

Investigating The Potentiality of Integrating a Telecollaboration Programmed to Promote Intercultural Awareness to Adolescent Learners

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Abstract

The inevitable reality of the global use of English where users are from multicultural and multilingual backgrounds demand English language education to include tasks that enable learners to handle this current situation. Intercultural awareness is vital to promote understanding and flexible manners to handle the interactions in multicultural contexts. In this sense, telecollaboration as a virtual intercultural exchange offers some affordances to expose learners with the current reality and promote intercultural awareness. The study investigates these affordances by describing the area of intercultural awareness that could be promoted by telecollaboration. It utilized Action Research as a framework for research. The findings also revealed the relations between tasks designed within the telecollaboration programmed with its affordances to intercultural awareness.

Keywords: global use of English. intercultural awareness, telecollaboration.

Introduction

Scrutinizing intercultural virtual exchanges in English language teaching

The global use of English has shown that the lingua franca or the language of the world is spread and used globally by interlocutors who are diverse in multilingual and multicultural backgrounds (Jenkins, 2015, Baker, 2015, 2016).

In this sense, the relation between language and culture is intertwined. Local culture has influenced the interlocutors' version of English for example word options, accents, and even the varieties in grammar (Jenkins, 2015).

As a consequence, successful global communication no longer requires mere linguistic competence but also an intercultural awareness to better equip learners with flexible manner and understanding to handle interaction within multicultural contexts.

This reality entails some consequences in language pedagogy. First, it raises a question about the relevance of maintaining the standard English rooted in the so-called native model of English (particularly the UK and the US). As language learners may encounter interaction with English as a medium of communication within multicultural context, exposing learners to a single standard of English especially in spoken language is debatable.

Second, tasks and activities to expose learners to the varieties of English as a result of the multicultural background of its interlocutors is crucial to better equip learners with awareness and competences in global communication.

In relation to above concerns, this study explores the potentiality of employing a set of tasks within a virtual intercultural exchange programmed to familiarize learners with the

multicultural nature of the global use of English. The virtual intercultural exchange programmed in this study adopts O'Dowd's (2007, 2009) terminology namely telecollaboration.

The term is used to define 'the use of online communication tools to connect language learners in different countries to develop collaborative project work and intercultural exchange' (O'Dowd, 2007) and as an 'umbrella term for different formats and structures of online intercultural exchange' (O'Dowd, 2011).

It has been a common practice in English Language Teaching (ELT) especially to (1) provide authentic context for intercultural communication (Belz, 2007 cited in Thorne, 2013, p.31), and (2) developed interpersonal interaction and intercultural dialogue that is often left out in L2 education (Thorne and Black, 2007, p.142) among others.

To this extent, this study investigates the potentiality of incorporating a series of tasks in a telecollaboration programmed into a General English class for adolescent learners to promote the learners' intercultural awareness.

Contextualize telecollaboration

Despite its importance to introduce and later familiarize learners to the multicultural nature of global English interlocutors, telecollaboration should be treated as an integrative programmed in the classroom. It means that the programmed needs to be contextualized to fit the class' profiles and needs. In this sense, a telecollaboration programmed needs to take the classroom's voices, namely the learners' opinion, the existing syllabus, and the institutional goals, into a great account.

In order to achieve it, this study proposes the application of Action Research (henceforth AR) as a technique not only for data collection and analysis, but also to proceed the telecollaboration programmed designing.

AR is considered as a technique in Qualitative Research (Brown and Rodgers, 2002) where small-scale research is done in a classroom with the teacher as a part of the class' stakeholder takes a role as a researcher.

In this sense, I was a teacher and also played a role as a researcher who deliberately reflected and critically examined my practice and the classroom needs and attempted some actions accordingly. This dual role may provide emic or insider perspectives as the study is conducted by the member of the researched classroom, thus enabling a more critical and holistic point of view.

In this study, AR is applied as a framework since the very beginning of the study to guide the steps for programmed designing to the research process.

Procedure

This part explores the procedure of the research comprising the description of the stages in AR adapted for the telecollaboration programmed designing, its application in the classroom context, and data collection and analysis.

Stages in AR

The stages in AR comprises (1) planning, (2) action, (3) observation, (4) reflection (Burns, 2015, pp.190-191). The stages are adapted in the study by combining a pre-stage with a reflection upon the current teaching practice.

Pre-stage: Preliminary observatory stage

A reflection stage toward my own practice, including the objectives of the class, and the current development of research in the area of ELT in relation to the global use of English, and the current practice of globalELT educators to involve in various intercultural exchanges.

Stage: Planning

Formulated the research questions and the research design

Created a framework for the telecollaboration programmed as a part of the research design advised by research in this area (Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence by Byram, 1997, tasks design intelecollaboration programmed by O'Dowd and Waire, 2009, and O'Dowd, 2011 among others).

Stage II: Action

Executed the telecollaboration programmed by integrating a telecollaboration programmed into a regular English language class.

Followed up the initial contact with the partner language school.

Distributed the ethics forms and to parents to explicitly inform them of the research process and data collection in relation to their children's privacy.

Stage III: Observation

Evaluated the data collection procedure and conducted interim analysis

Observed the application of the telecollaboration programmed

Started to connect the emergent data to the research purpose and questions.

Stage IV: Reflection

Reflected toward the data. At this stage, I drew overall conclusions and interpretations from the data compiled during the observation stage.

Conducted data analysis with inductive coding procedure

Composed the data analysis and the process of the research into a report

This is the first cycle of an AR. A teacher-researcher may consider restarting another cycle,

advised by the earlier one. This study, however, investigated the first cycle, with an intention to resume the next cycle at the next research.

AR adaptation for research procedure

Preliminary observatory stage

This stage comprises: Reflection toward the class's objectives

Observing the global practice of ELT teachers in reliable organization in social media for example, the British Council's Teacher Community on Facebook

Reading journals and attending webinars related to research in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and other areas in ELT.

Planning stage

Profiling the context

In AR, research subjects are considered as co-participants. It entails a consequence to the study that is to provide a detailed description of the participants' profiles and the contexts around them.

The context of this study is my own classroom i.e., a general English class for adolescent learners in a private English course I co-founded in Indonesia. There were eight learners aged thirteen to fifteen years old in the class.

These learners were from various backgrounds; two of them were from Balikpapan, a coastal city in the island of Kalimantan, which is also the place where the English course is located, and the other six were from Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia.

The online format of the class made crossing locations possible. The learners were also from diverse educational backgrounds namely state and private junior dan senior high school.

The learners grow up in multilingual neighborhoods where Indonesian is used almost exclusively in social and academic life, but ethnic dialects in the forms of word coinage and phrases occur in daily conversation. As with many Indonesians, most learners are from multilingual and multicultural families where parents are from mixed ethnic groups.

Task designing

The telecollaboration programmed was planned to be attached to the weekly schedule (Tuesday and Thursday afternoon). Thursdays were used for regular lessons and Tuesdays were dedicated for the telecollaboration programmed for twelve meetings.

The duration of each meeting or session (both terms are used interchangeably in the study) were planned for eighty minutes, similar to the duration of the regular class. In terms of length of time, the telecollaboration programmed was planned to last for three months

which is half of the length of the English language class.

The lessons and activities in the telecollaboration programmed are structured based on pre- and post-tasks before and after the telecollaboration. The pre-tasks consist of the introduction of each topic in the telecollaboration programmed, and the post-tasks refer to writing up the learners' reflective journal entries.

All of the tasks in the programmed fall under the terminology 'telecollaboration task.' In order to make a distinction with the exchange involving live interaction with the Russian learners, this particular session is called 'live intercultural telecollaboration.'

The Russian learners' involvement was during the live intercultural telecollaboration and the asynchronous chat between Meeting 9 and 10 of the programmed.

The design for the tasks derives from the first and second categories suggested by O'Dowd and Ware (2009, p.176). In relation to the affordance of telecollaboration in an ELT classroom for adolescents, O'Dowd (2007) argued that the programmed should involve their daily usage of technology.

Additionally, it is also crucial to consider Dornyei's (2006, cited in Galloway and Rose, 2015) that 'indirect contact' with some cultural products such as movies, video or magazines can also influence learners' appreciated and open-minded attitude toward the multicultural English users.

Task category	Telecollaborative task (O'Dowd and Ware, 2009)	Task in the study	The platform used in the study
Information exchange tasks	Authoring 'Cultural Autobiography	Presentation of one's culture	- Canva (for making a presentation)
	Engaging in informal discussion	Real-time and synchronous exchange	- Zoom Meeting
	Carrying out virtual interviews	- Asynchronous chat	- WhatsApp - Google Document
		- Learner's reflection journal	Google Drive - Edu blog

		- Blog content	
		writing	
	Exchanging story collections	Exchanging folktales during intercultural telecollaboration	- Canva - Zoom Meeting
Comparison and Analysis	Analysing cultural products.	Analysing morals and the	- Zoom Meeting
		representation of	
		folktales	

Action stage

This stage puts the planning into research action. It includes dealing with ethical issues, collaborating with co-participants, and executing the research process as planned in the previous phase (Burns, 2015).

In this stage, I followed up on my initial contact with the partner language school overseas. The stage also marks the execution of the which was based on the design elaborated in the earlier stage (Planning).

Observation stage

The essential action in this stage is evaluating the data collection procedure and conducting interim analysis when possible (Burns, 2015, p. 190-191). In this stage, I observed whether the data collection procedure is still aligned with research questions and the purpose.

The observation was also made toward the action stage (in this study, the progressing telecollaboration programmed) to ensure that the programmed could sufficiently function as a useful data resource.

Observation notes and reflection toward the classroom discussion and interaction is made throughout the programmed as doing it at the end of the programmed would risk an overwhelming pile of data (Burns, 2010).

I also connected the emergent data to the research purpose and action. In relation to this study, the entries and notes throughout the observation stage are compiled as a part of data collection to be analyzed during the reflective part.

Reflection stage

It is the heart of an AR, as knowledge building is rooted in this stage (Burns, 2010). The reflection stage draws overall conclusions and interpretations from the data compiled during the observation stage. Burns(2010) indicates that reflection in this stage comprises

reflecting on practice and reflecting on the research process.

In relation to this study, I looked closely at the connection between the emergent data during the action stage and how they answered the research questions and purpose.

I also reconsider whether the integration of the telecollaboration programmed was successfully promoting the Indonesian learners' intercultural awareness and was engaging for them.

To this extent, the reflection stage took place as data analysis where the pile of data was labelled, coded and categorized. I will discuss the data analysis which utilized 2 cycles coding for data refinement and inductive coding for detailed analysis during the presentation. The model of twelve components of intercultural awareness. (Baker, 2015, 153-171) is used to analyze the potentiality of the telecollaboration programmed to raise the learners' ICA.

Result and Discussion

This study showed that a telecollaboration programmed has the potential to foster ICA for the learners. Some aspects of ICA arise and develop as the learners engage with the telecollaboration programmed.

The raising awareness is indicated by the emergent categories in the second cycle coding in relation to Baker's model of twelve components of intercultural awareness. (2015, pp. 153-171). The findings are shown as a brief bullet point below.

In the presentation, I will demonstrate the analysis over some extracts from the data resources that led to these findings.

The data analysis unveiled the potentiality of the telecollaboration programmed to raise the learners' awareness and understanding in below area:

1. Awareness in self identity
2. Awareness on the nature of generalization toward cultural practice and values
3. Awareness of the multivoiced of cultural representation
4. Awareness of the possibility of communication issues
5. Awareness of shared interests and identities
6. Understanding of stereotypes

Conclusion

The purpose of the study is to describe the elements in ICA and other competencies that occurred as adolescent learners engaged in a telecollaboration programmed. It demonstrated some development of essential elements in ICA and other competencies as a result of the employment of the programmed. This was done by employing a telecollaborative programmed in a general English class for adolescents.

The results of the study appear to agree with Kohn (2021) that ELF advised pedagogy can be integrated into a regular ELT classroom and with O'Dowd (2007) that different tasks and platforms entail different affordances in a telecollaboration programmed. It also demonstrates the other affordances of a telecollaboration programmed namely digital literacy and linguistic competence.

Their journal entries and my observation recorded in the reflective researcher journal reflected the development of different aspects of ICA and these competencies. With regard to ICA, the essential elements in it that have been promoted and developed through the programmed comprise the flexibility to handle real-time communication, awareness of the fluidity of culture, and avoiding simplification and stereotyping.

In relation to this development, there is also an indication that the current development of ICA can help them to handle any intercultural communication in the future whether it occurs in personal, local, or global contexts.

The study also reveals the benefit of personal experience and an immersive programmed where learners experience intercultural encounters firsthand. Personal interaction is central in a telecollaboration programmed due to allowing subjectivity thus development to some aspects in sociocultural development (O'Dowd, 2013, Kohn, 2015).

The subjectivity nature of the telecollaboration exchange where the information and perception toward culture are attained from the eyes of individuals as opposed to factual objective account makes telecollaboration particularly useful for making students aware of certain aspects of sociocultural knowledge (Byram, 1998, cited in O'Dowd, 2013).

However, as Baker (2012) argues, there should be a balance between exploring and evaluating the intercultural experience.

It has to be made clear for learners that all the sources in the programmed provide "only a partial account of the culture thus inevitably be biased" (Baker, 2012, p. 69). In this term, the teacher's role to provide moderating role (O'Dowd, 2013) and guidance to ELF-advised pedagogy (Kohn, 2021) are crucial to scaffold learners' criticality toward the cultures.

Another important finding in this study is that it should not presuppose that learners' ICA will grow at the same time during or after the programmed and whether it grows at all.

Personal growth must be acknowledged and what matters here is that they have been exposed to intercultural awareness. As Baker (2015) pointed out, the model of twelve elements of ICA does not suggest that a participant in intercultural communication will pass through each level.

There is always a possibility that a participant is in the Level 3 of the model, probably as she or he grows up in a multilingual and multicultural environment. Some learners in the study

seem to easily construct their awareness between levels, but some are likely to stay in a stereotypical perspective typical to the basic level (Level 1) in the model.

In relation to the learners' profile, it is suggested by the study that learners involved in a telecollaboration programmed are not only those who are advanced users of English (for example B1 above). As suggested in the findings could find a way to make the communication successful.

It is deemed crucial as Byram (1998) suggested that intercultural awareness is important for learners in any age group and therefore level of proficiency should not be an obstacle to applying for a telecollaboration programmed.

This study was a part of a research for a master's dissertation study where the author is a student. The master's dissertation is an unpublished work.

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