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COLLABORATIVE ONLINE LEARNING (COIL) AS A PROMISING PEDAGOGY FOR ENGAGING STUDENTS IN GLOBAL COLLABORATION: UKRAINIAN-SPANISH CONTEXT

This paper gives insight into the theoretical and practical aspects of Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) - a pedagogy that is fast emerging as a more democratic and dynamic alternative to traditional in-person student exchange programs. This pedagogy is currently gaining popularity among Ukrainian educators who are looking for new ways to engage students in international collaboration amid the emergencies of the ongoing war conflict in the country. The paper is a preliminary report of the research in progress which aims to investigate whether COIL can level the unevenly developed language and academic skills of the collaborating Spanish and Ukrainian students. The reported preliminary findings of one of the three collaboration projects carried out by the faculties of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (KNU) and Universitat Jaume I (UJI) show a range of benefits including academic skills enhancement, improvement of intercultural competence as well as personal satisfaction. The authors also shed light on the challenges encountered when introducing COIL activities into the classroom. Taken together, the article provides an insightful overview of the benefits and limitations of COIL strategies as a means of promoting intercultural and interdisciplinary learning and understanding.

Keywords: *Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), emergencies, global collaboration, intercultural and academic skills, COIL benefits and limitations.*

Introduction

There is a growing interest in making the curriculum of colleges and universities more internationalized to include intercultural and international engagement across borders of difference. Currently, in almost every academic discipline, as Johnston and López (2022) claim, we can see how globalisation has impacted our knowledge and understanding of the subject, and how multiple cultural perspectives and intercultural contexts can enrich our learning. Global experience is a valuable asset today; however, many obstacles make it difficult for students to have this experience.

Apart from the COVID-19 pandemic that has made it challenging for students to study abroad and engage in in-person exchange programs, other factors pose challenges to in-person academic mobility. In the Ukrainian context, for instance, the economic factor used to be a traditional barrier with a new and traumatic factor added in 2022: the full-scale invasion of Russia into Ukraine. The wartime circumstances, though, have forced educators to innovate and come up with new teaching solutions and approaches.

First, the involuntary switching to online learning and the changes made to our courses have increased our awareness of the benefits of online learning opportunities. Second, more than ever before, we have realized the urgency of promoting global learning. The reason for this is the fact that

several millions of Ukrainians, including schoolers and university students, have become refugees or displaced people around the globe and are expected to come back with newly acquired educational skills, cultural habits as well as teaching style preferences. The task of Ukrainian educators then will be to meet their expectations and preferences.

Consequently, we now need virtual global learning more than ever before. Such learning can be carried out as collaborative online international learning (COIL). Incorporating COIL into an existing course does not require an expensive technology platform or an extensive course redesign. It requires an interest in innovative pedagogy, flexibility, enthusiasm, and thoughtful preparation.

Therefore, this paper aims to offer insights into the collaborative teaching experience between two faculties, one in Spain and the other in Ukraine. It will provide a summary of the lessons learned from this experience, highlighting what we should do differently given the situation that one of the partners is working in an emergency environment. The study will showcase how this pedagogy presents students with a unique academic opportunity, how culture influences participation and perception, and suggestions for integrating this pedagogy into a university curriculum.

Methodology

Theoretically, COIL relies on constructivism – a learning theory introduced by Piaget (1969). According to this theory, learning is an active process that involves constructing knowledge rather than just acquiring it. The theory suggests that individuals learn and develop knowledge through social interaction rather than individual exploration. In an international constructivist classroom, collaboration not only helps students create a personal understanding of the material but also creates a space where the social construction of knowledge and meaning can occur in a multicultural setting. Brookfield (1995) argues that collaboration promotes

initiative, creativity, critical thinking, and dialogue among learners. Therefore, this leads to a deeper level of understanding and learning.

The organizational framework involves three COIL activities carried out by the Department for Methodology of Teaching Ukrainian and Foreign Languages and Literatures at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (KNU) and the Department of English at Universitat Jaume I (UJI), Castelló, Spain. The time embraced the period from November 2022 to December 2023, with the number of students engaged totaling 72.

The objective of the project was to foster an intercultural dialogue among students from different geographical, linguistic, political, and cultural backgrounds. To meet the project goal, the engaged teachers from the collaborating universities arranged the collaboration following the traditional organizational phases: finding a COIL partner; designing a COIL project; developing a COIL project (SUNY COIL, n.d.)

To facilitate team interactions between the students engaged in the project, various digital platforms such as Zoom, Skype, WhatsApp, Messenger, and Facebook were employed. While working on a project, the students were expected to develop collaborative, remote-tasking, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills in addition to gaining cultural knowledge. This article focuses on the second COIL experience which took place in 2022 between Ukrainian and Spanish students to strengthen the relationship between universities through COIL collaboration.

Literature review. COIL as an innovation in pedagogy and curriculum internationalization. Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) is an online learning approach where students and faculty from diverse international and intercultural backgrounds interact and learn together, both in and out of the classroom (Leask, 2020). It gained popularity in the US and Europe in the early 2000s. The SUNY

COIL Center is considered a leader in this field, providing a partnering platform for virtual exchange communities to create new COIL courses or participate in existing ones (SUNY COIL, n.d.). Another experienced institution is the Borough of Manhattan Community College, which has set up its site to provide detailed, step-by-step instructions on how to try COIL (OpenLab at BMCC, n.d.).

According to its founders, COIL is a type of online learning that connects students and professors in different countries for collaborative projects and discussions as part of their coursework (SUNY COIL, n.d.). For the SUNY COIL Center, this new type of collaboration must embrace diversity through inclusive teaching and learning focused on equity while connecting through difference. The University of Michigan-Dearborn coordinators define COIL as "a type of virtual exchange or telecollaboration, a learning process where faculty members in any discipline use online technology to facilitate sustained student collaboration to increase intercultural competence" (University of Michigan Dearborn, n.d.).

In simpler terms, COIL promotes intercultural collaboration and partnership, while also enhancing professional competence in the chosen field of science. It utilizes familiar online communication technology, which allows for easy management of online meetings and tasks, and empowers students to take charge of their learning and immerse themselves in language and cultural settings. COIL can be conducted between different educational institutions, countries, time zones, cultures, and courses, as long as there is something that unites participants, for instance, a shared language for communication. A COIL activity can be embedded into the curriculum or it can be a COIL course or a program. Jon Rubin, who is considered one of the founders of COIL, states that COIL can take up a minimum of 4–5 weeks and can be used for one or two assignments in the chosen course (Rubin, & Guth, 2022).

COIL is an effective way to enhance the learning experience through globally connected courses. This approach is both cost-effective and impactful, as it introduces global perspectives to on-campus and remote learning courses (Johnston and López, 2022). To connect courses globally, educators identify relevant course materials, resources, and assignments that students from different parts of the world can explore remotely. Local faculty members then guide students in their respective regions to interact globally within the context and focus of the course.

COIL coordinators at Borough of Manhattan Community College recommend incorporating both synchronous and asynchronous COIL activities into courses. This approach allows students to use digital technologies to make contacts and acquaintances with each other before collaboratively preparing assignments outside of the virtual classroom setting. The standard COIL pattern involves a four-week collaboration, which begins with a teacher's announcement of COIL activities and an introduction to the topic of study. In the second week, students share partner emails and establish contact through video conferencing. During the third week, joint online discussions are conducted, and in the final week, collaborative student task performance, reflection, and evaluation take place (OpenLab at BMCC (n.d.)).

According to Borger (2022), the use of various digital technologies during the COVID-19 pandemic has equipped both educators and students with IT skills, so, there is no need to introduce online digital technologies to them. However, when conducting a COIL course or project, teachers must possess a high level of intercultural competence to ensure that students can communicate effectively and inclusively across cultures. This is particularly important in multicultural classrooms to maintain objective and equitable communication. Consequently, when it comes to conducting intercultural meetings,

teachers must possess both intercultural competencies and pedagogical content knowledge. The latter includes a deep understanding of the curriculum, students' comprehension of the subject matter, instructional strategies, and assessment of students' performance (Deardoff, 2009).

It is worthwhile mentioning that since the inception of COIL initiatives, numerous research studies have been carried out in collaboration with universities across the globe (Palloff, R.M., & Pratt, 2005; Marcillo-Gómez, & Desilus, 2016; Ward, 2016; Stefanova, 2018; King de Ramirez, 2019; Vahed, & Rodriguez, 2020, etc). These studies report on the positive impact of COIL on the personal and academic growth of participants; it is highly regarded by teachers, students and employers alike since participating in COIL projects provides several benefits such as establishing or reinforcing international partnerships, incorporating innovative and challenging practices into their courses, adding an international perspective to learning, collaborating with peers, enhancing class dynamics, and boosting student interest and satisfaction levels.

However, the implementation level of COIL across the globe is far from being enjoyable. The main reason for this, according to Johnston and López (2022), is a lack of knowledge and limited resources for faculty interested in developing globally connected courses. A vivid illustration is the context presented in this paper: unlike the Spanish partner university, KNU could not boast of any COIL projects until November 2022. Currently, though, we are observing the tendency among the KNU higher-ups to encourage COIL integration in curricula and establish a COIL Centre to offer COIL courses for students.

To sum up, COIL projects are an accessible alternative to democratize the experiences of internationalization (at home) of students and teachers, as well as an opportunity to enrich the process of building individual and collective knowledge, offering challenging dynamics of working in international teams. COIL as a new digital communication learning opportunity, is proving to be an effective way to develop intercultural competence, computing and online interaction skills among students. The acquisition of these skills is critical for business professionals who aim to excel in the expanding global community (Manzoor, 2016; Gartner, 2021).

Results and discussion

COIL overview: preparation and pedagogy. From November 2022 to December 2023 2 Spanish authors and 1 Ukrainian author (V. Drobotun) collaborated on designing and conducting 3 COIL activities for students, with the 2-nd Ukrainian author being a research reporter and editor. The first COIL activity was held in November 2022 and involved 20 fifth-year UJI students studying Business English in the Double Degree Program in Business Administration and Law and 12 fourth-year KNU students doing an Academic English course in the Linguistics program (Turkish/ Persian/ Chinese, English Language and Literature and Translation). The primary goal of this COIL activity was to foster students' intercultural communication skills, academic writing and academic discussion skills among participating students. This goal was achieved through engaging discussions and collaborative online opinion essay writing. The success of this innovative learning approach demonstrates its potential to provide a valuable platform for international collaboration and skill development in higher education. The topic of the COIL activity was 'Corporate Sustainability', which was in the curriculum of both universities, allowing students to have prior knowledge of the subject matter.

Closely connected with the first activity was the third COIL activity (November-December 2023) which involved a total of 40 participants, including 20 fifth-year students studying Business English in the Double Degree in the Business Administration and Law program at UJI,

13 third-year students majoring in Theory and Methodology of Teaching Ukrainian Language and Literature and Foreign Language in Basic Secondary School at KNU, and 7 second-year students majoring in Foreign Literature and English, the Theory and Methodology program at KNU. The primary objective of this COIL echoed the goal of the first activity: to enhance intercultural communication skills and academic writing skills through participation in discussions and a collaborative online opinion essay. The students were also required to record their collaborative writing performance.

The second COIL activity, which is the focus of this paper, was carried out in December 2022 among 30 participants: the 5th-year students majoring in Secondary education at UJ, Spain and 3rd-year students who studied English for Intercultural Communication course, the Theory and Methodology of Teaching Ukrainian Language and Literature and Foreign Language in Basic Secondary School program, KNU, Ukraine. The topic under investigation and discussion was the similarities and differences between the national systems of education in Spain and Ukraine, including types of teaching styles, home assignments, examinations and assessments.

Before the collaboration was arranged, the teachers of both universities meticulously scrutinized the course curricula of UJI and KNU to choose a suitable topic for the COIL activities. Given that students from both universities were studying the Teaching Methodology, it was decided that they would discuss the national systems of secondary education and share their experience of emergency teaching in Ukraine during wartime. The major objective of the COIL collaboration here was to enhance students' academic and cultural awareness of the secondary education systems in Spain and Ukraine as well as hone their academic speaking and presentation skills. Further, the teachers

coordinated critical details such as the date of the COIL collaboration, the meeting time, the platform for conducting the collaboration, and a learning management system to publish tasks. The outcome of the COIL collaboration was the presentation made by the students on the chosen topic.

The decision to use Google applications in universities was based on their widespread use and familiarity among students. For videoconferencing, Google Meet was chosen, while Google Classroom was used for publishing assignments. The COIL activities consisted of four stages, including announcement, introduction, information searching, and final product demonstration through a PowerPoint presentation.

In stage one, the teachers announced COIL cooperation and set goals separately for each university group. In December 2022, KNU students had to study online due to the ongoing war in the country, while UJI students attended in-campus classes. The topics related to secondary education were chosen by the teachers, and students were allowed to pick the ones they found interesting. The presentation delivery time was limited to 4–5 minutes.

During the second stage of the project, the teachers planned an Icebreaker where students from two different universities were paired up to work together on a task. The objective was to get acquainted with each other, gain cultural knowledge and discuss cultural perceptions in a virtual Meet session. However, due to the unforeseen blackouts in Kyiv, this stage had to be skipped.

In stage three, literature review and task performance were the main focus. To avoid negatively affecting the learning objectives, teachers appointed two Ukrainian students to work together and present their research on the Ukrainian system of secondary education. The Spanish students were then expected to express their vision and comparisons during the virtual Meet session.

Finally, step four was conducted online using Google Meet. The Spanish students

were present in a specially equipped classroom with video conferencing hardware and an internet connection, while the Ukrainian students participated online from their locations.

The Ukrainian students followed a pre-arranged procedure to present their research on various topics, including challenges of teaching English during wartime, teaching grammar to 6th-grade students, secondary education and professional pre-higher education in Ukraine, formative and summative assessment in secondary school, and homework as a learning strategy. Because of frequent blackouts and electricity shortages in Kyiv, the students prerecorded their 4–5 minute slideshow presentations beforehand and sent them to their teacher via email. This ensured that the presentation could be viewed in case of any interruptions caused by electricity outages or air-raid sirens, which were common occurrences during the time of the presentations. After the presentations, discussion time was allocated for the COIL class.

Lessons learned. As the preliminary observations show, both Ukrainian and Spanish students have voiced general approval of the COIL activities as well as a high level of satisfaction. The teachers witnessed active engagement and high motivation of students during the work on the project. In terms of pedagogy, the experience was also invaluable for the Ukrainian faculty since COIL was a novel practice for them. Therefore, the activities were successful owing to the Spanish partners who assisted and supervised in all stages of the collaboration. Hence, our practice shows that to avoid negative perceptions of the globally connected courses, it is advisable that a novice collaborator should have a more experienced COIL partner.

In terms of organization, the participants have realized the necessity to plan an alternative project version to minimize the negative consequences of the emergencies. It is the second project that faced numerous limitations because of the emergencies. So, the partners are planning to improve collaboration planning for 2024 to neutralize the sense of underperformance among students.

From the perspective of intercultural communication, the collaboration appeared useful for both Spanish and Ukrainian students. On the one hand, the students have partially ruined the cultural stereotypes they had about the students-partners. On the other hand, the Spanish students were able to have first-hand accounts of the situation in Ukraine, ask questions and provide commentaries.

The collaboration was also fruitful in terms of language skills enhancement. Since the only common language for communication was English – a non-native tongue for both Spanish and Ukrainian participants – the students claim they have significantly improved listening skills as well as comprehension of non-native English accents. Additionally, the interaction with non-native speakers of English was less challenging for both Ukrainian and Spanish students.

Finally, the collaboration had a particularly positive psychological impact on the Ukrainian students. Because of the ongoing war, most of them have to spend a lot of time in shelters or isolation, which does not contribute to good mental well-being. Interaction with Spanish partners was reported to improve the psychological state, help concentrate on the task, and increase satisfaction.

Conclusion

This paper investigates Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) – a modern, dynamic, and cost-effective approach to teaching and curriculum development – in the Ukrainian-Spanish context. The collaboration was interdisciplinary and took different forms, such as online discussions, video conferences, class-to-class meetings, and online workgroup projects. The learning outcomes of the COIL included a group opinion essay and an oral presentation on a topic.

The preliminary research observations and findings prove that COIL is a promising

approach to teaching and curriculum development that can provide significant benefits to both students and faculty members. The authors emphasize the positive academic, pedagogical, cultural and psychological impact of COIL on the participants even though one of the three projects appeared less successful due to unforeseen emergencies in Ukraine. Therefore, the lessons were learned by the Ukrainian faculty to address the emergencies appropriately in future and improve collaboration planning and design.

COIL partnerships have also allowed the authors to collaborate and explore new teaching techniques, forge research partnerships and expand intercultural awareness. Therefore, the benefits of COIL for educators are also manifold, including enhancing communicative skills for working with non-native English speakers, developing digital literacy skills for working in virtual teams, gaining a new perspective on teaching, and engaging in global problem-solving.

The preliminary research observations and findings also prove that COIL is an effective approach to teaching and curriculum development in emergencies due to its flexibility and cost-effectiveness. Since this paper is a preliminary observational report, the future research perspective lies within the investigation of whether COIL can level the unevenly developed language and academic skills of the collaborating Spanish and Ukrainian students.

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СПІЛЬНЕ МІЖНАРОДНЕ ОНЛАЙН-НАВЧАННЯ ЯК ПЕРСПЕКТИВНА ФОРМА ЗАЛУЧЕННЯ СТУДЕНТІВ ДО ГЛОБАЛЬНОГО СПІВРОБІТНИЦТВА: УКРАЇНСЬКО-ІСПАНСЬКИЙ ДОСВІД

Постановка проблеми. *Інтернаціоналізація вищої освіти є нагальною потребою та умовою успішної підготовки кваліфікованих фахівців у 21-му столітті. Традиційною формою інтернаціоналізації завжди були програми академічної мобільності у закордонних університетах. Однак, такі програми виявилися не досить гнучкими та фінансово затратними, що змусило освітян шукати нові форми глобального співробітництва. Такою інноваційною формою стало спільне міжнародне онлайн навчання (СМОН), яке поки що не знайшло широкої підтримки в Україні. До основних перепон реалізації СМОН відносять академічні та культурні розбіжності учасників, брак знань про принципи СМОН та недостатній рівень обізнаності викладачів з технологіями впровадження СМОН у навчальний процес.*

Мета статті *полягає в узагальненні практичного досвіду імплементації СМОН у трьох спільних проєктах, виконаних у співробітництві між викладачами кафедри методики викладання української та іноземних мов і літератур Київського національного університету імені Тараса Шевченка (КНУТШ) та кафедрою англійської мови Університету Жауме І (УЖ I), Іспанія.*

Методологія дослідження. *Теоретичним підґрунтям МКОН є теорія конструктивізму, яка потрактовує навчання як активний процес, що передбачає конструювання знань через соціальну взаємодію. Звідси СМОН, засноване на соціальній взаємодії, допомагає студентам створити простір, де соціальна конструкція знань відбувається в мультикультурному середовищі. До описаного в статті СМОН були залучені автори статті та 72 студенти з двох університетів протягом листопада 2022 р. по грудень 2023 р.; при цьому виконано три спільних проєкти. Для командної взаємодії між українськими та іспанськими студентами, які брали участь у проєктах, використовувались платформи Zoom, Skype, WhatsApp, Messenger та Facebook.*

Результати. *У статті представлені попередні результати СМОН та зокрема другого проєкту, який виявив як переваги, так і недоліки спільного міжнародного онлайн навчання. Отримані попередні результати свідчать про високу ефективність СМОН у царині вдосконалення міжкультурної компетентності студентів, умінь спілкування англійською мовою з неносіями мови та умінь академічного письма. Стаття також проливає світло на труднощі, які зустрілися під час організації СМОН. Автори доходять висновку, що СМОН є поки що єдиною ефективною формою міжнародного співробітництва в екстремальних умовах.*

Ключові слова: *Спільне міжнародне онлайн навчання (СМОН), глобальне співробітництво, міжкультурна компетентність, уміння академічного письма, екстремальні умови.*

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