

Virtual Collaborative Learning as One of the Effective Strategies for Raising Cross-Cultural Awareness in Business English Classroom

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Abstract

Recently, Business English (BE) has become an integral part of teaching English due to its growing demand in the employment market and its power to facilitate cross-cultural communication and dialogue between speakers of all languages. Since BE serves as a Lingua Franca globally, a good mastery of the so-called Business English as Lingua Franca (BELF) is getting more and more attention among practitioners and researchers of Business English, who attempt to update their curriculum in accordance with cutting-edge developments for better occupational purposes. With this in mind, the presented paper will attempt to showcase the merits of Virtual Collaborative Learning (VCL) as one of the effective strategic tools for raising cross-cultural communication in the Business English classroom which indeed fosters the development of a culturally intelligent generation through support and guidance. The combined questionnaire was designed to study the experiences of BE learners—specifically, the experiences of former beneficiaries of Virtual Exchange in a shared Business English course

between Grigol Robakidze University (Tbilisi and Batumi Campuses) and Azerbaijan Pedagogical University held during the Spring term of 2021. Since the representatives of different cultures were learning Business English via Virtual Collaborative Learning (VCL), they were automatically exposed to various intercultural contexts which aimed at raising their cross-cultural communication awareness through the use of BELF. The results of the questionnaire were applied to evaluate the effectiveness of Virtual Collaborative Learning to facilitate cross-cultural knowledge as a result of which VCL was/will be added as an integral part of the existing BE curriculum.

Keywords: Virtual Collaborative Learning, Business English; Cross-cultural communication; Cultural Intelligence; Effective strategies

Introduction

In today's globalized and socially distanced world, where working remotely has become the new normal, online collaboration that crosses borders has become increasingly popular. According to a recent survey involving employees from 90 countries, it was discovered that 89 percent of white-collar workers engage in projects within global virtual teams (GVTs) in which team members are spread across the globe and depend upon online communication tools. (Taras et al., 2021)

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that organizations worldwide engaging in cross-cultural and international business ventures are actively seeking talent that possesses global cultural competence. Furthermore, as reported by the International Labor Union, 70 percent of international ventures end in failure primarily because of cultural differences (Banerjee, 2015).

In nearly every classroom, the incorporation of cross-cultural communication fundamentals into the Business English curriculum is imperative, as it not only enriches students' learning experience but also enhances their employability in the professional world.

Undoubtedly, the importance of this issue cannot be overstated; however, the key lies in finding the most effective means to achieve it.

The most effective approach to address this challenge is leveraging real-life tools that bridge cultural gaps. Having said that, Virtual Collaborative Learning (VCL) has proved to be one of the most efficient strategies for improving cross-cultural communication in the Business English classroom. While VCL might not consistently enhance the overall student learning experience in a typical setting, its implementation has demonstrated notable success in fostering the growth of students' Cultural Intelligence.

The paper examines how the integration of VCL creates unique opportunities to raise awareness of cross-cultural sensitivity within the Business English classroom. Its primary goal is to empower the emerging generation, ultimately fostering a deep sense of Cultural Intelligence. Firstly, the Concepts of Cultural Intelligence and Virtual Collaborative Learning will be defined. To underscore these notions, the included study will exemplify a case of Virtual Exchange within a Business English classroom involving a collaboration between Grigol Robakidze University (Tbilisi and Batumi Campus) and Azerbaijan Pedagogical University.

Concept of Cultural Intelligence

At this point, the terms IQ and EQ have entered the everyday lexicon. However, in today's increasingly fast-paced, complicated, and competitive world, a new term has emerged known as CQ (Cultural Intelligence). CQ refers to the capacity to comprehend and navigate various cultures with effectiveness (Madhusudan, 2017).

Cultural Intelligence goes beyond mere awareness of different cultures. It empowers individuals to not only understand diverse cultural contexts but to also adapt and interact effectively with people from various backgrounds. This ability enables them to work harmoniously and build meaningful relationships across cultures (Farrell, 2023).

Consequently, the process of acquiring CQ extends beyond the limited scope of reading newspapers, exploring literature, art, music, or watching films from various cultural backgrounds. Instead, one must actively engage in a diverse range of experiences, interact with individuals from different cultures, and immerse oneself in global diversity to truly grasp its essence.

Cultural Intelligence is closely related to Emotional Intelligence, but it extends beyond that point. Emotional Intelligence allows individuals to sense the emotions, desires, and needs of others. Meanwhile, Cultural Intelligence allows individuals to be finely attuned to the beliefs, communication styles, and values of diverse cultures. Armed with this knowledge, one can foster empathetic and understanding interactions with people from various backgrounds (Farrell, 2023) Both Cultural Intelligence and Emotional Intelligence share a critical element, as stated by psychologist Daniel Goleman, "a propensity to suspend judgment—to think before acting" (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004). To better understand the concept, let us discuss three sources of Cultural Intelligence: head, body, and heart.

The term "head" pertains to possessing knowledge about the customs and beliefs of diverse cultures. However, having this knowledge does not necessarily ensure that an individual will readily recognize the clues to a culture's shared understanding (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004). Teaching BE

students about cross-cultural intelligence in class could be a first step, yet it alone falls short of fostering a robust level of Cultural Intelligence.

Body encompasses the ability to translate cultural knowledge into observable behaviors, reflected in gestures, body language, and the manner in which culturally significant tasks are performed. “Your actions and demeanor must prove that you have already to some extent entered their world.” (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004) This is where Virtual Collaborative Learning can emerge as a significant player, providing students with a great opportunity to navigate through diverse cultures.

Even if one applies “head” and “body” to cultural situations, one may not be fully prepared without the third component, which is the “heart”. Mastering the process of cultural adaptation involves facing and overcoming a range of challenges and setbacks. High levels of motivation and confidence gained from prior experiences in similar situations can greatly aid in navigating through these challenges. If one does not believe in himself that he will not handle the situation, it is highly unlikely he will succeed. The absence of self-belief in one's capabilities to handle a situation greatly reduces the chances of success (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004). In moments of unsuccessful interactions, reflecting on the factors that led to the outcome and being attentive to the most effective strategies are crucial for growth and improvement. The Business English Lecturers could play a pivotal role in building this confidence.

Acknowledging the significance of CQ, which is further amplified by globalization and the heightened interactions among individuals from varied backgrounds where Cultural Intelligence is not just an advantage but a vital skill, the importance of Cultural Intelligence is poised to reach unparalleled levels.

Concept of Virtual Collaborative Learning

Before exploring Virtual Collaborative Learning (VCL), Collaborative Learning (CL) must first be discussed. The term was first coined in the 1970 book Collaborative Learning by Edwin Mason, but interest and implementation really took off in the mid-1980s (Yang, 2023). To this day, as evidenced by the continued publication of articles in scholarly journals on this topic, CL is still widely accepted to be an effective teaching strategy and is regarded as an important area of research.

While variations in definitions exist among researchers, the essence of CL instruction is fairly straightforward, “it is a situation in which two or more people learn or attempt to learn something together” (Dillenbourg, 1999, p. 1). More specifically, CL is an umbrella term that is widely accepted to be grounded in a set of tenets: 1) Two or more learners are working together to complete a goal; 2) Learners help each other to share

knowledge and negotiate meaning; 3) All group members share in the work; 4) Skills such as problem-solving, decision-making, communication, and conflict management are developed; and 5) The pair or group reflects on the work process and the final product upon completion of the goal (Laal, 2013). In addition to the core tenets, the philosophy of less structured lessons, student agency, and teacher as facilitator is generally accepted (Bruffee, 1999).

Virtual Collaborative Learning, as the name suggests, takes CL out of the physical space, harnesses the power of the internet, and allows learners to connect and work cooperatively through their computers, laptops, tablets, or any other capable electronic device at their disposal. These electronic devices are then connected to other learners through commonly used programs such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, and the like. The primary advantage of VCL is two-fold. First, it allows for students learning from home to engage in real-time, back-and-forth communication (Stacy, 1999). Second, and most related to this study, it allows learners from different cultures and far away communities to engage with each other in ways that would be time and cost-prohibitive otherwise (Clauss, Lenk, & Schoop, 2019).

Literature Review

Our world is more interconnected than ever before. It offers diversity at the workplaces often with remote teams, making cross-cultural communication a vital part of organizational success. Every culture has its own set of challenges when it comes to face-to-face interactions. Cross-cultural communication allows people to avoid miscommunication and misinterpretation even when a language barrier does not exist. Embracing cultural differences among diverse groups and effectively interacting within a given context are prerequisites of working cohesively and understanding each other on a human level. Patty Goodman believes that efficient cross-cultural communication plays a crucial role in mitigating conflicts and fostering a harmonious work environment that accommodates everyone. A fundamental aspect lies in gaining a proper grasp of cultural elements, traditions, and behaviors divergent from the dominant national culture, which necessitates a receptive and adaptable approach (Goodman, 2019).

The Society for Human Resource Management reports that culture has a significant impact on productivity. As such, it is important to be aware of the fact that employees with diverse backgrounds are driven by varying motivations and respond differently to distinct management and communication approaches (SHRM, 2015)

After gaining an understanding of how cultural elements influence communication between individuals and groups in the workplace, educators

faced a need to develop strategies that promote effective cross-cultural communication skills. One of the offered approaches was to make those strategies an inseparable part of language learning. This concept was agreed upon by the researchers in the 1950s at the symposium held by the American Foreign Language Education Association. The researchers declared that the cultural knowledge of the country should be taught along with foreign language teaching. Discussing the important role of culture in people's social lives, Chinese researcher Qiong Yue, proves that fostering cross-cultural competence in English education promotes an impartial cultural perspective, strengthens students' capacity for empathy, tolerance, and effective negotiation, and additionally enhances their proficiency in accurately and fluently conveying local cultural nuances (Qiong Y., 2022).

Developing students' cross-cultural communication competence in the Business English classroom demands not only providing students with cultural knowledge but also an in-depth and application-oriented teaching approach. Ulla Lundgren proposes four perspectives model in teaching business English:

- Communication skills in a foreign language;
- Cultural competencies specific to the foreign language;
- Intercultural competencies facilitating the natural behavior in the cultural environment of the foreign language;
- Organizational communication competencies, that develop the ability to interact efficiently in a new organizational culture, where the foreign language learned is the formal language of the organization (Lundgren U., 2004; 2005):

Based on this model, Professor Violeta Lilians Negrea offers a Cross-cultural Business English framework that combines the specific competencies of foreign language, cultural knowledge, and organizational culture knowledge, all of them serving to facilitate the development of a natural behavior in a different professional culture environment.

- Communication (L1 and L2) – targeting the development of reading, listening, writing and speaking skills.
- Culture (student's and target language) - General cultural behavior, ideas, perceptions, art, belief, literature, history, music, etc.
- Cross culture (intercultural communication competencies) - adaptability, tolerance, empathy, flexibility, cultural identity, social constructivism;
- Organizational culture (organizational communication competence) - recognition and use of organizational culture patterns, communication stereotypes, and procedures (Nigrea, V. 2012)

To achieve the goals listed in the framework, Violeta Negrea suggests an innovative pedagogical approach to Cross-cultural Business English which stimulates students' capacity to adapt and react adequately to the otherness of a new cultural and organizational environment through a content-based environment and active pedagogy. She underlines Collaborative Learning as one of the effective pedagogical approaches to developing cross-cultural competence in the business English classroom.

Collaborative Learning has been proven to be one of the prominent approaches to enhance cross-cultural communication skills by other researchers as well. They speak about the benefits of Collaborative Learning, which can be applied while teaching business language both during face-to-face or virtual learning.

- Collaborative learning offers a unique platform to enhance interaction among students from diverse cultural backgrounds and promote cross-cultural communication in the English classroom.
- Enhanced Language Proficiency: Engaging in discussions, presentations, and group activities in a virtual environment can improve students' English language skills, aiding them in effective cross-cultural communication.
- Increases Cultural Awareness, Sensitivity, and respect: Collaborative interactions enable students to develop a deeper understanding of cultural norms, values, and practices, thereby fostering cultural awareness and sensitivity.
- Develop empathy for others - When individuals are able to collaborate effectively, they can work together towards common goals, share ideas, and support one another. On the other hand, it helps to develop empathy. Empathy allows individuals to understand and relate to the feelings and experiences of others, leading to increased understanding and connection. It contributes to positive social interactions and healthy relationships.
- Celebrates differences - Students learn to work with all types of people. During interactions, they find many opportunities to reflect upon and reply to the diverse responses fellow learners bring to the questions raised. It also allows students to add their perspectives to an issue based on their cultural differences. This exchange inevitably helps students to better understand other cultures and points of view.

Virtual Collaborative Learning tends to be a promising strategy for promoting cross-cultural communication in the Business English classroom. When coupled with well-designed activities and effective facilitation, it can lead to significant improvements in students' cross-cultural competence and language skills.

Method

With the purpose of evaluating effectiveness, the enrolled students of Grigol Robakidze University and Azerbaijan Pedagogical University's Virtual Learning Experience of Business English course in the Spring 2021 semester participated in an online questionnaire. The designed questionnaire consisted of 7 closed prompts (based on the Likert scale, i.e., Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree and one from Always to Never) and 1 open-ended (which required producing a small piece of writing based on the opinion) question. The following link was shared among former beneficiaries of VCL who were asked to respond: <https://forms.gle/GQiZa48VYbHfn52n7>. The empirical data obtained from the online questionnaire was used to analyze the effects of their VCL experience and to consider it as an integral part of the existing BE curriculum at GRUNI, which will be put into practice in the coming academic year.

Results

The online questionnaire was completed and returned by 67 respondents from Azerbaijan and Georgia; in particular, 52.5% of the respondents were students of Business English from Azerbaijan Pedagogical University, whereas 47.5% were represented by the Students of Business English from Grigol Robakidze University (Tbilisi Campus and Batumi Branch).

94.1% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (43.4% agreed; 50.7% strongly agreed) with **Statement 1** "*The virtual collaborative learning activities from the Georgian-Azerbaijan BE Classroom encouraged me to interact with peers from different cultural backgrounds,*" which indeed illustrates that VCL indeed supported interaction among the representatives of different cultures which was one of the major Goals of the project.

Similarly, 90.9% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (34.8% agreed; 56.1% strongly agreed) with **Statement 2** "*The virtual exchange program helped me to understand and appreciate cultural differences.*" As can be seen from the students' feedback, the program was extremely helpful for them in order to become aware of cultural differences.

Statement 3 "**I actively participated in cross-cultural discussions during the virtual exchange program**" required answers placed on a 1 to 5 scale *from Always to Never*. In this case, 30.3% of the respondents replied that they **Always** actively participated in cross-cultural discussions during the virtual exchange program; 48.5% answered with '**Often**', whereas only 15.2% of former students were active only '**sometimes**.' This, overall, shows not only very good attendance but at the same active participation from the students of target countries which would not have been possible without

instructors' efforts and a strong selection of topics in Business English relevant to learners' language competence needs.

92.5% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (41.8% agreed; 50.7% strongly agreed), with **Statement 4** "*The virtual collaborative learning activities improved my ability to communicate effectively with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds.*" This is considered to be one of the biggest achievements of the project since the top priority was to improve BE learners' ability for intercultural communication. Only 6% of the students showed a neutral position. This could be attributed to less effort and/or passive engagement as well as other factors, i.e. stress, language competence, etc.

89% either agreed or strongly agreed (35.9% agreed; 53.1% strongly agreed), with **Statement 5** that "*I found specific virtual collaborative learning exercises particularly beneficial for enhancing cross-cultural communication*", which is encouraging as it can be interpreted that students benefited from tasks and exercises offered during CV and further contributed to developing their cross-cultural communication.

Following the same trend, 84.8% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (51.5% agreed; 33.3% strongly agreed) and only 12.1% of the students showed a neutral position with **Statement 6** '*The virtual exchange program provided me with opportunities to apply cross-cultural communication skills in real-world scenarios*'. This could be due to the fact that either not all of the beneficiaries of the VCL project have had an opportunity to put gained expertise into practice, or the program may not be equally sufficient for all participants in terms of applying knowledge in real-life situations due to its nature of being fully online.

An absolute majority consisting of 94% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed (35.8% agreed; 58.2% strongly agreed) with **Statement 7** '*I found the virtual collaborative learning experience enjoyable and engaging.*' 'This represents promising results for all the engaged instructors and initiators of the project since they managed to create an enjoyable and engaging learning atmosphere during the times of the pandemic and raised students' cross-cultural communication skills in tandem with teaching Business English.

On the open-ended question of the online questionnaires which asked students to '*share a specific example during the virtual exchange program where you experienced a positive cross-cultural communication interaction*' we received myriad responses which are particularly interesting and worth taking into account for course developers, instructors from both institutions in Georgia, Azerbaijan, and beyond, as it demonstrates extremely productive lessons learned from Virtual Exchanges. It also shows gained

knowledge about the peculiarities of cross-cultural communications and its pivotal role when doing Business internationally by using Business English as Lingua Franca (BELF).

Discussion

Based on the analysis of the findings, VCL helped students to understand and learn what cultural differences a person can have and still have the ability to talk and share their experiences on board.

It is also noteworthy that Georgian students communicated a positive experience in meeting students from Azerbaijan and communicating with them about different topics, i.e. brand awareness, and promotion, and learned about their perspective on getting luxury items in contrast to Georgian students where we are not much keen on brands.

Referring to the response, *“I really remember that Virtual Learning of Business English and lectures given by Lecturers from Georgia and Azerbaijan was a different experience but on the whole it was interesting and useful to communicate using only English and also make new contacts. VCL really helped me to use more English, improve my Business English and learn how to effectively solve problems in groups and work with new team members. We often worked in pairs and groups in Zoom breakout rooms and I remember that we had to use only English to answer discussion questions so this was really good for us,”* we infer that students engaged with this ‘new’ experience, as well as activities offered by the instructors, i.e. group work in zoom breakout rooms which helped them to use English and improved on the whole 21st century skills, including communication and problem-solving.

Based on the response, *“Business English is my favorite subject and when our teacher asked us to learn it with peers from Georgia, GRUNI I was first surprised but after the first meeting which was of course on zoom because of the pandemic I realized that it was very beneficial and we tried to understand different problems from different perspectives. I also remember that once I disagreed with my Georgian pair about brand awareness - Is it a good idea to be obsessed with brands and then I realized that we all have some obsession and that's why we negotiated and were happy,”* the program resulted in raising cross-cultural awareness around different topics, i.e., brands based on the discussion techniques and opinion development which is one more indicator for success of the project.

It is also noteworthy that apart from gaining knowledge about Cross Cultural Communication, the program assisted the students in overcoming the tedium and monotony commonly associated with the pandemic and virtual learning. The experience encouraged students to meet new people,

build new relationships, and also learn from each other, as evidenced in several students' responses:

'The program was helpful and also successful because we were all very bored during the pandemic, without traveling and this helped us to discover each other's cultures more;'

'I really enjoyed meeting students from Azerbaijan and communicating with them about different topics, i.e., brand awareness, promotion and learned about their perspective about getting luxury items in contrast to Georgian students where we are not much keen on brands;'

'Pandemic was a very stressful period for us all and we missed meeting new people and making new friends. VCL helped us to support each other and talk about new normal, paused businesses and find joint solutions for a better future. So, Group activities during the program made us once again realize that Pandemic was a global problem and English was the most powerful tool for us to fight for a better future.'

'During virtual Business English Classes I met students from Georgia and we discussed common problems in global business, problems of misunderstanding between different cultures and shared our own experiences of dealing with similar challenges. Instructors from Georgia and Azerbaijan as well as foreign lectures encouraged us to minimize barriers by using Business English.'

Based on the provided feedback, VCL on the whole was a very positive experience for the surveyed beneficiaries from GRUNI and ASPU. They were united under one global challenge and did their best to learn from each other about common problems in global business, discuss problems of misunderstanding resulting from low awareness in cross-cultural communication, share their own experiences for coping existing challenges, and--in their own words--'to fight for [a] better future'.

The results of the questionnaire are very helpful for all target groups to analyze the progression of the Virtual Collaborative Learning, its effects on students' virtual performance, obtained knowledge together with different experiences and to update the Business English curriculum with best practices and lessons learned from the pandemic.

Conclusion

In the context of today's world where cross-cultural communication plays a key role, integration of effective strategies for raising intercultural awareness is critical.

This paper has examined the benefits of using Virtual Collaborative Learning (VCL) as one of the effective tools to nurture students' Cultural Intelligence within the Business English classroom.

A comprehensive survey revealed the impact of VCL on enhancing cross-cultural communication in the Business English classroom. This case revolves around a virtual exchange program between Grigol Robakidze University (Tbilisi and Batumi Campus) and Azerbaijan Pedagogical University.

The responses verified the positive influence of VCL activities in promoting interaction among students from different cultures and heightened awareness of cultural understanding. The open-ended answers further illustrate the benefits of VCL.

One crucial point to emphasize is that guidance and support are great contributors of VCL activities which should be supplemented with feedback, effective discussions, and providing the students with needed resources. This approach equips students with essential skills to thrive in a globalized business environment regardless of their areas.

In the broader perspective, VCL could be referred to as one of the effective strategies in the Business English classroom in empowering future generations to practice effective cross-cultural communication and shaping culturally intelligent individuals. It is evident that by utilizing the potential of Virtual Collaborative Learning, BE educators can contribute significantly to the development of cross-cultural communicators in their BE classrooms.

With all data considered, we are planning to incorporate this approach into our Business English class curriculum and reintroduce it in future curriculums.

Human Studies :

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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Appendix 1

Responses on the open-ended question “Please share a specific example during the virtual exchange program where you experienced a positive cross-cultural communication interaction”:

During a virtual exchange program, I had the opportunity to observe a positive cross-cultural communication interaction between two students from different countries.

The virtual exchange program helped me to understand and learn what cultural differences we can have and still have the ability to talk and share our experiences on board. It was really joyful for me to talk with strangers from different countries about their cultures, traditions mindset and education

I really enjoyed meeting students from Azerbaijan and communicating with them about different topics, i.e. brand awareness, promotion and learned about their perspective about getting luxury items in contrast to Georgian students where we are not much keen on brands.

During VCL, we participated in a breakout room session where we decided to show each other and turn cameras on which showed that Georgian students were a bit ashamed speaking in English during a big audience but in smaller groups they were more open and we made friends and we really would like to meet them in person. Hope University will support us in finding them!

I really remember that Virtual Learning of Business English and lectures given by Lecturers from Georgia and Azerbaijan was a different experience but on the whole it was interesting and useful to communicate using only English and also make new contacts. VCL really helped me to use more English, improve my Business English and learn how to effectively solve problems in groups works with new team members. We often worked in pairs and groups in Zoom breakout rooms and I remember that we had to use only English to answer discussion questions so this was really good for us.

I was very happy to be a part of the VCL project and meeting new friends from Georgia as well as new Lecturers who gave us a great experience. I remember from the very beginning we were shy and a bit passive but after breakout room and group tasks we had to solve various problems and find group solutions on Business English topics which was not easy but we managed and that's why it was a great project.

Business English is my favorite subject and when our teacher asked us to learn it with peers from Georgia, GRUNI I was first surprised but after the first meeting which was of course on zoom because of the pandemic I realized that It was very beneficial and we tried to understand different problems from different perspectives. I also remember that once I disagreed with my Georgian pair about brand awareness - Is it a good idea to be

obsessed with brands and then I realized that we all have some obsession and that's why we negotiated and were happy.

For me VCL was a very enjoyable experience as I loved meeting young people from GRUNI, also it was engaging to communicate with them through different tasks and activities. This experience was fully positive as it was pandemic and wanted communication and different learning. But I hope that we will continue to cooperate.

It was very amazing to see Georgian Colleagues virtually during the pandemic;

It was a topic related to the proper official communication rules. We discussed some examples that are popular in our countries.

Firstly, I express my deepest gratitude to the organizers of this project, and feel honored to be part of this team, and I enjoyed every session of it.

Baku

Nothing

I did not have so experience

We spend time with Chinese students and see their relaxed behavior.

Furthermore, we see Dutch people's punctual attitudes to their job

The virtual exchange program provided me.

We shared our experiences

ERASMUS

ASPU

It was very interesting and fruitful, thanks a lot for everything

VCL

Good

I agree with all above sayings

USA high institution program

!!!!

I don't want to give a specific example.

We were respectful of each other's cultures. We were open-minded and willing to learn about each other's cultures.

I understood the culture of foreigners.

I can show many interesting examples.

It is always a great idea to discuss different cultural backgrounds by doing group works.

Some new communication interaction clubs

I found Virtual Collaborative Learning very interesting, entertaining, and involved. It helped me to improve my cross-cultural communicative skills. It encouraged me to communicate to my peers from different cultural backgrounds.

I had cross-cultural discussions about different topics with my foreign colleagues during the virtual exchange program.

Pandemic was a very stressful period for us all and we missed meeting new people and making new friends. VCL helped us to support each other and talk about new normal, paused businesses and find joint solutions for the better future. So Group activities during the program made us once again realize that Pandemic was a global problem and English was the most powerful tool for us to fight for a better future.

During virtual Business English Classes I met students from Georgia and we discussed common problems in global business, problems of misunderstanding between different cultures and shared our own experiences of dealing with similar challenges. Instructors from Georgia and Azerbaijan as well as Foreign lectures encouraged us to minimize barriers by using Business English.

I loved working with Georgian students since we discussed intercultural accidents related to the topic of religion, also we analyzed our traditions and role of English as an International Language in doing global business. I was not a very active participant but I really liked this experience and would like to have it in the future as well.

I was not very active during virtual Business English classes but whenever I attended it gave me positive emotions and also students from Baku loved Georgians which made it easy to communicate without any problems.

Business English is my favorite subject because it is very useful for employment. I think that Virtual classes helped me to improve business communications skills and made me understand people from different cultures.

Virtual classes in Business English were helpful because I started to appreciate differences between our cultures. But I think we need more experiences with other cultures as well.

The whole experience was very positive and engaging because we had foreign lectures and they helped us to develop our Business English with cross-cultural understanding of each other's cultures.

I really liked virtual learning of Business English with foreign lecturers and students from Baku but I was not able to be very active because of zoom and also language barrier. But I think that Business English is very necessary for cross-cultural communication .

I remember well that it was a new experience for us, at first it was a bit stressful to talk in a new situation but our instructors and also experts helped us to overcome barriers and become more engaged in the activities and use Business English.

The program was helpful and also successful because we were all very bored during the pandemic, without traveling and this helped us to discover each other's cultures more.

On the whole, virtual learning was really worthwhile because it gathered students from two countries and helped them to understand differences. In this case the role of English was crucially important and it helped us to improve BE.

The program was very useful which increased my understanding about cross-cultural communication and in general raised my knowledge about different cultures with the help of English which was a medium in our case.

Virtual classes in Business English with students from Baku helped me to gain new skills, improved my Business English and also made me understand different communication styles. I really loved the new way of learning BE and it was really very engaging especially during the pandemic when we were locked and could not travel at all.

Business English helped me to solve real-life problems and better communicate with people from different cultures. I remember that students from Azerbaijan liked different brands and had different interests of spending free time. It will not be so hard to communicate with them in real life now.

During Business English classes we enjoyed funny and interesting activities in zoom breakout rooms. We introduced ourselves and found that we had many things in common as we are good neighbors. Besides, we realized that for us Business English is very important and helpful for employment. The VCL was a very positive experience and a great memory from the pandemic.

During Business English Classes I remember group discussion on Business Etiquette in Georgia and Azerbaijan which caused a great interest between group members. We discovered lots of similarities and differences and were very pleased with it.

Cross-cultural communication with students from Azerbaijan was a positive experience because we were all non-native speakers and for us Business English was the most powerful strategy to overcome barriers and avoid miscommunication.

It is difficult to name one specific example because I think that all classes in BE were positive for us as we learned about each other's cultures and communicated effectively virtually.

For me VCL was a very positive experience because it was stress-free and a very funny way of learning Business English. I think that it must be not only during the pandemic but also now.

For me a positive experience was interaction with Azerbaijani students especially during group work when we used English which helped us to improve our cross-cultural communication and better understand each other's habits, traditions, attitude to work, life and so on.

I enjoyed online classes in Business English and had a very positive memory from them. Especially interaction with foreigners and using English for communication. It was very good for our group.

I remember online lessons well, but these were absolutely different from regular classes. We had to use white board, breakout rooms and find common solutions to various questions and problems. It made us discover cultural things as well.

One of the most positive moments of virtual BE Classes with Azerbaijani students was learning language in a foreign environment where we had a field like being abroad. I liked this moment of meeting foreigners and learning their cultures directly from them.

Before this class I had difficulty in communicating in English with foreigners but this online class helped me to see that most important is to communicate and understand each other.

I really liked virtual communication especially with foreigners especially when we discussed global problems with English. It improved my business English and knowledge about different business cultures and I can use it in my real life.

I remember that our teachers and Azerbaijani teachers did their best and helped us to participate actively in group work. They provided us with necessary vocabulary, prompts and knowledge and prepared very interesting and useful topics which we can use in our career.

During VCL, I learned that Azerbaijanis are a bit conservative and the decision-making process goes through huge bureaucracy and multiple, lengthy, useless meetings. On the contrary, Georgian managers seem more flexible and riskier than Azerbaijanis. So, I was happy to learn about such differences. But VCL can help us all to understand each other's differences and plan businesses more effectively.