



Global Engagement Begins With Proper Education

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Today, much more than providing answers, I will be asking questions. Global engagement is the ticket to solving the challenges of humanity. The management of interconnectivity among different races, various ethnic groups and diversity of religious beliefs is education on its own. Everything that is good also has some demerits; from my standpoint I believe the advantages of global engagement outweighs its disadvantages. We can't talk about globalization, international trade, and true education without talking about deliberate efforts and strategies that promote global engagement. Countries have moved from being closed societies to being open to other nations. Education has outgrown the state of just acquiring and disseminating knowledge, it is now an industry on its own. Education is an industry like every other business ventures, and this is not wrong. We have institutions setting up satellite campuses in other regions or countries; universities invest so much funds in student recruitment, they travel far and wide, beyond the shores of their comfort to publicize and market their brands. This is good, this is beautiful, and this is global! The questions our professors and educational leaders should however answer are:

1. Having gone over the cliff to bring the world to us, do we have what it takes to keep the world with us?
2. Are we willing to do what needs to be done to engage the world, not only in our own way but in a global manner?
3. Are we forcing our beliefs on the world or interacting and exchanging concepts so both parties can grow and expand?
4. Do we actually have the right motives for global engagement and education?

John Dewey said and I quote, “Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.” It is in search of this life, this true education that thousands of students have travelled from their countries, leaving behind their comfort. Thousands of international students are here, and I can assure us, without any doubt, that several thousands are still coming.

In Cyprus International University alone:

1. There are students from 81 different cities in Turkey and over 105 countries.
2. CIU had 3,545 students in 2006, the number has risen to 16,132 in 2017.
3. There were 20 undergraduate programs in 2007, this is now 53 in 2016.
4. In over a five year period the number of students has risen by 97.47%.
5. The number of students has risen by 36.7% in a year.

Why are students trooping abroad to study? Why are parents becoming more comfortable sending their children to other countries to study? We know there are several answers to these questions; however one of the answers stand out. Everyone is in search of better education, international exposure, career enhancement, global relevance, and finally, more befitting platform for their skills and talents. In summary everyone is looking for a solution!

Can North Cyprus provide the solution students seek? Are the institutions equipped to help and provide answers to the problems of their visitors called ‘the international student community’? Do we have schools that have expanded their capacity to meet the demands of the influx of students from varying backgrounds? There are students who have been in their institutions for three, four, six or many more years; have they been able to satisfy their quest for enlightenment and global engagement?

Maybe some students will find themselves saying YES we found the gold we came for. Of course there are students who will say being a student of CIU or coming to North Cyprus is a life transforming experience. Yet, there are those who will shout NO with a loud voice. There are those who believe they will be better off staying back in their nations. I have met students who say they have better infrastructure in their respective countries; students who confirmed they have better institutions and standard of living than what is obtainable here.

To such students, we must ask, if you think what you have back home is bigger, why stay in a place you claim has smaller to offer? If you are convinced your institutions in Africa, Asia etc.

are better, why stay here where you think they don't match-up? If you think it is too expensive here, why not stay in your country where you perceive cost of living is cheaper? The answers to these questions bring us to the core reasons we are here: GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT & RELEVANCE! And I will like to commend all the universities in Cyprus for playing major roles in creating opportunities for global connection.

In CIU, education has gone beyond the four walls of classrooms. Of course the class room is important! What we experience in CIU is an interplay between academics, social interaction, community involvement and global engagement. Almost every week, we have countries celebrate their independence with colleagues from other nations of the world. Events where countries are given the resources and platform to cook their local food and share with friends from other nations are regular occurrences. One of the institutions that have taken festivals of nationalities to the next level is CIU. I have wondered why CIU invest heavily in these events when they could have used the funds for other academic related activities. It is because, in addition to the publicity it creates, it promotes unity in diversity, it promotes inter-cultural and inter-ethnic connections.

Global Engagement in North Cyprus Institutions: What has been done and what can be improved.

In addition to the industry and business-like approach, keen observation shows that most of the institutions in North Cyprus have core family values built in the system; this is good! In my experience, CIU is a home, not just an institution. There is so much that has been done, and I believe there is still so much more that can be done. I will explain this with the following points:

1. **Research and Academic Environment** – If there is anything that has kept me and my colleagues in CIU, it is the quality of research at our disposal. This can be summarized as follows:
 - a. The lecturers and supervisors I bonded with. They immediately became my family away from home. They taught me, they loved me, they cared for me. I never for once fell out of place despite the challenges that came along. Hence we can say teachers play a major role in & out of the classrooms towards uninhibited global engagement.

- b. The cutting-edge research opportunities made available is another instance. I am an Energy Systems Engineering student. CIU is the home of SERC, where the largest solar photovoltaic plant installation by a university is located, in Cyprus. It serves the institution and also provides research opportunities for students. We have started welcoming IT students from other countries and schools to understudy the research going on. Scholarly articles have been published from from SERC, many more are on the way. The same goes for the Environmental Engineering Dept., Business Dept., and a host of others. The truth is, **'we can't engage people if we don't have what it takes to keep them coming.'**
 - c. The library has been expanded over time to accommodate more students. The information & computer center offers students the opportunity to carry out independent research and connect with people across the globe. Those are incentives for globalization placed at our fingertips.
 2. **Religious Activities** – As we speak, CIU is a hub of religious activities. This has never in any way distract students from their studies. Religion is a sensitive matter. The attachment people have to their religion cannot be overlooked. One of the things that has helped the growth of international community in CIU is the free and open platform given to religious organizations.
 3. **Registration Flexibility** – In an attempt to ensure no student is left out, CIU has engage strategies to absorb students and give them provisional access to classes and general education pending when their fees obligations are met. While we do not encourage students not to meet up with obligations, they are not cut-off in cases where they default. There extreme cases. What can be done?
 4. **Capacity and Career Development** – CIU has robust guidance and counselling center. Many charity platforms are owned by students, personal development institutions are run by students and these are encouraged in CIU. Sometimes students find it easier to associate with organizations led and run by students. With a little support from the institution, these has grown and it is still growing. Examples of such include PATRAL.
 5. **Accommodation** – What is the possibility of an institution accommodating 50% or more of her students? CIU is trying her best; not up to 50% but there are plans to get it there. One of the major disadvantages students see in studying here is housing. Rent increases every year at a high rate; students now pay annually as against monthly;

landlords are now discriminating, some don't want Africans, others want only ladies, some want people from same country alone to stay together in their houses. These are huge challenges. As international students, who do we run to for help? No one except our schools! If students are homeless in a foreign nation, peaceful engagement and co-existence with other students or nationalities become almost impossible.

6. **Business Development** – We need to empower our students! Create a platform where international students can operate their businesses legally under the umbrella of their respective institutions. There is so much more can be done but students feel restrained. There are students involved in mobile businesses, online marketing etc. and that's where they pay bills and some fees from. There are those with workable ideas that will generate enough revenue to take care of their fees and other basics, but there is no platform for such. If students are empowered to generate funds and not just spend, everyone has a lot to gain.
7. **Give students the future, don't just teach them about the future** – An average student, when asked about why s/he is in school, they respond, 'money, jobs, security etc'. There are people who don't go to school and have those things. Education is not meant to put us at disadvantage, but to give an edge over those who don't have it.
 - a. There has to be a connection between the classroom and the real world.
 - b. Are we training students to graduate so they can apply for jobs or create jobs?
 - c. How do we balance the business of education with the education of business?
 - d. We can't keep people if we can't engage them; if we can't engage and keep people, our investments automatically become written-off expenses.