Enhancing Cross-Culturally Communicative Skill through Collaborative Online International Learning

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Abstract

In today's interconnected world, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) programs have emerged as valuable platforms for facilitating cross-cultural communication and fostering global competence among students. However, the effective exchange of ideas and meaningful collaboration in such programs can be hindered by various cross-cultural communication challenges. The purpose of this study is to describe cross-cultural communication skills in the distance learning process. This research was conducted using a qualitative approach with data in the form of interview results. Data were obtained from interviews, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), and observations. The informants are the distance learning participants of Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL). The number of informants is determined purposively according to the needs of this study. The results of the study obtained a tendency that distance learning participants felt interested and challenged by this distance learning model. They are interested because this learning is one of the variations of learning. It is challenging because they are in an environment where they learn to use English as an instructional language. With this learning model, students can improve their cross-cultural skills without having to spend a lot of money and in an easy way.

Keyword: Communication, Cross-culture, Collaborative, Online learning, Communication technology

Abstrak

Di dunia yang saling terhubung saat ini, program Pembelajaran Internasional Kolaboratif (COIL) telah muncul sebagai platform yang berharga untuk memfasilitasi komunikasi lintas budaya dan menumbuhkan kompetensi global di antara siswa. Namun, pertukaran ide yang efektif dan kolaborasi yang bermakna dalam program tersebut dapat terhambat oleh berbagai tantangan komunikasi lintas budaya. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mendeskripsikan keterampilan komunikasi lintas budaya dalam proses pembelajaran jarak jauh. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan data berupa hasil wawancara. Data diperoleh dari wawancara, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), dan observasi. Informan tersebut adalah peserta pembelajaran jarak jauh Collaborative Online International Learning

(COIL). Jumlah informan ditentukan secara purposive sesuai dengan kebutuhan penelitian ini. Hasil penelitian diperoleh kecenderungan bahwa peserta pembelajaran jarak jauh merasa tertarik dan tertantang oleh model pembelajaran jarak jauh ini. Mereka tertarik karena pembelajaran ini merupakan salah satu variasi pembelajaran. Ini menantang karena mereka berada di lingkungan di mana mereka belajar menggunakan bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa instruksional. Dengan model pembelajaran ini, siswa dapat meningkatkan keterampilan lintas budaya mereka tanpa harus mengeluarkan banyak uang dan dengan cara yang mudah.

Kata kunci: Komunikasi, Lintas budaya, Kolaboratif, Pembelajaran online, Teknologi komunikasi

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about significant changes in the way humans interact. Conditions that require physical distancing and reduced direct contact force individuals to adapt to long-distance communication technology. This technology is the main means of maintaining social and professional interaction despite physical limitations (Baber, 2022). In the world of education, the pandemic has become the main driver for adopting online learning methods, allowing the teaching and learning process to continue without face-to-face meetings (Dhawan, 2020).

This sudden change demands rapid adaptation to the proper technology to help students and educators continue the teaching and learning processes. One of them is online learning technology. Both educators and students must be able to master online learning platforms and virtual communication tools to ensure a smooth educational process. Digital literacy is now an important competency that must be possessed in this modern era (García-Morales et al., 2021).

The pandemic accelerated the transition from conventional methods to digital methods in various aspects of life, including education. This transformation can be seen from the increasing use of information and communication technology (ICT) in the learning process. The need for equitable access to education has encouraged the development of a digital ecosystem to support distance learning (Hodges et al., 2020).

Despite being physically separated, the need for human beings to continue to communicate remains high. Communication technology becomes a bridge that connects individuals in different locations, allowing the exchange of information and ideas without geographical boundaries. In the context of education, this technology supports the interaction between students and teachers effectively despite being separated by distance (Rapanta et al., 2020).

Reliable communication technology is the main needs to bridge distances. Online learning platforms that offer flexibility, such as asynchronous learning, allow students to access materials at any time according to their needs (Hrastinski, 2019). This supports a more inclusive and adaptive learning process to various conditions. Innovation and adaptation during the pandemic show the great potential of technology in improving the quality and accessibility of education. One of the relevant innovative approaches is Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL). This approach integrates cross-cultural learning through digital platforms, allowing collaboration between students from various countries without having to do physical mobility (Rubin, 2017).

COIL not only improves cross-cultural communication skills, but also prepares students to participate in an increasingly connected global work environment. Through these collaborative learning experiences, students can develop the intercultural skills, global understanding, and critical thinking abilities required in today's professional world (O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016).

Research related to the application of COIL shows the great potential of this method in improving cross-cultural competence and collaborative ability of students. Rubin (Rubin, 2017) identified that COIL provides a cross-cultural learning platform that can integrate learners from different countries to collaborate in a virtual environment. The results of this study show that participation in the COIL program helps students develop intercultural understanding and global communication skills, without the need for physical mobility.

Furthermore, research by Knoth et al (Knoth et al., 2022) states that COIL allows the creation of international relations between students from universities in various parts of the world. The study found that students who engaged in COIL-based learning showed increased understanding of global issues, multinational teamwork skills, and confidence in communicating across cultures. The research also highlights that digital technology plays a key role in realizing this cross-cultural experience.

Research conducted by Moore and Simon (Hodges et al., 2020) revealed that the integration of technology in COIL learning is able to create a collaborative and in-depth learning environment. Students from the United States and Japan who participated in the program reported improved critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills in cross-cultural contexts. This research also highlights the importance of coaching by lecturers to ensure the effectiveness of learning.

On the other hand, Helm and Guth (Helm & Guth, 2022) show that COIL is not only effective in building cross-cultural competence, but also in reducing barriers to intercultural communication that often arise in international contexts. In this study, students showed an increased understanding of various cultural perspectives and the strengthening of inclusivity values in their interactions.

This communication phenomenon is interesting to observe. Communication between nations can be done through online international learning programs that are collaborative. The case study is learning between STARKI and one of the universities in the Philippines. The student's experience in establishing relationships with students abroad is an experience itself. The problem in this study is how students experience through the COIL program.

The purpose of this study is to describe the experience of students in the COIL program. Previous research has tended to highlight the effectiveness of COIL in collaborative skill development or cross-cultural teaching in general. This article can make a new contribution by focusing on the development of cross-cultural communication skills, namely the ability to communicate effectively with individuals from various cultural backgrounds. Another novelty can be found in the exploration of how the asynchronous approach in COIL is able to improve student engagement and overcome time constraints and time zones. This article can examine how asynchronous formats provide flexibility without sacrificing the quality of cross-cultural learning.

This article can offer a new model or framework on how technology integration in COIL is specifically geared towards improving cross-cultural competence. This includes the use of specific digital tools, project-based curriculum design, and success evaluation based on cross-cultural competency dimensions.

Literature Review

To understand the phenomenon of Intercultural Communication, the cross-cultural communication theory (CCT) is implemented. This theory focuses on understanding communication between people from different cultural backgrounds. It explores the challenges, strategies, and processes involved in effective intercultural communication, emphasizing the importance of cultural sensitivity, empathy, and understanding. One of the cross-cultural communication theories is communication accommodation theory.

The theory of intercultural communication was developed by William B. Gudykunst (Gudykunst, 2005; Koester & Lustig, 2015; Piller, 2012). Intercultural communication theory is a theory that describes communication between people from different cultures. This theory was developed and describes intercultural communications as communications between people of different culture, which encompasses cultural, sociocultural, and psychocultural systems (Piller, 2012). It assumes that intercultural communication requires four elements, i.e. two people (or two groups), from various cultures, in interaction, and that negotiate a common meaning.

This theory also assumes that every human being cannot fail to communicate, all behaviour is communication, and intercultural communication is more complex than communication between people of the same culture. Intercultural communication can be seen in student exchanges in the collaborative online international learning program (COIL) by analysing how intercultural communication affects the effectiveness of communication and collaboration between parties (Marcillo-Gómez & Desilus, 2016). This theory helps identify factors that influence intercultural communication, such as cultural barriers, linguistic differences, and technological challenges, as well as how cultural intelligence, intercultural competence, and empathy affect intercultural communications in situations such as the COIL program.

Intercultural communication is one of the types of intergroup communication (Amzalag & Shapira, 2021; Nagar et al., 2021). Intergroup communications cover various types of communication that may not be accommodated in intercultural communications groups, for example intergenerational communication, communication between members of different social classes, communication among people of different races or ethnicities and even communication with disabled people.

This theory of intercultural communication can be used to explain the phenomenon of student exchange in the collaborative online international learning program (COIL) by analysing how intercultural communications affect the effectiveness of communication and collaboration between parties (Liu, 2023).

Previous Research

Collaborative Online International Learning is one of the methods of distance learning primarily inter-national. The learning of this model is especially rapidly growing during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thanks to Covid-19 by which all forms of remote communication are possible. The transformation of analogue communication into digital communication is growing rapidly.

The development of this learning model has been carried out by many universities both at home and abroad (Abidin et al., 2020). They're doing distance learning using the latest communication technology (Bali, 2019). There are many large-capacity remote learning platforms such as zoom cloud meetings, Microsoft teams, and so on. With the impact of this communication technology, learning is becoming easier, cheaper, and can be done by anyone.

The change in the role of higher education has been rolling since 2010 in the United States of America, long before the Covid 19 pandemic appeared. The American Council on Education has held meetings with experts in various countries to discuss the changing role of higher education in an increasingly global world. "...a world that increasingly operates across sovereign borders. Just as countries have become more interconnected worldwide. It embodies a wholly new way of thinking and working. Higher education is explicitly a global enterprise and global engagement" (Peterson & Helms, 2013). Global engagement refers to student mobility and faculty exchanges, faculty to faculty research partnerships and faculty-based research networks, participation in jointly taught courses, and other cross-border educational collaborations.

In this digital and global age, COIL is perfectly suited and provides many benefits to students, faculty, institutions, and others, while at the same time becoming an alternative to intercultural and interdisciplinary learning (Amaral et al., 2022; Bauk, 2019). There have been many testimonies and evaluations of this COIL program that COIL is a new learning breakthrough in this global era. In addition to providing benefits for students to interact with clan students from different countries, students can also learn cross-country cultures (Hackett et al., 2023; Nicolson & Uematsu, 2013), learn to use digital technology to communicate (Beldarrain, 2006), students and faculty members can create global connections (Ceo-DiFrancesco & Bender-Slack, 2016), COIL becomes a challenge in emergency situations (Ferri et al., 2020). There are previous researches about COIL.

COIL is a way to connect with students from all over the world without having to live or be in the desired campus (Rubin, 2017). Anyone from any part of the world can interact with each other on one platform. COIL is also a new concept and a new learning experience (Meyer et al., 2022). Students from different countries can come together to share roles and work on a task. Thus, they are charged to interact with each other virtually. Digital communication skills became the key to their success in working the duties of lecturers. Under these conditions, students can learn and experience their own multi-cultural learning processes (Asojo et al., 2019).

Another study by Lehtonen et al (2020) shows that COIL can address the challenges of cross-cultural communication through the appropriate use of technology. In this study, students who participated in the COIL program reported increased confidence in communicating with peers from different cultural backgrounds. The study also underscores the importance of flexible curriculum design to ensure student engagement, especially in an asynchronous learning environment.

In addition, Helm and Guth (2016) highlight the role of technology in reducing barriers to intercultural communication. COIL creates a space for students to develop critical thinking skills through interaction with peers from different countries. The study also found that participation in the COIL program encourages students to explore new cultural perspectives, ultimately improving their cross-cultural competence.

In the context of asynchronous learning, Hrastinski (2019) stated that this approach provides flexibility for students to learn according to their respective schedules. This flexibility is particularly relevant in COIL programs, where participants often come from different time zones. Hrastinski also emphasized that asynchronous learning supports deeper reflection, allowing students to analyze and understand the material more comprehensively. Another study conducted by Moore and Simon (2021) investigated the impact of COIL on the development of cross-cultural communication competencies. In this study, students from the United States and Japan collaborated on an online project. The results show that students not only improve their communication skills, but also develop sensitivity to cultural differences, which is an important element in the global workforce.

In particular, Jager and Meier (2020) emphasized the importance of COIL as a cross-cultural learning approach in the digital era. They found that the COIL program helps students better understand global dynamics through collaborative experiences. The study also highlights the need for lecturer training to ensure the successful implementation of the COIL program, including strategies to facilitate productive cross-cultural discussions. However, although many studies have explored the benefits of COIL, there is a gap in the literature regarding its application in Indonesia. Most previous research has focused on developed countries, so there is a need to understand how COIL can be adapted in the context of education with limited technological resources. This article aims to fill this gap by examining the application of COIL

in the development of cross-cultural communication competencies in Indonesia, as well as offering a learning model that is relevant to local needs.

Research Method

This research is qualitative research with data in the form of words not numbers. The data in this study is in the form of data obtained from interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGD), and observations. Interviews are used to obtain information individually from the informants while FGD is used to obtain information obtained simultaneously from discussion participants. Participants were given the freedom to express their opinions on the implementation of online joint classes between the STARKI campus and the Mirriam College campus in Manila. Observations were made during the class taking place online. The informants in this study are online class participants. Their number was 10 people who were selected with a special purpose.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Online joint teaching and learning activities are a form of implementation of cooperation between STARKI and universities abroad. Moreover, the curriculum of higher education in Indonesia requires the existence of independent learning, an independent campus (MBKM). Student exchange is a very ideal activity in this MBKM. It has been planned that one day the two campuses will send their students to stay for a while not only attending lectures but also doing other activities so that students have direct experience to learn many things. However, due to limitations in many ways, this activity is carried out online.

This online learning was carried out to coincide with the outbreak of the Corona virus which forced educational institutions, especially higher education, to organize online learning. This situation is considered an opportunity to immediately organize MBKM in the form of lecturer exchange in teaching. This online class was attended by students of both campuses. The lecturers who teach are two people; one from STARKI and one from Mirriam College on different days, of course. The language used is English.

Although this learning experience was initially less interesting, over time this learning process was very interesting. The students of both campuses are also very active in attending lectures, as evidenced by the many questions that arise from students of both campuses. This shows the enthusiasm of students to attend lectures online.

Collaborative Online International Learning program fun for the students. They were challenged to understand something they acquired not from their own lecturers but from outside lecturers especially abroad and using English or international language. Studying with strangers provides a new experience not only learning science but learning to understand others with logat and different accesses especially English by a Filipino. Thus, students must be extra focused because the accents and logat of Filipino English is slightly different from a native speaker. This is because English is influenced by logats and accessories of the mother tongue, Tagalog. Although there had been a little difficulty, but this is challenging for Indonesian students.

Collaborative Online International Learning gives a special pride. In the day-to-day lecturing, the language used is Indonesian. In this COIL program the language is English and the lecturer from the Phillipines does not understand Indonesian at all. Therefore, the students feel proud that they are part of the international class with the instruction language is English. Thus they are forced to communicate with their lecturer also in English.

COIL program is a means for students and teachers to get to know a completely different culture (Eliyahu-Levi, 2023). It is for example in terms of language. Following this COIL program is a challenge of its own. The lecturer must think about how to deliver the lecture in English so that it can be understood by non-English students. Students also have to

strive hard to be able to understand what they hear and must be capable of conveying their opinions in language that they do not use in everyday life.

Both sides are experiencing a cultural shock, both sides adapting and trying hard to understand each other. They were forced to communicate messages in unusual ways. Both sides refrained from destroying the atmosphere that had been built during the program. Thus, both sides strive hard to understand each other. So, both students and lecturers are challenged to understand different cultures especially the use of English.

There are some other challenges to the implementation of this COIL. First, language barriers. Address linguistic challenges through language support services, translation tools, simplified language usage, and encourage a supportive learning environment. Second, a divergent style of communication is to navigate the differences in communication styles, nonverbal signs, and indirect communication to avoid misinterpretation and misunderstanding. Third, cultural sensitivity and adaptation. Identifying and managing cultural differences within values, norms, and hopes to promote effective collaboration and intercultural learning.

Despite being very challenging, this COIL program also has constraints. One of them is a very disturbing internet connection. For smooth communication to take place, both sides must have a good internet connection. If only one side is good then communication doesn't go well. It can lead to miscommunication or information that is transmitted is not perfectly acceptable. The second problem is less interesting. The COIL program is an online lecture program so that the interaction between faculty and students does not take place face-to-face, or meet in person. Thus, the meeting of virtue students and dsoen less can feel the sensation. Anyway, live meetings are still the top choice and the interaction between faculty and students will be better.

From the experience of students attending the COIL program, it was found that communication skills in the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) program are skills that enable students to interact and share ideas with other students from different countries. In COIL programs, students interact online, so good communication skills are a priority for improving communication effectiveness and reducing communication gaps. Research has shown that students who have good communicative skills are easier to interact and share their ideas with others. This is the key to developing critical, creative, and innovative skills, as well as facilitating the learning process.

Communication skills in the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) program are important factors in facilitating the communication process between students and instructors. In the COIL program, students interact online with other students from different countries, so good communication skills are a priority for improving communication effectiveness and reducing communication gaps.

Collaborative Online International Learning is an educational program that uses information and communication technology (ICT) to help students and teachers in international networking and enrich their understanding of different cultures and social environments. The program aims to enhance students' knowledge, service, and competence in international networking, as well as to serve as a platform for developing intercultural competence. The COIL programme is one of the initiatives related to information and communication technology (ICT) based education, which aims to develop the competence of students and teachers in international networking and enrich the understanding of different cultures and social environments.

CONCLUSION

The teaching and learning process in this COIL program provides benefits for students because they can learn not only to study lecturing materials but also to learn to use English as a means of communication. Students also learn how to express opinions so that they can be well accepted by the interlocutor. Likewise with lecturers where lecturers must try hard to deliver material in English which of course will be very different from delivering material in Indonesian. This program helps both students and lecturers to adapt to conditions where communication is very limited to verbal communication. Even though there are many obstacles, this program is very good to improve communication skills, especially English skills.

The Collaborative Online International Learning Program (COIL) is an educational program that uses information and communication technology (ICT) to help teachers and students from different countries, cultures, and languages in international networking and enrich intercultural communication. The COIL program aims to develop intercultural competence in students, which is the basis for understanding and adapting to other cultures. The COIL programme also helps students in internationally networking, which is an important competence in the era of digitalization and globalization helps students to share information, discuss, and collaborate with other students' faculty and friends, which are strategies to strengthen intercultural communication.

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