

COLLABORATIVE ONLINE INTERNATIONAL LEARNING (COIL) BETWEEN SPANISH AND UKRAINIAN STUDENTS: NEW TASKS AND NEW RELATIONSHIPS

APRENDIZAJE INTERNACIONAL COLABORATIVO EN LÍNEA (COIL) ENTRE ESTUDIANTADO ESPAÑOL Y UCRANIANO: NUEVAS TAREAS Y NUEVAS RELACIONES

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Abstract

Nowadays, our professional lives face challenges that inevitably require a quick reaction and a shift in the field of education. Moreover, globalisation and the ongoing war in Ukraine motivate teachers to look for new opportunities to communicate across cultures. This research aims to analyse students' perceptions of the effects of collaborative online international learning (COIL). The study participants were 12 fourth-year Ukrainian students from Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv who were taking the course on Academic English within the Languages, Literature and Translation program and a group of 20 Spanish fifth-year students from Universitat Jaume I who were enrolled in the Business English course as part of the dual degree in Business Administration and Law. The methodology consisted of three stages. Firstly, participants used online communication tools to establish contacts with partners. Secondly, students discussed the topic of corporate sustainability on Zoom. Thirdly, each group used online collaborative teaching (OCT) to write an opinion essay. Results from the final questionnaire after the COIL experience confirmed that,

despite the difficulties due to the ongoing war in Ukraine, students' perceptions of their experience of COIL were positive. They were more motivated and believed the activity had helped them to improve their writing and speaking skills as well as their intercultural competence.

Keywords: collaborative online international learning, online collaborative teaching, IT tools, intercultural competence, students' learning self-perception.

Resumen

Actualmente, nuestra vida profesional se enfrenta a retos que inevitablemente requieren una rápida reacción y un cambio en la educación. Además, la globalización, y la guerra en curso en Ucrania, motivan al profesorado a buscar nuevas oportunidades para la comunicación intercultural. Esta investigación pretende analizar los efectos que produce en el estudiantado una experiencia de aprendizaje internacional colaborativo en línea (COIL por sus siglas en inglés). Los participantes en el estudio fueron 12 estudiantes ucranianos de la Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (Ucrania) de una asignatura de Inglés Académico en el cuarto curso del programa de Lenguas, Literatura y Traducción, y 20 estudiantes españoles de la Universitat Jaume I matriculados en Inglés para los Negocios en el quinto curso del doble grado de Administración de Empresas y Derecho. La metodología constó de tres fases. En primer lugar, los participantes se comunicaron en línea para establecer un primer contacto. En segundo lugar, debatieron sobre sostenibilidad corporativa en Zoom. En tercer lugar, cada grupo redactó un ensayo de opinión en colaboración. Los resultados del cuestionario final confirmaron que, a pesar de las dificultades debidas a la guerra en Ucrania, la percepción del estudiantado sobre su experiencia con COIL fue positiva. Estuvieron más motivados e indicaron que esta actividad les había ayudado a mejorar sus destrezas orales y escritas, y su competencia intercultural.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje internacional colaborativo en línea, enseñanza colaborativa en línea, herramientas informáticas, competencia intercultural, percepción del aprendizaje por los estudiantes.

1. Introduction

COIL (collaborative online international learning) is considered to be “a new teaching and learning paradigm that promotes the development of intercultural competence across shared multicultural learning environments” (Rubin and Wilson n.d.). COIL requires the engagement of a global network to provide a

context for virtual communication and collaboration among participants. This type of online learning gathers at least two groups of representatives from different cultural backgrounds and educational programs located in another city, country, continent and even time zone. Furthermore, participants in COIL initiatives may study different subjects, which means that an interdisciplinary approach is also one of the components of COIL. This type of collaborative learning can be synchronous or asynchronous, and language is the aspect that unites the participants. The beneficial outcomes of participation in COIL appear to be intercultural information exchange and practice with both previously and newly gained skills (Hackett et al. 2023).

Another valuable point is the opportunity to receive information about the world through eyes, senses, emotions and understanding directly from those who experience them. In such a way, we can form images and perceptions of the world. That is why COIL can promote students' intercultural awareness and foster their curiosity and motivation to learn more.

After gaining the experience of working outside the classroom during the two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, educators and students have become more acquainted with a wide range of educational IT platforms and tools. COVID-19 forced teachers to understand that the world, which was previously perceived as a 'small global village' where people had a great number of opportunities to travel, work, study and actually explore, may at a certain times force us into isolation, causing us to become unreachable. In this setting, teachers, now equipped with the skills to work online, feel more confident and ready to gain new experience in implementing the COIL methodology in their classrooms.

COIL fosters communication and collaboration across cultures without requiring physical border-crossing and can broaden students' awareness of cross-cultural communication and foster multicultural literacy. Students may participate in activities abroad, not only by acquiring new knowledge and improving skills developed previously, but also by sharing ideas, knowledge and experiences while staying at home and attending classes at their university. Moreover, this kind of activity requires the involvement of modern means of communication that are tightly connected with IT programs, platforms and applications, thereby enhancing students' digital literacy. In other words, COIL may help to raise a generation of technologically savvy global citizens with profound knowledge of others.

2. Literature Review

In the search for new angles and approaches for teaching and learning foreign languages, growing attention is being given to COIL (O'Dowd 2016; Marull and

Kumar 2020). Virtual exchange is considered to be an umbrella term for COIL (O'Dowd 2018), which is broader. There is a wide range of terminology used to denote technology-based learning and collaboration: online intercultural exchange (O'Dowd 2016), telecollaboration (Sonnenwald et al. 1999; Lee and Markey 2014; O'Dowd 2016), globally networked learning (Crabtree et al. 2008; McNair and Paretto 2010), internet-mediated intercultural foreign language education (Belz and Thorne 2006) and e-tandem (O'Rourke 2007) or teletandem (Telles and Leone 2016). The authors of this research agreed to use the term COIL, as for us, such notions as internationalisation and online learning are of central importance.

As great attention is paid nowadays to global citizenship education around the world, COIL approaches can be employed to foster “a flexible body of issues, skills, attitudes, and sensitivities that enable individuals to be thoughtful, responsible, participatory citizens of their local community, state, nation, and world” (Cruz 1998: 28). This means that by applying COIL, instructors may engage participants in meaningful interactions, such as dialogues between students from different cultures. This approach fosters cross-cultural awareness and helps students discover common ground while also encouraging an appreciation of the uniqueness of their own and others' perspectives. To reach this goal, classroom discussions about messages or problems depicted in videos or articles are beneficial, as they encourage students to draw on their knowledge and share experiences. Furthermore, the received knowledge, which is the product of collaboration with peers, could be a valuable source for further assignments, both oral and written (O'Dowd 2016). Thus, this type of online collaboration and communication has become vital for researchers and language learners as, through partnerships and networks, students perform various tasks and improve both their language skills and background knowledge of the topic.

O'Dowd (2016) delves into the tendency to involve university students in collaboration exchanges in many ways. For instance, the use of English, French, Spanish or other languages as a lingua franca can successfully build and develop students' intercultural and sociocultural competence and awareness of the role of a language in intercultural communication. Such activities enable the development of critical reflective skills of primary importance in our modern world, as they may help sustain peace and the principles of democracy or build cultural and economic contacts. Recognising COIL approaches helps improve soft skills and professional knowledge in the younger generation, which in turn might contribute to mitigating or preventing future economic crises and armed conflicts.

Moreover, King de Ramirez (2019) provides COIL project results among students enrolled in universities located in the Arizona-Sonora Megaregion. Using various platforms such as Facebook, Skype, WhatsApp, Gaming, Snapchat and Instagram,

participants collaborated in communication to discuss the political debates held due to the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The aim of the project was to understand whether international online communication could increase students' awareness of intersections between local and global communities. In this research, COIL was intended to remedy a general lack of knowledge and communication between students who live in the Arizona-Sonora Megaregion within 70 miles of the United States-Mexico Border in either one or the other country. This can be considered an example of how collaborative initiatives can foster the development of essential global competences, including the ability to analyse international relations, critically appraise media and recognise the intricate connections that shape global interdependence. All of the aforementioned experiences demonstrate that COIL enhances global citizenship and language skills (Marginson and Sawir 2011).

The successful implementation of COIL encourages educators to conduct research and analyse the merits of COIL in different fields of science, as shown in the research conducted by Rubin (Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning 2017), who implemented a four-credit COIL course on video production for university students from Belarus and the US. The purpose of the course was to identify and improve cross-cultural and professional competence. As part of the research, each team of students produced a 4-minute film on the theme chosen and later emailed the final video to the members of the second team. The outcomes reflected an improvement in professional skills and meaningful international experiences that enhanced cross-cultural sensitivity, comprehension and perception of the different images of the world (Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning 2017).

Similarly, another group of educators implemented technology-based learning in a virtual exchange project between the Pereiaslav-Khmelnyskyi Hryhorii Skovoroda State Pedagogical, Ukraine, and Trakia University, Bulgaria (Rzhevskaya et al. 2020). The researchers found that students enrolled in non-engineering fields of study used well-known tools for their collaboration, resulting in a positive impact on their outcomes and gained further appreciation for learning new IT skills for successful cooperation and communication. Therefore, alongside improving language skills and communicating across cultures, students acquired new knowledge in the field of digital literacy.

The study carried out by Orsini-Jones and Lee (2018) provides an account of a COIL project dealing with the integration of global citizenship education into the curriculum and assessment of language courses provided at Coventry University, in the United Kingdom, and the Université de Haute-Alsace, in France. Students from both institutions used a common learning management

system, where they participated in activities related to developing strategies for intercultural pragmatics and netiquette.

Previous research has highlighted that students perceive COIL as an excellent tool to boost language skills, raise cross-cultural awareness, enhance professional knowledge and skills and develop critical thinking and IT literacy (Nguyen et al. 2024). It allows educators to engage at least two groups of students from universities in different counties or even continents to participate in discussions on socially relevant topics and to work collaboratively through an online platform using a lingua franca. Nguyen et al. (2024) found different ways in which students perceived an improvement of English as a lingua franca. On the one hand, they made an effort to make themselves understood and to understand their interlocutors by means of the resources available in online communication. As other authors (Çiftçi and Savaş, 2018) point out, in telecollaboration, learners' abilities to communicate and adapt interculturally can be boosted through problem-solving. Furthermore, Nguyen et al. (2024) showed that students believed COIL had helped them develop not only their English skills but also their attitudes, awareness, knowledge and intercultural skills, making them more confident to use English.

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3. Objectives and Research Questions

Though previous studies have explored the use of COIL, to our knowledge none has dealt with COIL between Spanish and Ukrainian students, especially in wartime. This research aims to determine whether students perceive that COIL can create advantages for learning the English language and make them aware of cross-cultural communication, while they learn new content and cultural aspects. In order to reach this objective, the following research questions will be answered:

- RQ 1. What is the students' perception on how COIL affects English language learning in interdisciplinary settings?
- RQ 2. What additional benefits for global education do students report after the implementation of COIL?

4. The Study

4.1. Participants and Context

The study participants comprised 32 students from two groups: one consisting of fourth- and fifth-year students enrolled at Universitat Jaume I (UJI), Spain, and

another from the Educational and Scientific Institute of Philology, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv in Ukraine (KNU). The students in the first group belonged to the dual degree in Business and Law who took the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course titled Business English at UJI. The second group consisted of 12 students enrolled in a degree in Turkish, Persian, Chinese and English language and literature, and took a course in academic English at KNU. Although the special circumstances of Ukrainian students (most located in a country at war) were not taken into account for the development of the COIL activity and the research study, they inevitably affected participants' performance in several ways.

In November 2022, the second author of this article was a visiting professor at the UJI, teaching online at KNU, and together with the first author organised a series of COIL activities between students of the two institutions. Firstly, the students communicated online to establish contacts and find out information about the other country's customs and traditions as well as the university itself. For this purpose, students at both universities were divided into 12 groups and provided with the email addresses of their interlocutors to conduct the first online meeting outside the classroom. Then, all students had an online class (Google Meet) as part of their coursework. In the case of the KNU students, it was based on the course book *Global: Level Advanced, 2nd edition* by Lindsay Clandfield and Amanda Jeffries, Macmillan, 2016, and *Academic Writing, A Handbook for International Students, 3rd edition* by Stephen Bailey, Routledge, 2011. Regarding the students at the UJI, the class was about the specific disciplinary discourse of business in English. In both groups, the goal was to introduce the characteristics of academic discourse and to learn the strategies of source-based writing, the ways scientists integrate their ideas into their written texts, using paraphrasing, citations and stylistic devices to express different points of view; and rules for organising a list of references according to the APA, 7th edition.

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4.2. The Task: Instruments and Procedure

The task was divided into 3 parts. First, the students in each group were assigned a partner from the other institution. As the number of students was not the same in both institutions, some Ukrainian students were assigned 2 Spanish students. The first part of the task consisted of establishing contact.

To facilitate this, all students were provided with a guide for the first virtual 40-minute interview, which included a list of 13 open-ended questions (see Appendix 1). The file was published on Google Classroom (for Ukrainian students) and Moodle (for Spanish students). This questionnaire was designed so that students could collect information about their counterparts' academic

background, personal interests and perspectives on their studies. Students' responses provided their partners with insights on the country and its culture and traditions. Additionally, in order to foster successful academic collaboration, it was essential for them to know more about their partners' study habits and learning preferences as well as their attitude toward time management and responsibility.

The aim of the second and third parts of the task was to learn about the discussion topic of corporate sustainability and the norms of written and spoken academic English. As preparation, students were provided with some instructions on the conventions of academic English and two scientific articles on corporate sustainability (Montiel and Delgado-Ceballos 2014; Michie 2018) which they had to read during the following week. Then, as a second part of the task, they were asked to participate in a live discussion on the topic, for which UJI students were in the classroom and connected online through Google Meet with KNU students, who were online and outside the classroom setting. To stimulate this discussion, they were provided with some questions to answer:

1. What do you think "corporate sustainability" is?
2. Are many companies committed to it?
3. Why? Why not?
4. Which aspects of corporate sustainability do companies mainly pay attention to: governance, product, economic and social impact, environment, energy saving?
5. Do big and small companies implement corporate sustainability measures in the same way?
6. How do you see the future of corporate sustainability?

After the discussion, students were given two more weeks to asynchronously prepare a collaborative academic research-informed opinion essay on corporate sustainability and then submit it as a Google Doc, as the third part of the task. In order to fulfill this task, they were provided with the instructions appearing in Appendix 2. Although an assessment of the quality of the essays is out of the scope of this research, it should be pointed out that they were assessed according to a rubric made known to the students and shared by both instructors, and the mark received for this task counted for 15% of the final grade.

Before concluding the collaborative writing task, the students were asked to voluntarily fill in an anonymous questionnaire in a Google Form to analyse the outcomes of their collaboration (see Appendix 3). All the respondents gave their express consent to the processing of their data, and all personal and private information was anonymised and treated confidentially. The questionnaire consisted of 13 multiple-choice, open-ended and linear-scale questions, which

were designed to evaluate students' experience and perception of their collaborative online learning.

In order to achieve the study aims and answer the research questions, we analysed the anonymous answers provided voluntarily by students in the final questionnaire: their perception on the contribution of COIL to their English language learning and what it had meant as an intercultural and personal experience. Although 32 students participated in the COIL activities, the number of respondents to the second questionnaire was 27 (18 Spanish students and 9 Ukrainians). The answers were coded as Sp and Uk and assigned a number indicating the order in which the response was received. In the next section, the responses to this questionnaire will be analysed in order to answer the research questions.

5. Results and Discussion

Before answering the research questions, there are some data about the participating students that need to be highlighted. It was essential to know whether the students had any experience in participating in COIL activities; the answers to questions 1 and 2 would help predict obstacles and barriers to participating successfully. In the case of UJI students, 90% acknowledged it was their first COIL experience, and for 56% of them, this was the first time they communicated with someone for whom English was not their native language. In the case of KNU students, it was surprising that for all of them it was the first time they had contacted foreigners with whom they could only speak in English, even though for only 60% of the students it was their first COIL experience. The explanation is that some students had participated in previously organised virtual telecollaborations between Turkish and Ukrainian students who majored in Turkish linguistics. That is why the language of their communication was mainly Turkish; however, if miscommunications happened, they applied their knowledge of English.

It was revealing to learn the participants' preferences for communicating with each other: they communicated using online video meetings, email or texting on social networks. Unfortunately, the time chosen for the COIL activities in 2022 coincided with electricity outages throughout the territory of Ukraine, thus raising the researchers' concern about the impact of technical obstacles, which could cause frustration and disappointment with the COIL experience for students. As a result, the researchers did not insist on synchronous spoken communication. However, students overcame these difficulties, communicating mainly by email or texting, with about 50% successfully holding video communication on Zoom, Meet or WhatsApp (questions 3-6). To meet the requirements of the task, the Ukrainian students tried to find cafes, restaurants or offices which had generators

to produce electricity and cope with power cuts. That is why 90% of all participants had a fluent exchange of messages, in which they shared information and organised their work, especially the collaborative writing task.

The analysis of the questionnaire data (question 7) revealed similarities and differences in the topics discussed. For instance, 100% of the Ukrainian students concentrated their attention on exchanging information and organising collaborative writing, followed by 89.9% who discussed the task performance and 77% who addressed personal matters (Figure 1). Similarly, 100% of the Spanish students prioritised the topics on organising collaborative writing, while 88.9% concentrated on exchanging information and 83.3% addressed attention to task performance issues, whereas only 66.7% of Spanish students showed interest in discussing personal matters (Figure 2).

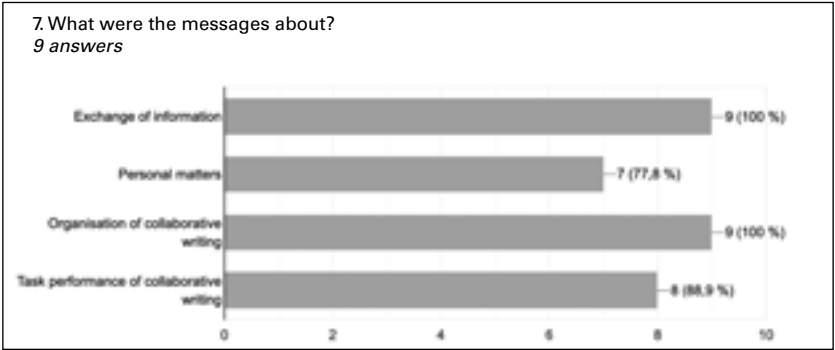


Figure 1. Topics of messages by Ukrainian students

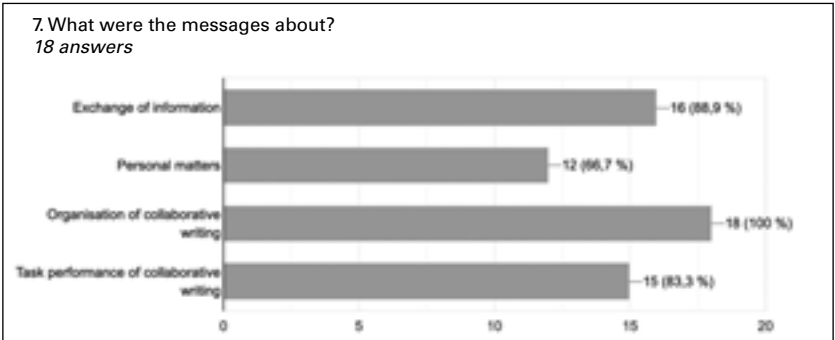


Figure 2. Topics of messages by Spanish students

These findings indicate that participants from both universities recalled having placed equal importance on the task-related discussion and collaborative writing, in particular. However, the Ukrainian students reported placing greater emphasis on information exchange and personal issues than their Spanish counterparts. This highlights the importance of addressing both professional and interpersonal aspects to foster collaboration in cultural contexts.

5.1. Students' Reported Effect of COIL on Language Learning in Interdisciplinary Settings

Based on the responses to the second questionnaire (Appendix 3), we found that students evaluated the COIL activities very highly: 78% of students gave the initiative a score of 5 out of 5 points, and 22% gave it 4 points (questions 8 and 10). Students claimed that the COIL activities carried out were successful and fruitful, prompting them to employ previously received knowledge and experience and to focus on new knowledge gained from reading and listening tasks. The Ukrainian students learned about the topic of corporate sustainability, which Spanish students were familiar with, but they were not. On the other hand, Spanish students learned about academic writing, a skill which was not new for the Ukrainian students. Therefore, interdisciplinary settings, in our case Business English and Academic English courses, created a fruitful environment where participants delved into business approaches and modern concerns to save the planet. The process of broadening their subject knowledge was not only undertaken through reading articles, but also through oral communication. The topic of corporate sustainability provided a context in which to receive and convey ideas in English (questions 9 and 11), according to the views of some Ukrainian students:

I deepened my knowledge in this field, listened to different points of view and learned something new. [Uk_2]

It was interesting to hear foreign students' opinions on corporate sustainability. [Uk_4]

The live classroom discussion motivated students to practise their speaking skills. Spanish students appreciated their partners' active participation during the discussion and valued the wish to sincerely express themselves on the topic, thus finding whether the points of view coincided, as some of their opinions reflect:

It was interesting to hear the Ukrainian students and their opinions. Thanks to this discussion, I could learn about their opinion. [Sp_7]+

I saw that many people think like me about corporate sustainability. Also, I saw that Ukrainian students participated every time, unlike us, and I liked that. [Sp_3]

It was also at this time when participants of COIL could check and practise their comprehension skills and learn that a different accent is not a barrier to understand

a speaker if the participants in the conversation can negotiate meaning by asking questions to check they have understood the message.

While performing COIL activities, participants completed exercises to learn new vocabulary and discourse and practised its usage by asking and answering questions in the discussion, which demonstrated the ability to use new vocabulary and discourse, along with the subject knowledge of the topic of corporate sustainability. More specifically, students explained in English the meaning of the term “sustainability” and its growing importance in the modern world. In the words of a Ukrainian student, the COIL classes equipped them with the background knowledge on the topic, gave them information about the researchers who carried out studies, and also further details about the main components of corporate sustainability:

I have learned that corporate sustainability consists of 3 parts and that Adam Smith’s economic theory does not require entrepreneurs to make positive social and environmental impact on the world. [Uk 7]

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Students reported that reading the articles, watching the video, and later participating in the online discussion helped them to develop different language and cognitive skills (Appendix 3 - question 13). One of the main learning objectives of COIL was to encourage students to analyse and synthesise the information from texts and use the knowledge gained in their essays. Thus, students signified and conveyed in their essays the idea that entrepreneurs are concerned about corporate responsibility and the implementation of its main principles to make our world better.

According to the results of the questionnaire (Appendix 3 - questions 11 and 13), both Spanish and Ukrainian students indicated that they had opportunities to improve their academic writing skills by practising and using formal vocabulary easily, as they expressed:

On an academic level, I think it has prepared us for future, because nowadays in most companies you have to be fluent, and you are going to have to interact with people from all over the world. [Sp 10]

It has helped me to learn English and have new experiences communicating with new persons. [Sp_5]

I have applied the essay writing requirements that we received during our English class. [Uk_3]

The whole topic of corporate sustainability was new to me, so I learned quite a lot about it and at the same time practiced my academic English. [Uk_6]

Since English was the only language of their communication, students were provided with a rich opportunity to share their knowledge and develop fact-based arguments in English:

I have learned to work with people who don't speak the same language as me. To do an opinion essay with another person only speaking English. [Sp_8]

As explained by the students, during their online conversations, cross-cultural pronunciation differences sometimes required some clarifications and at the same time forced them to rephrase and explain their ideas to avoid misunderstanding. That is why the communication was natural and effective. What is more, in both groups there were students who considered themselves introverts and for whom speaking up in the classroom setting was a common source of tension. For these subjects participating in COIL was a way of facing these challenges, and they overcame communicative difficulties (question 13).

It helps us to get loose and it helps us to lose the embarrassment of talking to people who don't speak our language. [Sp_12]

Any communications with English speakers give you lots of skills. It is a great opportunity to get out of comfort zone. [Uk_8]

All in all, students reported having learned about both the language and a relevant topic for society such as corporate sustainability. They acknowledged the benefits of collaborative writing and also those of speaking in English as a lingua franca with other students.

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5.2. Additional Student-Reported Benefits of COIL

Students acknowledged that by performing language-learning tasks, their soft skills, which are of great importance in the modern workplace, had been boosted (questions 11 and 13 in Appendix 3). In their answers to these questions, both Spanish and Ukrainian students highlighted an important benefit of COIL: the opportunity to work as a team, as the task required them to collaborate and produce an outcome from their joint work — an informed opinion essay. Similarly, students acknowledged the difficulties they had faced and how they had learned time management skills, while arranging online meetings with a partner, making plans and setting deadlines.

Then, some more soft skills they seem to have acquired are adaptability and problem-solving, as can be gathered from their answers to question 13. Being in different countries, having time differences and facing problems related to internet connectivity and electricity, the students quickly adapted their timetables and coped with the challenges they were faced with:

I learned that even tasks which seem impossible can be completed in time. [Uk_9]

The necessity to activate communication skills helped them to broaden their knowledge about cultural aspects of both countries, Ukraine and Spain, everyday lifestyle and the current state of life and business, as they acknowledged in their answers to question 12.

Analysing the feedback, we can state that, after finishing COIL activities, participants of both universities seem to have become more cross-culturally competent inasmuch as they have learned the characteristics of people in the other country. Spanish students considered Ukrainian students brave, strong, very intelligent and hard-working. Spanish students also mentioned that Ukrainians put much effort to continue their studies in spite of the war in their country, with the circumstances they must overcome every day and the suffering involved:

I didn't have any specific ideas about how Ukrainian people were, but now I think that they are very motivated and hard-working. Feeling this through the experience was really motivating for me also. [Sp 15]

I think they are having a very bad time, and it is a situation, I would not wish to anyone. Despite this, they are very predisposed and kind people. In addition, they are very friendly for the situation in which they find themselves. I don't think I would take it so well. [Sp 12]

Then, they noticed that, though Ukrainian students majored in languages, they could also show some competence to discuss business issues. Likewise, Ukrainian students defined their Spanish peers as kind, friendly, sociable, open-minded, easy to work with and they made a positive impression for being punctual and respectful of deadlines:

Spanish students turned to be very open-minded, sociable, and easy to work with. After this project I was left with a nice impression of Spanish culture and people. [Uk 5]
As for me, it was very interesting to communicate with Spanish students. During the online meeting, it was interesting to observe how they communicate, how they behave, what emotional state they have. [Uk1]

In addition, COIL aroused self-awareness. Students seem to have understood the importance of appreciating and valuing their everyday life, and that the best way to receive true information is by engaging with witnesses:

After this experience I realised that they are struggling much more with the Ukrainian war than of what it is shown on TV. Despite of this, I think that all of them wanted to work with us and were motivated, so for me it is very appreciated. [Sp 2]

The students' answers reveal how they have developed intercultural competence by learning about how their counterparts in the other country behave. All participants reported in the anonymous questionnaire that they had a positive and invaluable experience of collaboration with students from another country.

6. Conclusion

This paper studies COIL, an educational approach that connected university students from two countries to collaborate in asynchronous and synchronous

formats during four weeks. A final product of the initiative was a collaborative academic opinion essay conducted by students of the UJI in Spain and KNU in Ukraine.

The objective of this research was to find out if students perceived that COIL could make them aware of cross-cultural communication and its advantages for learning language, content and culture. In order to reach this objective, the study tried to unveil, on the one hand, students' attitudes regarding the way COIL can affect English language learning, especially in interdisciplinary settings, as the Spanish students belonged to an ESP course, while the Ukrainian students were studying Linguistics. On the other hand, the research study sought to depict additional benefits of COIL for global education recognised by students.

The implementation of COIL in these two universities proved that it can be an extension of classroom learning and teaching in a virtual setting where collaborative learning and peer guidance prevail. This study enabled active learning and a constructive process in which the instructors' influence on task performance was limited to setting the goals, forming groups and choosing learning materials, while participants sought ways to perform the task successfully.

Answering the first research question, students reported that the COIL approach helped them to create multicultural learning environments and to apply English to support communication in the virtual classroom. Live discussions and having English as the only language to interact with their partners seem to have compensated for artificial language learning and created the environment to build content knowledge and individual accountability in students.

The English language became the bridge to connect students from the two participating universities, countries and cultures. The relevant COIL activities seem to confirm their efficacy in times of uncertainty, as in some cases participants successfully maintained their collaboration asynchronously through texting despite power outages in Ukraine. Students perceived that performing the tasks had allowed them to improve their academic oral skills in the discussion sessions and meetings, their reading skills by reading two scientific articles, and their writing skills through the collaborative writing of an opinion essay which involved text structuring, citation and referencing. As noted by the participants through an anonymous questionnaire, COIL activities seem to have upgraded both their oral and written English language skills. In addition, these activities were effective in making them aware of their different English language levels, accents and use of English, and made them realise the importance of learning in authentic situations in which English is the only lingua franca for communication. In addition, for most students, the COIL experience was the first occasion they had to establish a relationship exclusively through the English language, and they

gained self-confidence in its use, as previously noted by other researchers (Çiftçi and Savaş 2018; Nguyen et al. 2024). Moreover, this activity seemed to motivate students to learn new vocabulary and discourse to be active participants in discussions and in studying the interdisciplinary content, in this case, corporate sustainability.

As for the answer to the second research question, the results show that participants felt they had developed soft skills such as the ability to collaborate. Collaborative writing made them organise themselves to complete pairwork with students from a geographically remote setting in order to create a single document, a very useful skill nowadays. In the business world, organisation and negotiation are essential and the perceptions gathered from students by means of a post-task questionnaire showed that COIL could develop these skills. Majoring in different disciplines (Linguistics and Business), the participants had different types of subject knowledge and they were required to help and complement each other, which developed tolerance and respect.

Another valuable outcome of the COIL activities was that they contributed to developing cross-cultural competence. Students learned about another culture by meeting students who were almost their same age. They appreciated the opportunity to meet each other and eventually some of them might continue their relationship.

Finally, using online tools in a creative way can be motivating for students. Most of them appreciated the activity of writing an academic essay collaboratively, in spite of the fact that, especially for the Ukrainian students, due to the war situation it was not an easy task to keep in contact with the Spanish students and carry out the activity.

Although sharing war experiences was not one of the aims of the activity, some students held conversations about it. For Spanish students, it was a way to learn first-hand from their fellow students what it means to live in the middle of a war and maybe to avoid conflicts in the future, if ever they are in a position to do so. For the Ukrainian students, it was a way to share their situation and to raise awareness of the problems they have. In the case of the Ukrainian students, COIL acted as a substitute for physical mobility, something that is not possible at the moment due to ongoing war in the country and economic downturn.

This study shows some limitations. It involved the attitudes and perceptions of students regarding one COIL activity held in a single subject. In the future, it would be very interesting to conduct further research in order to compare students' perceptions with their actual improvement in English language competence and in intercultural communication skills. In addition, it would also be relevant to analyse the effect of a continuous plan of COIL in these courses,

how effective it could be for language, content and the development of intercultural communication.

To conclude, as other researchers have done before (Çiftçi and Savaş 2018; Nguyen et al. 2024), we want to invite other English as a Foreign Language and English for Specific Purposes instructors to introduce COIL activities in their courses to allow their students to enjoy an international intercultural experience using English as a lingua franca. It may be especially relevant and motivating for those who cannot travel due to their personal circumstances, or restrictions imposed in times war, as was the case in this research.

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Appendix 1.

Initial Questionnaire: Building Rapport with your Partner

1. Student's name.
 2. What is the name of your university?
 3. When was your university founded?
 4. What does its name mean?
 5. How many students / departments are there at your university?
 6. What do you study?
 7. Why did you decide to major in Business Administration and Law/Linguistics? What are the benefits and drawbacks of your specialization?
 8. Tell me about some of the courses you are taking. Which is your favorite?
 9. How long have you been studying English?
 10. Do you prefer to work independently or as part of a team?
 11. Have you ever missed a deadline? Why, and what was the outcome?
 12. What are your interests and hobbies?
 13. Where do you see yourself in 3 years?
 14. What are your favorite national holidays?
 15. What is your favorite national dish?
 16. Any other questions
-

Appendix 2.

Guidelines for the Collaborative Writing Task

COLLABORATIVE WRITING TASK: CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY

Directions

The following assignment requires you to use information from two sources (see a list of references below) to discuss concerns that relate to a specific issue. When paraphrasing or quoting from the sources, cite each source used by referring to the author's last name and the year of publication, and page, if you quote. Try to paraphrase, summarise, or synthesise the ideas of other authors.

Assignment:

- 110** Read the selected articles carefully and then write an essay in which you identify the most important concerns regarding the issue and explain why they are vital. Your text must draw on information from several sources. In addition, you may draw on your own experiences, observations, or readings. Be sure to CITE sources whether you are paraphrasing or directly quoting.

Appendix 3.

Final Questionnaire. Assessment of Collaborative Work

The anonymous answers to these questions will be used for research purposes and to improve the international collaborative task you have carried out. Please tick if you agree that these data are used for research.

I agree

1. Has this been your first communication experience with somebody with whom you can only speak in English?*
 - Yes
 - No
 2. Is this your first academic international telecollaboration experience?*
 - Yes
 - No
 3. How did you communicate with your partner?*
 - Online video meetings
 - Email
 - Texting
 - Other:
 4. How many online meetings did you have with your Ukrainian/Spanish partner?*
 - One
 - Two
 - Three
 - Other:
 5. How many email exchanges did you have?*
 - One
 - Two
 - Three
 - Other:
 6. How many texting exchanges?*
 - One
 - Two
 - Three
 - Other:
 7. What were the messages about?*
 - Exchange of information
 - Personal matters
 - Organisation of collaborative writing
 - Task performance of collaborative writing
 - Other:
 8. How much did you like the discussion held on Corporate Sustainability on the 14th of November?*
 - Very little 1 2 3 4 5 Very much
 9. Did you learn something new from this Discussion? What?*
-

-
10. How did you like the collaborative writing task on Corporate Sustainability?*
- Very little 1 2 3 4 5 Very much
11. What did you learn from this task?*
12. How has your idea about Ukraine and the people who live there changed after this experience? *
13. Reflect on the whole telecollaboration experience: personally, methodologically, content knowledge, etc.*

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR ANSWERS

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