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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring Vietnamese and Filipino Students' Perceptions of Culture-Learning Experiences and Global Attitudes Through a COIL-Based Project

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Abstract

Higher education has witnessed a rising demand for intercultural competence and global citizenship skills, which propelled the development of Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) as a groundbreaking student exchange model that uses virtual collaboration to connect students from different cultures. The research study investigates student perceptions about their learning experiences and their anticipated readiness for global interactions through a COIL project. The study employs the theoretical frameworks of Intercultural Communicative Competence (Byram, 1997; 2021) and Global Citizenship Education (UNESCO, 2015). The qualitative descriptive research method allowed researchers to gather information from 37 EFL students who wrote reflective responses, which were subjected to thematic content. The findings revealed that students showed strong involvement along with enjoyment of the experience, experienced enhanced abilities in cross-cultural communication, and demonstrated more readiness for future international collaborative work. The study expands the current knowledge base regarding virtual exchange in Southeast Asia while providing implementation guidance for culturally responsive COIL programs in language education.

Keywords: COIL, ICC, English language teaching, Southeast Asia, global competence.

1. Introduction

The modern world requires educational institutions to prioritize the acquisition of intercultural communication abilities, together with global citizenship skills. Modern students must focus on mastering their academic field while developing a worldwide understanding alongside cross-cultural empathy. The educational world has responded to these needs by establishing COIL as a digital teaching approach that allows students to collaborate with international peers through course-based connections across different cultural backgrounds (De Wit & Leask, 2015). Traditional student exchange mobility programs differ from COIL because the latter enables internationalization at home by integrating global learning into standard academic

programs to provide equal access to intercultural learning for students without financial resources (Helm, 2015; O'Dowd, 2021).

There are few studies of the COIL framework in Southeast Asia since most research focuses on North America and Europe (Hackett et al., 2023). Researchers have directed their focus toward educational design led by faculty members and institutional outcomes without examining student-centered experiences in linguistically disadvantaged, rural, or resource-constrained settings (Belarga, 2019). The integration of intercultural competence frameworks through virtual learning environments requires deliberate action to bridge the gap between educational goals and classroom implementation, according to Chau (2020) and Chau et al. (2023).

The current study investigates how participation in a COIL-based essay writing project affected students' intercultural awareness, language development, and future attitudes toward global collaboration through Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) frameworks of (Byram, 1997, 2021 and Global Citizenship Education (UNESCO, 2015). The study focuses on students' cross-cultural learning while also analyzing how the COIL experience impacted their willingness to participate in future international activities.

The study is guided by two research questions:

1. How do students perceive their learning experiences in a COIL course regarding language development and cultural awareness?
2. In what ways does the COIL experience shape students' attitudes related to global collaboration?

The study highlights student voices from underrepresented populations in Southeast Asia, which contributes to an improved understanding of COIL's impact at the local level. This article adds to published works on intercultural competence self-report and virtual exchange projects by offering views from the community, which are often overlooked by top-down institutional platforms. This research also offers practical recommendations for developing culturally inclusive COIL programs that enhance language learning and intercultural relations, in turn contributing to the internationalization of education in countries with limited resources.

The research first examines existing literature regarding COIL together with its impacts on language acquisition and intercultural abilities and student perceptions toward global educational partnerships. This section establishes the research foundation through theoretical and empirical evidence while pointing out unresolved issues that the current investigation plans to solve.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Collaborative Online International Learning

2.1.1 Definition

COIL, a pedagogical approach, enables classrooms worldwide to participate in a structured virtual collaboration that integrates their curriculum. Beelen and Jones (2015) define this

approach as the strategic inclusion of international components in educational settings, which allows students to collaborate with their cross-cultural peers since they are still in schools. De Wit et al. (2022) supports the idea that internationalization should extend past traditional student mobility programs by implementing educational changes that include COIL as one of its primary methods. In this context, Chau (2025) describes COIL as an educational model that brings teachers and students from different countries together to engage students to a collaborative learning project as a part of a teaching course via online platforms. Universities and governments are increasingly aware of the need to prepare students to be ready to participate in diverse global contexts, thereby making ICC a central learning objective in COIL initiatives (De Wit & Altbach, 2021).

2.1.2 Core Components

COIL exists thanks to faculty and students from different institutions who form partnerships to teach and learn together (Eisler & Potter, 2014). The main purpose of this approach is to focus on experiential, collaborative learning – through projects that build worldwide understanding, digital literacy, critical thinking, cultural competence and subject matter depth in all participants, without requiring physical mobility (Wahls et al., 2017; Hackett et al., 2024; Chau, 2025). The successful implementation of COIL demands both faculty and students to work together through deliberate planning of objectives from shared curriculum; collaborative assignment development; online platform selection and evaluation methods for joint assessment learning and team collaboration (Starke-Meyerring & Andrews, 2006). The COIL methodology contains three essential components including course material integration and international teamwork and digital tools for virtual community development. In addition, planned and unexpected occurrences should be recognized as educational opportunities since the COIL process delivers educational value equal to the content. (Potter & Bragadóttir, 2019)

2.1.3 Goals and Outcomes

COIL functions as a budget-friendly substitute for conventional study abroad opportunities because it uses digital tools and social platforms and minimizes international travel during worldwide security threats and pandemic outbreaks (Rubin, 2017). The outbreak of COVID-19 boosted COIL's popularity because universities required alternative methods to provide international education virtually. COIL aims to establish global perspectives together with cultural competence development for students and faculty members. Students develop intercultural awareness through cooperative international projects which allow them to view different cultures from fresh angles (Komatsu, 2023). COIL is recognized as an innovative pedagogical model that uses computer-mediated communication (CMC) to enhance intercultural competence and language skills among students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, standing out as an effective model for cultivating global competence, communicative adaptability, and intercultural awareness in higher education (Chau, 2025).

2.2. COIL's Impact on Language Development and Intercultural Communication Competence

Research has reached a consensus about COIL's dual effects on language learning and cross-cultural skills. Through ongoing task-based interactions with international students, participants build their language proficiency while learning how to understand and react to various cultural viewpoints. The investigations conducted by Chau et al. (2023) demonstrate that COIL produces real intercultural education through its use of authentic cross-cultural language contexts. The combination of these experiences results in enhanced confidence during speaking activities as well as better recognition of social language norms and a strong grasp of different communication patterns.

According to Goldstein (2022), cross-cultural learning experiences like studying abroad can offer students the chance to enhance their awareness of cultural differences and language skills. This is particularly evident when programs incorporate structured reflection and interactive components, which may also be beneficial when employing COIL. However, these positive outcomes are not guaranteed to happen automatically. Chun (2011) emphasizes that developing intercultural and linguistic competencies require carefully planned interactions and deliberate analysis of experiences through intentional program design. The research by Naicker and his colleagues in 2022 revealed that students who participated in COIL programs with structured cultural immersion activities developed communicative adaptability significantly as well as cultural empathy. The study by Vahed and Rodriguez in 2021 demonstrated that certain students faced difficulties concerning synchronicity, together with cultural miscommunications, yet these challenges led to increased resilience, together with better intercultural understanding and advanced discourse techniques. The combined evidence from several studies confirms this holistic approach.

The study by Hackett et al. in 2023 proved that U.S. and Dutch COIL participants demonstrated better cultural intelligence and adaptability progress when compared to students under standard conditions, as demonstrated by Spieler et al. in 2025. The empirical data confirms this integrated perspective. The work of Hackett et al. (2023) revealed that U.S. and Dutch COIL participants showed much better cultural intelligence and adaptability development than their control group counterparts, while Spieler and his team in 2025 documented that early childhood education students from Norway and Canada improved their intercultural understanding together with English proficiency. These findings gain further support from Chau et al. (2023) and Sun (2024), as they demonstrate that AI-enhanced and peer-led COIL models enhance both language skills and intercultural understanding. The research of Chun (2011) on reflection connects with the current research that analyzes deliberate instructional approaches. The research conducted in South Africa (e.g. Vahed & Rodriguez; 2021; Naicker et al. 2022;) demonstrated that COIL programs lead students to surpass their initial exposure limits and technological barriers and language confidence deficiencies through structured collaborative activities that promote reflection and continuity.

In short, COIL can be used as one of the best tools to bridge the gaps among countries around the world. It helps to improve understanding of cultural differences, develop cultural sensitivity, and ensure cultural transmission and exchange (Anderson & Or, 2024).

2.3. Student Attitudes towards Global Collaboration and Openness

The learning process through COIL promotes students' changing views about worldwide collaboration and their approach to global acceptance. The internationalization mindset transforms when COIL students move from theoretical goals to practical relational processes. Students who engage in COIL demonstrate increased excitement regarding worldwide partnerships and develop stronger cultural understanding while becoming more skilled at intercultural interaction. The research conducted by Chau et al. (2023) shows that COIL participation leads students to develop stronger emotional connections and greater openness to working with students from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

However, building a continuous, open-minded approach needs more than just enthusiasm because it needs deliberate educational planning. The study by Chun (2011) proved that exposure to diversity does not automatically lead to intercultural maturity among individuals. The essential components for students to understand and incorporate their international experiences include guided reflection, together with critical dialogue and scaffolded interaction. The study by Naicker and colleagues (2022) demonstrated that students who took part in COIL projects with cultural immersion and reflective activities developed increased empathy alongside greater adaptability and willingness to engage in subsequent international collaborations. The benefits resulted from deliberate, inclusive design rather than random events.

Vahed and Rodriguez (2021) present additional research demonstrating that students who found it challenging to manage asynchronous work and new cultural practices during COIL gained improved resilience along with enhanced cultural appreciation and interpersonal adaptability. The experiences students gain through international collaboration develop their short-term perspective on global learning while preparing them for professional success through worldwide teamwork opportunities.

Notably, virtual international exchanges, which emphasize cooperative examination and cultural discussion, play a vital role in reinforcing these attitudinal transformations. Research conducted by Dooly together with Sadler in 2016 confirms that web-based intercultural activities in educational environments enhance students' worldwide perspectives and their inclination to team up with foreign students. Educational interactions trigger self-assessment in students while they build their ability to understand other cultures and create formalized chances to explore worldwide problems and various viewpoints. Through COIL experiences, students gain the skills to work effectively across cultural borders because they learn how to adapt their interactions while showing genuine interest in cross-cultural dialogue.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

This research builds its theoretical base from Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and Global Citizenship Education (GCE). The study examines the learning results of a COIL-based essay writing course by using these frameworks to analyze intercultural awareness and language development alongside attitudes toward global collaboration.

2.4.1 Intercultural Communicative Competence

Byram (1997, 2021) developed the ICC framework that defines essential abilities for suitable communication across different language groups and cultures. Byram identifies five essential elements that include attitudes (curiosity, openness) alongside knowledge (understanding social groups and cultural practices) and skills of interpreting and relating and skills of discovery and interaction and critical cultural awareness. The five essential components establish the basic framework for intercultural communicative competence. The model by Byram incorporates linguistic competence together with both sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence to demonstrate that effective intercultural communication demands adequate language proficiency for proper idea expression and meaning negotiation between cultures (Abdulhasan, 2024). This combination enables learners to switch among different cultural perspectives to achieve respectful and efficient communication with people from various cultural backgrounds.

The current research uses the ICC framework to study how students benefited from intercultural learning through tasks to develop communication flexibility and self-awareness and intergroup understanding. Students demonstrate ICC elements through their stories about cultural curiosity alongside their growing confidence in cultural self-expression and their enhanced tolerance toward others.

2.4.2 Global Citizenship Education

According to UNESCO (2015), GCE broadens its scope by emphasizing worldwide collective duties beyond personal intercultural relationships. The educational approach of GCE aims to build learners who understand global problems while being empathetic and ethically involved and equipped to create a peaceful inclusive world with sustainable solutions. The framework consists of three interconnected dimensions that include cognitive understanding of global systems and diverse perspectives together with socio-emotional empathy and solidarity and behavioral responsible global participation through action-oriented engagement.

GCE functions as a framework inside COIL to track how students modify their perspectives about working with international partners in the future. Students demonstrated progress toward GCE's socio-emotional and behavioral targets by developing global perspectives together with affective openness as shown through their reflective comments about having an "eye-opening" experience and their desire to build more connections and show cultural respect. The study reveals that students gained emotional responses along with language skills yet developed limited critical global awareness which demands instructional support to achieve GCE outcomes according to Chau et al. (2023).

2.4.3 Integrating ICC and GCE through the COIL Experience

This research combines ICC and GCE frameworks to study how students handle language and cultural boundaries in virtual intercultural partnerships. COIL represents a novel educational approach because it places intercultural engagement directly in academic classes to promote "internationalization at home". The collaborative and task-based structure of this method allows students to practice linguistic agency and cultural reflexivity during authentic learning experiences.

The Vietnam-Filipino COIL project included students who practiced reflective writing and collaborated with peers while engaging in intercultural dialogue. Through these activities students developed their ICC and GCE components which led to improvements in language skills and intercultural empathy and global engagement openness. The encountered obstacles including asynchronous communication and cultural misunderstandings served as pivotal moments which led students to develop enhanced intercultural understanding together with resilience.

The study uses two theoretical frameworks to establish COIL as a teaching strategy that generates fundamental modern abilities. The research adopts Byram's (1997, 2021) ICC model together with UNESCO's (2015) GCE paradigm to examine the progressive development of students' cultural, linguistic, and attitudinal growth within international educational environments.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

The research utilized a qualitative case study methodology to analyze the cultural learning experiences and global openness development among EFL students from Vietnam and the Philippines who participated in a COIL-based essay writing course. Researchers used this design to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the individual, communal, and cross-cultural interpretations of students through their collaborative learning experiences across national borders.

3.2. Participants

The COIL project involved 60 undergraduate students who joined from Vietnam and the Philippines. The students took academic writing courses while collaborating in diverse national groups for four weeks. From the complete cohort of participants, only 37 students provided complete answers in the post-project reflection survey, which led to their inclusion in the final analysis.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Semi-structured reflection questionnaires were sent out at the end of the COIL project strategy, and qualitative data were gathered. The tool consisted of an open-ended questionnaire with

questions based on six themes: general experience, friendship, learning culture, acquiring language, challenges, and future dreams. Questions were designed to elicit the reflective narratives (e.g., “What did you enjoy the COIL class the most?” or “How did the COIL experience change your perspective on other cultures?”). Responses were accepted in both English and Vietnamese.

Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis served as the analytical method to examine student reflections in a qualitative data analysis. The method enabled researchers to detect and explain both straightforward and subtle patterns within the data to achieve an in-depth analysis of student intercultural experiences. The initial stage of the analysis required researchers to read through all responses multiple times in order to create a complete understanding of the dataset. Researchers created initial memos during this phase to document emerging patterns together with emotionally charged language and recurring concepts.

In the second phase, researchers established the coding process through both deductive and inductive reasoning methods. The deduction of codes came from the established research base, which contains the intercultural awareness and global citizenship education framework created by Byram (1997, 2021) and UNESCO (2015) respectively. The analysis generated codes that represented student expressions about cultural curiosity, together with intercultural communication and peer support, and confidence in English use. The researchers developed inductive codes that emerged from unique student responses, which allowed the data to present itself. The analysis produced inductive codes through context-specific student expressions, which included “feeling eye-opened”, “learning through group laughter”, “missing replies in the chat”, and “realizing our culture is unique.”

After the first coding stage, the third phase required the researchers to group these codes according to general themes, which revealed common participant experiences. The data analysis process transformed the codes “made new friends” and “supported by teammates” into the thematic element Friendship and Relationship Building. The analysis discovered that participants used the expressions “learned about Filipino celebrations” and “shared family traditions” to develop the Experiential Cultural Discovery theme. The analysis showed that participants expressed increased confidence and enjoyable teamwork alongside natural English language use, which formed the basis for the Collaborative and Enjoyable Learning as well as the English Language Development themes.

Through analysis of participants’ statements during the program, researchers determined several distinct categories that emerged. The coding process revealed that participants generally explained their experiences using three primary categories that included Friendship and Learning.

The fourth phase of the study involved researchers checking the developing themes against all collected data to maintain internal consistency and analytical validity. Data segments that displayed weak support or inconsistency required reassessment before researchers could either

enhance them or remove them. During the fifth phase, researchers created clear descriptions of themes by assigning names to them and providing representative quotes that demonstrated their essential meaning. The study produced six themes for the first research question and five themes for the second research question, which appear in Tables 1 and 2 of the Findings section. The final research phase included the process of writing up findings, which involved interpreting themes in connection with study objectives and relating them to literature about intercultural learning and COIL.

3.4. Ensuring Trustworthiness

To make our analysis more trustworthy, we followed some solid qualitative research practices based on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) guidelines. We checked credibility by using multiple methods, like combining written reflections with optional follow-up interviews. We also had two researchers independently code some responses and then work together to come up with the final themes. This approach allowed us to reduce personal bias and develop a more objective understanding. To ensure the reliability of our findings, we diligently documented all our coding choices, the process of theme development, and any changes we made along the way. We also maintained conformability by writing detailed analytic memos and conducting peer debriefings, allowing others to review and validate our interpretations. Lastly, we made sure our findings could be relevant to similar contexts by providing rich descriptions of the research setting, the instructional design, and the participants, and including direct quotes from students. All these steps together helped make our study transparent, strict, and more applicable to other educational environments.

4. Findings and Discussion

In this session, students' perspectives on the immediate and the long term of their language learning and cultural learning in COIL and their attitudes towards intercultural awareness will be analyzed.

RQ1: Student Perceptions of Experiences in Culture and Language Learning through COIL

When students reflect on their experiences in a COIL-based essay writing course, they realize that virtual exchange effectively shapes their comprehension of language while building their cultural knowledge. The analysis of six fundamental themes proves that structured peer-based cooperation produces interactive learning experiences that promote reflection and personal development. The themes demonstrate multiple connections, highlighting the complex structure of student development in intercultural communication.

Table 1*Key Themes in Student Perceptions of Language and Culture Learning through COIL (RQ1)*

Theme	Description	Frequency	Qualitative Indicators
1. Friendship and Relationship Building	Formation of meaningful, supportive peer relationships that enhanced learning and trust.	79	"Making friends with foreign students,"; "felt supported,"; "our group worked well together."
2. Experiential Cultural Discovery	Learning about food, customs, traditions, and everyday life from peers.	72	"Filipino cheerful behavior"; "Vietnamese customs during Tết"; "interesting family habits"
3. Collaborative Intercultural Learning and Respectful Engagement	Appreciation for group tasks, feedback, shared presentations, and engaging learning structure.	70	"Group work was fun"; "presenting helped me feel confident"; "cheerful atmosphere"
4. Intercultural and Soft Skills Development	Growth in teamwork, time management, digital collaboration, and problem-solving.	70	"Learned to work across time zones," "better teamwork," "more independent online"
5. Intercultural Communicative Competence through English	Improvements in fluency, vocabulary, confidence, and spontaneous communication.	48	"Improved pronunciation"; "more confident speaking," "learned from real conversation"
6. Challenges and Cultural Self-Awareness	Navigating language gaps, non-responsiveness, and identity reflection through cultural explanation.	<i>Emergent</i>	"Hard to express ideas"; "explaining my culture made me think more"; "realized uniqueness"

Theme 1: Friendship and Relationship Building

The theme that was most discussed in the data (79 occurrences) revolved around the development of cross-cultural friendships, commonly presented as the most memorable and inspiring aspect of the COIL exchange. For example, one student noted:

"I enjoyed the part of making friends with foreign students—it made the learning atmosphere so cheerful."

Another stated:

"I like getting to know each other, making friends, and collaborating in group tasks—it made me feel supported."

These reflections confirmed O'Dowd's (2021) argument that affective bonds were a vital factor for successful virtual communication. Learners who made genuine friends reported to enhance their willingness to speak and, at the same time, reduced the anxiety of using English.

Theme 2: Experiential Cultural Discovery

Thanks to COIL, the students mentioned they could feel the cultural immersion in conversations as well as in the ways they learned about food, festivals, traditions, and lifestyles.

Replies such as

"I learned about the Sinulog festival, cuisine, and cheerful Filipino behavior."
and

"I learned how Vietnamese people celebrate Tết and live their daily lives."

show clearly how COIL is putting students in the position of being experienced rather than relying upon textbook examples.

This is in line with Byram's (1997) model of interpretive competence and the argument put forth by Spieler et al. (2025) that reflective discussion with peers promotes cultural depth, particularly if the cultural comparison is reciprocal and task-focused.

Theme 3: Collaborative Intercultural Learning and Respectful Engagement

It was emotionally appealing and fun for the participants to be part of a COIL class, facilitated by a variety of group projects, shared reflections, and an intercultural project. Common themes included "comfortable and cheerful atmosphere" and "Group presentations helped me build my confidence."

One student wrote, *"The most fun part was collaborating with my Vietnamese group—we learned to laugh at our grammar mistakes and grow together."*

Research supports the idea that virtual worlds can greatly influence students' perspectives, aligning with Helm's findings (Helm, 2015). Students not only become more emotionally engaged but also deepen their academic understanding. The collaborative nature of these tasks promotes cross-cultural connections among students, leading to more meaningful peer feedback and increased participation.

Theme 4: Intercultural and Soft Skills Development

Many report growth in skills essential to working in a global team: how to collaborate, manage time, and communicate.

"COIL helped me improve in time management and teamwork."

"I learned to work across time zones and be more responsible online."

These observations align with those of Hackett et al. (2023), who discovered that, in comparison to their non-virtual exchange (VE) peers, participants engaged in VE tend to develop higher levels of cultural adaptability. What's more, students' growth in managing asynchronous communication, adapting to various group roles, and working effectively with digital communication tools reflects the emphasis on internationalization at home and the importance of soft skill development through digital means.

Theme 5: Intercultural Communicative Competence through English

Students described learning English not only as rote memorization but as a meaningful, situation-based conversation.

“The more I communicate, the more I improve my vocabulary and confidence.”
“I improved my speaking and listening because we had to use English to plan and solve problems together.”

This finding confirmed that real-time collaboration could enhance the development and proficiency in English and pragmatics. It was this interactional orientation that provided an opportunity for learners to play with language, trial and error, and exposure to English in use (thus “lower stakes” exposure).

Theme 6: Challenges and Cultural Self-Awareness

This was not the most frequently discussed theme, but probably one of the most reflective. Students said they had difficulty participating in groups and that there were language barriers:

“Sometimes my friends did not respond, so I had to be patient and help them understand,” she said.

“It was difficult to articulate cultural concepts well, but it made me even more aware of how unique our culture is.”

Rather than as deficits, students saw these as occasions for the development of autonomy, empathy, and cultural metacognition (Chun, 2011). The effort to articulate one’s own culture also led learners to become more aware of their values, identity, and communicative style, thereby enhancing their cross-linguistic and cross-cultural awareness.

Although all six themes have been identified in terms of how they capture different dimensions of the students’ experience within a COIL classroom and can be isolated to some extent, it would be more accurate to view them as part of the larger process of development and progression along an intercultural and language arc. Collaborative Intercultural Learning and Respectful Engagement (Theme 3) laid out the foundation for a nurturing and emotionally enriching space that facilitated the creation of cross-cultural friendships (Theme 1). These interpersonal relationships acted as an inducement for more meaningful interaction and provided students with the psychological security to discuss challenging cultural material (Theme 2) or take communicative risks in English (Theme 5). With further interaction on the task, the students experienced logistical difficulties and intercultural complications, such as variation in language proficiency, communication, and group coordination (Theme 6).

Instead of discouraging engagement, these obstacles stimulated learners to apply and to refine other soft skills such as collaboration/group work, time management, empathy, and intercultural communication (Theme 4). In an important sense, those experiences were not isolated ones: In reflecting on them, students made sense not simply of a different culture, but of their prejudices, habits, and selves. This way, the themes as a whole describe how COIL moves students from being passive recipients of information to active, reflective participants in

intercultural dialogue, in line with the kinds of transformative learning that are linked to global citizenship education (UNESCO, 2015) and intercultural communicative competence theory (Byram, 1997; 2021).

Overall, that students understand language and cultural learning through COIL is promising for the transformative power of the model. Based on cooperation, feedback, and actual communication, COIL offers an experiential approach to learning that supports the development of personal relationships and ICC. These results contribute to the current literature (e.g. Helm, 2015; O'Dowd, 2021) and also provide a novel, data-driven description of how EFL students in Southeast Asia negotiate and develop in virtual ICC environments.

RQ2: COIL's Influence on the Aspiration for International Collaboration

To capture the overall range and resonance of students' attitudinal responses, Table 2 summarizes the five thematic categories that emerged from the qualitative data.

Table 2

Key themes in student attitudes and aspirations following the COIL experience (RQ2)

Theme	Description	Frequency	Qualitative Indicators
1. Increased Confidence in International Communication	Increased comfort and willingness to speak English with international peers.	4 (explicit "Yes") + 8 implied	"I feel more confident," "less nervous to speak,"; "not scared to join the discussion."
2. Enhanced attitude toward intercultural peer collaboration	Students became more open, willing collaborate with peers after the COIL experience	7 (explicit "Yes") + 6 implied	"More open to others," "understand perspectives," and "respect other cultures."
3. Desire for More COIL Experiences	Strong interest in having more COIL-integrated courses and activities.	14 (total in two items)	"Please organize more COIL sessions,"; "want to meet more international peers."
4. Aspirations for Better Cultural Exchange Design	Creative suggestions to make future exchanges more meaningful, such as storytelling, deeper topics, and more interaction.	9+ suggestions	"More games or presentations," "share stories," "deeper cultural topics"
5. Emotional Resonance and Positive Affect	Students described the COIL experience with enthusiastic, emotionally positive language.	Highly frequent in descriptors	"Fun," "amazing," "eye-opening," "memorable," "exciting," "engaging," "thrilling"

The results from RQ2 indicated that students' engagement in the COIL-based writing class had a longer-lasting impact not just on their immediate language and cultural learning (as explored in RQ1) but also on their dispositions, desires, and orientations towards global engagement more generally. However, these attitudinal shifts are not independent from the learning outcomes of RQ1; instead, they can be seen as the next step of development, i.e., transformation of perceptions in motivation, reflection, and future intentions.

To understand this evolution, five themes were illuminated from the data. **Table 2** provides a summary of these themes, including how often these appeared and qualitative signs employed,

highlighting both the frequency of occurrence and qualitative indicators drawn directly from student reflections.

Theme 1: Confidence in International Communication

Students continuously indicated feeling more confident and inclined to talk to international classmates. Although the binary items prompted few participants to state “yes,” the open-ended responses raise more general emotive benefits. As one student noted, *“I feel more confident to share now, even if I make mistakes.”*

This supports the claim that confidence in global communication is based not in language competency alone but in the emotional security and trust produced in COIL collaborations (O’Dowd, 2021; Chau et al., 2023).

This confidence is connected to the experiences reflected in RQ1 Theme 3 (Enjoyable Collaboration) and Theme 1 (Relationship Building), in which students enjoyed that group work was “fun”, “supportive”, and “safe”. In such, the affective base fostered by collaborative learning has helped to springboard a greater level of linguistic agency — a willingness to speak and to connect across cultures without fear of judgment.

Generally, this study’s finding of enhanced cross-cultural communication aligns with Chau (2020), who reported strong student engagement in Vietnam’s EFL cultural activities via reflective responses, though oral reflection was less effective. Similarly, Wang and Hemchua (2022) found that EFL textbook visuals foster ICC, suggesting diverse media can enhance cultural awareness.

Theme 2: Enhanced attitude toward intercultural peer collaboration

Students consistently conveyed an observable transformation in their attitudes toward working with culturally diverse peers after their COIL engagement. Statements like “I understand other people better and respect the differences we have” along with “I learned there are more things alike between us than I thought” point to a shift from basic observation to authentic interpersonal empathy and team collaboration willingness.

The change in attitude matches the pattern which RQ1 Theme 2 (Experiential Cultural Discovery) illustrated through its approach to learning about customs and daily life that builds respect and mutual comprehension.

These research results support previous work by Chun (2011) and Chau et al. (2023) who showed that structured virtual exchange reduces cultural distance and develops intercultural sensitivity through reflective dialogue and meaningful interaction.

Theme 3: Desire for Continued COIL Experiences

Students’ **enthusiasm for more COIL-based learning was** a particularly strong theme. Many explicitly requested future sessions.

“Please continue this; I love learning this way.”
“I hope we can have more cultural exchange with new partners.”

In this instance, the search for the fun and relevance mentioned in RQ1 Theme 3 (Collaborative and Enjoyable Learning) and Theme 4 (Soft Skill Development) has been the cord of the connection. The favorable mood that arose from these experiences led to an authentic motivation to continue international engagement. Evidence for the result that Vahed and Rodriguez (2020) already reported on, and which was in addition to Chau et al. (2023), argued that VE is a highly effective motivation for students to look for new international learning events, both through virtual as well as physical ways.

Theme 4: Aspirations for More Meaningful Cultural Exchange

Students desired not only additional COIL. They wanted it better, deeper, and more interactive. That is why they suggested such things as storytelling, country-focused games, and comparative group projects. One student responded:

"It would be more exciting if we could tell stories about our countries or show pictures."

This theme goes well with RQ1 Theme 6 (Challenges and Cultural Self-Awareness), yet a more shining example of it is when not only students found it difficult to cope with various obstacles but also the self-as dimension, when the students critically reflected on how to improve cross-cultural dialogue in the future.

Theme 5: Emotional Resonance and Positive Impressions

Students frequently utilized the COIL program to share their emotional feelings with "eye-opening," "you never forget," "attractive," and "unforgettable" as the most suitable words. These reactions based on feelings are very essential and are the empirical proof for Helm (2015) of the emotional layer in virtual exchange profitability. Those reactions to emotions not only correlate with the majority but also constitute a verbal representation of the themes in RQ1, especially Friendship (Theme 1), Enjoyable Learning (Theme 3), and Language Confidence (Theme 5). Research groups led by Chau et al. (2023) have reached similar conclusions in their study, where they highlight the importance of affective engagement in online collaboration with the development of intercultural competence for a long time.

The process through which students' COIL experiences go from short-term communication to long-term understanding reflects the way the students' experiences in COIL transition from cultural and linguistic interaction to global awareness, intercultural openness, and learner-driven engagement. COIL can act as a bridge for this instructor when it is built with the use of emotions and intercultural scaffolding as well, a feature that shows students the platform that they need to pursue socially balanced lives. The international exposure of students during the pandemic revealed that students were not only aware of the different needs that the community has, but also willing to contribute through their knowledge and skills

The core of the students' experiences in the COIL-based project, through two research questions of their impact on intercultural communicative competence development and global engagement attitudes change, along with educational implications in Vietnam for language

instruction and international education, is revealed. This is the stage of the paper where there are subheadings discussing details about cross-cultural learning and intercultural competence (section one) and another examination of the effect of COIL on students' global collaboration ambitions, as well as the study's scholarly contribution and policy recommendations for integrating COIL into EMI frameworks.

Cross-Cultural Learning and Intercultural Communicative Competence

The first research question reveals that COIL becomes an efficient tool for ICC development when it receives proper structure and guidance. Most students stated that collaborative work with peers helped them better comprehend different cultures while simultaneously stimulating self-examination of their cultural biases. The current results support both Byram's 1997, 2021 framework of ICC through their emphasis on curiosity and the interpretation of cultural meanings across different contexts.

Students developed different levels of intercultural competence through the project despite their increased interest in cultural exploration. The research showed that multiple participants wanted to understand different cultures, yet only some demonstrated advanced intercultural abilities, including critical decentering and cultural perspective negotiation. The present study aligns with Helm (2015) and Chau (2023), who found that virtual exchanges need proper scaffolding to avoid creating superficial cultural encounters instead of meaningful intercultural exchanges.

The results present significant relevance within the framework of Global Citizenship Education (UNESCO, 2015). COIL serves as a tool to promote early-stage intercultural acceptance, but GCE fundamental goals, such as inequalities and power dynamics reflection, need teaching methods that progress students into action-based critical analysis from initial descriptive content.

Shifts in Attitudes Toward Global Engagement

The second research question found evidence of a substantial change in student perspectives toward working with international partners. Students demonstrated stronger motivation to interact with international peers through their growing interest in cross-cultural interactions and their improved English language abilities. The emotional results established by GCE match its main mission, which aims to develop empathy and cultural respect as well as a dedication to worldwide collaboration (UNESCO, 2015).

A closer analysis demonstrates that many students experienced emotional changes that did not translate into new cognitive perspectives. Students showed strong feelings of excitement and positive emotions regarding international cross-cultural interactions, yet they failed to produce stable critical evaluations of global systems alongside their analysis of social inequalities and their positions. According to Chau et al. (2023), emotional expression by itself

does not lead to the necessary critical global understanding that enables effective global citizenship.

COIL presents multiple possibilities alongside specific boundaries in educational contexts. Students receive an essential entry point to global engagement through this experience, yet their initial interest may fade if they lack ongoing support and exposure to intricate cultural obstacles. These reflections supported O'Dowd's (2021) argument that affective bonds were a vital factor for successful virtual exchange, and a research design with an extended timeline would help assess the lasting impact of these attitudinal changes.

The research results establish particular recommendations for implementing English Medium Instruction (EMI) practices throughout Vietnam. EMI adoption in higher education institutions has grown, yet many programs fail to create authentic communication environments, which leads to diminished intercultural abilities. The findings of Phan et al. (2024) demonstrate that Vietnamese EMI programs fail to deliver sufficient language skills to their students because of unrealistically high proficiency standards in the classroom. The authors maintain that students need innovative teaching methods with cultural relevance to build the necessary skills for international interactions in the absence of such approaches. Through its specific approach to cultural collaboration, COIL develops the communicative and intercultural skills that EMI programs aim to create.

Contribution to Literature, GCE, and EMI Practice

The research adds to the existing COIL and virtual exchange studies by delivering a student-focused view from the underrepresented Southeast Asian academic perspective. The research findings align with prior work by Chau et al. (2023), which demonstrates how technology-mediated collaborative learning improves students' language skills while decreasing their fear of communication and promoting cross-cultural understanding among historically underrepresented student groups.

The research findings demonstrate a fundamental internal conflict. COIL programs extend international learning opportunities to students, yet they fail to achieve the necessary level of critical engagement that global citizenship education (GCE) frameworks require unless institutions deliberately integrate intercultural reflection methods into the experience.

In the context of Vietnam's rapidly expanding EMI policies, these findings are particularly salient. EMI initiatives must move beyond narrow instrumentalist goals of English language acquisition to integrate global citizenship competencies, ethical intercultural communication, and critical global literacy into their curricular frameworks. COIL offers a promising model to support this broader vision, particularly if paired with intentional instructional strategies that promote reflection, dialogue, and critical intercultural engagement.

Thus, the contribution of this study is twofold: it validates COIL as a viable pedagogical approach to support internationalization at home, and it highlights the need for more critically informed, reflection-driven, and sustainability-focused implementations to achieve deeper intercultural learning and global citizenship outcomes.

Implications for EMI Policymakers and University Leaders

The findings of this study highlight important implications for policymakers and university leaders. They need to focus on these research results because these support their objectives to promote EMI together with the wider objectives of GCE. Institutions should stop treating COIL as an optional addition to EMI because it serves as a strategic option to develop real-world learning environments accessible to everyone while simultaneously advancing language skills and cultural understanding.

When universities implement COIL throughout their EMI courses, students gain real-world English communication possibilities, which transform the academic language into a practical tool for worldwide teamwork. The implementation of COIL enables students and educators to access international learning opportunities that extend beyond mobility programs because it serves a broader student and educator population who experience financial or linguistic and geographical obstacles.

Universities need to implement COIL across their programs while providing structured intercultural reflection and clearly defining learning outcomes based on GCE principles, which highlight critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and intercultural humility.

The way EMI is intentionally developed enables it to function as both a language learning tool and a social responsibility development platform, preparing students to ethically engage with the globalized world.

5. Limitations and Conclusion

This research delivers essential knowledge about how COIL programs influence intercultural skills along with global involvement among EFL learners, but its interpretation requires acknowledgment of specific research limitations. The research depends on subjective self-reports, which may produce results influenced by participant preferences and restricted ability to evaluate their own performance; future research should adopt mixed-methods designs to verify findings through both qualitative data and quantitative measurement of language skills and cultural understanding.

The research duration was insufficient because it concentrated on short-term consequences, thus demanding future studies that examine the lasting effects of COIL implementation. The limited selection of study participants from two Southeast Asian institutions weakens the generalizability of results. To fully grasp the revolutionary potential of COIL, we need to expand research efforts across various academic disciplines, different types of institutions, and cultural settings, especially in regions of the Global South that are often underrepresented in current studies.

The results emphasize COIL's promising role in offering students from under-resourced backgrounds meaningful international learning opportunities, presenting a practical alternative to conventional mobility programs. This research adds to existing knowledge by illustrating how COIL operates not just as an innovative teaching method but also as a powerful instrument

for advancing Global Citizenship Education. When supported by appropriate structures and comprehensive teaching approaches, COIL enables students to develop stronger communication skills and cultural awareness, meeting the demands of today's globalized educational environment.

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Appendice

A. Development Process of the Semistructured Reflection Questionnaire

1. Research Focus

To explore students' experiences, perceived benefits, challenges, language development, attitudinal shifts, and intercultural learning outcomes from participating in a COIL course between Vietnamese and Filipino students.

2. Clarify the Purpose and Scope

Define the aim of the inquiry clearly. In this study, the purpose is to gain an in-depth understanding of how students experienced the COIL course, what they perceived as its benefits and challenges, and how the course contributed to their intercultural competence development.

Guiding Research Questions:

1. How do students perceive their learning experiences in a COIL course regarding language development and awareness across different cultures?
2. In what ways does the COIL experience shape students' attitudes related to global collaboration?

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The questionnaire design was informed by a review of relevant literature on:

- Intercultural communication in virtual exchange programs,
- Reflective practice in international learning contexts,
- Theoretical frameworks of Intercultural Communicative Competence (Byram, 1997; 2021) and Global Citizenship Education (UNESCO, 2015)
- Prior qualitative instruments used in COIL-related studies.

3. Drafting the Questionnaire

An initial set of open-ended questions was developed, organized around key thematic domains:

- Intercultural awareness and communication styles,
- Teamwork and collaborative processes,
- Learning experiences and virtual communication,
- Personal and academic growth.

Each question was open-ended to allow participants to express their experiences in depth, while still guided by thematic prompts to ensure relevance to the research focus. Optional sub-prompts were included to support deeper reflection.

4. Expert Review for Content Validity

The draft questionnaire was reviewed by two subject matter experts in intercultural education and qualitative research. Their feedback focused on:

- Clarity and cultural appropriateness of language,
- Alignment with reflection and learning objectives,
- Potential for eliciting detailed, meaningful responses.

Revisions were made to enhance clarity, reduce ambiguity, and ensure inclusivity for participants from both cultural contexts.

5. Pilot Testing

To ensure usability and appropriateness, the revised questionnaire was piloted with a small sample of students ($n = 5$) who had previously participated in similar COIL activities. Pilot feedback addressed:

- Ease of understanding,
- Willingness to reflect deeply,
- Response length and cognitive load.

Minor adjustments were made to improve flow, balance question depth, and clarify instructions.

6. Finalization and Implementation

The finalized instrument consisted of six semistructured reflection questions, each representing a key theme related to the COIL experience. Instructions emphasized that:

- There were no right or wrong answers,
- Honest, thoughtful reflection was encouraged,
- Participants could respond freely and in their own voice.

The questionnaire was administered in written format at the end of the COIL project.

7. Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of the activity, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw at any time. Informed consent was obtained in compliance with institutional ethical guidelines.

B. List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Term
COIL	Collaborative Online International Learning
ICC	Intercultural Communicative Competence
GCE	Global Citizenship Education
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EMI	English Medium Instruction
VE	Virtual Exchange
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
CMC	Computer-Mediated Communication

Bionote

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