

Research on the Impact of COIL Projects in Enhancing Students' Public Speaking Skills

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This practitioner research in education paper is based on the experiences of an English language educator taking part in a Collaborative Online International Learning project (COIL). The collaboration took place virtually between two institutions of higher education, located on different sides of the globe, namely United State (US) and United Arab Emirates (UAE). Asynchronous teaching methods were used for English language learners to meet and work with students from other countries in a public speaking course. Students met to work individually and in groups on a public speaking project (PSCP). At the end of the project, the researcher conducted an empirical analysis through a web-based questionnaire to investigate the students' perceptions of public speaking activities which they have participated in, and its impact on enhancing their learning experience and intercultural awareness. In addition, qualitative data were collected through the open ended-questions and the self-reflection report. It is hoped that this research will contribute to understanding higher education students' views, regarding COIL projects and providing reference suggestions for future improvements on how to design COIL projects that can develop students' public speaking skills, intercultural competences, and digital skills needed for the 21st Century to become truly global graduates. The results of the study showed that the PSCP offered the respondents a teaching/learning model that enhanced their growth in the areas of verbal communication skills and cultural competence.

Keywords: COIL, public speaking skills, intercultural competence

Research Aims or Objectives

Collaborative online international learning (COIL) started playing a major contribution to the educational approach in teaching. COIL projects have delivered internationally recognized success in recent years and become an integral part of many educational institutions (Rubin, 2017). COIL creates equitable team-taught learning environments where faculty from two cultures work together to develop a shared syllabus, emphasizing experiential and collaborative student learning. As SUNY COIL (2013) mentioned "A well-planned COIL Collaboration enhances your existing course, helps students develop curiosity about the world and a deeper understanding of their own and other cultures, bolsters 21st-century skills, and provides new perspectives on course content" (SUNY COIL, 2015).

In the UAE context, specifically, AURAK, students were engaged in COIL projects with other students from the US universities. Faculty from the two cultures worked together to develop shared collaborative projects. An experience of working on activities with students from different geographical and linguacultural backgrounds

was designed to provide students with opportunities to attain cross-cultural competence and intercultural awareness while learning the English language. Such collaborative international education based on “humanistic ideals” will provide graduates with a global vision, who will possess excellent analytical skills and the ability to perform with ease in international and intercultural contexts (Nava-Aguirre, Garcia-Portillo, & Lopez-Morales, 2022). The COIL has been a way to create “at-home” international experiences for students between two or more universities by creating international virtual learning (Gray et al., 2021).

During the project it was noticeable on the one hand that some students valued the role of the shared activities in forging relationships with peers from another culture and increasing their intercultural awareness, communicative skills while working with non-native English speakers, and developing their digital literacy skills for working in virtual teams. However, on the other hand, other students found it very challenging. Therefore, in order to better use the COIL projects, this research tried to investigate students' perceptions of public speaking COIL project they have participated in, and its impact on enhancing their verbal communication skills, intercultural communication, and digital literacy skills.

Review of Literature

COIL projects have been implemented in various academic institutions as a means of promoting cross-cultural and global competencies among students. In recent years, there has been growing interest in the effectiveness of COIL projects in enhancing student engagement and motivation, preparedness for global workforce. This literature review aims to examine the existing research on the impact of COIL projects on student engagement and motivation, language learning, and their readiness for multicultural collaborations at Higher Education.

Studies on how to use COIL projects in enhancing language learning and teaching have found that COIL projects promote language learning by engaging students in intentionally designed activities that foster communication skills in their home or new language. O'Dowd (2018) in his study found how virtual exchange contributed to overcoming students' stereotypes, gaining confidence as communicators in their second language (L2), and reconceptualizing English as a tool for communication rather than as an abstract academic activity. Horn (2023) also noted that “The COIL pedagogy is particularly effective for language learning, with students improving both their speaking and comprehension skills and their cultural understanding by collaborating with students at the global partner university”.

Research conducted by Woodside and Panaloza (2021) investigated the effectiveness and benefits of implementing COIL components in distant-learning context. They concluded that the project helped students to develop linguistics capacities, establish international connections, and foster intercultural competencies with minimal investment resources. With a variety of obstacles encountered they managed to make authentic connections to improve students linguistic and intercultural competences that encouraged their students to continue their language studies.

Several other studies have found that COIL projects can increase student engagement by providing students with opportunities to interact with peers from diverse backgrounds and perspectives (Rubin, 2017; Yusuf, 2019). A study by Jia and Li (2021) found that COIL projects positively impacted student engagement, as students reported increased interest and participation in class discussions, and a greater sense of belonging in the course. The COIL has been a way to create “at-home” international experiences for students between two or more universities by creating international virtual learning (Gray et al., 2021). The term “internationalization at home”

was introduced by Nelson in the 1990s (Nava-Aguirre et al., 2022), who argued that it was essential for students to have international experiences for the domestic students who would not have the opportunity to study abroad. Other terminologies like “virtual international activities” (O’Dowd, 2018), “telecollaborations” (Chun, 2015), “online intercultural exchange” (Akbar, 2015), and “virtual mobility” (European Commission, 2013) were used to refer to COIL.

It has been highlighted that COIL can have a positive impact on higher education by promoting innovation. Pischerskaya et al. (2021), Wimpenny et al. (2022), and Jie & Pearlman, (2018) all suggest that COIL can be used to promote innovation in higher education, by providing a space for different perspectives (Wimpenny et al., 2022), by helping students learn about other cultures (Jie & Pearlman, 2018), and by forming cross-cultural professional competencies (Pischerskaya, Rokitskaya, & Filippova, 2021). Ramirez (2020) suggests that cultural considerations are important for the success of COIL projects, which is also relevant to the promotion of innovation in higher education.

COIL projects have also been found to enhance student motivation in various ways. For instance, COIL projects can provide students with a sense of purpose and relevance by linking course content to real-world issues (Campbell, Willison, & Forsyth, 2020). This can increase student motivation and engagement in the course. Additionally, COIL projects can increase student motivation by providing opportunities for autonomy and control over the learning process (Liu, 2023). Students may feel more motivated to engage with course content when they have a greater sense of ownership over their learning.

Another benefit of COIL projects would be mastery of digital skills. Digital literacy is now required in the job market, and have become crucial for intercultural communication. To communicate in COIL projects or other virtual exchange environments, students not only require language abilities but also non-linguistic skills, such as an understanding of digital tools (Liu, 2023). Students are required to communicate with their local and worldwide COIL partners via text, audio, or videoconferencing on various social media platforms in order to finish an international group project. As Liu (2023) mentions, they might need to use some learning management systems (like Blackboard, Moodle, and Edmodo) and other software for teaching (e.g., VoiceThread, Flipgrid, Whiteboard).

Other studies emphasized several factors crucial for establishing effective COIL initiatives. This study recommended that on an institutional scale, there must be a commitment to offering support, encompassing both time and resources, to facilitate the planning and execution of global virtual projects (SUNY COIL Center, 2013). Additionally, peer educators must meticulously organize the course framework and content, as well as strategize their approach, including the selection of technology and anticipation of potential challenges (Asojo, Kartoshkina, Amole, & Jaiyeoba, 2019).

To sum up the wide literature on COIL projects, one can say that COIL projects have positive impact on language learning and intercultural competencies are underlined in the engagement of students in a well-structured virtual exchange that motivated them to take part in sustained and mentored online communication with members of other cultures. Students can not only develop aspects of their L2 competence, but also their intercultural competence and other elements of global citizenship (de Wit, 2016; O’Dowd, 2018).

It is hoped that this study with its specific focus on how to enhance students’ public speaking skills may add to literature as it is the first research on COIL projects that focus on public speaking and intercultural awareness. As well as, it is the first research to be done in the UAE context.

Research Design & Methods

Context

To advance Internationalization through COIL the US Embassy in the UAE sponsored some COIL projects in the UAE. In AURAK three COIL projects were initiated between AURAK and WSU in different majors. One of them is the Public Speaking Project “Cross-cultural introductions”. The current study outlines the process of implementing a COIL course, and reports on the impact of such course on student perspectives with regards to the development of public speaking skills, and enhancing intercultural competencies.

The PSCP facilitated links between AURAK and WSU. It occurred in September of 2022. The team from both universities, for three months, organized many online meetings to design the project activities. They communicated regularly via TEAMS or Zoom and emails. A useful template was used to include any needed information or tasks. The template has information regarding Logistical information, Academic issues, COIL activities, and the Timeline.

The objectives of the COIL project were stated clearly and shared with the stakeholders' right from the beginning of the project. They included the following: Students will be able to:

- demonstrate understanding and experience the role of self-introductions in forging relationships with peers across different cultures;
- identify and use strategies to communicate with peers across different cultures;
- identify and use strategies to provide feedback to peers from across different cultures;
- prepare and record an extemporaneous self-introduction speech.

Participants

The participants ($N = 17$) were enrolled in the PSCP: six students in the ENGL 102 Public Speaking Course and eleven students in the ENGL 099 Foundations of College English course at AURAK University. They were studying different majors. There were eight male and nine female students. See Table 1 for a complete description of the participants.

Table 1

Background of Participants

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	8	47.1
	Female	9	52.9
University major	Architecture	2	11.9
	Artificial Intel.	1	5.9
	Biotechnology	4	23.5
	Business	2	11.8
	Civil Eng.	1	5.9
	Computer Science	2	11.8
	Finance	1	5.9
	Interior Design	1	5.9
	Mass Communication	2	11.8
	Petroleum Engineering	1	5.9
Course level	General education	6	35.3
	Foundation	11	64.7

Research Method

This study used a mixed method approach. The roles of the PSCP in providing students with meaningful opportunity to develop virtual social relationships with students from other cultures, and how this international learning experience enriched the academic learning of public speaking skills were measured through a questionnaire through Microsoft Forms to assess students' knowledge, values, skills, and attitudes towards the PSCP. The questionnaire was administered at the end of the project. The survey was available online and the students were asked to complete the research survey independently. A hyperlink was uploaded on AURAK Blackboard course with instructions to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire took 10 minutes to complete.

The questionnaire included two parts for the students in AURAK. The first part identified students' notion of the PSCP within 19 elements. The internal consistency of this part in the survey was assessed by using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The total result was measured at 0.901, which means the reliability was high.

Qualitative research method was obtained from the open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire and the SRR used to assess the cross-cultural partnerships of student's experiences in the PSCP to gain an emic perspective from participants without confining responses. At the end of the PSCP, AURAK ENGL 102, six students were asked to submit a self-reflection report.

Achieving meaning saturation was important for this study because we not only wanted to identify important issues regarding students' attitudes and gained skills, but also gain an in-depth understanding of the students' experience and what feature deems more important for designing these types of COIL projects that may lead to success of learning languages.

Procedures for rigor and validity in the form of validity checks were done during data collection and the thematic analysis by the researcher.

Ethics

Ongoing informed consent was collected from students. Students were given a letter of information and consent was sought for participation for the online questionnaire and the SRR. All questionnaires and SRRS were de-identified to ensure anonymity. This study received full ethics approval from the AURAK Office of Research & Community Service Unit.

Survey

The researcher designed a questionnaire to measure the role of the PSCP in providing students with meaningful opportunity to develop virtual social relationships with students from other cultures, and how this international learning experience enriched the academic learning of public speaking skills. All the 17 participants were AURAK students.

The survey question types included both Likert scale and open-ended items. The questionnaire included four sections. The first part identified students' concerns regarding participating in the PSCP before starting the COIL project (4) items. The second set of the questions revolved around the students' perceptions regarding receiving meaningful opportunity to communicate and collaborate with students from US after participating in the COIL Project (5) items. The third set revolved around the students' perceptions regarding developing their public speaking skills. It contained 10 items. The fourth set revolved around the usefulness of the used platforms two items. The last set of questions resolved around the students' willingness to participate in other COIL projects two items. Having in mind not to force data into preconceived categories, the researcher left the last question

open to be responded to without forcing responses. The written responses gave useful qualitative data regarding the impact of PSCP on enhancing students' language learning and intercultural communication skills and future recommendations.

Collected quantitative data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Data Analysis

Statistical Quantitative Data Analysis

For the predominant quantitative phase, descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data with $p < 0.05$ set as statistically significant (SPSS-Version 26®). Factor analysis was performed for data obtained from the Likert Scale to identify underlying variables/factors. Content validity was used to ensure the questionnaire focused on concepts and constructs that emerged from the literature review on COIL. The internal consistency of the survey was assessed through Cronbach's alpha.

Quantitative Survey Results

There was a 100% response rate to the questionnaire. Although small sample sizes tend to yield low commonalities, this study had commonalities that were greater than the suggested acceptable value of 0.5. As illustrated in Table 2 the reliability scores for the Likert scale questions exceeded the recommended Cronbach's alpha value of $\alpha = 0.70$, indicating consistency of scoring.

Table 2

Reliabilities

	Section	No. of items	Cronbach's alpha
1	Meaningful opportunity to communicate and collaborate	5	0.745
2	Developing students' public speaking skills	10	0.873
3	Usefulness of the used platforms	2	0.783
4	Willingness to participate in future projects	2	0.764

The below sections will present the results.

Results & Findings

Students Concerns Before Starting the COIL Project

Table 3 reveals that students were concerned regarding participating in the COIL course. This is evidenced in the results. Their concerns go around their ability to communicate in English, as they are non-native speaker of English, collaboration with students from another countries in a classroom setting, their IT skills to communicate virtually, and their time management skills as they have to stick to the time allocated to deliver the introduction speech. The results showed that time management skills got a high mean (3.24).

Analyzing these concerns more deeply, as shown in Figure 1, it was noticed that 52.9% of the students were somewhat concerned regarding their time management skills while working online. And 11.8% of them were concerned to a large extent and 17.6% were concerned to a great extent.

Lacking IT skills to communicate virtually was another concern, where 35.3% were little concerned and 11.8% were somewhat concerned and 17.6% were concerned to a great extent.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Students' Concerns Before Starting the PSCP

	No.	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Before starting the COIL project, I was concerned with my ability to communicate in English.	17	1	5	2.76	1.348
Before starting the COIL project, I was concerned with my ability to collaborate with students from another country in a classroom setting.	17	1	5	2.82	1.334
Before starting the COIL project, I lacked the IT skills to communicate virtually.	17	1	5	2.29	1.448
Before starting the COIL project, I was concerned about my time management skills.	17	1	5	3.24	1.091

Another concern that the data revealed was the lack of the ability to collaborate with students from another country in a classroom setting. 35.3% of them were somewhat concerned and 11.8% of them were concerned to a large extent and 17.6% were concerned to a great extent.

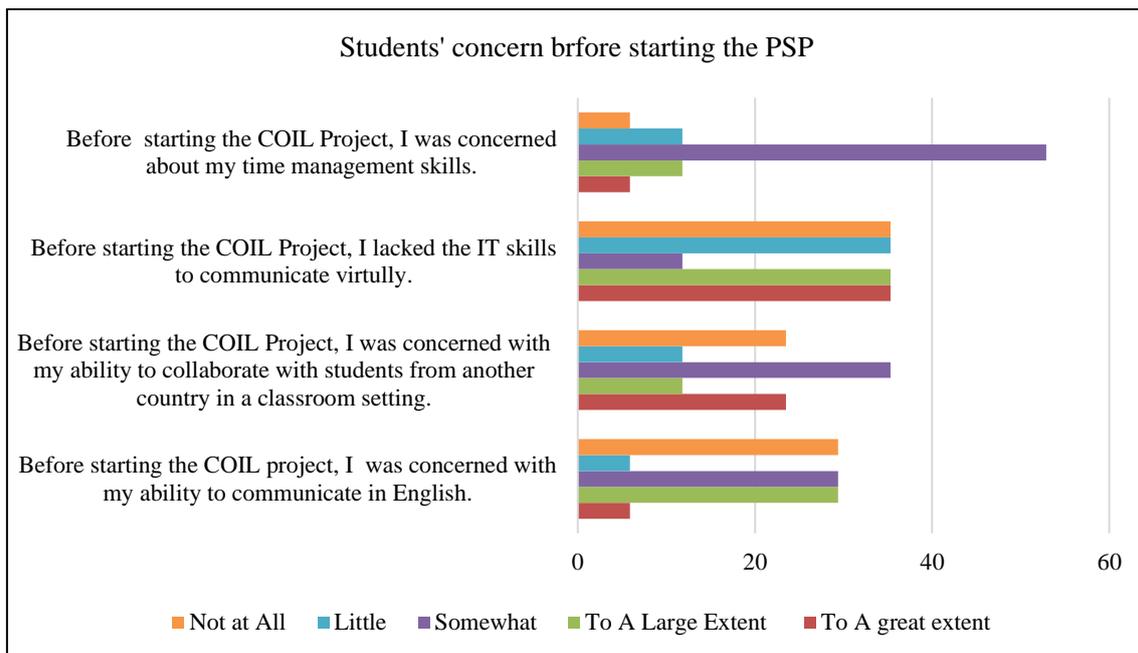


Figure 1. Students' concerns before starting the PSCP.

Project Outcomes Regarding Providing Meaningful Opportunity to Communicate and Collaborate With Students From US After Participating in the COIL Project

This section details the questionnaire's questions regarding students' perceptions regarding the meaningful opportunity provided by the PSCP to communicate and collaborate with students from the WSU. The responses are presented below in Table 4 along with Figure 2.

Looking at the results it is noticeable that the students obtained a great benefit from the PSCP regarding having a meaningful opportunity to communicate and collaborate with students from US. The four statements in this section received high results with an average mean of four and above. If we look closely at each statement to figure what was the most positive outcome of the project in regard to "collaborating and communicating with students from other cultures", the data showed high positive results. The statement "The project provided me

with meaningful opportunity to communicate with students from other country” received a very high positive results where “To a great Extent” received 70.6%, “To a large extent” received 17.6%, and “Somewhat” received 5.5%, and another 5.9 to “Little”. None of the students chose “Not at all”.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics of Project Outcomes Regarding Providing Meaningful Opportunity to Communicate and Collaborate With Students From WSU

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
The project provided me with meaningful opportunity to communicate with students from other country.	17	2	5	4.53	0.874
The project provided me with meaningful opportunity to collaborate on a project/assignment with students from other country.	17	2	5	4.06	0.966
The project provided me with meaningful opportunity to develop virtual social relationships with students from the USA.	17	1	5	3.53	1.375
The project helped increase my self-confidence to participate in international programs.	17	1	5	3.94	1.029
The shared activity of self-introduction speech helped me in having friends from other country.	17	1	5	3.18	1.629

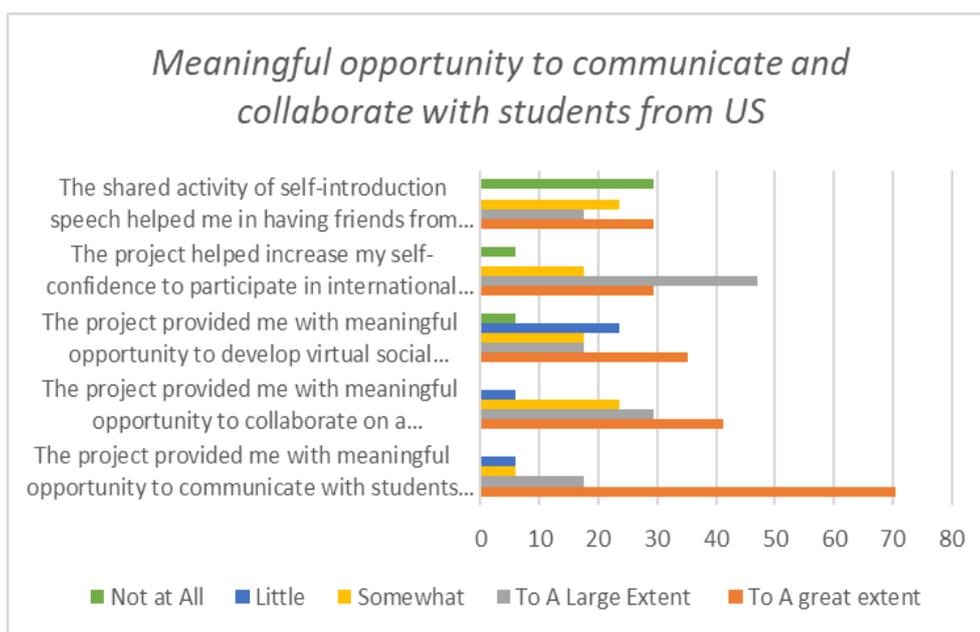


Figure 2. Project outcomes regarding providing meaningful opportunity to communicate and collaborate with students from WSU.

With regard to the PSCP’s role in increasing students’ self-confidence to participate in international programs, the results showed that the mean was 3.94, which is very positive. The five Likert scale used (To a great extent, To a large extent, Somewhat, Little, and Not at all) received these results 29.4%, 47.1%, 17.6%, 5.9% respectively.

The results showed that the PSCP had less impact on helping students to have friends from other country, which received the lowest mean (3.18). This could be due to the nature of the activities and the time difference between the two countries. Though in the qualitative results some students mentioned that they started having friends with WSU students through other virtual communication contacts.

Project Outcomes Regarding Developing Students' Public Speaking Skills

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics of Project Outcomes Regarding Developing Students' Public Speaking Skills

	No.	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
1. The assignment we shared in the project was very useful.	17	1	5	4.00	1.118
2. The shared activity of self-introduction speech helped me to gain skills on being at ease in front of a camera.	17	2	5	3.82	1.015
3. The shared activity of self-introduction speech helped me to adopt natural facial expressions and gestures.	17	2	5	3.53	1.231
4. The shared activity of telling audience about a specific incident from my life helped me to reveal my own character in addition to other group students.	17	3	5	4.18	0.809
5. The shared activity of self-introduction speech helped me to use appropriate, clear, and easy-to-follow language.	17	3	5	3.82	0.883
6. The shared activity of three minutes self-introduction speech helped me to manage my time efficiently to stay within the allocated time limit.	17	3	5	4.53	0.624
7. The shared activity of self-introduction speech provided me with skills of speech organization: Introduction, Body and Transitions, and Conclusion.	17	2	5	3.94	0.966
8. The shared activity of self-introduction speech provided me with skills on having a good attention-getter introduction and a clear preview or purpose statement that led the audience smoothly into the speech.	17	3	5	4.18	0.951
9. The shared activity of self-introduction speech provided me with skills on how to conclude my speech emphasizing the main point(s) and drew the speech to a close with an effective memorable statement.	17	3	5	4.24	0.831
10. I feel that this international learning experience enriched the academic learning of public speaking of my course.	17	2	5	4.25	0.772

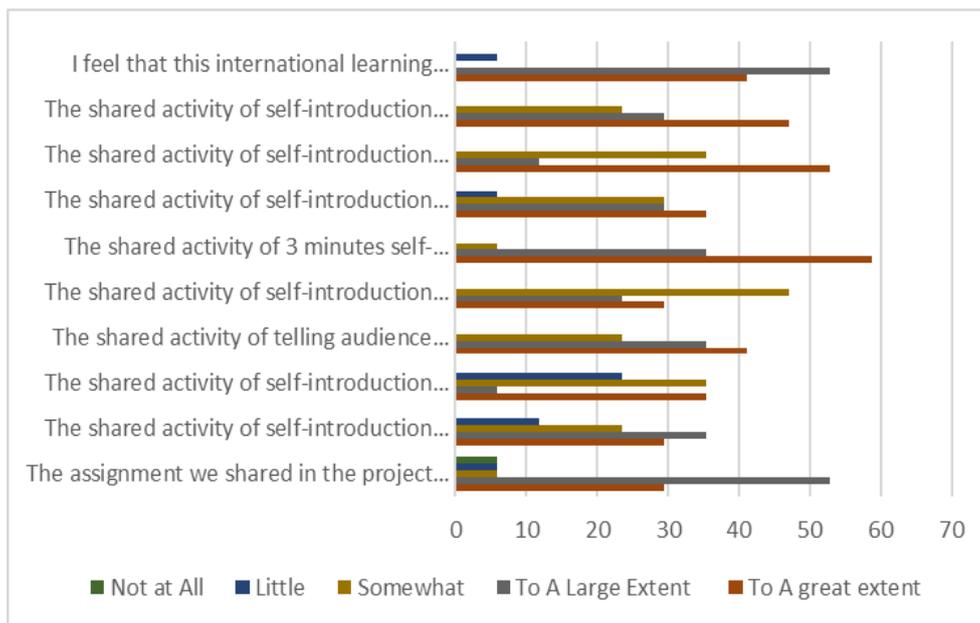


Figure 3. Project outcomes regarding developing students' public speaking skills.

Looking at the results of this important focus, “the role of PSCP in developing students’ public speaking skills”, it was noticeable that most of the items got positive responses regarding the impact of the PSCP on developing their public speaking skills (Table 5).

If we look closely at the public speaking skills obtained by students due to participating in the project, the data showed high positive results. The skills of “speech organization: Introduction, Body and Transitions, and Conclusion” received a very high positive result where “To a great Extent” received 35.3%, “To a large extent” received 29.4%, and “Somewhat” received 29.4%, and 5.9% to “Little”. None of the students chose “Not at All”.

Another public speaking skill that received positive response was “adopt natural facial expressions and gestures”. The results showed that only 23.5% of the respondents responded as gaining little. However, 35%, 5.9%, and 35.3% goes to “Somewhat”, “To a large extent”, and “To a great extent”, respectively.

The item that got high results as well, was “speech organization; having a good attention-getter introduction and a clear preview or purpose statement that led the audience smoothly into the speech”. The results showed a very high positive result where “To a great Extent” received 52.9%, “To a large” extent received 11.8%, and “Somewhat” received 35.3%. None of the students chose “Little” or “Not at all”.

With regard to the PSCP’s role in developing another part of speech organization; “skills on how to conclude my speech emphasizing the main point(s) and drew the speech to a close with an effective memorable statement”, the results showed that the mean was 4.24, which is very positive. The five Likert scale used (To a great extent, To a Large Extent, Somewhat), received these results 47.1%, 29.4%, 23.5% respectively. Again, none of the students chose “Little” or “Not at all”.

“Managing time efficiently to stay within the allocated time limit skill” also got high positive results. The item received the following results: “To a great Extent” received 58.8%, “To a large extent” received 35.3%, and “Somewhat” received 5.9%, and None of the students chose “little” or “Not at all”.

Another important skill related to speech delivery was item 19, “being credible and revealing own character”. This item received high positive responses where 41.2% of the students chose benefitting from the PSCP “to a great extent”, 35% chose “to a large extent”, and 23.5 chose “somewhat”. Again none of the students chose “little” or “Not at all”.

As the speech was delivered virtually in a COIL project, one of the skills that was investigated was dealing with online communication. The results showed that the skills “of being at ease in front of a camera” received a very high positive result where “To a great Extent” received 29.4%, “To a large extent” received 35.3%, and “Somewhat” received 23.4%, and 11.8% to “Little”. Again none of the students chose “Not at all”.

Looking in general how the PSCP, this international learning experience, enriched the academic learning of public speaking of the public speaking course. The results showed that it was a rich experience, where 41.2% of the students found it useful “to a great extent” and 52.9% found it useful “to a large extent”. Only one student, 5.9% found its impact “little”. These results provide evidences that the students found the PSCP really useful in developing their public speaking skills.

The Usefulness of the Used Platforms

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics of the Usefulness of the Used Platforms

	No.	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
The platforms used for the virtual classroom meetings were supportive.	17	3	5	4.35	0.862
The platforms used for the virtual classroom meetings were easy to use.	17	3	5	4.53	0.624

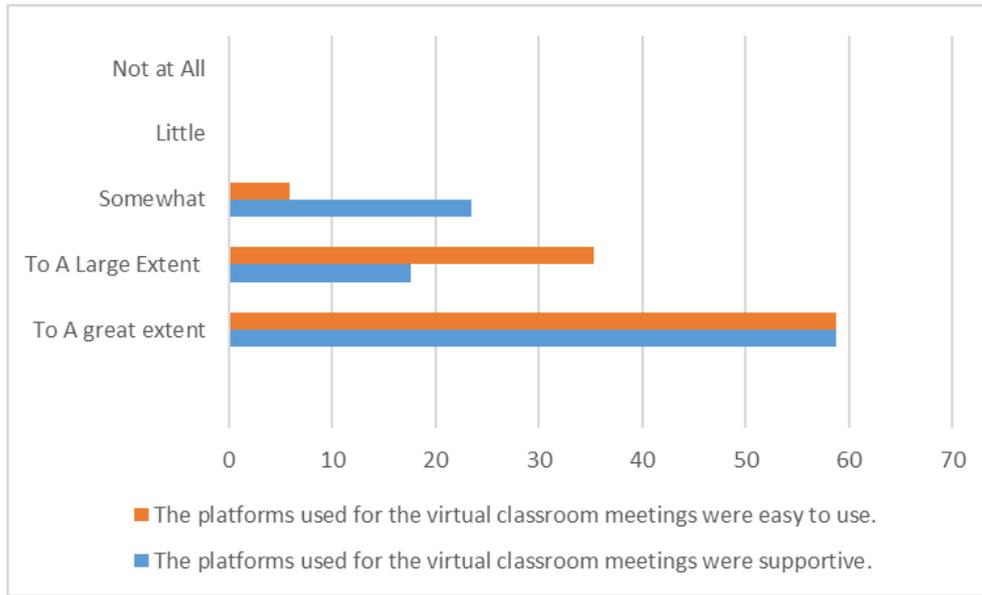


Figure 4. Project outcomes regarding the usefulness of the used platforms.

Table 6 shows the statistical results of the survey to questions that investigate the usefulness of the used platforms in the PSCP. The two relevant questions had mean answers that were significantly greater than the neutral value of 3 (4.35, and 4.18). The students found the two platforms used as supportive and easy to deliver their speech, communicate, and give feedback to their peers at WSU. 58.8% found it supportive “to a great extent”, 17.6% found it supportive “to a large extent”, and 23.5% of them found it supportive to “somewhat”.

To check how the platforms were easy to use in their classroom meetings, again students were very positive. 58.8% found it easy “to a great extent”, 35.5% found it easy “to a large extent”, and only one student, 5.9% found it easy to “somewhat”.

The Students’ Willingness to Participate in Other COIL Projects

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics of Students’ Willingness to Participate in Other COIL Projects

	No.	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
I am willing to take another course that connects me with students from other countries.	17	1	5	3.47	1.375
I am willing to participate in another international program or project.	17	3	5	4.18	0.809

Table 7 shows the statistical results of survey to questions that investigate students’ motivation and willingness to participate in other future COIL Projects. The two relevant questions had mean answers that were significantly greater than the neutral value of 3 (3.47 and 4.18). It was clear from the positive responses that the students enjoyed the experience and were willing to participate in other COIL projects. Though two students were uninterested in taking another course that connects them with students from US (“Not at all” 11.8%, “Little” 11.8), the rest of the students showed interest and willingness to participate in another international projects or programs. The chart (Figure 5) shows that approximately 99% of the students were positive and willing to participate in COIL international projects.

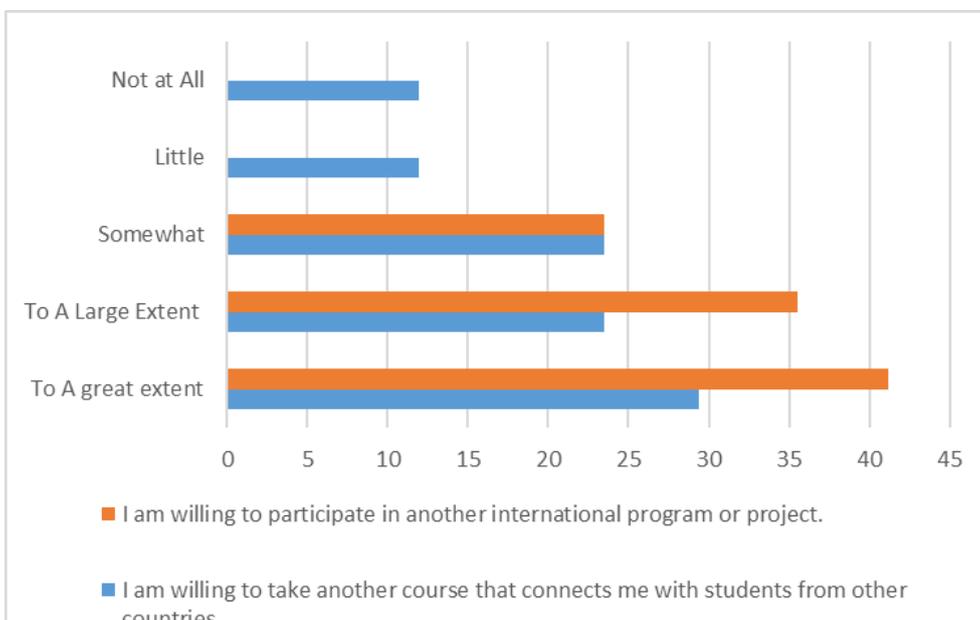


Figure 5. Project outcomes regarding the students' willingness to participate in other COIL projects.

Qualitative Data

Textural data from both the questionnaire and the SRR were managed using ATLAS ti. A codebook for the qualitative data was created, tested for inter-coder reliability, and used to code the written data.

This section outlines the outcome space, that is, the five qualitatively different categories of description, which emerged from the data. Key extracts from the SRR and the survey open-ended questions will be discussed; illustrative quotes from the reports are presented in original and without reference. The below categories reflecting student growth and transformation emerged from the qualitative data. The responses came under the following categories:

- (1) A meaningful opportunity to communicate and collaborate with students from US
- (2) Enhancing public speaking skills
- (3) Overcoming fear and weaknesses
- (4) Practice providing feedback.
- (5) Motivation to participate in the Public Speaking COIL Project (PSCP)

The table below (Table 8) shows the quantitative results from qualitative data on how many quotes have been received for each code.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics of Quotations

		Frequency	Percentage %
1	A meaningful opportunity to communicate and collaborate with students from US.	12	70.5
2	Enhancing public speaking skills.	11	64.7
3	Overcoming fear and weaknesses.	9	52.9
4	Practice providing feedback.	9	52.9
5	Motivation to participate in the Public Speaking COIL Project (PSCP).	15	88.2

If we look at the following sample of quotes obtained from the respondents, we can see that the qualitative findings strengthen the quantitative results. It also recommended ideas from the respondents' point of views on what and how COIL activities can lead to successful practices.

A Meaningful Opportunity to Communicate and Collaborate With Students From US

Many AURAK students responded very favorably to communicate and collaborate with students from the US. One student reflected, "This Coil project gave me a chance to meet people from another country and I got to know different personalities and understand them."

Students also really enjoyed their interactions with each other. One student commented: "In fact, we were able to communicate with students from other countries virtually, knowing more about them via their stories. This COIL project has helped me boost my self-confidence and my communicative skills."

One student shared that "It helped me gain my confidence; I loved to communicate with students from other countries." Another student appreciated the experience "Having a chance to practice various tasks, gave me the experience to connect with international courses, and to be able to know more about their teaching and learning styles. This is an amazing experience."

Communication and collaboration activities provide the students with suitable opportunity to enrich their intercultural awareness and speaking skills.

Enhancing Public Speaking Skills

Responses from students regarding how the PSCP enhanced their public speaking skills, the main focus of this research, indicated that students became much more aware on how to deliver speeches virtually and what skills they have obtained from this COIL project. Students seemed to have obtained many skills regarding delivering self-introduction speeches. As for delivering speeches, they mentioned how the PSCP enhanced their language and speech delivering skills. One student reflected: "It helped me to improve my English skills and delivering speeches, for example: arranging the speech in a best order."

Another student mentioned:

I've picked up a lot of skills and tactics that I must use when giving speeches, including hand gestures, the importance of having a good video setup, using your voice, and most importantly, how the tones you use affect the audience.

Other students mentioned other skills needed once delivering speeches. She said "arranging the speech in chronological order". Other students added "After this experience with the self-introduction speech, I enhanced my speaking skills." One also reflected "It helped me improve my English to a great extent."

One student commented on how the PSCP helped him to develop an important issue in verbal communication (time management). He mentioned "I learned how to prepare my speeches to fit the allocated time with all the required details. In addition to speaking with audible voice." Other student mentioned "This PSCP made me learn the techniques of delivering speeches to use them in my real life." A goal that we want to achieve, creates a generation who links their studying with real life.

One student shared that "When doing the template for the self-introduction speech I learnt how to make it descriptive and choosing a story that is meaningful to me so I can talk about it comfortably with no issues with my team."

From students' quotes, it is clear that the PSCP helped them in many ways to develop their language and public speaking skills.

Overcoming Fear and Weaknesses

The PSCP helped the students to work on their weaknesses and overcome their fears. This was really beneficial for them to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses. This was apparent in the way they gave feedback on their videos. They indicated how the project helped them to realize their strengths and weakness and how to overcome their own fears once dealing virtually with people they do not know before.

One of the students at the end of the project mentioned in his SRR:

To strengthen my weaknesses, I would work on shortening my speeches by giving all the required details, practicing frequently to gain more confidence in presenting in public for upcoming speeches, visualizing my expressions by acting naturally, and improving my tone skills.

Other student added “I intend to strengthen my areas of weakness by paying more attention to my instructor’s feedback and taking her suggestions, since I am confident that it will be helpful both now and in the future.”

One of the students really appreciated the experience as it helped him change his attitudes towards delivering speeches. He mentioned “I really liked this project because it let me face something that I don’t like to do, giving speeches. After doing it I realized that talking and asking questions are not that bad. Now I really want to have this project again.” Other student mentioned “It helped me gain my confidence. Now I love to communicate with students from the other country.”

Practice Providing Feedback

The PSCP allowed the students to practice providing feedback in a different cultural context. This was an instructive learning method for them. They learned to be culturally sensitive in their role as feedback providers. Before interacting with the WSU students, they were briefed on the cultural differences in giving feedback and communication with other cultures. This was apparent in the way they gave feedback on WSU videos. The students learned to face positive issues once giving feedback on their peers’ videos. In this way, they learned to be culturally sensitive in their communication. The data revealed positive comments about students’ appreciation for having had access to different points of view; they also indicated a high level of awareness of “self” and “other” when giving or receiving feedback from their international peers.

One of the students at the end of the project mentioned in her SRR:

After I posted my video on the platform, the curiosity on what others would think on my video was so high. However, the feedback I got was so pleasing and it made me want to do even better for my next assignment.

Other student remarked,

The opportunity to communicate with others and giving or receiving feedback on a speech made me feel completely calm before and after submitting my speech. I felt so thankful to receive positive feedback from people from other cultures. I really admire the American life and I wish they did enjoy my Arabic life from just sharing stories about our background.

One mentioned: “The best part that I liked was presenting my introduction speech to them and eagerly waiting for their responses.”

Another student reflected:

Due to the cooperation and group work that occurred in the PSCP, I have learned how to connect my concept with various cultural traditions. I have gained knowledge of the disadvantages to avoid. After introducing myself to strangers and members of other cultures, I was at first nervous about uploading because I was worried about how to begin and end my speech and what if I accidentally offended their culture or they thought it was dramatic. This anxiety faded away after I

posted my speech. I was relieved and joyful receiving positive feedback that boosted my self-confidence to give feedback on their videos.

One of the students really appreciated the experience of giving or receiving feedbacks:

I was carefully watching each video I had to provide feedback for, and I made the decision to be fair. I don't know if it's strange, but I get excited whenever I receive feedback. I was excited to hear from them because I wanted to learn from the feedback coming from other cultures.

The PSCP experience led students who took this course and dealt with students from different culture to develop both an awareness of different cultural practices in self-introduction and the ability to incorporate their new knowledge into their public speaking skills. PSCP is therefore an important way to prepare truly global graduates with cross-cultural competence and intercultural awareness.

Motivation and Recommendations to Participate in the PSCP

Responses from students regarding their motivation and willingness to participate in COIL projects indicated students' high motivation in participating in this type of education. Though few students were hesitant and feared the experience before starting the PSCP as shown in the quantitative data analysis (Table 4) the qualitative data supported the positive high results responses from students. It showed their full willingness to participate in future COIL projects.

Sample of quoted responses:

"After doing it I realized that talking and asking questions are not that bad. Now I really want to have this project again."

"It was good. It makes me feel more comfortable in future about participating in projects with people in other countries."

"This project encouraged me to join more international projects. I am really satisfied and excited for future international projects."

"I feel really happy because it made me to identify my true inner self."

"Now I feel like I can make it through other international projects with flying colors."

Students provided great ideas on how to gain a higher positive impact from the COIL activities. One student mentioned "After doing this COIL project I would highly recommend that we meet those students physically. I want to know then closely. That way, we could connect better with each other and become truly friends." Another student supported this point, he mentioned "After doing this project, I think why not we make trips outside the country. Meet students and join in more real-life classrooms, deliver face to face speeches other than online ones."

One student mentioned a very good point regarding the verifications of activities and virtual contacts. "The number of activities in the COIL project to be increased where some part of the activity is to make direct calls with the other students from the other university, example using zoom." Another student also mentioned "If it was a live classroom through zoom or Microsoft teams, I think it will be better than recording. Though I know it is difficult because of the time difference."

One student marked a very good point suggesting "Why not international relations in multiple projects/courses to be able to learn more experience and knowledge."

These great recommendations from the students' responses will help in stating our future recommendations.

Challenges and Limitations

No research is without some challenges or limitations, in the PSCP the researcher faced some challenges that can be summarized as follows.

Time Difference Challenge

Managing time zone disparities posed a significant challenge, especially with a nine-hour gap between the UAE and the US. This time difference forced us to establish an agreement that all the activities and the collaborative work be practiced during asynchronous sessions, using relevant platforms and assessment tools. Adaptability is a requirement (SUNY COIL Center, 2013).

Short Period of Project

Collaborating for only five weeks was a challenge and has limitations. Few activities were practiced. Students showed this in their report and wished to have a longer period of collaboration where they can deliver other sorts of public speeches.

Limited Size of the Sample

Given the limited size of the sample (only AURAK students were involved) it is crucial to view the findings as specific to this study, and they should not be generalized. Despite this limitation, the researcher's intention was to offer an initial evaluation of the COIL program's impact, focusing on the public speaking course. These initial findings will serve as a foundation for a more comprehensive study, which will encompass a larger sample size. In future research, we can expand the sample and involve COIL partners faculty and students to reach further findings on how to improve the overall public speaking skills and the intercultural competence of all students.

This study relied on self-reported answers by students who volunteered to participate, common method bias is expected. However, all the constructs in this study can only be measured by individual perceptions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of this study provided insights into the impact of the COIL model on students' progress toward public speaking and intercultural competence. The COIL experience embedded in the public speaking project provides several insights for language educators. This experience gave students the opportunity to start developing public speaking skills, cross-cultural sensitivity, appreciation for technology, and collaborative international learning and teaching. The AURAK students became more conscious of cultural perspectives when delivering speeches either as speakers or when providing feedback. The study proved that the three main components of the PSCP (speech delivery skills, virtual communication skills, and cross-cultural learning) strengthened the integration of multicultural perspectives in this course.

In addition, the COIL experience contributed to strengthening the partnership between the two universities and among professors. The collaboration has illustrated the feasibility of imparting knowledge about other cultures to students without the necessity of physical travel abroad. Through designing collaborative assignments and interaction structures, faculty partners from the WSU and AURAK successfully established an immersive teaching environment. Within this environment, students learned delivering introduction speech, asking and responding to raised questions, and giving oral and written feedback virtually. Furthermore, the students now appreciate the need for international learning and teaching exposure through continuing this COIL experience, and for international student exchange.

Having experienced the benefits of such a productive partnership, the researcher encourages faculty across disciplines to explore similar collaborations with universities abroad and design assignments suitable for COIL. The researcher stresses that while the COIL teaching experience is undoubtedly valuable in any course, it necessitates careful and thoughtful planning from both partners. In essence, COIL stands out as an exceptional tool for bridging global divides, fostering an understanding of cultural distinctions, promoting cultural sensitivity, and facilitating cultural transmission and exchange.

The researcher recommends the following to achieve a better impact:

- Enriching the Content and Form of the COIL Projects to Develop the Public Speaking Skills

Instructors should explore some new and diversified teaching contents, when encountering public speaking skills. All types of public speaking should be practiced among students. To develop students' speaking skills, Aristotle was advising speakers to construct their speeches for different audiences on different occasions for different effect (Parvis, 2001). Therefore, it is important in the planning process to consider the collaborative nature of the endeavor, especially while creating common learning tasks, whether synchronous or asynchronous bearing in mind the time difference.

- Enhancing Intercultural Skills

The progression toward intercultural competence is crucial for today's students to function productively and with harmony in tomorrow's ever-increasing global society (Ilie, 2019). Therefore, the topics chosen and the activities practiced should be designed to motivate students to incorporate in-depth exchanges about topics like culture, stereotypes, traditional celebrations, academic life, and future plan while delivering their speeches. Bear in mind to establish clear ground rules regarding respectful etiquette for interaction and avoid potentially sensitive topics.

- Providing Structured Reflection and Assessment

Integrate structured reflection exercises into COIL projects to encourage students to think critically about their intercultural experiences. Develop assessment tools that specifically measure intercultural competencies, delivering public speeches virtually, communication skills, and digital literacy to track and evaluate progress.

- Using Practical Communicative Platforms to Raise Virtual Skills

Before starting any COIL project, instructors need to select the right tools that they are going to use to collaborate. The platforms that help instructors plan out lessons, incorporate engaging activities, and monitor students' work, at the same friendly use by both faculty and students, will help a speaker to record, upload, and respond to their colleagues with the confidence needed without fear or frustration.

- Incorporating Diverse Technologies

Embrace a variety of digital tools and platforms to enrich the COIL experience. Explore virtual reality, collaborative online platforms, and multimedia resources to enhance both language learning and intercultural engagement.

- Training for Faculty and students before the COIL project starts

Provide professional development opportunities for faculty involved in COIL projects. This could include workshops on effective online communication, intercultural sensitivity training, and strategies for fostering public speaking skills in a virtual environment. This would reduce the negative issues that students and faculty might face before they are involved into the project.

- Establishing Partnerships

Foster and strengthen partnerships with international institutions. This could involve creating a network of institutions committed to COIL initiatives, facilitating a continuous exchange of ideas and practices.

- Continuous Research and Adaptation

Promote a culture of continuous research and adaptation. Stay abreast of emerging technologies and teaching methodologies, and be ready to refine COIL project designs based on ongoing research and feedback. The goal is not just to implement COIL projects but to continually enhance their effectiveness in preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

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