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A DESCRIPTIVE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ON FAITH-LEARNING INTEGRATION IN CONSTANTA MARITIME UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Seafarers' cultural background is an important factor when talking about appropriate working conditions and daily life activities on board the ships. Nowadays, merchant ship crews are multinational. This is why nautical students should be prepared to face with intercultural differences during their training education. It is time to admit that, in this particular situation, standardised teaching methods might be insufficient. In this respect, we tried to integrate students' faith to our teaching, in order to facilitate learning and integration of international students. The present case of study deals with international students enrolled in the study program called 'Navigation and Maritime' and 'River Transport', second and third year of study. It is about 83 international students and two lecturers teaching 'Heat transfer and Thermodynamics' and 'Meteorology and Marine Hydrology'. The findings of this descriptive qualitative research indicate that implementing faith knowledge of students in the teaching process allows a better understanding of theoretical knowledge and a smoother integration in the focused multicultural groups, as seen at the end of the semester.

Keywords: seafarers, multiculturalism, religion, thermodynamics, meteorology

1. Introduction

In the actual era of globalization, maritime transportation plays a key role in the international sustainable development. Since resources might not be at the hand of all communities and many goods are produced in certain zones, maritime transportation is seen as a significant pillar of globalization. It is obvious that goods movement matters in our daily life; people take advantage every day of items brought from all over the world. The vast majority of them (around 90%) are transported by sea due to the efficiency of this transportation mean [1]. In this context, it is absolutely normal to observe the impact of globalization on human resources involved in the international shipping industry. Moreover, shipping is a multicultural business, seafarers' safety behaviour being strongly influenced by their national cultures [2]. The need of

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professionals on board the ships resulted in the multinational crews, which are highly qualified, according to international standards; this is due to the fact that modern ships imply advances technologies, specific for huge and completely automated machines [3].

Navigation is an activity developed in early civilisations in order to fish, explore new territories or establish trade routes. Navigators are still facing dangers generated by weather, geographic or technological hazards and not only (sea piracy). Brody's findings in this respect might be resumed as follows: as a result of dangers at sea, ancient seafarers were a category with religious needs, in search of divine protection; Brody introduces the concept of 'specialized religion' in order to explain the unique aspect of cult practices of this professional group [4].

For many, such as Sanguineti is, scientists and academicians should pay attention to the constructive connection between Science and different religious profiles. His opinion on this issue is that Science do not offer answers to all our questions while the absence of God will be filled by Science or Nature - which might be often disappointing [5]. Howard Ecklund et al published a first survey data including biologists and physicists at all carrier stages, from eight regions around the world, countries with different degrees of religiously and scientific infrastructure. They found that over half scientists declared to be religious and to the not see Science in conflict with their faith [6].

Seafarers are professionals with strong technical skills. They are trained not only to drive the ships, but also to control the systems on board the ships, whether it is about navigation or engineering systems. Seafaring is a particular carrier due to the complex duties on board the ships and because of the specific stress factors such as separation from the families, multiculturalism, lack of quality sleep or pour recreation opportunities. In present times, researchers, such as Dragomir, conclude that countries providing seafarers are featured by strong religious beliefs, so that on board of modern ships will be encountered interactions between different religions [7]. Some researches reveal the benefit of integrating workers' faith in their work affirming that on board the ships, a free religious believe environment contributes to the well-being of seafarers and to the achievement of cohesion of the crew [8, 9].

Multiculturalism on board the ships is a reality. In Constanta Maritime University, future seafarers are trained in this respect throughout their curricula: students from the specialization 'Navigation' study the subject 'Multiculturalism' in the second year. But due to different reasons, such as Russia-Ukraine war, the lack of higher maritime education and training institutions in countries bordering oceans and sea or simply for soft reasons, such as study and learn differently, gain independence, gain knowledge on a new culture - multiculturalism is encountered earlier in Constanta Maritime University. In this academic institution, besides Romanian students, there are also trained foreign students coming from Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Qatar, Algeria, Tunis, Ukraine and Greece. It is well known the fact that international students have to face academic challenges, social isolation,

religious and cultural adjustment. In the light of above mentions facts, this paper deals with academic multiculturalism and some attempts of faith integration into teaching practices, in Constanta Maritime University. The adaptation and adjustment of international students might be supported, as the findings of this paper indicate, by faith-learning integration. In this research were involved two lecturers teaching 'Heat transfer and Thermodynamics' and 'Meteorology and Marine Hydrology'. Each of these lecturers has more than twenty years of teaching experience in Constanta Maritime University. The findings of this paper were derived from the lecturers' observations. It will be noticed that this new approach in teaching motivated international students in their integration and learning processes.

2. The situation in Constanta Maritime University (CMU)

Formerly established in 1972, Constanta Maritime University (CMU) it is now an important provider of higher educated professionals for the most advanced ships of the international fleet. The university, as well as all study programs, are being regularly verified and accredited by the Ministry of Education and Research though the Romanian Quality Assurance Agency. The Romanian Naval Authority performs yearly audits and checks the full compliance of the study programs with the mandatory requirements of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) - The International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watch keeping for Seafarers (STCW Manila). Students enrolled at Constanta Maritime University can choose between three study programs: Navigation and Maritime and River Transport, Naval Electromechanics or Electrical Engineering. After four years of higher education, the above-mentioned programs enable future seafarers to be recognised on board for their specific engineering and managerial skills and to respond to the challenges of international maritime shipping activities. CMU graduates are worldwide appreciated for their strong theoretical knowledge and for their practical skills as well; a proof in support of what has been stated being the high employability rate of these graduates.

According to the curricula, 'Heat transfer and Thermodynamics' is a discipline provided in the second year of study, second semester, while 'Meteorology and Marine Hydrology' it is scheduled in the third year of study. The structure of nationality and religious believes is given below (Table 1 and Table 2).

In his study, Siahaan describes how Biology, Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics lecturers brought faith learning integration into their teaching practices. During their classes, lecturers compared the theory with Biblical teachings, concluding that the Christian knowledge should not be separated of other knowledge [10]. Taking advantage of this experience 'Heat transfer and Thermodynamics and Meteorology' and 'Marine Hydrology' lecturers in CMU aimed to facilitate the multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious cohesion of students enrolled in 'Navigation and Maritime' and 'River Transport' study

program (second and third year of study) and to facilitate the theoretical knowledge understanding by linking, throughout different examples, their faith with the curricula. Thus, international students are encouraged to participate to launched debates and to find common points in their religious education - when dealing with the provided scientific topics.

Table 1. Cultural diversity of students enrolled in the 2nd year.

Country	Number of students	Believer	Religion
Irak	1	Yes	Muslim
Kenya	1	Yes	Catholic
Qatar	1	Yes	Muslim
Algeria	1	Yes	Muslim
Egypt	2	Yes	Muslim
Syria	2	Yes	Muslim
Greece	1	Yes	Orthodox
Tunisia	1	Yes	Muslim
Ukraine	21	Yes	Orthodox
Nigeria	6	Yes	Catholic

Table 2. Cultural diversity of students enrolled in the 3nd year.

Country	Number of students	Believer	Religion
Irak	2	Yes	Muslim
Egypt	1	Yes	Muslim
Tanzania	1	Yes	Catholic
Ukraine	38	Yes	Orthodox
Nigeria	4	Yes	Catholic

3. Qualitative description of the observational research developed by lecturer responsible with 'Heat transfer and Thermodynamics'

Since the beginning, the lecturer exposed the fact that 'Heat transfer and Thermodynamics' are interlinked sciences. Thermodynamics studies the energy conversion; it enables the deeper understanding of thermodynamic process and assesses the efficiency improvement potential. Heat transfer deals with the energy flow caused by a temperature difference. According to Bejan, the dependency between heat transfer and thermodynamics shows its utility due to the fact that thermodynamics of heat transfer is a strong tool in the analysis of the performance, aim, function and design of thermal systems [11].

This lecturer has encouraged she's students to explore the faith - Science interconnection, in her new approach, by introducing the findings of Sanchez-Canizares. Sanchez-Canizares affirms that scientists dealing with Thermodynamics introduced religious views into scientific debates [12]. Muslim researchers as well have studied the relationship between Thermodynamics and religious dogmas, such as Ashrafi et all and Dadach; they have concluded that

this interconnection brings benefits not only to scientists, but to the humanity as well [13, 14]. The lecturer considered that the famous scientists, mentioned in the research of Sanchez-Canizares, whom perspective on Thermodynamics transmits that the religious analysis of the world should not be seen as fractured by the scientific one, will help international students to better understand pure theoretical knowledge. In this respect, some of the examples mentioned during her teaching will be described below. William Thompson believed that the laws of Universe were discovered and explained by scientists, but the divine intervention was or necessary or probable [12]. When talking about laws of Universe, it is important to notice that many researchers considered that the first law of Thermodynamics (dealing with energy conservation) and the second law (dealing with the dissipation of energy) are two major laws of the Universe. 'Heat transfer and Thermodynamics' lecturer has explained that nothing is lost or gained, as the law of conservation states; the amount of energy will be kept constant, even if it is transformed from one form to another. Students were asked if they see any link with their religious beliefs. Muslims students affirmed that from Quranic perspective, the first law deals with only with the energy conservation and not with its source. They said that Allah is the Creator of everything from nothing. Christian students recognized a similar message in the Bible, Genesis - Chapter 2: after the Universe has been created, the Creation was finished for good. With other occasion, the lecturer gave an example of annihilation process: new particles can be created from energy alone. She informed students that Kelvin and Joule believed that only God can annihilate mechanical work [12]. Marine engines are able to move ships from one port to another, by converting heat into useful work. Wind powered cargo ships are the future when talking about lowering greenhouse gas emissions. Muslim students said that the wind is a sign of Allah's Mercy. Allah is guiding people on land and on sea and He sends the winds as heralds of glad tidings. Christian students completed by saying that wind is associated with the Holy Spirit. We cannot see the wind, just feel its power - so it is with the Holy Spirit. All the students agreed that humans are the stewards of this world - which is God's Creation, so we have to protect and preserve it. As we have a responsibility towards environment, all students easily understood the key role of Thermodynamics played in the study of renewable technologies - which will be studied in the following years.

Other topic studied during 'Heat transfer and Thermodynamics' is the second law of Thermodynamics which introduces the entropy - a thermodynamic property used to indicate the feasibility of a process. Clausius defined this concept by the use of heat and temperature. For many years, this law is also accepted by some as the law of increased entropy.

Entropy increases in closed systems. All real processes take place only in the direction in which entropy increases; spontaneously occurring processes will lead to the Universe's entropy increase. 'Heat death' is a phenomenon in which the Universe reaches its state with the largest possible value of entropy, so that all the processes will stop. Kelvin christened the possibility of heat death of the Universe, since entropy can only increase in a closed system as the Universe

also is; the motivation is that in the state in which maximum entropy it is reached, it is impossible to extract work anymore [12]. According to Ben-Naim, the entropy cannot be defined for the entire Universe. He states that it is not yet shown where the entropy should increase in the Universe and what process should be [Ben-Naim, arXiv: Chemical Physics, 2017, 1-25]. International students were enthusiastic when debating on the second law, according to the lecturer's observations. If previously Muslim students were the first in linking faith with Science, this time Christian students connected the concept of entropy with the Apocalypse. They remembered that in Bible it is written that "a curse devours the Earth"; they also said that they heard about the 'curse of decay' and decay in life in nothing else than gradual death. In turn, Muslim students found a correlation between the second law and their religious beliefs. Their connection was expresses as: the second law of Thermodynamics deals with the directionality of the processes - Allah created the Universe through a clearly directed process; He created the heavens, the Earth, the Sun and the Moon and after that, the rest of the Universe.

According to the lecturer, this scientific-religious link was helpful not only in the learning process, but in the cohesion one as well. Her affirmation is based on the observations of student's behaviour. More exactly, students were assigned with the preparation of two assignments during the semester. One was planned to be delivered after four weeks of study, while the second one was scheduled for the penultimate week (week number thirteen). Students were instructed to form groups, according their affinities, and to work in teams. The first assignment was dealing with gas mixtures. Students were free to select the fuel composition to be burned in a marine gas turbine, in order to solve the specific requirements. The second assignment topic was the calculation of the thermal efficiency of a Diesel engine. Students were free to choose the atmospheric parameters of the air.

In respect with gas mixtures, the lecturer explained that in the vast majority of cases, the thermal working agents are gas mixtures (such as air or combustion gases). When asked, students replied that the air is mentioned in their Holly Books. In their opinion, 'air' is a sign of God/Allah. Christians said that God created the beings and the Holy Spirit animates their life. In fact, they were thinking to the Bible verse Job 33.4 "The Spirit of God has made me and the breath of the Almighty gives me life". Muslims said that the Earth's upper atmosphere plays a protection role. Indeed, In the Holy Quran, verse 21:23 it is written: "And we have made the heaven a roof. Safe and well-guarded. Yet they turn away from its signs".

On other note, the lecturer explained that thermodynamic cycles are closed loops in which the thermodynamic system turns back to its initial state. It consists of at least two processes, which take place according to a given order. Thermodynamic power cycles convert heat into mechanical work; they are the basis for the operation of heat engines. From their everyday experience, students said that they have heard about 'diurnal cycle' as a result of the Earth's full rotation around its axis, thus being possible the day/night cycle. All students

affirmed that the Creator created day and night and alternate between them. To be more precise, Muslims indicate Sura Al-bAnbiyya verse 33: "It is He who created the night and the day and the sun and the moon….". Christian students mentioned Genesis 1.5: "God called the light Day and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day."

For this first assignment, students formed three teams: one formed by Arabs, other formed by Nigerians and the Kenyan student, while the third team was formed by Ukrainians and the Greek student. It is obvious that the teams were formed on religious, racial and cultural basis. All three assignments need to be improved, after the evaluation. After a semester of debates including aspects beyond technical knowledge, such as religious beliefs, the structure of the teams was totally different when solving the last assignment. This time, only two groups were established: one team was composed by part of the Arab students (coming from Iraq, Qatar and Algeria), the Kenyan student, part of Ukrainians (10) and part of Nigerians (4), while in the second team were seen Arabs (coming from Egypt, Syria and Tunis), Nigerians (2), the Greek student and the rest of Ukrainians (11). The first observation is that instead of three smaller groups, at the end of the semester resulted two greater groups. This situation has a positive aspect due to the fact that on board the ship, seafarers have to show skills such as adaptability, easy communication, flexibility or team work. The second observation is that finding common points in their religious background, while gaining scientific theoretical knowledge, learning and cohesion are achieved easier. This statement is based on the fact that the assessment of the results for the last assignment indicated an improvement in the integration of knowledge, skills and attitudes of international students.

4. Qualitative description of the observational research developed by lecturer responsible with 'Meteorology and Marine Hydrology'

The 'Marine Meteorology and Hydrology' course and seminar aim to familiarize students with the main processes and phenomena occurring in the atmosphere and on land surfaces and ocean basins and, by implication, with the meteorological phenomena involved in navigation.

From the beginning, the lecturer made the students aware that they would encounter notions they knew from their native culture, about the production of which they had some idea since their basic education, but which would now be explained to them in order to be better understood and easier to identify in their future professional activity. Most of the notions are related to weather and the meteorological elements that are taken into account when characterising the weather and climate of certain areas of the globe.

Each of the students present agreed that weather forecasting has a certain amount of risk, that weather is always unpredictable and that, no matter how sophisticated and powerful forecasting software has become today, there is ultimately an 'unseen authority' that 'decides' the final appearance of the weather, independent of our volition and knowledge. It has opened the way for

open discussion with Orthodox, Catholic and Muslim students, who acknowledge certain references from their native religious beliefs to the knowledge side of the weather.

In the past, people were more connected to the land and Nature than we are today; they were also more dependent on the weather and more powerless to overcome its effects. Today, only in the midst of Nature's greatest phenomena do most people turn their eyes upward. Only desperation sometimes brings us to the situation of correlating the unleashed force of nature with a divine power.

At the beginning of the semester, the lecturer has announced the topics of the seminar hours and the topics to check the knowledge. At the end of the semester, each student must write a synthesis paper analysing each meteorological parameter for a port in a region of the world (a sea basin, a maritime region with a certain meteorological specificity, etc.). It is a summative work, with students adding after each seminar session the information learned and processing numerical data specific to each chosen weather station. The subject was met with hesitation at first, with students tending to assign their ports to the same area according to ethnic (and thus religious) groups. Ukrainian students, visibly affected by the unexpected move to a university in another country due to domestic political events that led them to move to Romania in their third year of college, were initially quite reluctant to communicate with their peers, preferring that everyone only choose ports of their home area and surrounding areas. They proved to be good and fluent speakers of English, allowing the lecturer to develop the discussions greatly. The lecturer advised them to think better about the choice of the areas where they will choose the subject because there are chances that many other areas will be more attractive in terms of meteorological events and their variation. The teacher chose to show an application video for each session to make the concepts more relevant and easier to understand. In order to increase the interest of the audience, a film on weather superlatives/extremes was shown, which had the desired effect.

Presenting the case of high intensity storms endangering the fate of seafarers' voyages, the Christian students made a correlation between the biblical sayings of Psalm 89.9 and the importance of a good knowledge of meteorological theory on board: "You rule over the troubled sea; when its waves rise, you calm them". The discussion then moved on to the religious contexts mentioned in the foundational books of the world's religions where sailors benefited from divine protection. Some of those nations have the belief that a god can either choose to help - for example, by sending much-needed rain - or to harm - for example, by causing bad weather [15]. When resource stress is taken into account, the climate variables still have strong links to religious beliefs. R.C. Ember et al said that it is speculated, for example, humans experience more anxiety during droughts than during floods, which may lead to a higher urge to think that supernatural creatures are not just in charge of the weather but may also aid people in difficult situations.

The biblical authors have a lot to say about the weather. Less extensive but perhaps no less fierce storms are said to have served as instruments of God's wrath in later times, as in the case of Jonah (Jonah 1.4-15). God showed favour to the sailors who threw Jonah overboard and calmed the storm (verse 15). King David celebrates other times when the Lord did the same (Psalm 107.23-30).

Muslim students recognized in this example an analogy with the story of the prophet Yunus/Jonah who is said to have been called to preach to the people of Nineveh. Yunus departs the city and boards a ship. He decides that enough is enough and sets sail far from the location of his failure. But once at sea, a storm develops, and the crew is afraid. These pagan sailors decide to cast one man overboard to calm the storm because they believe the sea gods must be angry with them. They draw the number that says Yunus ought to be thrown overboard [16].

The contexts in which the students identified similarities between the religious teachings of their confessions paved the way for wider discussions within the group of students, increased their attention during explanations and also increased their participation during open discussions with the teacher.

A more special moment was that of the explanations about the optical phenomenon known as the rainbow. Refraction is the process through which water droplets, such as raindrops or fog, scatter the Sun's light, resulting in the formation of rainbows. Refraction happens when sunlight bends in a different direction as it travels through an object that is denser than air, like a raindrop. When the light is refracted, it enters the raindrop, is reflected off the back, and then is refracted once more as it leaves the raindrop and makes its way to the eyes.

The belief of Christians concerning the rainbow is recorded in Genesis chapter 9.12-16 of the Bible. The appearance of the rainbow is believed to remind God of his covenant with man to never destroy the Earth again. The belief of the Muslims as pertains to the rainbow is similar to that of the Christians. Although there are no records of the rainbow in the Quran, two hadiths have something to say about it, one record is as said by Ibn Abbas: "The rainbow is security for the people of the earth that they will not be drowned. The Milky way is the door of the heavens and forms a furrow through it". [17]

The professor added in a friendly manner with reference to the secular significance that the appearance of the rainbow had in the vision of the president of the United States of America on the occasion of his visit to Romania in 2002 and which he presented in his book 'Decision Points' [18]: " ...the rain stopped and a very clear rainbow appeared. It stretched across the sky to the back of the balcony, which was lighted as a memorial to freedom. It was an amazing moment, and I whispered: 'Today, God smiles on us'", emphasizing that the appearance of the rainbow was "an amazing moment" for the "young democracy".

All the present students concluded that the appearance of the rainbow is a guarantee of a good mood, joking that the Meteorology seminars also provide this context. All these premises contributed to the strengthening of relations

between students belonging to different nationalities and religions. It was found that the discussions created the framework for the restructuring of the working group component for the final topic. The students no longer grouped themselves based on ethnic and implicitly religious criteria, but chose to form groups based on the criteria of affinities over the areas where certain specific phenomena took place, which they now discussed much more relaxed. In the end, a student from Iraq together with a student from Egypt and ten Ukrainians chose to characterize ports in tropical cyclone incidence areas, two Nigerians, the Tanzanian student and nine Ukrainians went to ports in monsoon areas, eleven Ukrainians and an Iraqi considered the areas with winter phenomena interesting and the others (Nigeria and Ukraine) grouped themselves by choosing Asian ports.

The Ukrainian students proved to be better technically, in the structuring of information and documentation in terms of the data to be processed, and the Nigerian and Iraqi students were more extroverted and communicative; the finality of group work proving much more efficient.

The two lecturers involved in this study agree with the fact that working with people from various nationalities offers the possibility to observe how things work within a small population of people who have different languages, different traditions and different religions living in one restricted place [19]. They found that by working in a multicultural group each member's knowledge will be improved. This may be of advantage if a person transfers to a shore-based job where such knowledge can translate directly into a business advantage.

Language was found to be a critical issue for multinational groups. Use of mother tongue rather than a common language (English) fostered suspicion among multilingual crews so that this could result in frustration. Horck said that some European persons who work with people from Eastern cultures prefer to stay in groups in order to easily communicate and share similar values. People in groups of more than four persons, tend to take their culture with them to their new environment [20]. The lecturers have observed a similar student behaviour.

5. Conclusions

This study is an attempt to assess the results of faith-learning integration in teaching practices of 'Heat transfer and Thermodynamics' and 'Meteorology and Marine Hydrology' lecturers in Constanta Maritime University. These two lecturers used international students' religious knowledge while explaining the content of their disciplines. They used a common strategy: scientific knowledge understanding by linking students' faith with the curricula, throughout different examples taken from their own religion.

The two lecturers have observed the behaviour of their students during the whole semester. This qualitative assessment shows clearly that exploitation of students' faith results in their academic and spiritual growth. This finding is very important due to the specificity of seafarer profession.

The two lecturers have observed an improvement in the students' behaviour as a result of their unique approach. If, at the beginning of the semester, students solved their tasks by working in groups constructed on religious and geographic criteria, at the end of the semester students were observed to work in groups made up according their affinities. Working in multicultural and multi religious groups allowed gain of satisfaction and gives hope that future seafarers will be able to face the specific challenges on board the ships.

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