

# Los intercambios virtuales lingüísticos y culturales en educación superior: estudio de caso

## Language and culture virtual exchanges in higher education: A case study

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### RESUMEN

#### Palabras clave

Aprendizaje virtual, comunidades virtuales, contexto universitario, interculturalidad, innovación didáctica, teleconferencias, proyecto educativo

El estudio describe una intervención docente llevada a cabo en el campo de la telecolaboración interinstitucional y con el doble objetivo de incrementar el tiempo de práctica oral para la mejora lingüística (inglés/español) y favorecer la toma de conciencia intercultural entre estudiantes universitarios en los contextos español y británico. La metodología aplicada da cuenta de las percepciones de estos participantes de manera cualitativa y del grado de implicación y participación de los discentes. En primer lugar, en este estudio de caso abordamos el término telecolaboración y recogemos aportaciones recientes en este ámbito; en segundo lugar, presentamos el proyecto y sus tres fases principales: toma de decisiones, desarrollo y evaluación. A continuación, analizamos los resultados de participación y los comentarios positivos y negativos obtenidos de los universitarios, según se refieran a los aspectos lingüísticos o culturales o a otros más generales relacionados con la experiencia de participación. Por último, en la discusión y las conclusiones hablamos del éxito de esta experiencia, el cual reside en la planificación y el diseño de tareas que han originado una alta participación.

### ABSTRACT

#### Keywords

Virtual learning, virtual communities, university context, intercultural, didactic innovation, teleconferencing, education project

*This study describes a teaching intervention carried out in the field of telecollaboration on a university-level course. Two main goals were set for this didactic innovation, which was carried out through an Interinstitutional Teaching Project: firstly, to increase the time of exposure to the foreign language (English/Spanish) and secondly, to raise cultural awareness among British and Spanish university students. The qualitative method has been applied in order to describe the participation and involvement of the learners. This case study firstly describes telecollaboration and the research that has recently been carried out in this field. Secondly, it presents the three phases of the project: action plan, development and evaluation. Thirdly, participants' perceptions (both positive and negative) are described. Students' comments are analyzed mainly in terms of linguistic, cultural or other general features expressed by participants. Finally, this case study includes a conclusion in which planning strategies and task design are emphasized, since both have brought about a successful experience for university students.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the teaching of English as a foreign language is being firmly implemented at the different educational levels and there are numerous projects that focus on enriching learning achievements through virtual tools. Along these lines, recent contributions are set out in virtual conversational exchanges with native speakers as a tool to improve communicative competence ((Romaña, 2015; Kurek, 2015). These exchanges promote interaction, allow for the learning of contextualized lexicon and increase the exposure time to the language thanks to the practice they offer outside the classroom. Similarly, they can be efficient in making progress in the development of the intercultural competence (Byram, 1997). In regard to the foregoing consideration, it is worth highlighting the way in which this type of experiences encourage the student to know aspects of the target culture that may contribute to break out previous cultural stereotypes that make specific conversational exchanges in the English language or any other foreign languages, object of learning, more difficult.

O' Dowd and Lewis (2016) discuss different reasons to use virtual exchanges as tool to improve the foreign language. They realized its potential to develop generic, interrelated and transferable skills to subsequently integrate graduates into the labor market that will require these technological competencies. Among the above, there is the ability of communicating efficiently in a foreign language with collaborators or remote contact partners through asynchronous tools such as e-mail, and synchronous such as online telephony and videoconferences (O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016, p. 7).

Other authors have considered the meta-cognitive processes produced in this type of virtual projects and, in particular, the development of the "learning to learn" competence (Salmerón and Gutiérrez-Braojos, 2012). The authors realize that experiences in which the use of new technologies are introduced to create more autonomous learners, contribute to the self-regulation of learning and self-learning and transform the competencies of the academic setting in more useful strategies for the future of the students. Likewise, they point out the need to plan these learning experiences from a holistic approach and to focus them on "competencies and strategies that develop self-confidence and the concept the students have of themselves" (Salmerón y Gutiérrez-Braojos, 2012, p. 7).

Therefore, this project does not focus solely on the communicative aspects but also on other intercultural aspects that could contribute to increase the motivation and interest of the students. Dörnyei considers the topic of motivation in the concrete learning context of the second language or foreign language, and he affirms that it is not comparable to the motivation in other contexts since "a L2 [Second/foreign language] bears the

development of a certain identity and the incorporation of specific elements of the culture of said L2” (Dörnyei, 1998, p. 118).

In his contribution *Motivation in second and foreign language learning*, Dörnyei summarizes different theories related to the motivation of the context of language learning. In accordance with his contributions, the *expectancy-value* and *expectancy of success* theories deserve special attention. The author clarifies that the difficulty of the tasks may lead the students to lose confidence in their own success while “a strong sense of efficacy enhances a disposition in the students towards accomplishment and helps them face more complex situations with confidence” (1998, p. 120). In summary, Dörnyei considers that the increase in motivation in learning a foreign language resides, among other factors, in the possibility to successfully complete a task which difficulty level is adequate and in which the fundamental objective is not to overcome unreachable challenges, but rather to develop and complement a specific process efficiently.

To the foregoing considerations, we must add what Gardner calls “individuals integrally motivated”, which means “learning a language because there is a genuine interest to communicate with the community of speakers of said language and [...] have a favorable attitude towards the situation in which learning occurs” (Gardner, 2007, p. 19); this attitude can be fostered by virtual projects that require the participation of students for the collaboration of tasks in the second language.

In line with the foregoing, it is necessary that the student be assigned structured tasks (Kurek, 2015) that guide them in the process of interaction with the speakers in another similar setting. This has been pointed out by authors such as García, Rey and Rosado (2009) or Bueno (2011), who have also referred to the virtual exchanges tele-collaboration projects besides highlighting the importance of the design of the tasks and questionnaires these exchanges have in orienting the student and providing the teacher with the information on the evolution and degree of satisfaction of the student in performing these tasks.

The abovementioned considerations constitute a starting point for the development of an interinstitutional teacher’s project between the Warwick University in the United Kingdom and the Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha (UCLM) in Spain, whose main objectives are to improve the communicative skills in the English language (Spanish-English) looking for new settings and opportunities to participate and make the students aware of the target culture through oral and written virtual exchanges.

This study presents the design of tasks, the planning and the participation results of the project Language and Culture, in which 120 students participated: 60 Warwick University students and 60 from the UCLM.

These students experienced three assessment moments: initial (through a questionnaire), intermediate (semi-structured interview) and final (assessment questionnaire). First of all, we described the planning of exchanges and the design of tasks that encourage the oral production regarding cultural topics. Subsequently, we expounded the comments obtained through semi-structured interviews and follow-up data; lastly, we discussed the final results that show a very positive assessment from the students in both institutions and an increase of the motivation that coincides with the initial expectations of the participants.

## **VIRTUAL EXCHANGES**

We commented in the introduction that in the last years many publications have come out that refer to the potential of conversational exchanges that, through Internet tools and applications, allow the students of a foreign language or a target culture to connect. These practices receive the name of tele-collaboration and even though these are increasingly more common in the areas of knowledge as psychology or sociology, they have gained considerable prominence in the teaching of languages. Dooly (2008), in particular, considers the term tele-collaboration as “a teaching and learning experience mediated by the use of Internet and carried out between two distant educational institutions” (p. 21). Recently, Helm added the intercultural component and defines the term as an educational practice consisting of “involving learners in classes geographically disperse in an online exchange through Internet communication tools to develop the linguistic and/or intercultural competence” (2015, p. 197).

McCloskey's contribution reviews in general terms some of the contributions of these intercultural exchanges; he refers more specifically to the advantages regarding the development of the teaching profession. Likewise, the author goes over certain considerations that, from different fields of knowledge, have to be taken into consideration in organizing these experiences, such as the technological resources, the metacognition processes, reflection cycles or the expectations of the teachers and the students involved in the intercultural exchange. In regard to the contribution of these intercultural exchanges, the author examines how “intercultural tele-collaborations provide opportunities to practice and improve the students' skills in terms of discovery and interaction” (2012, p. 44).

## **METHOD**

### **Content Description: Language and Culture Project**

A total of 120 students participated in the first phase of the Language and Culture project. Sixty belong to the Department of Education of Toledo of the UCLM and study Foreign Language and its Didactics II of the Master's Degree in Child Education. The other participants are students of the

Language Center at Warwick University; it is necessary to mention that the latter are in the second and third course of university studies and study intermediate Spanish, however, not all of them belong to the degrees related to education.

The level of Spanish of the Warwick students and the level of English of those of UCLM is very similar; all of the students study a B1 of the foreign/second language of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching (MCER) (European Council, 2002). In regard to the UCLM, two students have a B2 official accreditation but none of Warwick students possess an external official accreditation of the same level (B2) or higher; hence, we can say that all of them show an intermediate level of foreign language.

The students of a Master's Degree in Child Education at the UCLM, have to take the compulsory case study course of the context subject while it is not compulsory for the Warwick students. Productive as well as receptive skills are worked upon in both language courses and this is done from a communicative approach. In both institutions, students require more practice of the oral skills and they must also take an oral test to complete the course satisfactorily. It should be mentioned that, in general, all of students encountered difficulties to pass the test given the tension or nervousness that this type of examinations produces in expressing themselves in a foreign language.

## DEVELOPMENT

The project started with an analysis of the needs in both settings during the 2014-2015 academic cycle. We identified the following shortcomings and particularities that affect the students' training in a foreign language:

- Lack of oral fluidity to complete B1 level of the foreign language.
- Anxiety, nervousness and insecurity in the students in facing final oral or progress tests.
- Cultural shortcomings of close realities, for example, the British educational system.
- Vocabulary shortcomings, repetitive basic vocabulary and scarcity of conversational resources.

To these four shortcomings we add the fondness and the interest of youngsters for new technologies and, more specifically of the constant use they make of social networks through which they build mobile or virtual networks with class contacts to transmit knowledge or share academic information. By analyzing the foregoing, and given the recent contributions (Romaña, 2015; Kurek, 2015; García, Rey and Rosado, 2009), we designed a three-phase project which is anchored in the tele-collaboration setting (Dooly, 2008; Helm, 2015), and attempts to address

the linguistic and cultural shortcomings of the participants. First, we describe the process of decision making, afterwards, the implementation and, lastly, the evaluation.

### **First Phase: Decision Making**

The decision making process prior to the development of the tele-collaboration project was carried out by an English language teacher at the UCLM and a Spanish language teacher from the Warwick University and, this had to do with the following aspects mainly: context, tasks design and project assessment. The tasks design focused on the computer tool(s) to be used, the temporalization, duration and tasks assessment. Skype was considered the most appropriate tool (O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016), since it would allow face-to-face conversation besides offering great accessibility and different functions and services. Furthermore, the students were told that, in order to complete the proposed tasks, they could also use other tools such as WhatsApp or Facebook. It was also agreed that the tasks would be posted on the Moodle platform for UCLM and on the Blackboard for Warwick; each institution would also request from their students relevant documentary evidence of their interventions.

Likewise, Dörnyei (1998) and Gardner's (2007) premises were considered to search for topics and tasks that could be accessible to university students and be simple enough to be completed by the participants within an enriching and motivating practice community. This would allow the students to avoid facing excessively complicated challenges which could result in a low participation or implication.

In reference to temporalization, since the case study conducted (Foreign language and its Didactics II) was part of a quarterly course (September-January), a duration of six weeks plus one week of reflection for the assessment were necessary.

Along these lines, both institutions non-school days were taken into consideration to impede that the time some students had available for learning be irregular and be affected by external factors.

Similarly, teachers involved in the project agreed that the indicated virtual exchanges would have a minimum duration of sixty minutes. This time would be allotted to the students to maintain conversations or videoconferences through Skype to complete a series of tasks. During these sixty minutes, the Warwick and UCLM students who were connected would converse part of the time in English and part of the time in Spanish. With that in mind, the students of both institutions were advised to dedicate thirty minutes to the English language and thirty minutes to the Spanish language in order to avoid any uneven situations.



## Second Phase: Implementation

This section contains the tasks that have been designed, including temporalization, objective preparation and a section of questions suggested by the interaction. For this design, we resorted to Kurek (2015) and Chapelle (2001)'s contributions. Chapelle (2001), in particular, emphasizes the potential, adaptability, meaning, positive impact and practical nature that virtual tasks must have. To the foregoing, Kurek (2015) adds the need of concrete instructions that contribute to bridge the geographic distance or the differences in institutional settings (See Table 1).

**Table 1.** Summary of the tasks and questions for interaction

Week-activity	Preparation	Interaction
Week 1  First contact	Warwick students have to prepare questions in advance that they will make to their exchange partners  UCLM students prepare ten questions to ask their exchange partners	Where do you live?  How many languages do you speak?  Have you ever been to England/Spain?  Do you like to travel?  What do you study and why?
Week 2  My university life	UCLM and Warwick students choose a photograph (not necessary one in which they appear) that reflects questions related to their university life that they share with their partner and provide details on their studies, activities, university club, etc.	Where is your university?  What subject do you prefer?  Is there a course that is difficult for you to pass?  Do you belong to a university association or club?
Week 3  Let's talk about food	The students share information on a typical or well known dish or recipe in their geographic setting. They also deal with topics on their favorite dish, culinary habits or international dishes	Is there a typical dish in your country?  What do you have for dinner or lunch?  What are the most frequently times to have lunch or dinner in your setting?  Are you a good cook?
Week 4  Breaking the cultural stereotypes	Students give their opinions on the degree of truth of the most widespread cultural stereotypes that affect British and Spaniards. They may also try to find possible solutions to overcome stereotypes in	Is it true that Spaniards take a nap every day?  Is it true that in Spain people speak loudly or make noise in public places?

	their setting and how the study of the foreign language can contribute to break down some of these stereotypes.	Are British always well educated?  In England, are people are always on time?
Week 5  Youth and labor market	The students talk and share experiences on the labor market in their respective countries, the work opportunities for young people, their expectations and previous experiences, is any	Do you work or have worked during your studies?  Is it easy to find a first job in England/Spain?  In what would you like to work when you finish your studies?  Do you think it will be difficult to find a stable job?
Week 6  The news	The students talk about a recent piece of news that has occurred in their place of residence or in the surroundings or they can refer to some topic on a current issue in their country of residence	Do you read the newspaper or watch the news on television?  Do you believe there is a lot of violence in the media?  Are you interested in your country's current political affairs?
Week 7  Reflection and assessment of the experience	The students complete an individual questionnaire; they can also comment on their participation in the project	Would we like to keep in touch after this Exchange?

In Table 1, we observe that the tasks were simple and accessible to the students; hence the complexity was not an excuse to reduce the degree of participation. The topics chosen were basic and common to the proposals of the MCER (2001) for the intermediate level of the foreign language. In this sense, this highlights that the information on close and general facts requires lower linguistic skills that synthesize or show agreement or disagreement with very specific topics.

### Third Phase: Assessment

This third phase consisted in two well defined activities: those directed to evaluate the implication of the students in the projects and those that had to do with the assessment of the results and the perception of the students on the virtual exchange, that, besides being expressed in their final comments, were completed with two pre and post project questionnaires that allowed the tutors to gather data to evaluate the experience and improve the design of future editions. Our contribution was to focus exclusively on the participation data and the general assessment comments issued by the students.



In order to evaluate the first aspect, students and professors who participated in the project, established a fluid relationship based on an ongoing contact and which overcame the obstacles they came across during the conversational exchanges. Furthermore, UCLM students left a written record of three of the tasks (detailed in Table 1) through the MOODLE section to that purpose.

In regard to the evaluation of the results, we elaborated two questionnaires: an initial one and a final one. In the latter, we left a section so the students could write open comments that would allow us to assess their experiences, positive as well as negative. At last, we considered the objective data of participation as a measure to know how the students received the project. In the next section, we addressed the perceptions of the students of both institutions, the tasks given as well as the participation of the Castilian-Manchego students in the conversations. Since there were grouped in pair, the follow-up extended to the British students and it was not relevant to refer to the delivery of tasks of the Warwick university.

## RESULTS

As we have commented earlier, the results have to do with the participation data and the compliance with the tasks during the project. Likewise, we drafted the results on the perceptions observed in the students in the final questionnaire, in the open comment section.

For the first segment of results, the students completed a questionnaire that was developed virtually and which contrasted with the real participation data; from these results, the UCLM students left a record through MOODLE when they entered their tasks on the platform.

The results reveal that 27% of the students of the second course of the Master's degree in Child Education at the UCLM, claimed having performed all the proposed tasks and all the exchanges through Skype; the percentage of 43.3% is lower than the number of students who performed all the exchanges and more than three tasks, however, it represents a high value in regard to the participation through Skype. The students that did all the exchanges but less than two tasks represent 8.3%, which is the equivalent to five students.

Lastly, 3.3%, i.e., two students claimed not having done a good follow-up of the project. They did not hand in any activity or participated in the proposed exchanges. If we group the first two percentages, since both refer to the follow-up of the exchanges, we can point out that 70.3% did all the conversational encounters; the difference resides solely in the remittance or not of the written material associated to the same.

As we stated above, the second part of the analysis focuses on the positive or negative comments of the participants. This paragraph gave the

students a lot of freedom to express themselves; they were only asked to indicate something positive or negative about the project. In general, the majority of students pointed out positive aspects of the project while the negative comments were: “There is nothing I didn’t like about it”. Next, we grouped the comments according to the institution of origin of the student. In the case of UCLM, only seven of the 60 participants issued some negative appreciation of the project (See Table 2).

**Table 2.** Negative comments of the UCLM participants

Number of participants	Negative Comment
2	“What I didn’t like were the schedule and the communication problems”
3	“The conversations lacked fluidity because she did not answer the e-mails and I had problems in communicating with her”
16	“It was difficult to get in touch with him”
26	“In my case, what I did not like was the tardiness in answering the emails to agree on the schedule. This slowed down the exchange”
30	“I couldn’t always get a connection with the camera so we exchanged more though e-mail”
42	“I would have like the project to be longer”
50	“He didn’t take it seriously”

In this section, UCLM students describe connectivity problems or the slowness of the responses by their exchange partners as negative aspects. However, we have mentioned that given the number of comments, these are isolated cases in which there might be a lack of commitment from the participants. Participant 42’s comment, even though it was captured from the negative appreciations section, refers in fact to a positive aspect since said participant considers that a project of the same type but longer would have brought better results.

On the other hand, Warwick students made five negative comments (See Table 3).

**Table 3.** Warwick participants' negative comments

Number of participants	Negative comment
65	"My partner only wanted to speak English and not Spanish"
72	"I think in our case the conversations tended to feel a bit forced/unnatural because one of us was writing in Spanish and the other one was replying in English"
78	"The hardest thing was perhaps finding a time to chat! It was difficult finding a time when both of us were available"
87	"The thing that I don't like is that I haven't got much contact with him"
91	"We spoke via WhatsApp or e-mail and we didn't use Skype a lot"

The comments made by the Warwick participants point out similar reasons to those collected by the UCLM. In this section, we should mention that notwithstanding the fact that participant 91 disregarded Skype as the fundamental tool for the exchange, and his comment was considered in the negative section, he brought information on new routes of communication used by the students, such as WhatsApp; this fact could be positive for the students if we understand it as mediated communication; however, it shows us that those involved in the exchange used synchronous as well as asynchronous tools (O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016).

The other comments from the students were positive and we grouped them into three blocks, referred to as the improvement in the language, the increase of intercultural awareness thanks to the project and the general experience. In the first block, the UCLM participants highlighted the possibility to be corrected when speaking the language being learned: "I liked it that he corrected me when we were speaking" (participant 12, UCLM). Other comments referred to the learning of lexicon through conversational exchanges: "What I liked most was that my vocabulary has increased" (Participant 45, UCLM); this comment could be associated with the use of the language in a real setting and with university native speakers that can use colloquial expressions of expressions belonging to the students' academic slang.

Lastly, and also within the language section, some students referred to the improvement of their aural comprehension of the target language; in this case the comment comes from a participant of the British university: "Speaking with native Spanish speakers allowed me to improve my listening skills, which is probably the weakest aspect of my Spanish" (participant 69, Warwick).

In regard to the improvement and development of intercultural awareness, the participants seem to have reflected on underlying aspects of the exchange experience, such as overcoming stereotypes or the initial fear of the conversation with students from other cultures. Along these lines, those involved show their satisfaction with the project with contributions such the following: “What I liked most has been to be able to know and speak with a foreign person, besides helping me with my English” (Participant 52), UCLM). They also mention the construction of interpersonal relationships and give as an example the following comment: “To speak with a person that one doesn’t know and to trust this person as if we knew one another” (Participant 10, UCLM).

Along these lines, the participants of the British university show their conviction through the development of conversations. They point out, among other aspects, the cultural learning brought about by the exchange and the successful development of communication: “What I liked the most of this experience has been the good interaction and communication with my exchange partner. It has been like talking with a person that you have known all your life. I have learned many things about her and her culture” (participant 100, Warwick). They also consider other aspects of the academic or university life they have learned during the exchange: “Learning about the Spanish culture, how Spanish students deal with approaching English language lessons” (Participant 68, Warwick).

The third block of comments is more general and gathers aspects related to the increase in motivation and experience, or the combination of language and culture. In this sense, the opinion of one of the Warwick participants on motivation highlights the foregoing: “I met new people motivated to learn a new language” (Participant 81, Warwick). Other students praise the experience and show their interest to extend said experience to other subjects or acquire it in other courses: “Hopefully other teachers would propose pursuing this project with the next course” (Participant 5, UCLM).

Along these lines, we can claim that the perception of the students is very positive, above all in terms of language practice, interpersonal and cultural experience and increase of motivation. Likewise, the perception of the students vary significantly according to the degree of involvement of the exchange partner and of his/her own. It is worth mentioning that the scarce number of negative perceptions of the participants and how in general, these are associated to difficulties of connection or time of intervention.

## DISCUSSION

After submitting the results of the participation and the comment section, we can point out that, in general, the students’ participation represents a good indicator of the reception of the project, since 70.3% of the

participants carried out all the exchanges and all or the majority of the tasks, while only two students (3.3%) did not perform any exchange or task. The number of participants whose involvement was scarce is very low; it represents only five students, i.e., 8.3% that did less than two tasks in spite of performing all the exchanges. By taking into consideration that the interactions were paired, we can infer that two pairs of students did not participate at all or participated very little in the conversations and five pairs of students did not work very well, at least in reference to the tasks. The other exchanges, according to the data collected, worked well or very well.

The data on participation correspond to the comments received by the participants who highlighted their satisfaction with the linguistic and cultural experience (Byram, 1997; Salmerón and Gutiérrez-Braojos, 2012; O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016). As we pointed out in the foregoing paragraph, the students expressed their acceptance of the project and acknowledged the aspects specific to the increase of motivation for learning a language (Dörnyei, 1998) and the intercultural awareness or improvement of intercultural relationships.

In reference to the more negative data expressed by the participants, we encounter space and time issues: time of the connections and their duration. In general, these scarce negative comments revealed that the students were not always capable of finding the appropriate moment for the conversational exchange. Other aspects related to the students' commitment and their will to participate actively were also collected. However, we are dealing with two isolated cases that are not significant and refer to the students that did not submit the tasks associated with the project.

In the results section, we mention that only two participants expressed their complaints in feeling that they had not been reciprocated by their conversation partner. More specifically, there are two more negative comments from the Castilian-Manchego than from the British; this may well be because of the previous virtual experiences of the latter since it was the second time they had a virtual exchange with similar characteristics while it was the first experience of this type for all the UCLM students.

Likewise, the results are consistent with some of the considerations expressed in the theoretical framework of this study; more specifically, these results give evidence of the statement of Romaña (2015) on the intercultural potential of the linguistic exchanges through Skype, and reinforce the opinion of Kurek (2015) in regard to the need to plan in detail the development of the tasks. According to McCloskey (2012), we have proven with this experience the need to establish cycles of reflection that allow the students and professors involved to formulate proposals of improvement, to conduct analysis of participation or to intervene in the solution of issues.

The number of participants could represent a possible limitation in the case study. Although reduced, these figures have allowed us to evaluate and analyze the comments qualitatively and in detail. Likewise, and since we are dealing with the description of the recent experience, the study has not referred to the observable or measurable results the participants could have achieved given their participation in this exchange. However, the study can be replicated by other experts that wish to inquire about the specific aspects of this type of virtual conversational exchanges, as well as the long term results.

## CONCLUSIONS

The design of the tasks and the planning of the phases of this project have resonated positively in the participation and evaluation of the students. The number of slightly positive or negative comments is scarce. Therefore, the positive comments include a great number of aspects that suppose a positive reinforcement of the development of the project: tasks and increase in motivation are those highlighted.

More specifically, the perception of the participants has shown the linguistic benefits of the implementation of this intervention by indicating how the students increased their lexicon or had the opportunity to put into practice the spoken language in a real setting. Likewise, the learners evaluated the intercultural experience in the virtual setting and showed, through their comments, their curiosity toward relative aspects of the university life in the context of the target language. The perceptions on the increase of motivation or the intention the students showed to extend the duration of similar conversational exchanges or apply them in subsequent courses are also highlighted. This fact is connected with the analysis of initial shortcomings and therefore is part of the initial expectations: cultural shortcomings of close realities (e.g.: British educational system) and lexical shortcomings, repetitive basic vocabulary and scarcity of conversational resources.

In regard to the impact of the project at short and medium term, the students pointed out two aspects that cover the initial shortcomings identified and for which the project was designed, i.e., the lack of spoken fluidity necessary to complete level B1 of the foreign language and the anxiety, nervousness and lack of confidence of the students while facing terminal or progressive oral exams.

With all of the above, we may conclude by highlighting the good results observed and how the aspects related to the planning, decision making, development and evaluation presented in this study can be used as a model for future researches in the field of teaching tele-collaboration through Skype and other virtual platforms in the university setting with the objective of improving productive and receptive skills in the foreign language.



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