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Transformed by the Renewing of Your Mind: Exploring Change in International Students at Africa International University

By Janice Horsager Rasmussen

Abstract

Many institutes of higher education aim to transform students. Parents, churches, and governments spend plenty of money and students invest years of their lives for this goal. This qualitative inquiry explores how international graduate students at Africa International University say they have changed. The levels and domains of change are analyzed. International students reached holistic perspective transformation (according to Mezirow's phases) in one main area: the broadening of perspectives related to international and interdenominational worldviews. They also evidenced various affective, psychomotor and cognitive changes, as categorized by Bloom's taxonomy. More specifically, on Krathwohl's revised taxonomy of the structure of knowledge, students showed learning in factual and conceptual knowledge. They also learned procedural and meta-cognitive competencies, although these were mostly learned informally. Student quotes illustrate these various levels and types of change students experienced. Implications for theological educators are given.

Introduction

For over thirty years, students from around Africa and the globe have sought higher education at Africa International University (AIU). They came because of AIU's reputation as a premier theological school. The faculty, many of whom are respected authors, attracted students. Students were also drawn AIU because it has international networks. And yet, while international, it is solidly situated in an African context, claiming to be "a school in the heart of Africa with Africa on its heart." Its long-standing mandate to develop Christian scholars and leaders for and in Africa has resulted in a powerful base of AIU alumni who also pull students to AIU.

AIU's mission clearly aims for change in its students. That mission is "to educate Christ-centered leaders for the transformation of God's people and world"¹. This implies that the students themselves must first be transformed before they can transform others and the world. But how do we know if students have transformed? How do they change during their time at AIU, if they do change? Exams may show some changes while

¹ "Africa International University Website," *Africa International University*, November 26, 2014, <http://www.aiu.ac.ke/>.

graduation brochures reveal others, but how do the students themselves gauge the changes in their lives?

This article reports how international students at AIU describe the ways in which they have changed while studying at AIU. These findings come out of the author's MPhil in Education research. An overview of the study's purpose, scope, context and methods are given. Findings are reported using the frameworks of Mezirow's phases of transformational learning and Bloom's learning domains and then analyzed. Implications for theological educators follow.

Purpose of the Study

This study was an exploratory qualitative inquiry into the experiences of international students at AIU. Generally, it aimed to understand the ways international students described their learning experiences at AIU, including the influences of their past learning experiences on their expectations and experiences at AIU. More specifically, it aimed to understand how international students described themselves changing while at AIU, if indeed, they did change. This article will focus on the latter aim.

Africa International University

Africa International University (AIU), which provided the context of this research, is located in the suburban Karen area of Nairobi, Kenya. Since its inception in 1983 as Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST), AIU has aimed to prepare Christian scholars from throughout English speaking Africa for ministry in Africa. The original goal was to provide quality theological education at the graduate level (Master's and recently Ph.D.) for students from many denominations. AIU is currently expanding beyond the graduate level into Bachelor's level and also beyond theological education to train Christian professionals for the marketplace and civil society.² Started by the Association of Evangelicals in Africa, it is accredited with the Accrediting Council of Theological Education in Africa and chartered with the Kenyan government.

In recent years, 19-23% of the student body has been international students (non-Kenyan passport holders) from about 28 countries. During the 2012-13 school year, one-hundred and seven international students enrolled at AIU. Most come from English-speaking countries in Africa, but North America, Asia, Europe, Australia, and South America have also been represented in the student body in the past five years.³ Some of these are only on campus two or three weeks per year for intensive

² Douglas Carew, "From the Voice of the Vice Chancellor," *NEGST Graduation Magazine*, 2009, 15.

³ Nidah Muthu, *Summary Statistics on Reported Student Intake 2012/2013*, Admissions Dept. (Karen, Kenya: Africa International University, May 2, 2013).

programs, while others live on campus. Because international students get priority for campus housing, the on-campus community is very international. Most international faculty also live on campus. In recent years, about half (10 of 17) of full-time AIU faculty are non-Kenyan, although as the school adds bachelor's level courses, the percentage of international faculty is decreasing⁴.

Method

This study utilized a qualitative, phenomenological, interpretive approach. The intention was to understand the lived experiences of these international students and the meaning they made from these experiences, from their points of view and in their own words. Participant observation and interviews were utilized. Since the researcher was the International Student Coordinator at AIU throughout the three years of the study, she knew most of the international students on campus personally and interacted with them regularly.

Participant observation notes were taken which captured a broad range of experiences of international students on campus. These included skits in chapel, small group discussions and one-on-one discussions with international students from many countries and programs. Five preliminary interviews with international students were also conducted, transcribed, and analyzed.

To get more in-depth, rich, detailed description, she developed and pilot-tested an interview guide. After revising it, all those in the population were sent an email invitation to be interviewed. Those who agreed were interviewed by the researcher. Fortunately, these represented a variety of countries, programs and family statuses (near maximum variation). When permission was granted (in all but one case) the interview was digitally recorded and then transcribed verbatim. In the other case, notes were taken during the discussion. Transcriptions were sent back to participants for accuracy checks and a few clarifications were made.

1. Population and Sample

International graduate students were chosen as a focus for this study because of AIU's history as an internationally-recognized graduate institution. In addition, very little research has been reported on international students studying in Africa. The population included all enrolled graduate international students living on the AIU campus and studying full-time and with at least one previous term of enrollment. "Graduate" included Masters and PhD students. "International" referred to

⁴ Ruth Kihika, *Summary Statistics on Reported Students 2010/2011 Intake*, Summary Statistics on Student Intake for 2010-2011 (Admissions Department: African International University, April 13, 2011).

all non-Kenyan passport holders. The total population at the time of the study was 34.

Students were interviewed from different countries, family and marital statuses, and programs. The sample included 12 men and one woman. It included six Master of Arts students, three Master of Divinity students, one MPhil student and three PhD students. The students in the sample had studied at AIU between three and fifteen terms, some in previous programs. The average was eight terms. The average age was 35. Various marital statuses were represented in the sample (single, engaged, married with family on campus, married with family back home, no children, up to five children). The students had lived outside of their passport countries from zero to 19 years, besides their stay at AIU.

The thirteen interviewed represented the wide cultural variety of students who attend AIU. This group spoke seven different mother tongues and came from eight different countries (Tanzania, Malawi, Nigeria, S. Sudan, USA, DRC, Canada, and Ethiopia). They had studied in thirteen countries in various languages including Arabic, Amharic, Oromo, French, Kiswahili, and English as well as some years in their mother tongues. Students came from a variety of schools, including denominational Bible schools, liberal arts colleges, secular universities, schools of ministry, and other theological schools.

2. Data Analysis

The transcripts and the participant observation notes served to triangulate the findings, as the participant observations included those who had not agreed to an interview and caught a wider range of student experience. The texts from both interviews and participant observations were all analyzed using the computer program WEFTQDA. The data were open coded into categories, then into axial codes, with themes eventually emerging. The process continued as interviews continued until no new information emerged. These themes were then sent back to the participants for member checks and comments. Informal discussions with international students helped to solidify the researcher's understanding of the themes. The themes related to transformative learning and changes in the various learning domains are reported in this article. Quotations from the transcripts were added to illuminate each theme, using pseudonyms for students.

Results and Discussion of Learning Theories

While international students reported changing in many ways, one may wonder if there was evidence of any transformative learning in their time at AIU. Indeed, there was one way in which all of them reported a transformational level of change: this is in the broadening of their worldviews. This perspective transformation happened as students

encountered diverse cultural perspectives and different theological, denominational viewpoints at AIU. They were challenged to examine their assumptions and to consider new meaning schemes and perspectives while at AIU. This transformational learning will be reported and analyzed, using Mezirow's framework of perspective transformation. This theory is meant to explain the process of perspective change, although it has been noted that the learners' perspectives have been missing in the transformational learning theory.⁵ This article attempts to address that gap.

In other areas, student added knowledge, skills or changed attitudes. For example, they gained Biblical knowledge and hermeneutic skills. They developed confidence in their writing and ministry abilities. They developed coping skills for handling challenges in the new environment of AIU. These changes will be examined, using Krathwohl's revised Bloom's taxonomy.

Transformative Learning

First, a brief overview of Mezirow's transformative learning is in order. Mezirow claims that transformational learning occurs when one's person's belief, attitude, or entire perspective is transformed. As one's point of view (made of specific attitudes, beliefs, values) changes, so then, can one's habits of mind (dispositions) change. On a deeper level, one's frame of reference can change when taken-for-granted assumptions and expectations are challenged. If experiences and impressions are then filtered differently, those experiences may be given new meaning. This new meaning may lead to perspective transformation. This process of perspective transformation involves cognitive, affective, and conative aspects.⁶

Mezirow asserts that true, deep change often begins with a "disorienting dilemma,"⁷ Other theorists of transformation in education concur, referring to this as a "sense of disequilibrium" (Piaget),⁸ a "perplexing trigger event"⁹ or a state of disenchantment.¹⁰ This implies that

⁵ Patricia Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide for Educators of Adults* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1994), 63.

⁶ Sharan B. Merriam, Rosemary S. Caffarella, and Lisa M. Baumgartner, *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 133.

⁷ Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1991), 168.

⁸ Diane E. Papalia, Sally Wendkos Olds, and Ruth Duskin Feldman, *Human Development*, 9th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2004), 36.

⁹ Stephen D. Brookfield, *Developing Critical Thinkers: Challenging Adults to Explore Alternative Ways of Thinking and Acting* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1987), 26.

some pressure and discomfort is helpful, or even necessary, for transformational learning to happen.

In Mezirow's phases, once a disorienting dilemma happens, the person begins to reflect on the situation and the associated feelings. The person then must critically examine their assumptions and their meaning schemes. The person talks with others (who may be having a similar experience) about this issue and their related assumptions. Together, they consider new ways of acting, relating, and thinking. They rethink their frames of reference and their meaning schemes. They make a plan of action (develop an alternate perspective) and then look for the knowledge and skills to carry it out. With the help of a mentor, they try out the new roles/perspectives and then they revise them and gain confidence and competence in them. They then integrate these changes into their daily lives.¹¹ See Figure 1.

| |
|--|
| 1. Disorienting dilemma |
| 2. Self-examine, with feelings of guilt, shame |
| 3. Critically assess assumptions – their epistemic, socio-cultural, or psychic assumptions |
| 4. Recognize discontent and that the process of change is shared - others have been through it |
| 5. Explore options for new roles, relationships, actions |
| 6. Plan a course of action, an alternative perspective |
| 7. Get knowledge and skill to implement new plan/perspective |
| 8. Try new roles/ideas, provisionally |
| 9. Build competence and confidence in new roles/relationships/perspectives |
| 10. Reintegrate life on basis of new perspective's conditions |

Figure 1. Mezirow's Phases of Perspective Transformation, Adapted by Author.¹²

Transformative Learning: Broadening Perspectives

All of the international students interviewed and many around campus spoke of experiencing the transformational change of broadening their perspectives. This occurred as they were exposed to different cultural mores and different ways of thinking. It also resulted from exposure to different denominations and various Christian viewpoints. Following are quotations from students' experiences that illustrate each of Mezirow's phases of transformation. These all relate to the theme of "broadening perspectives and worldview change" in their Christian, international context.

¹⁰ William Bridges, *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Transition*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2004), 107.

¹¹ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 4, 168–169.

¹² Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner, *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*, 146, 168.

1. Disorienting dilemma

International students were faced with many disorienting dilemmas. Their past learning and cultural experiences affected how they approached learning at AIU. Even before going to class, they had to deal with culture shock and disorientation.

You are coming in Africa, you don't expect such changes. You assume that it's going to be like Africa. You are Africans. You have similar outlooks and all that. Then all of a sudden there's this rude shock or awareness that, oh, we're Africans, but there are so many things that are different (Jeremiah, Nigeria).

In class, although all held an Evangelical theology, they were surprised at all the different perspectives presented by faculty and represented by their fellow students. Many had previously attended Bible schools in their own country and denomination. Suddenly, the viewpoints of many cultures, denominations and worldviews were thrust upon them.

When I came here, I have only one perspective; I have only one perspective of Anglicanism because all my learning was done on Anglican institutions... Then when I came here, I was exposed to a bigger tradition, the mixed international tradition or mix of many traditions, not only Anglicans. . . . You mix with other peoples, you know their theology, and you know their thinking. . . . The church is so big. . . . We have to listen to one another, to respect one another's view (Timitheo, Tanzania).

AIU made me think critically about my theology, about my church doctrines. . . . AIU is an ecumenical university with people from different denominations The more you interact with these people, the more you gain, the more you change your mind (Isaka, Tanzania).

2. Self-examination

Once they were exposed to people believing and doing differently, students began to question their own perspectives. They began to reconsider some of their beliefs and attitudes.

AIU changed my thinking, yeah, wrestling with professors in class about issues; at times I questioned myself and never thought that way. . . . It has just really changed me in thinking a different way (Yohanna, Malawi).

3. Critical assessment of assumptions (epistemic, socio-cultural, or psychic)

As international students confronted dilemmas and they began to examine their own viewpoints, they became cognizant of some of their basic assumptions. As they reconsidered their assumptions and checked their validity, they found that some needed to change. Many students shifted at this point, changing their frames of reference, and eventually, their meaning perspectives.

I think the classroom experience has been quite unique... I can say for sure that my perspectives have changed on a good number of things I used to think... I am able to double-check, sort of, some of the things I have been holding as my own perspective and world view. It has been

challenged and shaped so that I think I'm going out a better person than I came (Samson, Cameroon).

4. Recognition of discontent, need to connect with others going through similar changes

The international, non-denominational campus community became important not only for providing disorientation, but for processing it. Students sought out others to discuss their confusion, both in class and outside of class. The international community on campus was vital for this processing.

If your interest is also to interact with people outside your culture, or to meet different people and if your vision is to work in future in Africa, this will be a good place to interact with people from outside of your country, in Africa. ... This is a campus made up of people from different cultural backgrounds so that is a solidarity pool. . . . You know you are not alone whatever happens (Matteo, Nigeria).

If I was going through a rough time, like culturally, adjusting, I could just go across the room, you know, and go to my friend and they could relate to me, because on my floor, we had an Ethiopian, Tanzanian, Kenya, and an Indian. . . . It's all totally diverse. . . . We help each other out; the ones on the floor, over time as we've understood each other....We've become our own little family (Samuel, USA).

I expected to have classmates who I would really learn from as well and that's happened – people who are in pastoral ministry or people in Muslim related ministry or something – and we've been able to discuss things and sharpen each other and that kind of thing . . . It's after we'll have breaks and things during classes and so we'll be out talking and yeah, things just come out, like how my friend Paul, he'll see things like from a very unique perspective that I had not even thought of (Yakobo, USA).

5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, actions, and beliefs

Students continued to interact on the perplexing issues, talking with their lecturers and fellow students about their assumptions, predispositions, and frame of references. They compared theirs with those of others. In relationships, they dialoged through their questions and explored new beliefs and attitudes.

I enjoyed the intercultural and ethnic mix of the school... that's, for me, the strongest learning thing, 'cause you learn from different experiences across Africa and across the world. For example, I was in a class with [various students] ... from America, from England, from Zambia, from Malawi, and each is bringing something into the learning environment...that... helps to broaden your knowledge, broaden your understanding and broaden the concepts that you have in mind...that learning environment was very helpful, very rich for me... you have your own assumptions, prejudices, but ... with time, it reduces that. Wherever go, you are able to say, well ... people have their own good ways of doing things. My own way is not always the best. So those prejudices are lowered (Jeremiah, Nigeria).

You get to know how other people approach life from their different countries and how they see what you don't see, through interaction with one another, learning from what they are doing out there in their countries, how they approach life, how they see things, how their system in education. . . . I had a roommate from Nigeria. . . . The Nigerian and Tanzania culture, they differ. So we came to learn from one another, slow by slow. We came to appreciate one another for that one year we spent together (Pierre, Tanzania).

6. Plan a course of action, develop an alternate perspective

Students spoke of developing new perspectives and thinking about how these might operate once they went back home. Some of their work at AIU facilitated this process.

I feel like each term ... there is a certain paradigm shift that I totally went through, just kinda of thinking of things in a totally different perspective (Benjamin, USA).

I've been generally really happy about the assignments because essentially what the profs are doing is they are saying, 'OK, take the content and merge it with your life and your ministry.' . . . A good percentage of my assignments have been geared toward engaging, and not just spitting back the content, not just demonstrating that you understand it but demonstrating that you have engaged it in such a way that it's kind of become part of your life, part of how you want to be and then part of how you want to teach and preach or minister on the side, too (Yakobo, USA).

Whatever I was receiving in class, my mind was reflecting back to the ministry (Pierre, Tanzania).

7. Get knowledge and skill to implement plan

Students built knowledge and skills as they broadened their perspectives on worldview and Christian diversity. Lecturers taught them to seek knowledge for themselves through such skills as learning Greek and Hebrew to read the Bible in its original languages, and developing skills in hermeneutics. Students also learned to relate cross-culturally so that they could continue to broaden their cultural perspectives, checking assumptions and frames of references in new situations.

I meet different lecturers in different departments and they are quite good lecturers, quite a good approach in teaching and helping students to understand, in helping us to learn more, to be independent, not too dependent only on the commentaries - you can read commentaries and critique them. This is what I found very inspiring at AIU (Timitheo, Tanzania).

So relevance and context have been very, very important ... other departments [besides Biblical Studies] also have been of great help to me and help me to really think outside the box (Samson, Cameroon).

8. Try out new roles, beliefs, ideas provisionally

Some international students were able to try out their new perspectives around campus and around Nairobi. Others wished for more practical outlets to try their new perspectives out while they had support and to solidify them before returning home.

The African is more practical-oriented, but here you are meant to think more in terms of abstract. You learn a lot of stuff, but there are no outlets. It's like you have to wait after three years. Then you go there and then you start to practicalize some of these things and . . . some of them, you even forget. . . . but if you had opportunities to maybe put some of them into maybe direct practical use, they may be helpful, may stick with you more and perhaps, even help you to see how you may act out some of them in your context (Jeremiah, Nigeria).

9. Build competence and confidence in new roles/relationships, beliefs, attitudes

Some international students had opportunities to develop their broader perspectives through events on campus and through interactions with other students, teachers, and visitors. Faculty who were available to support the change and to coach and mentor students were appreciated.

One of the events that took place here that still has an impact in my life is the witchcraft colloquium. It has enhanced my understanding of witchcraft phenomena. I come from a culture where people really, really, really feel witchcraft and it's an issue. But I feel like I've felt an environment where we can talk about it, discuss it and it has really shaped and changed my way of looking at, 'What is witchcraft?' And when I go back home, I think I'll be different and I'll be able to help people to see how we can handle this issues that is with us (Daudi, Malawi).

So the faculty, most of them, have been very, very generous and gone out of their way to give advice and counsel outside of the classroom which has been very, very helpful, . . . more mentoring. They have given the students the feeling that we're more like colleagues than a strict teacher-student division. . . . I wasn't expecting it would be that collegial. . . . It's not just about being in the classroom. So exposure to faculty who are willing to talk to students outside of the classroom has been a great benefit (Paulo, Canada).

10. Reintegration into life on the basis of the new perspective's conditions

For many international students, the real test of their perspective changes will be when they reenter their home cultures and ministries. However, some returned home each term break and were able to integrate some of their learning into their ministries. For example, one pastor told how he had realized some of his decisions were made based on culture, when he had thought they were Biblical. He went home and was able to reverse a decision about who someone could marry after he had gone through a perspective transformation at AIU.

In attitude, especially before coming here, I was very conservative in my ministry, just following some cultures, but my mind became open more to deal with the issues . . . reading books, learning here, having different discussions, different situations in the cultures, opened my mind to think broad and ah, to deal with the situation by being based on the Bible, not only on the culture (Emmanuel, Ethiopia).

I know there will be a lot of ministry benefit too in terms of teaching and ministry strategizing for later – there is a lot of benefit in my studies so far - because of exposure, yeah – and even in talking with fellow students and getting different perspectives – so some of the problems I was encountering as a teacher in Tanzania are being touched on in different ways (Paulo, Canada).

Student Changes by Domains of Learning

International students reported many other changes while at AIU. Although not necessarily transformative in Mezirow's definitions, these are still worth exploring. Bloom's revised taxonomy is helpful in studying the ways international students changed while at AIU. Bloom and his group separate possible learning outcomes into three basic dimensions: cognitive/knowledge, affective/character, and psychomotor/skills. See Figure 2. Students reported changing in various degrees in all of these domains.

| |
|-------------------------------|
| Cognitive/Knowledge |
| Affective/Attitudes/Character |
| Psychomotor/Skills |

Figure 2. Bloom's Taxonomy: Domains of Learning¹³

The affective and the psychomotor domains will be explored first. Then the changes in the cognitive domain will be explored in more detail. Although Bloom's taxonomy further stratifies the domains into levels, for clarity of discussion here, the affective and psychomotor domains will not be categorized by levels. For the cognitive domain, the revised "structure of knowledge dimensions" is more helpful for reporting these findings than the original "levels of learning" which used remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create.¹⁴

1. Affective Domain Changes

In the affective domain, including the character and spiritual aspects of learning, the students learned to integrate their faith and learning. They reported that they grew spiritually through programs on campus, through friendships and through their struggles. Many developed compassion for

¹³ Norman E. Gronlund, *Stating Objectives for Classroom Instruction*, 2nd ed., Current Topics in Classroom Instruction (New York: Macmillan Pub. Co., Inc., 1978), 26–34.

¹⁴ David R. Krathwohl, "A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy: An Overview," *Theory into Practice* 41, no. 4 (Autumn 2002): 215.

people who suffered, as they suffered more away from home, without their families and communities around for support. Many also learned to trust in God anew for financial provision, as they no longer had steady jobs or family nearby to care for them. They learned to pray hard and to trust in God more. Their faith grew as they saw God provide. Humility grew in many, as some were bishops, teachers or pastors but at AIU, all were just students learning together.

It has helped me to trust God more than there [back home] where you can make phone calls and say there is no bread. . . . You don't have to pray. But here, you have to pray quite a lot, so that has kind of strengthened my faith to believe God will [provide] more for big things than was the case [at home] (Matteo, Nigeria).

Decker¹⁵ asserts that students who study in another country for several months often experience spiritual disorientation. This period of spiritual dissonance may follow a similar pattern to their cross-cultural adjustment. It is generally not an intended experience, but happens as a result of the many challenges in the new environment. He noted that, while the person often feels alone and far from God in this period, the person's identity is often permanently changed from living in a new culture and from going through this dissonance. He recommends support for students before, during and after this experience, to keep pointing them to God, and even praying Psalms of Lament.

Yeah, so it was about prayer and total surrender to God and even it was a time of humbleness, humility, to give over your pride and just be humble, to ask from people, and share with people your struggles. Actually prayer helped me also. I also find friends who can pray with me (Luka, DRC).

Students developed networks with people from around the world and grew in appreciation for others. They mentioned professors who believed in them and who mentored them. Through this, they gained confidence that they could contribute to the world.

Here the learning process is for the purpose of ministry together. So we're all doing these studies because we're all going to go out and better the African church and start and understand our ministries better so there's more of a team sense, even with the faculty. . . . We have some mutual respect for each person's studies as each contributing to something broader. We're all working for the church in Africa. . . . We are all doing it together here. . . . We're part of a community and we're contributing to the greater good of the church and the academy across the continent, and also a sense that our studies are relevant and needed.

¹⁵ Murray S. Decker, "Student Sojourners and Spiritual Formation: Understanding the Intersection of Cross-Cultural Adjustment and Spiritual Disorientation," in *Effective Engagement in Short-Term Missions: Doing It Right!* ed. Robert J. Priest, Evangelical Missiological Society Series 16 (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2008), 566, 584.

That's also something that our teachers have given us a strong sense of (Paulo, Canada).

Being grounded in African realities with African faculty and experienced students affirmed some of the students as African scholars.

My worldview has changed. I now cherish my Africanness. . . . Most of the lecturers that were teaching me here were Africans. . . . I'd never interacted with African PhD guys, because we don't have many there. . . . I . . . was about to lose my Africanness because I grew up in town and I went to American school where we felt like . . . our Africanness will one day disappear. But coming here to this school, AIU, I found it taking me back to my roots . . . the courses that I've taken here, the lecturers. They really push us back to our African roots to value our culture, to appreciate a lot of cultural aspects of our communities (Daudi, Malawi).

Now, I began to read a lot. . . . Now I have the interest of to being writing and to see how to start writing career, like writing books and articles in missions, even for the church, doing field research and writing articles. . . . Now, I'm more interested in combining the practical part of mission and the academic part. . . . I had never thought of myself like being a lecturer, but now I can see it (Luka, DRC).

2. Psychomotor (Skill) Domain Changes

Many students developed skills while at AIU. Skills mentioned included study skills, writing, researching, reading, and English proficiency. Some greatly improved their computer and library skills, particularly those who arrived with few of these skills. Doing parts of their classes via e-learning challenged some.

I struggled like the first three terms. I was like totally confused between the IT, and the library, and the classes and actually in my undergraduate we don't use computers. This was one of the hard things. Sometime I can write and in the middle of my assignment, I lost it. You can just feel the frustration (Luka, DRC).

Many students came from schools with exam-based assessments, but at AIU, academic papers were often required. Some came with very little experience writing academic papers or book reviews. Or the essays were expected to be written in a different style, as a Korean student found when he tried to write in the more "spiral" Korean writing style. The standards upheld at AIU for issues such as ownership of knowledge, plagiarism and reference systems were foreign to many students. Many noted improvement in their writing and research skills.

I've improved my writing skills, especially writing a thesis has helped me to know how to write. I have especially appreciated . . . the critique that people were putting on my paper. It really helped me to see, yeah, this is how I should write (Daudi, Malawi).

Although NEGST (now AIU) was established as an institution for English-speaking Africa, English was the mother tongue of very few international students. English language abilities varied immensely. Some

had hardly studied previously in English, whereas others had studied their entire lives in English. Some were proficient in French, but chose to come to AIU instead of its French sister school because of geographic accessibility, perceived quality differences, quantity of theological resources, and a desire to develop English competence. In fact, students from many countries (Rwanda, Ethiopia, Sudan, Tanzania, DRC, and S. Korea) came to AIU partly to improve their English competence.

We sometimes have very complicated books, so coming from French to English – even now, if you go to my desk, I have English dictionary. . . . I normally write slowly. I have to do these things together. So I need much time than my colleagues . . . and I need a proof reader. . . . It's expensive. . . . My English has improved a lot. When I came for the first time, I could even not pray in English. Now I can pray in English, I can preach in English. I can write in English. I've written two theses now in English, though it was hard, but I've done it and so my language has changed (Marco, DRC).

Those accustomed to learning in other languages (Congolese, Ethiopian, Tanzanian, Sudanese) found it nearly overwhelming to learn solely in English. Simultaneously, many had to learn computer, library, critical thinking and academic writing skills. All of the language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) in English challenged them. Several sent their papers to friends around the world (even to Australia) to proofread for them, or they paid people locally.

That's another challenge, in fact, to write in a good way; since we are from different countries . . . we don't have English. Our people, they do not speak English. But here, since we are from different countries, our teachers, they look to our work, according to their standards or according to the other students, not understanding our problem, or our weakness in English (Emmanuel, Ethiopia).

Some who were accustomed to learning in English (West Africans, North Americans, Malawians) struggled most with listening, as understanding the various professors' accents in echoing rooms was difficult at first.

For a lot of the students, you know, English isn't their first language, so they have to put in so much effort and time. It's just overwhelming. Even for me English was a challenge,. . . like when you hear some of the accents from West Africa,. . . I couldn't understand for a while (Samuel, USA).

Students found their classes were preparing them practically for ministry. They appreciated opportunities to develop ministry and leadership skills in class, in their practicums, on the student council, and in their work study jobs. They developed these skills by doing oral presentations in class, by being a teaching assistant for a professor, by doing work study in the IT lab, and by observing the teaching processes at AIU. Their practicums in churches helped them gain confidence and

experience teaching, developing curricula and other ministry. They watched teachers teach, learning from faculty as models. Some noted the small class sizes at AIU as an advantage to getting attention and mentorship from professors. Some learned new skills because of their family situations, such as cooking, marketing, and balancing roles in the home.

3. Student Cognitive Changes by Knowledge Dimensions

In his revision of Bloom's taxonomy of learning, Krathwohl categorizes the knowledge dimensions into factual, conceptual, procedural, and meta-cognitive knowledge. These categories provide a framework to illuminate the various types of cognitive learning that students reported. The sub-categories of meta-cognition are also instrumental in understanding how students have changed more specifically in that category. See Figure 3.

| |
|---|
| A. Factual Knowledge - The basic elements that students must know to be acquainted with a discipline or solve problems in it. |
| Aa. Knowledge of terminology |
| Ab. Knowledge of specific details and elements |
| B. Conceptual Knowledge - The interrelationships among the basic elements within a larger structure that enable them to function together. |
| Ba. Knowledge of classifications and categories |
| Bb. Knowledge of principles and generalizations |
| Bc. Knowledge of theories, models, and structures |
| C. Procedural Knowledge - How to do something; methods of inquiry, and criteria for using skills, algorithms, techniques, and methods. |
| Ca. Knowledge of subject-specific skills and algorithms |
| Cb. Knowledge of subject-specific techniques and methods |
| Cc. Knowledge of criteria for determining when to use appropriate procedures |
| D. Metacognitive Knowledge - Knowledge of cognition in general as well as awareness and knowledge of one's own cognition. |
| Da. Strategic knowledge |
| Db. Knowledge about cognitive tasks, including appropriate contextual and conditional knowledge |
| Dc. Self-knowledge |

Figure 3. Structure of the Cognitive Dimension in the Revised Taxonomy¹⁶

3.1 Factual Dimensions of Knowledge

In the factual dimension of knowledge, students learned basic facts and concepts. Many reported a significant increase in knowledge, particularly related to their majors and to the African context. They gained new insights which most felt would be helpful in their future work and lives.

*The reason I came here is to be changed, to increase my knowledge. . . .
The Yoruba proverb that says if you are singing and your voice is not melodious; you don't need anyone to tell you as long as you can hear. . . .
I can tell that I have changed in terms of what I know... If your primary*

¹⁶ Krathwohl, "A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy: An Overview," 214.

objective is to get content, I think this is the best place to get it, in our area of interest, on this continent . . . and to prepare for ministry (Matteo, Nigeria).

3.2 Conceptual Dimensions of Knowledge

In the conceptual dimension, they learned theories and how the concepts fit within the larger structure of their disciplines.

I've now done this course and realize theory is with me. . . . They are like brother and sister, theory and research, side by side. Theory is needed. For me, theory was like those who go to the moon. It has brought them to my home. . . . [I] thought these are for the Western world. We don't speak like being a scientist, yet what we're doing makes you a social scientist (Jean, Nigeria).

Students learned principles for understanding the Bible. For many, AIU challenged them to new levels of analyzing and evaluating information and theories. They were encouraged to critique commentaries, to think critically about doctrine, to compare ideas, and to create their own research projects.

[I changed in my] approach of the Bible, how I can read the Bible in its' own context 'cause sometime we, and I can say that even myself, we can jump to the Bible and jump to conclusions, we think that this is what the text is really saying, but sometime we got the message wrong so after theses two years I came that I should be very careful in every text . . . and faithful in every text I'm approaching and preaching, to have a right and good message from the test, not to bring my presuppositions and thinking to the text (Timitheo, Tanzania).

3.3 Procedural Knowledge Dimension

Most international students had to learn a new system of education, so their procedural knowledge increased drastically while at AIU. By necessity, they learned various methods of inquiry, criteria for deciding which skills, techniques, and methods are appropriate for which problems and when to apply them. Some who were accustomed to more teacher-centered approaches to learning had to develop skills in discipline to adapt to the student-centered approach of many lecturers at AIU. Many struggled to become more independent learners.

When I came here, I found a very different system. The teacher is like giving highlight and sending you back to work so that you may fill the gap – don't give you everything – give you major things and he send you now to fill the gap with readings, with assignments, with whatever. So that was, that was too new for us.... You are teaching yourself, you have to teach yourself. That's the kind of learning process here. They just guide you (Marco, DRC).

One of the least favorite has also been the best. There was one particular assignment where we really were pushed . . . using only primary sources . . . we were just groping in the dark to try and figure it out and produce a decent paper, so that was a really tough exercise, but it was also one of the best learning experience, without very much

guidance...so it was just kind of being thrown into the deep end. . . . Most of it was on our own. (Paulo, Canada)

Since lecturers varied in their approaches and expectations, they also had to adapt to the context of each class, figuring out what was expected and the knowledge that would be most useful in that situation. This was a greater challenge when teachers and students were more dissimilar in teaching approaches and cultural values. So the students had to learn the AIU system in general, but also the specific expectations of each teacher, who had schooled in a large variety of contexts and systems.

You can have different lecturers; everyone . . . has his own system of writing papers, even of referencing. . . . We are using Turabian as a main, but some are like parenthetical, some footnotes (Matteo, Nigeria).

Because of the heavy work load, students were forced to develop better time management, planning, and study skills. They worked many hours, but they also learned how to discipline themselves and how to prioritize their work. They learned when to skim books and when to study in depth.

I've learned how to plan, how to use time well and using every single minute wisely (Yohanna, Malawi).

I'm not a fast reader, so I'm learning how to read more quickly and selectively . . . I think I'm more efficient in thinking, sorting out, in reading – being able to sort out what the key arguments are, what to look for – for academic reading – that's a big benefit. (Paulo, Canada).

Perhaps because of the many diverse backgrounds, students wished for more clarity from professors and more consistency across the system. They wanted expectations to be clearly laid out in the syllabi. They wanted constructive feedback on their work.

You keep saying, 'Write a good paper.' That is somehow confusing . . . but if you give me guidelines, follow these guidelines correctly, then I can do better (Timitheo, Tanzania).

3.4 Meta-cognitive Knowledge Dimension

In the metacognitive realm, students increased their strategic knowledge capacities. Critical thinking, though expected in many graduate classes at AIU, was difficult for many. Students reported growth in their reasoning and thinking abilities. They learned some contextual knowledge and also increased in self-awareness.

Previous research on master's students at AIU revealed that most students expected knowledge to be absolute and certain. They were accustomed to receiving knowledge from authorities, such as elders,

sages, and bishops.¹⁷ They were challenged when they were expected to critique various points of view and create their own evaluations regarding the knowledge claims.

Some students from Ethiopia, South Sudan, DRC, and Tanzania, for example, had previously been punished if they did not merely repeat back what the teacher said. Critical thinking had not been taught nor encouraged in their previous schools. A Sudanese student who had been taught in his Arabic school not to question the teacher but rather to repeat back what had been said found it difficult to debate with his American teacher. Lecturers often assumed students came in with these skills, so it took time for students to figure what was expected from some teachers (thinking critically, debating, or arguing in class) and to develop these skills. Likewise, students who had been taught to critique various viewpoints and to question all sources found it difficult to be in class with a professor who was expecting to be seen as the expert.

At AIU, study goes beyond what they call soaking in . . . beyond cognitive . . . like you wake up overnight . . . the learning is so different . . . a beautiful, wonderful program. . . . It's unique. It needs decoding. It's in coded form (Jean, Nigeria).

I've improved my reasoning. I can argue and find my way out (Daudi, Malawi).

Students' daily interactions within the international environment required that they develop contextual and conditional knowledge as they learned how to relate to various people and how to operate at AIU and in Kenya. All students came to AIU with considerable previous learning experiences which, no doubt, influenced their expectations of their time at AIU. Those who came from backgrounds based on more differences from the AIU and Kenyan cultures faced a steeper learning curve than others.

[The] learning approach when I was doing my Bible School and diploma was totally different from the system that I've seen here at AIU, and as well in South Africa, and even when I was in England (Isaka, Tanzania).

AIU is smaller than some of the schools people had previously attended, with only about 500 students at the time of the study. Those from large secular universities (such as Nigerians) were confounded by the more organic way education was administered at AIU. Procedures seemed unclear, inconsistent, and they were unsure of where to take their concerns and questions. Conflict resolution processes were culturally confusing to many.

Here you don't quite know where to go. Maybe that is where you get some of your worry from. You don't quite know which systems to follow.

¹⁷ John K. Jusu, "Factors of Epistemological Frameworks among Master of Divinity Students at the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology" (Doctoral Dissertation, Trinity International University, 2009), 170, 185.

And even when you do that, the general spirit around does not seem you as if you are doing something right even when your motive is right (Matteo, Nigeria).

Students also developed their self-knowledge through studying at AIU. The doctoral students in particular spoke of how much they had learned about themselves. One said “a lot of self-awareness” when he was asked how he had changed from studying at AIU. Many master’s students also grew in their understanding of what worked for them as they tried to cultivate discipline, time management, prioritizing, planning capabilities.

Conclusion

This research study described how graduate international students at one private Christian university in Kenya (AIU) reported changing. This study revealed that perspective transformation was possible at AIU, as evidenced by students’ transformed perspectives on worldview and theology. This change will prove helpful as students go out into an increasingly globalized world and as they interact with other ministers from various denominations. They will be equipped to be bridge people for God’s kingdom. However, this change took time and effort. It required some discomfort, a hard look at one’s assumptions, comrades in the process, and coaching as students considered new perspectives. It required a safe place where students were allowed to try out new ideas. It also required “scaffolding” and support from teachers as students made commitments to new perspectives. A holistic, campus-wide effort was needed, as the informal discussions around campus in grace groups, the cafeteria, and the apartments were just as important as classroom discussions in facilitating perspective transformation.

This study also uncovered that learning occurred at AIU in all of the various domains. These were worthy changes, but some of these may have been more transformational if lecturers intentionally approached them with a goal of perspective transformation. The cognitive learning goals were more intentionally taught, particularly at the factual and conceptual levels. Some psychomotor, procedural and meta-cognitive competencies were taught. For example, staff on campus taught library and computer skills and some lecturers taught students about time management or writing a book review. However, students learned many of these haphazardly, out of necessity. Explicitly teaching some of these competencies (such as critical thinking, academic writing and English) may have been more efficient. Affective learning was often more “caught” than “taught” although a few lecturers intentionally influenced students’ affective learning.

It is uncertain if or how long these changes will endure once they return home. Mezirow suggests that the more students have developed and “practiced” new perspectives, skills or attitudes at AIU, the more they

will be incorporated into their lives and in future situations. Coaching, group support, practicums, and bridging to key people back home during the AIU stay may help facilitate lasting change.

This exploratory study points to several follow-up studies. Researching how alumni have changed from their studies at AIU would shed light on which changes have been the most important and enduring. Comparing Kenyans with international students would differentiate which changes are particular to international students. Comparing students at AIU with students of other similar institutions would provide insight on various contexts. A more in-depth study on how students experience the steps of perspective transformation may reveal more about the process. Studying how faculty facilitates change as they teach would also be helpful for teachers in similar institutions.

Implications for Theological Educators

While perspective transformation involves the entire campus, this study points to several key actions faculty can take if they are sincerely interested in transforming God's people, as AIU's mission states:

Create disorienting dilemmas for the students, or utilize their existing dilemmas.

Help students check their assumptions and rethink their frames of reference.

Push them to develop alternative perspectives and try them out.

Provide coaching, support, scaffolding, and a safe environment for trying out new ideas.

Encourage students to build a learning community at AIU but also including key people back home.

Teach procedural and meta-cognitive competencies needed to learn the facts and concepts.

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