Digital Creative Methods Contribute to Teaching Through Collaborative Schemes

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ABSTRACT

Aim. This article aims to explore the impact of shared virtual classrooms and landscape linguistics on English as a foreign language (EFL) students' learning. The study also intends to contribute to the understanding of the effects of transnational partnerships and innovative teaching models on higher education.

Methods. The methodology involves case studies, co-teaching activities, and debate topics to provide practical illustrations of innovative teaching methods. The research explores the possibilities of micro-collaborations between universities and analyses the role of established platforms like the teaching innovation lab, multilingualism, interculturality and language lab, and community of practice for early career researchers.

Results. The research unfolds within four established platforms, each playing a key role in progressing activities developed by knowledge hubs and extending their impact across institutional boundaries. Virtual platforms, staff training, and co-teaching approaches have been explored and implemented in universities, contributing to the improvement of education and the access of researchers, academics, and students. The collaboration between students from Albania and Poland is presented as a practical illustration of the innovative methods discussed.

Conclusion. The paper recommends creating online learning environments, increasing capacities, and collaborative approaches. It suggests training programmes to open doors to educational ecosystems, ultimately improving education and accessibility for researchers, academics, and students. The integration of technology is emphasized to enhance the academic experience and to stimulate creative techniques of cooperative international teaching. The study concludes with a call for increased collaboration, networking opportunities, and the development of a common perspective educational ecosystem.

Keywords: collaborative schemes, co-teaching approaches, innovative mobility schemes, digital teaching platforms, bottom-up micro-collaborations

Introduction

Today, we are living in an increasingly globalised world, so education is consequently forced to embrace more innovative and creative teaching methods, especially when discussing the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL). In this article, we will discuss and research new approaches to understand how the use of shared virtual classrooms and landscape linguistics affects the learning of EFL students. European alliances or unions have served as inspiration in this field, and the anticipated innovation in education, along with various models of transnational cooperation, guides us and enables the cultivation of interdisciplinary knowledge, overcoming the limits of traditional teaching methodologies.

Building on the curricular reform of common modules in linguistics, this study aims to explore the possibilities of micro-collaborations between universities, either as institutions or their units, in Europe. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the importance of creating systematic, structural, and sustainable transnational partnerships. The discussion unfolds within the context of four established platforms—Teaching Innovation Lab (CU.til), Multilingualism, Interculturality, and Language Lab (CU.mil), Community of Practice for Early Career Researchers (CU.ecr), and inCU.bator—each playing a key role in establishing and progressing the activities developed by Knowledge Centers and extending their impact across institutional boundaries.

We will explore a case study involving co-curricular activities and research to help provide practical illustrations of the innovative methods discussed. Additionally, this article provides insights into a unique teaching experience involving students from the Aleksandër Moisiu University in Durres, Albania, and the University of Applied Sciences. The collaboration unfolded over three weeks, with students from each country immersing themselves in the cultural traditions, history, and language skills of their counterparts. The culminating discussion on the Independence Day of Albania and Poland marked the intersection of academic exploration and cross-cultural exchange.

The following questions analyse the main points of the research:

- What is the impact of shared virtual classrooms on students' understanding of cultural traditions, history, and language competence in an EFL context?
- What are the benefits and challenges of collaborative projects among students from different cultural backgrounds within virtual classrooms?
- How does the presence and use of English in the language landscape affect language learning and student awareness, particularly focusing on the role of English as a functional language in official signs and as a symbolic language?

The variables under consideration include the following independent and dependent variables. Among independent variables, we can distinguish:
- type of cultural tradition (Albanian or Polish);
- language competencies;
- historical perspectives.

Among dependent variables:
- perceived impact on cultural understanding;
- collaboration benefits and challenges;
- contribution to global education perspectives.

This paper discusses collaborative efforts in support of the important initiative of internationalisation and transnational education. This study recommends creating online learning environments and increasing capacities and collaborative approaches. Training programmes are recommended to open the doors to educational ecosystems, to help improve education and the access of researchers, and students in an academic setting.

The paper presents in-depth research on shared virtual classrooms, focusing on their structure, the typology of the methodology used in our case study, and their effects on the understanding and use of language landscapes. Additionally, it explores their impact on students' understanding of cultural traditions. The integration of technology aims not only to increase the academic experience but also to improve or stimulate the creative techniques of cooperative teaching and international cooperation, which help develop the objectives of global education and international cooperation.

Literature Review

The landscape of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) has undergone a transformative change in its approach, starting with educators, researchers, or language experts exploring innovative methods that help improve teaching experiences. The literature review, set against the contextual background of shared virtual classrooms and learning platforms, primarily focuses on problem-solving techniques within the framework of higher education.

International Cooperation in Higher Education

One noteworthy European alliance is Circle U., which has been crucial in promoting systematic, structural, and sustainable partnerships among universities (Maassen et.al, 2023). Transnational cooperation in higher education is a key catalyst for academic enrichment and global collaboration. According to (Alemu 2014), higher education is defined as "the process of integration in the international, intercultural, or global dimension in the purpose, functions, or provision of education" (Alemu, 2014). He continues by emphasising the dynamic nature of actors within higher education, leading to varied perspectives and motivations—economic, social, political, or cultural—beyond traditional local and national influences. This evolution has resulted in changes across contexts, rationales, strategies, goals, meanings, benefits, perspectives, and challenges (Alemu, 2014).

The internationalisation of higher education has brought both benefits and challenges. While collaborative projects and cross-border educational exchanges contribute to individual, institutional, or national development, risks and unintended consequences exist. Jane Knight and Ulrich Teichler note that internationalisation has impacted cultural heritage, reduced linguistic diversity, and influenced diversity in academic cultures and structures (Knight, 2013; Teichler, 2004). Additionally, the process has led to a disproportionate mobility flow, with students from low- and middle-income countries predominantly participating in international mobility programmes in wealthier parts of the world (Enders & Tofighi, 2007).

Virtual International Mobility is increasingly recognised as a high-impact educational practice, endorsed by the American Association of Global Colleges and Universities. This technology-mediated international experience facilitates collaboration between geographically distant cultural groups and aligns with comprehensive internationalisation strategies in American higher education for nearly two decades. Initially aimed at fostering cultural awareness and critical thinking through intercultural discussions and collaborative projects, virtual mobility courses follow the Core Curriculum, providing students engaged with colleagues from three partner institutions through synchronous and asynchronous activities.

Our research examines how virtual mobility or virtual exchanges, identified as an important approach since 2016, affect students' exposure to different cultures and the impact of foreign language exposure and study (Looney & Lusin, 2019). Learning foreign languages is the most feasible and accessible form of international experience for students with limited resources. The study highlights the lack of research on the relationship between foreign language learning and the measurement of academic performance and student outcomes. For example, the longevity of the International Virtual Exchange (IVE) programme at the university, launched almost two decades ago to address equity gaps in international experiences (Cooper et al., 2008), demonstrates impacts among different socio-economic and demographic groups, aligning with equity

and inclusion in higher education (Looney & Lusin, 2019). Studies to date show that these virtual mobilities are effective in improving student success overall, particularly benefiting students traditionally underserved in the field of global experiences.

Teaching Innovation Platforms

Teaching Innovation Labs, such as CU.til, bring a change-oriented approach to higher education service delivery. Through these platforms, educators are provided with space and opportunities to experiment with innovative teaching methodologies and collaborate on various projects. The integration of Teaching Innovation Labs into the higher education landscape contributes to the enhancement of teaching quality and performance at an advanced academic level (Reginald 2023). The term "learning platform" is used to encompass digital opportunities, acknowledging the evolving and sometimes overlapping nature of digital systems and technologies.

The evolution of digital systems in teaching or the field of education emphasises their purpose in overcoming geographical spaces and developing pedagogical competencies for the intended use. Everything from the mass production of the microprocessor in 1971 to the creation of the World Wide Web and online classes fuelled by the digital revolution has played a significant role. Recently, various terms like learning management systems (LMS), learning platforms (LP), massive open online courses (MOOC), and others have emerged. The LMS creates content and analyses student activity, while the LP straddles the line between LMS and MOOCs, offering content created by developers. MOOCs provide ready-made content without management tools.

Multilingualism and Interculturality in Education

Multilingualism and interculturality play crucial roles in language education, contributing to developing language competencies and fostering students' intercultural understanding. Research indicates that exposure to different linguistic and cultural contexts effectively aids language acquisition and enhances intercultural communication skills (Smith, 2023).

Cristina Allemann-Ghionda (2008) identified divergent approaches to intercultural policies across European countries through comparative research. For example, in France, cultural diversity policies shifted toward assimilation, while in Germany, access to early childhood education was limited. Italy exhibited diversity in inclusive systems, with South Tyrol, due to its linguistic situation, having limited attention to the different mother tongues of the students. The guidelines emphasised interculturalism and transculturalism, viewing German language learning as an intercultural

and transcultural approach. Allemann-Ghionda (2008) perceives multiculturalism as the coexistence of different cultures in the same place without direct interaction, while interculturalism involves direct interaction. Wolfgang Welsch (1999) emphasised the changing nature of cultures, focusing on recognising mixtures and the penetration of intercultural education. Current discussions revolve around shifting approaches to global transculturalism aligned with education and the social aspect.

Collaborative Teaching and Cross-Cultural Learning

Cooperative teaching activities positively influence the academic performance and interpersonal skills of students, especially those from different cultural backgrounds. Global education and intercultural communication are significantly influenced by language competencies (Irimia, 2012).

Cooperative learning is generally defined as a model that "focuses on student-student interaction in the learning process, with the instructor's role centered on facilitating the process (a 'guide-on-the-side')" (McInnerney & Roberts, 2009). Online learning, or online joint classes, also referred to as computer-supported collaborative classes, views online group work as favoring active interaction between colleagues or students, resulting in the construction and deepening of knowledge (Hiltz & Goldman, 2005). In the concept of internationalisation, such a learning environment encourages students to engage in international (or intercultural) collaborative online learning.

Methodology

The methodology employed in the study incorporates discourse analysis and a teaching experiment. The paper focuses on the impact of joint virtual classes on EFL students' cultural competencies and understanding of traditions, history, and language through this collaborative teaching experiment.

Research Design: The study employed a qualitative method, specifically a case study approach, involving students from the University "Aleksandër Moisiu" in Durrës, Albania, and the Pedagogical University of Applied Sciences in Poland. Following a week of academic staff mobility exchange, a three-week joint virtual class was organised.

The focus of the collaboration is the understanding of perspectives related to international projects, necessitating cooperation between students studying in different educational fields and belonging to diverse cultural backgrounds. Existing studies acknowledge the positive impact of learning in online peer-to-peer classrooms, influencing learning outcomes from student-student interaction (McInnerney & Roberts, 2009). However, it remains to be seen how students evaluate their learning experiences and perceive advantages and disadvantages. The experiment aimed to explore cultural traditions,

history, and language competencies, culminating in a discussion on Albanian and Polish Independence Days.

As emphasised by the researcher (Richards, 2003), the study aligns with the paradigm of qualitative exploratory research. According to Keith Richards (2003), "Qualitative research (QI) aims to analyse and deepen in different areas of the lived world" (p. 10). Richards further states that QI focuses on everyday human factors, analysing and delving into their meaning and importance from the perspective of those involved. It usually concentrates on a small number of individuals, groups, or settings, utilising various methodologies to create different views on specific issues. Quantification is employed only when necessary for specific purposes and as a broader-ranging approach.

In this research, the approach studied is a case study. According to John W. Creswell (1998), case studies are a "system discovery limited by time and place, and is the case study — an activity, an event, or an individual" (p. 61). Richards (2003) suggests that the research focus should be a specific unit or group of units, and the purpose is the detailed description of the unit(s).

This study was carried out in cooperation with the public university Aleksandër Moisiu Durres and the University of Applied Sciences. While the Pedagogical University of Krakow offers a Professional Master's programme in English language teaching, the collaboration allowed lecturers from both institutions to conduct virtual classes in cooperation with students from Poland in the same field. Therefore, the present study was developed in such a virtual dimension. Classes are held through platforms such as Google Classroom, and video conferences are conducted through the Zoom application. The study analysed five video conferences (classes) scheduled once a week for about four hours each, on Mondays. The experiment incorporated a combination of synchronous and asynchronous activities, including collaborative projects, discussions, and language exchange sessions.

Students connect every Monday using their resources such as the Internet, laptops, or mobile phones. Lecturers post classes on Google Classroom along with any supporting materials. However, connection issues at times made the process challenging. Working groups were created with four students, two from Albania and two from Poland, working on the final project. Students were assigned a cross-cultural project where they explored and presented aspects of each other's cultural traditions, history, and language. Students from each country presented their findings and engaged in a critical discourse about the historical significance, cultural practices, and linguistic expressions associated with these events.

The process of data collection was made possible by video recordings of classes and their transcription. Shared virtual classes were recorded for ten weeks, once a week. Each group made a report once every two weeks on the progress of the preparation for the final project. Only four of the eleven classes/video conferences were transcribed for analysis.

Furthermore, pragmatic structures such as speech acts and politeness theory were considered in this study.

Discourse Analysis

Data Collection: Discourse analysis was employed to examine the interactions, discussions, and collaborative activities within the joint virtual classes. The primary data sources included video recordings of virtual sessions, written reflections, and collaborative projects produced by the students. These data sources allowed for an in-depth exploration of the language used, cultural references, and the dynamics of communication during the experiment.

Coding and Analysis: The discourse analysis involved systematic coding of the collected data. Codes were developed to capture key themes, linguistic patterns, and cultural nuances that emerged during the virtual sessions. The analysis aimed to identify instances of effective communication, intercultural understanding, and areas where collaborative learning enhanced language competencies.

Data Analysis

The experiment aimed to create dynamic and collaborative connections for both lecturers and students enrolled in the English Language Teacher programme at UAMD, Faculty of Education, Albania, and in the Master's programme in Poland. The primary objective was the promotion and development of intercultural competencies through communication in English with foreign students, intercultural cooperation, and familiarisation with research hubs. The importance of their use for the future, or their creation for countries like Albania, was also highlighted. Through innovative teaching methods, such as shared virtual classes and collaborative projects or research hubs for the future, the experiment aimed to recognise and improve students' knowledge of cultural traditions, history, and language competencies within the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

The analysis of the experiment addressed the main research questions, exploring the impact of shared virtual classrooms (or research hubs in the future) on EFL students' understanding of cultural aspects. The analysis delved into the advantages and challenges of collaborative projects between students of the same nationality or not but who are from different cultural backgrounds. The analysis of the experiment also focused on the implications for global education and intercultural communication. In the dynamics of cooperation, cultural influences were distinguished when the comparative analysis was carried out between Albanian and Polish students. The research also investigated the long-term effects of the experiment on students' intercultural competencies, suggesting future collaborative initiatives in favour of teaching or learning improvements. These research questions formed the basis for a nuanced and comprehensive analysis, enriching the understanding of the results and implications of the experiment.

In the experiment carried out in cooperation between the two institutions, 20 students were voluntarily included, with 12 enrolled in the Master's programme English Language Teacher at UAMD, Faculty of Education, Albania, and 8 in the Master's programme in Poland. The diversity of students from both countries provided a culturally enriched learning environment. The formation of the groups for the final projects, consisting of 2 Albanian and 2 Polish students in each group, aimed to promote cooperation and encourage intercultural interactions. The criteria taken into consideration for the formation of the groups were different language competencies, academic strengths, and cultural knowledge. This deliberate approach aimed to increase the continuity and relevance of the final projects, with each group exploring specific themes related to Albanian and Polish cultural traditions. The methodology prioritised intercultural exchanges, aligning with the main goal of fostering intercultural competencies using the English language.

With the help of technology, innovative platforms, and assistive technologies to create attractive and interactive teaching, shared virtual classes were targeted, created, and implemented (serving as an experiment for future research centres in Albania). The main core platforms that were used as video conferencing tools like Zoom and online collaborative learning environments like Google Workspace. Planned to span ten weeks, these virtual classes followed a structured schedule, with each session lasting approximately three hours and including lectures, interactive discussions, and collaborative project work. Despite meticulously organised planning, the implementation faced occasional technical challenges, including stable internet connection issues and problems due to participants' limited knowledge of virtual platforms. Despite these obstacles, the experiment showed resilience, with dedicated effort and assistance from both students and faculty to ensure a meaningful and effective virtual learning experience. In the first two weeks, 50% of students had difficulty staying connected for the entire 3-hour period, but these problems decreased to 8%. The 10-week duration allowed for continuous adjustments, ensuring that the experiment effectively served its purpose of fostering intercultural cooperation and competence.

Quantitative data analysis of the experiment was conducted to measure the impact of collaborative and virtual classroom learning on students' understanding of cultural traditions, history, and language competencies. Pre-experiment assessments indicated a baseline level of knowledge, while post-experiment assessments aimed to measure the rate of growth or change.

The pre-experiment assessment revealed that Albanian students scored at 45%, while Polish students scored slightly higher at 55%. In contrast, the post-experiment assessment displayed a marked improvement, with Albanian students achieving a score of 80% and Polish students scoring slightly lower at 75%

In fact, due to the economic situation and openness to the civilised world, for the Albanian students, this experience was the first time; they had not heard of such

collaborations even from other students. This innovation brought about by this experiment paves the way and develops efforts for further collaborations. The results showed a statistically significant improvement in the understanding of the cultural traditions and history of both groups of students, indicating the effectiveness of the cooperative learning approach. Language competencies, assessed through structured assessments, also showed positive trends, confirming the success of language exchange activities within virtual classes. Because they could not use their mother tongue, it helped them develop their English speaking and listening skills as well as thinking in English. According to the post-experiment data, the Albanian EFL students' English proficiency increased by 27%.

Table 1

Comparative Language Competency Assessment Before and After Experiment Implementation

Language competency	Assessment criteria	Pre-experiment scores (Albanian students)	Post-experiment scores (Albanian students)	Pre-experiment scores (Polish students)	Post-experiment scores (Polish students)
Vocabulary	Number of Words Known	45	68	55	69
Grammar	Sentence Structure	34	65	57	65
Pronunciation	Accurate Pronunciation	42	75	62	71
Fluency	Smoothness of Speech	44	76	67	81
Listening skills	Comprehension	51	85	61	74

Source. Own research.

Quantitative data underscored the effectiveness of the experiment in enhancing students' mastery of diverse cultural contexts and linguistic nuances, aligning with the primary goal of promoting intercultural competence in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. The pre-experiment assessment scores averaged 60% for cultural traditions and history knowledge and 50% for language competencies. Subsequently, post-experiment assessments revealed a significant improvement, with average scores increasing to 80-85% for cultural knowledge and history, and 70% for language competencies

Table 2

Comparative Assessment of Cultural Traditions, History, and Language Competencies

Assessment type	Pre-experiment scores (average)	Post-experiment scores (average)	Improvement
Cultural traditions knowledge	60%	80%	+20%
History knowledge	55%	85%	+30%
Language competencies	50%	70%	+20%

Source. Own research.

The data analysis reveals a commendable progress rate of approximately 20% in deepening students' understanding of cultural traditions and history. This demonstrates the effective contribution of shared virtual classes to enhancing their knowledge, encompassing both cultural and linguistic competencies, which increased by an average of 20%. This affirms that advancements in language skills are a direct outcome of engaging in language exchange activities.

These findings hold significance in illustrating the upward trajectory of students' cultural awareness and language competence as a direct consequence of the conducted experiment. The success of the virtual classrooms is substantiated by the quantitative data from the experiment, showcasing not only the achievement of teaching objectives but also the fostering of intercultural competencies among the participating students

The students' reflections were analysed to comprehend the qualitative insights that played a crucial role in dissecting and grasping the nuanced and subjective aspects of the experiment. Students' perceptions of the process and impact of virtual classrooms underwent scrutiny through reflective essays, discussions, and questionnaire responses. Qualitative reflections revealed aspects related to heightened cultural awareness, improved intercultural communication skills, collaborative learning with peers, and a significant novelty for Albanian students who had never experienced group work online with foreign peers before. The students not only appreciated the opportunity to collaborate with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds as an added value for cultural sensitivity but also envisioned it as a long-term global perspective.

Language exchange emerged as a priority for all students, fostering increased self-confidence in language competencies and a deeper appreciation for linguistic diversity. Furthermore, qualitative insights underscored the development of teamwork skills and digital technical proficiency. It is noteworthy that adaptability and resilience were notably cultivated in the virtual learning environment, a trait particularly pronounced among Polish students. These reflections, enriched with personal narratives, contributed valuable qualitative dimensions to the overall analysis, offering a comprehensive understanding of the profound impact of shared virtual classes on students' intercultural learning journey.

The qualitative insights from student reflections played a crucial role in capturing the nuanced and subjective aspects of the joint virtual classes experiment. Through reflective essays, discussions, and open-ended survey responses, students articulat-

ed their perceptions of the impact of the virtual classes on their learning experience. Common themes that emerged from these qualitative reflections included heightened cultural awareness, improved intercultural communication skills, and a sense of shared learning across diverse perspectives. Students frequently expressed appreciation for the opportunity to collaborate with peers from different cultural backgrounds, citing enhanced cultural sensitivity and a broader understanding of global perspectives. Many reflected on the positive influence of language exchange activities, emphasising increased confidence in language competencies and a deeper appreciation for linguistic diversity. Moreover, qualitative insights highlighted the development of teamwork and digital collaboration skills, emphasising the adaptability and resilience cultivated in the virtual learning environment. These reflections, enriched with personal narratives, contributed valuable qualitative dimensions to the overall analysis, providing a holistic understanding of the profound impact of the joint virtual classes on students' intercultural learning journey.

The collaborative projects in the joint virtual classes experiment were a testament to a rich tapestry of cultural exploration and cross-cultural integration. Groups demonstrated remarkable creativity and innovation, employing diverse media formats like engaging presentations, thought-provoking videos, and interactive content to effectively convey the intricacies of Albanian and Polish cultural narratives. These projects not only showcased an impressive blending of artistic expression and academic rigour but also served as powerful vehicles for cultural exchange, fostering an environment where students embraced the opportunity to creatively represent and appreciate the richness of their peers' heritage. Beyond the creative dimensions, the collaborative projects reflected an interdisciplinary approach, seamlessly integrating cultural insights with elements of literature, history, and linguistics. This not only deepened the understanding of cultural contexts but also highlighted the versatility of the collaborative learning model in addressing complex, multifaceted subjects, becoming a testament to the effectiveness of the joint virtual classes in promoting a broader appreciation for the interconnectedness of diverse academic disciplines in higher education.

In evaluating the quality of the projects, factors such as creativity, depth of analysis, and intercultural perspectives played pivotal roles. The projects exhibited a remarkable blend of creativity, academic rigour, and intercultural engagement, showcasing inventive approaches and providing nuanced insights into cultural traditions and historical contexts. The collaborative nature of the projects fostered a harmonious collective effort, with effective communication among group members contributing to the projects' cohesiveness. The success of the virtual learning environment in promoting teamwork across geographical and cultural distances was evident, and the projects stood as powerful expressions of cultural exchange, celebrating and understanding the diverse backgrounds of the participating students.

Survey data and qualitative responses provided valuable insights into the perceived benefits of the collaborative projects undertaken in the joint virtual classes experiment.

Participants consistently highlighted enhanced cultural awareness and a deeper under-standing of intercultural perspectives as primary benefits. Many students expressed sat-isfaction in the development of language competencies through collaborative activities, emphasising improved communication skills and increased confidence in engaging with peers from different cultural backgrounds. The projects were seen as powerful tools for breaking down cultural barriers, fostering a sense of global citizenship, and promot-ing empathy and appreciation for diverse perspectives. Moreover, participants noted the lasting impact of the collaborative projects on their academic and personal growth, citing increased adaptability, teamwork skills, and a broader worldview as significant and enduring benefits.

Despite the evident successes, challenges were an inherent part of the collaborative process. Common obstacles included differences in time zones, varying levels of tech-nological proficiency, and occasional communication barriers. However, the groups demonstrated resilience and adaptability in navigating these challenges. Utilising virtual communication tools effectively, scheduling regular check-ins, and establishing clear communication protocols were among the strategies employed. Additionally, participants emphasised the importance of fostering an inclusive and supportive team dynamic, where each member felt valued and encouraged to contribute. The ability of groups to navigate challenges collaboratively became a crucial aspect of the overall success of the joint virtual classes experiment, showcasing the student's commitment to the collaborative learning process.

Analysing each group's progress and assessing collaboration efficiency

Table 3

Group 1: "Historical Perspectives on Albanian Independence Day"

Project component	Criteria considered for assessment	Pre-project evaluation	Post-project evaluation
Explore key events leading to independence	Thoroughness in researching and presenting key historical events.	41%	65%
Analyse the roles of prominent figures	In-depth analysis of the roles played by key figures in the independence struggle.	38%	70%
Examine societal changes following independence	Evaluation of the impact of indepen-dence on societal changes.	35%	68%
Overall presentation and collaboration	Effectiveness in presenting findings, clarity, and collaborative efforts.	55%	85%

Source. Own research.

Table 4

Group 2: "Literary Reflections on Albanian Independence Day"

Project component	Criteria considered for assessment	Pre-project evaluation	Post-project evaluation
Investigate literary works of the independence movement	Depth of investigation into literary works from the Albanian independence movement.	31%	64%
Analyse poems, novels, or essays on the spirit of independence	Quality of analysis on the literary pieces capturing the spirit of independence.	33%	66%
Discuss the portrayal of national identity in literature	Thoughtfulness in discussing how national identity is portrayed in relevant literature.	28%	64%
Overall presentation and collaboration	Effectiveness in presenting literary analyses, clarity, and collaborative efforts.	45%	75%

Source. Own research.

In comparing Group 1's project on "Historical Perspectives on Albanian Independence Day" with Group 2's project on "Literary Reflections on Albanian Independence Day," both groups exhibited significant advancements in their respective areas of focus. Group 1 demonstrated notable improvements across key components, with increases from 41% to 65% in exploring key historical events, 38% to 70% in analysing roles of prominent figures, and 35% to 68% in evaluating societal changes following independence. Their overall presentation and collaboration skills also saw a commendable surge from 55% to 85%. On the other hand, Group 2 showcased substantial growth in their literary analysis and presentation abilities, with scores escalating from 31% to 64% in investigating literary works, 33% to 66% in analysing literary pieces, and 28% to 64% in discussing the portrayal of national identity in literature. The most significant leap was observed in overall presentation and collaboration, soaring from 45% to 75%. Both groups demonstrated impressive progress, albeit in different domains, reflecting their dedication and effective collaboration in achieving project objectives.

Table 5

Group 3: "Historical Context of Polish Independence Day"

Project component	Criteria considered for assessment	Pre-project evaluation	Post-project evaluation
Explore historical events leading to independence	Thorough exploration and presentation of key historical events.	40%	66%
Investigate geopolitical factors and international influences	In-depth investigation into the geopolitical factors and international influences during the period of Polish independence restoration.	25%	59%

Project component	Criteria considered for assessment	Pre-project evaluation	Post-project evaluation
Analyse the aftermath and consequences of Polish independence	Quality of analysis regarding the aftermath and consequences of the restoration of Polish independence.	33%	51%
Overall presentation and collaboration	Effectiveness in presenting findings, clarity, and collaborative efforts.	50%	60%

Source. Own research.

Table 6

Group 4: "Polish Literary Contributions to Independence Day"

Project component	Criteria considered for assessment	Pre-project evaluation	Post-project evaluation
Examine literary works of the Independence restoration	Thorough examination and presentation of literary works from the period of Polish independence restoration.	33%	48%
Analyse expression of national pride and identity	Quality analysis of how Polish writers expressed national pride and identity in their literary works.	55%	75%
Discuss the impact of literature on shaping the narrative	Thoughtfulness in discussing the impact of literature on shaping the narrative of Polish independence.	36%	56%
Overall presentation and collaboration	Effectiveness in presenting literary analyses, clarity, and collaborative efforts.	50%	65%

Source. Own research.

Group 3 and Group 4 both exhibited notable progress in their respective projects, although with variations in emphasis and strengths. In Group 3's "Historical Context of Polish Independence Day," the scores improved across the board, with increases from 40% to 66% in exploring historical events, 25% to 59% in investigating geopolitical factors, and 33% to 51% in analysing the aftermath and consequences of Polish Independence. Their overall presentation and collaboration skills also saw an improvement from 50% to 60%. Conversely, in Group 4's "Polish Literary Contributions to Independence Day," significant advancements were observed in literary analysis and presentation, with scores rising from 33% to 48% in examining literary works, 55% to 75% in analysing expressions of national pride, and 36% to 56% in discussing the impact of literature on shaping the narrative of Polish Independence. The overall presentation and collaboration skills for Group 4 increased from 50% to 65%. While Group 3 excelled in historical exploration and geopolitical factors, Group 4 demonstrated strengths in literary analysis and expression of national identity, showcasing the diverse achievements and collaborative efforts within the two groups.

Table 7

Comparative Evaluation for Group Projects

Group	Project title	Project components	Pre-project evaluation	Post-project evaluation
Group 1	Historical perspectives on Albanian Independence Day	Explore key events, analyse roles, examine societal changes	36%	69%
Group 2	Literary reflections on Albanian Independence Day	Investigate literary works, analyse spirit, discuss national identity	34.25%	67.25%
Group 3	The historical context of Polish Independence Day	Explore historical events, investigate factors, analyse the aftermath	37%	59%
Group 4	Polish literary contributions to Independence Day	Examine literary works, analyse expression, discuss the impact	43.5%	61%
Group 5	Evolution of formal language: a comparative analysis	Historical overview, comparative analysis, socio-cultural influences, presentation	39.5%	79.5%

Source. Own research.

In conclusion, the collective efforts of all five groups in their respective projects have demonstrated commendable growth and achievements. Group 1 showcased a substantial improvement in exploring historical events, analysing the roles of key figures, evaluating societal changes, and overall presentation and collaboration skills. Group 2 exhibited significant progress in investigating literary works, analysing the spirit of independence, discussing national identity, and enhancing their presentation and collaboration abilities. Similarly, Group 3 demonstrated advancements in exploring historical events, investigating geopolitical factors, analysing the consequences of Polish Independence, and overall presentation and collaboration skills. Group 4 excelled in the thorough examination of literary works, analysis of expressions of national identity, discussion of literature's impact, and overall presentation and collaboration. Group 5, exploring the evolution of formal language, displayed growth in historical overview, comparative analysis, examination of socio-cultural influences, and overall presentation and collaboration. Collectively, these diverse projects not only deepened the participants' understanding of their chosen topics but also showcased their collaborative skills, critical thinking, and effective presentation abilities, marking a successful implementation of the virtual shared classrooms experiment.

Limitations and Challenges

The joint virtual classes experiment, while successful in achieving its primary objectives, was not without its limitations and challenges. One notable limitation was

the reliance on virtual platforms, which, despite providing valuable opportunities for collaboration, also introduced technical challenges. Varied internet connectivity and proficiency with online tools among participants occasionally led to disruptions and disparities in the level of engagement. These technical limitations could have influenced the consistency and quality of the collaborative experience for some students, potentially impacting the depth of their engagement with the material and the overall learning outcomes. Additionally, the experiment's duration, spanning 10 weeks, may have presented time constraints that affected the depth of cultural exploration and collaboration, potentially limiting the extent to which intercultural competencies could be fully developed.

Furthermore, the cultural and linguistic diversity among participants, while enriching the collaborative process, also presented challenges in ensuring equitable participation and understanding. Differing language proficiency levels and cultural contexts could have influenced the dynamics within each group, potentially leading to variations in the depth of contributions and interpretations. The nuances of cultural communication, while valuable for fostering intercultural competencies, may have also introduced complexities in accurately assessing the impact of the experiment on individual students. Recognizing these limitations is essential in contextualising the findings and interpretations, acknowledging that certain aspects of the collaborative experience may have been influenced by factors beyond the experimental design.

Implications and Recommendations

The analysis of the joint virtual classes yields valuable implications for future intercultural education initiatives. To enhance the effectiveness of similar initiatives, it is crucial to prioritise the development of comprehensive pre-programme orientations that address the technical challenges associated with virtual platforms. Providing participants with the necessary tools and resources to navigate online collaboration can mitigate disparities in engagement and ensure a more seamless and equitable experience. Additionally, considering the limitations associated with the experiment's ten-week duration, future initiatives may benefit from extended timelines that allow for a more in-depth exploration of cultural topics, fostering deeper collaboration and understanding among participants. Introducing periodic assessments and feedback mechanisms throughout the programme could also provide valuable insights into the evolving dynamics and challenges, facilitating timely adjustments for optimal learning outcomes.

Furthermore, recommendations for refining the approach should involve a continuous emphasis on inclusive and culturally sensitive pedagogical practices. Acknowledging and embracing the diversity of cultural backgrounds among participants should be central to the programme design, fostering an environment where each student feels valued and included.

Incorporating targeted cross-cultural communication training and teamwork workshops can enhance participants' skills in navigating cultural nuances and strengthen collaborative efforts. Emphasising the development of a shared cultural space that respects and celebrates the uniqueness of each participant's background can contribute to a more harmonious and productive collaborative learning environment. Lastly, fostering ongoing communication and dialogue between participating institutions, educators, and students can contribute to the sustained success of these initiatives, ensuring a collaborative and informed approach to intercultural education.

Conclusions

The virtual shared classrooms and collaborative projects undertaken in the English Language Teacher programme at UAMD, Faculty of Education, Albania, and the Master's programme in Poland have proven to be instrumental in fostering intercultural competencies. The diverse range of projects, from exploring historical perspectives to delving into literary reflections and linguistic analyses, has not only significantly improved students' knowledge of cultural traditions and language competencies but has also enhanced their collaborative and presentation skills. The noticeable upward trend in average percentages across pre-project plans and post-project evaluations underscores the overall success of the experiment. The participants' resilience in overcoming initial technical challenges and the substantial reduction in difficulties over the ten-week duration showcase a dedicated effort from both students and faculty. The collaborative initiatives have not only met the primary objective of promoting intercultural understanding but have also demonstrated the adaptability of virtual platforms to create meaningful and effective learning experiences.

Recommendations

Building on the success of the virtual shared classrooms, it is recommended to sustain and expand collaborative initiatives between the two institutions. Providing ongoing technical skill enhancement sessions will further empower participants to navigate virtual platforms seamlessly. Diversifying project themes to encompass various aspects of language, literature, and history will ensure a comprehensive understanding of intercultural dynamics. Expanding the participant pool to include students from additional countries or academic disciplines will bring further diversity, enriching the overall learning experience. Continuous assessment mechanisms should be integrated into future projects, allowing for real-time adjustments and ensuring adaptability to challenges. Additionally, a follow-up assessment to evaluate the long-term impact of the experiment on students' intercultural competencies is crucial for

understanding the lasting effects and shaping future collaborative initiatives. Through these recommendations, the institutions can continue to build an inclusive and dynamic learning environment that fosters global perspectives and intercultural communication.

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