

## **Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence through Telecollaborative Modules Integrated in Foreign Language and Intercultural Communication University Courses**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In the framework of the Intercultural Communicative Competence - a Competitive Advantage for Global Employability project 14 modules targeting the development of students' intercultural communicative competence were developed by international teams of educators, piloted and implemented in 13 higher educational institutions across Europe, involving 66 educators and more than 800 students, who were the direct beneficiaries of the project. The impact of the project is felt by stakeholders, researchers, decision makers, and potential global employers, who have the benefit of a better trained and skilled workforce who can meet the demands of international business. The dissemination of the project results included a collection of 30 case studies on the implementation of the modules, providing valuable feedback by the participating educators. In addition to giving an overview of the project, the paper presents a pilot study of implementing a module including telecollaborative exchanges into teaching intercultural communication for business students. Findings from the pilot study show how (tele)collaboration provided students an opportunity to work in international teams, how it contributed to foreign language skills development and how it increased intercultural awareness and sensitivity.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Culture and Intercultural Communication**

The development of extensive and intensive international relations in economy, politics and cultural life casts light on the importance

of cultural differences in communication and behaviour, which may significantly influence success and failure in any kind of cooperation and collaboration between partners of different cultural backgrounds. The demand to clarify which cultural differences may lead to a breakdown in communication and how it is possible to overcome these difficulties first appeared in the world of business, where communicational failure can directly result in measurable financial losses. Therefore, it was international companies that first initiated and financed research in this area decades ago (Hofstede, 1997). They aimed to explore the nature of culture, identify the characteristics or dimensions of cultures that distinguished them, find reasons for the differences and help business communities overcome the difficulties that might occur when doing business abroad. Many definitions were created to explain what culture was (Hidasi, 2005; Hofstede, 1997; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2007). The most famous one is Hofstede's (1997), who said culture was the software of the mind based on a value system which was typical for a particular group of people, and as such it directed thinking, behaving, decision-making and judging.

The term intercultural communication was first used by Hall (1973) referring to communication between partners who did not belong to the same national, ethnic, or religious group. Actors of business still seem to use the term in this meaning (Loch, 2017). They agree with the essentialist view of culture (Hofstede,

1997; Hofstede et al., 2010), which claims that group characteristics dominate thinking, behaviour, and communication. However, due to globalization and multiculturalism, the interpretation of the term intercultural communication has been broadened lately. In multicultural societies, several cultures and hybrid cultures exist in parallel where there might be no typical behaviour any more (Dah, 2014; Kramsch, 2008), which has led to a new approach to interculturality. According to the new non-essentialist approach (Holliday et al., 2004; Verdooren, 2014), the individual as an actor and a constructor of his/her own culture in the actual context has a much larger role in cultural reactions than the group they belong to. Thus, now the term intercultural communication refers more aptly to the interaction between individuals who do not necessarily represent any particular national, ethnic, or religious group culture. The non-essentialist approach of intercultural communication is reflected in the definition of global competence, as proposed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD),

“Global competence is the capacity to examine local, global and intercultural issues, to understand and appreciate the perspectives and world views of others, to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development.” (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2018).

Both the essentialist and non-essentialist views of culture define intercultural competence as the complexity of skills and attitudes that enable an individual to suspend one's own beliefs about cultures (both own and other) in order to establish and maintain human relationships cross-culturally and to communicate and cooperate efficiently to accomplish tasks successfully (Dooly, 2006).

### **The ICCAGE Project**

Education has the responsibility to prepare the future generation for successfully handling the challenges in their lives. In today's heterogeneous societies and economically globalized world, developing students' intercultural competence is an important and relevant objective at all levels of education. Recognizing this important development led to an international university project called Intercultural Communicative Competence – A Competitive Advantage in Global Employability (ICCAGE) between 2015 and 2017. In the framework of the project, 14 teaching and learning modules targeting the development of students' intercultural communicative competence were developed by international teams of educators from the Czech Republic (Technical University of Prague), Portugal (Polytechnic Institute of Castelo Branco), Spain (University of Leon), and Hungary (Budapest Business School). The modules were piloted and implemented in 13 institutions of higher education (HE) across Europe; involving 66 educators and more than 800 students, who were the direct beneficiaries of the project.

In the project, open educational resources (modules) were compiled in English and Spanish (both regarded as *lingua franca*). As for the content of the modules, broad professional areas were defined such as business, management, and tourism. Foreign language courses, languages for specific purposes courses, and intercultural communication (IC) courses were identified as relevant subjects for implementing the new modules into the curricula. In order to provide an intercultural learning environment, the modules were designed to include telecollaborative exchanges which students can accomplish in cooperation with other student groups in partner institutions abroad by using information technology (IT) tools for communication. "Telecollaboration, or 'online intercultural exchange' refers to the application of online communication tools to bring together classes of language learners in geographically distant locations to develop their foreign language skills and intercultural competence through collaborative tasks and project work" (O'Dowd, 2015). On the basis of O'Dowd and Ware's (2009) task type categories, each unit includes three telecollaborative exchanges: and Information Exchange task, a Comparison and Analysis task, and a Collaborative Product task. The Information Exchange task serves the purposes of breaking the ice and getting to know each other. The Comparison and Analysis task requires the participants to collect information and data from their partners, analyse and compare them with

data from their home culture, interpret similarities and differences and summarize their findings in a presentation or a report. The Collaborative Product task requires learners to work together to produce something together, which includes a strong element of interdependence (Müller-Hartmann & O’Dowd, 2017; O’Dowd & Lewis, 2016).

**Intercultural Skills**

The most intricate decision was to define the skills targeted for development. In the project, a Council of Europe’s (2016) publication on the competences for democratic cultures and the results of a survey carried out in the scope of the project with HE educators and employers (Morgado et al., 2016) were considered to make a well-informed decision about the skills to be developed. The conceptual model of the Council of Europe consists of four categories: values, attitude, knowledge, and

skills that need to be acquired by learners if they are to participate effectively and live peacefully together with others in culturally diverse societies (Council of Europe, 2016).

In the framework of the ICCAGE project, a survey was conducted to base the material development on real needs. In the countries participating, 28 interviews were conducted with employers, and 72 with educators in higher education. In the Hungarian survey (Loch, 2017), employers agreed that the most important skills and attitude elements that might guarantee success in an inter- or multicultural environment included foreign language communication skills, ability and willingness to study, adaptability, openness and friendliness, tolerance and tact, ethical thinking and assertive behaviour. Many of the factors identified by the respondents clearly corresponded to items in the competence model of the Council of Europe (Table 1).

Table 1  
*Employers’ success factors and the model of the Council of Europe (2016)*

Council of Europe categories	Content of categories in the model	Employers’ views on keys to success
Values	Valuing: human dignity and human rights, cultural diversity, democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law	Ethical thinking
Attitudes	Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views, and practices, respect, civic-mindedness, responsibility, self-efficacy, tolerance of ambiguity	Openness and friendliness, friendliness, tolerance and tact

Table 1 (*Continued*)

Council of Europe categories	Content of categories in the model	Employers' views on keys to success
Skills	Autonomous learning skills, analytical and critical thinking skills, skills of listening and observing, empathy, flexibility, and adaptability, linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills, co-operation skills, conflict-resolution skills	Foreign language communication skills, ability and willingness to study, adaptability
Knowledge and critical understanding	Knowledge and critical understanding: of the self, of language and communication, and of the world: politics, law, human rights, cultures, religions, history, media, economies, environment	Assertive behaviour, foreign language knowledge

The educators in the survey usually elaborated on the questions more extensively. The skills they listed could be categorized as general skills, work-related skills, mobility skills, and skills related to

personal growth (Table 2). Educators and employers were also asked about what content they recommended including in an IC course, which served as a basis for material development in the project.

Table 2

*Categories of skills according to educators (based on Loch, 2017)*

Categories	Examples for categories
General skills	Acceptance, ability to study, empathy, tolerance, creativity
Work-related skills	Business communication, competitiveness, teamwork skills
Mobility skills	Openness, curiosity, adaptability, cooperativeness
Skills of personal growth	Self-reflection, revising knowledge and experience

The modules consist of a series of activities and tasks to be done either individually or in small groups autonomously, partly in class time and partly outside the classroom. The activities all

have the potential to develop several skills and subskills, but each module has a few well-definable skills or attitudinal elements to focus on (Table 3).

Table 3  
Targeted skills in the modules of the ICCAGE-project

Theme of module	Knowledge acquired	Skills/attitude targeted in particular	Skills to be developed in all modules
Moving abroad	facts about other cultures, acculturation process	adaptation, tolerance and tact, acceptance of otherness	
Living with global and local identity	knowledge about partner countries	awareness of identity, curiosity, respect	
Working in multinational teams	team roles, event organisation	cooperation skills, negotiating, making compromises	foreign language skills (listening, speaking, reading), communication skills (such as informing, asking, agreeing, disagreeing, persuading, declining, turn-taking), active listening, autonomous learning
Mediating between cultures	cultural diversity, organising a meeting	ability to think ethically, handling conflicts	skills, critical thinking, discipline and punctuality in work, IT skills, organizational skills, responsiveness and self-reflection, teamwork skills
Working with international customers	products of home and destination countries, marketing issues	business communication skills	
Dealing with time and space	time concepts, Hall's concept of context	willingness to learn, awareness of diversity	
Using English as Lingua Franca	marketing and advertising	problem solving, customer-friendly attitude	
Communicating and collaborating online	the use of IT tools, e-communication	assertiveness, active listening, IT-skills	
Launching a business abroad	launching a business, market research, marketing policy	data collection and interpretation skills, responsibility	
Planning an international holiday package	information about touring and attractions in destination countries	openness and friendliness, empathy, creativity	

The aim of developing and compiling innovative teaching material was to enhance students' intercultural awareness and communicative competence. The module activities were also expected to result in more knowledge about culture, a change in attitude towards the diversity of cultures and a growing sense of responsibility. Therefore, it was important to explore whether the implementation of a module in an existing course did or did not contribute to improvements in these areas. The study was intended to answer the following research questions:

- What kind of knowledge do the participants accumulate (if any) during the activities?
- Do the participants experience any shift in their attitude towards other cultures due to the course?
- How does collaboration work in different teaching contexts?
- How do the activities contribute to participants' communication skills?

To measure and assess the development of competences is a great challenge in education, and it is even more so in the case of intercultural communicative competence. Some items of efficient communication might be relatively easy to measure (e.g. the use of certain linguistic forms in negotiation), whilst others, and especially changes in attitude are very difficult to objectively track and assess, especially in the scope of a one-semester university course. However, feedback from teachers and learners may provide valuable information about changes

in motivation, foreign language development and the success or failure of teamwork in the teaching/learning process.

In order to explore the benefits and pitfalls of collaborative exchanges in competence development, a pilot study was conducted using an English module developed in the framework of the ICCAGE project. The study describes and summarizes the experience accumulated when implementing the relevant parts of the module titled 'Dealing with Time'. The module was piloted in three different contexts: (1) with three international groups of students without partners from abroad, (2) with an international group with partners from Norway, and (3) with a linguistically homogeneous group with partners from Portugal. The module was added to Business English and Intercultural communication courses.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **The Teaching Material**

Dealing with time is a relevant topic both in Business English and IC courses. In previous years courses included lectures on time concepts, Hall's theory on different time approaches and how they influence and modify information processing in communication (Hall, 1973). In this case, the topic of dealing with time in different cultures was taught and learnt through a series of activities provided in the module. The module includes six activities, each consisting of 3-5 tasks. The first activities contain reading and discussion tasks on the different approaches to time, and on how this

may influence communication styles. The second part contains three telecollaborative exchanges (the last of which – due to time constraints – was not used in any of the courses) which are the following:

- **Information Exchange:** An interview between students of the home institution and the partner institution abroad to get acquainted with each other.
- **Comparison and Analysis:** Preparing a short video film on how people organize their lives in terms of time in one’s country; exchanging the videos between countries; comparing and analysing information and reporting the results back to their own class.
- **Collaborative Product:** Preparing a joint calendar of the two partner countries including the descriptions of holidays and special events in the next year.

Regarding the topic, Exchange 2 (Comparison and Analysis) was the core exchange. The tasks in the exchange activities had to be slightly modified in all

the courses because of the different contexts. In the case of the first course, the groups had no partner groups from any universities abroad. However, thanks to the cultural diversity of the students in the groups, it was possible to implement most of the activities. In the case of the second course, the groups in Hungary and Norway were of very different sizes (25 vs. 7 students), which made it necessary to change the scope. In the third course, besides differences in group size, the very different scheduling of the academic year led to changes.

**Participants**

The participants were students of business, marketing or tourism at a university of applied sciences in Budapest, Hungary (Table 4), both Hungarians, and non-Hungarians who studied at the university either as full-time students or on a one-semester scholarship.

Table 4  
*The participants in the pilot study*

	Course 1 (3 groups)	Course 2 (1 group)	Course 3 (1 group)
Number of students	105	25	16
Hungarian	58	18	16
Non-Hungarian	47 (from 11 countries)	7 (from 5 countries)	-
Non-Hungarians’ country of origin	Azerbaijan, Belgium, the Netherlands, Finland, France, Germany, Laos, Tunisia, Nigeria, Vietnam, China		-



Table 4 (Continued)

	Course 1 (3 groups)	Course 2 (1 group)	Course 3 (1 group)
Partner country	-	Norway	Portugal
Number of students in the partner country		7	24
Number of videos prepared in Hungary	29	5	4
Topics of videos	Student life, Working life, Holidays, Leisure time activities, Forms of nonverbal communication		
Methods of data collection	Teacher's diary,  Case description,  Students' feedback	Teacher's course evaluation,  Students' feedback	Teacher's evaluation,  Group interview with students

*Note: Ethnic or national background may differ from citizenship.*

### Data Collection

The method of collecting data about the experiment included a teacher's diary, course descriptions and evaluations prepared by the teacher and students' feedback which was collected via questionnaires and a group interview at the end of the courses. The data from the questionnaire survey were processed statistically, but qualitative data from the teacher and the group interview were just as valuable as statistics.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Course 1

Three groups of students (altogether 105 students from Hungary and eleven other countries) did an IC course which included

the new, innovative module on dealing with time. A teacher's diary was used in the case of all the three groups to track and describe how the activities worked. The activities seemed to work well: they inspired the students to think, understand and interact. Creativity was a strong motivator in preparing their videos on the topic of time and watching fellow students' videos proved to be eye-opening. The groups were multicultural themselves, which ensured that the topic was elaborated on extensively, involving many cultures from Europe, Asia, and Africa. The cultural diversity of the groups made group formation and work organization more difficult than expected but resulted in more factual knowledge and deeper understanding according to

the teacher. In total, 29 video films of 3-5 minutes were prepared in which students recorded themselves and/or their friends talking about a time-related topic (student life, daily routine at work, leisure time, holidays) in their own cultures/countries.

Challenges faced included mainly technical problems: there was not enough storage space in the university’s learning platform for storing 29 videos, which meant it was not possible to make students watch and analyse videos of their choice outside class time. It was the teacher who selected a few videos for watching in the classroom. Comparative tables were provided for the students to record information from the videos and compare facts. Watching fellow students’ videos generated genuine interest and led to enthusiastic discussions. Using English as a lingua franca was authentic thanks to the multicultural nature of the groups.

The teacher made a list of benefits in her diary, which included genuine interest and noticeable motivation, more willingness to communicate, an increase in the percentage of students’ talk, aha-experience, clear signs of recognition and revelation and preparedness to share work in group activities (practically no students stood back when they worked on their collaboration activity).

A questionnaire was compiled to collect feedback from students at the end of the course. They were provided statements and asked to indicate on a 1-5 Likert scale to what extent they agreed with them. Table 5 shows the relevant items in the questionnaire and the mathematical average of the responses on the Likert-scale where 5 stands for I completely agree, and 1 stands for I completely disagree.

Results show that 76 % of the students agreed or completely agreed that they could

Table 5  
*The students’ feedback on the IC course (n=29)*

Statements in the questionnaire	Average of responses on a Likert-scale
I understand more about how other cultures see the world.	3.97
I understand more about how my own culture affects the way I look at the world.	4.1
I have learned how to cooperate with people from other cultures.	4.06
I understand I need to adapt my language and way of communicating to others’ needs.	4.06
I realise that cultural diversity in business environments is something I need to study more about.	4
I realise that I need to study more about how other cultures work and communicate in business contexts.	4

Table 5 (Continued)

Statements in the questionnaire	Average of responses on a Likert-scale
I understand that although cultures influence people, not all people from the same culture act the same way.	4.28
I have learned how to use online tools to communicate and collaborate with people from other cultures.	3.45

understand their own cultures and others' too, more than before, they had learned how to cooperate with people from other cultures and they understood that they needed to study more about how other cultures work and communicate in business contexts. They also understood that people even from the same culture might be different (83%). The lowest percentage (66%) refers to learning how to use online communication tools, which, as written comments indicate, shows that most students were already familiar with the IT tools they used in the activities.

At the end of the questionnaire, the participants were offered the opportunity to write about what they had learned during the activities. Comments were varied and basically very positive. Most of the comments fell into two categories. They either focused on communication skills or referred to cultural learning, for example as follows,

"I think I have learned the way how to cooperate people if they are foreigners. Firstly, I was afraid a little bit because of the language difference but then gave me lots of confidence."

"I think I learned a lot about myself and others also, the way we behave

and why we behave like that. I think this course was very useful for me because I'm sure that can use this knowledge in the future."

"I learned that when there is a conflict it is most of the time because of cultural differences and not because people actually mean to hurt others. In order to deal with those conflicts, it is really important to learn about other cultures and to understand them. Just because something is different it does not mean it is not right."

## Course 2

Course 2 was attended by 25 students from Hungary and five other countries all studying in the home institution. The group had a partner group of seven students from a university in Norway. In order to match the curricula in the two universities and to handle the difference in group size, the original activities were modified. However, the telecollaborative exchange of preparing a video and conducting an interview via Skype remained the core activity of the course. A common online platform was set up by the Norwegian partner teacher where students uploaded their videos and the records of

their interviews via Skype. The online platform worked very well and technical challenges were related to skyping mainly. Another challenge for the students was to arrange interviews between one person at one end, and 3-5 students at the other end of the line. Also, some of the students from Norway were more mature students, which first surprised and embarrassed Hungarian students (a cultural issue). Although the activities were accomplished, the benefits of telecollaboration could hardly compensate for the difficulties that the teacher reported on. Difficulties included the difference in group size, which did not allow all the students to participate in either the video-making or the Skype interview to the same extent. Some students stood back from active participation in teamwork, either because they did not want to work hard, or because there were too many contributors, which led to the loss of motivation. Some other students had serious difficulties with the Skype interview, either technically or it was too difficult for them to arrange an interview date that was convenient for all the members of the group. As the telecollaboration activity was part of the course requirements, students who had difficulties were asked to find an interview partner even outside the project, which meant much extra work for the student and the teacher alike.

At the end of the course, the students were asked to give feedback on teamwork and their own contribution to it. Twenty-one students responded to the questions and their responses strongly supported the teacher's

evaluation of the course. More than half of the respondents explicitly stated that they were satisfied with their groups (some even said they became friends). Quite a few students mentioned that though they worked together with enthusiasm, time management and leadership skills were still to be learnt. However, 9 out of the 21 respondents (40%) said that the work was not equally distributed in their teams and some students practically did not contribute to the project at all, some were even impossible to contact outside the class. Three students indicated that they did not like teamwork because they felt more comfortable when they were allowed to work individually. With a few exceptions, the students found both tasks (video film-making and interview with a partner abroad) very interesting, unusual, and therefore inspiring and useful. However, they also mentioned difficulties that they were or were not able to overcome such as finding time slots convenient for everybody, organizing themselves, communication within the group, punctuality, keeping deadlines, and technical problems. Table 6 contains samples of students' feedback on aspects of their collaboration tasks that are relevant to the present research.

The teacher admitted that she had expected telecollaboration with students from a university abroad to be even more promising in terms of efficiency, independent learning, learning by sharing, and personal growth than working with an international group within the home institution. However, this expectation was fulfilled for only some of the students. The difficulties they faced

often resulted in frustration, and loss of motivation.

Table 6

*Sample responses from students' feedback*

Research areas	Sample answers
Culture knowledge	<p>“It was a great feeling getting to know nice people from different cultures.”</p> <p>“I like the interview more than the film because it was a big thing for me to get to know foreign people in front of the screen.”</p>
Collaboration	<p>“I loved my team. We managed to make ourselves understood really easily. Every member of the group participated in the tasks and working with them was something unforgettable.”</p> <p>“Next time I would like that everyone has his/her own part and not one or two people do everything alone and the others not so much or nothing.”</p> <p>“Only 2 or max. 3 people in one group, no more!!! For 5-6 people it's too difficult to find free time for the same days.”</p>
Team roles in collaboration	<p>“Next time I would take the role of a leader and coordinate the tasks so we can finish everything faster or earlier.”</p> <p>“I could help a lot when we had to collect information for being able to prepare the video ... My weakness during the video was that I didn't want to act so I just gave my voice to the video, maybe once I will be more brave.”</p> <p>“There's a girl who organised the work and tells us what we need to do.”</p>

Table 6 (Continued)

Research areas	Sample answers
Communication skills	<p>“We could communicate politely and have been kind.”</p> <p>“My strength was that I looked around for many information, though I could have had a better practice in English.”</p> <p>“Sometimes it was hard for me to make myself understood.”</p> <p>“I made the running of the interview ... it was a good practice.”</p> <p>(in the interview) “We talked a lot for almost more than 40 minutes, which I think is a lot for an interview.”</p> <p>“I think I did well my job, but also have something I’m not satisfied. In the interview part, I joined but just talked a little bit.”</p> <p>“Next time I would participate even more.”</p> <p>“The interview would have been better if we have done it one-to to one.”</p>
IT literacy	<p>“I was supposed to record the interview, which I’m sad about because the software was not compatible with Skype, so we couldn’t record the whole group with video.”</p>

*Note: The students’ responses are quoted in their original form.*

### Course 3

Parts of the same module on dealing with time were introduced into a Business English course the syllabus of which does not include intercultural communication topics explicitly. However, teaching and learning a foreign language always include cultural and intercultural elements, which may become particularly significant in the context of business English. Time related issues such as punctuality and keeping to deadlines are important aspects of efficient business communication and cooperation. Therefore, dealing with time was a relevant

topic for business students. The course was attended by 16 Hungarian students, who worked in groups of four throughout the course. Each group was assigned one of the topics in the module to prepare a video film on it for their partner groups in Portugal. The partner students in Portugal worked on the same topics. The activity (agreed on by the teachers in Hungary and Portugal respectively) was intended to include the following steps: making videos, contacting partners, exchanging videos, comparing facts, and preparing a comparative presentation.

The activities were not fully completed mainly due to differences in scheduling, but telecollaboration did take place and provided lessons to learn. On the basis of a teacher's evaluation sheet and a group interview, findings from the previous two case descriptions were confirmed both in terms of benefits (enhanced motivation, more intense communication, increased awareness of cultural diversity) and in terms of difficulties (time management problems and technical difficulties). The only essential difference was that in the third case, linguistically homogeneous students worked together in both institutions, and therefore, the communication in English was not guaranteed while working on the product (the video film) in and outside the classroom.

There were three questions asked across the different courses (n=47). The responses show that the large majority of the students (96%) enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity to work together with students from other countries. 72% of the students agreed that they gained confidence in communication during the courses, and more than half of the students (64%) reported that they felt more open to other people than before learning about intercultural communication, which might be interpreted as a shift in attitude to cultural differences.

## CONCLUSIONS

The reason behind developing and implementing this module was the intention to raise intercultural awareness and enhance skills development through an intercultural learning context in which (1) students can

discover, share and accumulate knowledge on cultural differences and similarities; (2) students can develop their communication and IT skills in meaningful interactions; and (3) students can develop their general working skills such as time management, organizing teamwork and collaboration.

The module activities fulfilled the expectations. Students' feedback gave evidence of accumulating knowledge (both factual and conceptual), growing cultural awareness, experiencing teamwork positively and intensive communication practice, which led to language skills development.

The benefits of introducing similar innovative modules into higher education courses and supporting internationalization either transnationally or within the institution, include an increased level of students' motivation and independence in the learning process, the efficiency of experience-based learning and the advantages of sharing knowledge and learning by doing. It seems crucial to provide an inter/multicultural environment to achieve these goals, however, the difficulties and pitfalls of telecollaboration transnationally cannot be overlooked. The most important problems identified in the present study include the following: differences in curricula and course requirements, the different scheduling of the academic year, group size, cooperation between teachers transnationally and technical difficulties. Working with international groups of students within the same institution, however, seems to be an ideal solution to most of these problems.

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