of learning

For business administration and management programs around the world, the accreditation provided by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (the AACSB) remains perhaps the most recognized global quality assurance program. Together with the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS), AACSB is the most sought after accreditation program across the globe. In the past decade, it has become increasingly important for institutions involved in management education to achieve and then maintain AACSB accreditation (Romero, 2008). This is reflected in the plethora of scholarly work that has investigated the impact of the accreditation process on various aspects of business and management education (Smith and Rubenson, 2005; Lee and Quddus, 2008; Heriot *et al.*, 2009; Smith *et al.*, 2009; Hedrick *et al.*, 2010; Kelley *et al.*, 2010) and well as in the number of recent studies that have looked specifically at assurance of learning and relevant methods of assessment (Marshall, 2007; Martell, 2007; Pringle and Michel, 2007; Callahan *et al.*, 2009; Farias *et al.*, 2010; Christensen *et al.*, 2011; Lawrence *et al.*, 2011; Pesta and Scherer, 2011). Moreover, as Hodgson and Clausen (2012) observe, the increasing prominence of AACSB accreditation has now begun to impact management education, most especially in areas of the world like North Africa



and the Middle East, and as a result, there is a pressing need for business schools in these regions to uphold international standards, while, at the same time, understanding and responding to their own markets (Hodgson and Clausen, 2012; Zammuto, 2008). This paper is an account of one such attempt to understand assurance of learning within the context of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) including the development of an appropriate instrument to assess the communication learning outcomes of Emirati business majors. It does not address the validity of the AACSB accreditation procedure which has been subject to criticism (Porter, 1992; Smith, 2007) or the impact of striving for and achieving AACSB accreditation which some scholars have illustrated (Morgan, 2011), nor do we consider the complex issue of learning outcomes first promulgated in the 1950s (Bloom, 1956) and which have met with much criticism (Paul, 1993). We undertook our task on the basis that, regardless of the validity of the accreditation criteria or of stipulating neatly crafted learning outcomes, it behooved us to meet the institutional imperative to gain accreditation, an understandable concern for a university in an emerging economy. Taking advantage of the broadness of the AACSB standards, we set out to examine the logistics of incorporating the learning outcomes established by the university and, within the context of improving communication knowledge and skills, and of seeking an effective and uniform means of gauging how each student has assimilated knowledge and is able to implement this knowledge in various business communication contexts. Naturally, the precise role our instrument played in securing accreditation cannot be known. However, it does present a usable means of plotting learning goals, designing appropriate teaching strategies and assessing the degree to which these have been achieved by undergraduates.

To secure and maintain AACSB accreditation, a business school must show that it has sustainable systems in place to ensure excellence in all areas of activity, including teaching, research and professional service. While the AACSB does not include communication as a “traditional learning discipline”, it does, however, identify the acquisition of communication abilities as essential for business students, recommending that business schools develop these abilities as a part of a battery of knowledge and skills areas which also include problem-solving abilities and ethical reasoning skills (AACSB, 2003, p. 62). Recent studies by Waldeck *et al.* (2012) and by Conrad and Newberry (2012) also underline the importance of both identifying the communication skills that will be of most relevance for business, as well as then developing appropriate methods of evaluating these. The testing instrument we describe in this paper is part of the efforts to secure AACSB accreditation within the College of Business at a high-profile federal university in the UAE which was achieved in May 2013. Our aim is to show how we developed this instrument to systematically assess and then re-assess our students’ knowledge of and skills in communication over an 18-month period.

We begin our discussion with an account of the assurance of learning process at a prominent Middle East University within the College of Business, with particular reference to the communication landscape within the UAE. We then go on to discuss the development of our testing instrument to account for three different levels of knowledge processing, together with our efforts to create a reliable method of assessment. We conclude with a brief discussion on what we have learned as a result of developing the test, and its assessment and how we expect this to impact our teaching in the future.

Learning outcomes at the university

Communication skills in business are seen as tremendously important in the Gulf region, most especially because of the multicultural multilingual composition of the societies located there that typically consist of both locals and expatriates. In the UAE, in particular, from primary school onward, much education is now geared toward producing bilingual Arabic–English speakers able to function across all social domains. In tertiary education, this is a major concern which impacts the understanding of what learning should encompass at undergraduate and graduate levels and what skills and knowledge the universities and colleges of higher education should prioritize within their programs. In addition, as Harb and El-Shaarawi (2007) have observed competence in speaking English is a major factor in how well students perform academically in tertiary education, further underlining the need for good-quality instruction focused on English communication skills (Harb and El-Shaarawi, 2007). The university, as a high-profile federal university with a strong presence in both of the major cities of Abu Dhabi and Dubai, is at the forefront of this process. Set up in 1998 to serve the needs of Emirati women at undergraduate level, the university is now a rapidly expanding institution within the UAE providing undergraduate and graduate education both to Emirati men and women, as well as to international students from across the Gulf region and beyond. The university achieved Middle States Commission on Higher Education accreditation in 2008, and its business school is currently in the final stage of application for AACSB accreditation.

Students at the university complete their undergraduate programs in one of five different colleges: Arts and Sciences, Business, Information Technology, Education or Communication and Media Sciences. In the past few years, the university has identified a set of six learning outcomes – the university learning outcomes, or ULOs – that the university deems necessary if its graduates are to successfully contribute to the country’s socioeconomic development. These ULOs cover the following subject areas: critical thinking and quantitative reasoning, global awareness, information technology, language, leadership and technological literacy. Each college maintains its own set of major learning objectives, or MALOs, which are directly related to the university-wide ULOs. The MALOs that we will be concerned with in this paper are those related to language and global awareness, as these are the learning outcomes most relevant for communication in the contemporary UAE workplace. The university defines these outcomes as:

- “graduates will be able to communicate effectively in English, using professional conventions appropriately” [language]; and
- “graduates will be able to understand and value their own and other cultures, perceiving and reacting to differences from an informed and socially responsible point of view” [global awareness].

As stated above, the difficulties of establishing and assessing the achievement of learning outcomes have been explored by education scholars, and in the context of business communication, this has been assessed from a variety of perspectives (Yu, 2010). However, plotting learning outcomes in this field is notoriously difficult given the large number of elements that come into play in any communication context. Apart from the easy to assess level of language accuracy, many other layers are involved in a communication act such as correctly gauging the relationship between the interactants,

predicting the impact of the message on the person as influenced by their cultural origins and harnessing an adequate knowledge of, and response to, the other person's wishes relating to the communication act to gain attention and persuade. In designing our assessment instrument, we accepted the learning outcomes related to business communication as stipulated by our university and attempt to identify the component knowledge of communication skills and pursue means to assess student's mastery of them.

Business college's learning outcomes

Of the university's five colleges, the program in business sciences provided by the College of Business is currently both the most popular program and the most difficult to enter in terms of GPA requirement on completion of the university-wide Colloquy (Foundation) Program. Graduates in business sciences have typically entered public service in governmental or semi-governmental organizations across a wide variety of sectors including finance, the oil and gas industry, the construction industry and the civil service. However, as a result of a positive discrimination process known as Emiratisation (Toledo, 2006), designed to encourage more Emiratis into the workforce, business graduates are now increasingly likely to opt for managerial roles in the private sector. Finally, the workforce that our graduates will join on completing their studies is perhaps one of the most multicultural in the world, currently consisting of around 220 different national cultures. The multicultural nature of UAE society is reflected in the College of Business learning outcomes because the College aims to produce graduates who are equipped to take up managerial and leadership roles contributing both to the knowledge economy in the UAE as well as to the sustainable representation of the Emirati community within the workforce (Waddock, 2007).

The two MALOs in the College of Business that relate to the three communication courses we offer are:

- (1) "Communicating effectively in the business environment", that is, students will be required to demonstrate competence in professional communications, both written and oral; and
- (2) "Competing successfully in a global business environment", that is, students will gain an understanding of culturally determined differences in communication and learn how to operate within multicultural work settings to ensure harmonious and efficient communication among different cultural groups.

In the next section, we describe how we translated these learning outcomes into a set of components which we could then use to develop an instrument to evaluate and then re-evaluate our students at the beginning and end of the 18-month period in which their communication courses take place.

Development of the testing instrument

Component knowledge and levels of learning

At the beginning of the process, we translated the two college learning outcomes into five constituent component areas. We then operationalized each of these components into a set of multiple choice questions (MCQs) and cases designed to test our students' knowledge in each content area at three different process levels of increasing depth (knowledge, comprehension and application). Our intention was to test learning at the

beginning and end of our three communication courses to track achievement of learning outcomes.

As Moskal *et al.* (2008) discuss, program assessment based on the evaluation of student learning outcomes is problematic and requires both the appropriate collection of data together with the development of a reliable assessment method. At the beginning of the process, therefore, we were influenced by Fraser *et al.*'s (2005) development of an assessment method for business writing at California State University Fullerton in the USA. The instrument created by Fraser and her colleagues had been designed to assess a part of the Fullerton students' communication skills, and we knew that it had also contributed to a successful bid for AACSB accreditation in the year following its implementation. Fraser *et al.* (2005) describe the development of this instrument on the basis of a set of content components which could be directly related to the university's learning objectives. These components were: content, literacy, audience, strategy and style (CLASS). Their testing instrument was then used to assess written documents within the Business Communication Program at California State University Fullerton. To produce a similar set of content-driven components that were relevant for our context at the university and which could be incorporated into our communication classes, we referred to the development of the CLASS framework for Fullerton together with our understanding of the learning outcomes identified by our own university and the College of Business relating to language and global awareness. This resulted in the five components listed under the acronym CLASP, which stands for cultural literacy, language and genre, audience awareness, social capital and sustainability and persuasion:

- (1) Cultural literacy – Knowledge of culture and how this impacts on communication in organizational settings.
- (2) Language and genre – Understanding of the various communicative genres available within organizational settings and the ability to use these strategically, including channels, media, style, structure and language.
- (3) Audience awareness – Responsiveness to audience and how this determines the form and content of any communication event.
- (4) Social capital and sustainability – Ability to network, build good will and create positive enduring relationships in organizational settings.
- (5) Persuasion – Ability to communicate effectively to achieve objectives.

In the next stage of development, we again referred to Fraser *et al.* (2005) to identify three different process levels, that is, knowledge, comprehension and application, which would allow us to evaluate our students' ability to perform effectively for each component, and, thus, assess the learning outcomes for language and global awareness. Essentially, our aim in the communication courses is to guide students first toward gaining the knowledge of a given subject area, then to provide them with tools that can help them comprehend how this knowledge can be applied and finally reapplied in a different context. Accounting for this shift in process levels was particularly relevant for our testing instrument, because, as Baldwin *et al.* (2010) point out:

[...] there is universal agreement that the transfer of decontextualized or conceptual knowledge to contextualized application is challenging to achieve and perhaps the single most formidable challenge in all learning and education (2011, p. 586).

In addition, these three levels are implicitly encapsulated in the AACSB's goal for undergraduate training: "Students achieve knowledge and skills for successful performance in a complex environment requiring intellectual ability to organize work, make and communicate sound decisions, and react successfully to unanticipated events" (AACSB, 2012, pp. 58-59).

To evaluate knowledge, we developed a set of MCQs for each of the five components. We produced four questions for each component, each with four possible answers, providing us with 20 MCQs. In addition, we produced 20 extra MCQs to build a bank of 40 items to allow us to administer two different versions of the same test, one at the start of the first communication course and one at the end of their third and last communication course 18 months later.

To evaluate students' knowledge of each component at the levels of comprehension and of application, we compiled a set of short cases. To devise these cases, we referred to our own existing lesson materials, as well as to the textbook materials that we use with our undergraduate business students, for example, Guffey (2007), Andrews (2001) and Barrett (2008). As with the MCQ section, we developed a bank of two cases for each of the five components to evaluate the comprehension process level, and a bank of two cases for each component to evaluate the application process level to allow us to administer different versions of the same test at our two testing moments. Table I illustrates how the five subject areas assessed across three levels of knowledge processing generated a five by three matrix. It also shows the testing method we developed to evaluate each process level with two sets of MCQs and cases for each component.

To ensure an effective match between our CLASP components and our choice of MCQs and cases, we sought feedback from a Business Communication Professor at another university. We asked her to look at each MCQ and case and to assign these to one of our five CLASP components without her knowing beforehand what our intention was in the MCQ/case for each one. In instances where she found it difficult or impossible to assign the MCQ or case to only one component, we modified or replaced the item to produce a better fit, and we then checked this with our informant again. In this way, we produced a final bank of questions and cases consisting of 40 MCQs, 8 for each component and 20 cases, two for each component and process level.

CLASP component	Knowledge	Comprehension	Application
Cultural literacy	MCQs	Case type 1	Case type 2
	4 + 4	1 + 1	1 + 1
Language and genre	MCQs	Case type 1	Case type 2
	4 + 4	1 + 1	1 + 1
Audience awareness	MCQs	Case type 1	Case type 2
	4 + 4	1 + 1	1 + 1
Social capital and sustainability	MCQs	Case type 1	Case type 2
	4 + 4	1 + 1	1 + 1
Persuasion	MCQs	Case type 1	Case type 2
	4 + 4	1 + 1	1 + 1

Table I.
Learning outcomes
(CLASP), knowledge
process level and testing
method

An example from our testing instrument: the cultural literacy component

Within our set of five components, an innovative and difficult to assess component is cultural literacy – the “C” of CLASP. Cultural literacy is defined as:

[...] as a moderator that enhances the likelihood that individuals on international assignments will actively engage in the four stages of experiential learning (experience, reflect, conceptualize, experiment), which in turn leads to global leadership self-efficacy, ethno-relative attitudes toward other cultures, accurate mental models of leadership across cultures, and flexibility of leadership styles (Ng *et al.*, 2009).

Currently, academics are attempting to investigate and disseminate knowledge relating to cultural literacy as a means to tackle “the practical realities of globalization” (Ang *et al.*, 2007, p. 337). As observed previously, the UAE is a multicultural society consisting of > 200 different cultures and current estimates put the local Emirati community at only 17 per cent of the total population (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010). This means that both inside and outside the working environment, our business graduates are highly likely to be dealing with people from other parts of the world, and, therefore, to be engaged in multicultural interactions on a daily basis.

Given that cultural literacy is more difficult to assess in a quantifiable way than traditional communication components, such as language, where mechanical errors may be counted, it was considered essential to identify specific learning outcomes for this component. We present this example from our evaluation instrument to illustrate how even complex areas can be dissected into specific learning outcomes and correlated to appropriate assessment rubrics. In teaching cultural literacy to our undergraduates, major theories that we discuss include Hall’s (1976) work on high and low context cultures and related theory on monochronic and polychronic cultures and Hofstede’s (1996) work on cultural dimensions. These theories do not only appear in the communication modules of the business sciences program; they also underpin some of the discussions that take place elsewhere in the program, notably in courses related to human resource management and leadership. This means that, between our two testing moments, our students are exposed elsewhere to these theories, and we can also assume that a certain amount of reinforcement takes place across the curriculum spanning their communication courses. This is fortuitous in that it replicates knowledge gained in one subject within different subject areas, thus contributing to the holistic nature of our curriculum, a required feature for AACSB accreditation, as shown below:

In-depth learning requires performance over time and continued accumulation of knowledge and skills. Short-term experiences and engagement with subject matter must not make up the whole of students’ experiences. Some program requirements should develop depth of knowledge through extensive learning over time, and students’ records should show that they have achieved deep learning in one or more areas; i.e. learning that includes an understanding of context and relationships, not just applications of methods (AACSB, 2012, p. 58).

The MCQs and two different types of cases we devised reflect the cultural theories presented in our courses and were designed to allow us to investigate what level of knowledge processing our students have been able to achieve Table II.

We now provide examples of our MCQs and cases for the cultural literacy component to illustrate how elements of this component were embodied in the instrument. Figure 1 presents samples from our assessment bank of two sets of two MCQs designed to test

students' knowledge of the theory of high-and low-context cultures at the first process level of knowledge.

Theory on high and low context cultures predicts that high context cultures such as the UAE will prefer a style of communication characterized by significant use of non-verbal communication, limited focus on writing and a preference for politeness and ambiguity. Low-context cultures such as the USA, on the other hand, tend to place less weight on non-verbal communication, more emphasis on writing and have a tolerance for directness and conflict. Question 1 in our MCQs section is designed to test our students' basic knowledge of this theory and the consequences that belonging to either a high-or low-context culture has for the ways in which individuals prefer to communicate. In later research based on high-and low-contexts, scholars such as [Beamer and Varner \(2010\)](#) studied the impact of the differences between the communication styles prevalent in high-and low-context cultures on specific business events such as negotiation, and Questions 2A and 2B are based on this work and test students' knowledge of high-/low-context theory. These questions also test their ability to differentiate between two different cultural theories because students would need to be familiar with Hall's theory as well as Hofstede's theory to select the correct answer. As with the development of all our MCQs and cases, the A and B versions of this question were designed to be as similar as possible to ensure testing of the same knowledge.

Testing comprehension and application

In the second part of our assessment, we evaluate students on their comprehension and then application of a given concept by requiring them to respond to a set of short cases. [Figure 2](#) shows an example of one of the cases we developed for the comprehension process level of the cultural literacy component. The objective of this kind of case is to evaluate whether students can demonstrate that they have understood the knowledge associated with the given learning outcome.

Our intention in compiling this case, as in the majority of the others, was to create test items that simulate situations that are likely to occur within the UAE workplace. The importance of this localization of knowledge is underscored in the AACSB Assurance of Learning Standard 16 ([AACSB, 2003](#)). In addition, this was particularly relevant for the cultural literacy component, because, as [Blasco \(2009\)](#) has observed, culture is a slippery concept, and students need to contextualize their knowledge of cultural theories through an understanding of how these may impact real business activities.

Assessment rubric

With our testing bank in place, we needed to devise detailed assessment rubrics for the cases to ensure efficient evaluation of student responses and ensure agreement between raters, for the test to be reliably evaluated by all six communication faculty that are currently working

CLASP component	Knowledge MCQs	Comprehension case type 1	Application case type 2
Cultural literacy	High/low context (A+B) High/low context (A+B) Monochronic/polychronic (A + B) Uncertainty avoidance (A + B)	High/low context Power distance	High/low context Power distance

Table II.
Overview of testing items
for cultural literacy

- 1A. Communication within a high-context culture like the UAE is characterized by the following:
- Agreements made in writing are not considered binding, attention to detail is high, directness is valued
 - Politeness and ambiguity are valued, people rely on non-verbal communication, and agreements made orally are binding
 - The written word is very important, attention to detail is low, directness and confrontation are valued
 - Agreements in writing are considered binding, politeness and clarity are important, attention to detail is high
- 1B. Communication within a low-context culture like the US is characterized by the following:
- Agreements made in writing are considered binding, attention to detail is low, directness is not valued
 - Politeness and ambiguity are less valued, people rely on verbal communication, and agreements made orally are not binding
 - The written word is not very important, attention to detail is high, directness and confrontation are not valued
 - Agreements in writing are not considered binding, politeness and clarity are not important, attention to detail is low
- 2A. According to the researchers Iris Varner and Linda Beamer (2001) one set of business negotiators they observed, shared the following characteristics; they i) avoided conflict, ii) suggested additional items, iii) supported arguments with personal connections. It is **most likely** that these negotiators came from:
- a high context culture
 - a collectivist culture
 - a low context culture
 - any of the above
- 2B. According to the researchers iris Varner & Linda Beamer (2001) one set of business negotiators they observed, shared the following characteristics; they i) communicated directly, ii) worked through the items on the agenda in a linear way, iii) supported arguments facts. It is **most likely** that these negotiators came from:
- a high context culture
 - a collectivist culture
 - a low context culture
 - any of the above

Figure 1.
Examples of MCQs
relating to cultural
literacy

at the college. We established a performance rating ranging from Very Poor through to Excellent (Very Poor, Poor, Average, Good and Excellent) in a similar way to the grading rubric discussed in Fraser *et al.* (2005) which was used to evaluate writing assignments. We then discussed our expectations for each case and each process level and produced a short description of those expectations to be used as a guide for evaluators. Again, we sought the input of a different communication professor to test our assessment rubric for fit. The difficulties we experienced in applying these rubrics and how we achieved agreement among assessors are discussed in more detail.

Table III presents an example of the original assessment rubric that we used to evaluate the answers provided to these cases, with the associated grading scheme ranging from 0 to 4 (adapted from Fraser *et al.*, 2005). Each level of attainment was intended to show a different depth of comprehension for each case, from Very Poor (0), where the student is unable to relate the problem to cultural differences and how this impacts on communication in organizational settings, to Excellent (4), where the student has shown a comprehensive understanding of the problem, including the appropriate cultural theory and the communication typical of the cultures featured in the case.

When we piloted the test and applied this rubric, however, we found little agreement between the two independent raters (the authors) in their assessment of student answers. We, therefore, elected to develop a quantitative approach to evaluating responses to the cases. To do this, we discussed each case at length and identified a set of valid observations that students could offer in their response. This appears in Table IV.

Case 1

John is from the UK and has come to do business in the UAE on a five-day visit. For the first two days, his Emirati hosts take him on a tour of Abu Dhabi and Dubai, and he spends time with them in the evening in a number of the UAE's finest restaurants. On the third and fourth days, he is introduced to a series of new people that he has not met on the first two days. He begins to wonder when the discussion on business will start [...]

Explain why you think John is becoming frustrated.
Limit your answer to 50 words, using the space below.

Figure 2.
Example of the
comprehension cases
relating to cultural
literacy

Level of attainment	Description
Very poor = 0	The student has failed to realize that this is a problem related to cultural literacy
Poor = 1	The student has understood that this is a problem related to cultural literacy, but has been unable to identify the appropriate theory
Average = 2	The student has understood that this is a problem related to cultural literacy and has correctly identified the appropriate theory
Good = 3	The student has understood that this is a problem related to cultural literacy and has correctly identified the appropriate theory. She has provided a discussion on the relevance of that theory for communication
Excellent = 4	The student has understood that this is a problem related to cultural literacy and has correctly identified the appropriate theory. She has provided a discussion on the relevance of that theory for communication and she has differentiated between the communication styles of the different cultures involved in the interaction and explained how this is relevant

Table III.
Example of the
assessment rubric for the
comprehension of cultural
literacy

Using this quantifiable rubric produced much greater agreement in rating students' responses with 100 per cent consistency in rating across the two evaluators where $n = 68$. We believe this was a valid reworking of the rubric to facilitate the decision of the assessor as to whether a student displays awareness of significant culture-related concepts for two reasons. First, our objective was to determine if students were familiar with culture-related concepts (such as those listed in Table IV, applicable to this particular case) and if they could recognize contexts in which their importance comes into play. Consequently, listing the key concepts involved and counting how many a student could identify as relevant to the particular communication scenario set in the case was deemed suitable. Second, this case was designed to test comprehension, not application, so the key issue here is to assess student awareness that particular culture-related features are relevant in the given communication context rather than how they would integrate these concepts into a message.

We now present an example of a case designed to test the students' knowledge of cultural literacy at the process level of application Figure 3. This aims to assess if they are able to demonstrate that they can re-apply their knowledge of a given content area in a different situational context. Again, the related assessment rubric (not shown here) includes a set of possible points or observations that could be included in response to the case with the same levels of attainment as in the comprehension assessment rubrics, ranging from Very Poor (0), for no relevant observations, to Excellent (4), for five or more relevant observations.

In both versions of the test, the MCQs and cases were presented in random order to avoid any carry-over effects from the MCQ section to the cases which might affect the students' performance. As stated above, we generated two versions of the test each consisting of 20 MCQs, four for each of our five CLASP components, and 10 cases, one for each component at each different knowledge process level.

Level of attainment	Description
Very poor = 0	The student has failed to identify any of the cultural issues below
Poor = 1	The student has identified one of the cultural issues below
Average = 2	The student has identified at least three of the cultural issues below
Good = 3	The student has identified at least four of the cultural issues below
Excellent = 4	The student has identified at least five of the cultural issues below

Table IV.

Revised assessment rubric for the comprehension of cultural literacy

Notes: Observations relevant for the case: Cultural differences in general; The importance of relationship building; Concept of time; The importance of the group in the UAE; High-context vs low-context cultures; Monochronic and polychronic cultures; Collectivism and individualism

Figure 3.

Example of the application case relating to cultural literacy

Cultural literacy

Case 1. US business woman is visiting your company to negotiate a possible partnership which is important to your company. You are in-charge of helping her get to know the company and its employees. On her first day, she is to meet the CEO. The appointment was scheduled for 11:00 and was to include a lunch together at 12:30. The CEO arrived for the meeting at 11:25 and then invited a representative of another competitor company to join you all for the lunch. You sense that the US woman is confused by the way the day is going. What could you do to make her feel her comfortable and ensure she has confidence in the way your company operates on a day-to-day basis?
Limit your answer to 50 words, using the space below.

Conclusion

At the time of writing (April 2013), our progress with implementing our assessment tool is as follows. We piloted the test and original assessment rubrics at the beginning of the fall 2011 semester to students beginning the first of our communication courses. Having refined both the test and assessment rubrics, we administered a revised version of both in February 2012 at the beginning of our spring semester, again to the new cohort of students beginning the first of our first communication courses. Our assessment of this test displayed a high level of inter-rater agreement, and we have also been able to refine both the testing instrument and our lesson materials on the basis of what we read in our student responses. We plan to administer the second version of our test to the same cohort at the end of the spring 2013 semester when students are completing their third and last communication course. We are currently investigating ways of administering the test online to facilitate the grading of the MCQ section, and, thus, enable its administration in an efficient manner to a large number of students across both university campuses in Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

Our experience in developing the testing instrument so far has been that it has allowed us to reflect on our communication teaching in a systematic way as we sought to operationalize the university and College of Business learning outcomes that are of most relevance to communication courses. In doing so, we have been able to identify those areas of interest that we believe will best equip our students to make an effective contribution to the Emirati workforce in the future, most especially a knowledge of intercultural communication and a knowledge of the situations that occur in the real business world. Our assessment framework also provides a rigorous testing instrument that serves to evaluate the level of learning achieved by our students, essential, not only for their training but also for compliance with AACSB's requirement to specifically plot faculty intent and student achievement of learning outcomes. It enables us to demonstrate accountability of the quality of teaching to all sections in all the courses we deliver. Our college is currently finalizing its conformity to AACSB requirements and our instrument contributes to assurance of learning in general and the validation of the communication teaching in particular conducted within the business sciences program.

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