

**TEACHERS' STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES IN
PROMOTING INTERCULTURAL LEARNING THROUGH
VIRTUAL EXCHANGE AT SMP 1 KUDUS**



Thesis

Presented as partial fulfillment of requirements
for Master Degree in English Education

Submitted by:
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20540005

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A THESIS

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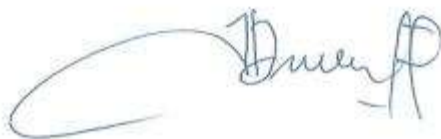
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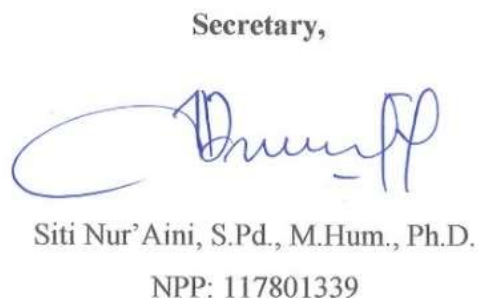
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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I affirm that this thesis entitled "Teachers' Strategies and Challenges in Promoting Intercultural Learning Through Virtual Exchange at SMP 1 Kudus" is entirely my own, except the words or ideas of other writers are specifically acknowledge according to accepted citation conventions. I have revised, edited, proofread, and ensured that this thesis is free of plagiarism.

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I certify that I am the author of this thesis and that any assistance I received in its preparation is fully acknowledged and fully disclosed in this thesis (examination). I have also cited my sources (footnotes and endnotes) from which I used data, ideas, theories, or words, whether quoted directly or paraphrased. I further acknowledge that this thesis has been prepared by myself specially to meet the requirement for the degree of Master in English Education.

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Nurul Azkiyah

ABSTRACT

Azkiyah, Nurul. 2024 "Teachers' Strategies and Challenges in Promoting Intercultural Learning Through Virtual Exchange at SMP 1 Kudus ". Thesis. Advisors: Siti Nur'Aini, S.Pd., M.Hum.Ph.D; Dr. Rahmawati Sukmaningrum., S.Pd., M.Pd.

Virtual exchange programs (VEPs) are a valuable tool to promote intercultural learning among young learners. This case study aims to investigate and understand how virtual exchange programs are implemented in Indonesian junior high schools, particularly concerning challenges and strategies related to teachers. The study focuses on the "Culture in a Box" virtual exchange program at SMP 1 Kudus, a school located in Indonesia, and examines the strategies teachers used in tailoring topics and designing the learning process and the challenges they encountered in the implementation. In-depth interviews were gathered from two teachers conducting the program in SMP 1 Kudus which was supported by some documents and observation. of VEPs and intercultural education in junior high school settings. The findings gleaned from this research underscore the transformative power of virtual exchange programs in fostering intercultural competence, language acquisition, and global awareness among junior school students. This research provides valuable insights and practical strategies for teachers and schools to effectively implement or enhance virtual exchanges in the Indonesian context.

Keywords: *Virtual Exchange Programs, Intercultural Learning, Junior High Schools, Teacher's Challenges, Teacher's Strategies*

ABSTRAK

Azkiyah, Nurul. 2024 "Strategi dan Tantangan Guru dalam Mempromosikan Pembelajaran Lintas Budaya Melalui Pertukaran Virtual di SMP 1 Kudus". Tesis. Pembimbing: Siti Nur'Aini, S.Pd., M.Hum.Ph.D ; Dr. Rahmawati Sukmaningrum., S.Pd., M.Pd.

Program pertukaran virtual (VEP) adalah alat yang berharga untuk mempromosikan pembelajaran lintas budaya di kalangan pelajar muda. Studi kasus ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki dan memahami bagaimana program pertukaran virtual dilaksanakan di sekolah menengah pertama Indonesia, khususnya terkait tantangan dan strategi yang berkaitan dengan guru. Penelitian ini berfokus pada program pertukaran virtual "Culture in a Box" di SMP 1 Kudus, sebuah sekolah yang terletak di Indonesia, dan mengkaji strategi yang digunakan guru dalam menyesuaikan topik dan merancang proses pembelajaran serta tantangan yang mereka hadapi dalam implementasinya. Wawancara mendalam dilakukan dengan dua guru yang melaksanakan program di SMP 1 Kudus, yang didukung oleh beberapa dokumen dan observasi tentang VEP dan pendidikan lintas budaya di lingkungan sekolah menengah pertama. Temuan yang diperoleh dari penelitian ini menggarisbawahi kekuatan transformatif dari program pertukaran virtual dalam menumbuhkan kompetensi lintas budaya, penguasaan bahasa, dan kesadaran global di kalangan siswa sekolah menengah pertama. Penelitian ini memberikan wawasan berharga dan strategi praktis bagi guru dan sekolah untuk secara efektif menerapkan atau meningkatkan pertukaran virtual dalam konteks Indonesia.

Kata kunci: *Program Pertukaran Virtual, Pembelajaran Lintas Budaya, Sekolah Menengah Pertama, Tantangan Guru, Strategi Guru*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter consist of the research background, novelty, problem statement, objectives, and benefits of the research

A. The Research Background

In today's globalised society, gaining intercultural competency is crucial, especially while learning a language. Gaining intercultural competency fosters a respectful attitude towards other cultures in addition to improving one's English language proficiency (Ahnagari & Zamanian, 2014). Beyond language learning, it helps individuals develop a broad range of abilities that they may utilize to communicate effectively in various cultural contexts (Knipp Silva & Scarlota, 2021). Therefore, Integrating cultural awareness into language education fosters intercultural competence, which is essential for creating inclusive and globally aware educational environments to prepare students for an increasingly interconnected world (Simões & Sangiamchit, 2023).

The integration of intercultural learning into English education is aligned with the goal of the Merdeka Curriculum, which is to develop the Berkebhinekaan Global dimension of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila (Suryaningsih et al., 2023). The global diversity (Kebhinekaan Global) dimension is a crucial aspect of education that aims to maintain a respectable culture, identity, and locality while being receptive to other cultures. This approach encourages tolerance and respect for the

Indonesian nation's culture (Giyatmi et al., 2024). The Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on a holistic, student-centered education is aligned with this strategy, which equips students with the critical thinking, creativity, and communication skills necessary for success in the twenty-first century (Cristiana et al., 2023; Nur & Ahmadi, 2023).

The educational landscape gives more freedom in designing the curriculum, especially when it comes to including virtual exchange programs. The rise in virtual events by the global COVID-19 pandemic, has profoundly transformed global cooperation, requiring the creation and implementation of innovative tools and strategies tailored to the unique needs of English language teaching (Ennis et al., 2021). The integration of Web 2.0 tools and applications like social media, video conferencing, and collaborative platforms such as Google Docs and Zoom, transcends geographical barriers, fostering cultural understanding and language acquisition (O'Dowd, 2021). Through the use of digital platforms, virtual exchange programs have emerged as crucial resources for promoting cultural awareness in English language classrooms (Anisa, 2024).

Incorporating virtual exchange into intercultural learning has a profound impact on participants, significantly enhancing their cultural competence. In addition, Hřebačková (2019) highlighted the importance of including guided virtual exchanges into classroom instruction. This allows students to get useful insights into cultural customs from different nations. This promotes increased cultural awareness, proficiency in the target language, and the capacity to collaborate

efficiently across different cultures (Knipp Silva & Scarlota,2021; Liu 2023; and O'Dowd & Dooly, 2020).

Furthermore, the integration of virtual exchange programs into educational settings has revolutionised language learning by going beyond traditional textbook methods and involving students in real-world cross-cultural interactions. Weda et al. (2021) state that engaging in activities fosters more links and respect between individuals from various backgrounds in addition to improving language proficiency. Virtual exchange programs, through broadening horizons, challenging stereotypes, and enhancing intercultural understanding, are essential to creating a more hospitable and inclusive global community.

However, prior research highlights the advantages of including multicultural education, but also points to a significant lack of understanding regarding its impact on junior high school pupils. The majority of studies have predominantly focused on adult learners and language departments, resulting in a lack of understanding regarding its impact on younger learners. The incorporation of multicultural materials in the curriculum for young English language learners is crucial for their holistic development and preparation for the global society, hence this shortfall must be addressed (Ratri & Tyas, 2022).

In terms of the scope of this study, the main focus is on strategies and challenges that teachers face when promoting intercultural learning through the virtual exchange program called "Connecting Classroom" at SMP 1 Kudus. The results may not be as applicable to other environments or teachers due to the study's limited scope. In addition, a significant amount of data is produced during the three-

month online cooperation period, which runs from August to October 2022 and is carried out via email, google classroom and Zoom Teleconference. But it might not fully capture the long-term consequences and complex issues that might surface over a longer period of time. Although the study recognises the opinions of the students, it does not go into great detail about their experiences and learning outcomes, which calls for more investigation. Moreover, this study is conducted in the specific context of the Merdeka Curriculum and the technological and cultural environment of SMP 1 Kudus. Consequently, there may be a limit to the findings' applicability in different educational contexts. Despite its limitations, the study offers helpful insights on how virtual exchange programs are implemented in Indonesian junior high schools, particularly concerning challenges and strategies related to teachers. It contributes to the growing body of knowledge in this area and offers perspectives for further study and application of intercultural learning, particularly in the Indonesian setting.

Researching the implementation of virtual exchange programs (VEPs) in Indonesian junior high schools is essential for two main reasons. First, the majority of studies focus on adults or higher education, hence there is a paucity of research on the effective modification of VEPs for younger learners in this specific context. Second, gaining a comprehensive understanding of the particular challenges and strategies involved in customising VEPs for junior high school students is essential for achieving successful implementation. Therefore, by analysing the "Culture in a Box" virtual exchange program at SMP 1 Kudus, this study aims to close these gaps. It will examine the strategies teachers used and the challenges they

encountered to provide insightful information for the effective implementation of VEPs and intercultural learning in junior high schools in Indonesia.

B. Novelty

This research is unique in two key aspects: firstly, it concentrates on junior high school students in Indonesia, and secondly, it promotes intercultural learning aligned with the Profil Pelajar Pancasila, namely the Berkebinekaan Global dimension.

This study aims to fill a notable research gap by particularly investigating the impact of the "Culture in a Box" virtual exchange program on junior high school students at SMP 1 Kudus. The majority of previous studies on virtual exchange programs (VEPs) have mostly focused on adult learners and their use in higher education environments, resulting in a lack of knowledge regarding their utilisation for younger learners (Ratri & Tyas, 2022). This research aims to identify the specific difficulties and approaches needed to effectively implement VEPs in junior high school settings. Developing age-appropriate techniques that effectively build intercultural competency among younger learners requires a key focus.

Furthermore, promoting Intercultural learning of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila, specifically the Berkebinekaan Global dimension, introduces a unique method that emphasizes the importance of cultural awareness and tolerance. By integrating the comparison between nations through virtual exchange, this initiative not only fosters a deeper understanding of local culture but also promotes an appreciation for other cultures. This dual focus helps students develop a balanced

perspective, enhancing their global diversity competence (Giyatmi et al., 2024). The integration of cultural learning into the English curriculum not only improves the significance and practicality of the research, but also guarantees that the intercultural education offered is firmly based on the cultural and educational principles of the country (Suryaningsih et al., 2023).

The research provides useful insights into the practical aspects of facilitating intercultural learning through virtual interactions by examining the specific technology and cultural environment of SMP 1 Kudus. The challenge faced and the strategies applied by the teachers as results examined can provide direction for the creation of improved and all-encompassing educational methods, thereby boosting the ability of young learners in Indonesia to effectively interact with people from different cultures and be prepared for global engagement. This research adds to the expanding knowledge in intercultural learning and provides insights for future research and practice. It ensures that intercultural learning is not only put into action but also in line with the national educational vision outlined in the Profil Pelajar Pancasila.

C. Problem Statements

This study aims to bridge this gap by extensively exploring junior high school teachers' strategies, challenges, and adaptations in organizing and facilitating international collaborations. To achieve this, the research seeks comprehensive answers to three primary questions:

1. How do teachers tailor topics for intercultural content in SMP 1 Kudus??
2. What are the most common strategies used in intercultural content instruction through virtual exchange programs in SMP 1 Kudus??
3. What challenges do teachers encounter when instructing intercultural content through virtual exchange programs in SMP 1 Kudus??

These three focal questions underpin the investigation into the intricate dimensions of intercultural education and its implementation within the context of virtual exchange programs, aiming to contribute novel insights into the integration of intercultural content in English education for Junior high school level. By delving deeply into these aspects, this research seeks not only to fill an existing void but also to shed light on the nuanced facets of language acquisition and cultural understanding among young learners within the Indonesian educational landscape.

D. Purposes of Research

The purpose of this research is to investigate and understand how junior high school teachers at SMP 1 Kudus navigate the implementation of intercultural content within virtual exchange programs. Specifically, the research aims to:

1. Identify the strategies teachers employ to tailor topics for intercultural content in SMP 1 Kudus
2. Examine the instructional strategies utilized in intercultural content instruction through virtual exchange programs in SMP 1 Kudus
3. Explore the challenges teachers encounter and the adaptations they make to overcome them in intercultural content instruction through virtual exchange programs in SMP 1 Kudus

By addressing these objectives, this research seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge on intercultural education in junior high school settings, offering insights that can inform the development of effective pedagogical approaches and support the integration of intercultural content into English language education at SMP 1 Kudus. Ultimately, this understanding aims to enhance students' intercultural competence and language learning experiences.

E. Significance of the Research

The research results are expected to benefit all parties involved in the Culture in a Box project. The benefits to be achieved include:

1. Theoretical Significance

This research contributes to existing theories on intercultural competence, constructivist learning, and technology-enhanced language learning. It examines how teachers apply these theories in virtual exchange programs to foster intercultural understanding and language acquisition in junior high school students.

2. Pedagogical Significance

This research provides valuable insights and practical strategies for teachers and schools to effectively implement virtual exchange programs in junior high school settings. The findings can inform curriculum design, teacher training, and classroom practices to enhance intercultural understanding and language learning. By focusing on a specific case study, it offers practical examples and lessons learned for educators in Indonesia and beyond.

By focusing on the "Culture in a Box" project at SMP 1 Kudus, this research offers valuable insights into the implementation of virtual exchange programs in the Indonesian context and contributes to the broader field of intercultural education.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, terms and concepts that are used in the discussion are presented. There are three parts of which the writer presents in this chapter. They are the review of previous studies, the review of theoretical studies, and the theoretical framework.

A. The Review of Previous Studies

Particularly in the areas of English language education and intercultural learning, the study of virtual exchange program (VEP) has been rather popular recently. Comprehensive analysis of relevant studies reveals a complex and varied environment marked by both good opportunities and ongoing challenges.

The effect of virtual environments on student academic performance is a common study question. O'Dowd's (2021) qualitative content analysis study shows virtual environments can improve intercultural learning by allowing students to challenge stereotypes, gain competency in their second language, and rethink language as a tool of effective communication. The study also found differences in learning results between transnational and telecollaborative interactions.

Whereas transnational exchanges mostly focus on strengthening cooperation and digital abilities, as well as raising awareness of cultural variations in communication styles, telecollaborative exchanges mostly prioritise cultural

differences and language practice (Satar, 2021). All things considered, the findings show that virtual interaction can help students to develop their awareness of intercultural communication and the impact of cultural differences on online cooperation.

Another area of investigation examines the teaching methods and technological capabilities of virtual environments. Prasetya, (2024) looked at how Indonesian English language teachers may use synchronous virtual meetings (SVMs) for instructional needs. Direct instruction, flipped classrooms, and communicative language education were the most often used pedagogical strategies found in the study among the many others. Moreover, it underlined the positive effect of including multimedia into the classroom on student participation and academic performance. Still, teachers have challenges include technical problems, keeping student interest, and the complexities of assessments. Despite these challenges, teachers agree that SVMs have benefits in terms of adaptability of instruction, enhancement of professional development, and global collaboration.

Furthermore, research has investigated the wider educational environment of virtual education, in addition to considering pedagogical factors. Malik et al., (2021) gave a thorough summary of the key obstacles and challenges faced by educators of English as a second language to Indonesian young students. These challenges cut across several areas including teachers, students, resources, and the educational system. The survey found that a lack of enthusiasm, limited instructional time, inadequate teaching tools and materials, and overcrowded classes all hinder many teachers. Students also often show poor English

competency and low learning motivation. These results highlight the need for substantial changes and focused initiatives to improve the quality of English language education across the nation.

Many studies have given insight into the challenges of implementing VEP. As possible challenges, Ennis et al. (2021) identified time zone gaps, differences in learning objectives, variances in academic calendars, and cultural attitudes. Farid et al., (2023) investigated the challenges English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers faced in the framework of online learning, which included technological difficulties, fewer chances for in-person interaction, the need for self-motivation, and the absent of immediate feedback. Examining student participation in English language classes, Sharifuddin & Abdullah, (2023) found that low confidence and fear of mistakes negatively affect active learning.

Despite these difficulties, research also identifies many positive strategies for better using VEP. As advised by Hill & Schulman, (2001), their relevance and impact can be maximised by gently introducing VEP activities into present curricula and making sure they match with learning objectives. The success of VEP highlights the ability of the program to close the gap between academic knowledge and practical application, thus enabling students to learn practical skills and therefore encourage a deeper engagement in their chosen disciplines (Jen et al., 2020). Furthermore, studies conducted in many educational environments Dooly & Vinagre, (2022) and Hauck et al., (2020) show that virtual environments (VE) significantly influence language competence, intercultural aptitude, and digital pedagogical competency. This demonstrates how well VEP can educate students

with the skills they need to face the demands of the worldwide employment market. Teachers may release the whole potential of virtual education as a revolutionary instrument for learning and instruction by appreciating and addressing the acknowledged challenges and using these motivating strategies.

Moreover, in addition to its general benefits, recent studies have clearly shown how well virtual education affects particular educational outcomes. Ary et al. (2023) looked especially at the success of short virtual exchange programs. Students' English speaking abilities improved significantly, as well as their cultural awareness, tolerance, and adaptability, according to the results. These results not only validate the need of virtual environment in gaining language skills but also underline their capacity to foster personal growth and intercultural understanding, therefore underlining their relevance as an essential instrument in the modern classroom.

To summarise, the field of study on virtual exchange in language instruction is large and diverse. VEP clearly can foster intercultural competency, enhance language skills, and enable personal development even if challenges still exist. Teachers and researchers have to address the underlined challenges and seize fresh opportunities if we are to fully maximise the transforming power of virtual participation in modern classrooms.

B. The Review of Theoretical Study

1. The Recent of the English Subject in SMP or Junior High Schools in Indonesia

Emphasising student-centered learning and character development grounded in Pancasila values, the Merdeka Curriculum marks a dramatic change in Indonesian education (Kemendikbud, 2021). Using the CEFR as a framework to address six basic language abilities (Kemendikbud, 2021), English language learning seeks to establish an interesting environment that promotes teacher-student interaction.

Differentiated learning is one of the main components of the curriculum since it meets the several requirements and aptitudes of the pupils (Nisa', 2022; Astuti, 2020). This strategy lets teachers give individualised help so that every student can attain their learning objectives (Kemendikbud, 2022). Furthermore, the emphasis on phase-based learning results gives students freedom so they may advance at their own speed (Nisa,' 2022).

Beyond academics, the Merdeka Curriculum stresses the growth of Pancasila student character in line with national education objectives (Nisa', 2022). Through the school's culture and a variety of learning activities, this entails developing several traits and skills that mirror Pancasila ideas (Kemendikbud, 2021). Recent research on English language education reveal how this is carried out, proving a dedication to mix language instruction with national identity (Ferdaus & Novita, 2023; Indriana, 2023).

Although the Merdeka Curriculum has many advantages, its implementation has proved difficult; some institutions have chosen a hybrid approach incorporating elements of the old and new curricula. Problems including time management and catering to different student interests have emerged (Kamal, 2024). Still, the emphasis on global diversity and intercultural understanding is absolutely vital, as demonstrated by studies using comparative proverb analysis to raise cultural consciousness (Giyatmi et al., 2024).

The Merdeka Curriculum's Merdeka Belajar emphasises technology's importance in improving education and advancing teacher development. This is consistent with studies demonstrating how well technology-enhanced intercultural projects improve English language acquisition and cross-cultural comprehension (Chen & Yang, 2014). Digital tools are helping to provide virtual interactions and project-based learning in Indonesia, thereby promoting cooperation (Puspitasari & Supriyanto, 2023). Furthermore proved to enhance intercultural communication abilities among Indonesian EFL learners is digital literacy programs (Nur Rakhmawati et al., 2018). These results underline the transforming power of technology in language instruction as well as its fit with the goal of modern and efficient learning expressed in the Merdeka Curriculum.

2. Tailoring Materials for Teaching English at the Junior High School

Incorporating indigenous culture and knowledge into English language teaching materials is crucial for enhancing student engagement and academic performance in Indonesian classrooms (Kristiawan, 2017; Septy, 2016). This

method establishes a connection between the language abilities and social behaviours that students already possess and the language they are trying to learn. This connection helps to create a stronger bond with the learning process (Kristiawan, 2017). By incorporating indigenous knowledge into educational resources, teachers not only foster proficient communication abilities but also imbue commendable moral qualities that are under the country's core principles (Septy, 2016). This supports Deckert's (2015) claim that customizing resources to suit students' needs enables them to connect with their immediate surroundings, pursue genuine interests, and cultivate mutual tolerance.

In order to accomplish these goals, educators must establish engaging learning environments and carefully select English class subjects. Incorporating personal experiences into the curriculum is consistent with the idea of personalized language learning (PLL), which recognizes individual variations in order to identify the most efficient treatments (Chen et al., 2021). This method not only fosters meaningful engagement by integrating students' interests but also enhances the learning environment by bringing their experiences into the subject matter (Villarroel et al., 2018).

Theme-Based Teaching (TBT) is a very effective teaching approach that addresses the unique requirements of students. The approach focusses on themes as the central aspect of learning, incorporating learning settings into thematic units to guarantee that language acquisition is both situated in a specific context and meaningful (Said et al., 2018). Cahyati & Madya (2019) stress the significance of integrating authentic language usage into this thematic structure. TBT enables

students to establish connections between their personal experiences and the subject matter, so facilitating the learning process and improving their knowledge and engagement. This is achieved by offering meaningful settings for learning English (Yang et al., 2019).

3. Integrating Culture into Language Context

Culture, serving as the bedrock of human society, contains a diverse array of beliefs, values, practices, and artefacts that mould our perspectives on the world. It encompasses both concrete manifestations like food, art, and music, as well as complex frameworks of cognitive patterns, attitudes, and methods of self-expression (Patras et al., 2023). This comprehensive analysis emphasises the substantial impact of culture on personal identity, cognitive growth, and social relationships. Sinulingga et al. (2021) highlight the significance of culture in moulding human cognition, proposing that the cultural milieu in which individuals are immersed has a profound impact on their cognitive processes, beliefs, and actions as they grow.

Considering the significant influence of culture on human development, it is imperative for educators to foster cultural awareness, particularly in the realm of language learning (Sinulingga et al., 2021). This task is especially pertinent in Indonesia, a nation renowned for its abundant cultural diversity. Teaching English in a diverse setting necessitates a subtle strategy that recognises and appreciates this variety while promoting language fluency. Implementing culturally responsive

teaching strategies is crucial for establishing inclusive learning settings that foster the optimal growth and development of young learners.

This study seeks to examine the techniques employed by Indonesian educators to foster cultural comprehension and linguistic proficiency in elementary school pupils. It will explore the obstacles they face and the inventive methods they adopt to tackle the intricacies of cultural diversity. Through an examination of intercultural education in this context, we aim to enhance the creation of teaching methods that are both more efficient and inclusive, enabling young students to successfully navigate a world that is becoming more interconnected.

4. Intercultural Materials in Indonesian EYL

Intercultural materials are crucial resources that enrich the process of language acquisition for young learners by exposing them to a wide range of viewpoints, practices, and traditions (Zhao et al., 2021). Incorporating cultural aspects into the curriculum goes beyond enhancing language skills; it promotes intercultural competency and cultivates an understanding and respect for global diversity (Sabilah et al., 2018). This method equips young learners with the necessary skills to navigate a globally connected society, while also fostering cultural sensitivity and open-mindedness. As a result, it creates a learning environment that is more inclusive and comprehensive.

Integrating intercultural content into young learners' classrooms can be efficiently achieved through a range of captivating activities. Sabilah et al. (2018) propose the incorporation of culture-themed games, songs, folklore, art,

handicrafts, and sports into the curriculum. By incorporating these culturally immersive activities into language instruction, instructors offer significant and fascinating experiences that deeply resonate with young learners.

Integrating intercultural resources in early years language (EYL) education is essential for fostering the development of persons who possess a comprehensive understanding of different cultures. These learners acquire the necessary abilities to effectively and courteously communicate in an ever more diverse and linked global world. By cultivating cultural comprehension from an early stage, educators establish the groundwork for a future that is more harmonious and inclusive.

5. Challenges in Adjusting English Materials

The task of modifying English language materials to cater to the varied requirements of Indonesian students is a complex undertaking that encompasses both internal and external obstacles. Teachers encounter challenging pedagogical decisions when attempting to use the most efficient methods for providing culturally pertinent material (Cahyati & Madya, 2019). Limited resources or assistance might cause a decrease in their motivation, and they must find a careful equilibrium between promoting global viewpoints and maintaining Indonesian cultural identity (Sepulveda-Escobar & Morrison, 2020).

From an external perspective, the process of identifying appropriate English content can seem quite challenging (Copland et al., 2014). Educators frequently have difficulties in finding resources that cater to the distinct requirements and inclinations of their students. The limited availability of resources might inhibit the

ability to tailor learning experiences to individual students, as generic or obsolete materials often do not resonate with their real-life experiences. This eventually obstructs their progress in language acquisition and cultural understanding.

The perpetual evolution of language and culture introduces an additional stratum of intricacy. To stay current with society's standards and language developments, teachers must consistently modify their curriculum. The continuous need for this might be overpowering, especially when there is a lack of support from institutions or limited prospects for professional growth. Ensuring that resources are current and culturally appropriate can be a constant challenge, causing educators to feel overwhelmed and ill-equipped to adapt to the changing field of English language instruction.

6. Integrating Technology in Indonesian EYL

The inquiry into the incorporation of technology in English as a Young Learner (EYL) education in Indonesia has uncovered its capacity to transform the learning process. By integrating digital technologies into early years language (EYL) classes, teachers can open up new opportunities for enhanced student involvement, interactive exercises, and customised teaching. Online learning, which involves the use of several digital platforms selected by teachers and schools, has become a major method of instruction (Badaruddin et al., 2023).

Zoom Meeting has become a popular platform among the various learning programs accessible. The utilisation of this approach constitutes an educational innovation that seeks to tackle the challenge of offering a wide range of learning

resources (Moorhouse et al., 2023). Zoom Meetings played a significant role in enabling various online activities, including as virtual exchange programs, during the COVID-19 pandemic. These programs connected students with peers from different nations (O'Dowd, 2021).

Virtual exchange programs, such as those facilitated through platforms like Zoom Meeting, provide a distinct opportunity for fostering intercultural competency among young learners. Through active participation in live interactions with students from various cultural origins, learners acquire vital exposure to a broad spectrum of perspectives, customs, and communication styles. This exposure not only improves language proficiency but also promotes cultural comprehension and global consciousness. The interactive aspect of these platforms fosters active engagement and cooperation, enhancing learners' understanding of cultural subtleties and nurturing proficient cross-cultural communication abilities.

C. The Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks serve as the foundation for research, providing a structured approach to investigating research problems and interpreting findings. They delineate the key concepts, variables, and the proposed relationships between them, guiding the research process and enabling researchers to make sense of their data (Dumond, 2000). Developing a robust theoretical framework is a crucial step in any research endeavor, as it helps to situate the study within the broader academic discourse and establishes the rationale for the research questions and hypotheses.

Based on the objective of the research: to identify the strategies teachers employ to tailor topics for intercultural content in SMP 1 Kudus; to examine the instructional strategies utilized in intercultural content instruction through virtual exchange programs in SMP 1 Kudus; and to explore the challenges teachers encounter and the adaptations they make to overcome them in intercultural content instruction through virtual exchange programs in SMP 1 Kudus, the research follows the theoretical studies mentioned above as in outlining the researcher's understanding of the problem and the variables involved.

Constructing a theoretical framework involves several key steps. First, the researcher must thoroughly review the existing literature to identify relevant theories and concepts that can inform the study (Leshem & Trafford, 2007) (Kivunja, 2018). This may involve synthesizing multiple theories or adapting an existing framework to the specific context of the research. Once the theoretical foundation is established, the researcher must clearly articulate the assumptions, propositions, and hypotheses that will guide the investigation.

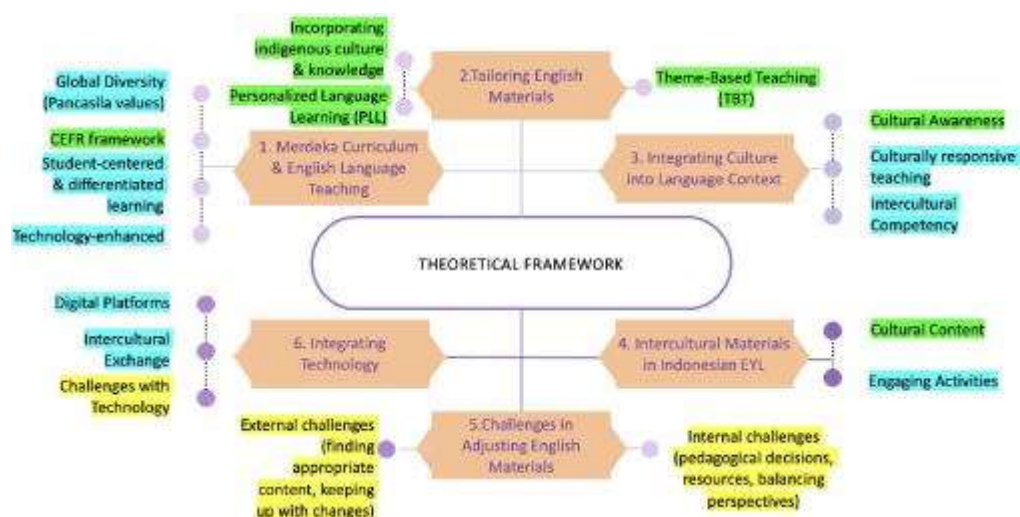


Figure 1 Theoretical Framework Chart

Based on the aforementioned theoretical framework and existing research, this research proposes to gain a deep understanding of the variety of teachers' strategies used to tailor topics for intercultural content in virtual exchange programs. It will explore these strategies through the lens of utilizing the CEFR framework, local cultural resources, incorporating students' personal experiences, adapting existing materials, and Theme-Based Teaching.

To uncover the most common instructional strategies used in virtual exchange programs at SMP 1 Kudus, this research will examine collaborative project-based learning (capturing Student-centered and Differentiated learning), online discussions (highlighting the digital Platforms used to foster Engaging Activities), and cultural exchange activities (promoting Global Diversity, Pancasila values, Intercultural Exchange, and Culturally Responsive Teaching).

Furthermore, this research will expose the challenges encountered in relation to technology infrastructure, internal challenges (pedagogical decisions, resources, balancing perspectives), and external challenges (finding appropriate content, keeping up with changes).

It is important to acknowledge the inherent flexibility of case study research. While the proposed framework provides a valuable initial structure for this investigation, the exploratory nature of the methodology allows for the possibility that the framework may not be fully utilized. As the researcher delves deeper into the complexities of the case, additional data sources may emerge that shed new light on the phenomenon under study. These unforeseen findings could necessitate adaptations to the original framework or even lead to the discovery of alternative

avenues for exploration. The richness and depth of data collected in a case study often necessitate deviations from the initial plan, potentially revealing unexpected insights and contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the research questions.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology of the research, which consists of Research Design, Research Site, Participants, Data Collection, Data Validation, and Data Analysis.

A. Research Design

A qualitative case study offers a valuable lens through which to examine the real-world challenges and strategies inherent in teaching virtual exchange programs (O'Dowd, 2018). By immersing researchers in the specific context of a virtual exchange program, this approach unveils the intricate interplay between cultural nuances, technological limitations, and pedagogical approaches, all of which significantly impact the success of such endeavors (Dooly, 2017). Moreover, the case study method provides a platform for educators to share their experiences, highlighting practical ways they have adapted their practices to overcome obstacles and foster engaging virtual exchange experiences for their students (Lewis & O'Dowd, 2016).

Ultimately, the case study approach facilitates a deep and holistic understanding of the research problem, generating knowledge that is both theoretically significant and practically relevant to the field (Yin, 2018). For instance, by closely examining the experiences of teachers involved in a specific virtual exchange program like "Connecting Classrooms," researchers can pinpoint

effective strategies, common challenges, and innovative adaptations that can be shared with other educators facing similar circumstances.

In essence, the insights derived from such in-depth analyses contribute to the ongoing development of best practices in virtual exchange teaching and learning, enriching both theoretical understanding and practical implementation (Helm & Guth, 2015). Through this process, the case study approach not only illuminates the complexities of virtual exchange programs but also empowers educators with the knowledge and tools to navigate these complexities effectively, ultimately enhancing the educational experiences of students engaged in these programs.

B. Research Site

The research was conducted in a SMP 1 Kudus which was collaborated with Whattanottaipayap Secondary School. They elaborated on their experiences in conducting international collaboration. With a project called as Connecting Classrooms, the teachers used online collaboration using communication tools Email, Google Classroom, and Zoom Teleconference. The duration of the project has been 3 months from August to October 2022. This program was participated by two teachers and 32 students from SMP 1 Kudus.

Several months before the conducting of the program, the teachers of both institutions had already started exchanging WhatsApp messages and emails, developing the project and making sure that the learning objectives and time organization of the semester would complement the lesson objectives. Hence both

learning instructions focused on the development of written and oral communication skills in a sharing live and local culture, with tasks such as preparing reports and giving presentations.

Before the start of the activity, the teachers in each school led the discussion with their students about what material they liked and fit with their interests and needs. The teacher told them the learning objective, the learning outcomes developed in the program, the activity of exchange, and the assessment. The students are given a chance to share their opinion toward the lesson plan. As part of the program, students had to explore the topic utilizing related materials with their peer groups to gather information, discuss their progress through messaging, complete task via Google Classroom and email, and support each other on the partner.

At the end of the program, students had to present a final report in the Culture in a Box program where they had to give a presentation showcasing their hometown product through Zoom Teleconference. Then, they send each other cultural products for cross-showcase on another day. Teachers' roles are facilitating the students going through the program until the task project finished.

SMP 1 Kudus was chosen as the focus of this research for several compelling reasons. The school has demonstrated an exceptional commitment to innovative learning by consistently implementing a virtual exchange program for the past two years (2021-2022), showcasing its dedication to providing rich and relevant learning experiences for its students. The success of SMP 1 Kudus in designing, implementing, and sustaining this program inspires this research to delve

deeper into the process. By understanding the key factors behind the program's success, it is hoped that this research can provide guidance for other schools in Indonesia to adopt and adapt these best practices. Furthermore, this research aligns with the spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum, which encourages student-centered, innovative, and relevant learning for the 21st century. SMP 1 Kudus has also expressed willingness to participate in this research, granting researchers access to collect relevant data, including teacher interviews, classroom observations, and program artifacts.

C. Participants

In this research, two teachers contributed to the subject research. The first is an English teacher who teaches grade 9 and was selected to participate in the "Culture in a Box" virtual exchange program. This teacher has over 20 years of experience teaching English and holds a master's degree in English education. During the program, she mentored and guided the students through the project completion process. The second teacher is an Indonesian language teacher who initiated the virtual exchange program by adapting the "Culture in a Box" model from the British Council. This teacher had the initial idea, sought out the virtual exchange partner, and formulated the theme, topics, and procedures for the project. Although not formally trained in English education, this teacher is an active English user and has a network of international teacher contacts established through his previous role as a British Council ambassador in Central Java, Indonesia. This

unique combination of expertise and experience from both teachers provided a rich foundation for the successful implementation of the "Culture in a Box" program.

In this program, their infectious energy and proactive involvement demonstrate a strong dedication to actively participating in and improving the virtual exchange program. their clear commitment to professional growth and educational innovation is seen in their collaborative efforts to use digital platforms to enhance student learning experiences.

D. Data Collection

To gain a holistic understanding of the complexities surrounding the implementation of intercultural learning within the "Culture in a Box" program, this narrative inquiry will employ a multi-faceted data collection approach. In-depth, semi-structured interviews, a method chosen to gain comprehensive insights into junior high school teachers' perspectives as they prepared for intercultural virtual exchange programs (Ary et al., 2010; Mack et al., 2005), will be conducted with the two participating teachers to explore their challenges faced and strategies employed of the program's impact on both their teaching practices and student learning. These open-ended conversations will encourage reflection and the sharing of personal narratives, providing rich qualitative data.

The in-depth interview technique encompassed both face-to-face and online interactions with the participants. This approach was chosen to meticulously unearth the strategies employed by teachers and elucidate the challenges they encountered in readiness for the intercultural virtual exchange program.

Additionally, document analysis will be undertaken, encompassing lesson plans and student work samples. This analysis will offer insights into the specific activities and materials used within the program. To further contextualize these findings, classroom observations of the virtual exchange sessions will be conducted, focusing on teacher-student interactions, the use of technology, and the integration of intercultural content. Data triangulation, achieved by comparing and contrasting information from these diverse sources, will enhance the credibility and validity of the research findings.

Instrument	Description	Purpose	Participants	Data Type
In-depth Interview	Face-to-face and online interviews to explore teachers' strategies and challenges in preparing for the intercultural virtual exchange program.	To uncover teachers' strategies and challenges in depth.	Teachers involved in the virtual exchange program.	Primary Data (Qualitative)
Document Analysis	Analysis of lesson plans and student work samples.	To understand the activities and materials used in the program.	Teachers and students involved in the program.	Secondary Data (Qualitative)
Classroom Observation	Direct observation during virtual exchange sessions, focusing on teacher-student interactions, the use of technology, and the integration of intercultural content.	To observe the implementation of strategies and challenges in a real context.	Teachers and students involved in the program.	Secondary Data (Qualitative)

Table 1. Data Instruments

By examining the convergence and divergence of data from interviews, documents, and observations, a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of

the teachers' experiences and the program's overall impact will emerge. Throughout the data collection process, ethical considerations will be paramount. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, and anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained. Participants will also be informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

E. Data Analysis

Following data collection, a thematic analysis was conducted utilizing Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-step process. The initial step involved immersing in the data, absorbing its intricacies, and preserving it in its raw form. This thorough engagement with the data, achieved through attentive listening and conversation (Widodo, 2014), allowed for a nuanced understanding of the complex phenomena embedded within the teachers' narratives.

The second step entailed generating preliminary scripts that aligned with the study's objectives, serving as the foundation for subsequent analysis. Themes organically emerged from these scripts, reflecting the essence of the teachers' insights. In the fourth step, these themes were meticulously refined, establishing connections to relevant sub-topics to ensure coherence and accuracy in the data representation. The fifth step involved a thorough review and definition of the themes, guaranteeing their alignment with the data's core meaning.

Finally, as advocated by Braun & Clarke (2006), a comprehensive summary was compiled, affirming the validity and reliability of the data. Throughout this process, participant feedback was actively sought, allowing their invaluable input

to shape interpretations and refine the thematic analysis. This collaborative approach ensured that the final analysis accurately reflected the teachers' experiences and perspectives.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents findings from a case study on teachers' experiences in the virtual exchange program, detailing the challenges and strategies they used. The discussion analyses how cultural, technological, and pedagogical factors influence these programs, with implications for teaching. This contributes to understanding virtual exchange pedagogy, offering insights for educators and researchers.

A. FINDINGS

This paper clarifies basic findings on virtual exchange programs, particularly at the junior high school level, underlining their significance and recommending for broad implementation. These results come up into three distinct sub-topics, each addressing relevant research questions: (a) the teachers' step in tailoring topics for the virtual exchange program, (b) the teachers' strategies in arranging intercultural learning for the virtual exchange program, and (c) teachers' challenges in promoting intercultural learning through the virtual exchange program.

1. Teachers Steps in Tailoring Topics for Virtual Program

The research indicates that teachers at SMP 1 Kudus employ a thoughtful approach in tailoring topics for intercultural content. The steps for tailoring the topic shown as the graph below:

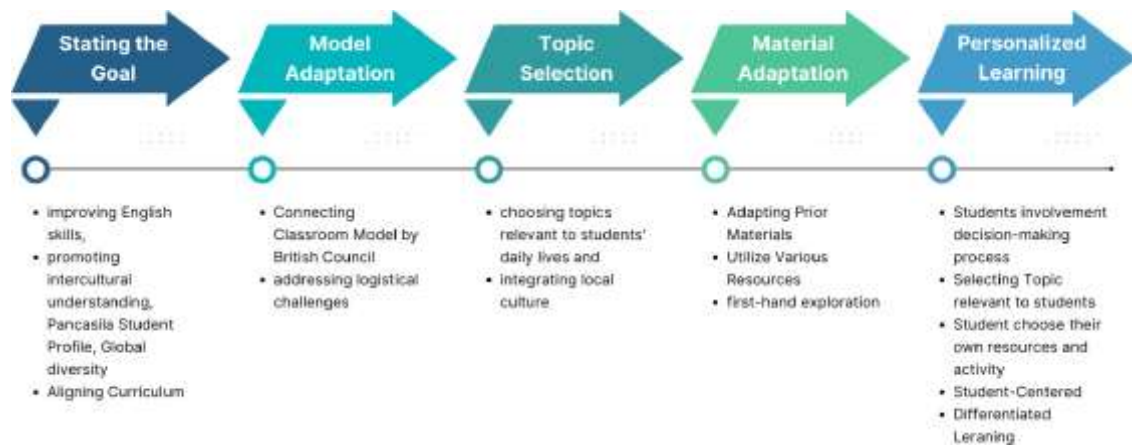


Figure 2. Flows of steps of the teacher tailoring the topics

The teachers prioritize aligning topics' relevance to learning objectives.

"Our main goals are to help students develop different understanding, improve their English communication skills, and encourage them to meet their friend from abroad."(ET.04)

"In addition, we also want them to have a more inclusive understanding of the Pancasila Student Profile which is globally diverse. That they can love their own culture and respect the culture of other nations"(AT.41)

The topics chosen must have a real impact on the main learning goals, which include improving English skills, promoting intercultural understanding, and following the ideals aim in the Pancasila Student Profile, Global diversity dimension.

Also, the topics that are chosen must fit in perfectly with the existing curriculum.

Pada akhir Fase D, peserta didik menggunakan teks lisan, tulisan, dan visual dalam berbagai jenis teks untuk berinteraksi dan berkomunikasi dalam konteks yang lebih beragam serta dalam situasi formal dan informal. Peserta didik memahami tujuan dan target pembaca/pemirsa ketika memproduksi teks lisan, tulisan, dan visual dalam bahasa Inggris yang terstruktur dengan kosakata yang lebih beragam untuk berdiskusi dan menyampaikan keinginan/perasaan/pendapat. (Capaian Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris Fase D)

Virtual exchange learning provides a rich and authentic learning environment for students to develop English language proficiency in line with Phase D Learning Outcomes. By interacting and communicating with students from different cultures, they learn to use English effectively in various contexts, developing essential language skills for their future success. This helps keep the program's educational credentials and ensures it complements the students' overall learning experience.

The British Council's "Connecting Classroom" approach was used as a base for SMP 1 Kudus's virtual exchange program. That being said, this plan wasn't just put into place; it was carefully changed to fit the school's specific needs.

"Yes, we adapted the 'Connecting Classroom' model from the British Council. We adjusted the themes and discussion topics to match the interests and abilities of the students at SMP 1 Kudus and the English subject matter which I also discussed with Bu Ami."(AT.42)

This customization ensured that the content remained engaging and relevant for the students while aligning with the curriculum objectives. An interesting new feature was also added: the "Culture in a Box" trade. Students could directly share cultural items from their own countries through this innovative activity. This made the intercultural learning experience more tangible.

Furthermore, the program's timeline had to be adapted to accommodate the differing academic calendars between Indonesia and Thailand. This adjustment underscored the complexities of international collaboration and the importance of flexibility in program design. The teacher elaborated,

"After approved, we talked to Ms Pah as a collaborator teacher from Thailand to discuss about time schedule, lesson plan and the topic of project for our students collaboration. We met a problem of time, because they have

different holiday and academic calendar. Previously we consider about 6 months collaboration but it become 3 months collaboration with some pauses." (ET.03)

Overall, these adaptations demonstrate the program's commitment to providing a meaningful and effective intercultural learning experience for the students of SMP 1 Kudus. By tailoring the model, incorporating unique activities, and addressing logistical challenges, the program successfully fostered cross-cultural understanding and communication.

After the model was changed, a very careful process of choosing topics was used. This process was based on two main ideas: choosing topics relevant to students' daily lives and integrating local culture into the learning experience. During the first round of discussion, many ideas were put forward. However, after working with the Thai teacher, three main themes emerged: "My Life," "My Town," and "Culture in a Box." These choices were made because they had a clear link to the students' real lives, including school, family, hobbies, and, most importantly, local culture. The "Culture in a Box" theme, in particular, provided a unique platform for showcasing local heritage.

"Absolutely, we make it a point to include local culture and knowledge in our lessons. For example, when we talk about 'Culture in a Box,' we have the students bring in cultural objects from their area and explain their significance to their international classmates. The product like as: Batik, Jenang, rebana, blankon, lentog and some other else,"(ET.12)

This hands-on approach encouraged students to actively engage with their cultural heritage, fostering a sense of pride and ownership while sharing their unique traditions with their international peers. The schedule and lesson plan are included in the appendix.

The teacher's approach to material adaptation for the virtual exchange project demonstrates a resourceful and multifaceted strategy, creatively blending traditional and innovative methods. Authentic materials, such as descriptive texts from textbooks, serve as a foundation for familiar topics like "My Life," as the teacher noted,

"For the 'My Life' topic, there are many descriptive text examples in the textbook that students can use to learn. To delve into place-based themes like "My Town" and "Culture in a Box," the teacher expands the learning landscape by utilizing diverse sources like YouTube videos and blogs, stating, "I use YouTube videos or blogs about Kudus for their materials."(ET.9-10)

This integration of multimedia enriches student understanding and engagement. Furthermore, recognizing the limitations of pre-existing materials, the teacher encourages first-hand exploration by prompting students to visit historical landmarks or interact with cultural artifacts, remarking,

"If there are no suitable materials, I ask my students to visit historical places... so they have an understanding of the topic."(E.11)

This emphasis on real-life experiences fosters a deeper connection to the subject matter, highlighting the teacher's commitment to providing dynamic and relevant learning opportunities.

The teacher's approach to personalized learning is evident in their efforts to cater to student interests and preferences, fostering a sense of ownership and engagement. As the teacher explained,

"Before doing the project, I asked students for their ideas on topics they'd like to explore or activities they want to share with their peers. We also give them the chance to create their own learning materials, like presentations or videos." (ET.15)

This upfront involvement in the decision-making process empowers students to select topics they're passionate about and choose activities that resonate with their learning styles. Furthermore, the teacher demonstrates flexibility in accommodating different learning preferences, stating,

"Yes, I let them use what they already know... But if they prefer something more visual, I tell them to look at YouTube, blogs, and other internet places to learn more."(ET.16)

Whether students gravitate toward written expression or visual representation, they are guided toward resources and activities that align with their strengths. For instance, students interested in cultural projects are encouraged to immerse themselves in real-life experiences, as the teacher mentioned,

"And for culture projects, I have them go to old places they are interested, explore local food they like, play traditional music, or wear our costume clothes."(ET.16)

This personalized approach not only caters to individual learning styles but also empowers students to take ownership of their learning journey, making the project more meaningful and impactful.

2 Teachers' Strategies in Arranging Intercultural Learning for the Virtual Exchange Program

a. Integrating Student Involvement, Motivation, and Engagement

Student involvement, motivation, and engagement are pivotal aspects of the virtual exchange program, yet they also present a nuanced challenge for educators. While the initial allure of connecting with peers from another culture generates palpable excitement, as the teacher observed,

"In the beginning of this program, they always ask to me when they will have zoom to their friends from Thailand,"(ET.33)

sustaining that enthusiasm throughout the program demands a proactive and multifaceted approach. The teacher's strategy centers on personalization and recognition, acknowledging the diverse range of student interests and learning styles. Recognizing that

"not all my students [are] interested in this agenda,"(ET.34)

the teacher strives to tailor tasks and activities to individual preferences, making the learning experience both relevant and enjoyable. This personalization extends to encouraging student autonomy and ownership, fostering a deeper sense of connection to the material. As the teacher explained,

"We also give them the chance to create their own learning materials, like presentations or videos."(ET.15)

Moreover, the teacher leverages cultural exploration as a means to enhance engagement, prompting students to go to old places they are interested in, explore local food they like, play traditional music, or wear costume clothes. This way, they can understand their ownership and share our culture with their friends in Thailand.

Despite these efforts, challenges persist. The varying levels of student interest and the potential for topics to be perceived as "too hard" necessitate ongoing adaptation and creativity on the part of the teacher. It's a dynamic process that requires constant monitoring and adjustment to ensure all students remain invested and motivated. To this end, the teacher employs a positive reinforcement strategy, emphasizing recognition, rewards, and encouragement. This approach not only celebrates student accomplishments but also reinforces the value of active

participation and intercultural exchange. Ultimately, the teacher's dedication to fostering student involvement through personalization, empowerment, and positive reinforcement creates a more enriching and motivating learning environment, even within the constraints of a virtual exchange program.

b. Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching plays a crucial role in enhancing the virtual exchange program, allowing students to gain a deeper appreciation of both their own and their peers' cultural heritage. As the teacher explained,

"I once asked students [to] demonstrate 'Kretek Dance,' play traditional musical and demonstrated how to wear 'iket' in front of their friend in Thailand through zoom meeting."(ET.13)

This active integration of cultural activities into the learning process facilitates meaningful intercultural exchanges, empowering students to share their unique traditions and perspectives.

Moreover, project-based learning centered around Kudus' history and cultural traditions encourages deeper exploration of the local heritage. The teacher elaborated,

"Also in doing virtual exchange I also incorporate project-based learning in which students do research projects about the history or cultural traditions of Kudus as their hometown and find some cultural product. Then, I asked them [to] create presentations or performances that showcase Kudus culture to their Thai peer through zoom meeting."(ET.14)

This approach not only strengthens cultural awareness but also promotes intercultural understanding and appreciation, creating a truly transformative learning experience within the virtual exchange program.

c. Promoting Understanding & Respect Through Virtual Exchange Project

The virtual exchange program fosters understanding and respect through a diverse range of activities designed to promote intercultural dialogue and connection. By incorporating online discussions, collaborative projects, cultural presentations, and the innovative "Culture in a Box" exchange, students gain firsthand experience interacting with and learning from their international peers. As the teacher explained,

"We use a variety of activities, including online discussions, collaborative projects, and the 'Culture in a Box' exchange we mentioned earlier."(ET.19)

These activities provide a platform for students to showcase their own cultural identities and explore the richness of their peers' traditions, fostering mutual respect and appreciation. The teacher further emphasized the program's emphasis on cultivating an open-minded approach, stating,

"We frequently engage in discussions about diverse cultural values and encourage students to present on their own culture. We also foster an open-minded approach and a willingness to learn from other cultures."(ET.29)

In addition to these formal activities, the program incorporates playful language exchange activities, adding an element of fun and deepening cross-cultural connections. By learning simple phrases in each other's languages, students experience the unique sounds and expressions that shape communication across cultures. This not only enhances their language skills but also fosters a sense of empathy and connection. The teacher shared an example of this, stating,

"We sometime let students share each other their local language. For example, to say how are you, our students learn to use 'Sawadecap.' Then, the Thai students learn to say 'Apa kabar.' Incorporating local language

into interaction [makes them] more enjoyable because it has unique sounds from each nations."(ET.37)

Through this multi-faceted approach, the virtual exchange program successfully cultivates an environment of understanding and respect, enabling students to develop meaningful intercultural relationships and broaden their perspectives on the world.

d. Technology integration

Technology integration plays a vital role in facilitating the virtual exchange program, enabling seamless communication, collaboration, and learning across geographical boundaries. As the teacher explained,

"We use several platforms, such as Zoom for teleconferencing, Google Classroom for task and material management, or Gmail. We also use social media like WhatsApp for informal communication."(AT.46)

This strategic utilization of a diverse range of platforms supports various aspects of the program, ensuring effective interaction and knowledge exchange. Zoom serves as the primary medium for teleconferencing, allowing students and teachers to engage in real-time discussions and presentations. Google Classroom functions as a centralized hub for task and material management, streamlining the learning process. Additionally, Gmail and WhatsApp are utilized for both formal and informal communication, fostering connections and enabling ongoing support.

To ensure student proficiency in navigating these digital tools, a brief training session is conducted at the program's outset, and continuous assistance is readily available throughout the program's duration, with the teacher assuring,

"Before the program starts, we conduct a brief training session on how to use the platforms that will be used. During the program, we are always ready to help if any students have difficulties."(AT.47)

Furthermore, the teacher actively guides students in leveraging technology for creating and sharing content, as evidenced by their statement,

"Here I help the children in using PowerPoint and sending pictures or presentations in Google Classroom."(AT.44)

The integration of technology not only enhances the logistical aspects of the program but also enriches the learning experience by enabling collaborative projects, online discussions, and the seamless exchange of ideas and cultural insights. The teacher described this further, stating,

"We prepare an online discussion forum where students can ask each other questions and share experiences through Google Classroom, email, and Zoom meetings. We also encourage them to work together on collaborative projects..."(AT.45)

This comprehensive approach to technology integration empowers students to actively participate in the virtual exchange program, fostering cross-cultural communication, collaboration, and understanding.

e. Feedback and Assessment

Feedback and assessment in the virtual exchange program prioritize both individual growth and the development of intercultural competence. The teacher provides targeted and constructive feedback, focusing on areas such as enhancing communication skills, deepening cultural appreciation, and fostering personal growth. As they stated,

"We offer specific and constructive feedback, focusing on areas such as how they can enhance their communication effectiveness or deepen their

appreciation for cultural diversity. We also provide suggestions for their personal growth."(ET.24)

This personalized approach ensures that students receive guidance tailored to their specific needs and learning objectives.

Observations and interviews indicated that although the teacher recognized the importance of assessment in the virtual exchange program, formal assessments were not conducted. The teacher's focus was primarily on providing immediate feedback, guidance, and coaching to students during the learning process. This could be attributed to several factors: the teacher's overwhelming workload, a focus on process-oriented learning, and time constraints due to the midterm exams coinciding with the virtual exchange program. The absence of formal assessments hinders a comprehensive evaluation of the program's effectiveness, making it difficult to gauge its impact on student learning and intercultural competence development.

3 Teachers' Challenges in Promoting Intercultural Learning through the Virtual Exchange Program.

a. Technical Challenges

Technical challenges, while inevitable in a technology-dependent program like the virtual exchange, pose a persistent yet manageable hurdle that demands adaptability and resourcefulness from both teachers and students. The most significant of these challenges, as the teacher frankly acknowledged,

"The main challenge is the internet connection which is sometimes unstable." (AT.48)

This instability can disrupt the seamless flow of communication and collaboration between students from different countries, hindering the full realization of the program's potential. Additionally, the issue of "students whose devices are inadequate" further exacerbates the digital divide, potentially limiting access and participation for some.

In response to these obstacles, the teacher adopts a proactive and solution-oriented approach, stating,

"But, we try to overcome this by finding alternative solutions, such as moving locations or borrowing devices from the school." (AT.48)

This demonstrates a commitment to ensuring equitable access and inclusivity within the program. Beyond connectivity and device limitations, the teacher also encounters occasional technical difficulties with the software and applications used, noting,

"Sometimes there are also technical problems such as applications that error."(AT.49)

These unexpected glitches, while frustrating, are met with a problem-solving mindset, with the teacher seeking solutions through online resources or assistance from the school's IT team.

Despite these challenges, the teacher remains optimistic, emphasizing the ability to adapt and find workarounds, stating,

"If there is a connection problem, we try to find a location with a better signal or reschedule the activity."(AT.50)

This resilience, coupled with the observation that

"There are no significant difficulties for students in using technology,"(AT.50)

underscores the positive attitude and determination that underpin the successful implementation of the virtual exchange program. By proactively addressing technical issues and fostering a supportive learning environment, the teacher ensures that the program remains a valuable and enriching experience for all participants, even in the face of technological obstacles.

b. Academic Calendar Disparity, Time Zone and School Hour

Academic calendar disparities, time zone differences, and variations in school hours pose significant logistical challenges in coordinating the virtual exchange program between Indonesian and Thai students. As the teacher candidly observed,

"So, the academic calendar at Whattanottaipayap School in Thailand is different from SMP 1 Kudus in Indonesia. In Thailand, the school year starts in May and ends in March, while in Indonesia it starts in July and ends in June. So, when Indonesian kids are already back in school, Thai kids are still on holiday."(AT.52)

This misalignment of academic calendars creates periods where one group of students is on holiday while the other is actively engaged in schoolwork, necessitating careful planning and coordination. Furthermore, the one-hour time difference and differing school schedules, as the teacher pointed out,

"Thailand is one hour behind Indonesia... In Thailand, school usually starts at 8 am and ends at 3 pm, while in Indonesia it starts at 7 am and ends at 1 pm,"(AT.52)

add additional complexities in scheduling synchronous activities and ensuring equitable participation.

To overcome these hurdles, the teacher employed a multi-pronged approach. This approach involves close coordination with teachers from both schools, flexible scheduling, and the strategic use of technology. Through collaborative planning and adaptation of lesson materials, the teacher ensured that students from both countries could progress at a similar pace, despite the calendar discrepancies. Additionally, the teacher created a flexible schedule that accounted for time zone and school hour variations, facilitating optimal engagement for all participants. The utilization of email and video conferencing further bridged the geographical and temporal gaps, enabling effective communication and collaboration between students from both countries. This proactive and adaptive approach demonstrates the teacher's commitment to overcoming logistical challenges and ensuring the success of the virtual exchange program, even in the face of scheduling complexities.

c. Cultural and Linguistic Barriers

Cultural and linguistic barriers, while anticipated, posed challenges in facilitating effective communication and understanding within the virtual exchange program. The students' limited English proficiency, particularly at the A1-A2 level, initially hindered their ability to express themselves fluently and comprehend their Thai peers. As the teacher candidly admitted,

"For language level, my students are in A1-A2 level. They have limited English practice."(ET.26)

CEFR Level	Number of Students	Description
A1	6	Can understand and use very basic phrases and expressions related to immediate needs.
A2	22	Can understand and use basic phrases and expressions related to areas of most immediate priority.
B1	2	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc.

Table 2. The distribution of the students CEFR level

This language barrier was further compounded by the unfamiliarity with Thai pronunciation, leading to potential misunderstandings.

To bridge this gap, the teacher proactively provided translations, encouraged the use of online dictionaries and translation tools, and offered clarifications and examples to facilitate comprehension. The teacher stated,

"Usually, I give translation to students' language. Along the time, my students can understand although some students still ask [me]. I also suggest online dictionaries and translation tools to my students."(ET.28)

Moreover, recognizing the potential for cultural misunderstandings, the teacher emphasized the importance of politeness and sensitivity in communication, fostering a respectful and inclusive learning environment. They noted,

"We also remind students to maintain politeness and sensitivity in their communication." (ET.32)

Despite these challenges, the virtual exchange program proved to be a positive experience for most students. The teacher observed,

"Generally, students are happy about participating in virtual exchange activities."(ET.38)

As I observed, happy students are those who have already good English delivery. So the students feel confident. Still, it needs the teacher's full energy of encouragement and support. As shown in this picture and video linked.



https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eL13ObxrZIR5wLZWPOduh_mLWSFno6pD/view?usp=share_link

Figure 3 Video snapshot of Zoom Teleconference

However, some remained hesitant to participate actively, likely due to language insecurity. The teacher acknowledged this, saying,

"However, we've observed that some students tend to be more silent. Perhaps they feel incapable with their English."(ET.38)

Classroom observations showed some students were hesitant to speak during virtual exchanges. For instance, one student didn't want to share during zoom teleconference. The teacher told the student to write first, but the student still didn't seem sure. Even with an outline and feedback, the student struggled. Finally, the teacher asked them to read their presentation.

Looking at the student's written work, There were a lot of grammar mistakes and the student's writing wasn't put together properly. This shows that they had trouble with more than just talking; they also had trouble writing.

Putting together what the teacher said, what I saw in class, and the student's writing gives us a clearer understanding of the problems they face when they communicate virtually. Teachers try to help shy students, but some need more one-on-one help. This is an example of how important it is to know what each student needs, give them the right kind of help, and make sure they feel comfortable participating.

While these challenges persisted, the proactive strategies implemented by the teacher, such as providing language support and fostering cultural sensitivity, helped to mitigate their impact and ensure a valuable intercultural learning experience for all students.

d. Different Engagement

Maintaining consistent student engagement poses a challenge in the virtual exchange program. The online format, coupled with individual differences in learning styles and comfort levels with intercultural interaction, can lead to varying levels of participation. Some students thrive in the virtual environment, actively engaging with their international peers, while others may be more reserved or hesitant. This disparity in engagement is further complicated by a tendency for some students to be less disciplined with deadlines, as the teacher observed, "It's just that our students tend to be less disciplined in meeting deadlines." This highlights the challenges of maintaining focus and motivation in a virtual setting.

To address these challenges, the teacher adopts a student-centered approach, providing tailored support and fostering a sense of ownership over the learning

process. By offering visual aids and additional information during written tasks, as exemplified by the teacher's statement,

"In composing the written task, I help students to enlighten their idea from pictures and videos or sometime I directly tell them what I have already know about the topic,"(ET.39)

the teacher ensures that all students, regardless of their learning styles, can actively participate and contribute. Furthermore, recognizing that virtual projects may take longer for some students, the teacher allows for flexibility in deadlines, encouraging consistent progress over rigid timelines. The teacher acknowledged this, saying,

"Usually the children are given one week to work on their project. But our students tend to be slow."(AT.52)

This approach creates a more inclusive and supportive learning environment, accommodating diverse learning needs and promoting student agency. By balancing individualized support with reasonable expectations, the teacher fosters greater engagement and empowers all students to benefit from the virtual exchange experience.

B. DISCUSSION

The research findings offer a rich tapestry of insights into the dynamic world of virtual exchange programs at the junior high school level, highlighting the interconnectedness of theory and practice in creating meaningful intercultural learning experiences.

The educators at SMP 1 Kudus have thoughtfully crafted their virtual exchange program to ensure its relevance and cultural richness. They carefully select topics that align with learning goals and actively incorporate local culture, particularly through the "Culture in a Box" initiative. This approach emphasizes the significance of creating a contextually relevant and student-centered learning environment, promoting active engagement and deeper understanding (Nurweni & Komariah, 2023).

Moreover, the teachers have skillfully adapted the "Connecting Classroom" model and proactively addressed logistical challenges. This demonstrates their dedication to providing a well-structured and impactful program that fosters intercultural learning, even amidst the complexities of virtual exchange (Olsen et al., 2021).

The multifaceted strategies employed by the teachers to promote intercultural learning exemplify a commitment to fostering both individual growth and cross-cultural understanding. By personalizing tasks, recognizing diverse learning styles, and empowering student agency, the teacher creates an inclusive and motivating environment that encourages active participation and ownership over the learning process (Susanti et al., 2021). The integration of cultural activities

and project-based learning provides opportunities for students to explore and appreciate their own cultural heritage while also developing a deeper understanding of their international peers' traditions. This approach facilitates meaningful intercultural exchanges, bridging geographical and cultural divides (Sabilah et al., 2018).

The strategic use of technology plays a crucial role in facilitating the virtual exchange program, enabling seamless communication and collaboration. The thoughtful selection of platforms, coupled with training and ongoing support, ensures that students can confidently navigate the digital landscape and actively participate in the program's various activities. By leveraging technology to foster online discussions, collaborative projects, and the sharing of cultural insights, the teacher creates a dynamic and interactive learning environment that transcends physical boundaries.

The challenges encountered in the virtual exchange program, such as technical difficulties, scheduling conflicts, and cultural and linguistic barriers, serve as a reminder of the complexities inherent in telecollaborative learning (O'Dowd, 2021). However, the teacher's proactive and resourceful approach to overcoming these challenges, through alternative solutions, flexibility, and cultural sensitivity, showcases the importance of adaptability and resilience in fostering successful intercultural exchanges.

The findings also shed light on the nuanced nature of student engagement in virtual environments. The initial enthusiasm for interacting with international peers may give way to challenges in maintaining motivation and addressing varying

levels of participation. The teacher's emphasis on personalized support, scaffolding (Timmis, 2019), and fostering a sense of ownership demonstrates a deep understanding of the factors that contribute to student engagement and motivation.

Furthermore, the research highlights the transformative power of authentic materials and real-life experiences in virtual exchange programs. By encouraging students to delve into their local culture, participate in language exchange activities, and engage with real-world issues, educators create a bridge between the classroom and the lived experiences of their students. This approach fosters genuine connections and authentic communication, enabling learners to apply their language skills in meaningful contexts and develop a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity.

The positive impact of authentic materials on learner motivation and communicative competence is well-documented in research (Aminifard & Mehrpour, 2019; Rohmah, 2013). By exposing students to real-life language use, cultural artifacts, and relevant social issues, educators tap into their intrinsic curiosity and provide them with opportunities to develop the skills necessary for effective cross-cultural communication.

The integration of the learners' first language (L1) also emerges as a valuable tool in facilitating comprehension and establishing a supportive learning environment. By allowing students to leverage their existing linguistic knowledge, teachers can bridge the gap between familiar and unfamiliar concepts, ensuring that language acquisition does not become an insurmountable barrier to participation. Research supports the use of L1 in foreign language classrooms, particularly for

beginners who are still developing their communicative competence and vocabulary (Siregar, 2019; Camó & Ballester, 2015).

However, navigating the use of L1 in virtual exchange programs can be complex, as collaborators may hold differing perspectives on its appropriateness. While some educators advocate for maximizing exposure to the target language, others recognize the value of L1 in scaffolding learning and facilitating understanding, particularly for young learners (Hall & Cook, 2013). Striking a balance between these perspectives requires open communication, flexibility, and a willingness to adapt instructional strategies to ensure all participants feel comfortable and supported.

The potential challenges associated with L1 use should not overshadow its potential benefits. By strategically incorporating L1 into the learning process, teachers can enhance comprehension, foster a sense of belonging, and empower students to actively participate in intercultural exchanges. This approach aligns with research that highlights the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment where students feel comfortable taking risks and exploring new linguistic and cultural territories.

The findings of this research emphasize the multifaceted nature of language learning in virtual exchange programs. By embracing authentic materials, real-life experiences, and the strategic use of L1, educators can create a dynamic and empowering learning environment that promotes intercultural understanding, enhances communication skills, and fosters a lifelong love of language and culture.

In conclusion, this research offers a comprehensive overview of the strategies and challenges involved in arranging intercultural learning through virtual exchange programs at the junior high school level. The findings underscore the importance of thoughtful topic selection, personalized learning approaches, cultural responsiveness, technology integration, and proactive management of challenges. By implementing these strategies and fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment, teachers can create transformative intercultural experiences that empower students to develop global perspectives, enhance their language skills, and cultivate meaningful connections with peers from around the world (Kurniawan, 2020).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

A. CONCLUSION

The insights gleaned from this research underscore the transformative power of virtual exchange programs in fostering intercultural competence, language acquisition, and global awareness among junior high school students. The careful tailoring of topics, the integration of student-centered and culturally responsive pedagogies, the strategic use of technology, and the proactive management of challenges contribute to the creation of a rich and meaningful learning experience that transcends geographical boundaries.

The study's findings highlight the importance of adaptability and flexibility in program design. By acknowledging and addressing the unique needs and contexts of both students and collaborating institutions, educators can ensure that virtual exchange programs remain relevant, engaging, and impactful. The adaptation of the "Connecting Classroom" model and the innovative "Culture in a Box" exchange exemplify the potential for creative solutions that enhance the intercultural learning experience.

Furthermore, the research emphasizes the value of empowering student agency and fostering a sense of ownership over the learning process. By involving students in topic selection, encouraging them to create their own learning materials, and providing opportunities for self-directed exploration, teachers can cultivate a deeper sense of engagement and motivation. This approach not only enhances

language acquisition and intercultural competence but also promotes critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration.

The strategic integration of technology emerges as a cornerstone of successful virtual exchange programs. By leveraging a variety of platforms and providing ongoing support, educators can facilitate seamless communication, collaboration, and access to resources, even across vast distances. The effective use of technology not only overcomes logistical challenges but also enriches the learning experience by enabling interactive activities, real-time communication, and the sharing of cultural insights.

The study's findings also shed light on the complexities of navigating cultural and linguistic barriers. The teachers' proactive approach to providing language support, fostering cultural sensitivity, and promoting understanding highlights the importance of creating a safe and inclusive learning environment where students feel comfortable taking risks and embracing diversity.

The nuanced nature of student engagement in virtual settings is another key takeaway from this research. By recognizing individual learning styles, offering personalized support, and maintaining flexible expectations, teachers can address the challenges of maintaining motivation and ensuring equitable participation. This approach fosters a sense of belonging and empowers all students to contribute to the rich tapestry of the virtual exchange experience.

Finally, the transformative potential of authentic materials and real-life experiences is underscored by the study's findings. By connecting classroom learning to the students' lived realities and cultural contexts, educators can tap into

their intrinsic motivation and foster a deeper appreciation for the diversity of human experiences. The strategic use of L1 as a scaffolding tool further enhances comprehension and facilitates meaningful communication, although careful consideration must be given to collaborators' perspectives on its usage.

In conclusion, this research provides a valuable roadmap for educators seeking to implement or enhance virtual exchange programs. By embracing the principles of adaptability, student-centeredness, cultural responsiveness, technological integration, and proactive management of challenges, teachers can create transformative intercultural experiences that equip students with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and globalized world. The findings underscore the potential of virtual exchange programs to not only enhance language acquisition and intercultural competence but also to foster empathy, respect, and a sense of global citizenship among young learners.

B. SUGGESTION

This study underscores the vital role of virtual exchange programs in fostering intercultural learning among junior high school students, highlighting their effectiveness and potential for wider implementation. Key findings and recommendations point to several crucial areas for enhancing these programs.

First and foremost, equipping teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge is essential. This involves providing comprehensive training on technology integration, culturally responsive teaching practices, and effective

intercultural communication techniques. Furthermore, creating opportunities for ongoing professional development and establishing collaborative networks can foster a supportive environment where educators can share experiences and best practices.

Addressing the persistent technical and logistical barriers that often hinder virtual exchange programs is also crucial. Investing in reliable internet infrastructure and ensuring equitable access to devices are fundamental steps. Additionally, adopting flexible program designs that accommodate time zone differences and varying school schedules, through asynchronous activities and pre-recorded materials, can ensure inclusivity and maximize participation.

Integrating virtual exchange programs more fully into the curriculum and ensuring cultural relevance are key factors for maximizing their impact. Aligning program topics and activities with learning objectives and incorporating local culture into the learning experience fosters a sense of connection and meaning for students, enhancing their engagement and motivation.

Providing adequate language support and scaffolding is essential to facilitate effective communication and learning among participants with diverse linguistic backgrounds. This can be achieved through the provision of translations, access to online dictionaries and translation tools, and strategic use of the first language (L1) to bridge comprehension gaps. Creating a safe and inclusive environment where students feel comfortable taking risks and using both their L1 and the target language can further enhance their language development and confidence.

Adopting student-centered and active learning approaches is crucial for fostering deeper learning and engagement. Providing opportunities for student choice and autonomy in selecting topics, activities, and modes of expression can empower students to take ownership of their learning journey. Encouraging project-based learning, collaborative tasks, and real-life experiences further stimulates motivation and promotes the development of essential 21st-century skills.

Lastly, ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the program's effectiveness are indispensable for continuous improvement. Gathering feedback from teachers, students, and administrators and incorporating their insights into program design and implementation ensures that virtual exchange programs remain responsive to the evolving needs and interests of participants.

By adopting these comprehensive strategies, schools can unlock the full potential of virtual exchange programs, empowering students to develop intercultural competence, enhance language skills, and cultivate a global mindset that prepares them to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world. The transformative power of virtual exchange lies in its ability to bridge cultural divides, foster empathy, and equip young learners with the skills and perspectives necessary to navigate a diverse and complex global landscape.

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Appendix 1 Familiarization with the Data, Interview Transcription

First Interviewee: An English Teacher, Female, 57 years old

Interview taken on January 12th, 2023

No	Questions	Teacher 1	Initial Impression/ Comments	Code
1	Can you tell me about your background and your journey leading up to your initiation in the "Culture in a Box" virtual exchange program?	I am an English teacher here with over 20 years of experience. I was teaching 9 grades students class A at that time.	The teacher has extensive teaching experience.	ET.01
		When Pak Gik told me the chance to join the "Connecting Classroom" virtual exchange program, I was excited. Then I and Pak Gik asked approval to the headmaster.	Enthusiasm for the virtual exchange program. Collaboration with another teacher and the headmaster in program preparation.	ET.02
		After approved, we talked to Ms Pah as a collaborator teacher from Thailand to discuss about time schedule, lesson plan and the topic of project for our students collaboration. We met a problem of time, because they have different holiday and academic calendar. Previously we consider about 6 months collaboration but it become 3 months collaboration with some pauses.	Challenges in adjusting schedules due to differences in academic calendars.	ET.03
2	What are the specific objectives conducting the "Culture in a Box" virtual exchange program?	Our main goals are to help students develop different understanding, improve their English communication skills, and encourage them to meet their friend from abroad.	- Program goals include developing understanding, improving communication skills, and fostering intercultural interaction.	ET.04

No	Questions	Teacher 1	Initial Impression/ Comments	Code
3	Is there any model of VEP adapted to fit the specific context and needs of SMP 1 Kudus? What is that? What unique elements did you incorporate?	.I only follow the procedure given by Pak Gik and discuss the topic suitable for my students	The teacher follows the provided procedure and focuses on topic suitability for students.	ET.05
4	How do you choose topics for intercultural content in your English classes?	The first agenda, we decide the topic. There are three 4 topic we are suggested. But at the last, as agreed by Thailand teacher, we decide three topic: My Live, My Town, and Culture In a box. We pick the topics because they are relevant to our students' lives, like things about school, family, hobbies, and the local culture. The Kudus pride topic includes: food, buildings, costume, dance, music instrument	Topics are chosen based on relevance to students' lives and local culture. Collaboration with the Thai teacher in topic selection.	ET.06
5	What factors do you consider when making these choices (e.g., student interests, curriculum requirements, available resources)?	We take a few things into account when choosing topics: what the students are into, if it fits with the curriculum, what resources we have available, and how the topic connects to what we want them to learn.	- Factors considered include student interests, curriculum alignment, resources, and relevance to learning objectives.	ET.07
6	Could you provide a specific example of a topic you've recently	One topic we explored as an example was "My City." We chose it because it gives students a chance to show off their hometown to their	- The "My City" topic was chosen to allow students to introduce their city and learn about others.	ET.08

No	Questions	Teacher 1	Initial Impression/ Comments	Code
	taught and explain why you chose it?	international peers and also learn about other city from other nation that was from Thailand		
7	How do you adapt existing materials or create new ones to ensure they are culturally relevant and engaging for your students?	For the "My Life" topic, there are many descriptive text examples in the textbook that students can use to learn.	The teacher adapts existing materials using descriptive text examples from textbooks for the "My Life" topic	ET.09
		But, for "My Town," I need to refresh their knowledge about Kudus. I show them historical places, tourist spots, and other unique places here. Similarly, for "Culture in a Box," I start by discussing Kudus' cultural products, like traditional clothes, food, toys, batik, dance, musical instruments, etc. I use YouTube videos or blogs about Kudus for their materials.	The teacher utilizes various resources like YouTube videos and blogs for topics like "My Town" and "Culture in a Box,". But, the exact creation process isn't detailed	ET.10
		If there are no suitable materials, I ask my students to visit historical places like Menara, Museum Jenang or find the cultural products in Taman Bujana themselves so they have an understanding of the topic they will be working on in the virtual exchange project.	Challenges in preparing materials and engaging students in out-of-class activities.	ET.11
8	Do you incorporate local culture and knowledge into your intercultural content? If so, how?	Absolutely, we make it a point to include local culture and knowledge in our lessons. For example, when we talk about "Culture in a Box," we have the students bring in cultural objects from their area and explain their significance to their international classmates. The product like as: Batik, Jenang, rebana, blankon, lentog and some other else	- Local culture is integrated into learning, e.g., through "Culture in a Box." Students bring and explain cultural objects from their region.	ET.12

No	Questions	Teacher 1	Initial Impression/ Comments	Code
9	Could you share an example of how you've adapted a material or activity to make it more culturally responsive?	I once asked students demonstrate “Kretek Dance”, play traditional musical and demonstrated how to wear “iket” in front of their friend in Thailand through zoom meeting.	The teacher Integrate cultural activities into lessons	ET.13
		Also in doing virtual exchange I also incorporate project based learning in which students do research projects about the history or cultural traditions of Kudus as their hometown and find some cultural product. Then, I asked them create presentations or performances that showcase Kudus culture to their Thais peer through zoom meeting.	Creating culturally relevant projects based learning	ET.14
10	How do you involve your students in the process of selecting or developing intercultural content?	Before doing the project, I asked students for their ideas on topics they'd like to explore or activities they want to share with their peers. We also give them the chance to create their own learning materials, like presentations or videos.	Students are involved in topic and activity selection before the project starts and given opportunities to create their own learning materials.	ET.15
11	Do you use any specific strategies to personalize the learning experience for your students?	Yes, I let them use what they already know about writing stories, telling about events, and explaining steps they have learnt at previous level. But if they prefer something more visual, I tell them to look at YouTube, blogs, and other internet places to learn more.	The teacher tries to understand student interests and learning styles to provide suitable tasks and personalized feedback.	ET.16

No	Questions	Teacher 1	Initial Impression/ Comments	Code
		And for culture projects, I have them go to old places they are interested, explore local food they like, play traditional music, or wear our costume clothes. This way, they can understand their ownership and share our culture with their friends in Thailand.		
12	Could you describe a time when you've successfully incorporated student input into your intercultural lessons?	When we were talking about "My Town," we had the students make photo collages that showed their hometown pride. The results were so different and interesting, and it really highlighted how each students has each concern and interest about their hometown.	Photo collages about "My Town" successfully engaged students and showcased their interests.	ET.17
		However so far, translate the conversation, bring the authentic materials, and provide their example very helpful. I can manage the students easily.	The teacher finds strategies like translation, authentic materials, and examples helpful in classroom management.	ET.18
13	What specific activities or projects do you use to promote intercultural understanding in virtual exchange programs?	We use a variety of activities, including online discussions, collaborative projects, and the "Culture in a Box" exchange we mentioned earlier. The students also create presentations about their own culture to share with their international peers.	Various activities are used, including online discussions, collaborative projects, cultural exchange, and presentations.	ET.19
14	Could you share a particularly successful virtual exchange	One activity that worked really well was when the students participated in Zoom teleconference. There they shared with, and commented on, by their international peers. This was successful	Zoom teleconference is considered successful for increasing interaction and intercultural learning.	ET.20

No	Questions	Teacher 1	Initial Impression/ Comments	Code
	activity and explain why it worked well?	because it got the students excited to be interactive and learn about other cultures through the teleconference		
15	What technologies or platforms do you use in your virtual exchange programs?	I myself don't really understand to use digital things. I only use whatsapp for communication. The things about digital were helped by Pak Gik	The teacher feels less confident with technology, uses WhatsApp, and is assisted by Pak Gik for digital aspects.	ET.21
16	How do you assess your students' intercultural competence in virtual exchange programs?	We plan to evaluate their intercultural competence based on several factors, including their participation in discussions, the quality of their collaborative projects. However the time is limited by school agenda	No specific assesment	ET.22
		However, we forget to ask students to write their self-reflections	The teacher forgot to include self- reflection as an assesment.	ET.23
17	What kind of feedback do you provide to your students to help them develop their intercultural skills?	We offer specific and constructive feedback, focusing on areas such as how they can enhance their communication effectiveness or deepen their appreciation for cultural diversity. We also provide suggestions for their personal growth.	Feedback is specific and constructive, focusing on communication, cultural appreciation, and personal growth.	ET.24
18	Are there any specific assessment strategies you've found particularly effective in this context?	One strategy we've found particularly effective is having students create portfolios that document their activities throughout the exchange program. These portfolios can include photos, or videos. By compiling a portfolio, students can track their progress and reflect on their experiences.	Portfolio creation is considered effective for documenting activities and reflecting on experiences.	ET.25

No	Questions	Teacher 1	Initial Impression/ Comments	Code
19	How do you help students overcome cultural and linguistic barriers during virtual exchanges?	For language level, my students in A1-A2 level. They have limited English practise. Most of them do it in only in English classroom, so I have to spent the time to train them before joining the virtual meeting. Hmm... and when they join the virtual meeting they are helped because other use ppt which full of text.	Students have A1-A2 English level and limited practice.	ET.26
		My students in the beginning does not familiar with the Thai's pronunciation.	Students initially struggled with Thai pronunciation but improved over time	ET.27
		Usually I give translation to students language. Along the time, my students can understand although some students still ask to me. I also suggest online dictionaries and translation tools to my students.	The teacher provides translations and suggests online dictionaries/translation tools.	ET.28
20	What strategies do you use to promote understanding and respect for different cultures?	We frequently engage in discussions about diverse cultural values and encourage students to present on their own culture. We also foster an open-minded approach and a willingness to learn from other cultures.	.Discussions on cultural values, presentations, and encouraging openness are used to promote understanding and respect.	ET.29
21	Have there been any instances of miscommunication or cultural misunderstandings during virtual	There is mirror miscommunication or cultural misunderstandings but not significant. It is mostly because the students limited English delivery.	Minor miscommunications occurred due to limited English proficiency	ET.30
		We typically clarify the situation and provide examples that are easier to grasp.	Clarification, examples	ET.31

No	Questions	Teacher 1	Initial Impression/ Comments	Code
	exchanges?How did you handle them?	We also remind students to maintain politeness and sensitivity in their communication.	reminders about politeness were used to address them.	ET.32
22	In your experience, what are the key factors that contribute to successful intercultural content instruction through virtual exchange programs?	The students really motivated. In the beginning of this program, they always ask to me when they will have zoom to their friends from Thailand. They really happy when they can present about their country.	- Student motivation is seen as a key factor for success.	ET.33
23	How do you keep students motivated and engaged in virtual exchange programs?	I think not all my students interested in this agenda. I mean, they like but sometimes they are bored because the topic is too hard for them to do.	- Not all students are equally interested. The difficulty of topics can lead to boredom.	ET.34
		In this time, I have to think and think more how to make the topic can engage and relate to my students.	The teacher tries to make topics engaging and relatable.	ET.35
		I recognize and reward students for their active participation. Additionally, I consistently offer encouragement and express appreciation for their efforts.	Recognition, rewards, encouragement, and appreciation are used to maintain motivation.	ET.36
24	Are there any specific strategies you use to make these programs more interactive and enjoyable for your students?	We sometime let students share each other their local language. For example, to say how are you, our students learn to use Sawadecap. Then, the Thai students learn to say Apa kabar. Incorporating local language into interaction	- Incorporating local language exchange is used to make the program more interactive and enjoyable. The uniqueness of different languages is seen as adding to the fun.	ET.37

No	Questions	Teacher 1	Initial Impression/ Comments	Code
		make them more enjoyable because it has unique sounds from each nations		
25	Have you noticed any differences in student engagement between in-person and virtual intercultural activities?	Generally, students are happy about participating in virtual exchange activities. However, we've observed that some students tend to be more silent. Perhaps they feel incapable with their English.	Students are generally happy about virtual exchanges but some are more silent, possibly due to language insecurity.	ET.38
		In composing the written task, I help student to enlighten their idea from picture and video or sometime I directly tell them what I have already know about the topic.	The teacher provides additional support during written tasks, such as using visuals and providing information.	ET.39

Second Interviewee: A Bahasa Indonesia Teacher, Male, 45 years old, Having Intercultural experience and Digital Literacy Interview taken on January 20th, 2023

No	Questions	Teacher 2	English Translation	Initial Impression/ Comments	Code
1	Can you tell me about your background and your journey leading up to your initiation in the "Culture in a Box" virtual exchange program?	<p>Saya guru Bahasa Indonesia, tapi saya sangat tertarik dengan pertukaran budaya. Dulu saya pernah jadi British Council Ambassador di Jawa Tengah, dan itu membuka banyak kesempatan buat saya kenal sama guru-guru luar negeri dan berkolaborasi.</p> <p>Awal tahun 2022, saya mencoba membuka peluang kolaborasi buat siswa-siswa saya yang saya coba adaptasi dari model "Connecting Classroom" dari British Council, dan saya coba sesuaikan untuk siswa di SMP 1 Kudus. Lalu saya mencoba berkirim email mengajak kolaborasi dengan teman guru dalam member british council dan ternyata seorang teman dari Thailand, Ms Pah, menanggapi ajakan saya</p>	<p>"I am an Indonesian language teacher, but I am very interested in cultural exchange. I used to be a British Council Ambassador in Central Java, and that opened up many opportunities for me to get to know teachers from abroad and collaborate. At the beginning of 2022, I tried to open up opportunities for collaboration for my students, which I tried to adapt from the "Connecting Classroom" model from the British Council, and I tried to adjust it for students at SMP 1 Kudus. Then I tried to send an email inviting collaboration with fellow teachers in the British Council member and it turned out that a friend from Thailand, Ms Pah, responded to my invitation"</p>	<p>- The teacher has a personal interest in cultural exchange. - Experience as a British Council ambassador led to international collaborations. - The program initiative came from the teacher, inspired by the "Connecting Classroom" model. - Collaboration with a Thai teacher.</p>	AT.40

No	Questions	Teacher 2	English Translation	Initial Impression/ Comments	Code
2	What are the specific objectives conducting the "Culture in a Box" virtual exchange program?	Tujuan utamanya sih biar siswa-siswa bisa ngobrol langsung sama teman sebaya mereka dari negara lain, sambil ngembangin kemampuan bahasa Inggris mereka. Selain itu, kita juga pengen mereka bisa lebih memahami secara inklusif Profil Pelajar Pancasila yang berkebinekaan Global. Dengan demikian, mereka dapat mencintai budaya sendiri dan menghormati budaya bangsa lain	"The main goal is for the students to be able to chat directly with their peers from other countries, while also developing their English skills. In addition, we also want them to have a more inclusive understanding of the Pancasila Student Profile which is globally diverse. Thus, they can love their own culture and respect the culture of other nations"	- Program goals include improving English skills, intercultural understanding, and developing character in line with the Pancasila Student Profile.	AT.41
3	Is there any model of VEP adapted to fit the specific context and needs of SMP 1 Kudus? What is that? What unique elements did you incorporate?	Iya, kita adaptasi model "Connecting Classroom" dari British Council. Tema sama topik diskusinya kita sesuaikan biar cocok sama minat dan kemampuan siswa di SMP 1 Kudus dan materi pelajaran Bahasa Inggris yang juga saya diskusikan dengan Bu Ami. Kita juga tambahin elemen unik, yaitu pertukaran "Culture in a Box", di mana siswa saling	"Yes, we adapted the "Connecting Classroom" model from the British Council. We adjusted the themes and discussion topics to match the interests and abilities of the students at SMP 1 Kudus and the English subject matter which I also discussed with Bu Ami. We also added a unique element, namely the "Culture in a Box" exchange, where students send	- The "Connecting Classroom" model was adapted. - Themes and discussion topics were adjusted. - The unique element of "Culture in a Box" was added. - Collaboration with the English teacher in topic selection.	AT.42

No	Questions	Teacher 2	English Translation	Initial Impression/ Comments	Code
		kirim barang-barang budaya dari negara masing-masing.	each other cultural items from their respective countries."		
4	How do you choose topics for intercultural content in your English classes?	Setelah saya dan Bu Ami menentukan topic, saya menghubungi Pah dari Thailand. Butuh waktu lama untuk menyepakati topik, karena ada event liburan baik di negara kami dan di negeri Thailand, perbedaan kalender akademik dll	"After me and Bu Ami decided on the topic, I contacted Pah from Thailand. It took a long time to agree on the topic, because there were holiday events both in our country and in Thailand, differences in the academic calendar, etc."	- Topic selection involved collaboration with the Thai teacher. - Challenges in agreeing on topics due to differences in academic calendars and holidays.	AT.43
5	How do you adapt existing materials or create new ones to ensure they are culturally relevant and engaging for your students?	Disini saya membantu anak-anak dalam menggunakan Ppt dan berkirim gambar atau presentasi dalam google classroom	"Here I help the children in using PowerPoint and sending pictures or presentations in Google Classroom"	- The teacher assists students in using technology for presentations and sharing materials.	AT.44
6	How do you encourage interaction and collaboration between your students and their international peers?	Kita siapin forum diskusi online di mana siswa bisa saling tanya jawab sama sharing pengalaman melalui google classroom, email dan zoom meeting. Kita juga dorong mereka buat kerja bareng di proyek kolaboratif, kayak bikin video atau poster sesuai	"We prepare an online discussion forum where students can ask each other questions and share experiences through Google Classroom, email, and Zoom meetings. We also encourage them to work together on collaborative projects, such	- Online discussion forums, collaborative projects, and sharing results between groups are used to encourage interaction and collaboration.	AT.45

No	Questions	Teacher 2	English Translation	Initial Impression/ Comments	Code
		kelompok minta presentasi yang sudah didiskusikan di awal pembelajaran lalu meminta mereka berbagi hasil antar dua kelompok siswa yang sudah dipasangkan.	as making videos or posters according to groups, asking for presentations that have been discussed at the beginning of the lesson, and then asking them to share the results between two groups of students who have been paired."		
7	What technologies or platforms do you use in your virtual exchange programs?	Kita pakai beberapa platform, kayak Zoom buat teleconference, Google Classroom buat manajemen tugas sama materi, atau gmail. Kita juga pakai media sosial kayak WhatsApp buat komunikasi informal.	"We use several platforms, such as Zoom for teleconferencing, Google Classroom for task and material management, or Gmail. We also use social media like WhatsApp for informal communication."	- Various technology platforms are used to support learning and communication.	AT.46
8	How do you ensure that your students have the necessary digital skills to participate effectively?	Sebelum program dimulai, kita adain pelatihan singkat tentang cara pakai platform-platform yang bakal dipakai. Selama program berlangsung, kita juga selalu siap bantu kalau ada siswa yang kesulitan.	"Before the program starts, we conduct a brief training session on how to use the platforms that will be used. During the program, we are always ready to help if any students have difficulties."	- Brief training and ongoing support are provided to ensure students have the necessary digital skills.	AT.47
9	Are there any technological challenges you've	Tantangan utama sih masalah koneksi internet yang kadang suka nggak stabil. Kadang juga	"The main challenge is the internet connection which is sometimes unstable. Sometimes	- The main challenge is unstable internet connections and	AT.48

No	Questions	Teacher 2	English Translation	Initial Impression/ Comments	Code
	faced in implementing virtual exchange programs?	ada siswa yang perangkatnya kurang memadai. Tapi, kita coba atasi dengan cari solusi alternatif, kayak pindah lokasi atau pinjem perangkat dari sekolah.	there are also students whose devices are inadequate. But, we try to overcome this by finding alternative solutions, such as moving locations or borrowing devices from the school."	inadequate student devices. - Alternative solutions are sought to address these challenges.	
10	What are the main technical challenges you encounter when implementing virtual exchange programs?	Selain masalah koneksi internet sama perangkat, kadang ada juga kendala teknis kayak aplikasi yang error. Kita biasanya coba cari solusi dari internet atau minta bantuan dari tim IT sekolah.	"In addition to internet connection and device issues, sometimes there are also technical problems such as applications that error. We usually try to find solutions from the internet or ask for help from the school's IT team."	- Technical issues beyond connectivity and devices, such as application errors, are also encountered. - Solutions are sought through the internet or help from the school's IT team.	AT.49
11	How do you address issues such as internet connectivity problems or difficulties using the technology?	Kalau ada masalah koneksi, kita coba cari lokasi yang sinyalnya lebih bagus atau reschedule kegiatannya. Tidak ada kesulitan signifikan pada siswa dalam menggunakan teknologi.	"If there is a connection problem, we try to find a location with a better signal or reschedule the activity. There are no significant difficulties for students in using technology."	- Connectivity issues are addressed by finding locations with better signals or rescheduling activities. - No significant difficulties in technology use were reported.	AT.50
12	Have you received any support from the school or other	Sekolah cukup support, mereka kasih akses internet yang stabil	"The school is quite supportive, they provide stable internet access"	- The school provides support in the form of stable internet access.	AT.51

No	Questions	Teacher 2	English Translation	Initial Impression/ Comments	Code
	organizations in overcoming these challenges?				
13	Have you noticed any differences in student engagement between in-person and virtual intercultural activities?	Hanya saja siswa kita cenderung kurang disiplin memenuhi waktu pengumpulan tugasnya. Biasanya anak diberi waktu satu minggu untuk mengerjakan projectnya. Tapi siswa kita cenderung lambat	"It's just that our students tend to be less disciplined in meeting deadlines. Usually the children are given one week to work on their project. But our students tend to be slow"	- Students tend to be less disciplined in submitting assignments during virtual activities. - It takes longer for students to complete projects.	AT.52
14	Can you explain the intercultural learning challenges you faced when holding VEP for Indonesian and Thai students from August to October 2002, considering the differences in calendars between the two countries, the	Begini, kalender akademik di sekolah Whattanottaipayap di Thailand itu beda dengan SMP 1 Kudus di Indonesia. Di Thailand, tahun ajarannya mulai bulan Mei dan selesai bulan Maret, sedangkan di Indonesia mulai bulan Juli dan selesai bulan Juni. Jadi, waktu anak-anak Indonesia sudah mulai sekolah, anak-anak Thailand masih liburan. Terus, ada juga perbedaan zona waktu. Thailand itu satu jam di belakang Indonesia. Artinya, kalau anak-	"So, the academic calendar at Whattanottaipayap School in Thailand is different from SMP 1 Kudus in Indonesia. In Thailand, the school year starts in May and ends in March, while in Indonesia it starts in July and ends in June. So, when Indonesian kids are already back in school, Thai kids are still on holiday. Then, there's also the time zone difference. Thailand is one hour behind Indonesia. This means that when Indonesian kids start school at 7 am, Thai kids		AT.53

No	Questions	Teacher 2	English Translation	Initial Impression/ Comments	Code
	academic calendars of Whattanottaipaya p Secondary School and SMP 1 Kudus, time zones, and school hours?	anak Indonesia masuk sekolah jam 7 pagi, anak-anak Thailand baru bangun tidur jam 6 pagi waktu mereka. Belum lagi jam sekolahnya juga beda. Di Thailand, sekolah biasanya mulai jam 8 pagi dan selesai jam 3 sore, sementara di Indonesia mulai jam 7 pagi dan selesai jam 1 siang. Nah, untuk mengatasi semua ini, saya melakukan beberapa hal. Pertama, saya koordinasi terus sama guru-guru di kedua sekolah. Kita sama-sama menyesuaikan materi pelajaran dan tugas, supaya nggak ada siswa yang ketinggalan. Kedua, saya buat jadwal pelajaran yang fleksibel. Saya pertimbangkan perbedaan zona waktu dan jam sekolah tadi. Ketiga, saya memanfaatkan teknologi. Kita pakai email dan video conference buat mempermudah komunikasi dan	are just waking up at 6 am their time. Not to mention the school hours are also different. In Thailand, school usually starts at 8 am and ends at 3 pm, while in Indonesia it starts at 7 am and ends at 1 pm. Now, to overcome all of this, I did a few things. First, I kept coordinating with the teachers in both schools. We adjusted the lesson materials and assignments together, so that no student would be left behind. Second, I created a flexible lesson schedule. I took into account the time zone and school hour differences. Third, I utilized technology. We used email and video conferencing to facilitate communication and learning between students from both countries."		

No	Questions	Teacher 2	English Transalation	Initial Impression/ Comments	Code
		pembelajaran antara siswa dari kedua negara.			

Appendix 2 Generating Initial Codes

No.	Initial Codes	Core Idea	Conceptualization	Categorization	Potential Themes
1	Motivation Initiation	Interest in cultural exchange and opportunities for students	Personal interest and the desire to provide valuable experiences for students are the main drivers for initiating the program.	Motivation & Background	Factors Driving Program Implementation
2	Program Goals	Develop English skills, intercultural understanding, and Pancasila Student Profile.	The program aims to enhance students' intercultural communication competence and prepare them to be good global citizens.	Goals & Benefits	Expected Impacts
3	Model Adaptation	Adapting the "Connecting Classroom" model and adding the unique "Culture in a Box" element.	The program is adapted to the local context and student needs, enriched with creative cultural exchange activities.	Implementation & Adaptation	Implementation Strategies
4	Topic Selection	Choosing topics relevant to students' daily lives and local culture.	Topics are chosen to engage students and align with learning objectives, considering the curriculum and available resources.	Curriculum & Content	Material Development
5	Factors in Topic Selection	Considering student interests, curriculum alignment, learning resources, and topic relevance.	Various factors are considered to ensure that chosen topics are effective and support student learning.	Curriculum & Content	Material Development

No.	Initial Codes	Core Idea	Conceptualization	Categorization	Potential Themes
6	Topic Example	"My City" as an example of a topic that teaches about local and global cultures.	This topic allows students to share about their city and learn about other cities around the world.	Curriculum & Content	Material Development
7	Material Adaptation	Adapting existing materials, creating new interactive materials, challenges in preparation, and out-of-class activities.	Learning materials are modified to be more culturally relevant and engaging for students. Teachers face challenges in preparing materials and involving students.	Curriculum & Content	Material Development
8	Local Culture Integration	Incorporating local culture and knowledge into lessons.	Students are encouraged to appreciate and share their own culture as part of the learning process.	Curriculum & Content	Material Development
9	Adaptation Example	Adapting games and activities, using a genre-based approach.	Learning activities are modified to be more contextual and enjoyable for students.	Curriculum & Content	Material Development
10	Student Involvement	Seeking student input on topics and activities, and providing opportunities for them to create their own materials.	Students are actively involved in the learning process, increasing motivation and ownership.	Teaching Approach	Student Empowerment
11	Personalized Learning	Understanding student interests and learning styles, providing suitable tasks, and giving personalized feedback.	Learning is tailored to the individual needs of each student to optimize learning outcomes.	Teaching Approach	Student Empowerment
12	Personalization Example	Photo collages and the use of translation, authentic materials, and	This activity encourages student creativity and provides	Teaching Approach	Student Empowerment

No.	Initial Codes	Core Idea	Conceptualization	Categorization	Potential Themes
		examples for classroom management.	opportunities to share about their lives. Teachers use various strategies to support student learning.		
13	Virtual Exchange Activities	Online discussions, collaborative projects, "Culture in a Box" exchange, and cultural presentations.	Various activities are used to facilitate interaction and collaboration between students from different cultures.	Interaction & Collaboration	Communication Facilitation
14	Encouraging Interaction	Providing online discussion forums, encouraging collaborative projects, and sharing results between groups.	These strategies aim to create an environment that supports communication and cooperation among students.	Interaction & Collaboration	Communication Facilitation
15	Successful Activity Example	Creating introductory videos and Zoom teleconferencing.	These activities are effective because they encourage student creativity and facilitate learning about other cultures.	Interaction & Collaboration	Communication Facilitation
16	Technology Used	Zoom, Google Classroom, Padlet, WhatsApp, and Gmail.	Various technology platforms are used to support learning and communication in the program.	Technology & Platforms	Digital Infrastructure
17	Developing Digital Skills	Brief training and ongoing support on technology use.	Students are provided with support to ensure they can participate effectively in the program.	Technology & Platforms	Digital Infrastructure
18	Technological Challenges	Unstable internet connections and inadequate student devices.	Technological challenges can hinder program implementation	Challenges & Solutions	Technical Obstacles

No.	Initial Codes	Core Idea	Conceptualization	Categorization	Potential Themes
			and need to be addressed with creative solutions.		
19	Assessing Intercultural Competence	Participation in discussions, project quality, self-reflection, and observation of interactions.	Intercultural competence is assessed holistically through various methods.	Assessment & Evaluation	Measuring Success
20	Feedback	Specific and constructive feedback on communication and appreciation of cultural differences, along with suggestions for personal growth.	The feedback provided aims to help students develop their intercultural skills.	Assessment & Evaluation	Measuring Success
21	Assessment Strategies	Creating portfolios to document activities and reflect on experiences.	Portfolios allow students to track their progress and reflect on their learning.	Assessment & Evaluation	Measuring Success
22	Technical Challenges	Internet connectivity issues, device problems, and application glitches.	Technical challenges can disrupt the program's flow and require appropriate solutions.	Challenges & Solutions	Technical Obstacles
23	Addressing Technical Challenges	Finding locations with better signals, rescheduling activities, providing explanations and tutorials.	Various strategies are used to overcome technical issues.	Challenges & Solutions	Technical Obstacles
24	Support from School/Organizations	Support in the form of stable internet access and training from the British Council.	External support helps overcome challenges and improve program quality.	Challenges & Solutions	External Support
25	Overcoming Cultural & Linguistic Barriers	Reminding students to respect each other, providing dictionaries and	These strategies help students communicate and interact	Challenges & Solutions	Communication Barriers

No.	Initial Codes	Core Idea	Conceptualization	Categorization	Potential Themes
		translation tools, and explaining cultural differences.	effectively despite cultural and linguistic differences.		
26	Promoting Understanding & Respect	Discussions on cultural values, cultural presentations, and encouraging openness and willingness to learn.	These activities aim to enhance students' understanding and appreciation of different cultures.	Challenges & Solutions	Increasing Cultural Awareness
27	Addressing Misunderstandings	Explaining situations clearly, providing examples, and reminding students to communicate politely.	Misunderstandings are seen as learning opportunities and are addressed with a positive approach.	Challenges & Solutions	Communication Barriers
28	Motivation & Engagement	Varied and interesting activities, rewards, encouragement, and appreciation.	Various strategies are used to maintain student motivation and engagement in the program.	Motivation & Engagement	Active Participation
29	Enhancing Interaction	Breakout rooms, collaborative applications, and ice-breaking sessions.	These strategies create a more interactive and enjoyable learning environment.	Motivation & Engagement	Active Participation
30	Differences in Engagement	Students are generally enthusiastic, but some are more active in face-to-face activities. Students tend to be less disciplined in submitting assignments during virtual activities.	Student engagement can be influenced by individual preferences and comfort levels in interacting. Challenges in maintaining student discipline in a virtual environment.	Motivation & Engagement, Challenges & Solutions	Active Participation, Technical Obstacles

Appendix 3 Searching for Themes

Theme	Initial Code	Core Idea
Teachers tailor topic for Intercultural Content	1. Stating the goal	Develop English skills, intercultural understanding, and Pancasila Student Profile.
	2. Model Adaptation	Adapting the "Connecting Classroom" model and adding the unique "Culture in a Box" from British Council
	3. Topic Selection	Choosing topics relevant to students' daily lives and local culture.
	5. Local Culture Integration	Incorporating local culture and knowledge into lessons.
	4. Personalized Learning	Understanding student interests and learning styles, providing suitable tasks, and giving personalized feedback.
Strategies in Virtual Exchange Program	1. Student Involvement and Engagement	Seeking student input on topics and activities, and providing opportunities for them to create their own materials.
	2. Culturally Responsive Teacher	Integrating cultural activities into lessons

	3. Virtual Exchange Project	Online discussions, collaborative projects, "Culture in a Box" exchange, and cultural presentations.
	4. Promoting Understanding & Respect	Discussions on cultural values, cultural presentations, and encouraging openness and willingness to learn.
	5. Technology Integration Zoom, Google Classroom, WhatsApp, and Gmail.	Various technology platforms are used to support learning and communication in the program.
	5. Assessment Strategies	Creating portfolios to document activities and reflect on experiences.
Challenge existing in Virtual Exchange	1. Technical Challenges	Internet connectivity issues, device problems, and application glitches.
	2. Overcoming Cultural & Linguistic Barriers	Reminding students to respect each other, providing dictionaries and translation tools, and explaining cultural differences.
	3. Different in engagement	Student engagement can be influenced by individual preferences

		and comfort levels in interacting. Challenges in maintaining student discipline in a virtual environment.
	4. Assessing Intercultural Competence	Intercultural competence should be assessed holistically through various methods but teacher forget to do this

Appendix 4 Observation Summary and Time-Table

“Connecting Classroom” Virtual Exchange Project

Between: Junior High School Kudus, Central Java, Indonesia and Wattanothaipayap School, Chiang Mai, Thailand

Date: August – October 2022

Students: 2 groups of 14-15 years old students (30 students per group)

Topic Outline

Week	Date	Topic	Activities	Observer Summary
Week 0		Project Planning	Teachers plan the project together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They align learning objectives, time organization, and assessment methods. • The collaborative planning phase ensures a well-structured and cohesive learning experience for the students.
Week 1	August	Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher introduces the project. • Students plan for the first e-mail. “Introduce myself to my new friend • Check the correction before sending the e-mail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher introduces the project to the students. • Students plan and draft their first email, introducing themselves to their international peers. • Teachers provide feedback on the emails before they are sent.

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students demonstrate enthusiasm and eagerness to connect with their peers from another country. The teacher's guidance helps students craft effective introductory emails.
Week 2	September	My Life	Idea: share about school life, daily life, hobbies, favourite subjects, things they like or don't like, etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students share about their school life, daily routines, hobbies, favorite subjects, and personal preferences through online communication tools. • Active participation and sharing of personal experiences foster cross-cultural understanding and connection among students.
Week 3	September	My City	Idea: share about their hometown, neighbourhood, landmark, transportation, activities people do in the city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students showcase their local culture and heritage by sharing information about their hometown, neighborhood, landmarks, transportation, and popular activities. • The use of technology enables virtual exploration of different cities,

				promoting global awareness.
Week 4	October	Culture in a Box	Idea: share about special product from hometown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students present their hometown's special product through a Zoom teleconference. • The presentation allows students to demonstrate their creativity, presentation skills, and pride in their local culture. • Real-time interaction during the teleconference facilitates immediate feedback and engagement.
Week 5	October	Virtual Touring	Idea: teleconference by Zoom Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students conduct a virtual tour of their school and city using Zoom Meeting. • Students take ownership of their learning by acting as tour guides, sharing insights into their local environment and culture. • The virtual tour offers a unique and immersive experience for students from both schools.

Appendix 5

Photo Documents

Photo	Details
	<p>MOU Signing by headmaster</p>
	<p>Zoom Conference showing the culture product from Indonesia to Thailand</p>
	<p>Thai friend receive the “culture in a box” thing from Indonesia</p>



Students receiving culture in a box from Thailand



Teachers and Students joining Connecting Classroom from Thailand



Teachers and Students joining Connecting Classroom from SMP 1 Kudus

MOU Letters



**MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
BETWEEN WATTANOTHAIPAYAP SCHOOL
AND
JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL 1 KUDUS (SMP 1 KUDUS)**



Junior High School 1 Kudus (SMP 1 Kudus) and Wattanothaipayap School enter into an agreement in order to actively promote various exchange program based upon the principles of good faith and mutual cooperation as follow:

1. Each institution shall cooperate to promote the following exchange programs based on equal and mutual benefit.
 - a. Ensure that the students develop their potential in global citizenship.
 - b. Allow students and teachers to share experience in learning and teaching.
 - c. Cooperate in the exchange of Thai and Indonesian culture.
2. Any matters not defuaed in this agreement and those which need to be signed separately or needed in terms of process shall be decided by consulting with each other.
3. This agreement is not intended for any legal or financial obligations between two institutions.
4. This agreement shall be terminated by eitherparty by notifying in writing to the other six (6) months prior to the expiration of the agreement.
5. This agreement shall come into effect at the time of signing and will remain in force for a period of two (2) years.
6. This agreement shall be written in English, and each of them shall be kept by both institutions.

2022. 07. 01

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL 1 KUDUS
(SMP 1 KUDUS)

Principal Mr. Ahadi Setiawan,



Appendix 6

Students' Worksheet

Hella! How am you? I hope you always healthy. oh yes, I'll be confident in my own voice, and keep trying to sing. That's you. in my country there is also a fmg ceremony on monday the ceremony starts all am. and we had 10 arrive at the school by 06.30 am.

I live in Kaden Central Java, Indonesia. In my City there is Mount Maria. lots of tourists who visit to see the waterfall. Many also come to Mount Maria to make a pilgrimage to the tomb of Sanan Maria. he is one of the hermen of ancient times He spread the teachings of Islam in Ilse Kadas plane. The highest mountain in Indonesia is Mount Iaya Wijaya which is located in Papun I have never been there because it is very far from my City. My city is very well known as "kretek city". There are many cigarette factories here, one of which in the dfamm factory. Most of the economy here in the result of selling tobacco eigarettes. But I don't like smoking, the smell alone makes me cough. In my city there is also a special food, namely Jenang. Ilse taste in very sweet, soft texture and a bit sticky. If there are foreigners who vacation in Indonesia, they usually choose Bali as their destination. Miere is a very beautiful brach. However, I have never been there myself. Because the distance is far from my city but okay, we can vacation together if the opportunity arisen Have a nice

limmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmal To hetiqiTeii

1

Hallo, Fm happy to know you too!

I wanted to answer your message yesterday. You already know my hobbies, but I also have a hobby of watching dramas and keeping a journal. I have a favorite color, the same as black, white, and

The Covid-19 cases in my city are still high enough that the government has to limit gatherings. Actually, not only in my city, many cities in Indonesia still have high COVID-19 cases.

Therefore, schools here are still implementing online learning. When I'm bored at home, I just spend time watching dramas.

Opening Instagram, watching YouTube. Always repeat it. Do you have Instagram? And do you like to watch drama? What drama do you like?

I hope you guys stay healthy there. Don't forget to wash your hands and put on a

A

obee*



To Am, Me

D m · D U M M .

I live in the Loserna small town in the northern part of the Island of Java. It is famous for its many traditional foods such as soto, pecel, etc. I explain, one of which is that lenang is a traditional food eaten generally in small towns. It is chewy and sweet, the main ingredients for making it are coconut, sate, geyser, javanese snail, brown sugar, and other complementary ingredients. In the Dumm there are valuable mountains. From the 1800s, naturally there were ducks with Islam and Hindu elements. My main religion is Islam, therefore there is a mosque here, namely before entering the month of Ramadan there is a food bazaar, the place is 1 km wide.

Back to discuss my school. The city of my school is Du. Among other schools, therefore my school is the favorite. School Name.



Daresse.e.s.

I I M M — M M M M M M M M f f I M M M E
II From what I read from you, Chiang Mai is very beautiful! I want

to visit it someday. I know something about Chiang Mai. Do you know Inthanon, There is the highest mountain in Thailand right? I have studied it before.

II EI I live in the Kudus city. Including a small town in Central Java province, Indonesia. Do you want to know more about my city? In my City there is a Menara Kudus which is very iconic, many local tourists visit there because there is the tomb of one of the 'Wall of Sanyo'. They are nine people who spread Islam in Java. Apart from the Menara Kudus there is another one on Mount Maria. There is also the tomb of one of the 'Wall of Sang' there. In my City there is a mountain, namely Mount Maria. There is so beautiful. You can climb to get to the top. There are also many waterfalls here. And

one more in my city there is a special fruit, namely parioto fruit. The fruit does not exist in any other city except in my city. Come here if you want it.



II Imm mmmmmmmmmmmmmmm