Discussing Global Citizenship through Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) - Virtual Exchange (VE) in Language Learning and Teaching

Symposium Proceedings

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Research Centre Global Learning | Coventry University

Foreword

This edited collection of papers addressing curriculum internationalisation through internalisation at home, using Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) Virtual Exchange (COIL-VE), offers compelling reading in supporting the preparation of students for societal issues locally and globally at personal and professional levels.

Bringing together established researchers as well as early career researchers from language teacher education and language learning, the collection illustrates the potential of COIL-VE as a means of engaging students from across different cultural backgrounds to consider contemporary critical issues and in ways not typically accounted for and/or presented. As a 'networked' pedagogical approach, such exchanges also present an inclusive intercultural dimension to teaching and research and with wider community partners.

Using synchronous and asynchronous means via various online platforms, and as part of integrated or at time optional study, COIL-VE, also known as telecollaboration (Helm, 2013), is explored as a pedagogical approach for valuing epistemological diversity. For example, the papers include critiquing immigration and nationalism/patriotism; creating global communities of practice to support linguistic diversity; enhancing international ELT programmes' response to changing global environments; translation strategies; pedagogical translanguaging; and challenging 'native-speakerism' ideology in ELT.

Whilst its impact on HE is still taking place, and despite research in the field over the last decade plus, we continue to appreciate the opportunities COIL-VE presents in addressing equity, diversity and inclusion agendas, new forms of collaboration and partnership, alternate approaches to assessment, ways to address sustainable development and global citizenship education. We also recognise COIL-VE is not without its challenges, especially as COILs can bring forth struggles and tensions which can be experienced as uncomfortable and disquieting, bringing into question issues of power, privilege, and intersectionality, and for which critical interrogation of the underpinning ideologies is required (Wimpenny et al. 2023). Indeed, it can take time for learners to digest and reflect upon the cross-cultural learning taking place. Yet being open to share and or reorientate thinking often requires uncomfortable introspection and deliberation, which only adds to the richness and benefits to be gained from engaging in COIL-VE. As such, themes arising from the papers bring nuanced perspectives which will be of interest to diverse disciplines including the languages, education strategy and leadership.

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Introduction

This is the edited collection of the papers presented at an international symposium held at Coventry University in hybrid mode on 16th November 2022. The publication aims to share research findings and good Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) - Virtual Exchange (VE) theory and practice for the development of global citizenship competences for the 21st Century, with a focus on language teacher education and language learning.

The papers bring a variety of perspectives on COIL-VE for language learning and teaching and report on COIL-VE projects involving Higher Education Institutions from Spain, Brazil, France, Turkey, Vietnam and the UK.

Each paper was peer-reviewed by three reviewers.

How to quote:

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1. The gains and drawbacks of virtual exchanges in higher education

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Abstract

This paper reports on some of the results obtained from a virtual exchange project between upper-intermediate learners of English for Specific Purposes from a Spanish university and learners of Spanish as a foreign language from a North American university. The discussion focuses on the gains and drawbacks identified through a pre- and post-questionnaire. The results revealed that both sets of learners were satisfied with the project and found it rewarding in terms of intercultural awareness, linguistic development and generally enriching.

Keywords: Foreign Language Learning, Telecollaboration, Virtual Exchange, Learner perceptions, Internationalisation of Higher Education

1. Introduction

Despite the many gains associated with virtual exchange projects in higher education to enhance foreign language learning (Duffy et al., 2022; Lenkaitis, 2020; Lou & Yang, 2022), there are also drawbacks that have been reported in relevant literature (Hagley, 2016; Helm, 2015). In this paper, I shall refer to both aspects in a project conducted with upper-intermediate students of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at the Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV), Spain, and learners of Spanish as a Foreign Language from the University of Maryland at Baltimore County (UMBC), USA.

To contextualise the study, I shall use Guth and Helm's (2010, p. 14) definition of telecollaboration/virtual exchange, that is, an 'internet-based intercultural exchange between people of different cultural/national backgrounds set up in an institutional context with the aim of developing both language skills and intercultural communicative competence through structured tasks'.

Virtual exchange is also seen as a means of providing opportunities to support the internationalisation of Higher Education by 'globalising the curriculum' and engaging learners in dialogue with peers. Such is the case of the recently launched Erasmus+ funding initiative that is a complement to physical mobility and focuses, among other aspects, on encouraging intercultural dialogue to increase tolerance, as well as promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom and non-discrimination.

In addition to increased motivation and linguistic output (Gimeno, 2018), several studies have pointed out the following as being some of the benefits for learners in participating in virtual exchanges:

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- language development (Hauck & Youngs, 2008; Kern et al., 2004)
- accuracy and fluency (Gimeno, 2018)
- intercultural communicative competence (Di Sarno, 2023; Fuchs, 2007; Oskoz et al., 2018)
- pragmatic competence (Di Sarno, 2020)
- learner autonomy (O'Rourke, 2007)
- online literacies (Gimeno, 2018)
- multimodal communicative competence (Hauck & Youngs, 2008).

2. Context and participants

2.1. Participants

Two groups of learners, 12 students enrolled in Aerospace Engineering from UPV and 12 from UMBC taking a Spanish history and culture course as a requirement for their major or minor in Spanish engaged in a telecollaborative encounter during one semester. The online encounters were therefore bilateral (between two groups of students from two different institutions), bilingual (where both English and Spanish were used depending on the topic being discussed) and bicultural (students from two different cultural backgrounds).

2.2. Tools

A private community using Google+ was used. The asynchronous nature of the postings was also a feature that the instructors sought to allow students time to think out and plan their responses (Guth & Thomas, 2010). As well as written interaction, students engaged in 30-minute synchronous sessions using Skype. After concluding both online written discussions, each group had to prepare a sound-enhanced presentation for their counterparts to watch in class and then comment on fluency, content and style. Audacity was chosen for students to create the main artefact to be peer-assessed in the form of a radiophonic podcast focussing on one of the topics discussed in the project. This requirement was in line with Helm's (2015) recommendation to have students collaborate and create a joint product instead of merely having them exchange information or compare products from both cultures. Lastly, SoundCloud was used to upload and share the podcasts for all the group members to listen to and peer assess.

2.3. Procedure

Organized into six groups, each with two participants from the USA and two from Spain, students initiated the project by introducing themselves to their counterparts in the forum. Subsequently, the students participated in three discussions, each of which took place over a period of two weeks, within the Google+ community. The first focused on the discussion of the TED Talk 'The Danger of a Single Story' by novelist Chimamanda Adichie (2009). Discussions two and three focused, on the one hand, on immigration and, on the other, nationalism and patriotism. In order to allow all the students to interact in their target language, the discussion

on immigration took place in Spanish and the discussion on nationalism/patriotism took place in English. All the group members were required to provide personal opinions and share personal experiences, integrate ideas from their classmates' contributions into their own comments, search for additional information, and ask questions that would help maintain the conversation. All the learners were required to post a minimum of four comments per topic.

2.4. Data collection

The results reported here were extracted from a pre-project questionnaire seeking students' expectations and a post-project questionnaire upon completing the virtual exchange project looking into their overall satisfaction. Both questionnaires were created *ad hoc* for the project. An ethics clearance form was signed by all participants.

3. Results

Regarding how they perceived that the virtual exchange project had helped them, the Spanish students reported benefits in all the areas queried, as can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1

How Spanish students perceived that the telecollaboration project had helped them
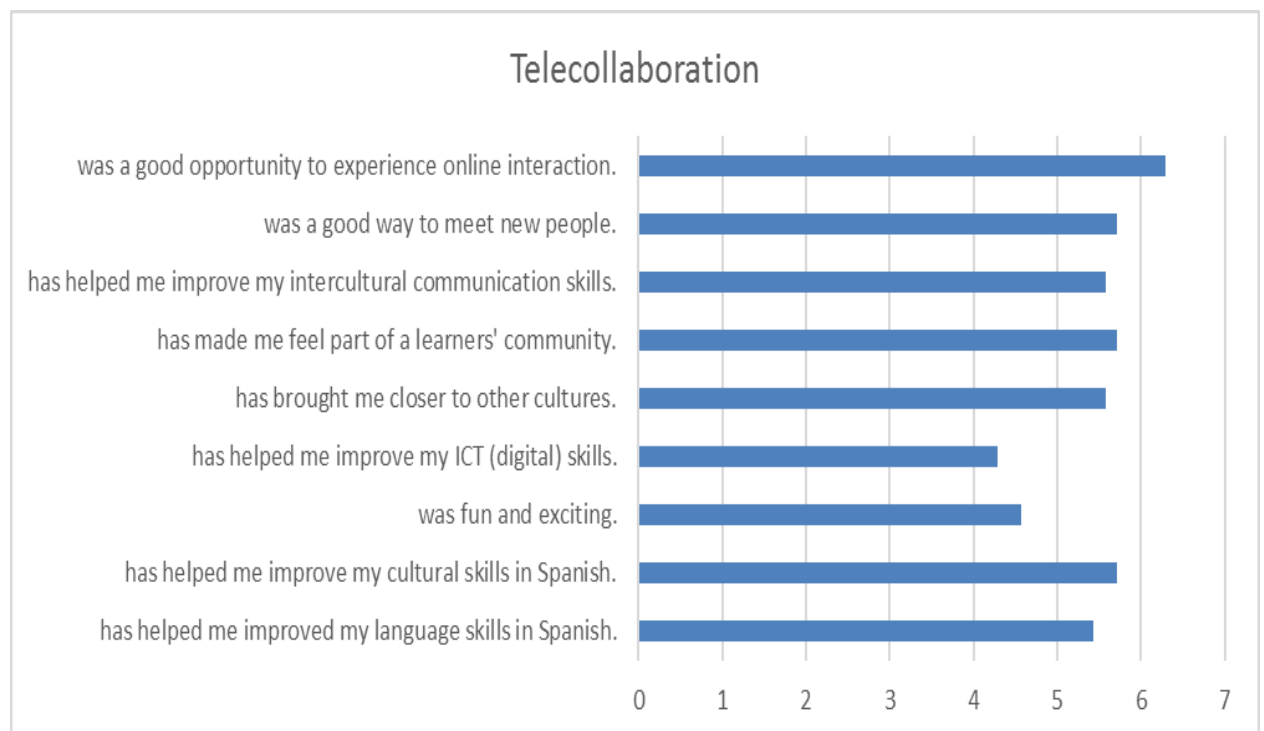
The US students rated all the categories slightly lower, thus showing a somewhat lower degree of satisfaction.

Figure 2

How US students perceived that the telecollaboration project had helped them

The Spanish students highlighted the opportunity to experience online interaction with fellow learners followed by three aspects: a) being able to meet new people; b) being able to improve their intercultural communication skills, both of which coincide with the US students; and c) having felt that they belonged to a community of practice, which the US students rated lower.

Regarding the benefits of participating in the online forums to discuss cultural issues, the US students pointed at four primary aspects: a) learning facts about their exchange partners' culture; b) having been given the opportunity to explain the cultural issues under debate (immigration and nationalism/patriotism) from the perspective of their own culture; c) acquiring an insight into how one's culture is perceived by others thousands of miles away; and d) having had the opportunity to learn facts about their counterparts' culture that are not presented in the media.

Figure 3

US students' perceived benefits of participating in the online forums (7-point scale)

Participating in the forums with the Valencia/Baltimore students to discuss cultural issues helped me...
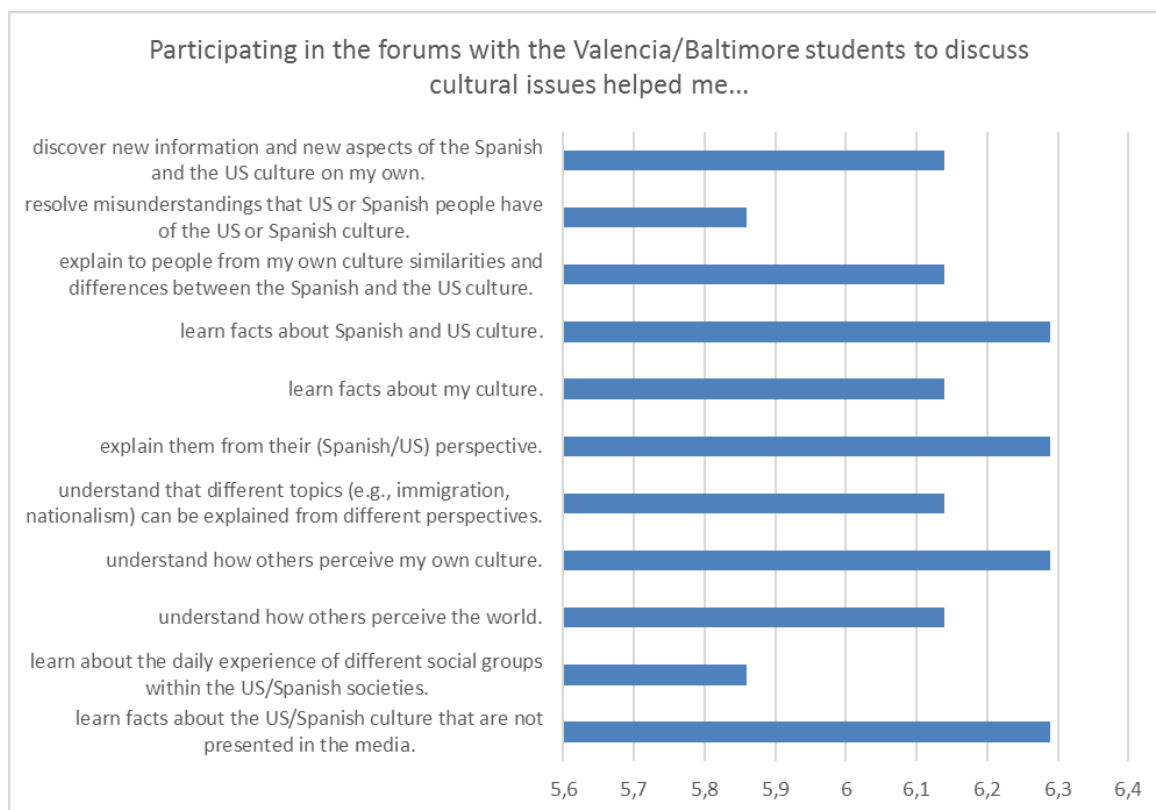
Likewise, the Spanish students also felt that participating in the forums had helped them understand how others perceive one's own culture but differed in other aspects. Specifically, they pointed out that the forums had helped them learn new information and new aspects about the culture of their foreign language (L2 culture) *on their own* (which implies that, in order to discuss a specific cultural issue pertaining to the L2 culture, they had to investigate the topic and gather relevant information that would allow them to contribute meaningfully to the forum discussions), and also that a given topic can be explained from different perspectives, a fact that undoubtedly contributes toward becoming more open-minded and tolerant with opposing opinions. Additionally, this last benefit was not foreseen to such an extent by the students in the pre-questionnaire.

Overall, the results derived from the pre-questionnaire correlate to those from the post-questionnaire, which leads us to believe that, in most cases, the leaners were able to foresee how participating in the online discussions would help them in terms of 'interculturality'.

Figure 4

Spanish students' perceived benefits of participating in the online forums (7-point scale)
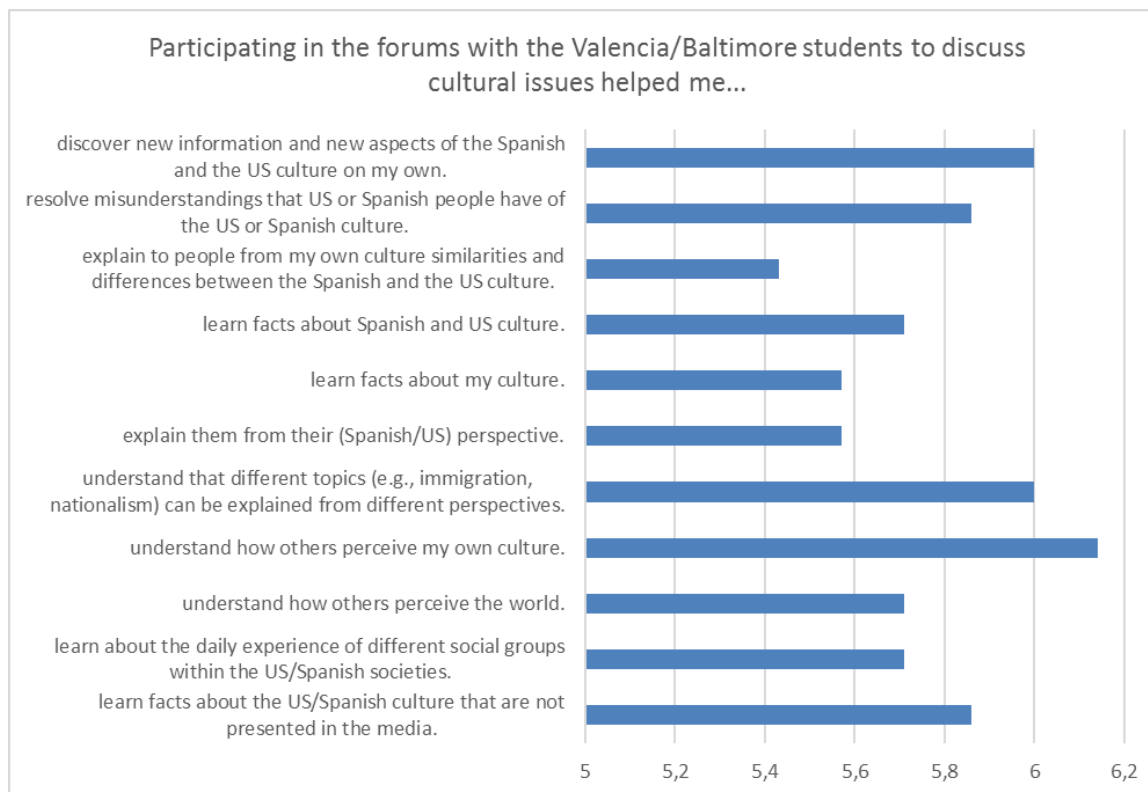
Regarding the learners' perception of the activities that were most useful, the American students preferred the online written discussions in the project forum, that is, interacting with their counterparts and exchanging points of view and opinions regarding the topics under discussion; whereas the Spanish students favoured taking part in and watching the sound-enhanced presentations that all the students had to prepare and deliver after each discussion concluded. The synchronous sessions were preferred by the Spanish students compared to the US students, something that may seem surprising considering the six-hour time difference which meant that the Spanish students carried out these sessions in the evening from home.

When asked what they thought about the virtual exchange project itself, the US students found it, on the whole, interesting, fun and useful, although a small number of them reported a certain degree of frustration. The Spanish students were of the same general opinion, but did not report being frustrated mainly because they saw the project as an innovative add-on to the subject which was also part of the final grade.

Lastly, when asked how the project had contributed toward the development of certain skills, the US students emphasised that the project had mainly helped them develop their team-working skills, whilst vocabulary, speaking, reading, writing, critical thinking and research skills came in second place.

The Spanish students, however, believed that the project had helped them improve a) their listening skills – thus placing more weight on the linguistic side of the learning process – followed by; b) vocabulary and speaking skills alike; c) reading skills; and d) writing skills, creativity, critical thinking, research skills and team-working skills.

4. Conclusions

The responses to the pre- and post-questionnaires showed that both groups of students were open-minded about discussing intercultural issues and collaborating with fellow students from a different cultural background. They did not think that communicating in writing through the online forum nor orally through video conference hindered authentic intercultural communication and interaction. The surveys also provided evidence that the learners' expected benefits correlated with their stated benefits after carrying out the project, which supported our belief that any frustrations and possible communication breakdowns had been kept to a minimum. Regarding specific gains, there was clear evidence that UPV students saw the project as being beneficial for their EFL improvement, which was also one of the project's aims.

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2. Looking back and ahead: reporting and reflecting on GAZUFES

Asuman Aşık[1] & Kyria Finardi[2]

Abstract

Virtual exchange (VE) between different English language teaching (ELT) contexts can afford opportunities to develop intercultural communicative competence (ICC) while also offering a window to reflect on different realities in terms of ELT. To this end, two ELT programmes integrated a VE project into their syllabi to provide pre-service teachers with opportunities to experience VE with reflection and development of ICC. The present account aims to describe and reflect on the GAZUFES (Gazi University and UFES University) VE project that involved pre-service teachers, tutors, and teacher trainers in a university in Brazil and another in Türkiye. GAZUFES was in turn part of the large-scale Erasmus+ KA3 Policy Experimentation European Virtual Innovation and Support Networks for Teachers (VALIANT) project. The exchange had some positive outcomes, but the sudden return to in-person classes at the end of the pandemic in the Brazilian university negatively affected the integration of GAZUFES into the Brazilian curriculum and the number of participants from Brazil. Despite the unequal number of students involved in the project, those who participated were very motivated and engaged in reflective and stimulating interactions.

Keywords: Virtual Exchange, English Language Teaching, Brazil, Türkiye, GAZUFES

1. Introduction

Virtual Exchange (VE), also known as telecollaboration (Helm, 2013) or Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) (Wimpenny et al., 2022), when practised as the constructive communication/interaction between geographically distant English language teaching (ELT) professionals and students, combines the potential of intercultural dialogue and the reach of digital technologies to foster teacher education. In this regard, this paper aims to describe and reflect on the VE project between Gazi University and the Federal University of Espírito Santo – UFES – (hereinafter GAZUFES) project that involved pre-service teachers, tutors, and teacher trainers in a university in Brazil and Türkiye in the first semester of 2022 as part of the large-scale Erasmus+ KA3 European Policy Experimentation European Virtual Innovation and Support Networks for Teachers (VALIANT) project led by Robert O'Dowd (https://valiantproject.eu/contact/). The GAZUFES VE project lasted six weeks and involved four groups of participants including pre-service teachers and a mediator (English teacher) for each group. The tasks carried out focused on the comparison of the two ELT contexts in Brazil

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and in Türkiye and on the co-creation of ICC-based activities aimed at English students in secondary school in those contexts. The sudden return to in-person classes because of the end of pandemic at UFES negatively affected the integration of the GAZUFES project in the Brazilian curriculum and consequently, it also affected the participation of the target Brazilian pre-service teachers. This resulted in a disparity in numbers of participants between the partners: 20 from Gazi University and nine from UFES (which included both pre-service teachers and mediators). Despite the unequal number of participating students from each context, those who managed to participate were very motivated and engaged in reflective and stimulating interactions, especially during the synchronous meetings held with the smaller groups.

2. VE in ELT contexts – a short review

Orsini-Jones et al. (2022) discuss how VE in the form of COIL projects can create global communities of practice to support international ELT programmes. In a related study, Orsini-Jones et al. (2021) address the potential of VE to develop critical literacy and intercultural awareness 'in' action, 'on' action and 'for' action in ELT through the analysis of the BMELTEVEP (Blending MOOCs in English Language teacher Education with Virtual Exchange during a Pandemic) project. This VE project was carried out between March and April 2021, with students and staff involved in English language teacher education in universities in the Global South (Brazil and Sri Lanka) and one in the Global North (UK) (Orsini-Jones et al., 2022). Participants were involved in the Third Space created through the VE project, engaging with each other synchronously online via Zoom and asynchronously with a global ELT community of practice of over 200,000 participants in a MOOC.

VE has been found to be effective when used in EFL and ELT contexts. Fuchs (2016) found an increase in negotiated design, implementation, and evaluation of language learning tasks with a VE between the USA and Türkiye. Another study with pre-service teachers from Germany and Israel also illustrated that the VE process improved pre-service teachers' preparedness to teach linguistically and culturally diverse students (Waldman et al., 2019).

Becoming an intercultural speaker and improving ICC have also been studied along with the VE projects in ELT contexts. VE projects promote several opportunities to meet these needs by improving language skills, multiple literacies and interculturality (Guth & Helm, 2010). According to a recent systematic review, intercultural competence is the most frequent trend topic of research related to VE (Barbosa & Ferreira-Lopes, 2021).

3. The GAZUFES VE project

As previously mentioned, the GAZUFES VE project was carried out between two universities, one in Brazil and another in Türkiye, in 2022. As previously mentioned, GAZUFES was part of the VALIANT project (Virtual Innovation and Support Networks for Teachers), an Erasmus+ KA3 project which aims to test the efficiency of this form of VE for providing students in initial teacher education with access to the realities of the teaching profession. The VALIANT project is a large-scale study that explores different ways in which Virtual Exchange can be used in the contexts of Initial Teacher Education and Continuous Professional

Development. This objective of the project provided an opportunity to work collaboratively with teacher trainers from Türkiye and Brazil. Through the partner search platform, the teacher trainers, who are the authors of this paper, found each other and started the VE project with the guidance of the VALIANT project team.

The GAZUFES project was designed within the framework of the VALIANT project and utilised the VALIANT Moodle platform to display content, organise asynchronous activities and set the tasks for the participants. The VE lasted six weeks and included three tasks (see Figure 1). The task cycle was designed according to the suggested framework by O'Dowd and Waire (2009). The first task was an icebreaker which included preparing introduction videos and uploading them to Moodle. The second task focused on exploring ICC and comparing two EFL contexts (Türkiye & Brazil) and sharing reflections. The final task, a collaborative production, required the student teachers to design a cultural activity collaboratively and microteaching the plan.

Figure 1. *Tasks of the GAZUFES Project*
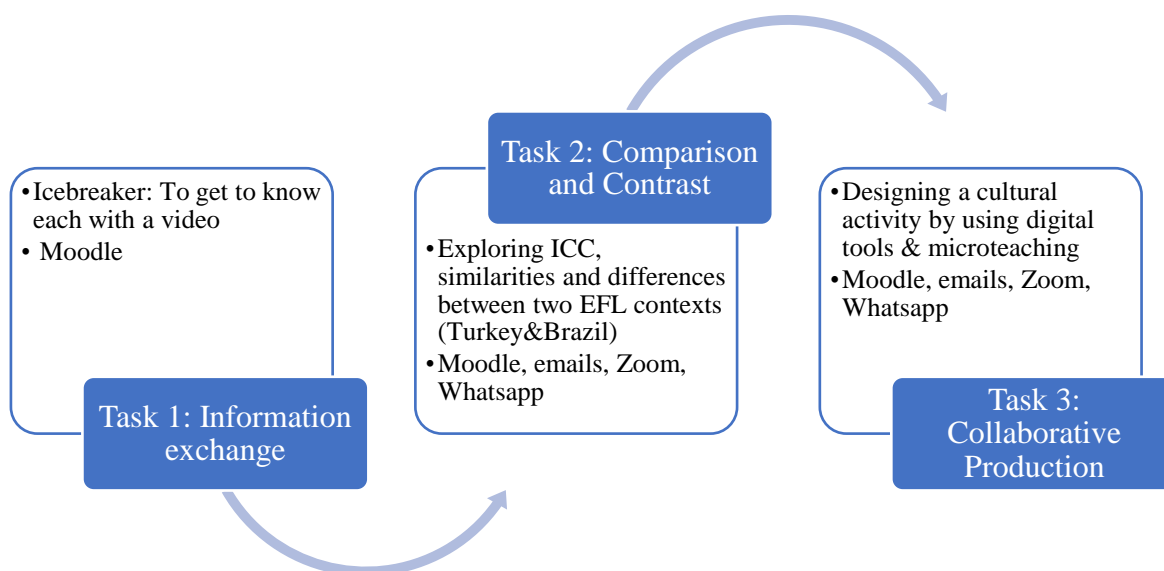
Source: Adapted from O'Dowd & Waire (2009)

In Brazil, at UFES, the GAZUFES VE was offered as an optional activity to the English Language Teaching Practicum course since the university returned to in-person classes and did not allow the integration of online components into the curriculum, so the Brazilian participants engaged in the project on a voluntary basis. The Turkish University, GAZI, integrated the VE into the course called 'Teaching English to Young Learners II' in which pre-service teachers are trained in teaching main language skills to young learners through both theoretical and practical aspects (microteaching). Although the VE was integrated into the syllabus of the

course at GAZI, the participants were included on a voluntary basis. Their participation in the VE was evaluated and graded in Türkiye. Two teacher trainers (henceforth TT), associate professors lecturing the English teaching practicum courses at UFES and GAZI, carried out the VE project. TTs were also assisted by five English teachers (who were carrying out their Master's and PhDs studies under the supervision of TTs) who acted as mediators. The remaining participants were undergraduate pre-service language teachers in the two Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Sixteen participants from ELT department of Gazi and 4 from UFES participated in the GAZUFES project.

5. Looking back and ahead

The reflections of two TTs and five mediators were analysed to evaluate the project and their ICC components during the period of the VE. The reflections from TTs included similar concerns such as the organisational issues and the VE managing process. They added only few comments on culture (their own culture or noticing any specific aspect from the culture of their partner) and ICC. They also state that despite the unexpected changes in the VE project, both TTs were flexible and ready to suggest solutions.

Furthermore, due to the lack of direct involvement of the TTs in the VE tasks (since the mediators organised and led them), the TTs felt that they could not control the process, which led to some organisational problems and a lack of sense of involvement in the VE process. Thus, the TTs stated that they felt the need to remind the tasks and deadlines to the mediators who were responsible for monitoring the VE tasks. The purpose of involving the mediators into process for monitoring the tasks was to provide an opportunity for the tutors to experience a VE project and to decrease the workload of TTs.

Moreover, the mediators' reflections as facilitators and participants of the VE also included common themes. Mostly, they found the VE effective and had a positive attitude toward it. However, there was low participation in asynchronous activities. Zoom sessions included more intercultural interactions. It was also noted that there was a need for guidance and monitoring for mediators to track the progress in VE tasks and the lack of learner autonomy. Initially there was limited knowledge of the culture of their partner country, but this increased during the VE. Here are some extracts from the mediators' reflections:

I had really a good impression of the Turkish students. They seemed so motivated and engaged. They like to interact and give their opinions (different from Brazilian students, in general). Although there were some divergent opinions, they showed respect and openness for new ideas. Besides me, there's one Brazilian student who is also participative and motivated. I'm really enjoying working with my group. (M1, BR).

In my previous experience as a tutor, the participation in the virtual exchange was part of the discipline, it was even evaluated - not a mere isolated initiative. This time, it is being regarded as an extra activity, which I believe explains the low participation. (M2, BR)

Since the number of Brazilian participants is already less than the Turkish ones, missing even one Brazilian participant makes a great difference. I feel like even numbers of Brazilian and Turkish students in each group would produce better results. (M3, TR)

As previously mentioned, the sudden return to in-person classes because of the end of the pandemic in the Brazilian university affected the integration of the GAZUFES project in the Brazilian curriculum and, consequently, also affected the participation of Brazilian pre-service teachers. Despite the unequal number of students from each context, those who managed to participate were very motivated and engaged in reflective and stimulating interactions, especially during the synchronous meetings held with the smaller groups in Task 2 and Task 3 through Zoom sessions.

6. Conclusions

Based on the experience gained with the GAZUFES VE Project, the authors can conclude that the VE projects between different EFL contexts provide opportunities for different cultural experiences for pre-service teachers of ELT departments/programmes. Since physical mobility between Türkiye and Brazil might not be possible due to the geographical distance, VE Projects can open up intercultural opportunities not available to students in the two countries as Internationalisation at Home (IaH) (Beelen & Jones, 2015) activities. Another implication is that including the mediators as participants in the VE process may offer the possibility of ICC development of the mediators who are managing the VE tasks. Therefore, the VE can provide a positive ICC experience both for the participants of the VE projects and the practitioners managing the process.

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3. Coventry/Nantes: two sides of the same COIL in the negotiation of translation strategies

Victoria Ríos Castaño[1] and Carlota Medina Díaz[2]

Abstract

This paper describes a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) project between Coventry University (United Kingdom) and the Université Catholique de l'Ouest Nantes (France), entitled 'Negotiation of Translation Strategies in English, French and Spanish' that ran between February and March 2022. This COIL experience was designed during the COVID-19 pandemic to encourage students of French and Spanish to reflect on issues related to textual and cultural comprehension of source and target texts. Three online workshops—on literary, legal and tourism translation—were organised to help students identify translation issues and lead to an exchange of ideas on decisions taken during the translation process. The paper attempts to engage with some current theories on virtual learning and reports on weaknesses and strengths experienced by students and tutors in both institutions. The discussion will consider the extent to which this COIL project proved successful in the organisation and mediation of learning in translation practice.

Keywords: COIL, Foreign languages, Translation strategies, Specialized translation

1.   Introduction

Coventry University's Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) is an emerging digital and pedagogical tool that aligns with the sustainable and equitable actions in higher education predicted by Brandenburg and de Wit (2011) and with de Wit's (2019) expectation for more inclusive and critical approaches to internationalisation practices (Wimpenny et al., 2022). Offering successful 'Virtual Exchanges' and the creation of a Third Space (symbolic in-between space) with international partners, COIL projects strongly contribute to the development of students' 'attributes, qualities and capabilities […] as global citizens and professionals' (Beelen et al., 2021). This paper reports on how the COIL 'Negotiation of Translation Strategies in English, French and Spanish' met said development. The project was co-organised by a professional English-French translator and tutor of specialized translation at the Université Catholique de l'Ouest Nantes (France), and the tutors delivering the Bachelor of Art (BA) Languages for Global Communication course at Coventry University. Second-year students of English, French, and Spanish who were registered in a translation module ('Thème

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français-anglais' in Nantes and 'Translation Theory and Practice 1' at Coventry) attended three sessions on literary, legal, and tourism translation, of one hour and a half each, that ran between February and March 2022. The rationale for this virtual mobility experience was grounded on the lack of social interaction between students of Foreign Languages due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Workshops were designed to encourage students to reflect on issues related to textual and cultural comprehension of source and target texts, to help them identify translation issues, and to share ideas on decisions taken during the translation process. In order to ensure a smooth running of sessions, 35 students (22 at Coventry and 13 at Nantes) were asked to enrol in an Aula link (a virtual learning environment used at Coventry University), on to which the French partner and the Coventry University team had uploaded all the material that was to be used in every session (i.e. PowerPoint presentations, exercises and recommended readings).

Figure 1. Image of Aula link accessed by students
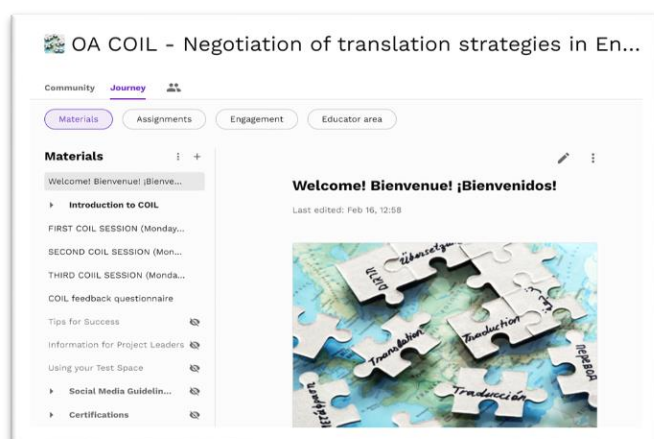
2. Method

2.1. Organisation of material and preliminary arrangements

Aula, the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) used at Coventry University, was used as a repository to support the exchange of materials between the tutors involved in the COIL project in the private tutor area. Once the Aula area for students was populated, students were asked to register and first announcements on session dates, topics to be covered, and meeting places were sent by email and posted on the Aula Community chat. Due to the on-going issues relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, the sessions were designed to be delivered in hybrid format, with students in both institutions able to elect whether to attend face-to-face or online (using Teams).

2.2. Delivery of sessions

2.2.1. First session: Pros and cons of Google Translate for literary translation

This session consisted of two sections. In the first section, participants knowledge-shared on their use of free machine translation systems like Google Translate (https://translate.google.co.uk/) and DeepL Translator (https://www.deepl.com/en/translator). Some key information was delivered via a 20-minute lecture, which intended to explain (1) the main translation strategies adopted by translators and (2) the differences between human translation and computer-assisted translation tools (CATs) (e.g. translation memory software, language-search engine software) versus machine translation. Following this theoretical introduction, tutors in each institution asked their students to discuss the pros and cons of human versus machine translation.

In the second COIL section, participants were invited to apply theory to practice. As an icebreaker, tutors in both institutions invited their students to translate 'anything you can think of (e.g. an introduction of yourself, an excerpt from a newspaper article, technical instructions, etc.) from and into English' and identify some of the translation techniques previously discussed. Preliminary discussions took place in each institution followed by hybrid-mode discussions. Having established that machine translation is unsuitable for the translation of creative writing pieces, students were split into groups (face-to-face in Coventry and Nantes with their respective tutors, and online with the tutor at Coventry). They read and discussed the content and characteristics of some verses by the American poet Robert Frost in the 'The Road Not Taken'. After signalling what potentially would/could (any) be lost in translation (e.g. rhyme), students were asked to use Google Translate to assess their answers. Students were finally asked to translate some sayings from French and Spanish into English. The activity was followed by a group discussion.

2.2.2. Second session: Legal translation

Having experienced the group dynamics of the first session, which will be discussed below (see 3. Results and discussion), the second session focused on the translation of legal texts. It promoted a more active involvement of students in the negotiation of meanings and the application of different translation strategies. The tutor at Coventry delivered a brief theoretical introduction (15 minutes) to define legal translation and differentiate text typology, highlighting structure and specialised terminology in a death certificate and a power of attorney. Having pointed out the main translation tools, students were asked to translate some previously selected keywords and fixed phrases in the analysed texts and look for equivalents in French and Spanish in the EU's terminology database ATE[3] (Interactive Terminology for Europe). Students were given around 20 minutes for this task in Nantes by their French tutor, while in Coventry their Spanish tutor asked them to work first individually (10 minutes out of 20) and then with their own group (remaining 10 minutes). The task was then followed by a group session, face-to-face and online, led by the French tutor. Students were asked to exchange equivalents in French and Spanish (e.g. 'birth certificate', 'acte de naissance', 'partida de nacimiento') and discuss translation options depending on context (e.g. 'acta de nacimiento' in Spanish family law and 'certificado de nacimiento' in the pharmaceutical industry). Finally, students were given a title deed and asked to translate it in pairs into French in Nantes and Spanish in Coventry, and the whole group again shared the results. In this manner, French students taking Spanish in Nantes

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[3] https://iate.europa.eu/home

took notes of the translation into Spanish and students of Spanish taking French in Coventry, the translation into French.

2.2.3. Third session: Tourism translation

The final COIL workshop summarised previous discussions on text types, translation strategies and specific terminology, focusing on tourist texts. In line with the structure of the former sessions, a short introduction on the nature of this type of consumer-oriented texts and an examination of some samples (e.g. excerpts from tourist brochures and travel guides) were provided. Issues in connection with functional theories (e.g. skopos) were also underlined, and students were encouraged to engage with recommended readings. The second part of the session was devoted to analysing common mistakes in connection with grammar, spelling, lexis, semantics, pragmatics and discourse (Durán Muñoz, 2012). Students were also given time to identify some common errors, including omissions, repetitions and additions, and to reflect on the reason why they occurred. As in former sessions, in the third and last part, students put theory into practice, firstly, by analysing a brief excerpt independently; secondly, by working in pairs; and thirdly, by sharing their translation decisions and comments with the group. Tourist texts in English had been carefully selected by tutors to foster discussion. Thus, students in Nantes were presented with brief descriptions of the main attractions in Coventry (extracted from https://visitcoventry.co.uk/things/) and students in Coventry of those in Nantes (extracted from https://www.levoyageanantes.fr/en/).

Having analysed the main features of these texts and whether these coincided in French and Spanish tourist texts (e.g. lexical level: use of superlatives, keywords reinforcing feelings of dream, adventure, and pleasure, and realia; syntactic level: use of nominalization, imperatives, and present tense), students were asked to translate, in pairs, some of the selected passages either into French or Spanish. Students in Coventry were aware that the main tourist website that was being used offered the French and Spanish versions, so they were encouraged to try and translate it themselves and then compare it with the official translation.

3. Results and discussion

The tutors involved in this project agreed that Aula and Teams proved to be adequate and essential platforms to design, share, disseminate, and discuss the materials with students. The registration process was simple, and students navigated the environments easily. Aula was a good repository for them for the purpose of downloading materials. They also made use of its interactive features, to access the messages that were posted by the tutors, with reminders of classrooms, dates, and topics to be considered in advance. The decision to have only one tutor leading each session worked effectively. No conflicting messages emerged. As for student engagement, issues arose due to the complexity of the hybrid format. Tutors had to be aware of students' interaction in both institutions, face-to-face and on screen. This extra space created confusion in the first session, as tutors found it challenging to engage with students online and in-class simultaneously. Students engaging online were also more reluctant to participate. There were also technical issues: for instance, in the first session, students from Nantes and Coventry failed to complete some tasks set due to the interruption of Wi-Fi connectivity, which also

caused some misunderstandings in relation to task instructions. In order to address these difficulties, the tutors approached the interaction with and between students differently in the second and third sessions. When required, students engaging online worked together only with their face-to-face group (e.g. all students at Nantes with their tutor) and the time for tasks was extended.

4.   Conclusions

This COIL project demonstrates the added value of completing translation tasks with intercultural teams. It highlighted to participating students and staff that strategies and negotiation of meaning in the translation process of three text types (literary, legal and tourist texts) could be enriched through teamwork. Despite some issues resulting from the lack of interaction from students online, the three synchronous sessions, combining face-to-face and virtual engagement, provided a fertile ground for students, a hybrid learning environment in both institutions to interact and exchange knowledge. Students at Coventry benefited from the French partner's experience as a professional translator (e.g. use of CAT tools) and students at Nantes were introduced to some translation theories (e.g. functional approaches) by the staff in Coventry.

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4. Fostering language teachers' intercultural awareness towards linguistic diversity and inclusion in education through COIL

Abraham Cerveró-Carrascosa [1], Zoe Gazeley[2]

Abstract

The following paper reports on a collaborative online learning experience (COIL) or virtual exchange (VE) between undergraduate students, pre-service teachers, from Coventry University in the UK and Florida Universitària in València, Spain. The exchange was embedded in two modules in each institution and aimed to foster critical views on multilingual policies and interculturality in English as a foreign language teacher education (MIEFOLTE).

The participants were grouped in breakout rooms where they engaged in discussions on the topics of social equity, linguistic diversity, and inclusion in education. In addition, their group reflections were posted on a digital noticeboard during the synchronous sessions.

The outcomes seem to illustrate how MIEFOLTE provided students with opportunities for critical reflection and made students aware that they had developed their Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and how to transfer it to their future professional practice.

Keywords: Pre-service Teacher Education, Virtual Exchange, Collaborative Online International Learning, Multilingualism, Intercultural Communicative Competence.

1. Introduction

This paper is reporting on the outcomes of linguistic diversity and inclusion in education expressed by pre-service teachers in the first iteration of a virtual exchange (VE) or collaborative online international learning (COIL) experience on multilingualism and interculturality in teaching English as a foreign language (MIEFOLTE).

Virtual Exchange or COIL refers to an academic experience that enables teachers to improve students, in this case, Higher Education students who will become teachers, to put into practice their communicative skills (O'Dowd, 2021). There is evidence that COIL projects can support the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (Dooly & Vinagre, 2021; Orsini-Jones & Lee, 2018) and critical digital literacy skills (Orsini-Jones et al., 2021). Moreover, COILs have been shown to develop different skills and competences in pre-service teacher education (Cerveró-Carrascosa, 2022). COIL as a learning experience in ELT/EFL/ELF teacher education has increasingly become a relevant approach for future teachers to reflect on

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their professional practice and, particularly, to be able to design and organise COIL projects themselves once in-service.

2. MIEFOLTE (Multilingualism and Interculturality in English as Foreign Language Teacher Education)

The design of this MIEFOLTE COIL project was informed by previous COIL experiences, as both institutions had already collaborated on primary and secondary pre-service teacher education:

- FLOCO (Florida Universitària & Coventry University) in 2017 and FLOCOCO (Florida Universitària, Coventry University & Universite de l'Haute Alsace) in 2018 (Cerveró-Carrascosa, 2019; Lloyd et al., 2018).
- BMELTET (Blending MOOCs into English Language Teaching Education with Telecollaboration) from 2017 to 2020, which had four iterations (Cerveró-Carrascosa, 2022; Orsini-Jones & Cerveró-Carrascosa, 2019).

Moreover, MIEFOLTE had a previous version in PREFLOCO (Pre-service teacher education in Florida Universitària and Coventry University) in 2021, in which pre-service teachers explored the development of ICC in English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher education.

The COIL reported here was part of pre-service teacher education in both contexts. At Florida Universitària, it was embedded in a Year 3 module on Culture in FLT (Foreign Language Teaching) for pre-service primary school teachers and was included in TEFL modules to become an English teacher in Primary Education. Furthermore, the contents covered were complementary to other subjects in multilingual policies set in pre-service teacher education in València.

As for Coventry University, the COIL was embedded in a final year undergraduate module on Teaching Young Learners, which is a mandatory module on the Bachelor of Arts (BA) in English Language and TEFL course and an optional module for the BA Languages for Global Communication.

The programme agreed by the COIL leaders, who are the authors of this paper, involved exploring the topics by watching a video about the concept of Culture and 'locality', reading articles and investigating multilingual policies in the students' contexts. There were four synchronous sessions. The session topics were discussed in class in each country before the actual online meetings as Table 1 below shows.

Table 1

Topics and resources used in MIEFOLTE per session

Session	Topic	Resources
1	Concept of Culture and 'local'	Tayle Selasie's TEDTalk

2	Intercultural Communicative Competence	Byram and Golubeva (2019)
3	ELT and multilingual policies	Regulations on multilingual policies (Generalitat Valenciana, 2018)
4	Translanguaging (use of L1/L2 in L2/FL classes)	Cenoz and Gorter (2020)

Time: Zoom Thursdays from 1 pm to 2 pm (CET) - 12 pm to 1pm (UK)

The sessions were arranged as follows:

- Welcome and greetings – 5 mins

- Presenting the topic – 5 mins

- Breakout rooms' discussions + Padlet posting – 25/30 mins

- Whole group feedback – 15/20 mins

- Conclusions, final thoughts & farewell – 5 mins.

3. Aim of the Study

The main aim of this study was to show participants' reflections in MIEFOLTE on the relevant topics in EFL pre-service teacher education. These topics are related to the contents to be acquired and competences to be developed by EFL pre-service teachers.

The research questions were:

1. What are the participants' views on linguistic diversity when developing ICC in schools?
2. What are the participants' views on inclusion in education by using pedagogical translanguaging in the English classes?

4. Method

A qualitative approach was followed with students' contributions being selected to illustrate how MIEFOLTE fostered the topics of interest for this study.

a. Participants

The pre-service teachers who participated in MIEFOLTE at Florida Universitària were 12 (N=12) Year 3 students from a BA in Primary Education and the participation in this COIL was

part of their coursework in the module on Culture in Foreign Language Teaching. Moreover, four (N=4) students from a MA in Secondary Education who got involved voluntarily as MIEFOLTE was a complementary activity for their training. All participants from both groups were from Valencia or its metropolitan area except for two Erasmus Italian students in the BA group.

At Coventry University, there were 27 (N=27) students distributed as follows: 16 from BA TEFL and seven from BA L4GC. This cohort included students from a wide range of nationalities and language backgrounds many of whom also spoke various heritage languages at home.

b. Tools

The students' reflections were posted on a Padlet arranged in columns for each session and the information from their contributions is shown below in Figure 1. The posts that best suited the topics of concern in this paper were selected and quoted as being representative of participants' judgements on those topics:

1. Linguistic Diversity. Use of languages or varieties of languages and teaching methods in different educational settings and stages. The regulations in the Valencian region (Generalitat Valenciana, 2018) will spark discussion.
2. Inclusion in Education. English Language Teaching, English as a Foreign Language or English-Medium Instruction and the use of pedagogical translanguaging as proposed by Cenoz and Gorter (2020).

Figure 1

Screenshot of Padlet (https://padlet.help/l/en/article/cpfiutfzzb-what-is-padlet) with participants' posts from all four sessions
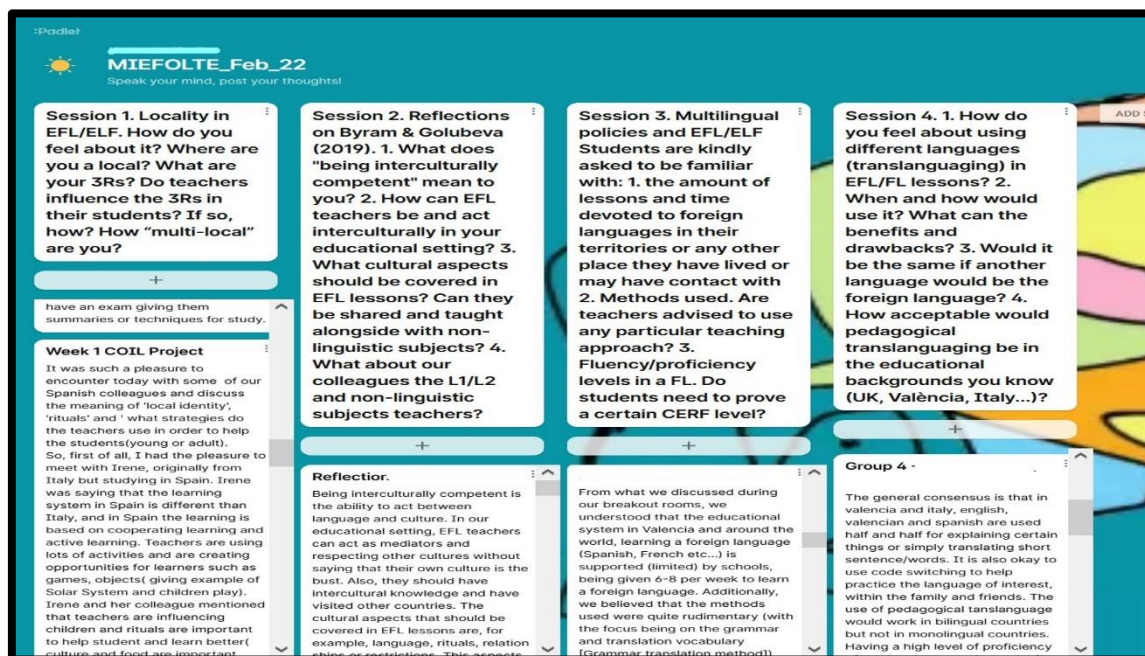
3.3. Procedure

During every synchronous session, participants posted their reflections about the questions they had been asked from the texts they had been assigned on Padlet, as Figure 1 above shows. The views reflected by participants related to linguistic diversity and inclusion in education were selected and quoted by researchers after being discussed.

The quotations extracted from the participants in MIEFOLTE were referred to according to the institution they belonged to: Coventry University was mentioned as CU and Florida Universitària as FU.

5. Results and discussion

The review of the pre-service teachers' contributions displayed a wide range of opinions that responded to the questions posed.

a. RQ1. What are the participants' views on linguistic diversity when developing ICC in schools?

The participants showed largely their agreement with the promotion of linguistic diversity in multilingual societies, particularly in multilingual societies as it enabled intercultural

communication as these CU students posted: 'A belief in the value of intercultural communication between groups. It helps if you speak more than one language.'

MIEFOLTE also expanded the views of participants on different educational contexts. CU students discovered the multilingual nature of most territories in Spain. Moreover, the project helped them with becoming familiar with school organisation in two different countries and the methods implemented in those contexts, as put forward by a CU student: 'we found that other European countries dedicated more time to the subject of foreign languages than the UK, usually around 2-3 hours in primary school, compared to 45 mins in the UK.'

Finally, as summarised on Padlet by one of the groups, participation in this COIL project enabled them to compare different educational programmes in several countries. They gained awareness of the implementation of multilingual programmes and the requirements for learners in those educational contexts as the quotation below by CU and FU students' depicts:

> Spain appeared to be the only country we discussed that dedicated some lessons to the CLIL method of teaching. In Italy and Spain, students are expected to work towards a CEFR level or similar certification, while in the UK, students are just fed the information they need to pass the exam.

b. RQ2. What are the participants' views on inclusion in education by using pedagogical translanguaging in the English classes?

As Cenoz and Gorter (2020) state, pedagogical translanguaging is a trendy term in multilingual studies in education. It refers to a practice employed by teachers who use the stronger language to develop the weaker one, which helps learners improve their knowledge on the content dealt with and their proficiency in the target language. In MIEFOLTE, pre-service teachers reflected upon this multilingual practice and suggested that translanguaging could reduce students' discomfort in situations in which cultural differences stand out. Translanguaging promotes a safer class atmosphere where students can feel confident to interact, it builds links between the home and school languages and cultures and fosters the development of a multilingual and multicultural repertoire (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021). As the following quote by a CU student outlines, 'cultural differences are important to understand and work with, especially in an educational environment. This [pedagogical translanguaging] will have an impact on the child's learning as not knowing the culture could make individuals feel uncomfortable in the environment.'

In a similar contribution, another group of students agreed with the basis of pedagogical translanguaging and that it encouraged English learners' participation regardless of their background as the following excerpt from a group of CU and FU students' post illustrates:

> Everyone agreed that translanguaging is an acceptable practice, as some students struggle with classroom anxiety, so switching between two languages would probably make them feel more comfortable. Not only that but it could also be helpful to draw comparison in the 2 language patterns and structures.

This previous post also acknowledged how pedagogical translanguaging can enhance language learning and allow students to compare patterns and structures so that learners with different L1s can take advantage of this practice.

6. Conclusions

Participating and completing MIEFOLTE appeared to have helped participants gain awareness of the meaning of ICC and knowledge of participants' educational systems (O'Dowd, 2021). Increasing pre-service teachers' knowledge of multilingualism and interculturality has widened participants' views on how schools face linguistic diversity. Moreover, MIEFOLTE also enhanced the role of the use of different languages in the EFL/ELT class to face differentiation in the foreign language classroom and as a policy in education, especially in primary schools.

The posts on Padlet and the discussions in the whole group feedback facilitated the promotion of reflection on linguistic diversity and multilingual policies across different and distant territories, allowing students to acquire an international perspective and fostering a 'glocal' community of practice (Orsini-Jones et al., 2022).

The MIEFOLTE COIL allowed a weekly exploration of different linguistic landscapes in different contexts, focusing on English language education. Additionally, it demonstrated the value placed on exploring students' cultural knowledge of their own heritage languages. Many of the CU students initially identified themselves as only being speakers of English but through this project and discussion with the FU students they realised that they could also include their heritage languages as part of their language identity.

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5. Virtual Exchange as a Third Space to Decolonise ELT (VETSDELT) project: report on its first action-research cycle

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Abstract

This paper aims to report on the VETSDELT (*V*irtual *E*xchange as a *T*hird *S*pace to *D*ecolonise *E*nglish *L*anguage *T*eaching) project. Its focus was to stimulate a reflection on English, ELT, and the 'native-speakerism' ideology through a Virtual Exchange (VE) as a safe Third Space. The paper illustrates how students and tutors engaged in English language teacher education in universities in Brazil, Spain, the UK, and Sri Lanka reflected on ELT in a series of synchronous dialogic sessions on Zoom. The paper reports on the initial findings stemming from cycle one of VETSDELT, which ran between November and December 2022 and involved 44 participants. The initial data analysis showed that VE could facilitate intercultural and international knowledge exchange in a safe Third (online) Space.

Keywords: Virtual Exchange, Third Space, Decolonial theory, English Language Teaching.

1. Introduction

There is a widespread belief in many English Language Teaching (ELT) circles (Galloway, 2017) that 'Native' English-Speaking Teachers (NESTs) have indisputable language expertise and are ideal teachers of English. This (incorrect, as argued here) assumption was defined as 'native-speakerism' by Holliday (2006; 2015). It is based on a 'standard' English ideal and ignores the Englishes in existence worldwide.

English has 'become this common language on a global scale' (Seidlhofer, 2011) and is not used exclusively among L1 speakers, the so-called 'native speakers' (Holliday, 2006). Most interactions through English take place in non-English-speaking communities, therefore, the number of L2 speakers of English outnumbers that of L1 speakers. Consequently, English is taught by a majority of L2 speakers, or 'Non-Native' English Speakers (NNESs).

Despite 'Non-Native' English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) representing 80% (12 million) of the 15 million English teachers worldwide (Wang & Fang, 2020), a native-speaker-oriented curriculum still influences hiring practices within the ELT context. Due to the prevalence of the 'native-speakerism' ideology in ELT, NNESTs are frequently discriminated and stereotyped (Houghton & Rivers, 2013), and most advertised positions in ELT are for 'native speakers' only.

Despite the attention this topic has attracted in ELT, it is still necessary to explore this conceptualisation further, especially from the perspective of the Global South (Macedo, 2019).

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Here it is proposed that the utilisation of Virtual Exchange (VE) (O'Dowd, 2018) as a language teacher education approach (Fuchs & Orsini-Jones, 2022; Guimarães et al., 2022) can support the decolonisation of ELT and stimulate a critique of native-speakerism by questioning deep-seated beliefs amongst L2 students and staff involved in English language teacher education.

Drawing on Bhabha (1994), it is argued here that VE can afford Third online Space(s), a liminal place of hybridity that challenges the notion of authenticity, static identities, and deep-seated beliefs. With the mediation of different technologies, the VE Third Space is a place of exchanges and clashes, contrast, re-articulation, and negotiation rather than a resolution space.

2. Method

The VETSDELT (*Virtual Exchange as a Third Space to Decolonise English Language Teaching*) project aimed to provide pre- and in-service students in teacher education and ELT teacher educators with opportunities to re-examine their existing belief system about English and ELT. The first cycle of the project ran between November and December 2022 and involved participants from four different higher education contexts as follows: 11 from Coventry University (CovUni), the United Kingdom; 20 from La Florida Universitària (FU), Spain; nine from the National Institute of Business Management (NIBM), Sri Lanka; and four from Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo (UFES), Brazil.

The sessions were delivered through the institutional Zoom in the lead university in a series of VE dialogic sessions of one hour each on four topics: 1. Varieties of English; 2. ELT beliefs, ideologies and attitudes; 3. Teaching English as a Global Language; and 4. 'Native-speakerism'. Participants were divided into five groups of eight in each breakout room (BoR), which were facilitated by two e-mediators. The training for the e-mediators was based on the experience and outcomes of a British Council-funded project[2]. Participants were asked to read a text on the session's topic as an asynchronous preparation task so that the seminar could be run in flipped mode (Bergmann & Sams, 2012).

Padlet walls were utilised to support the discussion on the topics debated by participants in BoRs. All materials and contents used in VETSDELT were available in Aula[3] Space, an institutional teaching and learning platform to support students' engagement in classes. The Aula Space for the VETSDELT project was organized week by week. After registering, participants had full access to articles, videos, and the links for the Zoom synchronous sessions, Padlet Walls, Microsoft Forms, and Surveys.

Data were mined from a) pre- and post-VETSDELT surveys administered with 'Online Surveys' (https://www.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/) consisting of Likert-scale type statements and open- and closed-ended questions; b) Padlet walls (https://teach.coventry.domains/articles/padlet/) to post the reflections of each group during the

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[2] Available at https://vivexelt.com/breakout-room-guide/

[3] More information at https://www.aula.education/

BoRs; c) Microsoft forms (https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/online-surveys-polls-quizzes) administered at the end of each session as a wrap-up; and d) focus group interviews with self-selected participants after the completion of the project in December 2022.

Overall, the study aimed to explore the following research questions: 1. How can the VE 'Third Space' support the questioning of 'native-speakerism'? 2. What are the beliefs about English of pre-service and/or in-service teacher education students and ELT staff? 3. What are the views and attitudes towards ELT of pre-service and/or in-service students in teacher education and ELT staff?

3. Results and discussion

Most of the participants[4] were female (40 out of 44). Regarding their age, 32 participants were in the 18-30 years old group, and 12 were in the 31 or above group (see Table 1). Most participants (39) self-rated their proficiency level in English as higher intermediate to advanced, while five rated themselves as lower intermediate. As for teaching experience, only six participants reported not having taught English before.

Table 1. Demographic data on the participants

Institution	Age		Gender		Level of proficiency		Have you ever taught before?		Length of teaching experience (year)		Are you a student (ST), practicing teacher (PT), or teacher trainer (TT)			Total
	>30	<31	M	F	>B1	<B2	Yes	No	>3	<4	ST	PT	TT	44
CU	5	6	0	11	0	11	9	2	3	6	8	2	1	11
FU	18	2	3	17	3	17	16	4	10	6	16	3	1	20
NIBM	7	2	1	8	2	7	9	0	6	3	5	4	0	9
UFES	2	2	0	4	0	4	4	0	0	4	1	3	0	4

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[4] The researcher and his Director of Studies are not included in this section because they were project leaders.

Amongst the 38 participants with teaching experience, half reported having three years or less of experience, and half reported having four years or more of experience. Out of the initial 44 participants, 26 completed the post-VETSDELT survey.

a. Native-speakerism

Table 2 shows part of the results for the question 'Do you agree the classification of English teachers as L1 ('native') and L2 ('non-native') speakers entails a hierarchical relationship in the profession, as well as dominant professional discourses?'. The results align with Holliday's (2006, 2015) conceptualisation of 'native-speakerism': the divide between 'native' and 'non-native' teachers, 'native' speaker model orientation in ELT, and the idea that L1 English speakers are better teachers than L2 speakers.

Table 2. Results of respondents' opinions about native-speakerism and dominant discourses in ELT

Number	Opinion
1	Yes, and I have suffered it when searching for a job, too. Native speakers are preferred to qualified teachers who teach a L2. In some jobs you are asked as well to have a 'good accent', meaning preferably a British accent to teach English
3	Yes. I agree that this classification happens, but I do not agree that it should happen. The market and even some students are worried with the 'perfect' English, not with ideologies related to the language. They bother with accent, for example
4	Yes, it implies that L1 English teachers are better than L2 English teachers. This is discriminatory as being an L1 speaker of a languages does not imply that you are a good language teacher

The results in Table 2 suggest that accent, 'perfect English' and 'standard' English (American and British) are features that contribute to the maintenance of 'native-speakerism' ideology and inequalities within ELT. Another major consequence of this ideology is discriminatory employment practices against NNESTs. Regarding this topic, respondents were asked: 'To your knowledge, do L2 English-speaking ('non-native') teachers encounter discrimination in the ELT job market/workplace?'. Selected answers are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Selected respondents' opinions about discrimination against L2 English-speaking teachers in the ELT job market (all quotes are *verbatim*)

Number	Opinion

1	Sure they do. In my city, for example, there [are] schools that only hire native teachers. I still see the slogan 'Learn English with a native teacher' very often on the internet (as a way to add value to a course), and it is common sense to believe that to reach a 'satisfactory' level of competence, one must spend some time abroad
2	Many schools look for native teachers, there are even job announces asking for native CVs only. I agree that getting that first-hand culture and language knowledge can be great, but sometimes a non-native speaker can contribute as much or even more to the classroom than a native speaker. I believe non-native speakers can be very helpful sharing their experience when learning the language and sharing tips, but they are usually excluded from the job search
3	Somehow, there is a huge believe that good teachers need to be native speaker just because [of] pronunciation and cultural related matters

The responses show that the 'native-speakerism' ideology is intertwined with the notion of the superiority of 'native speaker' and, as a corollary to this, the assumption that NNESTs are worse teachers. As discussed by Holliday (2015), there is a strong belief that NESTs represent a 'Western culture', which was also mentioned by respondents. The responses indicate that many language schools and courses do not associate their brand with NNESTs. The idealised standard language canon and the idea of mainstream culture are more valued than teaching experience and qualifications (see Table 4).

Table 4. Padlet posts on teaching experience and qualifications

Group	Session	Post
1	4 – 28/11/2022	'[…] the teachers should be selected on their **qualifications and relevant experiences**'
3	4 – 28/11/2022	'In language schools they prefer the accent, they prefer to hire native speaker even if they don't have **teaching qualification**. But we believe that **teaching qualification is more important than being native**'
4	4 – 28/11/2022	'[…] accent and pronunciation are not the most important thing to be a good teacher, you need some **specific skills** to be a good teacher apart from accent and pronunciation'

4. Conclusions

The partial data analysis shows that the VE Third Space can help with decolonising beliefs regarding English and ELT and challenge canon thoughts through global perspectives. Figure 1 shows the word cloud created at the end of the last session of the project. VETSDELT was

described by participants as 'informative', 'mind-opening', 'enriching', 'educational', 'new knowledge', 'informative', 'deconstruction', and 'necessary', to name a few.

Figure 1. Word cloud

The results suggested that BoRs motivated and provided participants with opportunities to experience meaningful co-construction of new knowledge and ways of knowing/seeing the world. By sharing contextual (local) experiences through multiple (global) collaborations, participants could develop self-awareness of their beliefs, values, and assumptions, negotiate meanings, and appropriate new knowledge. Third Spaces only existed because participants showed their positioning as the Other.

Therefore, the Third Spaces afforded by VETSDELT helped participants to understand that ideologies and beliefs are shaped by cultural and social perception. In this sense, people from different cultures see and experience events differently. Through engagement with different worldviews in VETSDELT, participants explored the possibility of validating local/contextual use of English other than the 'native' speaker-oriented paradigm. VE can be a means to bring marginalized perspectives into being and foster alternative imaginaries/epistemologies.

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6. The acquisition of pragmatic and intercultural communicative competence for global citizenship through telecollaboration

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Abstract

This study presents the results obtained from three different telecollaboration projects, that aimed to develop Spanish-speaking students' use of apologies in English (pragmatic competence) and their intercultural communicative competence (ICC). In particular, this paper aims to demonstrate how pragmatic competence and ICC are inextricably interrelated, and how these two competences help students become intercultural/global citizens through telecollaboration. Data was collected from both synchronous and asynchronous tasks carried out by Spanish learners of English who engaged in telecollaborative projects with L1 or highly proficient English speakers. The quantitative and qualitative analysis revealed that there is an empirical relationship between the learners' use of apologies and the development of their ICC. Also, following Byram's (2008) principles of education for intercultural citizenship, the results demonstrate that telecollaboration can foster language learners' intercultural/global citizenship.

Keywords: Telecollaboration, Pragmatic Competence, Apologies, Intercultural Communicative Competence.

1. Introduction

Intercultural contact frequently takes place through the use of technology. It is therefore imperative to incorporate the teaching of intercultural norms in the second/foreign language (L2) classroom, with a special emphasis on technology-mediated interaction. For intercultural interaction to be successful, not only do students need to know their target language, but they also need to possess pragmatic competence and intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Even though the relationship between pragmatic competence and ICC has been acknowledged, studies aimed at demonstrating this relationship are still limited (Jackson, 2019). One of the most appropriate ways to implement the teaching of these two competences in the language classroom is telecollaboration, as previous research has shown (González-Lloret, 2022; Sykes, 2017).

The aims of this short paper are:

1. To analyse the extent to which the relationship between pragmatic competence and ICC can be empirically demonstrated and how telecollaboration can strengthen this connection.
2. To illustrate, following Byram's (2008) principles of education for intercultural citizenship (EIC), how engaging in intercultural telecollaboration projects can help learners become intercultural/global citizens.

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Although some researchers use intercultural and global citizenship to define two different concepts (Portera, 2021), in this work they will be used interchangeably following Trapè (2020).

2. Method

This paper describes the data collected and the results obtained from three different telecollaboration projects, which lasted six weeks each. The aims of these projects were to foster Spanish students' use of apologies in English and to develop their ICC.

Participants of this study were three different groups of aerospace engineering students from the Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV), in Spain. The first group was composed of 7 students enrolled on an optional 3rd-year B2 level (CEFR) English subject, who collaborated with the University of Bath (UK). The second group was constituted by 24 students enrolled on an optional 1st-year B2 level (CEFR) Technical English subject, who worked together with the University of Hawai'i (US), while those in the third group were 6 students enrolled on an optional 3rd-year B2 level (CEFR) English subject, who collaborated with Morgan State University (US). All students from the partner institutions were L1 or highly proficient speakers of English who studied L2 Spanish.

A consent form detailing the study's objectives and the intended use of the data it collected was signed by each participant in the study. Their anonymity is kept. The aims and the context of the study were discussed with the instructors of each institution prior the start of the project.

Spanish students completed a pre-test on apologies before the start of each project. The aim of the test was to measure the students' understanding of apologies in English before the intercultural exchange. After that, based on previous research (e.g. Alcón-Soler, 2007; Plonsky & Zhuang, 2019) they received explicit instruction on pragmatics and apologies through audiovisual materials such as video extracts taken from TV series and films (the adequacy of these materials was previously tested in Di Sarno-García, 2018). This preparation was a relevant part of the study since when 'telecollaborative exchanges are combined with teacher mentoring before the exchanges take place, L2 learners' pragmatic competence […] will be enhanced' (Rezaeyan & Gimeno-Sanz, 2023). The third step was the telecollaboration project itself. Learners engaged in synchronous Zoom sessions with their counterparts, where they carried out open role-playing tasks to elicit their use of apologies and had also free time to practise oral conversation. Asynchronous cultural discussions were carried out through the MeWe platform, which is a free social network site that allows users to create a personal profile and to upload different file types such as pictures, videos, and PDFs, apart from posting comments (see Di Sarno-García, 2021, 2023). In addition, the researcher created a private group for each telecollaboration project that could be accessed only by the students and their teachers where the cultural discussions were carried out. Both types of activities were conducted on a weekly basis. At the end of each project, students from both sides co-created a sound-enhanced presentation (i.e. each slide contained an audio file recorded by the students) where they summarised the topics discussed, what they had learnt, and how they felt while dealing with

partners from other cultures. After that, Spanish students completed a post-test on apologies and a final project survey (see Appendix 1).

Data was collected through pre- and post-test, the role-plays, the MeWe discussions, the final presentation, and the final survey. The role-plays were recorded by the students themselves, who sent them to the researcher for their subsequent transcription and analysis. In terms of pragmatic competence, the strategies used to apologise by the participants were coded following a taxonomy based on those elaborated by Blum-Kulka and Olsthain (1984), Leech (2014) and Martínez-Flor (2016) through quantitative content analysis, while the responses obtained from pre- and post-test were analysed through descriptive statistics. In terms of ICC, based on previous research (Vinagre, 2016), instances or traces of Byram's (1997, 2021) five objectives of ICC were sought in the comments posted on MeWe, while the cultural topics discussed spontaneously on Zoom were categorised manually, both through quantitative content analysis. The Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to seek a relationship between pragmatic competence and ICC.

Byram's (2008) principles of EIC were followed to demonstrate how a telecollaboration project can help learners to become intercultural/global citizens.

3. Results and discussion

Regarding the first objective of this paper, the Pearson correlation coefficient revealed a statistically significant correlation between the number of comments on MeWe and the number of role-plays performed as $p=<.001$. This means that the more a student engaged in the cultural discussions on MeWe, the more they did the same with the role-playing tasks on Zoom, and vice versa. In line with this, the correlation between the number of MeWe comments and the number of strategies used during the role-plays showed a statistically significant correlation as $p=0.008$. This means that those students who participated more actively in the cultural discussions were also more prolific when apologising. Finally, a statistically significant correlation between the number of Zoom sessions and the number of sessions dealing with cultural topics was also found as $p=<.001$. This is especially relevant as those cultural topics were brought up in conversation spontaneously by students from both sides. Chun (2011) was the only similar previous study found. In her research, the students who showed L2 pragmatic abilities were the same who also demonstrated ICC and who discussed political and cultural topics. Therefore, the findings of the present study corroborate those by Chun (2011).

Regarding the second objective, telecollaboration has proved to be an adequate environment for the development of language learners' intercultural/global citizenship. The first principle of EIC (Byram, 2008, pp. 186-187) states that the 'intercultural experience takes place when people from different social groups with different values, beliefs and behaviours (cultures) meet'. In this sense, telecollaboration is a cost-effective way to meet culturally and geographically distant people, and it helps to overcome geographical and economic barriers. The second principle – 'being "intercultural" involves analysis and reflection about intercultural experience and acting on that reflection' – was also met as the students reflected on what they

had learnt and how they felt when they co-created the final product. This can be illustrated through the final slide of the students' presentations in Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3 below.

Figure 1. Last slide of one of the groups from the first telecollaboration project (all text is *verbatim*)
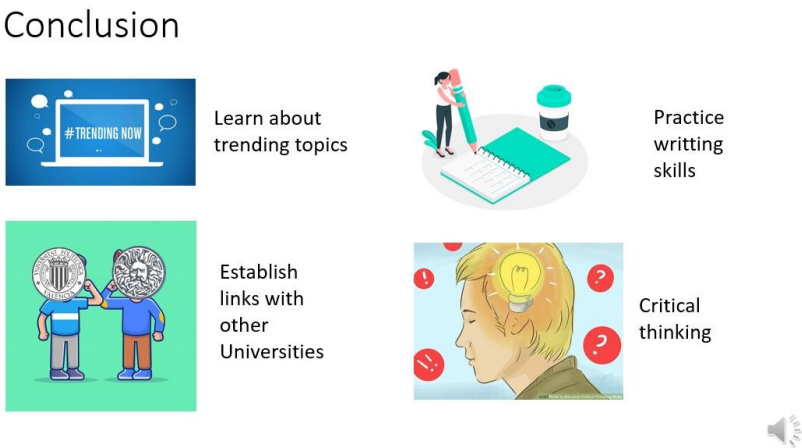
Figure 2. Last slide of one of the groups from the second telecollaboration project


Figure 3. Last slide of one of the groups from the third telecollaboration project
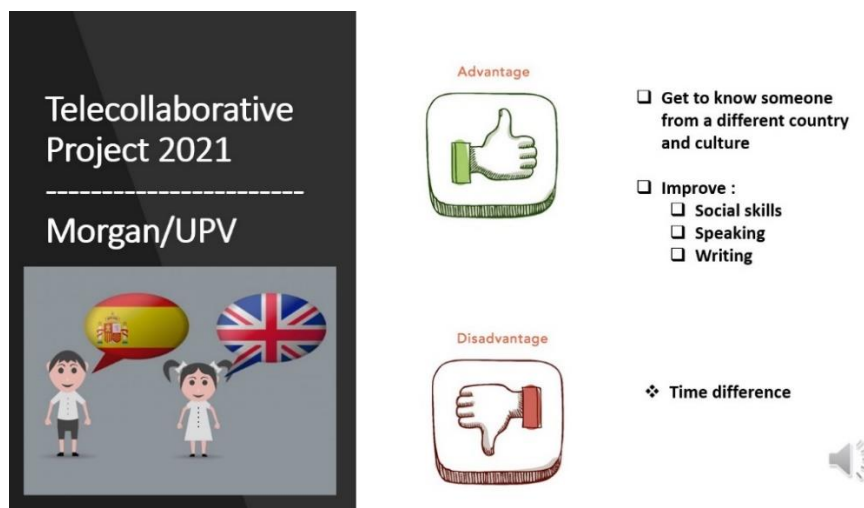
The third principle of EIC states as follows: 'intercultural citizenship experience takes place when people of different social groups and cultures engage in social and political activity.' This was achieved since students discussed sensitive topics such as the independence of Catalonia, immigration, and political borders (i.e., Mexico/US vs. Spain/Africa) on MeWe. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, cultural topics were brought up in conversation spontaneously. Those topics included *general aspects* (e.g., sense of culture, differences among countries, etc.) (24.82%), *sensitive topics* (e.g. Spanish civil war, World War II, etc.) (15.67%), *festivities and traditions* (13.87%), *education systems/university life* (13.14%), *food/timetables to eat* (10.95%), *languages* (9.49%), while other subcategories were also identified (e.g. notions of family). As previously mentioned, controversial issues were dealt with spontaneously, which reinforces the idea that sensitive topics should not be avoided in telecollaboration projects as it could hinder the intercultural experience (Godwin-Jones, 2019). Notwithstanding, cultural differences should always be taken into account since certain taboo topics cannot be discussed in some countries under any circumstances. For this reason, a robust ethical framework respecting differences should be followed.

According to the fourth principle, EIC involves:

> Causing/facilitating intercultural citizenship experience, and analysis and reflection on it and on the possibility of further social and/or political activity– i.e., activity which involves working with others to achieve an agreed end; creating learning/change in the individual: cognitive, attitudinal, behavioural change; change in self-perception; change in relationships with Others (i.e., people of a different social group); change that is based in the particular but is related to the universal. (Byram, 2008, p. 187)

Learners critically reflected on the intercultural experience through the co-creation of a final product, as it can be observed from Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3 above. The telecollaboration project also appeared to provide a transformational learning experience for the students and also affected their relationship with their partners, as illustrated by the results obtained from the final project survey (see Figure 4 below).

Figure 4. Results from the final project survey
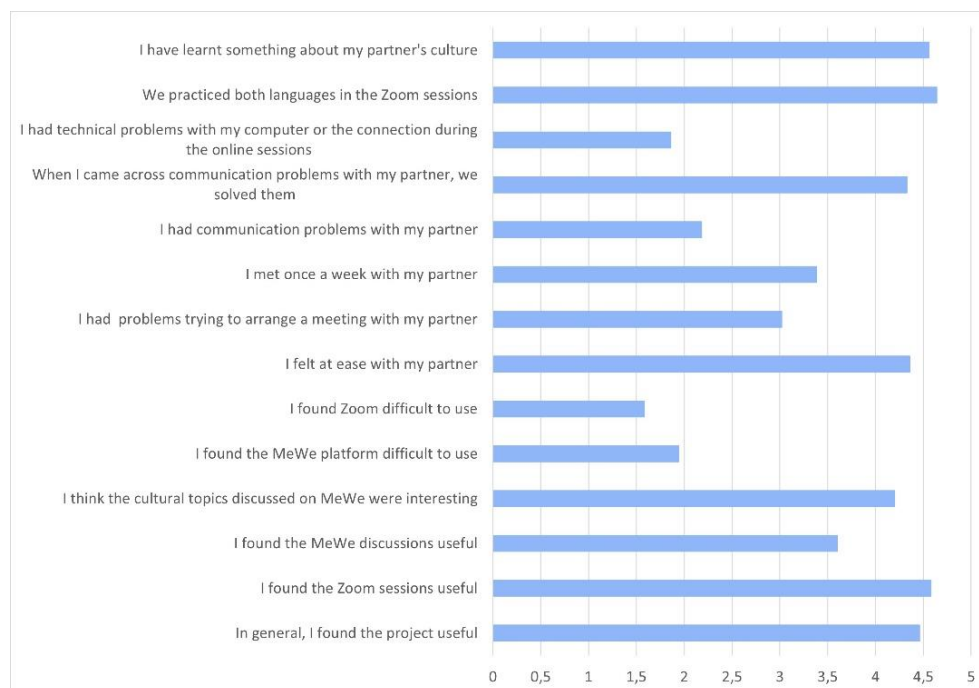
On a 5-point scale, where 1 was completely disagree and 5 was completely agree, the average response to the item *I have learnt something about my partner's culture* was 4.56 (Standard Deviation = 0.70). Moreover, most of the students were able to overcome communication problems with their partners, as the average response is 4.33 (SD = 0.82). This is in line with the responses obtained to the item *I felt at ease with my partner*, since the mean is 4.36 (SD = 0.74). This is especially relevant as one of the characteristics of the intercultural speaker is the ability to establish and maintain relationships with people from other cultures (Byram, 1997, 2021).

4. Conclusions

Despite the small sample size, this study has demonstrated how pragmatic competence and ICC are intertwined and how they can be developed through telecollaboration. Also, following Byram's (2008) principles of EIC, it has demonstrated that telecollaboration is a suitable approach for the development of language learners' intercultural/global citizenship. As claimed by Trapè (2020, p. 154), through telecollaboration 'young people are empowered to actively reflect on their role in a democratic society as active contributors: that is, as intercultural and global citizens'.

5. Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1 – final project survey

1) In general, I found the project useful.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

2) I found the Zoom sessions useful.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

3) I found the MeWe discussions useful.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

4) I think the cultural topics discussed on MeWe were interesting.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

5) I found the MeWe platform difficult to use.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

6) I found Zoom difficult to use.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

7) I felt at ease with my partner.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

8) I had problems trying to arrange a meeting with my partner.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

9) I met once a week with my partner.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

10) When I came across communication problems with my partner, we solved them.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

11) I had technical problems with my computer or the connection during the online sessions.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

12) We practiced both languages in the Zoom sessions.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

13) I have learnt something about my partner's culture.

1	2	3	4	5
Completely disagree				Completely agree

14) Would you like to keep on meeting with your partner after the end of the project?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

15) Do you have any comments or suggestions?

7. Action-research and role-reversal-informed creation of a Zoom breakout room guide for e-CIIC mediators

Marina Orsini-Jones[1], Bui Thi Ngoc Thuy[2], Jenny Wells[3], Andrew Preshous[4], Thi Thom Thom – Nguyen[5] & Farida Butt[6]

Abstract

This paper reports on how a Zoom breakout room (BoR) guide for E-CIIC (e-Classroom Interactional and Intercultural Competence) mediators was created as an unexpected outcome of project ViVEXELT (Vietnam Virtual EXchange for English Language Teaching). ViVEXELT was funded by the British Council and the National Foreign Language Project in Vietnam (digital learning innovation fund pilot – response to COVID-19, 2021-2022). The grant was awarded to provide research and insights to respond to specific questions about remote or digital capacity building during/post COVID not yet investigated in Vietnam. The ViVEXELT team delivered two iterations of a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Virtual Exchange (VE) course, in June-July 2021 and in October-November 2021 and reached over 200 participants, from 41 different educational institutions in Vietnam and five in the UK. The evaluation of the project was carried out with a mixed method approach. Rich qualitative data were collected from both individual interviews and reflective journals. The journals were analysed using NVivo software and a significant finding was the participants' interest for both the use of BoRs and the way they had been managed by e-mediators during the ViVEXELT synchronous sessions. As a result, an action-research-informed Zoom BoR guide for e-Classroom Interactional and Intercultural Competences (e-CIIC) mediators was created. It was an 'expert student' (who was also part of the ViVEXELT core team) who had the initial idea to co-create a guide with the other ViVEXELT participants. This paper will report on the research-informed process that led to the design of the guide.

Keywords: Virtual Exchange, English Language Teaching, CPD, Action Research, Zoom breakout rooms, E-mediators.

1. Introduction

Project ViVEXELT (Viet Nam Virtual Exchange for English Language Teaching) was made possible by the award of the British Council Learning Innovation Fund – Response to COVID-

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19 addressing Theme 2, Capacity Building) to the two lead institutions coordinating it: Coventry University (CU) in the UK and Hanoi University of Science and Technology (HUST) in Vietnam (https://www.britishcouncil.org/education/he-science/opportunities/vietnam-digital-learning-innovation-fund). The funding was awarded to projects that:

1. Supported Vietnam's National Foreign Languages Project (NFLP) ambition to improve the teaching and learning of English;

2. Explored more inclusive and accessible approaches, particularly through digital and education technology;

3. Encouraged collaborative partnerships between the UK and Vietnam generating new research, insight and/or innovations.

CU and HUST are committed to ways of internationalising the learning experience that comply with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) principles to foster the development of intercultural awareness and global citizenship attributes. Virtual Exchange can support an EDI-compliant approach to the internationalisation of the curriculum in a variety of educational settings as it:

enables sustained, technology-enabled, research informed, people-to-people education programmes or activities in which constructive communication and interaction takes place between individuals or groups who are geographically separated and/or from different cultural backgrounds, with the support of educators or facilitators' (EVOLVE, 2023).

Virtual Exchange can also be instrumental in supporting the creation of cross-continental communities of practice. Therefore, ViVEXELT aimed to address ELT capacity building and digital competence enhancement through the creation of a cross-sectional ELT network as community of practice supported by an online course that included both synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities. An interesting element of the project was the inclusion of the English language provision manager for the Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre (https://www.covrefugee.org/) in the core ViVEXELT team, who at the time of the project, was also a student completing her MA in English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics at Coventry University, with the co-principal investigator from CU as her supervisor. Participating

in ViVEXELT and reflecting on the feedback received on the use of the Zoom breakout rooms (BoRs) and the research data collected with the rest of the team, gave this 'expert student' the idea to base her MA dissertation on the creation of a guide for e-mediators in BoRs. The input from an 'expert student' in action research practice has been implemented for a number of years at Coventry University (e.g. Orsini-Jones, 2014; Lloyd, et al., 2018) and provides academic staff with the opportunity to see their practice through 'the looking glass' of their students.

The ViVEXELT course had two iterations and aimed at addressing a priority area identified by the Ministry of Education and the British Council in Vietnam, namely, teaching speaking online at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The content of the five Zoom synchronous sessions on the ViVEXELT course was as follows:

1. Introduction to ViVEXELT, e-CICs (e-Classroom Interactional Competencies, after Moorhouse et al., 2021) and intercultural awareness.

2. Teaching Speaking Online.

3. Communicative Grammar Teaching Online.

4. Tips and Tricks to Support Online Interaction.

5. Reflective Practice in ELT (with a focus on student-centred/learner-centred approaches).

This paper will focus on the analysis of the participants' reflective journals submitted at the end of the course, that highlighted their interest for the BoR experience. It will also illustrate how a BoR guide for e-Classroom Interactional and Intercultural Competence mediators emerged from these reflections, partly drawing on the findings on the mediation competencies needed by English teachers teaching online at the time of COVID-19 by Moorhouse et al. (2021).

2. Method

Two cycles of the ViVEXELT course were delivered, one in June-July 2021 and one in October-November 2021, and the research data collected included the qualitative NVivo analysis of the optional reflective journals submitted by participants, post-project focus group interview analysis and Padlet wall (https://padlet.com/site/product) reflections during the focus groups.

Over 200 participants took an active part in the ViVEXELT course. They engaged synchronously in the live sessions for five hours and were asked to engage asynchronously with a group task that required the co-design of lesson plans based on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (https://sdgs.un.org/goals) applied to their local contexts and needs. Each group presented their plan during the last Zoom synchronous session (see explanatory videos here : https://vivexelt.com/symposium-2/ and repurposable plans here : https://vivexelt.com/resources/).

The participants, who were from 41 educational institutions in Vietnam (state primary, secondary and tertiary and private language schools) and five in the UK (four universities and a charity) were students in English teacher education, language teacher trainers and in-service English language teachers. This was therefore a rich and cross-educational sector Community of Practice (CoP) (Wenger, 1998) that enhanced educational knowledge-sharing both locally and internationally.

Action research was the underpinning research approach (Burns, 2010) and the team addressed the issues that emerged from the first cycle in the second one (see Table 1 below). Participants were also invited to reflect 'in action' while engaging online, 'on action' reflecting on the lessons learnt and 'for action' for their future practice, in alignment with another 'tried and tested' approach to VE at CU (Orsini-Jones et al., 2021).

Table 1.

Actions taken in Phase 2 in view of the feedback received in Phase 1 community of practice

Feedback from Phase 1	Action(s) taken for Phase 2
1. More time in BoRs	BoR tasks were allocated a minimum of 15 minutes per task
2. More demonstrations of digital tools	More demonstrations included and video tutorials created for the most popular ones (see vivexelt.com)
3. Clearer instructions provided well in advance of each session	All participants were sent materials and session plans at least three days before each session
4. Too much academic material	The team had not realised that the project would attract so many primary and secondary school teachers. The materials were revised to address this
5. Greater focus on speaking skills	More speaking skills tasks were included
6. Need to have the support of a mediator to carry out the lesson plan task	Mediators were allocated to each of the groups (11 groups in total) to support participants with creating their lesson plans
7. Provision of more sessions	Session 5 became a full session; in Phase 1

	it had been an informal focus group. An extra, optional focus group was set up (session 6). The team also organised two symposia and one webinar in collaboration with the BC which provided further opportunities for ViVEXELT knowledge sharing
8. Provision of more systematic training and briefing for e-mediators in BoRs	E-mediators became part of the team and were invited to the weekly ViVEXELT meetings. Two CPD training sessions for e-mediators were created and delivered. E-mediators were sent more explicit instructions than in Phase 1 and a more systematic approach was adopted in relation to the allocation of participants to BoRs with the same e-mediator every week. E-mediators also participated in the creation of the BoR Guide, see further details below

2.1 Role-reversal action-research-informed inquiry

A large quantity of data were collected, however this paper will mainly focus on the feedback provided by participants in the reflective journals written for ViVEXELT that appeared to indicate that working in BoRs) during the synchronous sessions had been a transformational experience for them but had also presented challenges.

In view of the data emerging, the above-mentioned 'expert student', who is also one of the authors of this paper, proposed to base her MA dissertation on the creation of a BoR guide for e-CIIC mediators, making the inquiry 'expert student-driven' (as with other related projects, e.g. Lloyd et al, 2018) and informed by a student's perspective on a curricular action previously analysed by her tutor. In the role-reversal model of action-research-informed inquiry, a student identifies a problematic issue that relates to their tutor's curriculum and explores it in student-driven cycles (see Orsini-Jones, 2014). Butt based her reflections on the two cycles of ViVEXELT, with a focus on BoRs and the role of e-mediators in BoRs. This resulted in the co-creation of a BoR guide, see further details below.

The analysis of the ViVEXELT participants' reflective journals carried out with NVivo and the results of a subsequent focus group on Zoom underpinned the design of the various drafts of the guide (over 10) that were discussed with a self-selected number of participants (22) during an online focus group session.

3. Results

3.1 Reflective Journals Analysis for Phase 1 (June-July 2021)

Reflective journals were submitted by 22 participants in cohort 1 and NVivo version 1.5[7] (https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-qualitative-data-analysis-software/home) was used to undertake the analysis of the data (a total of 14,944 words). Journals were added anonymously to a single Word document which was then loaded into the NVivo software. The team opted for a thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017). A word frequency query was run against the whole data set and revealed the 1000 most frequently used words. A visualisation of this is represented as a word cloud in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

*NVivo word cloud from Phase 1 (complete)*

The four most frequent words were: 'online', 'students', 'teaching' and 'teachers'. However, the fifth and seventh most frequent words were 'breakout' and 'rooms' respectively, represented as 170 references to breakout/room in the entire data set. Re-running the word frequency query excluding the four most frequent words gives a clearer visualisation of the key words in the participants' reflections (Figure 2).

Figure 2.

NVivo word cloud from Phase 1 (excludes: 'online', 'students', 'teaching' & 'teachers')

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[7] NVivo is a qualitative data analysis computer software package produced by QSR International.

The number of mentions of the BoRs indicated that this was a theme of great interest. For several participants, using BoRs appeared to be a new experience and feedback was very positive, e.g. 'so getting the chance to communicate in smaller groups in the breakout rooms was something amazing to me and very useful as I could be noticed and listened to when asked.' The benefits of working in smaller groups were reiterated by many, suggesting participants felt more at ease and consequently more confident to engage with others. There was recognition that using BoRs could add value to participants' own lessons: 'Thanks to the virtual exchange, I have learnt encouraging students to collaborate and spend time in breakout rooms is effective in decreasing the teacher talking time and increase the student talking and working time.'

However, despite the many positive comments, using BoRs posed challenges too. Firstly, participants highlighted the importance of having access to task instructions once they had moved from the main room into the BoR. Other frustrations stemmed from differences in access to technology between participants, such as no access to microphones resulting in more written interactions via the Zoom chat facility, and the difficulties of working with time constraints in this new working environment. With technological issues and instructional limitations impacting on oral and written interaction, participants were often pushed for time to complete the tasks set for BoRs. Also acknowledged in the reflective journals were the different levels of engagement amongst BoR participants and the tendency for some to be very reluctant to appear on camera or engage at all. The role of the ViVEXELT e-mediators was recognised as important in helping with these challenges: 'In the future, I plan to also assign a group leader and/or a moderator to each breakout room, which is something that I learnt from the ViVEXELT sessions.'

There was evidence from the reflective journals of:

1. BoRs providing a positive environment for interaction and collaboration

2. Teachers not having used BoRs as much as anticipated (prior to ViVEXELT)

3. Specific challenges to working in the BoR environment

4. Recognition for the role of a moderator/mediator

5. Some initial definitions of the moderator/mediator role.

The specific BoR lessons learnt from Phase 1 and implemented in Phase 2 were:

- Recognising the importance of informal conversations in the BoRs and making time for these to happen

- More scaffolding of the BoR sessions to facilitate engagement and include all participants

- Ensuring sufficient time is allocated for tasks in BoRs

- Supporting participants to 'stay on task' and complete the set tasks

- Ensuring mediators have access to task instructions/links before heading to BoRs

- Providing e-mediators with more training.

3.2 Reflective Journals Analysis for Phase 2 (October-November 2021)

Thirty-six reflective journals were submitted by participants following completion of Phase 2 of the project. Again, these were amalgamated into a single, anonymous Word document (total 15,921 words) and analysed using NVivo. The same procedure as in Phase 1 was followed and, once the key words 'online', 'students', 'teaching' and 'teachers' were removed the results were very similar to Phase 1 (Figure 2) in Phase 2 (Figure 3), with 'breakout' and 'rooms' represented again as key emerging words.

Figure 3.

NVivo word cloud from Phase 2 (excludes: 'online', 'students', 'teaching' & 'teachers')

The four most frequent words in Phase 2 were the same as in Phase 1, while 'breakout' was the ninth most frequent word and 'room' the eleventh. What emerged was acknowledgement by participants of some success in revising and extending the e-mediator role implemented by the ViVEXELT team in view of the feedback received in Phase 1. The e-mediator's role in facilitating engagement and keeping participants 'on task' was commented upon by many participants, e.g.: 'I felt it teaches the (new) teachers how to manage online classes and how to interact with the learners.' Successes in implementation of the e-mediator role were reinforced by the positive remarks on e-mediators in Phase 2, e.g (*verbatim*).:

> I get more ideas about breaking rooms and how to control and facilitate students. Therefore, I have to say that my lessons are now more interactive and my students benefit more. They are no longer passive in their breaking rooms but they know what they have to do and be more active to share and cooperate.

Despite some challenges still being mentioned in Phase 2 (e.g. time-management in BoRs), it would appear that the action research reflections and actions positively impacted on the following aspects:

1. The implementation of the e-mediator role in BoRs.

2. The adoption of the BoRs/e-mediators practice in teachers' own contexts.

The feedback and reflections resulted in the decision to facilitate the creation of the above-mentioned participant-informed BoR guide for e-CIIC mediators in Zoom BoRs. This outcome had not been envisaged at the beginning of the project but aligns with existing literature on action-research (Burns, 2010) that discusses how this approach offers opportunities for transformational ELT research-informed practice.

The creation of the BoR guide drew from the:

- Analysis of individual participant reflections in the journals.

- Written reflections/feedback from ViVEXELT mediators.

- Mediator feedback before and after the live sessions.

- Self-selected participants' focus group on BoRs (16th February 2022).

The team had to make some choices while writing the guide, for example who the guide would be for (audience) and how it should be written (practical and informal? Academic?). It was agreed to opt for a clear, concise and accessible style, with an emphasis on practicality. The guide is now available at the project's website (vivexelt.com) and is included in the list of useful resources for VEs recommended by the VE expert Robert O'Dowd: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fbQ1xpPM_HHBiOlulk_mlSN0MkgrRyZpVM4lTx-BrM0/edit#

A limitation of the study is that it proved to be challenging to sustain the CoP after the funding ended, however there is evidence that the ViVEXELT Facebook page and the project website are still being accessed/used at the time of writing this paper (October 2023).

4. Conclusions

Participating teachers stated that they had acquired new competences and applied and disseminated what they had learnt into their practice. Most participants provided positive feedback on the lessons learnt about BoR use in their practice.

The analysis of the data and feedback discussed here would appear to illustrate that ViVEXELT was successful in supporting ELT teachers at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The ViVEXELT model of ELT CPD, 'in', 'on' and 'for' action, is a flexible, sustainable and transnational model for online teacher professional development that maximises opportunities for exchanging knowledge, experience and skills in a relaxed and friendly intercultural and international setting.

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