

## ***Nice to E-Meet You* Program to Facilitate EFL Lower High School Students' Intercultural Communicative Competence: A Case Study from Indonesia**

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### **Abstract**

Studies on cultural exchange through telecollaboration have been widely documented, yet more studies need to be done to explore the enactment of telecollaboration focusing on lower high school students in partnership with multiple partners situated in non-Anglophone contexts. In response to this empirical void, the present study delves into a case of telecollaboration by portraying how a school holiday's English camp program, *Nice to E-Meet You*, facilitated students' Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) and how students conceptualized their ICC development. Five lower secondary school students in a private school located in the eastern part of Indonesia partook in the program for four weeks by engaging in a series of cultural exchange activities mediated by Zoom with fellow learners and English speakers from Egypt, Italy, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, and the Philippines. The dataset was collected from semi-structured interviews, stimulated recall interviews, classroom observation, and reflective journals. The findings revealed that the *Nice to E-Meet You* program facilitated students' ICC as manifested in five emerging elements of Byram's (1997) ICC model, and the students appeared to undergo an evolvement in each element during the program. The encouraging outcomes of the *Nice to E-Meet You* program were made possible by the application of different experiential learning methods, diverse topics on the surface and deep cultures, and the engagement of multiple partners.

*Keywords:* Intercultural communicative competence (ICC), *Nice to E-Meet You* program, telecollaboration.

## Introduction

Extensive research has addressed telecollaboration, which is understood as the use of online communication tools to link groups of language learners (O'Dowd, 2015; O'Dowd & Ritter, 2006) and teachers (Batunan et al., 2023) for learning collaboration in geographically dispersed locations. With regards to students, telecollaboration has shown to enhance students' Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in various empirical studies (see Barbosa & Ferreira-Lopes, 2021; Dugartsyrenova & Sardegna, 2019; Duraisingh et al., 2021; Hagley, 2020; Kim, 2020; Luo & Gao, 2022; Martí & Fernández, 2016; O'Dowd, 2021; Okumura, 2020; Toscu & Erten, 2020). Despite the significant amount of research dedicated to exploring how telecollaboration promotes students' ICC, many of the previous studies have employed mixed methods to gather data (Shadiev & Sintawati, 2020). Furthermore, these studies have focused on telecollaboration between students from inner-circle and outer or expanding-circle countries, disregarding participants' previous engagement with interculturality. Within the mixed methods, many previous studies have used quantitative instruments such as questionnaires (Pasand et al., 2021; Taskiran, 2020) and surveys (Chen & Yang, 2016; Hagley, 2020) to collect data. However, these methods tend to treat ICC as a static and fixed variable, overlooking the possibility of cultural transformation and permeation across cultural boundaries. Although Bueno-Alastuey and Kleban (2016) employed qualitative data-collection instruments, their study only involved bilateral partnerships between two countries. In the context of telecollaboration, ongoing scholarly discussions have documented that it mainly involves participants from inner-circle countries and outer or expanding-circle countries, leaving the need for further investigation of how telecollaboration is situated in non-Anglophone milieu among participants from outer and expanding-circle countries (Freiermuth & Huang, 2021; Pasand et al., 2021). Interestingly, the majority of previous works on telecollaboration have investigated collaboration focusing between two countries (Akiyama, 2017; Bray & Iswanti, 2012; Chen & Yang, 2016; Dugartsyrenova & Sardegna, 2019; Freiermuth & Huang, 2021; Kim, 2020; Lee & Markey, 2014; Shadiev & Sintawati, 2020). In other words, telecollaboration with participants from one particular country in partnership with multiple partners from different countries is under-explored. Given the paucity of zooming in on the implementation of telecollaboration in Indonesia's context, studies (Avgousti, 2018; Shadiev & Sintawati, 2020) chronicled a focal emphasis on the enactment of telecollaboration at the tertiary level. As for study participants, literature has documented the implementation of telecollaboration involving participants from various countries with qualitative data garnering (Lázár, 2015; O'Dowd, 2021); these studies primarily include such study participants' backgrounds as gender, level of education, English proficiency level, and age, while overlooking their previous engagement in intercultural communication or their experiences living or traveling abroad.

In view of these current research gaps, the present study aimed to zoom in on the implementation of telecollaboration focusing on lower high school students situated in the eastern part of Indonesia. Lensing from a qualitative single case study, this study delved into their partnership with multiple tandem partners from outer and expanding circle countries, Egypt, Italy, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, and the Philippines.

## Review of Related Literature

### The Underpinning Theoretical Framework

Byram's ICC model has been the underpinning theory for many investigations on classroom activities and instructional materials for cultural competence. Apart from its significant contribution to specifically capturing what elements construct a good intercultural speaker, Byram's ICC model has been criticized and deemed insufficient to accommodate the intricate facets of today's world's flourishing intercultural communication (Hoff, 2020). Byram (1997) postulates the intercultural competence model under five elements comprising knowledge (*saviors*), attitude (*savoir être*), skill of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*), and critical awareness (*savoirs'engager*). Knowledge (*saviors*) domain refers to the repertoire knowledge of "social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction" (p. 51). Skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*) are defined as the capacity to "interpret a document or event from another culture, explain it, and relate it to documents from one's own" (p. 52). Skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*) comprise the ability to "acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes, and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction" (p. 52). Attitudes (*savoir être*) are connected to "curiosity and openness" as well as a "readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own" (p. 50). Critical awareness (*savoirs'engager*), deals with the ability to "evaluate critically on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices, and products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (p. 53).

Following Byram's (1997) ICC model, previous studies mostly used it as the underpinning framework within the context of bilateral partnerships. Schenker (2012), for example, documented a telecollaboration conducted between German and American students mediated by email. The findings suggest that the intercultural competence elements manifested in students' curiosity and openness, knowledge of social groups and their products, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness and political education during the intercultural exchange between these two groups of students. Another study investigated the telecollaboration between Korean and American fifth graders that lasted for 14 weeks (Kim, 2020), guided by tourist and tour guide approaches mediated by a social networking service called *Classing*. The study showed that students demonstrated curiosity and openness towards their interlocutors' cultures as they served as cultural representatives in sharing their host cultural knowledge with their partners. Another relevant piece of research that utilized Byram's (1997) ICC model was conducted by Arshavskaya (2018), involving university students in American universities to see the effectiveness of ethnographic interviews. This study suggests that students from different cultural backgrounds in the experimental group enhanced their knowledge of other cultures while also becoming more cognizant of their own cultures. Unlike those previous studies, Üzümlü et al. (2020) grounded their study in Byram's model in the context of telecollaboration between junior American and senior Turkish university students mediated by Edmodo. The students engaged in Byram's ICC elements during the sessions. In this light, previous studies suggest little is known about seeing the five ICC elements in multicultural contexts. As a result, this present study aims at filling the void in the current discourse of intercultural learning by applying Byram's (1997) ICC model situated in multicultural contexts involving Indonesian EFL lower high school students in partnership with peers, teachers, and non-native English speakers from outer and expanding circle countries mediated by Zoom.

## Research on Telecollaboration and ICC

The ongoing scholarly discussion about intercultural competence has drawn upon the nature of ICC, study context, and research participants. Previous studies with quantitative data collection strategies, such as surveys and questionnaires, tend to view ICC as a stable entity. Using an experimental design, Pasand et al. (2021) intended to see whether Iranian EFL students' intercultural sensitivity (IS) development is mediated by online interactions among students from various cultural backgrounds. The first experimental group outperformed the control group in IS, according to the results of participant responses to a questionnaire. Utilizing a survey for data collection, Hagley (2020) investigated the effects of Virtual Exchange on beginner EFL Japanese students' cultural and intercultural sensitivity. The study revealed that students improved their IS, appreciation of different cultures, confidence in interactions, and drive to acquire the L2. As for the study context, telecollaboration centers on the bilateral partnership, which is insufficient to foster multiculturalism among students. A study conducted by Bray and Iswanti (2012) examined the enactment of virtual exchange meetings engaging 47 junior Japanese university students in asynchronous collaboration with 28 sophomore Indonesian university students using Facebook. The finding suggests that Facebook serves as an exchange venue for students to learn English and cultures. Dugartysrenova and Sardegna (2019) investigated how Russian pre-service students, in tandem with students from the USA, perceived telecollaboration as a means to foster intercultural knowledge and skills mediated by Voxopop, an asynchronous oral tool. The findings demonstrated that Russian students highly appreciated telecollaboration and its implementation, along with the advantages of the audio-based computer-mediated communication (CMC) tool for facilitating their engagement in large-scale cross-cultural exchanges and developing their L2 and technological skills. Regarding the study participants' background information, most reported studies (see Angelova & Zhao, 2016; Chen & Yang, 2016; Liaw & Master, 2010; Loranc-Paszyk et al., 2021) did not delineate the previous intercultural engagement or experiences, for example, interaction with people from varied cultural backgrounds. This reviewed literature implied that future research needs to pay heed to the dynamics of ICC by scrutinizing study participants' past intercultural engagement and experiences in formal and informal settings to provide more comprehensive and robust data. In addition, inquiries involving participants in multiple transatlantic cultural exchanges to foster multiculturalism are worthy of further investigation.

In data garnering, previous researchers mostly applied quantitative and qualitative data-collecting methods to portray ICC elements. From a qualitative perspective, for example, Kim (2020) investigated a case study of telecollaboration focusing on attitude and knowledge between fifth-grader Korean and American students facilitated by Classting by utilizing observations, field notes, and interviews using qualitative content analysis procedures. Luo and Gao (2022) examined attitude and knowledge in a telecollaboration exchange mediated by WeChat between university students in America and China by utilizing multiple qualitative data-garnering instruments such as discussion transcripts, videoconferencing audio recordings, reflection journals, and interviews. They analyzed the collected data using grounded-theory approach. Unlike these two previous studies, the present study utilized semi-structured interviews, stimulated recall interviews, classroom observation, and reflective journals to collect data, coupled with an interpretative approach for the data analysis. The present study aims at delving into the enactment of telecollaboration situated in non-Anglophone contexts involving junior high school students in collaboration with multiple tandem partners from several countries. This qualitative case study can thus contribute to expanding our understanding of how telecollaboration is executed in the context of multiple transatlantic cultural exchanges. The research may also offer some practical implications for the enactment

of telecollaboration at the lower high school level in partnership with multiple tandem partners from outer and expanding circle countries facilitate students' ICC. The following research questions are especially addressed in this present study:

1. How does the *Nice to E-Meet You* program facilitate students' ICC?
2. How do students conceptualize their ICC development?

## Method

### Research Design

The present study applied a single-case study design. The design was employed because this study closely investigated and explored a case of the enactment of telecollaboration from under-explored contexts, situated in the eastern part of Indonesia involving lower high school students to gain more comprehensive findings. Furthermore, Yin (2018) believes that a case study can be used to assess a particular case, for example, the enactment of a program. In this scenario, this study aimed to scrutinize how the *Nice to E-Meet You* program facilitated students' ICC and how the students conceptualized their ICC development.

### Research Context and Participants

The study participants involved five students (four girls and one boy) from a private junior high school situated in North Sulawesi province, Indonesia. These participants were selected through purposive sampling by considering their internet stability and availability for the meetings. They were ninth graders aged thirteen to fourteen years old and were in A2 to B2 levels in reference to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) scale. The participants were able to speak Manadoese, Indonesian, and English. Students encountered first-hand intercultural experiences with people from different tribes and were in contact with foreign tourists from China and some English-speaking countries. Their exposure to multiculturalism in formal schooling was gained through an annual event, the so-called cultural week, where they were assigned to explore Indonesia's traditional songs, dances, musical instruments, and cuisines. The school organized "Pekan Nusantara" every October, where students collaborated in groups to create presentations and posters about various ethnicities in Indonesia. These students engaged the guests (friends, instructors, and parents) by performing traditional songs and dances while costumed in traditional attire. The visitors were also given local cuisine. Below is the participant demographic information, as seen in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Participant demographic information*

Pseudonym	Gender	Age (years)	English proficiency
Amanda	Female	13	B2
Anna	Female	14	A2
Cindy	Female	14	B1
Jean	Female	14	B1
Nick	Male	14	B1

The tandem partners and guest speakers for the *Nice to E-Meet You* program hailed from Egypt, Italy, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, and the Philippines. The tandem partners were six students from Egypt and seven students from Malaysia from the age of 11 to 14 years old. An Egyptian English teacher taught English at a private institution, and the other two Malaysian English teachers worked for state schools. The guest speakers came from all walks of life. The first guest speaker was an Italian female 28 years old (Federica) who currently lives in Lithuania. The second guest speaker was a 35-year-old male secondary school teacher (Dante) from the Philippines. The third guest speaker, a Mexican in her 20's (Ayesha), spoke English fluently. The fourth guest speaker was a 35-year-old male from Madagascar (Toky) who worked as an electronic engineer. These students, teachers, and English speakers were linked through various Facebook groups from our connections.

### Goals and Activities of the Nice to E-Meet You Program

The goals of this program were to instill the World Englishes paradigm, enhance students' speaking proficiency, and strike up a friendship with people across the globe. This program had three main activities: cultural presentations, storytelling performances, and guest talks. In the cultural presentation session, the students did a presentation of Indonesia's cuisine, traditional dances, tourist attractions, and landmarks to their peers across the globe. After the presentation, the students did quizzes about the presentation and were distributed into breakout rooms in which they would have more opportunities to interact with their fellow learners under some guiding questions. Then, they needed to go back to the main room to share their takeaways after conversing with their peers. In the storytelling performances, the students introduced their local cultures by performing Indonesian folktales like *Maling Kundang* (an ungrateful son who was cursed into stone by his mother) and *Timun Mas* (a girl who deceived a giant who tried to devour her). The students discussed the story in detail by interviewing each other. For instance, the questions centered on what they liked and disliked about the story; what they would like to change in the story; the question they would like to ask the author, the most exciting part of the story that they learned; and their feelings about the story. In brief, these students were encouraged to share their interview results and the takeaways from the discussions in the main room. In the guest session activities, speakers from other countries (Italy, Madagascar, Mexico, and the Philippines) introduced their cultures to the students. The guest talk was conducted in an interactive way in which both parties exchanged information and negotiated meaning by clarifying, asking questions, and explaining. Table 2 presents the overview of the program.

Table 2

#### *Overview of the Program*

<b>Phase/Topic</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Participants</b>
Week 1 Day 1 “Briefing and Introduction to Culture Understanding”	1) To obtain sufficient information about the <i>Nice to E-Meet You</i> program 2) To understand the concept of culture and cultural elements 3) To build up students' cultural knowledge	1) Classical discussion about the aim of the program and the types of the activities/projects 2) Classical discussion about the concept of culture and cultural elements through iceberg analogy and authentic materials	Teacher researcher and fellow participants

		3) Host cultural elements exploration through digital search and interviews with elders	
Week 1 Day 2 “Let's See the World through Your Lens”	1) To understand the concept of high and low contexts cultures 2) To build up students' cultural knowledge 3) To build up students' presentation skills	1) Classical discussion about high and low contexts cultures 2) Group and classical discussions about breakdown communication scenarios 3 Discussion about Indonesia's cultural diversity and outlines of cultural elements for presentation sharing	Teacher researcher and fellow participants
Week 1 Day 3 “Let's See the World through Your Lens”	1) To build up students' presentation skills 2) To build up students' cultural knowledge	Presentation and simulation of PowerPoint slides	Teacher researcher and fellow participants
Week 1 Day 4 “Let's See the World through Your Lens”	1) To build up students' communication and presentation skills 2) To build up students' cultural knowledge and attitude of open-mindedness and respect, the skills of interpreting and discovery	Cultural presentations using PowerPoint and question-and-answer sessions  Exploration of host and tandem partner cultures through discussion in breakout rooms and main rooms	Teacher and students from Egypt
Week 2 Day 1 “Indonesia Meets Malaysia: Let's Share Our Stories”	1) To understand what elements construct a story and make someone a good storyteller	Discussion about the elements of storytelling and what qualities make someone a good storyteller	Teacher researcher and fellow participants
Week 2 Day 2 “Indonesia Meets Malaysia: Let's Share Our Stories”	1) To build up students' storytelling skills 2) To build up students' cultural knowledge	Storytelling performance about local folklores/folktales assisted with PowerPoints  Host culture exploration of folktales/folklores through discussion in the main room and breakout rooms	Teacher researcher and fellow participants
Week 2 Day 3 “Indonesia Meets Malaysia: Let's Share Our Stories”	1) To get exposed to folklores and folktales from tandem's partner and perform storytelling to share Indonesia's folklores and folktales 2) To build up students' cultural knowledge and attitude of open-mindedness and respect, the skills of interpreting and discovery, and critical awareness	Storytelling performances assisted with realia and media  Host and tandem partner cultures exploration of folklores and folktales through discussion in pairs in breakout rooms	Teacher and students from Malaysia
Week 2 Day 4 “The Philippines”	1)To find out as much as possible information about the Philippine cultures	Digital search and questions formulation about the Philippines' cultures	Teacher researcher and fellow participants

	2) To build up students' cultural knowledge and skills in interpreting		
Week 3 Day 1 "The Philippines"	1) To get more understanding of the Philippines' cultures 2) To build up students' cultural knowledge and attitude of open-mindedness and respect, the skills of interpreting and discovery, and critical awareness	Guest Talk and discussion	Guest speaker from the Philippines
Week 3 Day 2 "Family Role"	1) To find out as much as possible information about Italian cultures 2) To build up students' cultural knowledge and skills in interpreting	Digital search and questions formulations about Italian cultures	Teacher researcher and fellow participants
Week 3 Day 3 "Family Role"	1) To get more understanding of Italian cultures 2) To build up students' cultural knowledge and attitude of open-mindedness and respect, the skills of interpreting and discovery, and critical awareness	Guest Talk engagement and discussion	Guest speaker from Italy
Week 4 Day 1 "Mexican Cultures"	1) To find out as much as possible information about Mexico 2) To build up students' cultural knowledge and skills in interpreting	Digital search and questions formulation about Mexico cultures	Teacher researcher and fellow participants
Week 4 Day 2 "Mexican Cultures"	1) To build up students' cultural knowledge and attitude of open-mindedness and respect, the skills of interpreting and discovery, and critical awareness	Guest Talk and discussion	Guest speaker from Mexico
Week 4 Day 3 "Let's Dive into Madagascar's Flora and Fauna"	1) To find out as much as possible information about Madagascar 2) To build up students' cultural knowledge and skills in interpreting	Digital research and questions formulation about Madagascar cultures	Guest speaker from Madagascar
Week 4 Day 4 "Let's Dive into Madagascar's Flora and Fauna"	1) To build up students' cultural knowledge and attitude of open-mindedness and respect, the skills of interpreting and discovery, and critical awareness	Guest Talk and discussion	Guest speaker from Madagascar

*Note: The teacher researcher was one of us (the first author)*



## **Research Instruments and Data Collection**

Empirical data were garnered from the semi-structured interviews, stimulated recall interviews, classroom observations, and reflective journals.

### ***Semi-structured Interviews***

We conducted individual semi-structured interviews with the participants who attended the *Nice to E-Meet You* program. The interview comprised six questions to address students' conceptualization of their ICC development. The questions focused on their previous, current, and future encounters with intercultural experiences. First, questions 1 and 2 about students' previous intercultural encounters examined their intercultural communication experiences so far and how interculturality was addressed in their daily learning experiences. Second, questions 3 and 4 about their current ICC during the program (attitude, skills, knowledge, and awareness) asked about how ICC elements were reflected during the program. Third, questions 5 and 6 about students' future ICC projection covered their expectations about their intercultural communication, questioning learners' future expectations about how they would apply the gained understanding, knowledge, and skills and keep engaging in intercultural interaction. The interviews were conducted in Indonesian language and lasted for 20 minutes for each participant at the program's end. The interview was recorded with the students' and parents' consent.

### ***Classroom Observation and Stimulated Recall Interviews***

Classroom observations were applied during online exchange meetings to capture the critical incidents happening during the sessions and see how five ICC elements were manifest in students' behavior, utterances, and interaction with the teachers, fellow learners, and non-native English speakers from abroad. In the stimulated recall interviews, we would review their observations during the *Nice to E-Meet You* program and ask students to recall their experiences. For example, we would delve further into Byram's ICC model reflected during the meeting in the stimulated recall interviews.

### ***Reflective Journals***

During the *Nice to E-Meet You* program, the students were assigned to compose their weekly reflective journals in Indonesian language and submit them at the close of each week. Their innermost feelings pertaining to ICC elements during the program's enactment were documented. The reflection inquiry dealt with their initial impressions of the virtual ICC program, any lessons they learned from it, and their future expectations of the program.

## **Data Analysis**

We applied a systematic interpretive approach to analyze the data. In the first place, all the recorded interviews on students' ICC development were transcribed and translated. The translated version was then sent to the participants for member checking. After the participants reviewed and acknowledged the translated version, it was sent back for further amendment

based on their feedback. Next, each interview transcript was first scrutinized to identify the specific ICC elements (knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness) the participants held during the program. The emerging themes were then categorized and compared across different interviews (regular interview and stimulated recall interview) to illuminate possible ICC facilitation categories of each participant, which were further reexamined and re-assembled by drawing on Byram's (1997) ICC framework to spell out how the program facilitates students' ICC development. We also reviewed and transcribed the video recordings during the program. A series of relevant ICC episodes were transcribed and analyzed to reflect on the process of the program facilitating students' ICC development. Relevant data germane to their ICC dimensions in the reflective journals were triangulated with the other data sources (semi-interviews and recall interviews). To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the findings, the researchers applied data triangulation, member checking, and intercoder agreement. In the data triangulation, we used several data instruments to crisscross the collected dataset. During member checking, participants were also asked to offer feedback on how the results were interpreted; these comments were taken into account as the final analysis was being refined. In intercoder agreement, after analyzing the data individually, we built a consensus about how to analyze the data under the same perspective and approach (Nunan & Bailey, 2009).

### ***Sample Coding Process***

The garnered data from semi-structured interviews, stimulated recall interviews, classroom observations, and students' reflective journals were analysed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) procedure illuminated by Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence model (1997). In practice, we went through these stages carefully to become familiar with the data, generating initial codes, pinning down emergent themes, evaluating the themes, assigning names to the themes, and reporting. Table 3 is presented to illustrate how we coded the data and labelled the induced themes

**Table 3**  
*Procedure in coding the themes*

<b>Transcription</b>	<b>Code Theme</b>	<b>Induced Theme</b>
<i><b>Amanda:</b> "In the coaching session, our teacher reminded us to talk equally to ourselves and our partners. We were encouraged to speak as much as possible and, at the same time, we should give the same amount of our time listening to our friends talking. We needed to listen attentively without interrupting our interlocutors"</i>	✓ Being aware of what attitude should they present in their engagement in intercultural communication: don't dominate the conversation and don't interrupt	<b>Skills of discovery and interacting</b>
<i>"...The second is on tourist attractions in Egypt or historical places in Egypt. I really want to visit these places. Because the shape of the building there is unique and different, it is also</i>	✓ Students' curiosity drove her to search for further information on the internet	<b>Attitude</b>

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*gorgeous... I think those places have a lot of history. The third is in the food in Egypt. **On the internet**, I saw that the foods in Egypt look delicious and have their own specialties”*

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## Findings

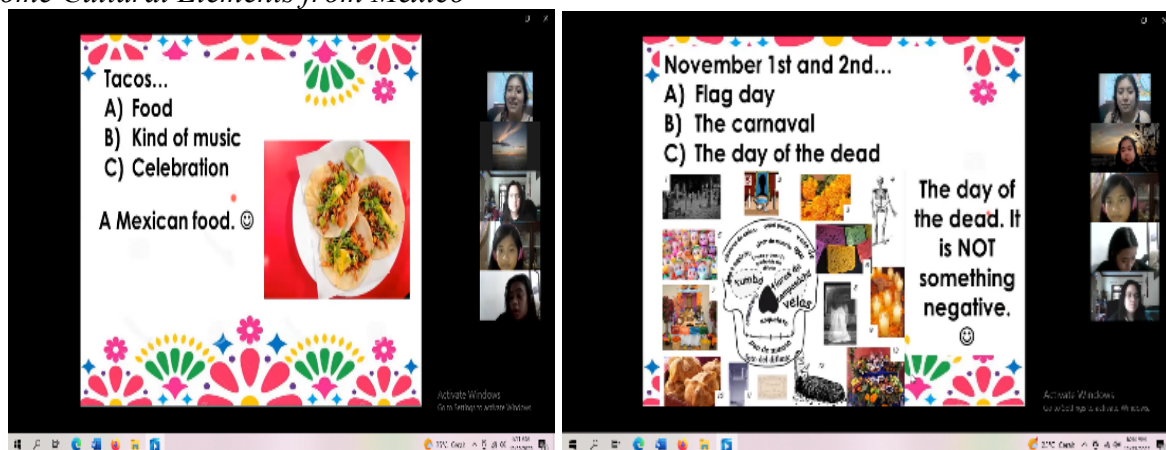
The data from students' semi-structured interviews, stimulated recall interviews, classroom observations, and students' reflective journals disclosed how the *Nice to E-Meet You* program facilitated students' ICC and how the students conceptualized their ICC development (past, present, and future).

### How does the Nice to E-Meet You program facilitate students' ICC?

#### *Expanding Students' Cultural Knowledge Repertoire*

Byram's first element of the intercultural model, knowledge (*saviors*), was manifested in the program. Partaking in exchange meetings was likely to build up students' cultural knowledge about the products, practices, and perspectives of their host and tandem partners' cultures. In a guest talk program with the speaker from Mexico, for example, the speaker shared Mexican cultural elements like food, music, dance, and some Mexican festivals as well as celebrations. Furthermore, she opened up a two-way interaction between her and the participating students by not only presenting her cultures but also requesting them to explain their host cultural elements to exchange information.

Figure 1  
*Some Cultural Elements from Mexico*



The speaker presented a picture on the screen and asked the students to guess what *Tacos* was and asked them to guess the ingredients of the food and explained how to make it. Then, she asked the students to explain one famous cuisine from Indonesia and how to prepare this food. She also expanded the presentation of Mexican cultures by bringing in the day of death by connecting it to a movie, *Coco*, and further explaining how they celebrate it. They celebrated that day by putting up an altar containing favorite food or objects by their deceased

ones, having a festival in city hall, visiting the grave by bringing flowers, and eating special bread on that day. This information is interesting for the students because in the eastern part of Indonesia, people do not celebrate a special day to commemorate their deceased ones, yet, in some occasions, they would come to visit the grave to weed the grass and light up the lamp.

The expansion of students' cultural knowledge was also visible during the meeting with a speaker from Madagascar. He shared about some endemic plants and animals. He talked about how local people name the objects according to their utilities and how they use them. He furthermore gave an example of *ravinala*, also known as *ravenala madagascariensis*, named traveler tree/traveler palm tree because the base of its leaves can collect and store water, and people drink this water during their long walks/journeys. In addition, he showed a video on a dangerous traditional sport called *savika*, where young men need to fight *zebu*, an endemic Madagascar's animal, without getting injured as proof that they are grown up. An interesting practice held by Malagasy people lies in their traditional wedding. The bride and groom families should share their origin and history of the family and go ahead with a debate contest in which they hire professional speakers. At the end of the debate, the family of the bride shows a list of girls and let them find out which one they would like to take. They should look for that girl in the entire house. They also practice dowry to prove that the man is financially stable to support the family.

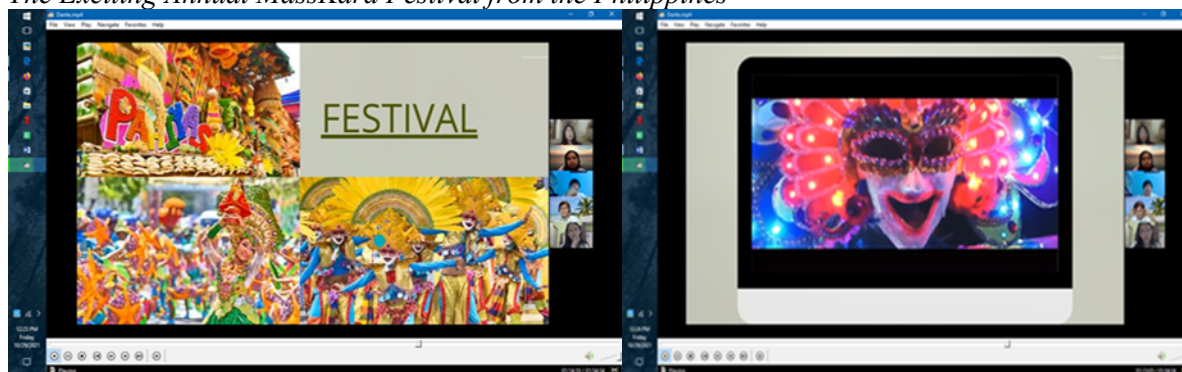
These two speakers from Mexico and Madagascar in the guest talk program, serving as resourceful sources that represent their cultures, introduced their cultures and expanded students' cultural knowledge repertoire by exposing the participating students to their cultural knowledge, practices, and perspectives. This occasion of learning makes possible the increment of cultural knowledge and information, which was unlikely to be accommodated in school textbooks due to the imbalance and absence of cultural representations therein.

### ***Sparking Curiosity about other Cultures***

Byram's second element of ICC, attitude (*savoir être*), was reflected in the program as seen in students' curiosity towards other cultures. The meetings sparked students' curiosity about other cultures. Jean shared her interest during her participation in a guest talk with the speaker from the Philippines who presented a festival event *Masskara* ( Figure 2).

**Jean:** *"During the Guest Talk with a Philippines[sic] teacher, we exchanged information about our cultures. One of the things that caught my eye was an iconic festival from the Philippines, Masskara. At first, it was only a regular festival. But, the speaker explained that this festival lasted until night. And at night, people need to put on the light on the masks, and I think that is really cool"* (Observation Note 9).

Figure 2  
*The Exciting Annual MassKara Festival from the Philippines*

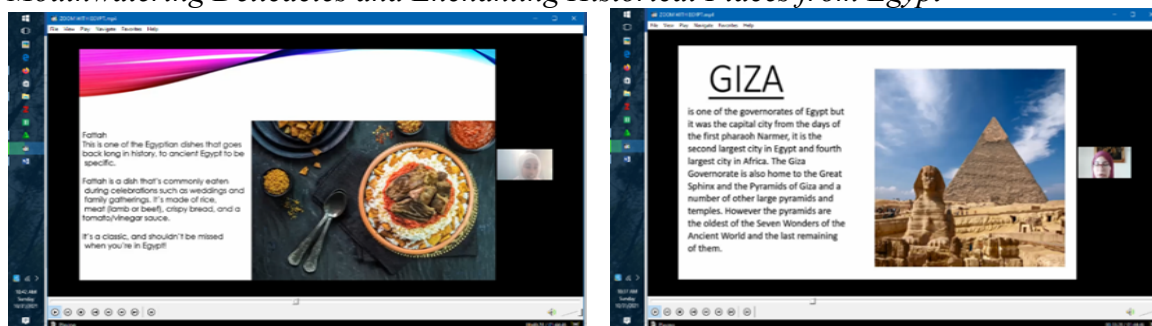


The presentation from the speaker helped her to see another side of the festival and caught her attention and curiosity. Students' curiosity could be also observed in their reflective journals. These students got an opportunity to meet peers and teachers from Egypt where they presented Indonesian cultures and listened to their partners' presentations about Egypt. The students were intrigued by the provided information and also looked for further information on the internet. An excerpt of the student's writing about Egypt that Cindy liked most is shown below, and the pictures are shown in Figure 3. Cindy presented her ideas:

*"...The second is on tourist attractions in Egypt or historical places in Egypt. I really want to visit these places. Because the shape of the building there is unique and different. It is also gorgeous... I think those places have a lot of history. The third is in the food in Egypt. On the internet, I saw that the foods in Egypt look delicious and have their own specialties" (Cindy's reflective journal week 1).*

**Figure 3**

*Mouthwatering Delicacies and Enchanting Historical Places from Egypt*



At first, students might have been shy. However, the ice-breaking activity broke the tension. They were eager to listen and talk. Students' curiosity and willingness to communicate were observed during their interaction with speakers and their partners from abroad through their extended questions about the presented materials.

***Skills of Interpreting and Relating***

Students' skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*) were reflected in their ability to relate and interpret the acquired information during the meetings. In a session with the speaker from the Philippines, a teacher spoke about some traits that characterize a Philippine: hospitality, respect, togetherness, resilience, colonial mentality, sense of gratitude, faithfulness, and family-oriented as can be seen in the following conversation between the speaker and the students.

**Dante:** *"So, Filipinos are very respectful. Children usually bless the hands of their parents or elders, especially at 6 o'clock in the evening. It is a common practice at our place. We typically use "po or opo" in answering questions means yes if somebody would like to request somebody to do something. It is a way of showing our respect to others, especially to elders. We use Kuya to show our respect to our older brother and Ate for older female sister. How do Indonesians show their respect to other people?" (Observation Note 5).*

One student, Nick, voluntarily answered the question to show how Indonesian people show respect. Nick says, *"Actually, at my home and school, when older people are talking, we need to be quiet and listen to them until they are done, and we then can express our opinions"* (Observation Note 6).

**Dante:** “Thank you very much for your answer. That is an excellent way to show respect by listening attentively to others, especially elders, while they are talking. Then, you express your opinions after they allow you to join in the conversation” (Observation Note 7).

Students can also recognize the similarities and differences between these two countries by relating and interpreting the information they learned. It could be reflected in a takeaway sharing after the session, as expressed by one of the participants:

**Anna:** “We are neighbors, and I observe that the Philippines and Indonesia have many similarities in terms of the weather, food, and qualities. The differences lie in the festivals, as the Philippines have lots of festivals in each city that are held annually” (Observation Note 8).

The meeting provided a platform where students were enabled to gain information from the guest speaker’s cultural presentation, and they should process and interpret this information on how this cultural practice of showing respect is actuated in Indonesia’s context.

### ***Skills of Discovery and Interaction***

Students’ skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*), the ability to put into practice the learned cultural knowledge, attitude, and skills of interpreting and relating in real-time communication with interlocutors, was reflected. Before participating in the meeting, they were invited to coaching sessions where they learned how to communicate effectively. These lessons were put into practice in their interaction with interlocutors from abroad. In this regard, Amanda shared her experience in the interviews and stimulated recall interviews.

**Amanda:** “In the coaching session, our teacher reminded us to talk equally to ourselves and our partners. We were encouraged to speak as much as possible and, at the same time, we should give the same amount of our time listening to our friends talking. We needed to listen attentively without interrupting our interlocutors” (Amanda’s story).

During the cultural exchange meetings, despite being fluent and acquiring a native-like American accent, Amanda restrained herself from dominating the conversation but listened to her interlocutors attentively and ensured that her interlocutors could have an equal amount of time to express their opinions and thoughts. She furthermore added more extended questions showing her curiosity about the topic that her interlocutors bring to the table. She mentioned that she tried to be respectful by not being judgmental despite the fact there were some things different from her held values, beliefs, and norms.

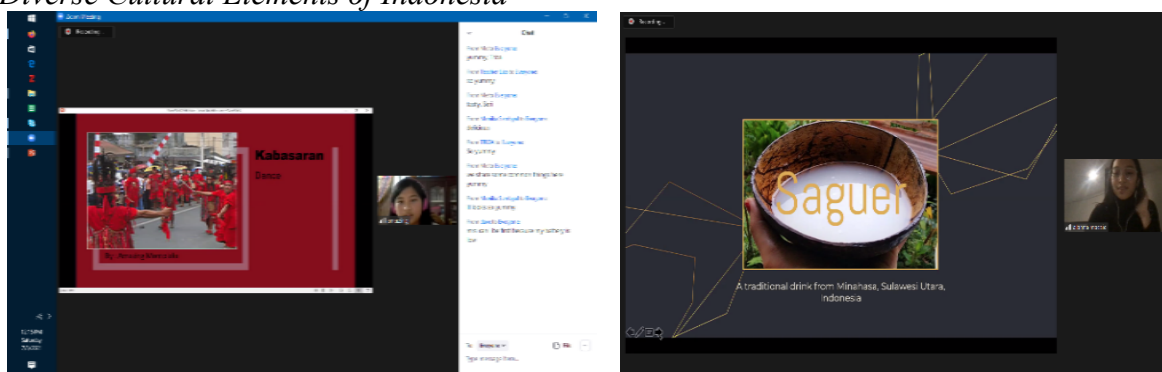
### ***Cognizance of Cultural Diversity***

Students’ cultural awareness (*savoirs’engager*) of their cultural diversity and richness surfaced and could be observed during their involvement in the intercultural exchange meetings. Making PowerPoints presentations on these participating host cultural elements, performing storytelling on folklore and folktales, and exchanging information about their home cultures with their fellow English learners and guest speakers from abroad required the students to do independent research to amass the required information. The exchange meetings raised their cultural awareness of cultural diversity that they might have not noticed or expressed before, as expressed by Amanda and Cindy.

**Amanda:** *“At first, I am not really into knowing Indonesia’s culture and history, but, during these intercultural exchange meetings I have to learn it. I realize that we have many unique cultures and cool places to visit. There are many things we can do and learn about Indonesia, and now I can understand some of them” (Amanda’s Story 4).*

**Cindy:** *“It is essential to present Indonesia’s culture because who else is going to do it? I am proud to be Indonesian because we have thousands of islands, many tribes, and interesting and unique cultures. These should be preserved. I notice that not many young people learn about their history and cultures. I think it is time for us to learn and pass it on to our offspring” (Cindy’s Story 2).*

Figure 4  
*Diverse Cultural Elements of Indonesia*



In addition, telecollaboration has opened up their cognizance of not only the diversity of their host cultures but also the existing diverse cultures across the globe. They came to the realization that people lead different lives and hold different perspectives. Understanding how people perceive things and lead their lives differently is pivotal to easing communication and promoting mutual understanding. This is in line with some of the students’ voices in their interviews highlighting the importance of understanding cultural plurality.

*Anna: “We can learn about other cultures and learning about these diverse cultures will help us to adapt and adjust ourselves to our real intercultural communication with people from other cultures”.*

Students started to see cultural diversity from a more comprehensive viewpoint and tried to be respectful. Cindy elaborated on this insight; she said that when she came across one particular cultural element incongruent with her belief (religious dogma), she had to respect perceived cultural disparity while stepping back from her held belief. It seemed they developed the flexibility to adjust and adapt in intercultural communication by suiting themselves in the middle ground (acceptable behaviors).

## **How do Students Conceptualize their ICC Development?**

### ***Students’ Conceptualization of their ICC Development***

Students' past, present, and future conceptualization of their ICC development shifted and progressed as the program went by. Students had an enriched and expanded cultural repertoire, improved attitude, enhanced skills of interpreting and relating and skills of discovery and interaction, and balanced critical awareness.

As for the first Byram's element, knowledge (*savoirs*), all participants acknowledged their limited cultural knowledge of repertoire. Before attending the program, they were only implicitly exposed to Indonesian's cultures. As the program proceeded, they were exposed to global cultures from Asia, South America, Africa, and Europe. After their engagement in the *Nice to E-Meet You* program, they perceived that it connected them to other people from different cultures. One of the participants, Anna, mentioned that partaking in these exchange meetings was an excellent opportunity to learn about their host cultures and other cultures and practice their English. Furthermore, Cindy mentioned that she noticed a difference before and after engaging in telecollaboration. Before attending the meeting, she could only have a general overview of one particular country, yet, telecollaboration gave her more specific insight into it. For example, at first, what she knew about Egypt was only a country with a massive desert. The meetings with Egyptian students and teachers helped her understand that Egypt is a Muslim country and has the oldest civilization in the world with amazing architecture. Students' cultural knowledge expansion could be observed in stimulated recall interviews when they were asked to share the uniqueness of their partner's country.

Concerning students' attitudes (*savoir être*), students acknowledged that the program made them more open-minded toward diversity. Being open-minded sparked their curiosity to explore multiculturalism further. Before attending the program, students held a single belief that knowing their host culture was enough and learning about cultures was boring and useless. Interacting with diverse people amazed them with the richness of cultural diversity. In Anna's words, she shared her thought:

*"Before this program, I was not used to exploring and looking for information about different cultures. I used to think that knowing Indonesia's culture was enough. Then, I proved myself wrong. Learning about other cultures was fun and sparked our curiosity and to be open-minded to accept differences".*

With regard to skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir comprendre*), telecollaboration enabled these students to confirm their previously held assumptions and information from books, magazines, newspapers, and movies through a direct encounter with cultural others from different countries. For example, Cindy mentioned that she knew that the Philippines' physical appearances are like Indonesians, and meeting a speaker from the Philippines confirmed this, and she could shift her held prejudice. She first thought that the Philippine people were individualistic, like Western people. She then understood that they were just like Indonesians: friendly, polite, religious, and collectivist. They love sharing food with their guests or strangers.

As for skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*), the knowledge that they acquired was indeed helpful in facilitating real communication with people from different backgrounds. For example, Amanda stated the importance of having cultural knowledge about certain cultures, intercultural communication skills, and respect towards disparity. During an actual interaction with people from different cultures, these cultural knowledge, intercultural communication skills, and attitude could serve as a bridge for building rapport and deeper engagement. This knowledge helped her to grow her understanding and get more connected to her interlocutors.

Students seemed to show a difference in their critical awareness (*savoirs'engager*) before and after taking part in telecollaboration. Students shifted from an ethnocentric view to ethnorelativism. They began perceiving cultural diversity from a broader perspective and showing respect. Cindy further explained that when she encountered a cultural aspect conflicting with her own beliefs (religious beliefs), she learned to respect the cultural differences while holding her convictions. It appeared that they acquired the ability to be adaptable and flexible in intercultural communication by finding a middle ground on how to mediate those cultural differences.



Students perceived intercultural communication as crucial for their future personal and professional life, for being able to communicate across cultural boundaries helps to succeed in this global era. Amanda mentioned that developing ICC would help her in her traveling, making friends with people from abroad, and escalating her future career. She wanted to be more prepared for the upcoming cultural exchange meetings by looking for information in advance and engaging more deeply in the discussion.

## Discussion

The present study was intended to explore how telecollaboration facilitated students' ICC and how students conceptualized their ICC development. The study was situated in the eastern part of Indonesia by involving lower high school students in collaboration with multiple tandem partners hailing from Egypt, Italy, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, and the Philippines. The finding disclosed that telecollaboration had facilitated students' ICC as reflected in the emergence of Byram's ICC elements during students' interaction in the program. In addition, the students had indifferent conceptualization of ICC development in each element during the program.

The participants' curiosity about other cultures and willingness to learn and communicate serves as the gate and basic foundation for intercultural communication (Byram et al., 2002). The participating students were involved in the classical and paired discussion and they raised questions to make meaning and maintain the communication. Their questions varied from surface level cultural questions: food, festival, folklore, fashion (Kubota, 2004) issues to deeper ones. Based on the data, we contend that telecollaboration is a viable venue to expand students' cultural knowledge repertoire as during the meeting they are exposed to host and global cultures (Shin et al., 2011; Tajeddin & Teimournezhad, 2015; Yuen, 2011). Telecollaboration could be a solution to address cultural imbalance representation in students' textbooks (Keles & Yazan, 2020; Messekher, 2014; Shardakova & Pavlenko, 2004). By comparing and contrasting as well as relating and interpreting, these processes provide ample opportunities for the participating students to examine the multiple perspectives/frames without losing their own (Lomicka, 2009).

We argue that the five Byram's ICC elements embedded in the telecollaboration offered students the opportunity to experience Paige's cultural dimensions (Cohen et al., 2003). In self as cultural, students were guided to explore their host cultures to dive into why they lead certain lifestyles. For example, it is a common practice for Minahasans (people who live in North Sulawesi) to drink *saguer*, an alcoholic beverage, on social gatherings. Students were further asked what meaning lies behind drinking this beverage and if they agree to keep maintaining this practice. The elements of culture were manifested when the students were asked to identify the cultural elements (products, practices, and perspectives of their own cultures). In particular cultures, students, for example, were given a situational breakdown of a communication scenario and they had to sort out how to engage with it. Communication strategies were acquired through students' direct and real communication with native people from certain cultures where they were enabled to confirm or disconfirm the ideas that they had learned and accumulated through discussion.

In addition, the teacher has demonstrated organizational competence as a telecollaborative teacher (O'Dowd, 2015) by designing varied online exchange activities in terms of storytelling performances, presentations, conversations, and discussions mediated by

Zoom, PowerPoint, Padlet, Jamboard, and Storyline online. The teacher's role as a "source and resource" (O'Dowd, 2007) is exercised when they help the students to identify the links between them and the sources from tandem partners' cultures. The teacher also performed their competency in initiating cultural exchanges and collaborating with other teachers to execute the program. In addition, the teacher has familiarized and equipped the students to engage in online intercultural exchange meetings (O'Dowd et al., 2019; Wach, 2013) with "pedagogical mentoring" in terms of supplying information, throwing support, being a role model, and giving feedback before partaking in the exchanges through coaching sessions.

Corroborating previous studies (Kim, 2020; Okumura, 2020; Schenker, 2012; Üzümlü et al., 2020), this study portrayed how Byram's elements surfaced during students' participation in the program through which they expanded cultural knowledge repertoire, curiosity about other cultures, skills of comparing and contrasting the home cultures and other cultures, ability to perform the learned knowledge and skills in real interaction with their interlocutors, and the cognizance of cultural diversity. Dissimilar to the existing studies (Bray & Iswanti, 2012; Dugartsyrenova & Sardegna, 2019; Kim, 2020; Okumura, 2020; Schenker, 2012; Üzümlü et al., 2020) that only involved one tandem collaborator, this present study expanded the empirics on how telecollaboration anchored in Byram's framework (1997) was operative in a multicultural context (in collaboration with several partners from outer and expanding circle countries) to facilitate students' ICC and their conceptualization of ICC development. The findings in this study contribute to the literature on several grounds. First, unlike previous studies (Bray & Iswanti, 2012; Kim, 2020; Okumura, 2020) focusing on surface cultures (fashion, food, festival, and folklore), the chosen topics in the present study not only center on surface cultures but also touch upon deep cultures (values, beliefs, customs, and norms). Second, different from previous studies on intercultural learning mediated by Facebook (Bray & Iswanti, 2012), a website called Classting (Kim, 2020), and Edmodo (Okumura, 2020), the present study implemented synchronous activities, such as presentation, storytelling performance, and discussion mediated by Zoom that allowed ample first-hand opportunities for the students to discuss and explore global and home cultures in a friendly and relaxed environment in collaboration with the representatives of respective cultures. In addition, in terms of the tools, Avgousti (2018) reported that synchronous activities are effective for discussion, and these sorts of activities promote experiential learning by allowing participants to interact and communicate with the natives of certain cultures (Paige, 2003) through immersion, observation, and participation (Shih, 2015). Third, the encounters with diverse tandem partners expose students to cultural diversity as a springboard to build up their cultural horizon and expand their understanding of other cultures as well as their own cultures (Menard-Warwick et al., 2013). These people from multiple backgrounds provide students with an authentic audience and diverse perspectives about cultural products and practices (Lee, 2009).

This finding also indicates that telecollaboration contributes to how the participating students conceptualize their ICC meaningfully. This study is in line with studies conducted by Ghasemi et al., (2020) and O'Dowd (2007), indicating that students' involvement in global activities and international connections potentially contribute to the way they conceptualize their ICC. The guest speakers from global cultures function as the role model of intercultural competent speakers and have provided a safe and supportive atmosphere reflected in their verbal and non-verbal appreciative and encouraging attitudes and comments (O'Dowd, 2019). In addition, these guest speakers set an example of a competent intercultural speaker by promoting the values of "respect, empathy, flexibility, patience, interest, curiosity, openness,

motivation, a sense of humor, tolerance for ambiguity, and a willingness to suspend judgment” (Fantini, 2000). The session with the guests from abroad was usually run in an interactive way, where the speaker actively involved the students in speaking on the chosen topic. In a session with the speaker from the Philippines, for example, the speaker was open and willing to share his personal stories and allowed each student to share their opinions. He gave encouragement by showing his friendly facial expressions, body gestures, and encouraging and honest comments. In addition, he provided some language scaffolding, for instance, by addressing extended follow-up questions to encourage students to talk more and providing a pattern on how to approach the questions. The guest speakers created a safe environment and atmosphere for the students to express their ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

### **Pedagogical Implications, Limitations, and Suggestions**

Based on our findings, we can bring forward some salient points related to the pedagogical utility of telecollaboration facilitated by Zoom. First, telecollaboration can facilitate the students to get connected with other students worldwide and experience first-hand cultural exchange without spending a costly budget to travel abroad. Second, the study has provided some ideas about how to conduct intercultural exchange meetings by utilizing several activities such as cultural PowerPoint presentations, storytelling performances, and guest speaker programs. This teaching praxis can be used as a reference and serves as a valuable model for teachers who would like to emulate the same program. As the nature of this present research is a case study, the generalizability of the study is limited. The dataset is short of heterogeneity since even though it involved tandem partners from outer and expanding circle countries with diverse social backgrounds, it was only sourced from Zoom-assisted meetings. Therefore, a similar scholarship with more learning platforms is recommended for future research. This study also had a limitation in portraying how telecollaboration shape students’ global citizenship identity in details. It is suggested that future research utilize different methodological perspectives, such narrative inquiry or ethnography study, to investigate how telecollaboration and global citizenship identity are intertwined in the context of a multicultural society.

### **Conclusion**

This study elucidates how the *Nice to E-Meet You* program facilitated ICC in EFL classrooms, where students collaborate with non-native English learners, teachers, and speakers from different geographical spaces. ICC was facilitated through exposure to global cultures, products, and practices framed in diverse activities and topics that cover both surface and deep cultures. Engaging young Indonesian learners as participants, the present study has addressed the dearth of evidence on the implementation of telecollaboration in a multicultural setting as viewed from learners’ dynamic lens.

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