

Global Classrooms: Virtual Exchange Strengthens Students' Ethical and Patient Safety Competence

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BACKGROUND

In response to growing calls for the internationalisation of radiography education, a sustained biennial virtual exchange was established in 2022 between radiography programmes at Lund University, Sweden, and the Central University of Technology, South Africa. This collaboration, bridging nearly 10,000 kilometres, was designed to prepare students for global professional practice by exposing them to different healthcare contexts while highlighting shared professional values. In this study, the authors evaluated students' perceptions of these virtual collaborations, which focus on two core annual sessions: 'Patient Safety' for second-year students and 'Ethics of Care from a Global Perspective' for first-year students. These topics were deliberately chosen as they represent universal challenges in radiography practice, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries.

AIM

The aim of the study was to evaluate radiography student's perceptions of an educational virtual class collaboration between a South African and Swedish university.¹

METHODS

Following the 2024 virtual class collaboration, during which students participated in mixed-country breakout groups for structured discussions, a cross-sectional online survey was administered using QuestionPro (QuestionPro Inc., Austin, Texas, USA). A total of 168 undergraduate students (88 first-year students and 80 second-year students) completed a nine-item instrument combining quantitative five-point Likert Scale questions on technical issues, participation, enjoyment, and learning outcomes with two open-ended items capturing qualitative insights and suggestions for improvement.

RESULTS

Quantitative findings showed positive responses across all measured domains: 92% reported enjoyment of the virtual format, 89% felt actively engaged in the discussions, 94% affirmed the sessions' relevance to their curriculum, and 96% valued the cross-cultural learning aspect. Technical issues were reported as minimal.

Qualitative responses provided rich context for these numerical findings. Students highlighted shared professional values across continents, noting that 'patients are prioritised everywhere'. Others highlighted the importance of diverse perspective and being 'exposed to different kinds of ideas'. Additional responses emphasised the discovery of 'common things in diagnostics', reinforcing that the radiography profession shares fundamental principles globally. Breakout rooms discussions were described as making

complex topics like ethics of care 'more plausible' through active dialogue. Engaging with peers from a different part of the world, yet within the same faculty, was considered 'an exceptional experience' because both universities teach 'practically the same curriculum'. This discovery of common ground was repeatedly cited as a highlight.

CONCLUSION

The identified challenges centred on logistical issues, including occasional noise disruptions in some breakout rooms at the South African venue and a clear need for smaller groups to facilitate more balanced participation. Several students noted that the students from the Lund University were often more vocal than their South African counterparts, suggesting that cultural differences in classroom participation styles warrant attention in future iterations. Students specifically requested more time for discussion and smaller group sizes

to enable deeper engagement with their international peers. Overall, this virtual exchange successfully promoted global knowledge exchange and strengthened understanding of shared ethical values and patient safety principles, demonstrating that virtual classroom collaborations are a valuable, scalable tool for internationalising radiography education² and preparing students for a globally connected professional future.^{1,3}

References

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