Creating an international learning experience in Higher Education Institutions: *The case of COIL*

Dr. Smitha Sunil Kumaran Nair Head, Centre for Postgraduate Studies Middle East College, Knowledge Oasis Muscat, Sultanate of Oman smitha@mec.edu.om

Internationalization is an integral part of Oman Higher Education system. Private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Oman have affiliation with international universities providing cross border education and awards to students. Will an international affiliation alone help a HEI to produce a global workforce? At Middle East College (MEC), students are given opportunity for an international learning experience besides an international quality curriculum to develop global capability, through Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL). The Internationalization, and Teaching and Learning strategies of MEC provide a framework for this initiative.



COIL is a means by which students of one or more HEIs in different countries exchange knowledge and ideas on a common topic, work collaboratively in synchronous and/or asynchronous mode, the latter being the best suitable mode especially during the current COVID-19 pandemic scenario. COIL experience generally involves solving a particular problem or a set of tasks based on the Internationalized Learning Outcomes over an online platform. The entire activity is managed, monitored and mentored by instructors at the participating HEIs.

MEC executes COIL with its international academic partner, Coventry University (CU), UK every year. The COIL projects are undertaken to widen the discipline-specific knowledge in a global context by choosing common modules offered at MEC and CU. Students from both the campuses share and peer review their ideas on the tasks assigned over the digital platform, mentored by instructors at both ends. The entire experience provides students a new perspective of interactions in a multi-cultural environment, and enables student learning with a global impact. The students' feedback shows that majority of them benefit from this activity aligned to the purpose of the task.

"It was an amazing opportunity to get to know each other and learn from each other studying at different campuses under the same university, the culture diversity while communicating, and their working and academic writing styles", Mr. Khalid Al Shukaili, M. Sc (IT) student said.

COIL creates an environment that fosters creative thoughts leading to joint research publication and innovation. The experience gained through COIL helps students build up networks internationally. This helps them explore career options abroad and sustain in a multi-cultural environment. The activities of COIL provide opportunities for students to get engaged with the world beyond the campus 'virtually' and experience a creative, distinctive, and culturally diverse learning environment. Besides providing digital competencies required for the 21st century, COIL enhances the teamwork skills wherein students are better prepared to work in virtual teams on international projects. The communication skills are also improved while working with non-native English speakers which equip them to be globally competent that would help them succeed in future careers.