

DEVELOPING EFL STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE AND COMMUNICATION THROUGH THE COLLABORATIVE ONLINE INTERNATIONAL LEARNING (COIL) APPROACH

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Abstract: This study aims to investigate Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) as an approach to help develop Indonesian and Japanese students' intercultural competence and identify EFL communication strategies in a multilingual context. Qualitative data in the form of observation notes and post-conference questionnaires were collected during an annual online conference as part of a larger COIL project. The questionnaires were adopted from Intercultural Competence theory and EFL communication strategies to identify learner approaches to entering into discourse using a foreign language. Findings suggest that through COIL learning, Indonesian and Japanese students demonstrated a sufficient degree of intercultural competence in attitudes, knowledge, and skills; meanwhile, the most frequent communication strategies used in communicating their ideas in English were appeals for help and message reduction.

Keywords: COIL, EFL communication strategies, intercultural competence

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Collaborative Online International Learning or COIL was developed in 2006 by a number of researchers, such as Joe Rubin and his colleagues and at the State University of New York. At that time, Rubin taught cross-cultural courses through videos for his students in Belarus, Turkey, and Mexico (Rubin, 2017). COIL is a relatively new approach of learning that uses online technology to help internationalize the curriculum (Rubin, 2017) and facilitate students and faculty members from different parts of the world to work on joint projects.

As a new approach, Bhandari & Kastler (2022) believed that research and literature on COIL are still emerging, with a limited number of studies on how COIL may be used in intercultural competence development, as evidenced in Hackett's (2023) research publication. In another study, Guth & Rubin (2015) describe COIL as an innovative approach to education

that aims to promote cross-cultural understanding and collaboration among students from different parts of the world. Similarly, Rubin (2017) confirms that COIL integrates international perspectives into the curriculum, fostering intercultural competence, global awareness, and collaboration skills, while at the same time, Anderson & Or (2023) argue that COIL can provide meaningful opportunities for global experiences that can be built into various programs of study.

Leading theorists of COIL, such as Rubin (2017), have summarized five principles of COIL: virtual collaboration, interdisciplinary learning, cultural competence, technology integration, and faculty collaboration. The first main principle is virtual collaboration, which leverages online platforms and tools to facilitate collaboration between students from different countries. The second indispensable principle is interdisciplinary collaboration, bringing together students from various academic disciplines to work on shared projects. The third element is cultural competence, which emphasizes developing cultural understanding and encourages students to explore and appreciate cultural differences. This helps students to develop a global mindset and the ability to work effectively in diverse teams. Finally, COIL projects involve faculty collaboration with faculty members from different institutions using technology integration.

The aims of this study are to investigate students' intercultural competence and identify students' communication strategies during the COIL collaboration in EFL setting. It seeks answers to the following research question: How does the COIL approach help Indonesian and Japanese students to develop their intercultural competence, and what communication strategies do students employ?

One of the main activities of COIL project that becomes the center of our investigation was the annual Online Students International Conference (OISC) conducted by Indonesian and Japanese universities involved in this study. In line with the research question, discussion on COIL in this context cannot be separated from the theory of intercultural competence (IC) and EFL communication strategies. IC involves proficient and appropriate communication in diverse cultural settings (Deardorff & Tatebayashi, 2024). Many theorists have defined IC to make it more comprehensible. Nevertheless, it is shown that summarizing the concept into one single definition is challenging (Zur, 2019). Bryam (2020) argues that in our efforts to understand IC, we must take into account the social contexts where IC is practiced. Further, Bryam's model (2020) focuses on five elements: attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical awareness (Bryam, 2020; Zur, 2019). Bryam believed that these elements are important factors leading to successful intercultural interactions. These elements can also be found in relevant models of IC as in Deardoff (2006), and Spitzberg & Changnon (2006). In a similar vein, Bolten (2006) argued that intercultural competence can be achieved when an individual can combine all the elements above in a linear way.

On the other hand, Deardoff (2006) states that the intercultural development can be seen as a non-linear and dynamic process from personal to interpersonal level. It starts with being open-minded and showing respect to other cultures, being curious, and being tolerant to ambiguity (Deardoff, 2006; Zur, 2019). Similarly, the Council of Europe (2014) also includes being empathetic, while at the same time also questioning what is generally accepted as normal in the worldview. Therefore, we can conclude that attitude plays a key role in fostering IC development (Zur, 2019).

From all theories on IC elaborated above, we defined IC as the skill to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural settings, relying on one's intercultural attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Deardorff, 2006; Deardorff & Tatebayashi, 2024). IC's essential attitudes are respect, openness, curiosity, and discovery. Openness and curiosity imply a willingness to risk and move beyond one's comfort zone. When communicating respect to others, it is important to demonstrate that they are valued. These attitudes are foundational to the development of knowledge and skills needed for IC. Being curious and open-minded implies being willing to take chances and step beyond one's comfort zone. The further development of the information and abilities required for intercultural competency is predicated on these attitudes (Deardorff, 2020). Along with these traits, IC attitudes are valuing other cultures, cultural diversity, openness to intercultural learning and to people from other cultures, withholding judgment, and tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty.

IC knowledge means deep understanding and knowledge of culture, culture-specific information, and sociolinguistics awareness. Intercultural scholars such as Deardorff (2006, 2020), Deardorff & Tatebayashi (2024), Bryam (2020) agree that the following knowledge is essential for IC: sociolinguistic awareness, culture-specific knowledge, deep cultural knowledge, including an understanding of other worldviews, and cultural self-awareness, which refers to the ways in which one's culture has influenced one's identity and worldview. IC skills also include ability to listen, observe, interpret, analyze, relate their understanding on the cultural diversity (Deardorff, 2006; Deardorff & Tatebayashi, 2024).

There is a scarcity of research in the field of EFL communication strategies in multilingual contexts, which is pertinent to this study. Published research on EFL communication strategies mainly took place in non-multilingual contexts, as evident in the research involving strategies employed by Indonesian EFL students (Pratama & Zainil, 2020), a case of reticence among EFL students in Hong Kong (Jackson, 2002), an investigation of communication strategy instruction for Taiwanese EFL students (Teng, 2012), strategies employed by Yemeni EFL learners (Ahmed, 2022) and Mexican students (Cervantes & Rodriguez, 2012).

In this study, EFL communication strategies refer to the strategies employed by Indonesian and Japanese students to make themselves understood by their communication partners who are also EFL learners. We adapted frameworks developed by Dornyei (2005), Kongsom (2009), and Nakatani (2010)'s model on the Oral Communication Strategy Inventory and modified those criteria that are considered relevant to this context. Further, we categorize EFL communication strategies into seven categories: (1) non-verbal strategies are all strategies students employ without speaking; body language, eye contact, facial expressions are among non-verbal strategies; (2) information transfer strategies are efforts students do to put spoken or written texts into another form, such as a chart, grid, picture, table or diagram to convey their messages; (3) meaning negotiation strategies consist of confirmation check, comprehension check or clarification request; (4) paraphrase (self-repairing) is correction made by speakers if they believe that their messages might not be understood well; (5) message reduction means replacing original messages or using simple words or expressions; (6) appeal for help is the strategy where learners ask for assistance from other peers or technology, and (7) time-gaining strategies are done when the learners use hesitation devices as fillers or gambits to expand time to think.

METHOD

This section outlines the methodological framework underpinning the study. It begins by describing the research design, followed by participants, the COIL procedure conducted during the study, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques.

Research Design

Relevant to the aims of this research, this study adopted a qualitative case study design to investigate the IC development and the communication strategies employed by Indonesian and Japanese students during the COIL project. The case study was chosen as this allows the researchers to explore deeply of “how” and “why” (Yin, 2018) participants developed the intercultural competence and communication strategies. Case study also enables the researchers to collect multiple sources of data in a real-life setting (Hancock et al., 2022; Yin, 2018) which are relevant to this study. Furthermore, the case study methodology (Yin, 2018) was particularly appropriate, as it allowed for an in-depth examination of a bounded system, which is the annual Online International Student Conference (OISC), within its authentic educational contexts. Although ethnographic methods might provide longitudinal cultural analysis, the project’s condensed timeline necessitated a focused case study approach. By prioritizing rich descriptive data through observation notes and open-ended questionnaires, the study achieved a nuanced understanding of IC development and strategy use.

Participants

Participants of this study were 12 Indonesian students and 15 Japanese students from varied disciplines as suggested by Rubin (2017) and de Wit & Hunter (2015) for COIL projects. The Indonesian students were pre-service teachers majoring in English Education at a public university in Bandung, West Java, and had completed an Intercultural Communication course. Meanwhile, the Japanese students were studying in one of the following undergraduate programs: International Communication, International Relations, Management, or Information Technology.

Procedure

The COIL activities were implemented by the faculty members and the students. In this study, all five principles of COIL from Rubin (2017), as stated in the previous section, were fully integrated into our project: virtual collaboration, interdisciplinary learning, cultural competence, technology integration, and faculty collaboration. At the planning and design stage (see Figure 1), the faculty members held meetings via Zoom once a week for two months to prepare for the students’ project in which we decided to create an online conference, as part of our COIL project, at the end of the program. At this stage, faculty discussed criteria for recruiting students, topics participants were expected to discuss at the conference, conference schedule, and technical considerations. Questionnaires were also developed for distribution at the end of the conference.

After the recruitment process, faculty members in Indonesia and Japan introduced the program in more detail to the students. The introduction included an introduction to COIL and

an invitation to participate in the online conference. Faculty members held separate training sessions with the students focused on public speaking skills, intercultural communication, and academic writing, and helped the students research Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) topics of their choice for their presentations and discussion. Faculty members also facilitated the exchanges of emails between the Indonesian and Japanese students with the aim of getting students acquainted and connected via social media if they desired. This pre-conference communication was anticipated to promote collaboration and reduce anxiety.

During the conference, faculty members observed all of the sessions and offered technical and non-technical support when necessary. The presentations and discussions in each breakout room were recorded to facilitate qualitative analysis of the interactions. The post-conference questionnaires were administered immediately upon completion of the even.

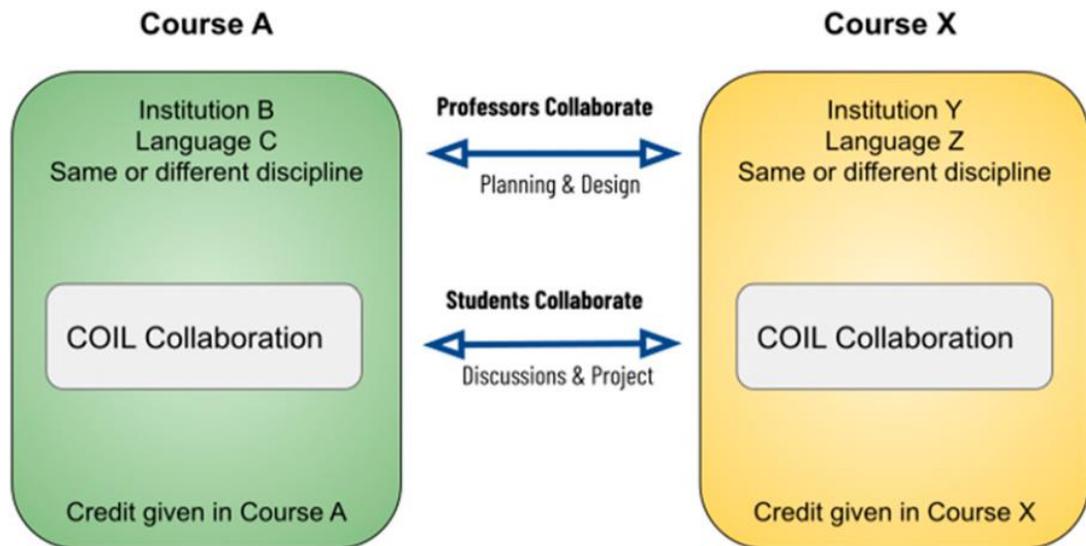


Figure 1. COIL Collaboration (Anderson & Or, 2023, p. 142)

Figure 1 illustrates an ideal COIL approach; however, an adaptation of COIL was used in this study, especially related to the credit given to the students. This is due to the fact that COIL is relatively new for the Indonesian university involved in this study, and faculty members there determined that further administrative procedures were needed before granting any official credit for the courses. Therefore, each faculty member determined how to award participation in the program (e.g., offering extra credit or participation points).

Data Collection

Qualitative data in the form of observation notes were collected during the Online International Student Conference (OISC) and from the post-conference questionnaires. The OISC is conducted regularly involving Indonesian and Japanese universities. It was one of the major activities of COIL that we investigated. Other activities under COIL project, such as

students' collaboration outside OISC or collaborations involving faculty members from those universities were excluded in this study. The conference was conducted in December 2023 and attended by 12 Indonesian and 15 Japanese students. In this article, they were referred to as I01-I12 for Indonesian respondents and J01-J15 for Japanese respondents. The OISC was held via Zoom for approximately 3 hours, in which participants discussed SDG-related global issues of their choice, such as climate change and environmental sustainability, education, gender equality and women's rights, social justice, global health and pandemic, food security and agriculture. Post-conference questionnaires focused especially on insights students gained related to intercultural competence and their communication strategies as elaborated in the previous section.

Data Analysis

Observation notes from all the Japanese and Indonesian researchers were combined and analyzed in online meetings between the researchers. In a similar vein, the collected data from the post-conference questionnaires were analyzed during these meetings. The observation notes and questionnaire data were analyzed using thematic analysis in a five-step procedure adapted from Braun & Clarke (2019). This includes (1) familiarization of the collected data: (2) generation of initial codes: (3) theme seeking and reviewing, (4) theme defining and naming, (5) presentation and discussion of the results. The resulting themes were then analyzed based on the framework of Intercultural Competence developed by Deardorff (2006, 2009) which consists of IC attitudes, knowledge and skills and the framework of EFL communication strategies modified from Dornyei (2005), Kongsom (2009), Ting, et. al. (2017) and Nakatani (2010).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

In this section, we discuss the results of the post-conference survey from both Indonesian and Japanese students to answer the research question: How does the COIL approach help Indonesian and Japanese students to develop their intercultural competence, and what communication strategies do students employ?

Intercultural Competence (IC)

Intercultural competence is essential for proficiency in a contemporary interconnected society. COIL initiatives necessitate students to proficiently interact across cultural barriers, sometimes employing a second language. The current program facilitates the enhancement of linguistic proficiency and the refinement of communication skills for Indonesian and Japanese students; hence, it promotes mutual understanding. The COIL approach enhances intercultural competence between Indonesian and Japanese students by fostering effective communication and collaboration. They acquire the skills to manage any misinterpretations and establish efficient communication channels.

Furthermore, intercultural competence has become a critical skill set for individuals navigating diverse cultural landscapes. In these findings, we highlight three key perspectives of intercultural competence: attitudes, knowledge, and skills.

During the COIL learning process, the three essential IC attitudes were visible. They include respect, openness, and curiosity. Students exhibited appreciation for people from diverse backgrounds and the willingness to explore beyond familiar surroundings (Deardroff, 2006). These attitudes form the basis for acquiring the knowledge and abilities required for intercultural competence. It also involves recognizing and respecting cultural diversity. This perspective is about being open-minded and acknowledging the differences in cultural norms, values, and behaviors. Representatives of students' responses that were evident within the IC attitudes included:

A mindset of respect for the ideas and diversity of various countries can be utilized (J02).

I will accept as much information as I can because it can make me more open-minded about what happens on the other side of the world and help me gain more understanding

I feel like the discussion in my group was lively because I felt like I can start a conversation where everyone can be included. Aside from that I did thorough research about my topic and my friends' topic so I can open up a conversation related to the topics that are being discussed (I02).

From my partner, I learn that Japanese university entrance examination is very difficult. I want to know how difficult it could be because my partner decided to move to other country where the exam is less stressful (I08).

The first response, ("a mindset of respect for the ideas and diversity of various countries can be utilized"), may indicate a positive intercultural attitude emphasizing the importance of valuing others' viewpoint. IC attitude of openness is also evident in the second response ("I will accept as much information as I can because it can make me more open-minded"). This response also indicated a willingness to receive new ideas. IC attitude of respect is demonstrated in a response where a student said "...I felt like I can start a conversation where everyone can be included", which showed empathy for others. These reflections indicate that the COIL experience effectively fostered intercultural attitudes, such as openness, curiosity, and respect, alongside active engagement strategies like preparation and inclusive communication. This supports the study's finding that learners showed growth in intercultural competence and employed common EFL strategies like appeals for help and message adaptation.

The second findings are related to intercultural competence knowledge. Intercultural understanding goes a step further by involving a deep awareness of cultural variations and one's own cultural identity. This perspective requires individuals to have a thorough knowledge of their own cultural frameworks, and how these frameworks influence their perceptions and interactions. Understanding cultural variations helps individuals appreciate the richness of cultural diversity and navigate intercultural interactions more effectively. It also involves being conscious of how one's cultural background shapes their worldview and communication style. Examples of students' responses included:

I learned it is important to make it in time (I03).

I could learn more about others' accents to understand more about each other. I also could use a cultural exchange as a reference for me to learn how to explain something in different manners because each of us had different ways of delivering it (I10).

I will apply everything that I learned in this conference in every single aspect that needs things like this, both social studies, English, assignments, writing, *et cetera* (J04).

Students' first responses may have reflected an awareness of different cultural expectation, especially related to punctuality in Japanese culture ("*I leaned it is important to make it in time*"). The second response might also indicate the student's experience in linguistic diversity ("*...learn more about others' accents...*") which at the end, could help them to understand each other. Meanwhile, the third response may indicate the transferability of COIL into broader academic context such as social studies and other courses.

These comments suggest that students moved beyond surface-level interactions and began developing deeper cognitive understanding of cultural differences, communication styles, and their own cultural frameworks. The data supports the study's finding that COIL environments can cultivate learners' intercultural knowledge—especially regarding language use, cultural expectations, and the need to adjust communication accordingly.

The third set of findings are related to IC skills. These skills encompass practical skills required for effective intercultural communication. This perspective includes the abilities to observe, listen, assess, analyze, interpret, and relate with one's background, which are skills needed to understand and process information.

I enjoyed the discussion very much. I learned a lot of different things. Everyone was very kind and willing to listen. I enjoyed it very much (J06).

I participated in the discussion and I actively asks questions and share my opinion as well as listening and asking for others opinion (I08).

There's time when I can't really understand what they are saying, sometimes it's their accents or pronunciation, but that's ok because we are still learning (J04).

When someone talk shortly, or when someone is too quiet. I tend to ask them slowly, take their time, and appreciate their speech (I10).

I think it is pretty hard to encourage the people on my team to discuss the issue, most of them are shy and silent. Maybe because it's the first tim (I11)

From the responses, we may infer that some students started to demonstrate IC in many ways, such as being open ("*I learn a lot of different things*") and curious ("*I actively asked questions*"). Students also showed their ability to listen ("*...share my opinion as well as listening...*") and assess a situation and relate it to their own experience or background as evident in the last response ("*...most of them are shy and silent. Maybe because it's the first time*"). More importantly, one response may indicate a student's capability to tolerate ambiguity ("*...I can't really understand what they are saying ...but that's ok because we are still learning*").

To sum up, COIL project may support the development of IC in EFL learners by fostering awareness, adaptability, and meaningful intercultural dialogues. Apart from that, responses above also demonstrated real challenges when communicating with people from different language backgrounds. However, students showed patience which may also indicate their intercultural maturity as opposed to being frustrated. This set of comments also reflects how students are applying and refining core interpersonal and interactional skills—such as active listening, empathy, and patience—in real-time intercultural communication. Students are also identifying communication barriers (e.g., accents, silence) and learning to navigate them, showing clear evidence of IC skill growth as defined in the study.

Communication Strategies

This section focuses on communication strategies employed by the Indonesian and Japanese students. They are divided into the seven categories outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Communications Strategies and Students' Responses

No	Categories	Students' Responses
1	Non-verbal strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – When I can't express what I want to say, I tried using my hands or gestures (J03). – I can see my group started being more expressive in our use of English after the ice breaking session (I07). – I needed to add a picture on my slides (J01).
2	Information transfer strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – I stressed some words for my partners to understand (I11).
3	Meaning negotiation strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – I clarified their arguments, I asked them to explain again, and I'm working to improve my comprehension (I06).
4	Paraphrase (self-repairing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – One participant gave an example in anime characters, that's good so I can relate (J05). – I could use information at the cultural exchange as a reference for me to learn how do we explain something with different manners because each of us had different ways to deliver it (I01).
5	Message reduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A participant from my group had trouble understanding a given question, so I made the question easier for him to understand (I04). – I modified some words and expressions (I12). – I change my vocabulary and the way I interpret and paraphrase my thoughts in case the other partners had difficulty in understanding my words (I05).

No	Categories	Students' Responses
6	Appeal for help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - With the help of my breakout roommates, I can be active in engaging conversation both for the culture and the issue (I01). - My partner asks her friend to translate her sentences into English so we could understand (J10). - I can't think that well when it comes to vocabularies because I'm nervous but then, I got some help from Google translate and my team (J04). - I was able to understand them because they tried - their best to understand me even though my English was not very good (J07). - I'm still a bit shy so I mostly just encourage them to speak up more (J13).
7	Time-gaining strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sometimes my partner is silent before he speaks, so I thought he's not going to say anything (I09)

Discussion

The objectives of this study were to examine the ways Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) activities, particularly online international student conferences (OISC), can contribute to the development of intercultural competence (IC) among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners and to identify the communication strategies employed during these types of activities. Qualitative analysis of observation notes and post-conference questionnaire data clearly demonstrate that both Indonesian and Japanese participants exhibited a significant degree of intercultural competence across the three dimensions of attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Moreover, these students effectively utilized various communication strategies to overcome the challenges associated with using English, a foreign or other language for all participants. This supports the growing body of literature suggesting that COIL and COIL type activities are a valuable pedagogical approach for fostering intercultural competence and communication skills in a globalized educational environment (de Castro et al., 2019; King de Ramirez, 2021; Munoz-Escalona et al., 2022; Vahed & Rodriguez, 2021).

Intercultural Competence and COIL

Intercultural competence is increasingly recognized as an essential skill in today's interconnected world. The COIL framework, with its emphasis on virtual collaboration, interdisciplinary learning, and cultural competence, provides a robust platform for students to engage in meaningful intercultural exchanges. The results of this study underscore the importance of possessing a deep awareness of one's own cultural identity, an understanding of other cultures, and the ability to navigate sociolinguistic nuances which are evident in all sets of findings: IC attitudes, IC knowledge, IC skills, and communication strategies. These findings

are consistent with Deardorff's (2006) model of intercultural competence, which emphasizes attitudes such as respect, openness, and curiosity as foundational for developing intercultural understanding. The students in this study exhibited these attitudes, evidenced by their willingness to explore and appreciate cultural differences and their efforts to understand their peers' perspectives.

The development of intercultural competence is not just about acquiring knowledge but also involves the ability to apply this knowledge in real-world interactions. The COIL experience facilitated this by providing students with opportunities to engage in discussions on global issues, thereby helping them to develop a global mindset. This aligns with the findings of Guth and Rubin (2015), who highlighted the role of COIL in promoting cross-cultural understanding and collaboration. The students' reflections, which emphasized the importance of mutual respect and the value of diverse perspectives, further illustrate the transformative potential of COIL in developing intercultural competence.

Communication Strategies in a Multilingual Context

In terms of communication strategies, the students employed a range of techniques to navigate the challenges of using English as a foreign language. These included paraphrasing, simplifying explanations, and using more accessible vocabulary, strategies that have been documented in previous studies on communication strategies among EFL learners (Aliakbari & Allvar, 2009; Ekhlas & Shangarffam, 2013; Lam, 2010; Noom-ura, 2013). The ability to adapt language use to ensure clarity and understanding is a critical skill in intercultural communication, particularly in settings where participants have varying levels of language proficiency.

Interestingly, the study also found that students with higher English proficiency, as indicated by English proficiency tests scores (TOEFL or Duolingo for Indonesian students and TOEIC for Japanese students) that students had to fill out in the questionnaires, often took on leadership roles in discussions, guiding the conversation while ensuring inclusivity and respect for all participants. This evidence highlights the intersection of language proficiency and IC, suggesting that the students who are more confident in their language skills may also be more effective in facilitating intercultural communication. This finding aligns well with the concept of Willingness to Communicate or WTC (see, for example, MacIntyre et al., 1998), which asserts that learners' readiness to engage in communication is influenced by both their motivation and perceived competence in the target language. The positive attitude towards multilingualism and the willingness to communicate in multicultural settings observed in this study further underscore the importance of fostering both language skills and intercultural competence in EFL contexts. This indicated that learners at different proficiency levels employ communication strategies to varying degrees. On the other hand, students who were more proficient in English initiated and led the discussions while at the same time maintaining inclusive and respectful discussions, which is also one of the characteristics of being interculturally competent.

Students' different communication strategies may have indicated an impact on communication dynamics within multilingual classrooms and showed a positive attitude towards multilingualism and a high degree of willingness to communicate in multicultural settings.

Willingness to communicate is proved to be an indispensable factor for language learners' success (MacIntyre, et.al., 1998; MacIntyre, 2020) and is often linked to greater motivation to learn second language (Shirvan et al., 2019) which was also indicated by a number of students who wanted to improve their English after they participated in this collaboration.

Challenges and Implications for COIL and EFL

Despite the overall success of the COIL collaboration outlined in this study, some challenges were noted, particularly in relation to language comprehension and communication. Students reported difficulties in understanding their partners' ideas due to differences in accent, pronunciation, and levels of self-confidence. These issues are common in multilingual classrooms and can affect the flow of communication. However, rather than being perceived as insurmountable barriers, these challenges were viewed by students as part of the learning process, reflecting a mature understanding of the complexities of intercultural communication. This positive attitude toward overcoming linguistic challenges is indicative of the students' growing intercultural competence and their appreciation for linguistic diversity. These findings may shed new light on the affective and communicative dimensions of COIL in EFL contexts—particularly in how learners develop respect, openness, and curiosity, as well as transferable intercultural strategies. These aspects have not been sufficiently explored in existing research, which often emphasizes linguistic or task-based outcomes over interpersonal growth. Students developed intercultural communication strategies beyond linguistic accuracy—such as turn-taking, active listening, and patience—suggesting that COIL encourages learners to develop socially responsible communication behaviors.

The findings of this study have several implications for the implementation of COIL in EFL settings. First, the findings suggest that while COIL type activities can be an effective tool for developing intercultural competence, it is important to provide students with adequate support in navigating the linguistic challenges they may encounter. This could include pre-COIL training sessions focused on communication strategies, as well as ongoing support during the collaboration. Additionally, the study highlights the need for further research into the specific communication strategies that are most effective in COIL contexts, particularly in multilingual environments where students may have varying levels of English proficiency.

Moreover, the findings suggest that COIL can play a significant role in enhancing students' motivation to improve their English skills. Several participants expressed a desire to continue developing their language proficiency following their involvement in the COIL project, indicating that the experience had a positive impact on their motivation to learn.

In summary, the COIL collaboration described above between Indonesian and Japanese students provided a valuable opportunity for participants to develop their intercultural competence and employ a range of communication strategies in a multilingual context. The findings suggest that COIL is an effective pedagogical approach for fostering intercultural understanding and communication skills among EFL students, although challenges related to language comprehension and communication dynamics remain. By addressing these challenges and providing students with the necessary support, educators can enhance the effectiveness of COIL and help students develop the skills they need to succeed in an increasingly globalized

world. Future research should continue to explore the intersections of intercultural competence, communication strategies, and language proficiency in COIL settings, with a particular focus on how these elements interact to influence students' learning experiences and outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to examine the impact of the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) approach on the development of intercultural competence (IC) and communication strategies among Indonesian and Japanese EFL students. Qualitative analysis of interactions during an Online International Student Conference (OISC) and post-conference survey responses, indicated that this COIL type activity served as an effective platform for enhancing intercultural understanding and communication skills in a multilingual setting.

The findings revealed that COIL significantly contributed to the growth of intercultural competence, particularly in the areas of attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Students exhibited essential intercultural attitudes such as respect, openness, and curiosity while expanding their understanding of diverse cultural perspectives and honing their communication abilities. These outcomes align with existing research, which underscores COIL's potential to foster cross-cultural collaboration and global awareness.

Moreover, the study highlighted the variety of communication strategies employed by students to navigate the challenges of using English as a foreign language. Techniques such as paraphrasing, simplifying explanations, and using non-verbal cues were commonly used to facilitate understanding, even in the face of linguistic barriers. The role of more proficient English speakers in leading discussions and promoting inclusivity also emerged as a critical factor in the success of intercultural communication.

However, the study was not without limitations. One significant limitation was the relatively small sample size, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations of EFL learners. Additionally, the study relied largely on self-reported data from post-conference surveys, which may be subject to biases such as social desirability or recall inaccuracies. The study also did not account for the potential variability in students' prior exposure to intercultural experiences, which could influence their development of intercultural competence. Furthermore, the short duration of the COIL project might not capture the long-term impacts of such initiatives on students' intercultural competence and communication strategies.

In conclusion, while this study provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of COIL in developing intercultural competence and communication strategies among EFL students, the limitations identified suggest the need for further research. Future studies should consider larger, more diverse samples, include longitudinal designs to assess the long-term effects of COIL, and incorporate additional data sources, such as interviews, to complement observation notes and survey findings. Despite these limitations, the integration of COIL into educational curricula remains a promising approach to preparing students for the demands of intercultural communication and collaboration in a globalized world.

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