

Chapter 6

Enhance University Students' Intercultural Competence With Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL): A Case Study of Vietnamese and Taiwanese Students

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ABSTRACT

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) has emerged as an innovative pedagogical approach to bridging cultural gaps in English language education context where opportunities for real-world English practice and intercultural engagement are often limited outside the classroom. This study explores how Vietnamese and Taiwanese university students demonstrate their intercultural competence through their participation in an eight-week COIL project. The project involved 11 first-year EFL students from a Vietnamese university and 13 students from a Taiwanese college. Data were collected through student reflection reports and

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-3506-2.ch006

in-depth interviews and analyzed in light of Deardorff's (2006) process model of intercultural competence. The findings highlight students' nuanced demonstration of their intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes during the COIL project. The students demonstrated curiosity, openness, and respect from the outset, and these attitudes were further developed through the project. Ultimately, the project not only improved their communication skills and cultural awareness but also forged lasting cross-border friendships, underscoring the value of intercultural competence in building meaningful global connections.

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, the ability to communicate effectively across cultural and linguistic boundaries has become a fundamental skill. The global context of internationalization in higher education (HE) has highlighted the need for developing intercultural competence (ICC) among students (Dang, 2020; Gregersen-Hermans, 2017, Deardorff, 2006). This competence is crucial for successful communication and interaction in diverse cultural settings (Byram et al., 2013). To address this need, universities are implementing various intercultural learning interventions, including specific courses and study abroad programs, which have shown positive impacts on students' intercultural competence (Sierra-Huedo & Nevado-Llopis, 2022). The integration of ICC into foreign language teaching at the tertiary level is particularly emphasized to enhance students' sociolinguistic skills and prevent cultural misunderstandings (Dang, 2020). These efforts aim to equip graduates with the skills necessary to function as global professionals and responsible citizens in an increasingly interconnected world.

For students in non-English-speaking countries, acquiring proficiency in English and developing ICC are crucial to thrive in both academic and professional environments. This need is particularly pressing in both Vietnam and Taiwan, where English is seen as a gateway to global opportunities. However, the limited use of English outside classroom settings and insufficient integration of cultural content into English language curricula often fail to provide students with immersive, real-world experiences necessary to foster English language proficiency skills and ICC (Hoa, 2011; Hang, 2017; Tran & Duong, 2018). According to Hoa (2011), while activities like interacting with foreigners can enhance ICC, their effectiveness in Vietnam is limited due to the infrequency of such interactions. This highlights the need for alternative methods to cultivate ICC in the HE contexts where exposure to native English speakers has remained limited. Therefore, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) emerges as a promising pedagogical approach to address these gaps by facilitating cross-cultural interactions through technology.

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