

EUTOPIA CERTIFICATE OF INTERNATIONALISATION

Student portfolio

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I, Shayan Samuel Reddy, grew up in Durban North, a suburb in Durban just fifteen kilometres from the Indian apartheid-created township where my mother grew up. Growing up as a South African Indian in a predominantly white middle-class suburb in post-apartheid South Africa, the concept of interculturalism became second nature to me. Interculturalism refers to the interaction and dialogue between people from two different cultural backgrounds. From a young age, interculturalism played a major role in my life through the way I interacted with other groups of people in the various realms of my life, whether it be at school or home with my family. I unknowingly became accustomed to engaging in cross-cultural exchanges with people in Durban North who had a culture different from that of my family's, as well as people from various other cultures, such as the isiZulu culture.



Me and my parents

My intercultural skills evolved as I chose to study French as a second additional language in high school. When learning a language, one must also get to know the language in the context of the cultures in which people speak it. In the case of French, the cultures of people from France and francophone Africa. Through the French literature and textbooks, I learnt much about French culture in France and cultures in Francophone Africa such as the Congolese and Senegalese cultures. Additionally, I was fortunate enough to experience two different French teachers, one from France and one from Mauritius, who both offered me the opportunity to engage in respectful dialogue between the South African and French/Francophone cultures as I was learning the French language. Learning French in high school ignited a passion for languages and for getting to know other cultures. This was my first taste of internationalism, in other words, interculturalism as an interaction between two different national cultures, and to an extent, languages in the context of these cultures. Therefore, when the opportunity came up for me to go on a bilateral exchange



Me at my primary school

in Germany towards the end of high school, due to my nurtured interest in internationalisation, I was inclined to grab it.

The process of my bilateral exchange entailed me and a family hosting a German student for six weeks, then me going to Germany to stay with his family for six weeks. This life-changing exchange was facilitated by Rotary, an international organisation, which ran a youth exchange with the goal of cultural exchange between two young people, each getting an opportunity to experience the other student's culture. Hosting "exchange brother" was a brand new experience of interculturalism for me and forced me to reflect upon the nuanced aspects of the different cultures in my surroundings and how they interacted and influenced one another. South Africa boasts being an

extremely culturally diverse country that has various different cultures, which, post-apartheid, were able to mix to create a melange, which is our national culture, which, however, is slightly different depending on who you talk to. Teaching my exchange brother about the cultures with which I personally interact and the differences between them, but how they can co-exist peacefully with respect, exchange, and dialogue, allowed me to see that the concept of interculturalism is woven into the fabric of society in our country. I was able to teach him what this looked like practically as well by showing him beloved television shows which contained local humour and cultural idiosyncrasies which I then was able to explain to him. Doing this allowed my exchange brother to see how interculturalism plays a major role in South African society and how the diversity of cultures adds to the complexity of what we consider to be our national cultural identity. Having my exchange brother with me in South Africa was an opportunity to explore internationalisation in my cultural context. Additionally, I was able to learn about his culture and more about the "German national cultural identity" from his perspective, allowing me to delve further into internationalism and the dialogue between two different national cultures. Through respectful dialogue and teaching each other about our respective cultures, I was able to see both the similarities and differences between our countries. This helped us to connect further and foster a friendship, which laid the foundation for a comfortable time during my stay in Germany with his family. This internationalism interaction motivated me to learn more about the German culture and language before my departure to Germany to stay with his family a few months later. Through learning some of the basics of the German language, I was able to appreciate even more of the German culture, which was useful in preparing me for the interculturalism and internationalism I was about to encounter during my time in Germany. I was motivated to learn more of the German language because, as I had already discovered with learning French, I was able to learn about the language in the context of the culture and further learn cultural nuances, bridging the divide between our cultures, leading to me having a better understanding of him and his family.

Going to Germany, I had somewhat of expectations of the culture in which I was to live based on what I learned from my exchange brother



Me, my brothers and my exchange brothers



and from what I learned from researching German culture and language. Having learnt some basics of the German language, I was able to pick up much of the language, especially vocabulary, through the inescapable German dialogue I encountered daily. My exchange family lived in a relatively small town not too far from the cosmopolitan city. Being in a smaller town meant that fewer people were comfortable conversing in English as they had little interaction with non-German-speaking, especially English-speaking, people. The fact that I knew a bit of the language also allowed me to engage in intercultural dialogue and interaction in a respectful manner, as I exhibited respect in attempting to appreciate and adapt to the culture in which I lived. I found this to be greatly appreciated by my host mother, who struggled a bit with English. Therefore, my being able to understand her when she wasn't able to express herself in English and only in German allowed me to better understand her and even engage in dialogue to share my culture and learn about their culture, which fostered a good relationship between us, which made my stay with the family even more comfortable. Additionally, people at the local school which my exchange brother attended, were more receptive to me as they appreciated the fact that I made the effort to speak their language and learn about their culture making it easier for us to communicate and interact therefore demonstrating to me that internationalism being a form of interaction and dialogue between two national cultures is important in making the dialogue and interactions respectful and an opportunity to learn about one another and find similarities in order to bridge the cultural divide between us. I was also able to enjoy and properly appreciate authentic cultural experiences without experiencing too much culture shock, as I was already minutely introduced to the culture. However, I encountered some difficulty with the aspects of the culture that were deeper than the stereotypes and known idiosyncrasies. Dealing with the cultural iceberg was quite difficult in terms of the fact that there were understood facets of the culture that are beyond the surface culture, which was something I had to learn through experience, and was something I could not prepare myself for. An instance where I encountered this cultural iceberg is when we had cold sandwiches for supper on many occasions. Unbeknown to me, "Brotzeit", a meal where German bread rolls are enjoyed with various cold cut meats, cheeses and other condiments, is not only a breakfast or lunch concept but also supper. In Germany, lunch was the meal where a large, warm, filling meal was enjoyed which was the opposite in South Africa where most of us enjoy this kind of meal for supper and a "Brotzeit"-type-of-meal for lunch. This small cultural difference which was not something previously known to me to be a German cultural norm allowed me to reflect upon how the small practices embedded in our cultures are formed by the way we view the world like in this instance where one culture viewed a different meal as more important than the other.



Me at the town's local Christmas market



The local school



My host family

In the same manner, encountering this cultural iceberg made me reflect on the aspects of my culture and the national culture of South Africa, which are often overlooked or regarded as “normal” and how my exchange brother may have struggled with this during his stay in South Africa. The cultural iceberg refers to the “deep culture” which lies below the “surface culture” entails aspects of the culture which are implicitly learned and things people do unconsciously. This facet of internationalism was something I was abruptly surprised by, as I had embarked on my exchange with the idea that, due to my experience with intercultural exchanges back home and the little internationalism experiences I had, I would be prepared to live within the local culture and not feel isolated or out of place. However, I feel that this experience prepared me for university, which I was to come back to once my exchange was over.

Interculturalism grew to become an even more prominent facet of my life as I moved away from home to university, where I encountered people who came from vastly different cultural backgrounds – even other South Africans who, however, shared the same national culture. My experiences and social interactions with international cultures up to this point have motivated me to get involved with the Stellenbosch University “Matie Buddy” programme. This programme entails us, Stellenbosch University students, interacting and welcoming international exchange students at the university and helping them adjust to the university and the culture in which they are to spend time. The Matie Buddy programme is a form of internationalisation that occurs in South Africa and in the South African cultural context, as it is a university initiative of exploring internationalisation “at home”. Having the international experiences with my learning of the French language and my exchange in Germany, I was excited to reencounter internationalism through dialogue and interactions with people from different cultures from across the world. My knowledge of the French and German languages and cultures allowed me to better communicate with the exchange students who, for the most part, were more receptive to someone communicating with them in their mother tongue. In this way, I was able to recount much of South Africa’s history and how it affects our culture today, and how the melange of different cultures forms a united national culture, which is also a bit different for different groups of people. This evoked memories of hosting my exchange brother in my home, as I similarly was encouraged to reflect on my own culture and the other cultures around me, which contribute towards the amalgamation that is our national culture as South Africans, in the dialogue between us as two people from different national cultures, that is, internationalism. I thoroughly enjoy many of these interactions as the exchange students were keen and curious as to hear about South Africa and our diverse culture in the same way I was equally excited to hear more about their cultures and the cultures of the many other students of various nationalities like students from the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, the USA, Ivory Coast, Columbia, China and even Japan. Learning about their cultures through dialogue exchange is something I relish and alludes to my curiosity surrounding intercultural exchange. This curiosity has been cultivated throughout my life from the way I was raised and through the experiences I chose to further engage in, where I was able to encounter interculturalism. Additionally, through engaging in discourse with the international students, I was made aware of the fact that Stellenbosch is a particularly unique place in South



Me and two fellow Matie Buddies
(SU students)

Africa as I constantly was asked about my home-city and realised that Durban and Stellenbosch were cultural polar opposites. This realisation fuelled a newfound pride and passion to share information about the province and city from where I come and how it is not better, but incomparably different to Stellenbosch and is uniquely beautiful as is many other various parts of our country.

Throughout the different intercultural and international interactions I had with people from local and foreign cultures, I was able to learn much about different cultures, which not only added to my knowledge but also expanded my worldview. Interculturalism promotes open-mindedness and tolerance as you get to explore how someone else views the world, especially through the lens of a contrasting culture. Such interactions and dialogues have fostered my love for different cultures and languages, which I plan to continue to grow by getting involved in more opportunities like the Matie Buddy programme. Additionally, through initiatives like the EUTOPIA Internationalisation seminars, I hope to learn more about interculturalism and internationalisation to enrich my life, allowing me to improve intercultural interactions in my personal and professional life as an aspiring medical professional. I believe that interculturalism plays an important role in clinical medicine, especially in South Africa, as I will have to interact with and treat patients who come from vastly different cultures than my own. Having the background of prior intercultural interactions will allow me to be a more understanding doctor and professional, as I can respectfully treat the patient while being mindful of their culture and be able to treat them holistically. Furthermore, in my personal life, as I continue to live with and interact with people from various cultures, I trust that my experiences of interacting and exchanging dialogue with different cultures, locally and internationally, will allow me to continue to learn about and from diverse people I encounter to not only enrich my life but broaden my world view and allow me to be more tolerant in situations where I have to maneuverer intercultural dialogue with cultures that I may not understand.

Reflecting on how my upbringing introduced the concept of interculturalism and how my relationship with the French language and culture evolved, my interactions with cultures on an international scale, I see the value of interculturalism and, to a greater extent, internationalism. Internationalisation is vital from a personal point of view as it allows me to see the world from different perspectives, therefore broadening my world-view, which teaches me the value of diversity and the virtue of tolerance and open-mindedness. These values will continue to impact the way I treat those around me especially patients who I will one day treat. Internationalism and intercultural exchanges have allowed me to reform my values and mature as a person into someone who is more patient as I have learnt that we all have different world views and intercultural collaboration or interaction requires patience and understanding. Global learning and cross-cultural exchange are integral to the development of a forbearing individual and I look forward to continual growth through intercultural dialogues and internationalisation.

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