

Enhancing Pre-service English as a Foreign Language Teachers' Intercultural Communicative Effectiveness through Collaborative Online International Learning

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Abstract:

Under the background of globalization, promoting intercultural communicative effectiveness (ICE) has become an urgent task for foreign language teaching, especially among pre-service EFL teachers. Collaborative online international learning (COIL) programs have been regarded as a means of providing learners from different cultural backgrounds with intercultural learning experiences. However, study on whether such programs contribute to the development of ICE remains limited. To bridge the gap, this study investigates the effect of COIL on the development of pre-service EFL teachers' ICE.

This study researched on a 10-week COIL program at a teachers' university in China. Forty eight pre-service EFL teachers were randomly assigned to an experimental group (n=24) and a control group (n=24). The experimental group collaborated online with 24 American undergraduate students through synchronous and asynchronous communication tools: Padlet, Zoom, email, and journals. Students from both sides formed intercultural teams on Padlet to explore self-selected cultural topics. Weekly Zoom meetings were held in which each group presented their topic and facilitated open discussions. Additionally, participants engaged in three rounds of one-on-one email exchanges on personal topics (e.g. hobbies, travel, family). To promote reflection, students submitted journals before the project, after each Zoom session, and at the end of the project. In the control group, the 24 participants were also divided into five groups and engaged in a teacher-led cultural learning program. The class met weekly for 90 minutes, beginning with group presentations on assigned cultural themes, followed by instructor-guided exploration. Students engaged in group discussions and comprehension tasks based on readings or video materials, and completed weekly written assignments analyzing cultural similarities and differences between Chinese and American cultures.

A mixed-method approach was adopted in data analysis. Guided by the Intercultural Effectiveness Scale, the ICE level of the experimental group and the control group were measured before and after the project, and analyzed using independent and paired-sample t-tests. Qualitative data, which included 2,056 transcribed Zoom utterances



(16,448 words), 250 Padlet posts (6,879 words), 97 email exchanges (77,600 words), and 72 reflective journals (34,000 words), were thematically analyzed to identify indicators of ICE development.

Results showed that the group involved in online communication activities significantly outperformed the control group in developing ICE, particularly in interaction management, message skills, identity maintenance, and behavioral flexibility. Notably, beyond measurable gains in intercultural communicative effectiveness, the COIL experience provided valuable pedagogical insights for pre-service EFL teachers, who had not yet engaged in real-situation teaching, with preliminary models and inspiration for designing culturally responsive learning environments in their future professional practice.

Keywords: intercultural communicative effectiveness, collaborative online international learning, pre-service EFL teachers

