

CHAPTER 10: PROMOTING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND AUTHENTIC LANGUAGE PRACTICE AMONG EFL LEARNERS: VIRTUAL EXCHANGE AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Samed Yasin ÖZTÜRK 

Abstract

This chapter explores the potential of Virtual Exchange (VE) for promoting Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in foreign language classrooms. Global Citizenship Education emphasizes the significance of developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for EFL learners to become responsible and contributing global citizens, while VE is about bringing together learners from geographically dispersed locations to engage in intercultural communication and exchange. The chapter provides an overview of GCE and VE and highlights their complementary nature. The chapter then examines the advantages of using VE for promoting GCE in English language teacher education and foreign language classrooms, such as fostering intercultural communicative competence and critical thinking skills, promoting empathy, and understanding, and providing opportunities for authentic language practice. The chapter discusses the challenges and considerations that need to be considered when designing and implementing such projects and studies. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the significance of incorporating VE into EFL classes and English language teacher education, as a means of promoting GCE and preparing learners to engage in a globally interconnected world.

1. Introduction

It might be necessary to revisit the background propositions leading to the first appearance of the popular concept ‘communicative competence’ in the field of applied linguistics before delving into the concepts of intercultural communicative competence and virtual exchange. In his definition of Linguistic Theory, Chomsky (1965) argued that the concepts of competence and performance refer to the “ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly...” (p.3). However, this explanation regarding competence and performance sparked heated debates among applied linguists. Hymes (1972) criticized Chomsky and argued that his description of linguistic theory and competence and performance ignores the social conditions in learning English as a foreign language. Moreover,

he indicated that competence and performance must be addressed by considering sociocultural features in a heterogeneous speech community unlike Chomsky's ideal speaker-listener in a completely homogeneous speech community argument.

Years later, Hymes (1985) touched on another important point by arguing that language and culture, as they are reflected in society, cannot be related according to end products of linguists and anthropologists. He points out that language and culture cannot be separated from society and people's daily lives and experiences. Canale and Swain (1980) expanded on the Hymes's concept of communicative competence by arguing that communicative performance is different from communicative competence because the former is the operationalization of respective competences in learners' use of language. Based on this perspective, they identified four types of competences: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. This model ignited the transition from traditional structure-based instruction to a modern instruction encompassing the dynamics of culture, society, and learner diversity in English teaching (Friedrich, 2013).

The contemporary approach to language teaching, namely Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), emphasized the integration of culture into language teaching. With the advent of CLT and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) approach, the concept of culture was replaced with "much more agentive, fluid, and hybrid notion of cosmopolitan practice, in which interlocutors seek alignment, not intercultural understanding, multilayered affiliations, not unidimensional identities, and communicate with one another in the absence of any shared values" (Kramsch, 2014). This restrictive and dogmatic approach to the concept of culture was criticized by scholars like Pennycook (2007) and McNamara (2012), and it was indicated that genuine interactions among people allow the construction of culture and cultural practices. It has also been argued that culture-specific instruction, which is focusing on only one culture, need to be replaced with culture-general instruction, which is interculturally interacting with people from diverse cultural background in variety of contexts and situations (Godwin-Jones, 2013).

Based on this constructivist view on culture & cultural practices and their place in language teaching, the concept of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) has garnered attention in the field of applied linguistics. The examination of the ICC has given rise to various theoretical models. Byram (1997) introduced the most well-known compositional model of ICC, Deardorff (2006) came up with the co-orientational model of ICC, and Bennett (1993) offered developmental model of ICC. Deardorff's (2006) process-based model of ICC highlights the significance of three dimensions: knowledge, attitudes, and skills. It emphasizes

the cyclical nature of the intercultural learning process and includes stages like "applied intercultural learning" and "global leadership". Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (1993) describes the stages individuals go through as they develop intercultural sensitivity and competence. It includes stages such as Denial, Defense, Minimization, Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration. Byram's (1997) holistic and compositional model of ICC is designed to help learners acquire the required skills and understanding needed to effectively communicate and interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The model goes beyond language proficiency and encompasses a broader set of competencies necessary for appropriate intercultural communication and establishing genuine intercultural relations.

Byram's model has five dimensions: attitude, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. The dimension of attitude emphasizes the significance of holding positive attitudes towards other people from different cultural backgrounds and their cultural practices. This includes open-mindedness, curiosity, tolerance, and respect for cultural diversity. Developing an attitude of empathy and a willingness to engage with different perspectives is a critical step for building appropriate intercultural relationships. The dimension of knowledge encompasses understanding the cultural norms, values, beliefs, and practices of other cultures and cultural practices. It also covers sociopolitical and historical aspects that influence intercultural interactions.

The dimensions of skills address the ability to understand and interpret written and spoken messages coming from people with diverse backgrounds. These skills also allow individuals to establish and maintain positive relationships with individuals. These skills are critical for effective communication and collaboration in cross-cultural situations, including adapting communication styles and codes. Regarding the last dimension of critical cultural awareness, it is emphasized that the ability and awareness of critically examining and questioning cultural stereotypes and biases can be a key indicator of having intercultural communicative competence since this dimension involves developing a critical perspective on one's own culture as well as the ability to analyze and critique cultural representations in intercultural interactions.

Byram's model has influenced the development of intercultural education programs and materials that aim to prepare language learners for successful intercultural engagement in a globalized world. Having emphasized the importance of ICC in foreign language classrooms, it is equally important to find practical and pedagogical ways to foster it among language

learners. In the following sections, two practical ways of addressing ICC in foreign language classrooms will be discussed: Virtual Exchange and Global Citizenship Education.

2. Virtual Exchange

Virtual Exchange (VE) is a pedagogical approach (Gutiérrez et al., 2021) that brings together learners online from geographically dispersed locations and diverse cultural backgrounds to engage and collaborate on certain tasks usually as part of coursework under the guidance of expert researchers and practitioners. As mentioned in the previous section, bringing up language learners as intercultural speakers with “think globally, act locally” ideology would equip them with the required competences to use the language meaningfully. VE is an ideal venue for achieving this goal in the most practical and economical way (Öztürk, 2022) because it represents a transformative pedagogical approach that uses digital technologies to connect students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, transcending geographical boundaries and fostering cross-cultural understanding.

In the last two decades, VE has been given different names such as telecollaboration, online intercultural exchange, collaborative online international learning, internet-mediated intercultural foreign language education, international virtual academic collaboration, virtual international cooperation projects, globally networked learning environments, and e-tandem (O’Dowd, 2023). Rubin (2016) indicated that use of many different names for VE makes the concept of VE difficult to be understood and realized. For this reason, O’Dowd (2023) offers that the use of VE as an only term would eliminate the confusion among researchers and practitioners.

Upon deciding on the agreed term, O’Dowd (2023) defines VE and sets the boundaries for related VE practices. He indicated that VE is a broad term encompassing various online learning methods. It involves students engaging in ongoing collaborative learning and interaction with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds as part of their studies.

As this definition suggests, VE practices have certain characteristics that differentiate them from other online virtual applications (O’Dowd, 2023) such as intercultural interaction taking place in online environments, their malleability in terms of integrating into curricula, guidance from experts and practitioners, learner-centeredness, and rich intercultural interaction.

3. Internationalizing in Higher Education and at Home

VE practices play critical roles in internationalizing higher education and internationalizing at home. De Wit et al. (2015) explained internationalizing higher education as: “the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society” (p. 29). O’Dowd (2023) argues that this definition indicates the complete difference between physical mobility and international education because internationalizing higher education is a strategic process that aims to instill global perspectives, experiences, and opportunities into the core missions of universities and colleges. The goal is to prepare students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world. Moreover, this goal also addresses the process of global citizenship education, which will be explained later in the chapter.

VE plays a significant role in advancing the internationalization of higher education by promoting global engagement, fostering cross-cultural competence, and expanding access to international experiences. It can contribute to the process of internationalizing higher education in the following ways:

- It can introduce diverse global perspectives to learners through courses, materials, curricula, and transnational collaborative projects,
- It can facilitate cross-cultural interactions among learners from geographically diverse locations and these interactions promote intercultural communicative competence, helping students develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to engage effectively in diverse settings,
- It can work as an alternative to physical mobility in certain ways for learners who may have financial constraints, family obligations, or health concerns. In this way, VE practices might democratize access to international experiences and exchanges,
- As Pittarello et al. (2020) indicated, VE practices can serve as a preparation for study abroad programs. Learners who would participate in study abroad programs can be part of VE projects that are organized with participants from the country they intend to study during physical mobility,
- VE encourages faculty and staff to engage in global professional development. They can collaborate with international colleagues, participate in global projects, and stay updated on international trends and research,

- VE encourages faculty to incorporate global perspectives into their teaching, contributing to the internationalization of the curriculum. This may involve redesigning courses to include global content or collaborating on cross-border research projects,
- VE equips students with global competencies, such as adaptability, cultural sensitivity, and the ability to work in diverse teams. These skills are highly valued by employers and prepare graduates for successful careers in an interconnected world.

Moreover, VE plays a pivotal role regarding internationalizing at home. Internationalization at home refers to efforts made by educational institutions to globalize their campuses and curricula, ensuring that students who may not have the opportunity to study abroad still receive international and intercultural experiences within their home institutions (Deardorff & Jones, 2022). VE contributes to internationalizing at home in the following ways:

- It offers learners the golden opportunity of connecting and interacting with fellow learners from geographically dispersed locations and diverse cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds in the comfort of their home,
- Thanks to VE projects and practices, learners can engage in meaningful cross-cultural interactions, discussions, and collaborative tasks and this would expose them to international perspectives and experiences right from their home.
- As mentioned, VE provides learners with the opportunity to interact with individuals from different cultures during a certain period and this promotes intercultural communicative competence and critical cultural awareness. Through these interactions, learners can better explore and appreciate different cultures and cultural practices.
- During VE projects, learners have ample opportunity to practice their English language skills. Such interactions are especially helpful to improve sociolinguistic and pragmatic skills.
- Engaging in cross-cultural discussions and problem-solving challenges learners to think critically about global issues. They learn to approach problems from diverse perspectives and consider the impact of culture on various aspects of life.
- VE can be a more inclusive approach to internationalization as it provides access to international experiences for students who may face barriers to physical mobility, such as financial constraints, family responsibilities, or health concerns.
- In an increasingly global job market, learners who have participated in VE are better prepared to work in multicultural environments. They develop skills that are highly

valued by employers, such as adaptability, cross-cultural communication, and problem-solving in diverse transnational teams.

4. Global Citizenship Education

As the concept of ICC, VE, and the merits of VE practices and projects were explained, it is worth noting that VE practices greatly contribute to the goal of bringing up global learners and teachers who can live and work in today's globalized world. According to De Wit et al. (2015), global citizenship education is closely linked to the concept of international education. International education refers to “the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society” (p. 29). It can be inferred that international education and global citizenship education mean more than physical mobility because it addresses all relevant processes to make higher education international, intercultural, and global (O’Dowd, 2023).

The goal of international education is to promote global citizenship education in schools and universities (De Wit et al., 2015; O’Dowd, 2023). Therefore, from this point on, global citizenship education and international education will be used interchangeably, and the relevant section on the role of VE in university internationalization will be understood as its role in promoting global citizenship in higher education. There are other concepts such as ‘global competence’ and ‘intercultural competence’ used by researchers to address the mentioned processes. However, global citizenship and global competence are two different concepts (O’Dowd, 2019; Porto, 2014). Though global or intercultural competence is closely related to intercultural communication skills, global citizenship and intercultural citizenship pertain to individuals capable of actively engaging in global societies to address worldwide issues and dilemmas. This suggests that global citizens are anticipated to possess a keen cultural sensitivity and the essential abilities to actively engage in societies and contribute to the resolution of global challenges.

UNESCO (2014) defined the aim of global citizenship education as: “to empower learners to engage and assume active roles, both locally and globally, to face and resolve global challenges and ultimately to become proactive contributors to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world” (p. 15). As mentioned, global citizenship or

intercultural citizenship can be understood as the implementation of relevant competences defined for the concepts of global competences and intercultural competences. Thus, integrating global citizenship principles into the higher education, especially into English teacher education programs, can contribute to the goal of preparing citizens and teachers who actively engage in their respected societies. Leask (2015) touched on this point by emphasizing that graduates who are trained in this direction “will be committed to action locally and globally in the interests of others and across social, environmental, and political dimensions” (p. 60). Porto (2014) also emphasized the significance of applying competences in foreign language classrooms and promoting global citizenship. She indicated that it combines the aspect of intercultural communication competence typically found in foreign language education with a focus on community-based civic engagement as seen in citizenship education.

Promoting and implementing global citizenship education in educational institutions, especially universities, has been identified by important organizations as well. The UN Global Education First Initiative recognized the promotion of global citizenship education as one of the priorities (UNESCO, 2014). European Union (EU) officials also recognized the promotion of global citizenship in all levels of education in the member states. In the Paris Declaration, which was announced in 2016, it was emphasized that the EU would take necessary steps for “ensuring that children and young people acquire social, civic and intercultural competences, by promoting democratic values and fundamental rights, social inclusion and nondiscrimination, as well as active citizenship” (European Commission, 2016, p. 3). It was indicated in the same document that the EU would put certain steps in action such as promoting critical thinking and media literacy, improving the educational standards of disadvantaged children, and fostering intercultural dialogue among people.

4.1. Models for Fostering Global Citizenship Education

There are different models and approaches to fostering global citizenship in educational institutions and foreign language classrooms (Leask, 2015). These models define certain competences to be followed when adjusting curricula and relevant VE practices can be shaped according to these adjustments as well (O’Dowd, 2023). Existing models for fostering global citizenship education in foreign language classrooms are as follows:

- the Council of Europe’s Framework of Competences for Democratic Citizenship and Intercultural Dialogue (2016),
- UNESCO’s model of Global Citizenship Education (2014),
- the OECD’s Global Competence Framework (2018),

- Byram's Framework for Intercultural Citizenship (2008).

O'Dowd (2023) indicated that there are numerous differences between these models, yet they share a certain characteristic, which is ensuring that people actively involve in their respected societies and work willingly to be part of the solution.

4.2. The Council of Europe's Framework of Competences for Democratic Citizenship and Intercultural Dialogue

The model focuses on developing the competences (knowledge, skills, attitudes) necessary for active and responsible participation in democratic societies. The framework emphasizes the importance of democratic values and principles, human rights, and active citizenship. It highlights the need for individuals to develop critical thinking skills to analyze and evaluate information critically. Cultural awareness and intercultural competence are central themes, promoting respect for diversity and the ability to engage in constructive dialogue with people from different backgrounds. Key competences of the model are as follows: critical thinking, understanding of human rights, intercultural competence, social and civic responsibility, and media literacy.

The framework serves as a reference for curriculum development and educational policies in European countries. It guides the integration of democratic citizenship and intercultural education into formal and informal learning contexts. Teacher training and resources are often aligned with this framework to support educators in fostering these competences in students.

The model has been criticized because it was created by the Council of Europe, and it merely reflects the European perspective and way of life (Simpson & Dervin, 2019). Yet, Barret and Byram (2020) argued that the model reflects the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and this declaration was signed and accepted by non-European countries and cultures as well. Regarding the use of this model in VE initiatives, O'Dowd (2023) warned researchers and practitioners because the content and principles of the framework might be misinterpreted by people from non-Western societies. The primary aim of intercultural education and VE is to expose students to vastly different worldviews and cultural outlooks. However, educators in other nations might perceive this framework as an effort to enforce European values.

4.3. UNESCO's Model of Global Citizenship Education

UNESCO's model of Global Citizenship Education (GCED) seeks to prepare individuals to become active and responsible global citizens who can address global challenges and

contribute to a more peaceful and sustainable world. It aims to promote values such as human rights, social justice, equality, and environmental sustainability. The model takes a holistic approach to education, aiming to transform not only what individuals know but also how they think and act. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of global issues and encourages individuals to consider the impact of their actions on a global scale. Cultural diversity, intercultural understanding, and the promotion of ethical values are central components of the model.

Key competences of the model are:

- Critical thinking: The ability to analyze complex global issues and evaluate potential solutions.
- Empathy and perspective-taking: Understanding different viewpoints and empathizing with people from diverse backgrounds.
- Ethical reasoning: Promoting values like tolerance, respect, and social responsibility.
- Sustainable development awareness: Understanding and actively promoting sustainable practices and environmental stewardship.
- Civic engagement: Encouraging active participation in civil society and global issues.

The model is inspired by a vision of global citizenship that focuses on ideals rather than practicality. It seeks to involve students in exploring universal topics such as sustainable development and peace, encompassing issues like conflict, poverty, climate change, energy security, unequal population distribution, and various forms of inequality and injustice (O'Dowd, 2023). The model is designed to reflect key principles of global citizenship education based on global and multidimensional perspective. Thus, it differs from the previous model. To elaborate on the competences of the UNESCO's model, following inferences can be made:

- An attitude underpinned by an appreciation of various layers of identity, along with the potential for a shared identity that goes beyond individual differences such as cultural, religious, or ethnic distinctions,
- Profound knowledge of worldwide issues and fundamental values like justice, equality, human dignity, and respect,
- Intellectual abilities that encompass critical, systemic, and creative thinking,

- Non-cognitive skills, including social aptitudes like empathy and conflict resolution, as well as communication capabilities,
- Behavioral capacities that enable collaborative and responsible action aimed at discovering global solutions to global challenges and striving for the common good.

4.4. The OECD's Global Competence Framework

The OECD's Global Competence Framework aims to equip individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in an interconnected world. It recognizes that global challenges, such as climate change and economic interdependence, require individuals to have a global perspective. The framework focuses on the development of global competence, which involves the ability to understand and engage with diverse cultures, solve global problems, and work collaboratively across borders. It highlights the importance of global awareness and a sense of responsibility toward global issues.

Just like the previously mentioned models, the global competence framework has peculiar competences as well such as intercultural understanding, problem-solving in global contexts and situations, effective communication, adaptability, and civic engagement. The OECD's framework is used as a reference by educational policymakers and curriculum developers to integrate global competence into education systems. It provides guidance on curriculum design, teacher training, and assessment methods to foster global competence in students.

4.5. Byram's Framework for Intercultural Citizenship

Byram's framework for intercultural citizenship (2008) is the extension of his original framework (1997) on the concept of intercultural communicative competence. With this model, he emphasized global citizenship and "service to the community" (O'Dowd, 2023). The framework emphasizes the significance of preparing individuals to participate effectively in diverse and multicultural societies while promoting democratic values.

The framework starts with the acquisition of knowledge about one's own culture and the culture of others. It includes awareness of cultural norms, values, beliefs, and practices, as well as historical, social, and political contexts. Next, individuals are encouraged to develop positive attitudes toward cultural diversity, including openness, curiosity, respect, and tolerance. The framework emphasizes empathy and a willingness to engage with people from different cultural backgrounds.

The framework highlights several essential skills to be acquired for proper intercultural and global citizenship:

- Linguistic skills: Proficiency in one or more languages is a fundamental skill for effective communication across cultures.
- Interpretive skills: The ability to interpret and understand cultural symbols, gestures, and non-verbal cues.
- Interactional skills: The capacity to engage in meaningful intercultural dialogue and adapt communication styles as needed.
- Critical cultural awareness: The skill of critically examining cultural stereotypes and biases, both one's own and those of others.
- Reflective skills: The ability to reflect on one's own cultural assumptions and experiences in cross-cultural encounters.

Byram (2008) identifies three interconnected components that contribute to global citizenship:

Knowledge of Culture: Understanding cultural diversity, including language, history, traditions, and values. This knowledge forms the basis for effective intercultural interactions.

Attitudes towards Culture: Fostering positive attitudes such as respect, empathy, curiosity, and openness toward different cultures.

Skills for Interaction: Developing the practical skills necessary for successful intercultural communication and collaboration. This includes linguistic competence, as well as the ability to adapt communication styles and resolve conflicts.

Byram's framework has significant implications for foreign language education. It suggests that education should go beyond language learning and include the development of intercultural competence as an integral part of the curriculum. Educators should create learning environments that promote cultural diversity, encourage critical thinking about cultural issues, and provide opportunities for students to interact with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. In this vein, it can be indicated that Byram's framework is quite a good fit for VE initiatives and practices.

Recent developments in foreign language education emphasize the need for students to use foreign languages in international contexts, including online environments. Transnational approaches acknowledge linguistic and cultural complexity, moving beyond a single national

standard. Foreign language education can address cross-cultural topics like the environment, human rights, migration etc. and promote global citizenship. Foreign language education and digital competence are essential components in nurturing global citizenship. Online communication networks enable students to engage in international interactions, and virtual exchange serves as an ideal tool for preparing students for this globalized scenario.

4.6. Global Citizenship Education through VE

Intercultural communicative competence & citizenship and global citizenship do not automatically take place when groups of learners are brought together from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Byram (1997; 2008) argued that when learners from different cultural backgrounds come together and interact only at the basic information exchange level, critical cultural awareness and proper intercultural communication are not fostered. He called this pre-political level of interaction. Byram (2008) argued that the intercultural interaction taking place among learners from different cultural backgrounds should move from pre-political to political level. At the political level, learners need to be part of instigating change in their respective societies based on their interaction and collaboration with their transnational partners.

O'Dowd (2023) argued that much of the interaction taking place in VE projects organized at universities stay at the pre-political level. Learners interact with their transnational partners and try to critically reflect on those interactions, yet they do not think about or put an effort on changing something problematic in their local and global environments.

O'Dowd (2023) identified the characteristics of VE initiatives that allow learners to instigate change in local and global communities and foster global citizenship education. In such initiatives, opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural interaction should be given to learners. Moreover, learners need to be encouraged to form genuine relationships with their transnational partners. In this vein, learners should be motivated to delve into topics that hold social and political significance in both their own societies and those of their partners. Most importantly, ample opportunities should be provided for guided reflection on intercultural interactions and exchanges.

He goes on to suggest configurations for organizing VE practices and projects in higher education (p. 70):

Class to Class Virtual Exchange,

- VE in foreign language education
- Virtual Exchange in STEM

- Virtual Exchange in Business and Economics
- Virtual Exchange in the Humanities

Class to World Virtual Exchange

Externalized models of Virtual Exchange

Virtual Exchange as part of physical mobility programs

- Virtual Exchange for pre-mobility
- Virtual Exchange as part of blended mobility initiatives

5. Class to Class VE

Class to class VE is the most common configuration of VE initiative. In this type of VE, two or more classes come together in online telecollaborative projects and work on assigned tasks by their teacher or mentor. Class to Class VE aims to enhance students' global competence, intercultural understanding, language skills, and critical thinking through collaborative projects and discussions. It fosters cross-cultural interactions without requiring physical travel, making it accessible to a broader range of students. Students can be at various educational levels, from primary school to university.

As it was explained, VE initiatives and practices rely heavily on digital tools and platforms for communication and collaboration. Common tools include video conferencing software (such as Zoom or Skype), online discussion forums, social media, and collaborative document editing tools (e.g., Google Docs). VE practices are usually facilitated by educators or coordinators from the participating institutions. Facilitators help design and structure the exchange, guide discussions, and ensure the program's success. Class to Class VE involves a variety of activities that encourage interaction and learning between students. For example,

Joint projects: Collaborative assignments or research projects that require students from different classes to work together.

Virtual meetings: Scheduled video conferences or online discussions where students can discuss topics related to their coursework or cultural experiences.

Online forums or discussion boards: Platforms for asynchronous communication where students can exchange ideas and reflections.

Peer feedback: Students provide feedback on each other's work, fostering a sense of peer mentorship.

VE programs can vary in length, from a single session to a semester-long collaboration. The duration depends on the goals of the program and the availability of participants.

Class to Class VE is designed to achieve several key learning outcomes:

- Improved language proficiency, especially in second or foreign languages.
- Enhanced intercultural competence, empathy, and cross-cultural communication skills.
- Exposure to diverse perspectives and global issues.
- Development of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.
- Increased motivation and engagement in coursework.

5.1. Class to World VE

"Class to World Virtual Exchange" is a pedagogical approach that connects an entire class or group of students with external individuals, organizations, or experts from around the world using digital technology. This type of virtual exchange expands students' horizons by allowing them to interact with real-world experts, engage in global discussions, and gain insights into global issues, all without leaving their classroom. It offers a means to bring real-world perspectives and experiences into the educational environment, enriching students' learning, and global awareness.

5.2. Externalized models of VE

Externalized models of Virtual Exchange refer to programs or initiatives where students or participants engage in virtual exchange activities with external partners, often outside their own educational institution. These models involve collaboration with organizations, individuals, or institutions external to the participant's academic setting. Externalized Virtual Exchange can take various forms, such as connecting students with experts, professionals, or community members, allowing them to learn from and interact with external resources to enhance their educational experience and gain real-world insights. This approach expands the scope of virtual exchange beyond the classroom and institutional boundaries, promoting broader and more diverse learning opportunities.

5.3. VE as part of physical mobility programs

Virtual Exchange as part of physical mobility programs is an approach that combines traditional physical study abroad experiences with online collaboration and intercultural exchange. Students who engage in physical mobility programs, such as studying abroad or participating in international internships, complement their in-person experiences with virtual exchange activities. Integrating Virtual Exchange into physical mobility programs provides a

more comprehensive and diverse learning experience, enabling students to continue their international engagement even when they are not abroad. It also offers flexibility, cost-effectiveness, and accessibility for students who may face barriers to physical mobility.

Moreover, VE initiatives can be used as pre-mobility practices that allow students to connect and interact with people from the country where he/she will go as part of a physical mobility program. In this way, learners get the opportunity to explore the culture and cultural practices of people with whom they will meet and live together for a certain period. As mentioned before, physical mobility usually does not ensure proper intercultural communicative competence. A well-designed and pedagogical VE practice can foster ICC among learners, and they can put these competences into practice when they attend the physical mobility program.

6. Key Principles of Integrating VE into Classrooms

VE projects and practices can be easily adapted and adjusted to course syllabuses (O'Dowd, 2023). As it was explained in detail in the section of internationalizing higher education, VE practices and other online intercultural collaboration projects can be integrated into curricula and course programs in various contexts and conditions. However, VE experts have indicated that bringing together groups of learners from different countries on online platforms does not meet the criteria of organizing successful VE and online intercultural collaboration practices (O'Dowd, 2016; Stevens Initiative, 2022). As Byram (2008) put forward, the content of the projects should make sure that intercultural interactions among participants move from pre-political to political level. O'Dowd (2023) briefly identified the required conditions for integrating successful VE practices into foreign language classrooms. He indicated that the content of any VE project (tasks, flow, organization etc.) should emphasize increased meaningful intercultural interaction and pedagogic task design.

The key principles to be applied in VE practices can be listed as follows (based on O'Dowd, 2023):

- **Integrate VE into the curriculum:** VE projects and practices need to be integrated into curricula so that they will be established part of educational programs. Moreover, learners' participation in VE practices and their acquired competences should be assessed and recognized.
- **Develop rich intercultural learning opportunities:** The task at hand is to create assignments that extend beyond mere information exchange and, instead, necessitate

students to genuinely grasp different cultural viewpoints and cooperate in jointly developing projects or products. Guth and Rubin (2015) suggested that tasks should encourage students to rely on each other for completion. Instead of having students write separate parts of a collaborative essay, they could conduct local interviews, share them with peers, discuss them online, and edit them together.

- **Integrate reflection with interaction:** For the VE practices to be successful and meaningful, participating learners need extended opportunities to critically reflect on their intercultural exchange experiences.
- **Support learners' foreign language needs:** Along with the benefits of VE initiatives on learners' intercultural communicative skills and collaboration skills, it is expected that non-native learners' English language skills would be improved at the end of projects, especially pragmatic and sociolinguistic skills. Having that in mind, some learners might have difficulty in following up with the tasks and interactions in English-only intercultural projects and such students must be supported to overcome those barriers.
- **Clear learning objectives:** VE practitioners need to define clear learning objectives for the participating learners. Specific skills, knowledge, or attitudes that learners are expected to develop through the exchange must be determined. This ensures that the experience aligns with the curriculum goals.
- **Technology Infrastructure:** Reliable access to technology and necessary software platforms needs to be ensured.
- **Structured Communication:** VE practitioners need to set up a structured communication plan between the participating groups. Moreover, regular interactions, discussions, and collaborative activities must be encouraged in a safe and respectful online environment.

There might be many challenges in organizing and implementing VE projects. Practitioners need to be aware of such possible challenges so that they can take necessary precautions beforehand. Some of these possible challenges can be as follows (not limited to these):

- **Time Zone Differences:** Coordinating schedules across different time zones can be challenging. It may require flexible scheduling and asynchronous communication options.

- **Language Barriers:** Language proficiency can vary among participants. Language differences can hinder effective communication and require additional language support.
- **Technology Issues:** Technical glitches, poor internet connections, and limited access to technology can disrupt the virtual exchange.
- **Cultural Misunderstandings:** Cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings or conflicts. It's essential to address these issues promptly and promote cultural sensitivity.
- **Assessment Complexity:** Assessing the outcomes of virtual exchange can be challenging. It may require developing new assessment methods or adapting existing ones.
- **Resource Allocation:** Implementing virtual exchange may require additional resources for technology, training, and support, which can strain budgets and time.
- **Participant Engagement:** Ensuring active engagement and participation from all students, especially in a virtual environment, can be difficult.
- **Safety and Privacy:** Addressing safety concerns and protecting students' privacy in online interactions is crucial.

7. Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher delved into the realms of intercultural communication, virtual exchange (VE), and global citizenship education (GCE) in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. The chapter revisited the roots of communicative competence in linguistics and explored its evolution to encompass sociocultural dimensions, paving the way for the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC).

ICC emerged as a vital component of contemporary language teaching, emphasizing not only linguistic proficiency but also the ability to navigate complex intercultural interactions. Byram's (1997) comprehensive model of ICC, encompassing attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness, laid the foundation for our exploration of practical strategies to foster ICC in EFL classrooms.

One such strategy, Virtual Exchange (VE), has emerged as a transformative pedagogical approach. VE brings together learners from diverse cultural backgrounds, transcending geographical boundaries and fostering cross-cultural understanding. VE serves as a catalyst for internationalizing higher education by promoting global engagement, facilitating cross-cultural interactions, democratizing access to international experiences, and equipping students and

educators with valuable global competencies. Furthermore, it plays a pivotal role in internationalizing education at home, providing meaningful cross-cultural interactions within students' comfort zones.

Global Citizenship Education (GCE) emerged as another crucial facet of preparing EFL learners to thrive in a globalized world. Rooted in international education principles, GCE empowers learners to become proactive contributors to a just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure, and sustainable world. By integrating global citizenship principles into higher education, especially English teacher education programs, we can produce graduates committed to action, both locally and globally.

Various models and approaches to fostering GCE in educational institutions and foreign language classrooms were discussed, all emphasizing the active engagement of individuals in their societies and the promotion of democratic values, social inclusion, and intercultural dialogue.

In conclusion, this chapter underscores the symbiotic relationship between VE and GCE. VE offers a practical and economical avenue for promoting ICC, which is a cornerstone of GCE. Together, they prepare EFL learners to be responsible and contributing global citizens, capable of navigating the complex challenges and opportunities of a globally interconnected world. As we navigate the evolving landscape of language education, the incorporation of VE and GCE principles into EFL classes and English language teacher education programs becomes not just a possibility but a necessity to empower learners for a future that demands intercultural competence and global citizenship.

REFERENCES

- Barret, M., & Byram, M. (2020). Errors by Simpson and Dervin (2019) in their description of the council of Europe's reference framework of competences for democratic culture. *Intercultural Communication Education*, 3(2), 75–95.
- Bennett, M. J. 1993. "Towards ethnorelativism: a developmental model of intercultural sensitivity." In *Education for the intercultural experience*, edited by R. Michael Paige, 21–71. Intercultural Press.
- Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Multilingual Matters.
- Byram, M. (2008). *From foreign language education to education for intercultural citizenship: essays and reflections*. Multilingual Matters.
- Canale, M. and Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 1–47.
- Chomsky (1965). *Aspects of the theory of syntax*. MIT Press.
- Council of Europe. (2016). *Competences for democratic culture—living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies*. Council of Europe.
- De Wit, H., Hunter, F., Howard, L., Egron-Polak, E. (2015). *European parliament, directorate general for internal policies of the union, & centre for higher education internationalization (CHEI), E. A. for I. E. (EAIE), international association of universities (IAU). Internationalisation of higher education*. European Parliament.
- Deardorff, D. K. 2006. "Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization." *Journal of Studies in International Education* 10(3): 241–266. doi:10.1177/1028315306287002.

- Deardorff, D. K., & Jones, E. (2022). Intercultural competence as a core focus in international higher education. In *The handbook of international higher education: Second edition* (2nd ed., pp. 223–242). Stylus.
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Driel, B., Darmody, M., & Kerzil, J. (2016). *Education policies and practices to foster tolerance, respect for diversity and civic responsibility in children and young people in the EU: examining the evidence*. Publications Office. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/46172>
- Friedrich, P. (2013). Communicative competence in Robinson, P. (Ed.) *The routledge encyclopedia of second language acquisition* (pp.95-98). Routledge.
- Godwin-Jones, R. (2013) Integrating intercultural competence into language learning through technology. *Language Learning & Technology*, 17(2), 1–11.
- Guth, S., & Rubin, J. (2015). How to get started with COIL. In A. Schultheis Moore & S. Simon (Eds.), *Globally networked teaching in the humanities* (pp. 15–28). Routledge.
- Gutiérrez, B., Glimäng, M., O’Dowd, R., & Sauro, S. (2021). *Mentoring handbook for virtual exchange teachers*. www.stevensinitiative.org/resource/mentoring-handbook-for-virtualexchange-teachers/
- Hymes, D. (1972). *On communicative competence*. In J.B. Pride and J. Holmes (eds), *Sociolinguistics*. Penguin Books. ———(1985). Toward linguistic competence. *Revue de l’AILA: AILA Review*, 2, 9–23.
- Kramsch, C. (2014). Language and culture. *AILA review*, 27(1), 30-55.
- Leask, B. (2015). *Internationalization of the curriculum in context*. Routledge.
- McNamara, T. 2012. Poststructuralism and its challenges for applied linguistics. *Applied Linguistics* 33(5): 473–482. DOI: 10.1093/applin/ams055
- O’Dowd, R. (2016). Emerging trends and new directions in telecollaborative learning. *CALICO Journal*, 33(3), 291–310. <https://doi.org/10.1558/cj.v33i3.30747>

- O'Dowd, R. (2019). A transnational model of virtual exchange for global citizenship education. *Language Teaching*, 53(4), 477-490.
- O'Dowd, R. (2023). *Internationalising higher education and the role of virtual exchange*. Routledge.
- OECD (2018). *Preparing our youth for an inclusive and sustainable world*. The OECD PISA Global Competence Framework. <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/Handbook-PISA-2018-Global-Competence.pdf>
- Öztürk, S. Y. (2022). *Intercultural communicative competence and global citizenship education of ELT student teachers through telecollaboration*. Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/intercultural-communicative-competence-global/docview/2763567956/se-2>
- Pennycook, A. 2007. *Global englishes and transcultural flows*. Routledge.
- Pittarello, S., Beaven, A., & Van der Heijden, C. (2020). *Scenarios for the integration of virtual exchange in higher education*. FRAMES Project. <https://zenodo.org/record/5573614#.YnKMHtpBw2w>
- Porto, M. (2014). Intercultural citizenship education in an EFL online project in Argentina. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 14(2), 245–261.
- Rubin, J. (2016). The collaborative online international learning network. In R. O'Dowd & T. Lewis (Eds.), *Online intercultural exchange: Policy, pedagogy, practice* (pp. 263–272). Routledge.
- Simpson, A., & Dervin, F. (2019). The council of Europe reference framework of competences for democratic culture: ideological refractions, othering and obedient politics. *Intercultural Communication Education*, 2(3), 102–119. <https://doi.org/10.29140/ice.v2n3.168>

Stevens Initiative. (2022). *Virtual exchange impact and learning report 2022*. www.stevensinitiative.org/resource/2022-virtual-exchange-impact-and-learning-report/

UNESCO. (2014). *Global citizenship education: preparing learners for the challenges of the twenty-first century*. UNESCO.
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002277/227729e.pdf>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Samed Yasin ÖZTÜRK

ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5643-9053

sy.ozturk@alparslan.edu.tr

Muş Alparslan University, English Language Teaching Department

Dr. Samed Yasin Öztürk holds BA, MA, and PhD degrees in Applied Linguistics/English Language Teaching. His research interests include Virtual Exchange, Telecollaboration, ICC, and learner autonomy. He currently works at Muş Alparslan University Faculty of Education English Language Teaching Department.

To Cite this Chapter

Öztürk S. Y. (2023). Promoting intercultural communication and authentic language practice among EFL learners: virtual exchange and global citizenship education. In K. Büyükkarcı & A. Önal (Eds.), *Current studies in foreign language education*, (pp. 234-257). ISRES Publishing.