Global Citizenship Education and Experiential Learning through "One Village One Product" Project in Kyrgyz Republic

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N 2005, the Kyrgyz Republic revived a USSR-era basic "unit of local socio-economic activities." The Kyrgyz government reaffirmed the importance of communities and passed the Law on Community-Based Organizations (OCB) in February 2005.

On the other hand, Japan started implementing development and technical cooperation projects with the Kyrgyz Republic in 2006. One priority component of the projects was about community empowerment and community revitalization.

Japan has been promoting community development using the "One Village One Product" (OVOP) model. OVOP started in a rural area of Oita Prefecture in Japan in 1961. It is a government-initiated movement which empowers local residents to voluntarily lead the development of their communities. The OVOP experiment in Oita prefecture was successful and resulted in the development of an OVOP movement in Japan. The concept focuses on developing one specific product from each village, using local resources such as agricultural products, specialty items, and tourism attractions. The vision of the OVOP movement was to increase the income and wealth of local people in Japan.

Although OVOP was developed in Japanese rural setting, the Japanese government promoted and adapted it to situations in other Asian countries including Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam and Mongolia.

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), a major institution that delivers the official development aid of Japan to other countries, adopted OVOP as a major focus in its work in the Kyrgyz Republic.

It developed an OVOP model adapted to the situation in the Kyrgyz Republic and based on the lessons in the previous countries' failures and challenges in implementing OVOP projects. JICA named the model OVOP +1 Kyrgyz model. JICA OVOP +1 project was implemented in the Issyk-Kul region in 2011 after JICA's feasibility study in 2006. OVOP+1 was quite successful. The project proceeded to the next step. In 2017, the OVOP Issyk-Kul model was disseminated all over the Kyrgyz Republic with around three thousand members producing products such as felt, handicrafts, food processing, and cosmetics.

In each community with an OVOP project, an OVOP Association was organized. The OVOP Association acts as the local producer of the products of the community (village). It was decided that each OVOP Association would have "+1," which refers to the extra support system on provision of technical, marketing and logistics support. Thus "+1" include support in meeting international needs: designing and packaging products, resolving logistics issues domestically and internationally, and maintaining quality and stock controls.

"+1" is very significant because technical support such as advanced dying techniques based on expertise from Tokushima University can be extended to a community in Kyrgyzstan.¹ The technical support can also cover marketing support. OVOP felt products can be sold in Mujirushi shops (as well as online), a non-brand quality goods store in Japan. This company believes in the philosophy of simplicity and universality. Producers and support systems work together to sell their products and make profits.

Under OVOP+1 model, the community and its partner create a winwin relationship. There is also one more function of OVOP+1 model, it has a brand committee, a third-party organization that certifies brand products.

Course on Global Citizenship Education

The American University of Central Asia (AUCA) located in Bishkek in the Kyrgyz Republic has a course where students explore Global Citizenship Education (GCED) as a transformative education aimed at building a just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable society. Students learn about the universal principles of GCED: Human Rights, Gender Equality, Non-Discrimination, and Non-Violence and respect for all. This is the "International Development and Cross-Cultural Communication" course which started in 2021.

Throughout the fifteen-week course, students learn Cross-Cultural Communication theories, "Cultural Intelligence," Emotional Intelligence," "Suspension of Judgement" toward people from different cultures and different human behaviors and "Six Dimensions of Cultural Categories."

Throughout the course, students pay attention to mode of communication. Soft skills and applications, particularly communication skills, are essential including "[a]ctive listening, self-expression, paraphrasing, and reframing, assertiveness, ability to cooperate, critical thinking, ability to think critically about prejudice, ability to deal with stereotypes, dealing with emotions, problem-solving, ability to generate alternative solutions, constructive conflict resolution, conflict prevention, participation in society on behalf of peace and ability to live with change." (Ofojebe, 2014).

Students apply these ideas through communication with fellow students and other people inside and outside the classroom.

This course facilitates the development of skills needed to navigate cross-cultural communication challenges in international organizations. Countless organizations are working on economic development around the world. Their employees are a wonderful diverse mix of international experts and local practitioners. Opportunities are everywhere for misunderstandings and errors in handling local customs and traditions. To help students prepare for and thrive in a multi-lingual, multicultural world, this course provides students with a solid grounding on the relevant theories of cross-cultural communication. Students learn how to apply theories to real-world situations that students would likely encounter while working with multinational development organization.

The course uses the GCED framework that involves three domains of learning: cognitive, social-emotional, and behavioral. Non-cognitive domains such as social-emotional and behavioral domains are equally important as cognitive domain. Cognitive domain includes knowledge acquisition of local, national, regional, and global issues and their interconnectedness and critical thinking skills. Social-emotional domain encourages students to recognize the values and acquire social skills to be able to live with others peacefully with a sense of belonging to a common humanity. Behavioral domain requires students to act responsibly in making a more peaceful and sustainable world through civic engagement at both local and global levels.

Thus, at the end of the course, students should be able to:

• Identify and analyze challenges facing global organizations today. (GCED – Cognitive domain)

- Demonstrate the role of insight and attribution in Cross-Cultural Communication. (GCED – Social-emotional and Behavioral domains)
- Explain the affective, behavioral, and cognitive elements of intercultural communication. (GCED – Cognitive domain)
- Describe cultural patterns that influence how people deal with and try to resolve conflict. (GCED Social-emotional and Behavioral domains)
- Relate to the significant elements of classic, intercultural communication theories, explain their origins, and reflect on their relevance to international development practice. (GCED – Cognitive and Social – emotional domains)
- Translate a social problem into an opportunity to co-create a social value and activity by applying social projects, social innovation research, and models. (GCED Cognitive and Behavioral domains)
- Recognize major elements of sociocultural diversity within the world. (GCED Social-emotional and Behavioral domains)

Students are also expected to develop the following skills during the course:

- Good reading habits, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills (GCED Cognitive domain)
- Working independently and as part of a team through assignments and production of project videos (GCED Social-emotional and Behavioral domains)
- Emotional and Cultural Intelligence including suspension of judgment toward different culture and human behaviors throughout the course (GCED Social-emotional and Behavioral domains)
- Constructing personal reflection on one's own values, perspectives and behaviors and attitude change (GCED – Social–emotional and Behavioral domains)
- Building capacities to take responsible action personally, communally, and socially (GCED – Social–emotional and Behavioral domains)
- Learn critical thinking, creative thinking. and practical thinking (GCED Cognitive domain)

The course employs experiential learning as pedagogy. Through this pedagogy, the students are asked to come up with ideas and applicable ways to make a positive impact and lead to more peaceful and sustainable world in both personal and local levels and possibly global level.



Introduction to OVOP and GCED

Empowerment through GCED

Using experiential learning, the "International Development and Cross-Cultural Communication" course:

- integrates knowledge gained on topics assigned with experience in fieldwork;
- requires students to analyze and formulate their findings and reflections on the experience acquired from fieldwork;
- allows students to work independently and as part of a learning community, and document their fieldwork experience;
- requires students to use their skills in writing scripts and producing media materials.

Ten students in the course from different countries (Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Republic of Uzbekistan, and Japan) and belonging to different programs (Business, Anthropology, Political Science, Economics, and Liberal Arts and Science – Entrepreneurship), and leaders of the AUCA Japanese Club observed OVOP+1 projects initiated through JICA.



Course students

They were divided into three groups with different assignments:

Group 1 - Empowerment of Women through small-scale business in the villages of the Issyk-Kul region applying "The Women's Empowerment (Longwe) Framework."² Students observed female working conditions and their situation in ovop projects through the lens of the Longwe framework. They observed women's participation in the decision-making process, their access to resources including welfare, and the conscientization, participation and control aspects of the projects.



(This page and opposite page, top) Learning the felt production technique.



Visiting the new OVOP manufacturing facility in Karakol city.



OVOP shop in Karakol city.

Group 2 - Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Students studied the SDGs using resources from the United Nations.³_Before visiting the Issyk-Kul OVOP site, they gave a presentation including a game activity related to SDGs. After the visit, students reviewed the report entitled "Monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goal Indicators in the Kyrgyz Republic 2014-2018" published by UNICEF.⁴ The students observed that this UNICEF report discussed how the achievement of a number of Goals supported the OVOP. The selected Goals were 1 (No Poverty), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth, 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production).



Video presentation on SDGs.



(Bottom and opposite page, top) Students playing game on SDGs inside a yurta.



Group 3 - Global Development (New/Alternative Development Paradigm). Students in this group presented "A Framework of New/Alternative Development Paradigm" focusing on sustainability as a core principle, and emphasizing inclusive growth, a collective journey towards prosperity, and cultural considerations. They studied the P.E.A.C.E. paradigm of development and a model by Toh Swee-Hin.⁵ The students also studied "The Pursuit of Happiness: A New Development Paradigm" of David Korten.⁶

The students had a two-day trip to Issyk-Kul villages and Karakol city on 5-6 October 2023.

Issyk-Kul villages and Karakol city

The Issyk-Kul region, well-known for its stunning Issyk-Kul Lake (one of the largest and deepest saline lakes in the world), draws tourists from all over the globe. In 2011, the OVOP +1 project was introduced in the region to support local communities and promote sustainable economic development. Today, there are twelve OVOP felt workshops, four food production workshops, and two cosmetic workshops, which employ around 2,750 members. These workshops produce a range of goods, including natural-dye felt crafts, sea-buckthorn juice, jam, and oil, as well as apricot-based products like dried apricots, apricot oil, soap, and scrubs. Other unique food items like dandelion jam are also made in the region.

On the first day of the site visit, students explored a few villages: Shorburak, where they learned about the needle-felt technique; Bokonbaevo, where they enjoyed lunch and a workshop; and Ak-Terek, where they observed the wet-felt technique. The day concluded with a trip to Karakol city.

On the second day, students toured felt, food, and dyeing workshops and attended an OVOP presentation at a new manufacturing facility in Karakol, established in 2022. Visiting the OVOP shop in Karakol city broadened the students' understanding of the region's rich artisanal traditions and how these were integrated into the local economy.

The students monitored the implementation of the initial model of OVOP +1. They observed the working conditions of the women involved in the OVOP projects. They inquired into the participation of the women in the decision-making process in the projects as well as their access to resources including welfare.

They observed and critically analyzed JICA's policy of equal opportunities for local communities through development projects as a part of Japan's unique international development projects.



After the trip, Gender Group recording.

Project Output

The students documented the visit to Issyk-Kul villages and Karakol city by creating videos of their interaction with the people of the villages.

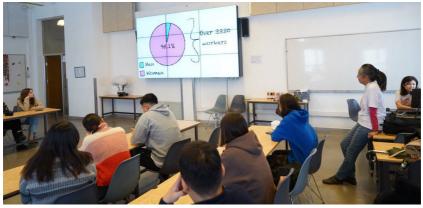
They uploaded on YouTube the video entitled "Students' Engagement with Global Citizenship Education through One Village One Product

(Kyrgyzstan)" on their visit to Issyk-Kul villages. (<u>www.youtube.com/chan-nel/UCV8 jNFg4PB3ablu2 UJ2wQ</u>) and Instagram (<u>https://www.insta-gram.com/reel/C4XhaaQO2Yl/?igsh=MWp4NDFoOTk3eGtrNQ==</u>).

The video describes the Kyrgyz society as a patriarchal society where women do more work than men. The OVOP + 1 project recognizes this situation and provides for flexible work hours and remote working conditions for women. The video shows two young girls working at a felt workshop. Felt is made mainly by middle aged and elder women, but the video shows opportunities for young girls in a rural area in the project. Earning money can teach them how to become independent and responsible at a young age. This may seem small but this can be a shift towards mental and emotional independence.



Watching OVOP and GCED videos made by students.



Women's empowerment video.



New development paradigm reflection session.

In relation to the SDGs and OVOP, the students obtained the following findings:

Goal 1: No Poverty

OVOP's community empowerment supports the Kyrgyz national economic policy. The goal of eliminating poverty necessitates community empowerment, recognized in national policy, and positive impacts on local economies. OVOP contributes to these areas.

Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

OVOP provides a large number of people with work opportunities. Under OVOP, many producers are connected with each other and with consumers. This is a truly unprecedented business model in Kyrgyz Republic.

Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

OVOP helps in the conservation of cultures, revitalization of rural communities, economic transformation and environmental sustainability in Kyrgyz Republic.

Goal 12 - Responsible Consumption and Production OVOP strives for sustainable ways of obtaining natural materials for its production. OVOP also promotes the consumption of eco-friendly and 100 percent natural products even if such products can cost higher than other products.

Regarding the Global Development (New/Alternative Development Paradigm) research, the students observed the combined use of local traditional values and appropriate technology in the OVOP projects. A student observed the time-consuming production process involved in making products that made him understand why the price of the products should be high. Learning took place as students witnessed the theories being applied into practice.

At the conclusion of the course, a final event titled "Students' Engagement with Global Citizenship Education through One Village One Product (OVOP) in Rural Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan" was held on 9 December 2023 with the support of AUCA Japanese Club. The event included discussion of the concept of GCED and the importance of Cross-Cultural Communication (Social-emotional Domain).

Three videos addressing various domains were shown:

- Empowerment of Women in the Issyk-Kul Region
- Sustainable Development Goals and OVOP
- New/Alternative Development Paradigms and OVOP.

There were around forty to fifty attendees, including AUCA faculty, staff, alumni, and students, as well as students from Kyrgyz National University, Bishkek State School № 70, Kyrgyz State Medical Academy, International University of Kyrgyzstan, and Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University.

Additionally, the students created a Kahoot quiz (an online game used as a learning tool) with fifteen questions to test the attendees' knowledge. The quiz was well-received, with active participation from all attendees.



Kahoot quiz.



Final event on 9 December 2023.

Students' Awareness of GCED

Students' awareness of GCED was measured using a survey form before the course was held and reflection paper at the end of the course. Analysis of the pre- and post-course assessment shows a number of significant points.

The pre-course survey shows that no student knew GCED. But at the end of the course, the reflection papers of all students answered the question "What is Global Citizenship Education?" Some answers cover the three domains (cognitive, social-emotional, and behavioral) of GCED:

#1. It gives me the education I need to be aware and act as a responsible global citizen. It is more than academic knowledge. It entails thinking critically, cultural competence, and social justice. Through GCED, I am inspired to think globally and respect different people's cultures as well as my own. It also makes me responsible and motivates me to play a positive role in making my society better and in affecting the global sphere.

#2. Global Citizenship and Global Citizenship Education, to me, means understanding our interconnectedness and taking responsibility for promoting positive change on a global scale. It involves recognizing diverse perspectives, fostering empathy, and actively contributing to a better world.

#3. Global citizen is the person who takes action ... in order to make a peaceful and sustainable life in his community. Global Citizenship Education fosters values necessary to become a global citizen, promotes critical thinking and the notions of interconnectedness of our world and the interconnectedness of the challenges of the 21st century, and develops knowledge about related topics like human rights, diversity, international development, SDGs, etc.

#4. Global Citizenship Education represents an innovative methodology for learning that extends beyond conventional educational frameworks. It [cultivates] awareness of global concerns, appreciation of cultural variety, and promotion of fairness and justice. By imparting essential knowledge, abilities, and moral principles, GCED strives to enable individuals to actively participate in resolving pressing international problems and constructing a more inclusive and environmentally sustainable society.

Students' Practice of Global Citizenship

A Pamirian⁷ student in the course mentioned that she faced challenges working with a group making video together with students from different academic backgrounds. But she tried to find the common ground to work with them. She mentioned that she developed her communication skills, critical skills and other video-making skills from groupmates. She was learning how to become a better learner.

During the field trip, two incidents happened. The first one was about a person in charge of documenting the field trip, he left the school's video equipment at a restaurant. A Japanese student left his expensive headphone in the restaurant as well. They noticed this problem two to three hours after leaving the restaurant. As a group, one solution came up: Call the café and order a taxi driver to bring the cameras and the headphone to the ovop shop in Karakol city where they went. All the arrangements were done by a Kyrgyz student and an Uzbek student. Another student who could speak Kyrgyz language also helped communicate with the restaurant and the taxi driver. The learning experience involved problem-solving, practical skills, communication skill, emotional intelligence skill such as caring and empathy.

The second incident was when a Japanese student accidentally misunderstood the purpose of stopping in a rest area. He started eating dinner at the rest area cafe. He even invited a Pamirian female student to join him. When the other students found out that he was eating at the café, everyone was patient and made no judgment. When the Japanese student and the Pamirian student were about to return to the bus from the café, an Uzbek student suggested to pretend that they were leaving them behind. The instructor and the bus driver agreed to do so. This was just for fun. The Japanese student and Pamirian female student realized that the bus was leaving them behind and started running toward the bus. But they were smiling while running to get on the bus. Other students on the bus were also smiling and having a good time witnessing the whole situation.

Throughout the course, as the instructor, I created a safe but challenging atmosphere for students to think outside the box. Cultural Intelligence is very crucial. Promoting empathy, non-violent communication and suspension of judgment are important. On the other hand, I encouraged them to think critically about the topics that were presented in the class.

Knowing the existence of patriarchy in Kyrgz society, students gave suggestions on ways to address the issue.

A male student suggested:

The next step could be the implementation of specific programs that address the gender issues... I personally would support and be part of community initiatives that promote gender equality, educate about women's rights and create opportunities for skill development and economic empowerment for women.

A female student suggested:

Conduct educational trainings or sessions in order to promote gender issues. Also, modify the school's curriculum (for 9, 10, 11 grade) and add some gender equality courses.

Another student gave a two-step suggestion:

First step is to educate young girls and women on gender inequality problems and to empower them to be more independent and gain equal rights at family and community levels;

Second step is to provide skills and knowledge necessary to expand women's opportunities even more. But even at the current level, I think OVOP+1 had a significant positive impact on the lives of women in rural Kyrgyzstan since these women were mostly occupied in unpaid household work.

Conclusion

The "International Development and Cross-Cultural Communication" course in AUCA is designed to make the students understand the meaning of global citizenship in its practical sense.

This objective can be achieved only with a proper pedagogy. I chose experiential learning as pedagogy in conjunction with my aim of examining how a national economic policy can take concrete form at the community level.

JICA'S OVOP +1 in Kyrgyz Republic provides the opportunity to employ experiential learning to understand community-level efforts that support the achievement of SDGs as well as promote GCED concerns particularly gender equality.

By visiting OVOP +1 projects in the Issyk-Kul region for two days and reflecting on their time on the field and workshop, students learned firsthand how small-scale business was making impact on Kyrgyzstan. Since OVOP +1 started, the local producers reached around three thousand three hundred and thirty people all over the country.

The fifteen-week course promotes the "Human Dimension, Caring and Learning" cycle where students experience working and learning together in small groups. Students learned the importance of being sensitive to each other's culture to have better communication in a diverse world. By working together, students started to be open-minded and to build trust relationships. Furthermore, students developed various communication skills by combining theories and practices.

Students in the course comprehended the challenges that Kyrgyzstan faces by learning about gender, SDGs and Alternative Development Paradigm, and the P.E.A.C.E. paradigm of development (Participatory, Equitable, Appropriate [keeping local traditional values, and appropriate technology], and Critical Empowerment).⁸

GCED brought positive changes to the thinking and behavior of the students and the AUCA community.

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234

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Endnotes

1 For more information on this, see Yumi Takahashi and Aidaana Khasanova "Living Heritage of Indigo Dyeing as a Bridge between Japan and Kyrgyzstan" that appeared in the IISNC-UNESCO, Journal of Intercultural Dialogue, 2023, volume 1, <u>https://online.fliphtml5.com/sedrz/ahul/#p=1</u>.

2 For more information on Longwe framework, see Equality and Empowerment (Longwe Framework), Equilo, <u>www.equilo.io/gender-analysis-framework-equality</u>.

3 See, for example, Take Action for the Sustainable Development Goals, <u>www.</u> <u>un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/</u>.

4 Read the full report, Monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goal Indicators in the Kyrgyz Republic 2014-2018, www.unicef.org/kyrgyzstan/reports/ monitoring-sustainable-development-goal-indicators-kyrgyz-republic-2014-2018.

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7 Pamirians live in the Mountain-Badakhshan District of the Tajik Republic. Researchers have called them "Iranian tribes of the Western Pamirs," "Mountaineers of the Upper Pyandj River," "Peoples of the Pamirs," "Prepamir Peoples," and "Pamirian Tajiks." Pamir Peoples, eHRAF Wprld Cultures, https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/cultures/roo3/summary.

8 See Toh, S. H., Cawagas, V. 2017. "Building a Culture of Peace Through Global Citizenship Education: An Enriched Approach to Peace Education," *Childhood Education*, 93(6), 533–537. https://doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2017.1398570.