

The Current State and Perceptions of a Cross-cultural Distance Learning Program for English in Korea*

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Lee, H. (2020). The current state and perceptions of a cross-cultural distance learning program for English in Korea. *Journal of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics*, 24(2), 1-22.

This article critically examines the current state of a cross-cultural distance learning program (CCDLP) for English learning in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, which has been running since 1998 among four universities in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. The initial purpose of the program was to provide a networked English language learning program to overcome the limitations of Asian EFL contexts where authentic interaction in English is minimal and to enhance intercultural competence. With physical exposure to international students on campuses increasing and further developments in communication and educational technology, the CCDLP has needed to evolve. In this article, how courses offered in the program have changed is analyzed. Data from a survey given to participants in two courses in the program were examined to determine participants' perceptions towards their contributions and satisfaction with the courses in the program. Results show that courses need to be more customized to maximize interaction through online collaborative learning and that the technology part of such a program no longer needs to be emphasized in the wake of widespread remote learning. Lastly, implications for distance learning programs in general are discussed.

Keywords: EFL, distance learning, intercultural competence, online collaborative learning

1 Introduction

For English learners in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, exposure to and actual use of the target language are limited (Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill, & Pincas, 1980). With the advent of technology and 24/7 access to the internet, learners have more opportunities than ever before

* This study was supported by a faculty research grant from the College of Liberal Arts at Korea University in 2019.

I wish to thank Kathy Lee and Minyoung Cho for administering the survey used in this study to their classes and to Gyeong Jung for her assistance with the data. I also thank the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions.

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to engage in direct and indirect language learning. In the age of globalization, people are expected to interact on a global scale with the world as their platform. English, as the most widely taught and learned language in the world, is the default means of communication (Crystal, 2003). At the tertiary level, university students are educated as 'global leaders' and take courses that facilitate communication skills and leadership so that they can network later on. The main drawback of learning English in contexts where it is not used for wider communication, was the lack of exposure to not necessarily native English speakers but opportunities for English use. Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) was a remedy to this problem.

In the past, CALL and distance learning were considered innovative means of teaching and learning foreign languages which could transcend time and place limitations through technology (Blake, 2009; Kern & Warschauer, 2000; White, 2006). As with all technology, this implies that remote learning has come under scrutiny about how it needs to transform regarding further developments and advancements. However, it has been found that although the current generation (aka, digital natives) is completely at ease with technology, this does not necessarily mean that their learning styles have radically adapted to innovative pedagogies so that it should be the technology that should be harnessed and not the learners (Margaryan, Littlejohn, & Vojt, 2011; Thompson, 2013)

In light of increasing technology use in learning and especially in higher education, universities have witnessed a change in their demographic make-up with more international students on campuses than ever before (Falcone, 2017). Several educational benefits have been touted about interacting with international students such as gaining diverse cultural perspectives and empathy as well as using English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) which leads to developments in intercultural competence (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013). The growing access to speakers who use ELF affords domestic students with opportunities to use English which were previously provided by long distance language learning programs.

It is against this backdrop from which this paper departs. Distance language learning programs are highly dependent on technology and, in terms of English, the unavailability to provide interaction with not necessarily native speakers but speakers who need to use English as an international language or a lingua franca to communicate with one another (Matsuda, 2011; McKay, 2002; McKay & Brown, 2016), so learners in the program can learn the language better. In this light, the research goal of this study is to critically examine a distance language learning program, how it has evolved, and what its present state is. A brief history of the program and its current state will be examined. Student perceptions of the program are quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed as they are the beneficiaries of the program. Lastly, implications for future directions this particular program and other similar ones could take are provided.

2 Approaches and concepts

This section provides a brief overview of the concepts related to the program and an analysis of the courses in the program.

2.1 Distance language learning

Remote or distance learning is often contrasted with conventional learning, which refers to typical brick-and-mortar institutions where learning takes place within the four walls of a classroom.¹ The definition of distance learning has evolved over the years to reflect changing ways to interact through technology at a distance. The earliest definitions refer only to “a separation between teacher and learner and their use of some means of communication” (Hiple & Fleming, 2002, p. 1). However, new criteria have been added to expand the definition to include what Keegan (1996) stated in terms of separation of the learner from other learners, provision of two-way communication, and the utilization of electronic means. Of these criterion for distance learning, Hiple & Fleming (2002, p. 1) placed special emphasis on the following which are said to be appropriate for effective, communicative language instruction.

- communication must be electronically based
- communication must be bi-directional

To serve the purposes of the present paper, a working definition of distance learning needs to include the aforementioned criteria and be narrowed down to *online collaborative learning*. According to Harasim (2012), online collaborative learning (OCL) stems from the concepts of computer-mediated communication or networked learning and is defined as follows:

Learning theory and practice based on collaborative learning and knowledge-building discourse modeled on knowledge communities. The role of the instructor is as representative of the knowledge community, inducting students into the conceptual framework and terms and their applications in solving problems and creating knowledge and innovation, constructing plans or developing explanations for phenomena. (pp. 178-179)

¹ Discussion regarding the unprecedented use of remote learning due to the COVID-19 situation has not been dealt with, as this study was formulated before the outbreak and as it is beyond the scope of this paper.

Harasim (2012) considers the core of OCL to be discussion among students led by a facilitator (i.e., teacher) who assists in generating discourse.

2.2 Network-based language teaching

A form of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is what has been called network-based CALL or network-based language teaching (NBLT). NBLT is defined as “the pedagogical use of computers connected in either local or global networks, allowing one-to-one, one-to many, and many-to many communication” (Kern, Ware, & Warschauer, 2008, p. 281) or more specifically, in terms of language, “language teaching that involves the use of computers connected to one another in either local or global networks” (Kern & Warschauer, 2000, p. 1). This approach focuses on human-to-human communication, i.e., the learners and how they can connect with native speakers of the target language they are learning.

In the early stages of NBLT, the most commonly used technological application was telecollaboration, an umbrella term that encompassed such internet communication tools as e-mail, synchronous chat, and threaded discussion (Belz, 2003). However, as aforementioned, synchronous learning took hold to include videoconferencing. Nakano et al. (2006) has shown how Networked English Language Education (NELE) has been successfully utilized at a Japanese university and how it has fostered intercultural communication across the Asia-Pacific region while Owada and Lee (2015) did a specific case study of NELE.

2.3 Student perceptions towards online learning

Students in online collaborative courses seem to show mixed feelings towards collaborative learning activities. As Macdonald (2003) stresses OCL is a “complex process, which may include basic IT skills, online interaction skills; a familiarity with the discourse and a growth in confidence” (p. 389). This can be burdensome and seen to be time-consuming by students. Despite the advantages of interaction, students may perceive collaborative online learning activities negatively (Capdeferro & Romero, 2012). However, the pros seem to outweigh the cons as seen in, for example, a study of a Flemish university and a Chinese university where a survey question about student satisfaction showed that students were satisfied with working in groups and a group project online (Zhu, 2012).

Feedback from students is important in assessing the effectiveness of OCL. The learners’ experiences and perceptions of the long distance courses are important as they serve as a snapshot of a particular course at a particular time. What learners contribute and how they develop in long distance learning environments are what Breen (2001; as cited in White, 2006, p. 258) calls “learner contributions,” i.e., what learners do in the process of learning.

Learner contributions come in a variety of forms and includes affect, expectations and beliefs, and other cognitive factors (While, 2006) which can be assessed through perception surveys. In online language learning contexts, Jung et al. (2019) report that learners have “strong, positive attitudes” towards online collaboration and are more willing to communicate online (p. 291). In a collaborative online learning environment, learners show “overall positive attitudes, increased motivation, and lower levels of anxiety” (Jung et al. 2019, p. 291) and perceive the need to use English.

3 Background of the Program

Waseda University has been conducting what is called the Cross-Cultural Distance Learning (CCDL) program since 1999 in order to enhance students' cross-cultural understanding and to improve their English communication skills. At the time, Michiko Nakano, who was then a professor at Waseda University in Japan, envisioned a form of education in which technology and the internet could be harnessed to provide a “network” of English learners. What she called Networked English Language Education (NELE), presented a new paradigm in which information and communications technology (ICT) was harnessed to enable speakers from different backgrounds to engage in English learning through authentic, real-time communication (Nakano, 2005; Nakano, Yoshida, & Owada, 2008). The four objectives of CCDL are (1) to deepen students' cross-cultural understanding between Japan and Asian countries through the means of English, (2) to foster understanding of different cultures based on the sound comparisons of cultures, (3) to acquire the willingness to participate in discussions, and (4) to acquire such skills as discussion skills, facilitation skills and presentation skills (Nakano, Yoshida, Owada, 2008).

As the second objective above indicates, in this global age, the importance of English among non-native speakers of English at the tertiary level cannot be emphasized enough. To accommodate this trend, the concept of ‘English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)’ emerged as an alternative to such concepts as ‘English as an International Language (EIL)’ and ‘World Englishes (WE).’ One feature of ELF is that it focuses on the actual interaction between non-native speakers of English rather than nativized varieties of English (see Congo & Dewey, 2012 for further discussion on this issue). In this vein, what CCDL aims to accomplish is in line with the concept of ELF.

CCDL was a way to offer a substantial amount of student interaction in the context of ELF. One benefit of CCDL for East Asian speakers of English was stated to be as follows:

Students who have been exposed in person to the styles of English communication by Chinese or Koreans, which are influenced by their cultures, would be in an advantageous position to better understand their English, compared with those who have not had such chances. This activity should also be meaningful as an effort to help Chinese and Korean people become familiar with the styles of communication in Japanese English. (Hino, 2009, p. 116)

In other words, one of the many goals of CCDL was to encourage students to engage not only in ELF interaction but also in cross-cultural understanding.

Korea University of Korea was the first to become a CCDL partner of Waseda University. The Korea Waseda Cross-Cultural Distance Learning Program (KWCCDLP) was initiated in 1999. Park (2003) states the following about the objective of the program:

KWCCDLP is a project which introduces and applies multimedia and internet technologies into the classroom environment to develop mutual understanding and friendship between students from different cultures. This project provides motivation for students to use and learn English as a communication tool by lowering their affective filter. (pp. 1-2)

In this light, KWCCDLP was established to foster linguistic and cultural exchange explicitly among Japanese and Korean learners of English.

In the KWCCDLP, students engage in real-time video conference (VC) classes. The VC classes afford students the opportunity to engage in class-to-class or group discussions. Another long distance face-to-face activity, albeit remote, that is group oriented is oral chat. Through various oral chat software, such as LiveOn² or Skype, students engage in group-to-group discussion. Other than these synchronous forms of communication, students engage in asynchronous communication through the use of the bulletin board system (BBS) function of a learning management system, such as that of Waseda University.³ Thus, CCDL integrates a variety of activities which are structured along different lines of engagement and the use of the internet.

The KWCCDLP is now in its twenty-first year and has undergone several changes. However, now seems to be a crossroads at which a critical review is necessary. The present study attempts to provide a detailed description of a network-based teaching and learning context as such contexts have not been studied in depth and because such a description entails

² LiveOn is a web conference system produced by Japan Media Systems Corporation.

³ While a learning management system called CourseN@vi was used, Waseda University has now switched to a system called Waseda Moodle.

“holistic, qualitative research that goes beyond inventories of linguistic features and attempts to account for the way classroom culture takes shape over time” (Kern & Warschauer, 2000, p. 15).

4 Method

A mixed methods approach incorporating qualitative analysis is adopted to analyze and discuss courses in the CCDL program. The framework used to analyze the program in the present study is based on what Kern and Warschauer (2000) referred to as “practices of use” (p. 2). The practices of use approach is based on specific social contexts and asks the following questions: Who were the learners? What exactly did they do? For what purpose? In what setting? With what kinds of language? In what patterns of social interaction? What were the particular outcomes in terms of quantity/quality of language use, attitudes, and motivation? (Kern & Warschauer, 2000, p. 2). These questions are examined by describing two specific courses in the KWCCDLP. Both are undergraduate courses classified as general education courses related to a major, which in this case is English language and literature.⁴

In order to supplement this qualitative program/course analysis, students’ perspectives were examined to see what they thought about the CCDL program, what they see as their contributions to the program, and how satisfied they were with it in terms of the course in the program they were enrolled in. Such surveys have been shown to be effective in gauging students’ perceptions in a similar context (e.g., Owada, Nakano, & Yoshida 2014). To analyze the above aspects, an online survey was administered via Google Forms at the end of the spring 2020 semester in two courses of the program. For the ‘Cross-cultural Communication in English’ course, 30 students answered, whereas for ‘Global Literacy’ 28 students answered for a total of 58 respondents. Students were asked to complete a survey with Yes/No, Likert, and open-ended questions. Demographic information was collected but not analyzed in depth as the survey results were not correlated with any variables. Instead, the questions asked students to comment on their thoughts and experiences in the course. Of the 20 items, the first five were Yes/No questions which asked about the course in general. The 12 Likert items were categorized into the following with two questions per category: Delivery (D); Contribution (C); Learning (L); Technology (T); Satisfaction (S); and Need (N). The first category, Delivery, asked questions about how the course was distinct and different than traditional English language learning courses. The second category asked students about their

⁴ These courses are not offered by departments directly but are managed by them to offer basic courses related to the department major.

participation and contributions in the course. Next, Learning asked about whether the course was helpful in learning English. Technology asked the students about their familiarity and problems with the technology used. The category of Satisfaction asked about the students' satisfaction with the course while Need asked students whether they thought such a course was needed in the university. A five-point Likert scale was used for these items where one indicates "strongly agree" and five "strongly disagree." The last section of the survey was comprised of three open-ended questions used to elicit personal opinion about the course in general. The answers were analyzed using a qualitative content analysis approach which allows for subjective interpretation in a systematic manner (Selvi, 2020). Key terms were identified and analyzed in a thematic way.

5 Program Analysis and Survey Results

A brief description of the courses in the KWCCDLP and how it has evolved will be given followed by a discussion of major changes and their implications for the program.

The following are some answers to the "practices of use" questions, as discussed in the Method section, which focuses on the learners, purpose, setting, language, social interaction, and outcomes of the practice at hand. The program was aimed at Korean learners of English at the tertiary education level who were to engage in authentic English interaction with English speakers from other East Asian language backgrounds. The setting was a classroom equipped with video conferencing equipment at universities in Korea and in Japan (and later in Taiwan), where English is taught and learned as a foreign language and not a widely used language of communication. The sole language of use was, therefore, English. The outcomes of the language use, attitudes, and motivation are discussed in conjunction with the survey results. These aspects are first discussed in the context of the program in the following section and through a brief overview of the changes in the program since it was established.

5.1 Courses in the KWCCDLP

As aforementioned, the KWCCDLP was launched in 1999. For an extensive historical overview of the KWCCDLP up until 2004, please refer to Park (2004). As this paper's intention is to focus on 2018 and afterwards, a recent crucial junction in the program, which mainly affected undergraduate courses, only relevant aspects will be dealt with here.

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(1) Program milestones in terms of course offerings (modified from Park, 2003, pp.5-6)

- 1998 Preparatory stage
- 1999 Program launched
Joint individual content undergraduate and graduate courses
- 2001 Joint individual general English courses added
- 2002 Joint English language and culture learning course first offered
- 2018 Redesign of joint English language and culture learning courses

In recent times, the main transformation of the program occurred in 2018 when courses were redesigned and renamed. At this time, a need for curriculum innovation was called for as the novelty of interacting with international students online was starting to fade as the presence of international students became common on campus and more opportunities to study abroad became available for students. Thus, the KUCCDLP was at a crossroads and faced the decision to terminate or revamp the program. After much discussion among the Waseda University and Korea University program administrators, it was decided that the programs should be redesigned.⁵ One of the most profound changes being that the original curriculum of five courses was reduced to three.

(2) Redesign of KWCCDLP courses

Courses 1 and 2

2002. Spring-2010. Fall: Multimedia and World Englishes → 2011. Spring: Cross-cultural Communication in English I, II, III → 2018. Fall: Cross-cultural Communication in English/International Interaction in English

Course 3

2003. Spring: Global English through Internet I, II → 2014.Spring: Global Communication in English I, II → 2018. Fall: Global Literacy

When looking at the courses in more detail, the first course which was established was called “Multimedia and World Englishes” in 2002. This course aimed to foster English interaction among students at different universities in EFL settings. This was the first course of its kind to be offered in a university in Korea and was also the beginning of blended online courses at Korea University. This was also the first course that was synchronously held via video with a university outside of Korea in Korea, which in this case was Waseda University. Half of the course was conducted online with

⁵ A meeting between Korea University and Waseda University was held at Waseda University on August 3, 2016, to discuss the future of the program.

students engaging in synchronous and asynchronous activities. The asynchronous activities included uploading self-selected reading materials and reading them; posting opinions on the discussion board; uploading reflections of topics; and responding to questions that were included with the reflections. The synchronous part, mainly online group discussion through written or oral chat, was dictated by the topics in the designated course textbook. In 2011, the course was redesigned and three iterations of this course were offered: Social and Global Issues, Media, and Career Path. If students enrolled in all three courses and successfully completed them, they received a certificate from Waseda University.

In 2018, the courses were conflated into the two courses of 'Cross-cultural Communication in English' and 'International Interaction in English.' With the name change came a change in the delivery of the course. While the general design of the course is still maintained today, the designated textbooks are no longer used. Furthermore, project-based learning and problem-based learning were implemented.⁶ In 'Cross-cultural Communication' students focus on a local issue of choice and collaborate throughout the semester to expand the local issue. In 'International Interaction in English,' students deal with a global issue as a semester-long project. Waseda University invited one more university in Japan, Ritsumeikan University and one university in Taiwan, Tamkang University to join the course.

The 'Global English through Internet' course also has undergone changes. Its two instantiations have been conflated into one course and the most recent modification is in the course name which now bears the same, exact name as Waseda University's course, 'Global Literacy.' It must be noted that this course is run differently than the other two courses, 'Cross-cultural Communication' in English and 'International Interaction in English.' This course takes on a whole-class approach, rather than a small group interaction approach as seen in the other two courses. Although students do form groups and prepare and deliver presentations, the presentations are received by the entire class. Three universities, Korea University, Waseda University, and Tamkang University, are currently involved.

5.2 Survey results

The results of the survey are presented in this section.⁷ First, the demographics of the survey participants are given in Table 1 to show the backgrounds of the

⁶ Professor Yusuke Kondo of Waseda University designed these two courses, is managing them, and is leading the combined teaching effort at present.

⁷ The demographic items on the survey are not provided due to space reasons. The other items are coded according to category in this paper, for ease of understanding. Please contact the author for access to the original survey.

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participants. As aforementioned, demographic variables are not considered as an initial analysis showed that the effects on the responses were minimal.

Table 1. Demographics of Survey Participants

Demographic information	Global Literacy/Cross-cultural Communication ⁸	
	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Female	27	47
Male	12	21
Non-response	19	33
Total	58	100
Nationality		
Korea	23	40
Japan	9	16
Taiwan	13	22
Other	13	22
Total	58	100
English competence		
Non-native speaker	46	79
Native speaker	12	21
Total	58	100

As Table 1 shows, the total number of respondents was 58. The majority of the course participants were female, Korean, and non-native speakers of English, which reflects the nature of the setting and the course.

Next, the results from the Yes/No items are given in Table 2. The questions have been truncated to a few keywords and the percentages have been rounded off for clarity. The survey results are provided according to the two individual courses to see if any differences exist, as the two courses are differently managed and conducted, as well as combined.

Table 2. Survey Results-Yes/No Items

Question	Yes		No		Total	
	<i>n</i> (GL/CC)	%	<i>n</i> (GL/CC)	%	Yes/No	%
First course	29/16	50/28	1/12	2/21	45/13	78/22
New technology	18/17	31/29	12/11	29/19	35/23	60/40
Necessity for course	29/24	50/41	1/4	2/7	53/5	91/9
Interaction	30/28	52/48	0/0	0/0	58/0	100/0
Another course	29/26	50/45	1/2	2/3	55/3	95/5

As can be seen in Table 2, the individual courses did not show much difference from the combined results, so only the combined results will be reported. For most participants (78%, *n*=45), the course they were enrolled in was the first

⁸ Due to space reasons in the tables, the next mention of these two courses will be abbreviated (GL for ‘Global Literacy’ and CC for ‘Cross-cultural communication in English’), omitted, or distinguished with a slash (/) in the respective order given.

time they have taken an online collaborative course. As whether the technology used in the course was new or not, 60% (n=35) answered ‘Yes,’ while 40% (n=23) answered ‘No.’ As for whether such a course is necessary at the university, 91% (n=53) answered ‘Yes.’ The only question of the five questions which displayed unanimous responses was the question, “Do you think interacting with students in universities in other countries is helpful?”, for which 100% (n=58) responded ‘Yes.’ For the last question about whether students would take another course like this one, 95% (n=55) responded ‘Yes.’

Next, the results of the Likert items are presented in Table 3. Like Table 2, the results are given for individual courses and discussed in combination where warranted.

Table 3. Survey Results-Likert Items

Question	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
D1	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	2/4	3/7	7/12	12/21	21/12	36/21
D2	0/1	0/2	0/0	0/0	1/3	2/5	7/5	12/9	22/19	38/33
C1	1/0	2/0	0/2	0/3	3/6	5/10	5/9	9/16	21/11	36/19
C2	0/0	0/0	1/1	2/2	0/3	0/5	6/10	10/17	23/14	40/24
L1	0/2	0/3	0/2	0/3	6/6	10/10	8/9	14/16	16/9	28/16
L2	1/0	2/0	0/1	0/2	3/5	5/9	7/10	12/17	29/12	50/21
T1	1/1	2/2	4/4	7/7	3/5	5/9	8/10	14/17	14/8	24/14
T2	0/2	0/3	0/1	0/2	4/7	7/12	9/7	16/12	17/11	29/19
S1	0/0	0/0	1/3	2/5	2/9	3/16	12/9	21/16	15/7	26/12
S2	0/0	0/0	0/3	0/5	0/4	0/7	9/13	16/22	21/8	36/14
N1	2/1	3/2	0/1	0/2	0/4	0/7	7/10	12/17	21/12	36/21
N2	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/2	0/6	0/10	4/9	7/6	26/13	45/22

Legend: D=Delivery; C=Contribution; L=Learning; T=Technology; S=Satisfaction; N=Need, n=n (GL/CC)

All of the items elicited more positive (Agree and Strongly Agree) responses than negative (Disagree and Strongly Disagree) ones and also showed similar distributions of answers, regardless of course distinction. The second L(earning) item which asked about improvement in understanding other cultures showed the highest rate of Strongly Agree at 50% (n=29) for the ‘Global Literacy’ (GL) course. This course also showed a higher rate of Strongly Agree for all of the items in contrast to the ‘Cross-cultural Communication in English’ (CC) course. As for the negative responses, the highest percentage was found regarding the T(echnology) items with both GL and CC showing low satisfaction rates for both items in this category, which

dealt with the technology used in the courses. In terms of specific items, the C(ontribution) and N(eed) categories showed similar distributions. Overall, the survey participants seemed to be satisfied with the courses.

Lastly, a sampling of responses to the open-ended questions which asked students about the best and worst things about the course is provided.⁹ The questions were as follows:

(3) Open-ended questions

- 1) What was the best thing about this course?
- 2) What was the worst thing about this course?
- 3) What needs to be improved in the course?

The results of the qualitative content analysis of the survey participants' responses displayed several themes according to the questions asked. Major themes were determined qualitatively and quantitatively according to keywords and the relative number of relevant responses given.

First, regarding answers to the first question of "What has the best thing about this course?", the two major themes of *language skills* and *different cultures* were extracted. The main keyword in the responses was "improve."¹⁰ Sample responses are given in (4).

(4) Sample responses which included "improve"

"I could learn how to convey my words clearly. This course helped me improve the practical part of English like speaking."

[GL]¹¹

"It can help to improve my English speaking." [GL]

"We can talk about anything in English with no worries and it helps me improve speaking." [CC]

"We can talk to others and improve our language skills better." [CC]

Another keyword found in the responses was "opportunities," which is shown in the extracts provided in (5).

⁹ All of the responses are provided verbatim, with no corrections to grammar and spelling to preserve authenticity. Respondent information was not given as all of the responses came from unique respondents.

¹⁰ Derivations of the same word have not been mentioned (e.g., communicate, communication) and can be considered to be represented in the given word.

¹¹ The abbreviation for the courses the responses originated from have been given in square brackets ([GL]='Global Literacy'; [CC]='Cross-cultural Communication in English').

(5) Sample responses which included “opportunities”

“I really do like it when I organize my thoughts into sentences. And by giving me opportunities to use English in an academic setting.” [GL]

“Having the opportunity to discuss with students from diverse backgrounds and being able to understand the culture better.” [GL]

“It was a great opportunity for me to experience untact, technical, international and global society. I think universities should bet at the lead of the society, suggesting new standards and norms in a fast-changing world.” [GL]

The second major theme found was *different cultures*, which encompassed keywords such as “different” and “other.” The following are some sample extracts from the responses.

(6) Sample responses which included “different” and “other”

“I learned about different cultures, and I can use English as a communication tool to get what I want to know.” [GL]

“I genuinely loved talking about social issues with students from different backgrounds and cultures. It was amazing to see how differently everybody views different issues.” [CC]

“It was a very valuable chance for me to communicate with so many different people. Unlike in Korea only, by discussing with students abroad I could get a better picture of Japan and Taiwan. Especially since we could share different points on same issues, both verbally and in a written form, it was great to learn how different people take approach on the same issue. If the course could be extended to other universities in other countries, I think it would be great.” [GL]

“Understanding the aspects of other cultures that I’ve never thought about. We can get more information from other countries.” [CC]

For the second open-ended question, “What was the worst thing about this course?”, most answers dealt with technical problems while some responses were related to (mis)communication issues. The keywords found were “technical,” “connection,” “communication,” and “participate.” The following are sample responses regarding the second question.

(7) Sample responses which included “technical,” “connection,” and “communication/communicate”

“Based on technical problems, we usually waste a lot of time on fixing them, that’s tooooooo bad.” [CC]

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*“Some students’ technical problem really bothered me.” [CC]
“Bad connection. Because it is online, sometimes the speaker is not heard very well, or it takes a long time for my mic to lead so that I can speak.” [GL]
“Due to a poor connection, sometimes we can’t take part in the class.” [GL]
“Some class participants are not good at speaking English, so actually for the most of the time, we cannot have an effective communication.” [CC]
Some students are not willing to talk or participate which made the interaction quite difficult.” [CC]*

The third and last open-ended question was “What needs to be improved in the course?” This question showed the broadest range of responses due to the unlimited scope of the question. Some keywords which emerged frequently were “encourage” and “(im)patient.”

(8) Sample responses which included “encourage”

*“Encouraging students to speak would be great.” [GL]
“When discussing upon an issue, students should be encouraged to introduce their culture to the students from other universities.” [GL]
“Each university should be encouraging the students more to make the interaction more active.” [CC]*

(9) Sample response which included “(im)patient”

“I think the most important thing is that all students stay patient with each other, because not every one is on the same speaking level of English. I think being impatient with one another, and making students feel incompetent, builds a bit of a barrier and disconnect between students. The environment should be patient and excepting so all students can feel comfortable to participate in discussion and give their honest opinions on topics.” [GL]

This section presented the results of the program analysis and the survey. The results show that the KWCCDLP has maintained a clear focus in its courses for its learners and that learners are relatively satisfied with the program.

6 Discussion

The program analysis of the KWCCDLP courses and the perceptions of the students show that students are aware of the use of ELF and that non-native vs. non-native interaction induces authentic target language learning, which supports recent literature (e.g., Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013). The CCDL program incorporates diverse activities which enable students to become the true agents of their learning. Activities such as VC sessions, oral chat, and asynchronous online interaction in the form of a discussion board complement one another in terms of the context and mode of communication so that technology is harnessed (Margaryan, Littlejohn, & Vojt 2011, Thompson, 2013). This multi-faceted approach coupled with high learning motivation provides a holistic cross-cultural learning experience for students. The CCDL courses are also a community of non-native speakers in which bonds are strengthened through continuous interaction both inside and outside the classroom and through discoveries of cross-cultural similarities and differences.

As for satisfaction levels, unlike previous studies such as Capdeferro & Romero (2012), students seemed to be satisfied with the course format of utilizing collaborative online activities. In addition, when looking at learner contributions (Breen 2001; as cited in White, 2006; White 2006), learners did have certain expectations and beliefs about what the courses were meant to deliver for them. The survey showed that participants had highly positive perceptions of learning more about other cultures through the medium of English, which echoes the positive attitudes found in online language learning contexts as seen in Jung et al. (2019).

As for the question of what the current state of the program is, while the learners did perceive the advantages of using technology, which supported previous findings (Kern, Ware, & Warschauer, 2008), it did not seem to be the technology used which was a problem. Instead the technical problems were perceived to be bothersome and hindering to effective communication as seen in the open-ended question responses in the survey results. The survey also showed that intercultural communication is still a skill that needs to be acquired through authentic exposure and that such a program and courses are still in demand at the university level. Thus, there seems to be a need for the program to evolve as to which direction it should take as the need for intercultural communication has still not been intricately incorporated into university level courses to satiate students' needs and wants.

For this program and similar programs, it is suggested that the target university investigated and other universities maintain such long distance joint programs and courses as they seem to be perceived to be beneficial by students. However, the program and courses need to be regularly monitored for quality control and to keep satisfaction levels high. To do so, checklists could be made and surveys can be administered to students and the faculty

involved regularly. As for technology, universities tend to lag behind advances due to costs. Instead of attempting to incorporate new technology, it would be better to determine what students consider technological norms and adjust technology to what they are familiar with. As the program here has a clear focus on enhancing intercultural competence in terms of both language and culture, efforts need to be made towards improving the overall curriculum. This type of English and intercultural communication program needs to take both content and delivery into consideration.

7 Conclusion

This paper has attempted to show the current state of a cross-cultural distance learning program and how it fosters ELF learning among non-native English speakers from different backgrounds. Overtly, the CCDL program aims to foster English learning among non-native speakers situated in different countries through the use of technology to transcend space and time. However, covertly, through the CCDL courses, students learn that English is a *lingua franca*—rather than the language of only native English speakers—and that they can be owners of English (Kirkpatrick, 2007). Students are exposed to authentic non-native varieties of English and take responsibility for their English learning. The only pressure students have is to understand others and to make themselves understood by others. Of course, this is a daunting task in itself, but in ELF learning, taking ownership of English is an important realization for non-native speakers (Widdowson, 1994).

In terms of practice, the CCDL courses immerse students in the context of ELF where they are continuously challenged to communicate in English in order to achieve mutual cross-cultural understanding. Although most of them enroll in the CCDL courses hoping to improve English skills *per se* rather than English skills in the ELF context, at the end of the course they will have learned that English is not just a means for interaction with native speakers but for communication with non-native speakers in the true sense of the word. In other words, students can reorient their English learning toward how to communicate effectively in English with other non-native speakers of English rather than striving to acquire a particular native variety. This is what makes the CCDL course such a unique and innovative English teaching program in the Asian context where strengthening networking among Asians is much more called for in today's globalized world. Once the students realize through the CCDL courses that they are users of ELF by both exposing their English to other ELF users from different cultural backgrounds and being exposed to the English used by other ELF users, they are able to acquire more confidence in using their own English variety in whatever ELF contexts they encounter in the future.

This paper is to serve as a review and as such it is not without its limitations. One limitation is that it examined only one particular program and is so relatively small scale and cannot be taken as supporting the effectiveness of similar distance learning language programs. In addition, as the data was collected via a survey, what could be gleaned from the responses may have been limited. The number of respondents was also small, but this was because responses were elicited from students who recently took courses in the CCDL program and the need for a current review of the program. Due to space limitations, discussion about the program's English language learning curriculum could not be included. Further studies could delve into the intricacies of the curriculum in regard to collaborative learning as well.

There are a few implications for the future of distance learning of English in Asian contexts. First, there still seem to be pedagogical limitations in learning English, despite access to the internet and other means of exposure. Second, universities do not provide sufficient means to foster intercultural communication through their English curricula and courses, although communication is a prominent skill that needs to be learned. Third, technology itself does not seem to be problematic, as students are apt at adjusting to new changes. As such, distance learning programs, in general, should continue subsisting and innovating to meet the challenges of the future.

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Appendix Survey

This survey is to find out what students think about the online collaborative components of the course you are enrolled in (Cross-cultural Communication in English or Global Literacy).

<Yes-No Items>

1. Is this your first time taking a collaborative online course?
2. Is any of the technology used in the course new to you?
3. Do you think this kind of course is needed at the university?
4. Do you think interacting with students in universities in other countries is helpful?
5. Would you take a course like this again?

<Likert Items>

- D1: This course is special because I can interact in English with international students.
D2: This course is not different from other English language learning courses.
C1: I participated actively in the online collaborative activities (e.g., group chat; presentation discussions).
C2: I spoke a lot in the online collaborative activities.
L1: I learned how to use English better for intercultural communication.
L2: I improved my understanding of other cultures.
T1: I had no problems using the online technology in the course.
T2: The technology used in the course is appropriate.
S1: I am satisfied with the online collaborative activities in the course (e.g., group chat; presentation discussions).
S2: I am satisfied with the course overall.
N1: I need a course like this to interact in English with international students.
N2: The university needs to offer an online collaborative course like this course.

<Open-ended Items>

1. What was the best thing about the course?
2. What was the worst thing about the course?
3. What needs to be improved in the course?

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Received: Sept 25, 2020

Revised: Nov 27, 2020

Accepted: Dec 1, 2020