

Examining Indonesian Students' Intercultural Presence in, and perspectives of, an International Community of Inquiry Via Virtual Exchange


Eric Hagley^{1*}, Wisma Yunita²

¹ School of Education and Professional Studies, Griffith University, Gold Coast, Australia

² Universitas Bengkulu, Indonesia; Shinawatra University, Pathum Thani, Thailand

*Corresponding author's email: eric@iveproject.org

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4795-8043>

 <https://doi.org/10.54855/callej.252613>

®Copyright (c) 2025 Eric Hagley, Wisma Yunita

Received: 30/08/2024

Revision: 05/12/2024

Accepted: 12/05/2025

Online: 17/05/2025

ABSTRACT

Keywords: Virtual Exchange, Intercultural Competence, Intercultural Presence, English as Lingua Franca, EFL

Globalization has resulted in educational and commercial groups requiring their mentors and mentees to have an international outlook and be interculturally aware. Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students are often assigned the task of ensuring students are attuned to this fact and encouraged to bring intercultural training into their classrooms. Acclimatizing students to intercultural contact with international peers is now possible in foreign language classrooms. This study examines Indonesian students' intercultural presence through an international Virtual Exchange (VE) being integrated into their university EFL course. The study is longitudinal as it followed a classroom, and the different participants therein, over a three-year period. A post-survey was used that included qualitative and quantitative data collection through Likert scale and open-ended questions. The surveys evince a deeper understanding of the students' perspective of, and reactions to, their intercultural presence in the VE. Results were analyzed with mean scores and standard deviations of the Likert scales calculated and thematic analysis of the answers to the open-ended questions. Despite some challenges, results show students had a positive impression of participating in an international community of inquiry through the VE and appreciated its effect on their English language and intercultural competence development.

Introduction

English education in Indonesia is undergoing enormous change as outlined by Zein et. al. (2020). The reasons are myriad but one is clear: that globalization is having a major impact on Indonesia resulting in a reappraisal of English language education. Obviously, the linguistic aspect of teaching English is essential but increasingly intercultural competence is required and, hence, English language learning that also enables the development of intercultural understanding and competency is now vital. Virtual Exchange (VE) is one method of teaching English that is making this possible.

When students and teachers participate in VE, they enter an international community of inquiry (Garrison et al., 1999) where they gain a unique educational experience that includes the cognitive, social and teaching presences outlined by Garrison et. al. (ibid.). However, an important addition to these presences in an international community such as a VE, is the intercultural presence that students and teachers bring. The intercultural presence of a student both affects, and is affected by, the peers' cultures they interact with. This has important implications for Foreign Language (FL) pedagogy.

There have been few instances of VE implementation in Indonesia and therefore students have had little exposure to it. How students from there perceive this form of education and how they participate in an international community of inquiry are important aspects to understand as they can affect the outcomes of student learning. This study endeavors to discover answers to those questions.

Literature review

Much has been written on English education in Indonesia, VE and the community of inquiry framework. This section synthesizes this literature and notes gaps in the research.

English Education in Indonesia

In Indonesia, English is a compulsory subject from junior high school (year 7) to university level. Even though it is studied for quite a long period of time, most students do not master the language, and many are unable to communicate in English when they reach university (Latifa, 2021). There is also often a perception among Indonesians that English is difficult to learn, the pronunciation is problematic and the sentence structure vastly different to Indonesian. In addition, English is not the language of instruction in schools or spoken by Indonesians in public spaces (Simbolon, 2021). Thus, Indonesian students have limited opportunities to interact in English or learn about foreign cultures through the FL, as language and culture are intertwined (Baker, 2012).

As with all countries in Asia, Indonesia has many unique cultural and socio-economic factors that affect every aspect of society and particularly FL education. The cultural importance of maintaining the plurilingual society (Murtisari and Mali, 2017) needs to be balanced with the economic importance of having a population able to interact with and participate in the globalized economy which requires a sound understanding of and ability to use English, in addition to being interculturally adept.

In the past, EFL educators were able to attend to building students' English language proficiency but due to Indonesia's relatively homogenous regions, they were limited in the way they could build students' understanding of other cultures and many struggled to ensure English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) was an option for their students (Mambu, 2016). VE is changing that, and educators are now able to intertwine intercultural learning with FL learning.

Virtual Exchange in Language Learning.

VE has been labeled Telecollaboration, Online Intercultural Exchange and Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL). However, VE is the term that governments and institutions such as the Stevens Initiative in the U.S. and the Erasmus project in the E.U. have settled on and most research on the subject is turning toward use of the term "VE". Hagley (2020) goes into detail on the terminology and why VE is the ideal term for this method of teaching FL.

VE has been defined in a number of ways throughout its development too (Helm, 2018), but its

simplest definition is it is a method of teaching a FL where “individual students, either by themselves or in groups, interact via the Internet with student peers in other countries but, importantly, under the tutelage of their teacher” (Hagley, 2021). It is therefore very different to COIL, as that practice generally involves students from two or more institutions in different countries learning a particular major subject together. VE has been shown to improve all aspects of FL learning. Improvements in oral communication (Canals, 2020; Zhou, 2023), writing (Choi, 2008), communicative competence (Godwin-Jones, 2019; Hřebáčková, 2019), critical literacy (Hauck, 2019), and intercultural understanding (Belz, 2007; Schenker, 2013) can be seen through the use of VE. Most of the VE noted here are of the dual-language variety but ELF VE have also been shown to achieve such results (Kohn & Hoffstaedter, 2017; Hagley, 2020b; Roarty, Tuncer & Tang, 2023). It is no wonder then that VE is becoming more mainstream in North America and Europe and slowly gaining attention in Asia and other parts of the world too.

The Virtual Exchange Used – IVEProject.

A detailed history of the IVEProject is outlined in Hagley (2023). It started in 2004 between a class in Japan and one in Colombia and became large-scale from 2015. Since then, some 50,000 students and 600 teachers from over 22 countries have participated in the project. A basic explanation of the process involves a teacher wanting their students to participate in this VE, so they check the website <https://iveproject.org/>, contact the organizers and sign up when the call for participants is announced. At the time of writing, the IVEProject is run twice a year. It is free-of-charge to participate in. Initially it was funded by a Japanese government-sponsored Kaken grant but is now supported by teachers and self-funding and is hence free of any agenda that is often part of other large-scale VE. After signing-up to participate, the organizers send details to the teacher on how they should send their students' data. Once the students' data has been added to the platform, students can access it through any internet-enabled device. They interact asynchronously with peers from numerous other countries via online forums, chats and, on occasion, synchronously via Zoom, Teams or BigBlueButton (depending on the teacher hosting that interaction.) There are several other tasks and projects students can participate in too. Teachers have total autonomy on how they assess their students' participation and how they want to incorporate it into their syllabi, though tools are available to assist teachers and a teacher forum is available for teachers to share ideas. The official interactions take place over 8-week periods, but students can continue for another month - and do - after the official IVEProject finishes. The main IVEProject uses ELF but also has dual-language VE where, for example, students studying Japanese in China work with students in Japan studying Chinese. This paper focuses on the ELFVE.

Implementation of the IVEProject in Indonesia

The IVEProject first came to Indonesia in 2019 and since then some 1,400 students from Indonesia have participated. One of the authors who teaches at a university in Sumatera has been instrumental in expanding and improving the IVEProject in Indonesia. She came to know about the project from an email sent to members of the Association of English Language Education Study Program. It invited lecturers of the association to participate in the IVEProject for the October-December 2022 iteration. During that iteration, 70 of her students from the Grammar in Spoken and Written Discourse courses were involved. She continued to participate in future IVEProjects. Thus, since its first introduction to Indonesia, the IVEProject has given intercultural experiences to Indonesian students that they would not have had without it. The teacher believed the project had benefits but wanted to understand the experiences of their students, hence this research.

Theoretical Framework - Adding Intercultural Presence to the Community of Inquiry

Garrison et al., (1999) outlined the essential elements to attain success in higher education which they termed a “Community of Inquiry”. In it, they noted cognitive presence as “the extent to which .. participants .. are able to construct meaning through sustained communication” and social presence as “the ability of participants ... to project their personal characteristics into the community, thereby presenting themselves to the other participants as “real people.” The final piece for them was the “teaching presence” or the design and facilitation of the educational experience which teachers generally take charge of.

When students express themselves in groups or as individuals, whether that be in online environments or face-to-face, connections are made. In each of the regions of Indonesia and other countries where a common language is the norm, the connections between students in a FL classroom are often restrained by the culture and language of that region. Students’ social presence is thus limited by the culture of the region which in turn limits their cognitive presence. Yes, they can “project themselves socially and emotionally, as ‘real’ people” (Ibid, p. 94) but the extent to which they can extend their cultural being and understanding is constrained by the provincial environment they are learning in. Through VE, participants attain a broader co-presence, as peers from around the world join the community in which they are engaging. Social, teaching and cognitive presences intertwine with “intercultural presence”. Intercultural presence is taken to mean the degree students interrelate culturally with others and with their own self. Throughout this process they learn to understand and express their cultural self. Intercultural presence affects, and is affected by, the social, cognitive and teaching milieu of the VE. New and important meanings can be found through the lenses of other cultures and deeper understanding attained when one is mirrored in other cultures. Intercultural presence is an essential facet of education in the globalized 21st century and VE is the method which allows students everywhere to participate. Whereas in the past, only those that could afford to travel to multiple different countries could interact with the cultures of those countries, through VE this is now open to anyone in an internet-enabled environment under the tutelage of a trained instructor. And with the addition of intercultural presence in an international community of inquiry, through VE, a framework for attaining 21st century skills is achieved.

Research Questions

To fully understand Indonesian students’ comprehension of VE implementation as part of their EFL education, the following research questions were formed.

1. How do Indonesian students perceive VE as a method of EFL learning?
2. What challenges and opportunities do Indonesian students encounter in a VE-enabled international community of inquiry?

Methods

To answer the research questions and examine the details, Indonesian students were surveyed over a three-year period.

Design of the Study

This research evolved into a longitudinal study seeking to examine students’ perceptions of VE implementation in Indonesia. Longitudinal studies involve research on a certain topic where data is collected over two or more sequential time periods. (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2011, p.185). This study involved students from a university in the south-west of Sumatra participating in

“Grammar in Spoken and Written Discourse” classes. Each year, from 2022 to 2024, the different students in these classes joined the IVEProject and were surveyed at the end of their participation. This study employed quantitative and qualitative survey items to obtain data on the students’ perceptions of the IVEProject and the effect it had, if any, on their language learning and intercultural understanding.

Participants

The initial survey in 2022 asked 70 students who had taken the Grammar in Spoken and Written Discourse Classes. 72 students in 2023 took the same classes and 90 students in 2024 took them too. All classes were taught by one of the authors. As part of the class, the IVEProject was introduced to offer students the chance to use the language they were studying - English - to interact with peers in multiple other cultures through VE.

Participants were aged from 18 to 20 years old and were majoring in English education. They had 7 years' experience with EFL learning. The majority were of a B1 to B2 proficiency based on the common framework of reference levels of English. They completed a consent form to be in this research and only students who had consented were included in the study.

Instrument of the Study

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions investigating the perceptions students had on the implementation of VE in Indonesia. The survey content did change a little over that period. The 2022 survey contained 9 items that used a 4-point Likert scale and 5 open-ended questions. The 4-point Likert scale ranged from “4” strongly agree to “1” strongly disagree. The 2023 questionnaire was used with a more detailed Likert scale with a 7-point range. In part A of that survey, the scale ranged from 1 “Is much worse” to 7 “Is much better”, part B from “Is much lesser” to “Is much greater” and part C from “I don't agree at all” to “totally agree”. The 2024 scale was a 6-point scale but had different degrees. Part A ranged from “Has not changed” to “Has improved / increased greatly”, part B from “Is much lesser” to “Is much greater” and part C from “I don't agree at all” to “totally agree”.

Data Collection

Data for the research was obtained from responses to a survey administered at the end of each IVEProject. Likert-scale responses and 5 open-ended questions were added by the author to gain more understanding of students’ perspective and motivations to participate in the IVEProject. The initial questionnaire was delivered to students via a google form given through the WhatsApp group and the final two years of data were obtained from students’ answers to the survey using the Moodle questionnaire module within the IVEProject. Thus, the data changed a little in the second and third iterations, but the overall questions were almost identical and so should not affect the outcome.

Data Analysis.

Quantitative data was analyzed with means and standard deviation calculated. Meanwhile, the qualitative data was thematically analyzed, and common trends examined using inductive coding (Thomas, 2006) initially and then focused coding using NVivo.

Results/Findings and discussion

The results of the study are presented based on the data taken students' answers. They are described below.

Quantitative Data

Table 1 shows the results from 2022 and table 2 the two latter years. As different systems were used, the Likert-scale lengths differed. The first survey was easily promoted by the teacher involved, as she created the survey on Google forms and knew how to share it with her students. It is for this reason that the response rate was much higher. It was not as in-depth as the following ones either. The 2023 survey was done within the IVEProject system and was new to the teacher and students hence the response rate dropped however by the 2024 survey the teacher was more understanding of the survey format in the IVEProject and was able to share it more widely with her students and the response rate increased.

Table 1.

Results of Questionnaire on Students' Perspectives of the VE in 2022.

| The statements | 2022 Mean (range 1 to 4) | SD (n=66) |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------|
| I think the virtual exchange was beneficial to learning English. | 3.288 | 0.818 |
| I learnt about the partner country. | 3.242 | 0.725 |
| The exchange didn't take too much time. | 3.015 | 0.568 |
| The web site was easy to use. | 3.136 | 0.721 |
| I wanted to learn English more because of the virtual exchange | 3.167 | 0.714 |
| I wanted to exchange information with students in the other countries. | 3.273 | 0.775 |
| I am more interested in the partner country because of the exchange. | 3.182 | 0.742 |
| I changed my view of the partner countries because of the exchange | 3.045 | 0.618 |
| I want to do another exchange. | 3.197 | 0.728 |

Table 2 displays the data from surveys in 2023 and 2024. As noted in section 3.3, the range of the Likert scales changed in 2024.

Table 2.

Results of the Questionnaire on Students' Perspective of the VE 2023-2024

| The Statements | 2023 Mean (range 1 to 7) | 2023 SD (n=25) | 2024 Mean (range 1 to 6) | 2024 SD (n=40) |
|--|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| My English level | 5.12 | 1.301 | 4.7 | 1.224 |
| My understanding of other countries' cultures | 5.12 | 1.301 | 4.9 | 1.057 |
| My understanding of myself | 5.44 | 1.294 | 4.625 | 1.353 |
| My interest in other countries | 6.36 | 0.952 | 5.3 | 1.114 |
| My interest in culture | 5.8 | 1.225 | 5.325 | 1.071 |
| My confidence to communicate with people in other countries | 5.28 | 1.308 | 4.85 | 1.272 |
| Part B | | | | |
| My feeling of being open to other cultures | 5.68 | 0.988 | 4.375 | 1.514 |
| My belief English is an important language | 6.44 | 0.768 | 5.125 | 0.853 |
| My desire to communicate with people in other countries | 6.2 | 1.08 | 5.675 | 0.572 |
| My understanding of the lives of people in other countries | 5.32 | 1.069 | 5.3 | 0.758 |
| My knowledge of my own country | 5.32 | 1.108 | 5 | 0.877 |
| My enjoyment in learning English | 6 | 1.118 | 5.25 | 0.840 |
| Part C | | | | |
| The IVEProject online platform was easy to use. | 6.08 | 1.077 | 5.5 | 0.641 |
| All students should participate in this kind of project. | 6.16 | 0.987 | 5.5 | 0.847 |
| I participated actively in this project. | 5.36 | 1.381 | 5.625 | 0.628 |
| I could understand the English of the students in other countries. | 5.76 | 1.165 | 5.55 | 0.597 |
| I feel I made a friend with someone from another country. | 4.8 | 1.871 | 5.325 | 0.944 |
| I was satisfied with the interactions I had with students from other countries. | 6.04 | 1.207 | 5.45 | 0.959 |
| I remember one or two names of students from other countries. | 5.52 | 1.447 | 5.175 | 1.152 |
| I would like to participate in an online exchange such as the IVE again in the future. | 5.76 | 1.562 | 5.55 | 0.783 |

In 2023 and 2024, two other statements were posed with yes/no responses. The first was “This is the first time I have interacted with someone from a different culture over a long period of time who is not a teacher.” to which 65% of students chose “yes” in 2023 and 84% of students chose the same in 2024. The other statement was “Did you post/reply to the forums twice or more per week?” to which 79% chose yes in 2023 and 88% of students chose the same in 2024. This second statement’s data was corroborated by data from the reports generated by the system showing the students were in fact logging on and participating actively throughout the

exchange.

Qualitative Data - Students' Voices

Several open-ended questions were included in each survey. Answers were initially inductively coded and then focused coding using NVivo followed. The first question asked of the students in 2022 was "What were your impressions of the IVEProject?" and in 2023 and 2024 "What were the good things about this international virtual exchange project? How did it help you?" Data from 66 of the 70 students in 2022, 25 of the 72 students that completed the survey in 2023, and 40 of the 90 students in 2024 was obtained. All students who took the survey left comments for this section of the survey. After coding was completed, six top-level themes emerged. They were, in alphabetical order, communication, enjoyment, general learning, intercultural understanding, language learning, and motivation. The data is outlined in table 3.

Table 3

Thematic analysis of open-ended questions

| Theme | Token count | Example tokens |
|-----------------------------|-------------|--|
| Enjoyment | 51 | It's fun; It's exciting; It's interesting; It's a pleasant experience; I feel very happy |
| Intercultural understanding | 48 | I learned about their culture; cross culture understanding; I understood more about the culture of other countries; it required me to be more 'curious' about something so that my knowledge of other countries increased. |
| General learning | 41 | I gained new knowledge; I now know many things from other countries; added to my insight, many new things I learned |
| Communication | 36 | chat with friends from abroad; we could talk directly with people outside; made friends |
| Self-esteem/motivation | 24 | IVE makes me want to learn; I have a new pride by participating in this IVE project; get a warm response from them |
| Language learning | 23 | I improve my English language skills; we can practice our English; being required to use English |

Specific examples of the types of comments made by students include the following (the 2022 students posted in Indonesian - those comments were translated into English for the above coding. In addition, for the 2023 and 2024 comments, the verbatim comments are noted here hence there are some spelling and grammatical mistakes):

Student A (2022) "This is a very exciting activity. I can talk to many people from different countries." Student B (2022) "That was an amazing experience, it was the first time I participated in a very cool project, so I could exchange information with foreigners about culture, favorite foods and stereotypes that exist in their country." Student C (2023) "International virtual exchange project make me inspired to get positive activities have more good things about conversation with other new people." Student D (2023) "according to me, the good things about IVE are I could learn about the cultural diversity in other countries, how the abilities languages of who I met in forums, and of course that's all really help me to improve

my English skill, furthermore that's makes me confident to speak English without dictionary or google translate.” Student E (2024) “The IVE project has provided great benefits in my life. I've started learning about cultures, foods, and other interesting things from friends abroad. My habit of frequently scrolling through TikTok has now shifted to a keen interest in learning more about cultures from around the world, and I want to have many friends from various countries. I also have a strong desire to improve my English because English is very important for both personal and future growth. Thank you for introducing me to the IVE project, it has brought good benefits and changes to my life ☺.” Student F (2024) “It really help me. At first, I think my English is really bad cause I seldom use it. But, when I communicated with other countries, I feel like I should confident with my communication skills. I also improve my language communication here.” Student G (2024) “There is a lot that I can learn from this IVE project, what I feel most is that my knowledge of foreign cultures is very interesting and now that I know about it, it is a very extraordinary thing to be able to get this experience. And also from here I can improve my English skills and one more thing is don't be afraid to talk to outsiders because apparently we all learn together”

The second question asked was regarding problems students had. It was phrased “What were the major problems with the IVE? Was there anything that bothered you? How would you like to make it better?” Of the 131 students over the 3 years the surveys were carried out, 56 added a comment in this section that discussed a problem. 24 wrote either “No problem” (or something similar) whilst 3 wrote the problem was that it stopped, and they wanted it to continue forever (which is not what we consider a problem for the purposes of this survey). The other students left this blank which possibly suggests they had no problems. The data for the problems was likewise coded and the following themes emerged: Devices, Inappropriate responses, Interface, Language, Login, Notifications, Other Technical, Response time, Time issues. This data is outlined in table 4. As above, some of the example tokens have grammatical errors in them but we left them “as is” for accuracy in reporting.

Table 4

Obstacles faced by students in joining the VE

| Theme | Token count | Example tokens |
|--------------------------|-------------|--|
| Other technical | 15 | connectivity issues during video calls; This server sometimes get down in my platform, like laggy, and stuck; sometimes I don't have signal |
| Time issues | 11 | my obstacles in participating in this IVE project are constrained by the time in the meet; zoom is better done in the morning or evening; the problem in IVE this project is a matter of time, because we have different times, when replying to someone's message they may not be online and are doing other activities. |
| Device issues | 10 | mobile phone, it must be through Chrome; it'll be better if IVE is an App, not just a website as an smartphone user its quite hard to open the IVE Website; My technical problem following Ive is a problem with the cellphone that I use for Ive. because my cellphone is difficult, but I often upload it via my mother's cellphone. |
| Response time from peers | 6 | Some people didn't respond; sometimes people take too long to reply to my comments, even up to 3 weeks; |

| | | |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Interface | 4 | when looking for comments from someone we have to manually scroll first; When the first reply is sent it immediately returns to the question even though their replies are in a row, so you have to scroll again to reply to their message below. |
| Notifications | 4 | it would be even better if there was a notification system; the notifications on my account are sometimes incorrect. the notification was already there but it appeared 2 times or more, |
| Login | 4 | we must include our Gmail first every time; log in because IVE got error |
| Inappropriate responses | 2 | there are still many general forums in the "intermedite and advance."; |
| Language level | 2 | Problems that I ever found is when people from other countries type the words in english but the writing is wrong. So, sometimes I felt hard to know what their meanings. |

As noted with the positive comments, there are some comments here with responses that include some spelling/grammar mistakes as they are shown here verbatim.

Student 1 (2022) "I sometimes forget to reopen and play in the IVE Project because I'm doing assignments, so I've missed info about the IVE several times. When I'm playing IVE I can even sometimes feel at home for a long time, but because I'm a little forgetful, I often forget to open the IVE." Student 2 (2023) "Honestly, it's quite slow sometimes back and forth to the main page. However, this is only because maybe my smartphone's signal is not that good." Student 3 (2024) "My problem when I was on ive was that I didn't get a reply from me replying to the forum. But it's okay I'm happy to be able to share my experience and knowledge."

There were other open-ended questions that asked about which activities the students preferred, what they thought of the assessment method and other comments. In the 2024 survey, students were also asked about the use of AI but the answers to these questions are beyond the scope of this paper so will be truncated here.

Discussion

The FL classroom is the quintessential community of inquiry. Students' cognitive and social presence are enhanced through the teacher's teaching presence but in relatively homogenous societies there is always something missing in a FL classroom and that is a setting or environment where the foreign and local cultures can be expressed. VE is the method of FL teaching that allows intercultural presence to flourish, and the data obtained from students suggests that it does and is well received in the Indonesian context.

Quantitative data analysis

The quantitative data supports the idea that Indonesian students overwhelmingly believe VE, and in this case, the IVEProject benefits their English language and intercultural learning. The very high mean score of students believing their English ability, enjoyment in learning English and confidence in communicating in English with those in other countries had improved/increased greatly. Coupled with the very low standard deviation of those scores, it suggests a very large majority of the students feel strongly that the IVEProject had a positive

influence on these. Similarly with students' appreciation of, and desire to learn about, other cultures, the data conclusively shows that VE is beneficial in achieving these outcomes. Students' answers to "My interest in other countries" showed the highest incidence of having increased greatly which is indicative of greater desire to improve their intercultural learning with similarly high means for the statements "My understanding of other countries' cultures"; "My feeling of being open to other cultures"; "I wanted to exchange information with students in the other countries" and "My understanding of the lives of people in other countries" indicating that students believe that participating in VE leads to improved intercultural learning outcomes. General participation in VE is well-received according to the data too. Students' satisfaction with the interactions they had with peers in other countries and the overall platform were uniformly high as too their eagerness to participate in future VE. The reliability of this data is high as this research has surveyed three separate groups of students doing the VE over a three-year period.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data results are further backed up by the qualitative data. Ryan & Deci (2020) note intrinsic motivation is an essential factor in educational motivation, so it is vital that students enjoy their learning. The fact that "enjoyment" ranked the highest of all factors noted by students with regard to VE as a method of FL learning is important. This shows that VE has a positive effect on students' appreciation of, and willingness to learn, the FL. As "enjoyment" is an essential element of motivation, the researchers considered whether to include it under the "self-esteem/motivation" theme but chose to separate them. The comments directly related to self-esteem and motivation, that is, how VE gave students pride in their learning and courage to communicate more, only reinforced the idea that VE was useful as a means of motivating FL students to learn.

The second most common theme from students' participation in VE was their belief that this method of FL learning increased their intercultural understanding. This is another crucial benefit of VE which traditional FL classrooms rarely can foster and never to the extent that VE can. Intercultural competency is increasingly being sought by employers as markets become more globalized. This talent is now even more sought after than FL ability in Japan as noted in the Keidanren (Japan Business Federation - 2018) report and subsequent ones as well. Indonesia is in a similar position to Japan and other countries in Asia and elsewhere with regard to the way its society approaches English language learning, hence ensuring students are interculturally aware and competent is becoming an important part of students' education but, without VE, difficult to incorporate into curricula. VE ensures students can develop their intercultural awareness and the data suggests students are very cognizant of this fact.

Interestingly, students saw what the researchers termed as "general learning" to be more apparent than specific "language learning" in their comments. The quantitative data showed explicitly that students believed VE assisted with their language learning, but their comments noted they learned a great deal about other facets of their peers' countries. There were no specifics that students wrote in their comments, just general statements such as "I gained new knowledge" and "I now know many things from other countries." More research would have to be done to examine these outcomes in more detail, but it is fascinating to note that students gained a wide range of knowledge from participation in the VE. The final major theme noted by students was that VE increased their ability to communicate with people. Language is usually learned for this express purpose - something many FL teachers sometimes forget. That VE allows our students to interact with those in other countries in the language that we are teaching them is a powerful reminder of the importance of encouraging students to use the FL

for real-world communication. This research demonstrates this point clearly.

Obstacles to participation in VE

As with most activities that involve technology, issues of connectivity will occur. This was the major concern for the students that faced obstacles participating in the VE. Considering the number of students surveyed and that they were studying in one of the smaller regions of Indonesia, it is surprising that there were not more comments relating to this, yet 15 of the 131 students that completed the surveys over three years had technical issues which is a little over 11% and is therefore a concern. Students' use of different devices also meant that some had a better experiences than others, which would also suggest that socio-economic factors have also come into play in these instances. Use of the platform is not actually affected by which device is used but students seemed to believe this was the case. More research needs to be done, but being able to offer equitable access to Internet-enabled devices and connectivity is an ongoing challenge to educators in many countries around the world.

Peer response time was another factor students mentioned as an obstacle, and it is important to address. When peers from other cultures do not reply to a student's post this can be demotivating. One way this can be addressed is through teacher training. Students from a variety of backgrounds participate in the IVEProject. In the past, students from Niger, Mali and regions of Colombia which also had very poor access to electricity let alone internet access, have participated. Their response times are obviously much slower than those in more developed areas. Students also have their lives outside of school and these can be hectic or affected by illness and other issues. Teachers need to help students understand these situations and offer them guidance by suggesting they approach a number of different peers to ensure that some of them do reply to their posts. It is nevertheless disheartening to students who don't receive replies to their asynchronous posts, and it is therefore important for all participating teachers to be aware of posts that have not received replies and encourage their own students to reply to students who are yet to receive one.

The other major obstacle for students was time management and time differences across the different time-zones. This is a common problem in VE that is truly international. When Indonesian students are interacting with students in Colombia, for example, there is exactly a 12-hour time difference between the two countries. When trying to organize synchronous exchanges this causes obvious problems particularly when students from Europe, Africa, the Middle East, South and Central America also wish to join these real-time exchanges with others from around Asia. Some students went to incredible lengths to do so. In one real-time call students from Türkiye woke at 1am their time to participate in such a Zoom call and were happy to do so but this is obviously not always the case. Students are also very busy with other classes so teachers need to offer a variety of time slots for real-time exchanges and let students know that due to different time zones and differing socio-economic and life circumstances, asynchronous exchanges can also be affected. As noted above, encouraging students to participate in many different discussions rather than focusing on only one would ensure students can have interactions with peers. Though this is a problem for students, it is actually a sign that they do appreciate VE as they are really saying "we want to communicate more" which is a positive sign.

The system used for the IVEProject involves the vast majority of students logging in using an authentication system called "Oauth". The system generally uses Google and Microsoft account authentication to ensure data for logins is not stored on the IVEProject server improving security and reducing the chances of identity theft. For students not used to this method, it can be initially a little confusing particularly if, when they set up their Google or Microsoft

accounts, they had inadvertently chosen to limit the way they can use those accounts. This was the main cause of login problems but was overcome in all situations relatively quickly. The system the project uses also had some issues in the 2024 iteration with doubling of notifications, but this was also rectified though it did cause some confusion for students during the two-week period it was occurring.

The final issues were related to what was termed “inappropriate responses”. It is unfortunate that some students, who were trying to increase the number of posts and words posted to the VE for assessment purposes, copied and pasted responses either from the Internet or from other students’ posts. In the 2024 iteration, the use of AI also became an issue as some students would ask AI for a response and post the AI response as their own. Seeing this is frustrating for the students who are trying to interact and learn responsibly. Again, teachers need to be aware of what their students are doing and guide them in the way they post to the forums. The IVEProject has many tools to help teachers see what their students are doing and if these tools are used well even the few problems that have been noted by these students shouldn’t really occur. This is one of the main reasons that the IVEProject only allows students under the tutelage of teachers to participate - to ensure that they are guided to participate with the goal of improving their linguistic and intercultural competence.

Implications

As Garrison et al. (1999) have noted, communities of inquiry are “essential to an educational transaction” and this is borne out in FL classrooms around the world. VE enables FL classrooms to join a larger community of inquiry - an international one. When a classroom in one country joins other classrooms from multiple other countries there are many more educational transactions that occur and the intercultural milieu students then find themselves a part of, encourages them to view the world through a more nuanced intercultural lens. Through their intercultural presence, they bring their culture to the milieu and learn from others therein, as they are exposed to the many different cultures that make up the VE. Their intercultural presence becomes a powerful force for understanding and enabling deeper and expanded educational transactions. Students appreciate this as is conveyed by the research carried out here over three years.

FL teachers generally want their students to be in an environment where they can use the FL they are learning to communicate and learn. VE offers this opportunity but is still not mainstream due to teachers not being able to easily access VE. The IVEProject is one means of easy access to VE and seems to be, based on the data from this research, easily accessible and enjoyed by students whilst being educational in FL, intercultural and general terms. Such VE could become a part of FL curricula and bring the benefits of VE to a wider audience. As the Internet becomes a part of the fabric of education throughout Indonesia and the world, harnessing the enormous potential of VE should become a priority of FL teachers.

From the data and this discussion answers to the research questions have emerged. The Indonesian students surveyed in this research perceive VE as being beneficial to their EFL learning and see that the intercultural aspect of VE enhances their understanding of other cultures. Hence, in answer to the first research question, as a method of EFL learning they overwhelmingly see it in a positive light and one they would like incorporated into their curriculum.

Regarding the second research question, the students note the challenges to incorporating VE, but these challenges are generally of a technological nature and can be overcome with institutional assistance. The opportunities students encountered were, on the other hand,

numerous and students were excited by VE and enjoyed engaging with peers from around the world. Through participation in the community of inquiry and exercising their intercultural presence, they came to learn not just about the FL they were studying, but many other aspects of culture and were able to perceive knowledge through an intercultural lens.

The implications for FL teachers in Indonesia and elsewhere are important. When incorporating VE into their syllabi, best practice initially involves ensuring students have equitable access to internet-enabled devices and have an environment whereby they can access the VE platform. From the feedback of these students, teachers should also be cognizant of the different functions available to them and their students and be able to show them how to effectively contribute to the VE. Training from the VE provider is essential in this regard and the IVEProject supplies this and a teachers' forum for further teacher-to-teacher interactions. Offering students in-class time to participate is another important practice teachers could include to ensure students know how to participate in the VE. Assessment is outside the scope of this paper, but it is crucial that participation in any VE is assessed, and more research is being done on this.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has shown the benefits and challenges of incorporating VE into a FL classroom in Indonesia. It has followed the same classrooms over three years and showed similar results for students over that time have been achieved, hence has strong reliability and validity. However, it was only two classes from one region and the study is therefore limited. A broader study or replication of this study including students from other regions of Indonesia would ensure even greater reliability and validity strength.

The students in this study for the years 2023 and 2024 had to use English in their replies so possibly were restrained from sharing everything they would like to share. Offering an option of sharing their thoughts in their native language would ensure more detailed responses could be obtained.

Finally, there was no control group for students to be compared with. Further, students' actual language and intercultural levels were not assessed and compared pre- and post-VE. Self-reporting, whilst important and accessible, does not always ensure actual outcomes of the self-reported activity are achieved. The incredibly high means and low standard deviations seen in this research suggests students are very confident they achieved the outcomes of improved language and intercultural learning, but these need to be independently verified.

Conclusion

FL teachers are beginning to realize that incorporating VE into their syllabi has numerous benefits. This study has shown that Indonesian students have embraced VE as a method that empowers them to acquire a worldview they would not be able to gain without it. They believe ELFVE is a sound manner in which to improve their English and intercultural competence in addition to gaining enjoyment from becoming a part of an international community of inquiry. The IVEProject is one VE that has facilitated these outcomes with few obstacles encountered by students. Though more research would be beneficial, the initial conclusion that can be made from this study is that Indonesian EFL students gain enormous benefits from participating in VE.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to express their gratitude and appreciation to the IVEProject team and the Indonesian participants of the IVEProject from 2022-2024.

References

- Baker, W. (2012). From cultural awareness to intercultural awareness: Culture in ELT. *ELT Journal*, 66(1), 62–70. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccr017>
- Belz, J. A. (2007). The development of intercultural communicative competence in telecollaborative partnerships. In R. O'Dowd (Ed.), *Online intercultural exchange: An introduction for foreign language teachers* (pp. 127-166). Multilingual Matters.
- Canals, L. (2020). The effects of virtual exchanges on oral skills and motivation. *Language Learning & Technology*, 24(3), 103-119. <http://hdl.handle.net/10125/44742>
- Choi, J.W. (2008). The role of online collaboration in promoting ESL writing. *English Language Teaching*, 1(1), 34-49
<https://ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/elt/article/download/508/490>
- Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T. & Archer, W. (1999). Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: computer conferencing in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 2, (2-3), 87–105. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1096-7516\(00\)00016-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1096-7516(00)00016-6)
- Gay, L.R., Mills, G.E., and Airasian, P.W. (2011). *Educational Research: Competencies for analysis and applications (tenth edition)*. Pearson Education Inc.
- Godwin-Jones, R. (2019). Telecollaboration as an approach to developing intercultural communication competence. *Language Learning & Technology*, 23(3), 8-28.
<http://hdl.handle.net/10125/44691>
- Hagley, E. (2020a). Musings on virtual exchange in the Asia-Pacific and beyond. In Hagley, Eric; Wang, Yi'an (Eds.), *Virtual exchange in the Asia-Pacific: research and practice* (pp. 231-240). Research-publishing.net. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2020.47.1154>
- Hagley, E. (2020b). Effects of virtual exchange in the EFL classroom on students' cultural and intercultural sensitivity. *Computer-Assisted Language Learning Electronic Journal*, 21(3), 74-87. <http://callej.org/journal/21-3/Hagley2020.pdf>
- Hagley, E. (2021). Incorporating the International Virtual Exchange Project into English Curricula in Japan – Benefits and Issues. *Bulletin of Research Center for Computing and Multimedia Studies, Hosei University*, 36, 47-53.
https://doi.org/10.34368/rccms.36.0_47
- Hagley, E. (2023). Bringing ELF to life via Virtual Exchange –The IVEProject, In Stevkovska, M., Idrizi, E., and Miftari-Fetishi, I. (Eds). *Contemporary Issues in Language Teaching*, (pp. 63-80), International Balkan University.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/369361904_Virtual_Exchange_Bringing_ELF_to_life
- Hauck, M. (2019). Virtual exchange for (critical) digital literacy skills development. *European Journal of Language Policy*, 11(2), <https://doi.org/10.3828/ejlp.2019.12>.
- Helm, F. (2018). *Emerging identities in virtual exchange*, Research-publishing.net
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED585082.pdf>

- Hřebačková, M. (2019). Teaching Intercultural Communicative Competence Through Virtual Exchange. *Training, Language and Culture*, 3(4), 8-17. doi: 10.29366/2019tlc.3.4.1
- Keidanren survey, (2018). (Japanese only)
http://www.keidanren.or.jp/policy/2018/029_kekka.pdf
- Kohn, K & Hoffstaedter, P. (2017). Learner Agency and Non-Native Speaker Identity in Pedagogical Lingua Franca Conversations: Insights from Intercultural Telecollaboration in Foreign Language Education, *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 30(5), 351-367, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2017.1304966>
- Latifa, A. (2021). The Attitude of Indonesian Learners in Tertiary Level toward Spoken English and its Learning. *Journal of World Englishes and Educational Practices*, 3(2), 01–09. <https://doi.org/10.32996/jweep.2021.3.2.1>
- Mambu, J. E. (2018). Critical pedagogy in the ELF era: An Indonesian-based English language teacher educator's reflection. In S. Zein (Ed.), *Teacher education for English as a lingua franca: Perspectives from Indonesia* (pp. 41–57). Routledge.
- Murtisari, E. T., & Mali, Y. C. (2017). Impact of English on the Indonesian language and culture: High school students' perceptions. *Studies about Languages*, 30, 90–104. <https://doi.org/10.5755/j01.sal.0.30.17570>
- Roarty, A. & Hagley, E. (2021). Using virtual exchange to develop intercultural understanding in EFL students. *Teaching English as a Second Language Electronic Journal (TESL-EJ)*, 25(3). <https://tesl-ej.org/pdf/ej99/a14.pdf>
- Roarty, A., Tuncer, H., Tang, L., (2023). Adding synchronous sessions to asynchronous virtual exchange: Insights from the IVEProject. *Intercultural Communication Education*, 6(1), 19–32. doi.org/10.29140/ice.v6n1.760
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 61, 101860. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101860>
- Schenker, T. (2013). The effects of a virtual exchange on students' interest in learning about culture, *Foreign Language Annals*, 46(3), 491–507.
- Simbolon, N. E. (2021). English Medium Instruction (EMI) practice: Higher education internationalization in Indonesia. *Englisia: Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities*, 8(2), 72-83. <https://doi.org/10.22373/ej.v8i2.8961>
- Thomas, D. R. (2006). A General Inductive Approach for Analyzing Qualitative Evaluation Data. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27(2), 237-246. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214005283748>
- Zein, S., Sukyadi, D., Hamied, F. A., & Lengkanawati, N. S. (2020). English language education in Indonesia: A review of research (2011–2019). *Language Teaching* 53(4), 491–523. [doi:10.1017/S0261444820000208](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444820000208)
- Zhou, A. (2023). Investigating the impact of online language exchanges on second language speaking and willingness to communicate of Chinese EFL learners: a mixed methods study. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1177922>

Biodata

Eric Hagley taught for 24 years in Japan, as associate professor at Muroran Institute of Technology and research fellow at Hosei University. He is now researching doing his PhD at Griffith University, Australia. The data collected in this study is not associated with his doctoral dissertation. He is chair of APVEA, was vice-president of PacCALL and has written and presented on VE extensively.

Wisma Yunita is an Associate Professor in the English Education Postgraduate Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Bengkulu, Indonesia. She earned her doctoral degree in Language Education from Universitas Negeri Jakarta in 2018. She has presented and published internationally. Research interests include English Grammar, Language Learning Strategies, Academic Writing & ELT Methodology and Innovation.