

Title: Collaborative Online International Learning as a Tool for Global Competence
Development: A U.S.–Taiwan Case Study

Overview:

This case study examines a US–Taiwan Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) course as a model of virtual exchange in higher education. Findings show significant gains in intercultural competence, digital collaboration, and global awareness, while highlighting implementation challenges, institutional supports, and effective practices for advancing internationalization at home.

Abstract (800 words)

As higher education institutions seek scalable and equitable approaches to internationalization, virtual exchange (VE) and Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) have gained prominence as effective pedagogical models for fostering global competence without physical mobility. This case study examines the design, implementation, and outcomes of a US–Taiwan COIL initiative collaboratively developed by the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) and Shih Hsin University (SHU) in Taiwan. The study aims to evaluate how participation in a structured COIL course influences students' intercultural competence, digital collaboration skills, global awareness, and professional development, while also identifying institutional conditions, challenges, and best practices that support successful virtual exchange in higher education.

The COIL course brought together 10 doctoral students from the United States and 20 undergraduate students from Taiwan in a multi-week, credit-bearing online collaboration embedded within existing coursework. The course design followed a phased structure that included orientation and relationship building, collaborative project development, synchronous and asynchronous intercultural communication, final presentations, and reflective activities. Faculty from both institutions engaged in extensive pre-course planning and ongoing mentoring throughout the initiative. A mixed-methods case study approach was employed, utilizing pre- and post-course surveys, open-ended questionnaire responses, learning management system reflections, and course artifacts to capture changes in student attitudes, competencies, and learning outcomes. Quantitative data

were analyzed descriptively, while qualitative data were examined through thematic and content analysis to identify recurring patterns and significant insights.

Findings indicate that participation in the COIL course generated substantial gains across multiple learning domains. Students demonstrated marked improvement in intercultural competence, including cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural sensitivity, intercultural confidence, and cultural bridging skills. Pre- and post-course comparisons revealed consistent growth across all measured dimensions, with particularly large gains observed in intercultural confidence and self-awareness. Students reported increased comfort engaging with peers from different cultural backgrounds and greater ability to adapt communication styles in cross-cultural contexts. These findings support the effectiveness of COIL as a high-impact practice for developing global competence in diverse student populations.

The initiative also produced significant advances in digital collaboration and academic skills. Students reported improved technical proficiency through sustained use of digital tools such as Zoom, WhatsApp, LINE, and collaborative document platforms. Cross-cultural teamwork, problem-solving ability, and professional knowledge application showed notable improvement, reflecting the experiential and project-based nature of the COIL design. Participants further reported heightened global awareness and a stronger ability to connect disciplinary content—particularly brand management and media analysis—to international and cultural contexts. Creative project formats, including short video productions and group discussions, received the highest satisfaction ratings, highlighting the importance of interactive and multimodal learning activities.

Emotional and attitudinal shifts were another key outcome of the COIL experience. While many students initially expressed nervousness and anxiety related to language barriers, time zone differences, and unfamiliar collaboration formats, post-course data showed substantial reductions in anxiety and increased enthusiasm, confidence, and satisfaction. These findings suggest that structured virtual exchange experiences can effectively reduce psychological barriers to international engagement while fostering positive attitudes toward global learning.

The study also identifies several challenges inherent in cross-border virtual collaboration. Time zone differences between the United States and Taiwan, language proficiency variation, workload management, and coordination across differing academic calendars emerged as persistent obstacles. However, the results demonstrate that these challenges can be mitigated through intentional course design and institutional support. Effective strategies included flexible scheduling, recorded synchronous sessions, mixed-language grouping, peer support systems, standardized communication platforms, clear project

guidelines, and intensive faculty mentoring. Faculty mentoring, in particular, was identified as the most utilized and impactful support mechanism, underscoring the central role of instructor engagement in successful COIL implementation.

From an institutional perspective, the findings highlight the importance of comprehensive support structures for sustaining virtual exchange initiatives. Technical assistance, schedule coordination tools, cultural resources, and project templates contributed to smoother implementation and higher student satisfaction. Students widely recognized the relevance of COIL-acquired skills to future career development, including employability, networking, leadership, and global competitiveness, suggesting that virtual exchange can play a meaningful role in preparing students for a globalized workforce.

Overall, this study contributes empirical evidence to the growing literature on COIL and virtual exchange by demonstrating the educational value, feasibility, and scalability of international online collaboration. The findings affirm that COIL can serve as an effective model for internationalization at home, expanding access to global learning opportunities while delivering measurable academic, intercultural, and professional benefits.

Recommendations for future implementation include earlier team formation, clearer project expectations, enhanced cultural exchange activities, and continued investment in faculty development and institutional infrastructure. Future research should explore the long-term impacts of COIL participation on students' academic trajectories and career outcomes, as well as comparative analyses across disciplines, institutional types, and cultural contexts.