

# Facebook for Engagement: Telecollaboration Between Finland and New Zealand in German Language Learning

Kirsi Korkealehto, Häme University of Applied Sciences, Hämeenlinna, Finland & University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland  
Vera Leier, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand

## ABSTRACT

This research presents a virtual exchange project between two tertiary institutions in New Zealand and Finland with 26 participants who were intermediate German language students. During the project, the students used a closed Facebook group to post about given topics; the posts combined video, audio, and text that adhered to multimodal meaning-making theory. The theoretical framework was task-based language teaching underpinned by the notion of engagement, social media in language learning, and telecollaboration. Language learning was viewed through a socio-cultural lens. A mixed-methods approach was used to collect data including questionnaires, interviews, and FB-logs. The qualitative data was analysed by content analysis method. The results indicate that the students perceived FB as an applicable tool for community building and they enjoyed the variation it brought to the course. Collaboration, use of communication tools, authenticity, and teachers' support fostered student engagement.

## KEYWORDS

Facebook, German, Higher Education, Student Engagement, Telecollaboration

## INTRODUCTION

Technology-mediated social networking sites (SNSs), such as Facebook (FB), have become an integral part of students' social and educational lives (Blattner & Fiori, 2011; Espinosa, 2015; Leier, 2017; Picciano, 2009). They are virtual spaces where students can join groups of learners from different countries and backgrounds, thus developing into new global contact zones that have led to the creation of online communities (Kulavuz-Onal & Vasquez, 2018; Oskoz & Gimeno-Sanz, 2020).

These spaces can develop into learning communities that foster engagement when teachers carefully design the learning activities and assignments. The notion of community and learning refers to Dewey's concepts of student-driven learning via engagement, active learning, and collaboration (Fink & Inkela, 2015). Online communities and interactivity that Web 2.0 facilitates draws attention as discussed by Palloff and Pratt: "Without the support and participation of learning communities, there is no online course" (Palloff & Pratt, 1999, p. 29). Kopp and Hill (2008) continued this line of thinking: "Learning occurs when knowledge is actuated through the process of a learner connecting

DOI: 10.4018/IJCALLT.2021010101

to and feeding information into a learning community” (p. 1). In this study the instructors created a Facebook group as a learning environment. Two groups of tertiary students of German who live in two opposite parts of the world meet on this platform and work on teacher-designed tasks. The students who knew only little about each other’s cultures build a community of learners by conducting tasks which were designed applying the three-layer task design (Ware & O’Dowd, 2008). The final task creating a joint product was the most challenging. The type of telecollaboration between two groups of non-native speakers from remote parts of the world using Facebook as a platform are first getting to know each other and finally creating a joint product is a new and innovative study and a contribution to the CALL literature.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Due to developments in network communication technologies, foreign language learners can extend their face-to-face classroom learning and gain access to other learners globally to learn a target language together, leading to intercultural communication and, consequently, intercultural competency (Byram, 1997). The extant literature references this approach to language learning as telecollaboration (Belz, 2003; Goodwin-Jones, 2019; Hauck & Young, 2008; Kurek & Müller-Hartmann, 2019; O’Dowd, 2011) or virtual exchanges (O’Dowd, 2018; The EVALUATE Group, 2019)

Traditionally, telecollaborations were email exchanges or situated on an institution’s learning platform (Belz, 2003; O’Dowd, 2011; Sadler & Dooley, 2016) since technology afforded easier and more affordable communication telecollaboration gained a lot of interest in recent years with studies reporting on telecollaboration initiatives between language students (Oskoz & Gimeno-Sanz, 2020), between language teacher students (Ryshina-Pankova, 2018), but also studies about practices and attitudes towards telecollaboration both of teachers and students (Helm, 2015). Telecollaboration projects are predominantly concerned about intercultural competence, either synchronous communication (Ryshina-Pankova, 2018; van der Zwaard & Bannink, 2019) or asynchronous communication using different social Web-tools (Lee, 2018; Oskoz & Gimeno-Sanz, 2020; Ryshina-Pankova, 2018; van der Zwaard & Bannink, 2019). Oskoz & Gimeno-Sanz studied 24 second language learners in the US and Spain over a period of one semester. The students completed collaborative tasks in groups of 3 or 4 using online tools such as Google +, online forums and Skype. Applying the appraisal framework, Martin & White’s (2005) results indicated that students enjoyed creating a close and safe learning environment. Lee (2018) established a Spanish American exchange over one semester using Voicethread, blogs and video chats. The communication was in Spanish and the US learners of Spanish profited of this exchange in particular gaining pragmatic knowledge. Ryshina-Pankova (2018) formed a telecollaboration with 13 teacher students in the US and 13 foreign language teacher students in Germany who communicated via online chat for a period of seven weeks. The topic of their chats was videos on soccer the students had to watch and subsequently discuss with their partners. Van der Zwaard & Bannink (2019) reported on a study between 60 Dutch and Australian students who collaborated for eight weeks on making a digital theatre play using synchronous computer-mediated communication, Skype and instant chat.

The community in a telecollaboration does not form naturally, as in a classroom; the course design is based on communication cues to influence community formation. Language teachers become designers and acquire the necessary skills and competencies themselves before being able to support learner autonomy in Web 2.0 contexts (Fuchs, Snyder, Tung, & Han, 2018; Hauck & Young, 2008; Palfreyman, 2018).

Task design enhances not only intercultural competence but also a sense of community. Beneficial tasks allow discourse to develop interactivity, reciprocity, and interactional balance (Chun, 2011; Ware & O’Dowd, 2008). Chun (2011) explored how online exchanges can play a role in second language learners’ development of pragmatic and intercultural competence. She studied the discourse style of advanced learners of the German language and learners of the English language. The exchanges

18 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: [www.igi-global.com/article/facebook-for-engagement/267191](http://www.igi-global.com/article/facebook-for-engagement/267191)

## Related Content

---

### The Effectiveness of Different Modalities in Facilitating Grammar Acquisition in the Flipped Classroom

Hongying Xu (2019). *International Journal of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching* (pp. 37-50).

[www.irma-international.org/article/the-effectiveness-of-different-modalities-in-facilitating-grammar-acquisition-in-the-flipped-classroom/238873](http://www.irma-international.org/article/the-effectiveness-of-different-modalities-in-facilitating-grammar-acquisition-in-the-flipped-classroom/238873)

### The Effects of Video Projects on EFL Learners' Language Learning and Motivation: An Evaluative Study

Hsin-chou Huang (2015). *International Journal of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching* (pp. 53-70).

[www.irma-international.org/article/the-effects-of-video-projects-on-efl-learners-language-learning-and-motivation/128256](http://www.irma-international.org/article/the-effects-of-video-projects-on-efl-learners-language-learning-and-motivation/128256)

### Effectiveness of Visuals in Learning Social Media Awareness During the Pandemic

Gayatri Rai and Sandeep Kumar (2023). *Handbook of Research on Learning in Language Classrooms Through ICT-Based Digital Technology* (pp. 200-212).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/effectiveness-of-visuals-in-learning-social-media-awareness-during-the-pandemic/318212](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/effectiveness-of-visuals-in-learning-social-media-awareness-during-the-pandemic/318212)

### The Nature of 'Talk' in Synchronous Computer-Mediated Communication in a Vietnamese Tertiary EFL Context

Long V. Nguyen and Cynthia White (2013). *Explorations of Language Teaching and Learning with Computational Assistance* (pp. 89-112).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/nature-talk-synchronous-computer-mediated/67464](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/nature-talk-synchronous-computer-mediated/67464)

### Bridging Activities: Social Media for Connecting Language Learners' in-School and Out-of-School Literacy Practices

Ellen Yeh and Svetlana Mitric (2020). *International Journal of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching* (pp. 48-66).

[www.irma-international.org/article/bridging-activities/257529](http://www.irma-international.org/article/bridging-activities/257529)