

Global Collaboration in the Classroom: Teaching Scottish Poetry and Prose using Eric Falconer and Alan Longmuir

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ABSTRACT:

The modern digital classroom encourages the use of technology to enhance global collaboration. The Prairie View A&M University B-Global Program requires students to participate in a global awareness program that emphasizes language, philosophy, and culture (core curriculum areas applicable to all majors). With the increasing presence of artificial intelligence (AI) in the classroom, the inclusion criteria for classroom material included Scottish writers, musicians, and non-digitized text. The search yielded two candidates: Eric Falconer and Alan Longmuir. As musicians and writers, both authors offer a peek into their early lives in Edinburgh, Scotland, through their autobiographical works, "An Edinburgh lad" and "I ran with the gang." Excerpts from both books were used in university-level Freshman Composition and Humanities courses, where students studied the texts, discussed aspects of the works, and participated in a Zoom call with the author. Students also used technology through group chats, collaborative projects, and online research, gaining a greater understanding and appreciation of Scottish culture while increasing their vocabulary and enhancing their technological and decoding skills through global collaboration. Future plans include continued collaboration with global counterparts and a working agreement with other institutions in Scotland.

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INTRODUCTION

With the introduction of a global initiative at a Texas HBCU, instructors scrambled to find multicultural materials for their updated

courses. The Prairie View A&M University B-Global Program requires students to participate in a global awareness program that emphasizes language, philosophy, and culture (core

curriculum areas applicable to all majors). Texas is second only to California in the number of Americans of Scottish descent (census.gov), making the inclusion of Scottish writers appropriate. With that in mind, the search for contemporary Scottish writers yielded two candidates: Eric Falconer and Alan Longmuir. Musicians and writers, both authors offer a peek into their early lives in Edinburgh, Scotland, through their autobiographical works, "*An Edinburgh Lad*" and "*I ran with the gang.*" Excerpts from both books were used in Freshman Composition and Humanities courses, resulting in American students increasing their vocabulary, appreciating learning from guest speakers, and gaining a greater understanding and appreciation of Scottish culture.

II. BACKGROUND

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the need for global education grows. Students must be prepared for the international marketplace, yet the move towards more global classrooms, while acknowledged, is slow to materialize. Until recently, the few ways to communicate with other cultures in the classroom involved physical mail, expensive phone calls, or bulky videos sent overseas. With the advent of the internet, the availability of technology in the classroom increased, and instructors and students learned to learn in a whole new way. Moore and Simon note, "educational institutions have been called upon to prepare students for the challenges of a global work force, with technology and creative curricular design potentially playing a crucial role in meeting the demands of globalization" (2015). University educators are tasked with fulfilling this relatively new requirement.

One barrier to multicultural experiences is cost, as few students can afford a trip abroad. With ever-increasing tuition and admission requirements, study abroad programs are simply not in the budget for most college students. Many American students also lack a basic understanding of world geography, global languages, current events, and history, especially when compared to their European counterparts

(Stearns, 2009). Current students are expected to possess intercultural competencies; Bennet offers a definition of these competencies that includes cognitive, behavioral, and affective skills (2008). Ideally, classroom experiences would encompass all three areas: cultural knowledge (cognitive), social skills (behavioral), and curiosity (affective). This study covered all three areas through international literature, interactive interviews, and engaging content. Instructors can push students out of their comfort zones and encourage them to become researchers in their own right (Dean & Montoya, 2014). Guest speakers spark intellectual, social, and emotional interests, and students are able to create their own questions relevant to their particular interests. The online environment connects students and educators worldwide, facilitating real-time collaboration. Traditional instruction is transformed, and Kern et al. note that teachers will "use the internet not so much to teach the same thing in a different way, but rather to help students enter into the realm of collaborative inquiry and construction of knowledge, viewing their expanding repertoire of identities and communication strategies as resources (p. 21). Because students create their own questions, they are able to explore areas that may not be covered in traditional learning. The benefits of creating a collaborative classroom include "better conceptual understanding, greater persistence, deeper learning, increased engagement, superior class attendance and effective problem-solving skills" (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2014, p.4).

Learning and student outcomes are enhanced through the use of guest speakers. Guest speakers can meet the class face-to-face or via online platforms, such as Teams or Zoom. Eveleth (2009) notes, "Guests possess a certain degree of credibility that serves to reinforce course concepts. In addition, guests' examples add breadth to the examples students receive from other sources." Students are thus more fully engaged with the material and learn to co-create knowledge for better understanding. In addition, new knowledge not available from traditional sources is gleaned, resulting in unique conclusions and introspection not otherwise

available. Preparing questions requires careful consideration and research, creating a collaborative environment, as students cannot ask the same questions, which necessitates interactive classroom discussion. Students are exposed to different viewpoints, which deepens their critical thinking as they absorb information from a guest speaker rather than the more traditional lecture format.

By engaging a guest speaker from a different culture and age group, students' cultural awareness is expanded. Hasian et al. (2017) remark that guest speakers raised awareness of cultural differences and motivated students. Students learn through discourse with a guest speaker, which promotes student confidence as they proficiently learn to ask and listen, and improve their self-reliance and communication skills when interacting with someone from a different background. Hasian et al. recognize that engaging a guest speaker requires students to create questions, ask the guest speaker, and comprehend and answer the guest speaker's questions (2017). Guest speakers are an invaluable source of information and foster a unique learning environment not available elsewhere.

American college students typically complete their freshman year with limited reading comprehension skills (White, 2004). Instructors can employ a range of methods to enhance comprehension in the classroom. Relating background information or experiences through non-reading-related information can improve comprehension (Lei et al., 2010). Interacting with a guest speaker created a deeper understanding of the text. Choi and Johnson (2005) note that "video instruction is more memorable than text-based information. Videos have a precise way of describing what could be confusing or difficult to understand in text alone."

In other words, "positive emotions lead to positive cognition" (Brekke, 2023). Students are exposed to new information, which requires more elaborate processing. Additionally, "texts that are personally interesting to learners

stimulate incidental vocabulary acquisition" (Huckin & Coady, 1999).

Since interactive technology is relatively new in education, research is still needed in some areas. Little data is available on how different students perceive guest speakers: gender, age, race, and background may all influence students' perceptions of guest speakers. Kubal et al. concluded that females appreciated guest speakers more than their male counterparts (2003). Craig et al. found that no study to date has assessed how "students of various racial and ethnic backgrounds might view the benefits of guest speakers differently" (2020). First-generation college students have also been under-researched regarding attitudes towards guest speakers, and more research is needed to provide valuable, relevant information for future implementation and funding.

III. MOTIVATION AND OBJECTIVE

With a communication revolution in full swing, global collaboration is in greater demand than ever. As the business world continues to conduct commercial transactions worldwide, the need for competent global employees increases exponentially. Future workers must be trained to communicate and collaborate globally, and the university classroom has a duty to fulfill this requirement. Instructors recognize the need for global collaboration, and universities worldwide are using technology to address it. The Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) grant, Global Partners in Education (GPE), and the B-Global Initiative are examples of government support for the growth and sustainability of global collaboration in the classroom. These programs are critical for educating students to meet current and future workplace needs, and more research is needed as demand for competent, globally educated employees increases.

R1: What is the impact of global collaboration in relation to students' appreciation of a different culture, vocabulary, and interviewing, technological, and decoding skills?

H1: After studying international literature and engaging with an international guest speaker, students' appreciation of Scottish culture, knowledge of vocabulary, and interviewing, technological, and decoding skills will show improvement.

IV. STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION/METHODS

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the need for global education grows. Students must be prepared for the international marketplace, yet the move towards more global classrooms, while acknowledged, is slow to materialize. Until recently, the few ways to communicate with other cultures in the classroom involved physical mail, expensive phone calls, or bulky videos sent overseas. With the advent of the internet, the availability of technology in the classroom increased, and instructors and students learned to learn in a whole new way. This study contributes to the field of research involving the use of technology for global collaboration in the classroom, offering observations, insights, conclusions, and recommendations.

This study utilizes a quantitative survey using a pre-test/post-test instrument for

assessment. Students enrolled in Freshman Composition (ENGL 1301) at Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View, Texas, USA, in July 2026 were participants in the study. Students completed a pre-test survey consisting of five multiple-choice Scottish English vocabulary questions and five Likert-scale questions regarding their attitudes towards Scottish culture, reading, guest speakers, and technology. After studying selected works by Eric Falconer and Alan Longmuir, students engaged in classroom discussion and then met with Eric Falconer and Derek Longmuir. The students then completed a short assignment regarding their experience and answered a post-test survey. Students were encouraged to send thank-you notes to the guest speakers, which the instructor delivered to the appropriate parties. The data was then analyzed.

V. RESULTS

Survey pretests were administered to 24 students on the initial class day, after the research was explained and permission forms were signed. Students next studied both Falconer's and Longmuir's work, took part in classroom discussions, and prepared interview questions. Zoom interviews were conducted on Day 3 between the guest speaker and the students, and the survey post-test was administered. Microsoft Excel was used to tabulate the results.

Item	Pretest										Posttest				
	Pretest (correct out of 24)	Pretest (% correct)									Posttest (correct out of 24)	Posttest (% correct)			Percentage Change
1. Jaffa cake	23	99%									23	99%			0%
2. Beano	8	33%									20	83.30%			50.30%
3. Chips	8	33%									16	66.67%			33.34%
4. Lip bum fluff	9	38%									21	87.50%			49.50%
5. Gig	15	63%									21	87.00%			24%

Item	PreTest							Posttest						
	Strongly Agree (x5)	Agree (x4)	I Neither Agree Nor Disagree (x3)	I Disagree (x2)	I Strongly Disagree (x1)	Pretest Total		Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	I Neither Agree Nor Disagree (3)	I Disagree (2)	I Strongly Disagree (1)	Posttest Total	Percentage Change
6. I like reading poetry.	10	16	21	14	4	65		30	20	21	4	2	77	18%
7. I like reading prose.	20	36	27	4	0	87		30	44	18	2	0	94	7%
8. I like learning from a guest speaker.	10	40	24	4	2	80		80	20	6	2	0	108	35%
9. I like using technology to enhance my learning.	45	28	12	4	2	91		45	32	12	4	2	95	4%
10. I have an appreciation of Scottish culture.	5	0	48	6	5	64		75	28	6	0	0	109	70%

Overall, the largest gains on the vocabulary section were the terms "Beano" and "lip bum

fluff" (gains of 50% for both items). The largest increase in learning preferences was "I like

learning from a guest speaker,” with a 35% increase. “I have an appreciation of Scottish culture” increased by 70% after students were exposed to Scottish literature and interviews with Scots.

VI. DISCUSSIONS

In America, the influence of Scottish culture remains prevalent. The Dictionary of American Regional English (DARE) contains the Scots form in Standard American English (SAE). “DARE reveals substantial evidence of the maintenance of Scottish culture in America, reminding the layman as well as the scholar of the contribution of Scots and Ulster Scots to American culture; the addition of a modern global text then highlights “the linguistic and cultural immigrant contributions to America, especially from British immigrant groups (Hamilton, 1998).

Eric Falconer, “*An Edinburgh Lad*”

When students are exposed to new cultures, the first difference they may notice is unfamiliar words or phrases. Falconer’s works are written in Scottish English, a dialect of the English language derived from the Germanic languages (Maguire &

Hickey, 2012). “Oor Eric,” for instance, has

a word count of 470 words, with 77 unfamiliar words to most American college students, which equates to 16% of the work’s Scottish English or British words (Falconer, 2015). Nation contends that readers must know 95% of the words in a text for general comprehension (1990); yet most students can use context clues or Google to understand unfamiliar words. Encountering new words and traditions increased the students’ interest, as Falconer would weave the Scottish English dialect into his tales of adolescent misbehavior. These descriptions caught the students’ interest, and they enjoyed deciphering his misadventures of singing out loud in class or wandering through the boiler rooms at school, “causin’ fuss” (Falconer, 2015, p. 13, line 30). The students gained a greater understanding and appreciation of Scottish culture through

vocabulary, shared experiences, and tangible artifacts, such as food, music, and comics.

Alan Longmuir, “*I ran with the gang*”

Longmuir’s work, in contrast to Falconer’s, is written in British English (BrE) and was easier for American university students to understand. The students started with Chapter 2, “My Teenage Heart,” and the first 492 words yielded 13 unfamiliar words or phrases (approximately 2.6%), compared to Falconer’s 470 words in the poem “Oor Eric,” which yielded 77 unfamiliar words (16%). Longmuir provides context clues within his text, such as “to make way for posh flats for the burgeoning Edinburgh gentry,” and “Dad smoked Woodbines,” and “we had the ground floor flat” (pp. 46-7). Longmuir’s description of a small apartment crowded with four children, two parents, and no bathtub or shower sparked a lively classroom discussion, with part disbelief and part indignation that young children (Alan and Derek Longmuir) would have to use public baths. Both cultural and generational gaps were narrowed as we progressed through the work.

Another aspect of teaching Falconer and Longmuir involved guest speakers. Guest speakers can be defined as individuals who deliver a lecture relevant to the learning goals and assignments, with students as the primary audience (Fedoryshyn & Tyson, 2003). Each student prepared two questions to ask the guest speaker; the questions ranged from dating habits and music to food, weekend activities, school, and family life. Closed captioning was enabled to minimize any difficulties in understanding accents or phrases for all parties. Emblen-Perry notes the benefits of guest speakers: learning and student outcomes, the educational experience, engagement, and workplace readiness (2023).

For this study, a quantitative survey using a pre-test/post-test instrument for assessment methodology was used.

Research Question: What is the impact of global collaboration in relation to students’ appreciation of a different culture,

vocabulary, and interviewing, technological, and decoding skills?

Finding #1: Vocabulary scores increased when students encountered a target word while reading, rather than in isolation.

Finding #2: Students' preference for learning from a guest speaker increased after engaging with a guest speaker.

Finding #3: Students' appreciation of another culture increased significantly after

The vocabulary words used were all chosen from both Falconer's and Longmuir's works, and were specific to British English (BrE). In isolation on the pretest, the students had no context clues to determine meaning. After reading excerpts, participating in discussions, and interacting with a Scottish guest speaker, vocabulary scores increased, with gains ranging from 0 to over 50%. Encountering an unfamiliar word in context brought meaning to the word, and also encouraged retention of the meaning. Additionally, "texts that are personally interesting to learners stimulate incidental vocabulary acquisition" (Huckin & Coady, 1999). Students were given "a purpose for reading the passage of information, their thinking needs were stimulated, their curiosity needs were aroused, and they were assisted with major concepts and vocabulary" (White, 2004). The purpose of reading Falconer was to enhance their cultural knowledge and identity, and their curiosity about the work stimulated their thinking, which was further encouraged by the interaction with the guest speaker, who also assisted them with central concepts and vocabulary.

Students were mildly interested in learning from a guest speaker in the pretest survey. After interacting with a guest speaker, however, a marked 35% increase was observed in the posttest survey. Learning and student outcomes were enhanced through the use of guest speakers. Eveleth (2009) notes, "Guests possess a certain degree of credibility that serves to reinforce course concepts. In addition, guests' examples add breadth to the examples students receive from other sources." Students learned to

co-create knowledge by preparing questions that required careful consideration and research, thereby creating a collaborative environment, and by not asking the same questions, which necessitated interactive classroom discussion. Students were exposed to different viewpoints, resulting in deeper critical thinking as they absorbed information from a guest speaker rather than the more traditional lecture format.

Eric Falconer was able to share insights and alternative opinions about his writing, offering his own teenage experiences and environment as a contrast to the students'. Falconer later commented, "If someone had told the wee boy playing on the Tarzan swing, fishing in the Water of Leith, learning to play viola or scoring tries for the school rugby team that more than sixty years later he would have written a book and furthermore be discussing it with a group of law students in Texas, he wouldn't have believed it! Seriously, though, it was an absolute pleasure to meet everyone through the miracle of the Internet. These young people are the future of your country, and it looks like it will be in safe hands. Thank you for the opportunity." The novelty of speaking to someone halfway across the world kept the students engaged throughout the entire class period, and the guest speakers were sympathetic to their shared challenges. The guest speakers also benefited from the experience, as Derek Longmuir noted, "I was delighted to be invited to talk. The students were very polite, and I was profoundly impressed by the thoughtfulness and articulation of the questions that were put to me. I truly hope that they pursue their ambitions. As an older person now, it filled my heart with joy that these young students will carry on the great profession of nursing, wherever that may take them. I wish them all the very best for their future."

Student engagement increased significantly with the inclusion of a guest speaker. Falconer's writing literally came to life when the students met him via Zoom. They asked about the meanings of certain words and enjoyed the change of pace from the traditional classroom experience. Yacek and Jonas (2019) comment

that “numerous studies have shown that secondary and college students are increasingly apathetic and disengaged from their schooling. Guest speakers encourage collaborative, interactive learning, thereby increasing student engagement and participation.

The students’ appreciation of Scottish culture increased by over 70% after studying Scottish texts and speaking with Scots. By engaging a guest speaker from a different culture and age group, the students’ cultural awareness was expanded. Hasian et al. (2017) remarked that guest speakers raised awareness of cultural differences and motivated students. Students learned through discourse with the guest speaker, which promoted student confidence as they proficiently learned to ask and listen, and improved their self-reliance and communication skills in interacting with someone from a different background.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Studying Falconer and Longmuir while incorporating supplemental instruction in the American classroom led to increased vocabulary and an appreciation of another culture. With Falconer and Longmuir, the students were exposed not only to their writings, but also to cultural artifacts, background information, and guest speakers who also functioned as instructors, explaining some of the writings and sharing their own related experiences with the students. “Instructors should provide class-related topics that are exciting and interesting.

The best instructors tell stories related to the topic” (Lei, et al., 2010). Research shows that emotion and cognition influence each other, and that when students are engaged with the material, their comprehension increases. In other words, “positive emotions lead to positive cognition” (Brekke, 2023). Students are exposed to new information, which requires more elaborate processing. Additionally, “texts that are personally interesting to learners stimulate incidental vocabulary acquisition” (Huckin & Coady, 1999). The use of Zoom to connect the students with a cultural expert of the text was beneficial, as “modern technology had a large impact on student learning and how the instructor provided enhancement materials” (Lei et al., 2010).

With the introduction of a global initiative at a Texas HBCU, instructors scrambled to find multicultural materials for their updated courses. The search for contemporary Scottish writers yielded two candidates: Eric Falconer and Alan Longmuir. Musicians and writers, both authors offer a peek into their early lives in Edinburgh, Scotland, through their autobiographical works, “*An Edinburgh Lad*” and “*I ran with the gang.*” Excerpts from both books were used in Freshman Composition and Humanities courses, resulting in American students increasing their vocabulary, appreciating learning from guest speakers, and gaining a greater understanding and appreciation of Scottish culture.

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