



# Language learners' expectations and satisfaction level in a telecollaboration project

*Expectativas y nivel de satisfacción de los estudiantes de idiomas en un proyecto de telecolaboración*

Sofia Di Sarno-García  
*Universidad Politécnica de Madrid*



## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse the data collected in a six-week telecollaboration project between 9 Spanish-speaking learners of English and 5 international students from the Erasmus+ programme, who engaged in both synchronous and asynchronous activities with 10 English-speaking learners of Spanish. Data was gathered through a pre-questionnaire enquiring about learners' expectations at the beginning of the project and a post-questionnaire seeking information about students' satisfaction at the end of the project. The results revealed that students' expectations mostly aligned with the perceived benefits after carrying out the exchange. However, some of the participants found it difficult to meet on a weekly basis with their virtual partners as was required. This suggests that students participating in telecollaboration projects may need further guidance and help to plan their meetings. Despite this, most of the comments received at the end of the project were positive and showed participants' overall satisfaction.

**Keywords:** Telecollaboration; Intercultural project; Expectations; Satisfaction

## Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar los datos recogidos en un proyecto de telecolaboración de seis semanas entre 9 estudiantes de inglés hispanohablantes y 5 estudiantes internacionales del programa Erasmus+, que participaron en actividades sincrónicas y asincrónicas con 10 estudiantes de español anglohablantes. Los datos se recogieron mediante un cuestionario previo en el que se preguntaba por las expectativas de los estudiantes al comienzo del proyecto y un cuestionario posterior en el que se pedía información sobre la satisfacción de los estudiantes al final del proyecto. Los resultados revelaron que las expectativas de los estudiantes coincidían en su mayoría con los beneficios percibidos tras realizar el intercambio. Sin embargo, a algunos de los participantes les resultó difícil reunirse semanalmente con sus compañeros virtuales, tal y como se requería. Esto sugiere que los estudiantes que participan en proyectos de telecolaboración pueden necesitar más orientación y ayuda para planificar sus reuniones. A pesar de ello, la mayoría de los comentarios recibidos al final del proyecto fueron positivos y mostraron la satisfacción general de los participantes.

**Palabras clave:** Telecolaboración; Proyecto intercultural; Expectativas; Satisfacción

## INTRODUCTION

As the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to engage in online learning, the interest in intercultural telecollaboration projects increased, as it was seen as an alternative to physical mobility and a way to “boost internationalisation at home” (Griggio & Pittarello, 2020, p. 129). Also, online learning changed “from being *an addition* to normal university educational practices to being *the norm* of university education” (O’Dowd, 2023, p. 1). It is precisely during the pandemic that the doctoral project to which this study belongs started.

Since learners are likely to establish social links through technology and will, therefore, create their second language (L2) speakers’ identity in those online spaces, providing them with chances to use technology for L2 learning is currently of paramount importance (González-Lloret, 2021). In fact, traditional formal teaching often lacks social contact with the learners’ L2 community (Sawin, 2022). Although several studies focused on students’ level of satisfaction after conducting a telecollaboration project, few of them compared their previous expectations with the perceived benefits. For this reason, this paper presents the results obtained from an intercultural telecollaboration project between American and Spanish students, with a special focus on participants’ expectations and their final level of satisfaction. The purpose of the study was to elucidate the extent to which language learners’ expectations aligned with the perceived benefits obtained after participating in the intercultural exchange project. An answer to the following research question was sought: Will Spanish students’ expectations at the beginning of the telecollaboration project coincide with their level of satisfaction at the end of it?

The first section of this paper will review the main significant contributions made in the field, as well as a definition of what telecollaboration is. The next section will explore the methodology followed by the researcher to conduct the study, including the setting and participants, the instruments and materials used, the general procedure followed, and the data collection and analysis procedure. After that, the main findings obtained will be presented and discussed. Finally, a conclusion will be drawn in the last section of the paper.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There is currently no general consensus on the umbrella term to be used to refer to intercultural exchanges mediated by technology. In fact, scholars have used a variety of terms such as teletandem, telecollaboration, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), virtual exchange (VE), online intercultural exchanges

(OIE), and so forth (Orsini-Jones & Lee, 2018; Dooly & Smith, 2020; Dooly & Vinagre, 2021; O'Dowd, 2023). Colpaert's (2020) position paper vindicated the use of the term 'telecollaboration' instead of 'virtual exchange', since, according to him, 'virtual' means "less than the real thing" (Colpaert, 2020, p. 655) and has, therefore, a negative connotation. Contrary to this, O'Dowd's (2023) recent reflection advocates for the use of the expression 'virtual exchange', as he claims that it is the most used by academic institutions and it allows us to make a distinction between projects integrated in formal education and more informal online interactions. Consequently, VE also involves the presence of the teacher as opposed to learning 'in the digital wilds' (Sauro & Zourou, 2019 as cited in O'Dowd, 2023).

The author of this paper is aware of the fact that VE is the 'mainstream' term, however it is believed that it covers a broader range of disciplines other than language learning and teaching, as opposed to the term 'telecollaboration'. In fact, the programme of the International Virtual Exchange Conference (IVEC) 2022 is proof of that, as papers regarding mathematics, pharmacology, and psychology were presented. For this reason, the term 'telecollaboration' is preferred, as the study presented in this paper involves language learning. Nonetheless, other terms, including VE, will be used in order to avoid redundancy. Having said this, Dooly's (2017) definition of telecollaboration will be taken as a reference:

The process of communicating and working together with other people or groups from different locations through online or digital communication tools (e.g., computer, tablets, cellphones) to co-produce a desired work output. Telecollaboration can be carried out in a variety of settings (classroom, home, workplace, laboratory) and can be synchronous or asynchronous. In education, telecollaboration combines all of these components with a focus on learning, social interaction, dialogue, intercultural exchange and communication all of which are especially important aspects of telecollaboration in language education. (pp. 169-170)

Thanks to telecollaboration, learners can engage in both synchronous (i.e., in real-time) and asynchronous meetings (i.e., not in real-time) (Helm, 2013) using different tools. With the advent of Web 2.0, numerous studies have reported on the various benefits that telecollaboration can have for language learning, namely the development of intercultural competence (Chun, 2011; Canto Gutiérrez, 2020; Vinagre, 2014), different language skills (Llopis-García & Vinagre, 2014; Guillén & Blake, 2017), pragmatic competence (Belz & Kinginger, 2002; Eslami et al., 2015; Di Sarno-García, 2024), and engagement (Andújar, 2020), among others. As Canto Gutiérrez (2020) claims, the vast body of research demonstrates the pivotal role of "networked interactions [...] in promoting the acquisition of foreign languages" (p. 42). Furthermore, intercultural exchange projects are "often presented

as an innovative approach to teaching and learning across cultures” (Guth, 2020, p. xix).

One of the different issues related to telecollaboration tackled in the past decades has to do with language learners’ perceptions at the end of telecollaborative projects. Previous studies such as Sevilla-Pavón (2016) and Gimeno (2018) found that participants were mostly satisfied with the tools used, although also feelings of frustration were aroused during the exchanges. Sevilla-Pavón (2016) reported that although most of the students were satisfied with the tools used in the project, some of them felt lost and confused. Feelings of frustration derived from differences in the levels of commitment of the learners. In line with this, although most of the literature reports on successful telecollaborative projects, Turula and Raith (2015) discussed the reasons why the intercultural exchange project that they carried out did not go as planned. They claimed that, in order to take full advantage of the potential that telecollaboration can offer, a “balance of agendas, of involvement, of expectations; and of teaching presence” (Turula & Raith, 2015, p. 35) should be kept. This study focused precisely on the participants’ expectations, as it is thought that for an intercultural exchange project to be successful, students’ needs and expectations should be met as much as possible. O’Dowd and Ritter (2006) suggested four different levels, namely individual, classroom, socioinstitutional, and interaction, at which several different factors may lead to failed communication in virtual encounters. At the individual’s level, factors such as motivation and expectations were identified and, according to them, they can deeply affect the outcome of the exchange project. In addition to this, Helm (2015) conducted a study among educators, and she discovered that 26% of them felt that students’ lack of motivation and their different expectations may have had a negative impact on the outcome of telecollaboration. For that reason, this paper emphasises the importance of knowing participants’ expectations in advance in order to succeed in assisting language student learning.

Promoting intercultural exchanges is imperative for language educators as the *Common European Framework for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment Companion Volume* (Council of Europe, 2020) devotes an entire section to online interaction and, in particular, to online conversation and discussion, which demonstrates the increasing use of this teaching practice. Therefore, it is highly advisable to investigate students’ expectations before an intercultural telecollaboration project starts to guide them to a successful exchange and maintain dissatisfaction to a minimum.

## METHODS

This paper presents a six-week intercultural telecollaboration project between a Spanish university and a North American university. As this is part of a project leading to a doctoral dissertation, the activities carried out in two previous telecollaboration projects (Di Sarno-García, 2024, in press) were replicated. However, the present study differs from the previous ones in that here the aim is to compare the students' expectations before the start of the telecollaborative project and their level of satisfaction at the end of it.

### Setting and participants

Participants of this study were 9 Spanish-speaking students and 5 international students participating in the Erasmus+ programme, all from a Spanish university, who engaged in both synchronous and asynchronous activities with 10 English-speaking learners from a North American university. All the participants were enrolled on an optional 3<sup>rd</sup> year B2 level (CEFR) English subject, although their initial level ranged between A2 and C1 (CEFR). Also, they were awarded 10% of their final grade upon project completion. The Erasmus students came from France, the Netherlands, Romania, and Hungary. From now on, the author shall use the expressions "students from the Spanish university" or "Spanish students" to refer also to those from the Erasmus+ programme.

On the other hand, students from the North American university, which was based in Maryland, were enrolled on a 3<sup>rd</sup> year Spanish subject which was part of their minor, and they were awarded 15% of their final grade for participating in this project. Their initial level of Spanish ranged between B1 and B2 (CEFR).

### Instruments and materials

In order to create dyads and triads, students from both universities completed a pairing questionnaire before the beginning of the project. Its aim was to pair learners with somebody who had similar interests to them. It was administered via Google Forms, and it was made up of 9 questions written in Spanish.

Before the start of the intercultural exchange, students also completed a pre-survey, the aim of which was to gather information about their expectations towards the telecollaboration project, prior knowledge of the tools and the activities that would be used in it, and whether they thought they would acquire some cultural knowledge. It was made up of 13 questions on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 was *completely disagree*, and 5 was *completely agree*.

After completing all the activities that the project involved, Spanish students completed a post-survey. It was composed of 19 questions, of which 16 were on a 5-point Likert scale, two of them were multiple choice questions, and one was an open-ended question. Its purpose was to collect data regarding participants' opinions and feelings about the project in general, the tools used in it, as well as the cultural activities involved. Most of the questions were aimed at making a comparison between learners' expectations and level of satisfaction before and after the telecollaboration project.

Zoom was the chosen channel for the synchronous activities, while MeWe was the platform used for the asynchronous cultural discussions. Spanish-speaking students (i.e., not Erasmus participants) and their US keypals carried out 6 open role-plays aimed at fostering Spanish students' pragmatic competence after they had received explicit instruction on the speech act of apologies by means of audiovisual materials and a PowerPoint presentation. Regarding the asynchronous cultural discussions, MeWe was the chosen platform as previous studies such as Di Sarno-García (2023) demonstrated that it was an adequate environment for the development of students' intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (as defined by Byram, 1997, 2021). The students were invited to join a private space set up by the researcher, thus ensuring a safe environment and protecting their privacy. This social media was not only used for cultural discussions but also to share any useful information regarding the project. In addition to this, the researcher also created a different post for every group of students and for every cultural discussion.

## Procedure

The project proposal was posted on the UNICollaboration website ([www.unicollaboration.org](http://www.unicollaboration.org)), and therefore it was used to find a partner for the telecollaboration project described here. As mentioned in the previous section, before the project started, participants completed the pairing questionnaire and the pre-survey about expectations. Before the first Zoom session, they also received explicit instruction on apologies, which was the speech act under study. Additionally, the students and the instructors from both universities participated in an introductory Zoom session where the instructor provided participants with the instructions about the project.

After registering on MeWe, they were asked to upload a video introducing themselves to break the ice. Then, they were expected to meet via Zoom once a week and to participate in the cultural discussions on MeWe also on a weekly basis. The topics discussed in the online forums were *US-Mexico and Spain-Africa*

*borders*, which was conducted entirely in Spanish, and *migratory movements in Spain and the US from a historical point of view*<sup>1</sup>, which was carried out entirely in English. Since the Erasmus participants had a low level of Spanish, they used a translator to participate in the first cultural discussion. The researcher used additional resources such as videos and articles to trigger the discussions.

Before the first cultural discussion took place, Spanish students carried out an in-class group activity on immigration as a preparation for the 2021 Global Conversations event (<https://offices.depaul.edu/global-engagement/global-depaul/global-conversations/Pages/default.aspx>) organised by DePaul University (US) in which some of them were going to participate. This event took place after the first cultural discussion had started and it was part of the telecollaboration project as it was organised by the author of the present paper and the instructor from the North American university. This is because the main topic, which was *Border Politics and Immigration*, was related to the ones students dealt with in the telecollaboration project. Therefore, the in-class group activity consisted of watching a video presenting the migration crisis at the border between the USA and Mexico and then creating a PowerPoint presentation where they compared that situation with the migration crisis that other countries were experiencing.

Following the Cultural Awareness Model proposed by Dooly et al. (2008) and the suggestions from O'Dowd and Waire (2009) and Godwin-Jones (2019), at the end of the project, students from both universities were required to create a final artefact with their counterparts. Here they explained how they felt during the project and what they had learnt or discussed by means of a sound-enhanced PowerPoint presentation. Spanish students recorded their audios in English, while American students did so in Spanish. According to O'Dowd and Waire (2009) and Godwin-Jones (2019), collaborative tasks involve negotiation of meaning on culture, content, and language. In fact, this is also included in one of the objectives presented by the Council of Europe in the *Companion Volume* (2020) within the B2 proficiency level. At the end of the project, the final artefacts were presented in a wrap-up Zoom session where students and teachers from both universities participated. After that, participants completed the final project survey.

---

<sup>1</sup> This is because at the time of the telecollaboration project the US-Mexico border and the border with Ceuta and Melilla in Spain-Africa received a huge number of migrants. Also, the migration crisis caused by the Taliban attack in Afghanistan was taking place at that time.

## Data collection and analysis

Although the telecollaboration project included several activities, this paper focuses exclusively on the comparison between the Spanish students' expectations and level of satisfaction towards the intercultural virtual exchange. Therefore, only the data collected through the pre- and post-survey will be analysed here. The researcher carried out a descriptive analysis through the statistical programme JASP to observe the means and the percentages of responses obtained. In particular, to compare the participants' expectations and their level of satisfaction towards the telecollaboration project, a comparison between the responses obtained in the pre-survey and the ones in the post-survey was carried out. With this purpose in mind, the mean (M) and the standard deviation (SD) were calculated.

## Ethical considerations

All participants signed a consent form before the start of the project, through which they were informed of the purpose of the study and that their anonymity would be kept. This allowed the researcher to collect the data produced by each participant. The purpose of the study was also discussed in advance with the instructor of each institution. Therefore, the author of this paper does not have any conflicts of interest.

## RESULTS

Regarding the research question, Will Spanish students' expectations at the beginning of the telecollaboration project coincide with their level of satisfaction at the end of it? it can be claimed that the students' predictions mostly aligned with their level of satisfaction.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the comparison between pre- and post-test

		Mean	Standard Deviation
Item 1	Pre-test	4.333	0.724
	Post-test	4.563	0.629
Item 2	Pre-test	4.000	1.000
	Post-test	4.563	0.814
Item 3	Pre-test	3.800	1.146
	Post-test	4.125	0.885
Item 4	Pre-test	2.333	0.816
	Post-test	1.938	0.772

		Mean	Standard Deviation
Item 5	Pre-test	1.800	0.775
	Post-test	1.813	0.834
Item 6	Pre-test	3.200	1.014
	Post-test	3.438	1.263
Item 7	Pre-test	3.600	0.828
	Post-test	2.875	1.258
Item 8	Pre-test	2.600	0.910
	Post-test	2.500	1.265
Item 9	Pre-test	4.200	0.862
	Post-test	3.813	0.981
Item 10	Pre-test	3.800	1.014
	Post-test	2.313	1.448
Item 11	Pre-test	3.600	1.454
	Post-test	4.188	1.223
Item 12	Pre-test	4.600	0.632
	Post-test	4.313	0.946
Item 13	Pre-test	4.400	0.828
	Post-test	4.333	0.778

As can be observed from Table 1 above, the general tendency indicates that the level of satisfaction aligned with the students' expectations or even exceeded them. There is evidence of this, for example, in pre-test item 2, which stated *I think the synchronous Zoom sessions will be useful*. The mean increases 0.563 in the responses of the post-test. This means that more participants perceived the synchronous Zoom sessions as a useful activity compared to the ones who had this expectation before starting the project. The same happens with item 3, *I think the cultural discussions on MeWe will be useful*, as most of the students answered between 3 and 5 in the post-survey, while in the pre-survey their answers ranged between 2 and 5. The opposite happens in item 4, where the mean decreases in the post-test. However, this is something positive as the item was *I think the MeWe platform will be difficult to use*, which means that participants felt that MeWe was less difficult to use than expected.

Regarding item 7, *I think I will be able to meet once a week with my virtual partner*, the findings demonstrate that it was complicated for students to arrange a weekly meeting with their counterparts. In fact, it was more difficult than expected. Something similar happens in item 9, *If we have communication problems, I think we will be able to solve them*, as some students thought it was harder than expected after participating in the project.

Turning to item 10, in the pre-survey it was *I don't think we will have technical problems during the sessions*, while in the post-survey *I had technical problems with my computer or the connection during the online sessions*. The decreased mean in the post-test shows that students had fewer technical problems than expected, which could have hindered communication. Table 2 below summarises the percentages of the responses obtained to the pre-survey, while Table 3 reports those obtained from the post-survey, both on a 5-point Likert scale.

Table 2: Percentages of the responses obtained to the pre-survey on a 5-point scale

	1	2	3	4	5
Item 1	0	0	13.3	40	46.7
Item 2	0	6.6	26.7	26.7	40
Item 3	0	13.3	33.4	13.3	40
Item 4	13.3	46.7	33.3	6.7	0
Item 5	40	40	20	0	0
Item 6	6.7	6.7	60	13.3	13.3
Item 7	0	6.7	40	40	13.3
Item 8	13.3	26.7	46.7	13.3	0
Item 9	0	6.7	6.7	46.6	40
Item 10	0	13.3	20	40	26.7
Item 11	13.3	13.4	6.7	33.3	33.3
Item 12	0	0	6.7	26.7	66.6
Item 13	0	0	20	20	60

Table 3: Percentages of the responses obtained to the post-survey on a 5-point scale

	1	2	3	4	5
Item 1	0	0	6.3	31.3	62.4
Item 2	0	6.3	0	25	68.7
Item 3	0	0	31.3	25	43.7
Item 4	31.3	43.7	25	0	0
Item 5	43.7	31.3	25	0	0
Item 6	0	31.3	25	12.4	31.3
Item 7	12.5	31.3	25	18.8	12.5
Item 8	18.7	43.8	18.7	6.3	12.5
Item 9	0	12.5	18.8	43.7	25
Item 10	37.4	31.3	6.3	12.5	12.5
Item 11	6.3	6.3	6.3	25	56.1
Item 12	0	6.3	12.5	25	56.2
Item 13	0	0	16.7	33.3	50

Regarding the comparison of percentages obtained in the pre- and post-survey, the students' level of satisfaction was higher than their expectations in item 1. In fact, 46.7% of the participants answered 5 to the statement *I think the project will be useful in general* as opposed to 62.4% who chose 5 in the post-test item *In general, I found the project useful*. The same happens in item 2, as before starting the project, 40% of the participants completely agreed to the statement *I think the synchronous Zoom sessions will be useful*, while in the post-survey, it was 68.7%. The difference is not so significant regarding the cultural discussions on MeWe (item 3), which shows students' preference for synchronous Zoom sessions rather than asynchronous MeWe discussions.

Regarding the difficulty in using the MeWe platform, which was new for all the participants, 31.3% of the participants completely disagreed with the post-test item *I found the MeWe platform difficult to use*, as opposed to 13.3% in the pre-test item *I think the MeWe platform will be difficult to use*. As mentioned before, this can be an indicator of the appropriateness of this social network for telecollaboration purposes. Regarding Zoom, which instead was known by students, there are no significant differences between pre- and post-test.

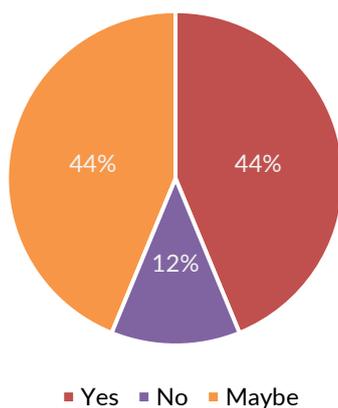
On the other hand, arranging weekly meetings with their partners was more difficult than expected for the participants. As a matter of fact, only 13.3% of the participants answered 5 or 4 to the pre-test item *I think it will be difficult to arrange meetings with my virtual partner*, while 31.3% completely agreed with the post-test item *I had problems trying to arrange a meeting with my partner*. These difficulties could have a number of causes, such as different schedules, time zones, or even a lack of commitment to the project. Similarly, 40% of the participants agreed to the pre-test item *I think I will be able to meet once a week with my virtual partner*, as opposed to only 18.8% in the post-test statement *I met once a week with my partner*. However, the participants had fewer communication problems than anticipated, although when they encountered those kinds of obstacles, it was more difficult to solve them than they thought at the beginning of the telecollaboration project.

Concerning the use of both languages (English and Spanish), they were used more frequently than expected. This is surprising considering that five participants were Erasmus students who barely spoke Spanish. Hopefully, engaging in a conversation with other students of Spanish motivated them to learn the language. Moreover, in terms of acquiring cultural knowledge, the results show that the students' expectations mostly aligned with the perceived benefits. Additionally, in the

post-survey, participants were asked if they found the cultural topics discussed on MeWe to be interesting. To this item, most of them gave a positive answer as 43.7% answered 4, while 56.3% answered 5. In line with Helm (2015) and Godwin-Jones (2019), it is believed that sensitive topics should not be avoided in telecollaboration projects as this may “misrepresent the reality of intercultural encounters” (Godwin Jones, 2019, p. 11). The results of this study demonstrate that students may be willing to discuss controversial issues and, thus, they should be brought up in the tasks carried out.

At the end of the project, students were also required to evaluate their relationship with their keypals through the item *I felt at ease with my partner*, to which 18.7% of them answered 3, while 50% of the learners answered 4, and 31.3% of them answered 5. These findings are positive in the sense that for a telecollaboration project to be successful it is important to create safe and friendly relationships among the participants. This is the reason why participants completed a pairing questionnaire at the beginning of the project, which is believed to have been useful. As a matter of fact, O’Dowd and Ritter (2006) suggested that learner-matching procedures can have a huge impact on the outcomes of cooperation. In line with this, it was found that at the end of the project most of the students were either willing to keep a relationship with their partners or considering that possibility, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Responses to the item *Would you like to keep on meeting with your partner after the end of the project?*



It is believed that these are promising results regarding ICC, the development of which was one of the main aims of the project, as according to Byram (2021) one of the characteristics of the intercultural speaker is the ability to establish and maintain relationships.

Regarding the Global Conversations event, in the post-test the students that participated were asked if they had found the activity useful. Only 16.7% answered 3, 25% answered 4, and 58.3% chose 5, which demonstrates that this kind of extracurricular events can be implemented in telecollaboration projects and be beneficial. In fact, Byram (2021) suggests that intercultural speakers can show “interest in discovering other perspectives on the interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in the cultures of the social groups to which one belongs and in other cultures and cultural practices” (p. 84).

Finally, participants were free to send the researcher comments or thoughts concerning the experience. During the project, one of the Erasmus students sent the following comments:

— Hi Sofia,

Here you will find the meeting number 2 for the telecollaboration project.

We spoke spanish and english and I thought that it was very interesting.

Thank you

— Good evening Sofia,

You will find attached the recording of the last ZOOM meeting. I really enjoyed this experience!

Thank you

Furthermore, some of the participants used the final project survey to add any thoughts regarding the telecollaboration project, as can be seen in the following comments:

— Loved it and it was very useful to improve my English! I'll only add the recommendation to include different variations for the roleplays in order to practise different situations.

— I think that everything was so useful and very well organized.

— It was a fantastic experience, I have been able to improve my communication skill.

— Both Telecollaborative Project and the Global Conversations event were very interesting ! Thank you !

Although most of the comments were positive, some of them also highlighted the difficulties encountered in terms of arranging weekly meetings with their partners. The following two comments are examples of this:

— It's really hard to communicate with people from USA due to the time difference.

---

— Communication has been proven to be difficult. Unfortunately, my partners were not really willing to interact or suffice the requirements of the assignment and as a Erasmus+ student this makes it difficult as I cannot fully participate in the project anyways.

## DISCUSSION

The results obtained by this investigation corroborate those of previous studies such as Gimeno (2018) and Taskiran (2019), according to which participants felt they had gained cultural knowledge and improved their intercultural communication skills respectively. In fact, the asynchronous cultural discussions and the Global Conversations event were aimed at fostering participants' ICC. This was facilitated also by the tools used to communicate during the project. In particular, although MeWe was a new tool for all the participants, it was easier to use than expected. This is in line with the results obtained from Di Sarno-García (2023) who claimed that MeWe was an appropriate platform for telecollaboration projects. In addition to this, previous research by O'Dowd (2007) demonstrated that a combination of asynchronous written tools and synchronous videoconference sessions could best support the development of ICC as written dialogue allows more time to reflect, while oral conversation simulate 'life-like' interaction. However, participants of this study showed a preference for synchronous Zoom sessions. This is in line with the results obtained by Sevilla-Pavón (2016) since her findings also revealed language students' enthusiasm for real-time videoconferencing communication in an online environment.

It is believed that dealing with sensitive topics helped students to develop their cultural awareness as they were given the opportunity to compare explicitly the two cultures (O'Dowd, 2007). As stated in the previous section, it is believed that controversial topics should not be avoided in telecollaborative environments (Helm, 2015). The positive responses of the students demonstrate that, indeed, dealing with those issues was not seen as a problem, but rather as a chance to engage in meaningful dialogue in a way that was new for most of them.

Nevertheless, also negative feelings were aroused due to the virtual exchange for a couple of students. The main problems were the difficulty in arranging weekly meetings, mainly either because of the time difference between Maryland and Spain or because of a lack of commitment on one of the two sides. Similar challenges were also found by Sevilla-Pavón (2016) and Gimeno (2018). It is important to tackle these kinds of issues as they can result in frustration and negative prejudices towards the other culture. For that reason, an effort by the instructors on both sides should be made to motivate and engage students. Intercultural encounters

should be described as something invaluable and extremely enriching. Also, planning techniques should be taught as time differences between countries may be an obstacle when trying to arrange the expected meetings. As Sevilla-Pavón (2016) points out, instructors need to guide “students throughout the process so as to avoid their feeling lost or frustrated” (p. 222).

## CONCLUSION

This paper reports on a study conducted among learners of English based in Spain, and learners of Spanish based in Maryland (US). The main aims of the project were to foster Spanish students' pragmatic competence and ICC, although the goal of this paper was to investigate the extent to which participants' expectations corresponded to their level of satisfaction at the end of the intercultural encounter. This was done as factors such as lack of motivation and commitment, un-met expectations, or time zone differences may sometimes affect the outcome of telecollaboration projects as reported in previous studies (Helm, 2015; O'Dowd & Ritter, 2006; Turula & Raith, 2015; Ware, 2005).

The findings reveal that in terms of the usefulness of the project in general and of the synchronous and asynchronous activities in particular, the perceived benefits aligned with or even exceeded participants' expectations at the start. Regarding the tools used (i.e., Zoom and MeWe), the students' predictions mostly aligned with their level of satisfaction. On the other hand, arranging weekly meetings was harder than expected, which led to feelings of frustration for a couple of students. Despite this, the results obtained in this study corroborate those previously achieved by Gimeno (2018), who found that students' expectations correlated with the perceived benefits, which made her believe that communication problems and frustrations had been minimised.

As suggested by O'Dowd and Ritter (2006) instructors should extensively get in touch before the telecollaboration project, and students may carry out introductory tasks where they explain to their virtual partners what their expectations towards the exchange are. This advice can help avoid feelings of frustration or unsuccessful intercultural exchanges. Moreover, as recommended by Hauck and Youngs (2008), task design is of paramount importance in developing students' ICC, as well as their electronic literacy skills.

The main limitation of this study is the small sample size. Also, the data analysed here corresponds to only the Spain-based students. Future studies should compare the data of both groups of students to seek similarities and differences in

terms of expectations and perceived benefits. In conclusion, it is believed that in general terms participants of this telecollaboration project felt that the intercultural encounter was successful, although some of them may have needed further guidance for meeting the scheduled sessions. Therefore, it can be claimed that education through telecollaboration succeeded in fostering students' language learning and ICC. Hopefully the results obtained here will serve as a basis for better planning of future telecollaboration projects.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The study presented in this paper belongs to a PhD project financed by Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV) (PAID-01-19). I would like also to thank Professor Ana Gimeno-Sanz (UPV) and Gonzalo Baptista (Morgan State University). I am also grateful to all the participants who allowed me to collect meaningful data for my research.

## REFERENCES

- Andújar, A. (2020). Language learner engagement in telecollaboration environments. In E. Alqurashi (Ed.), *Handbook of research on fostering student engagement with instructional technology in higher education* (pp. 249-266). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-0119-1.ch014>
- Belz, J. A., & Kinginger, C. (2003). Discourse options and the development of pragmatic competence by classroom learners of German: The case of address forms. *Language Learning*, 53(4), 591-647. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1467-9922.2003.00238.x>
- Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence* (1st ed.). Multilingual Matters.
- Byram, M. (2021). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence revisited* (2nd ed.). Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781800410251>
- Canto Gutiérrez, S. (2020). *Integrating intercultural telecollaboration in foreign language learning programmes*. Netherlands Graduate School of Linguistics.
- Chun, D. M. (2011). Developing intercultural communicative competence through online exchanges. *CALICO Journal*, 28(2), 392-419.
- Colpaert, J. (2020). Editorial position paper: How virtual is your research? *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 33(7), 653-664. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2020.1824059>
- Council of Europe. (2020). *Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment – Companion volume*. Council of Europe Publishing.
- Di Sarno-García, S. (2023). The development of foreign language students' intercultural communicative competence through telecollaboration. *The EuroCALL Review*, 30(1), 35-51. <https://doi.org/10.4995/eurocall.2023.16693>
- Di Sarno-García, S. (2024). The affordances of telecollaboration to teach apologies. *International Journal of English Studies*, 24(1), 25-47. <https://doi.org/10.6018/ijes.570211>

- Di Sarno-García, S. (in press). Do pair and group work modalities affect the outcome in telecollaboration? In M. González-Lloret & J. Sykes (Eds.), *Pragmatics & language learning* (Vol. 15). National Foreign Language Resource Center, University of Hawaii at Mānoa.
- Dooly, M. (2017). Telecollaboration. In C. Chapelle & S. Sauro (Eds.), *The handbook of technology and second language teaching and learning* (pp. 169-183). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118914069.ch12>
- Dooly, M., Masats, D., Müller-Hartmann, A., & Caballero de Rodas, B. (2008). Building effective, dynamic online partnerships. In M. Dooly (Ed.), *Telecollaborative language learning: A guidebook to moderating intercultural collaboration online* (pp. 45-75).
- Dooly, M., & Smith, B. (2020). Telecollaboration and virtual exchange between practice and research: A conversation. *Journal of Virtual Exchange*, 3, 63-81. <https://doi.org/10.21827/jve.3.36085>
- Dooly, M., & Vinagre, M. (2022). Research into practice: Virtual exchange in language teaching and learning. *Language Teaching*, 55(3), 392-406. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444821000069>
- Eslami, Z. R., Mirzaei, A., & Dini, S. (2015). The role of asynchronous computer mediated communication in the instruction and development of EFL learners' pragmatic competence. *System*, 48, 99-111. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2014.09.008>
- Gimeno, A. (2018). Learner expectations and satisfaction in a US-Spain intercultural telecollaboration project. *Bellaterra Journal of Teaching & Learning Language & Literature*, 11(3), 5-38. <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/jtl3.776>
- Godwin-Jones, R. (2019). Telecollaboration as an approach to developing intercultural communication competence. *Language Learning & Technology*, 23(3), 8-28. <https://hdl.handle.net/10125/44691>
- González-Lloret, M. (2021). L2 pragmatics and CALL. *Language Learning & Technology*, 25(3), 90-105. <https://hdl.handle.net/10125/73451>
- Griggio, L., & Pittarello, S. (2020). How a multilingual project can foster and enhance international mobility. In F. Helm & A. Beaven (Eds.), *Designing and implementing virtual exchange – A collection of case studies* (pp. 127-139). Research-publishing.net. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2020.45.1121>
- Guillén, G. A., & Blake, R. J. (2017). Can you repeat, please? L2 complexity, awareness, and fluency development in the hybrid “classroom”. In I. Sanz-Sánchez, S. V. Rivera-Mills, & R. Morin (Eds.), *Online language teaching research: Pedagogical, academic and institutional issues* (pp. 55-77). Trysting Tree Books. <https://doi.org/10.5399/osu/ubi1.d>
- Guth, S. (2020). Foreword. In F. Helm & A. Beaven (Eds.), *Designing and implementing virtual exchange – A collection of case studies* (pp. xix-xx). Research-publishing.net. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2020.45.1109>
- Hauck, M., & Youngs, B. (2008). Telecollaboration in multimodal environments: The impact on task design and learner interaction. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 21(2), 87-124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588220801943510>
- Helm, F. (2013). A dialogic model for telecollaboration. *Bellaterra Journal of Teaching & Learning Language & Literature*, 6(2), 28-48. <https://raco.cat/index.php/Bellaterra/article/view/290901>
- Helm, F. (2015). The practices and challenges of telecollaboration in higher education in Europe. *Language Learning & Technology*, 19(2), 197-217. <http://llt.msu.edu/issues/june2015/helm.pdf>
- Llopis-García, R., & Vinagre, M. (2014). Writing and culture in CALL: 21st century foreign language learning via email tandem exchanges. In M. Thomas (Ed.), *Pedagogical*

- considerations and opportunities for teaching and learning on the web* (pp. 129-151). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-4666-4611-7.ch008>
- O'Dowd, R. (2007). Evaluating the outcomes of online intercultural exchange. *ELT journal*, 61(2), 144-152. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccm007>
- O'Dowd, R. (2023). *Internationalising higher education and the role of virtual exchange*. Routledge.
- O'Dowd, R., & Ritter, M. (2006). Understanding and working with 'failed communication' in telecollaborative exchanges. *CALICO Journal*, 23(3), 623-642. <https://doi.org/10.1558/cj.v23i3.623-642>
- O'Dowd, R., & Waire, P. (2009). Critical issues in telecollaborative task design. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 22(2), 173-188. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09588220902778369>
- Orsini-Jones, M., & Lee, F. (2018). *Intercultural communicative competence for global citizenship: Identifying cyberpragmatic rules of engagement in telecollaboration*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-58103-7>
- Sawin, T. A. (2022). Technology in the acquisition of second language pragmatics. In N. Ziegler & M. González-Lloret (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of second language acquisition and technology* (pp. 215-229). Routledge.
- Sevilla-Pavón, A. (2016). Affordances of telecollaboration tools for English for specific purposes online learning. *World Journal on Educational Technology: Current Issues*, 8(3), 218-223. <https://doi.org/10.18844/wjet.v8i3.696>
- Taskiran, A. (2019). Telecollaboration: Fostering foreign language learning at a distance. *European Journal of Open, Distance and e-learning*, 22(2), 86-96.
- Turula, A., & Raith, T. (2015). Telecollaboration insights: Learning from exchanges that fail. *The EuroCALL Review*, 23(2), 19. <https://doi.org/10.4995/eurocall.2015.4666>
- Vinagre, M. (2014). El desarrollo de la competencia intercultural en los intercambios telecolaborativos. *Revista de Educación a Distancia (RED)*, 41. <https://revistas.um.es/red/article/view/236391>
- Ware, P. (2005). "Missed" communication in online communication: Tensions in a German-American telecollaboration. *Language Learning & Technology*, 9(2), 64-89. <https://doi.org/10.10125/44020>



## SOFIA DI SARNO-GARCÍA

Holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics from the Universitat Politècnica de València (Spain) as a member of the CAMILLE research group. Her main research interests include interlanguage pragmatics, intercultural communicative competence, and telecollaboration. She teaches English for Professional and Academic Communication at Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (Spain).

[s.disarno@upm.es](mailto:s.disarno@upm.es)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9952-4178>



Di Sarno-García, S. (2024). Language learners' expectations and satisfaction level in a telecollaboration project. *Bellaterra Journal of Teaching & Learning Language & Literature*, 17(3), e1232. <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/jtl3.1232>



Rebut / Recibido / Received / Reçu: 01-03-2023

Acceptat / Aceptado / Accepted / Accepté: 26-07-2024

<https://revistes.uab.cat/jtl3/>