Self-Evaluated Language Skills' Impact on Language Experiences: Evidence from COIL-based Classes between Kobe University and Dublin City University

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語学力の自己評価と授業経験： －神戸大学とダブリンシティー大学の共修－

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Abstract

　　The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted international student exchange programs, as Japan's strict border control measures have prevented foreign national students from entering the country. This resulted in an abrupt cancellation of planned study abroad programs, greatly affecting students at Kobe University's (KU) Faculty of Economics and Dublin City University (DCU). KU and DCU established an online classroom using the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) approach to address these challenges. This virtual classroom allowed students from both universities to interact with each other on interdisciplinary topics related to economics and interculturalism, while also improving their language learning experience. They shared and discussed prepared presentations, enabling students from both universities to develop their cross-cultural competence. The present study conducts a comparative analysis of the two universities, while also examining the relationship between students' self-evaluated language skills and their language learning experiences through COIL. Our analysis revealed notable discrepancies in how students perceived COIL and their language learning experiences. Within this analysis, we find COIL to be an effective alternative to traditional study abroad programs, allowing universities to maintain connections with their partner institutions and enhance their students' international awareness.

1.　Introduction

The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 caused significant disruptions in international activities, including student exchanges in higher education institutions (HEI). In response to this situation, HEI sectors in Japan had to shift their classes online quickly, and students were prohibited from coming onto campus. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Japan (MOFA) also implemented strict border control measures, which prevented foreign nationals from entering the country (MOFA, 2020, Asia Pacific Initiative, 2021: 5). Consequently, students at Kobe University (KU) Faculty of Economics in Japan and Dublin City University (DCU) in Ireland were greatly affected when their scheduled study abroad plans were unexpectedly terminated. DCU's Glasnevin campus was temporarily closed, and the number of exchange students, including from Japan, dropped significantly. In the face of these challenges, KU and DCU students found it difficult to continue their foreign language studies.

The pandemic forced HEI to explore alternative ways to maintain connections with their partner institutions. KU and DCU have had an enduring relationship since its establishment in 1992. Over the years, both universities have exchanged numerous students in both directions. To overcome the challenge caused by the unprecedented pandemic, both universities created an online classroom in 2021, using the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) method. The COIL approach allows students from different academic disciplines to communicate and interact with each other.

This virtual classroom between KU and DCU uses the COIL method to enhance international awareness by presenting interdisciplinary topics on economics and interculturalism, while improving students' language learning experience. It benefits KU and DCU students by allowing them to share and discuss prepared presentations. This study aims to present unique perspectives from our interdisciplinary COIL-based classes that function as a learning space for both learners of English and Japanese. In this paper we will examine the following:

- We explore how students' perceptions of COIL-based classes and foreign language learning differ between KU and DCU when comparing English for KU students and Japanese for DCU students.
- We analyze the relationship between students' self-assessed foreign language skills in speaking, writing, reading, and listening and two indicators: language learning and COIL experience.

2.　Education Programs

2.1　Overview of COIL

COIL is a virtual classroom that connects learners from different countries or cultures to work together. Among European policymakers, "virtual exchange" appears to be accepted as the umbrella term to cover all forms of "telecollaborative" teaching and learning, including COIL (O'Dowd, 2018: 4). Established in 2006 at the State University of New York (SUNY), the COIL model sets itself apart from other telecollaborative learning methods by utilizing a "joint or partially-merged syllabus" (Rubin, 2017: 29). Educators from different institutions collaborate to plan a COIL module, including defining learning outcomes, creating a syllabus, designing activities, and co-facilitating the class (SUNY COIL Center).

Successful COIL programs consist of four key phases: an ice-breaking phase, an intercultural discussion phase, a collaborative project phase, and a presentation & reflection phase (SUNY COIL Center). Telecollaborative learning methods, including COIL, have numerous advantages for learners and educators. Studies have revealed positive effects on language learning, such as "authentic access to the language," improved language skills, and increased motivation and confidence (Çiftçi and Savaş 2018: 291). They can also promote intercultural learning by challenging stereotypes, boosting intercultural communicative competence (ICC) skills, and enhancing intercultural awareness and understanding (Çiftçi and Savaş 2018: 291).

2.2　Program at KU

The Faculty of Economics at KU offers a unique five-year degree program in economics, which is referred to as IFEEK (International Five-year Economics Education Program at Kobe University). Students who are interested in obtaining this degree can choose to join the IFEEK program during the second year of their bachelor's degree. The program aims to teach students how to apply economic concepts in English to address real-world challenges by studying at KU and its partner universities abroad. The emphasis is on gaining proficiency in economics and utilizing it worldwide, with classes taught in both Japanese and English.

During the first quarter of the academic year, IFEEK students have the opportunity to participate in the Special Seminar on Global Communication course. This elective course is designed explicitly for second-year IFEEK students and for those planning to study abroad in the upcoming semester. The course is divided into two parts. The initial section focuses on intercultural communication and comprises engaging lectures and interactive activities. The latter part involves connecting KU students with DCU students

through COIL sessions. Prior to the commencement of the course, the content is designed and discussed thoroughly with instructors at DCU.

2.3　Programs at DCU

The School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies (SALIS) at DCU currently provides two Bachelor of Arts programs that allow students to major in Japanese. In these programs, which are respectively called ALTS and INTB, students either double major in Japanese and one European language (ALTS) or Japanese and Business (INTB). INTB students take business-related modules at the DCU Business School. After the COVID-19 pandemic, studying abroad in Japan was no longer mandatory for students in these programs. Yet, most of them still decide to embark on their study abroad as part of their four-year degrees.

　　The Japanese team primarily aims to equip students with linguistic skills to become language professionals throughout three years of Japanese language classes at DCU. The SALIS also offers modules dedicated to Japanese culture, society, and literature, which contribute to students' intercultural competence and interest in the target country. The COIL sessions with KU provide an opportunity for DCU students to test and improve their practical language skills and intercultural competence.

3.　Methods

In 2023, the COIL sessions brought together undergraduate students from both institutions. The students had a weekly COIL session via Zoom for four weeks between April and May. The sessions were held at 17:00 JST/9:00 IST for 70 minutes. During these sessions, the students prepared ten-minute presentations which covered topics in both economics and interculturalism. After the presentations, students engaged in small group discussions. Two presentations were given in English and another two were given in Japanese during each COIL session. Teachers chose broad and approachable presentation topics to help students from differing backgrounds engage in discussion more openly. Since courses offered at KU are 90 minutes long, KU students spent the last 20 minutes breaking up in pairs and reflecting on their performance after each COIL session.

　　Upon completing the four-week COIL sessions, KU and DCU administered a questionnaire to twelve students (n=12) who participated (Table 1): six from KU and six from DCU. The participants were asked to respond on a four-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (4). The questions listed in Table 2 were designed to measure the participants' self-assessed language proficiency in this COIL program,

taking cues from a survey created by Iwatsuki (2022) to assess the English communication abilities of international students. The study details were explained, and consent was obtained from all participants in advance. In accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation, this research project had been approved by the DCU Research Ethics Committee before the participants were involved.

To identify meaningful distinctions between KU and DCU, we employed a two-sided t-test to compare the mean of responses from the two universities. Furthermore, we utilized Stata software to examine possible correlations among the participants' answers to the questionnaire.

Table 1 Demographics

Student	University	Length of studying English/Japanese	Study abroad experience
1	KU	2-5 years	never
2	KU	More than 5 years	never
3	KU	More than 5 years	never
4	KU	More than 5 years	never
5	KU	More than 5 years	never
6	KU	More than 5 years	never
7	DCU	2-5 years	never
8	DCU	2-5 years	never
9	DCU	2-5 years	never
10	DCU	2-5 years	never
11	DCU	less than 2 years	never
12	DCU	less than 2 years	never

Table 2 Questions from the Administered Questionnaire

A: Self-evaluation of the four skills

A-1   Please evaluate your English/Japanese proficiency (Speaking)

A-2   Please evaluate your English/Japanese proficiency (Writing)

A-3   Please evaluate your English/Japanese proficiency (Reading)

A-4   Please evaluate your English/Japanese proficiency (Listening)

B: Perception of COIL-based classes

B-1   I think I communicated fairly well with my peers throughout the COIL program

B-2   I think connecting online is a good step before studying abroad

B-3	I am satisfied with my choice of taking this class
B-4	The presentation was challenging
B-5	I enjoyed the topics chosen for this class
B-6	Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) is a good class for deciding whether I want to study abroad in the future
B-7	It didn't bother me when I made a mistake
B-8	I was enthusiastic about meeting new people
B-9	It was challenging for me to speak up in a group of people
B-10	I felt thrilled to implement new ideas
B-11	I was able to learn from my mistakes
B-12	I enjoyed learning new things
B-13	I felt hesitant to consult my professors when I was stuck with understanding class
B-14	I felt terrible when I couldn't answer the question
B-15	I think connecting online is a good step before actually meeting in person
B-16	I found myself asking many questions about my KU/DCU classmates

C: Language Learning Experience

C-1	I was competitive in language learning
C-2	I felt optimistic about studying a foreign language
C-3	I was satisfied with my current language ability
C-4	I had no problem speaking with my KU/DCU classmates
C-5	I enjoyed studying English/Japanese
C-6	I felt that there was a great language barrier when communicating with my KU/DCU classmates
C-7	I communicated well in English/Japanese
C-8	The language was not a barrier
C-9	Speaking in English/Japanese was overwhelming
C-10	I felt anxious when speaking with my KU/DCU classmates
C-11	I think my English/Japanese communication ability was quite good
C-12	I was confident with my English/Japanese language ability

4．Results

4.1　Students' Perceptions of COIL-based classes and Their Language Learning Experiences

Table 3 reveals that students from KU and DCU have similar confidence levels in their ability to speak, write and listen in a foreign language (i.e., Japanese for DCU students and English for KU students). This is evident when looking at A-1 (Speaking), A-2 (Writing), and A-4 (Listening). On the other hand, KU students rated their reading skills higher than DCU students in Reading (A-3), with a statistically significant difference in their self-assessment (t=-2.88, p<.05).

Table 3 Students' Perceptions of COIL-based classes and their Language Learning Experience

	Kobe University (KU)		Dublin City University (DCU)		Mean Difference (KU – DCU)
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*
A-1	2.33	.75	2.33	.94	.00
A-2	2.33	.75	2.33	.75	.00
A-3	3.33	.47	2.83	.37	-2.88**
A-4	2.50	.96	2.50	.96	.00
B-1	2.50	.50	3.17	.69	2.72**
B-2	3.83	.37	3.83	.37	.00
B-3	3.83	.37	3.83	.37	.00
B-4	3.50	.76	2.33	.47	-4.50***
B-5	3.67	.75	3.17	.37	-2.08*
B-6	3.67	.47	3.33	.47	-1.73
B-7	3.67	.47	2.83	1.21	-2.22**
B-8	3.67	.47	3.50	.76	- .64
B-9	2.67	.47	2.33	1.25	- .87
B-10	3.33	.47	2.83	.37	-2.88**
B-11	3.67	.47	3.33	.47	-1.73
B-12	3.33	.75	3.83	.37	2.08*
B-13	2.17	.90	2.33	.75	.49
B-14	2.83	.69	2.50	.96	- .98
B-15	3.33	.94	2.83	.69	-1.48
B-16	3.00	.82	3.33	.75	1.04
C-1	2.50	.76	2.33	.47	- .64
C-2	3.33	.75	3.33	.75	.00
C-3	2.00	.82	2.00	.58	.00
C-4	2.83	.90	2.67	.75	- .49
C-5	3.17	.90	3.50	.50	1.12
C-6	3.17	.69	1.83	.69	-4.75***
C-7	2.67	.75	2.33	.94	- .96
C-8	2.33	.94	2.67	1.11	.79
C-9	3.00	.82	2.00	.82	-3.00**
C-10	2.50	.50	2.17	1.07	- .98
C-11	2.00	.82	2.33	.94	.93
C-12	1.50	.50	2.17	1.07	1.96*

Notes: M: mean, SD: standard deviation, t: t-statistic for comparing the group means;

*p<.1, ** p<.05, ***p<.01*

T-values point out a statistically significant difference in perceived presentation difficulty between KU and DCU students in B-4 (t=-4.50, p<.01); KU students found presenting in front of the class more challenging. Nonetheless, making mistakes during presentations affected KU students less than DCU students, as shown by a statistically significant difference in responses to B-7 (t=-2.22, p<.05). In addition, KU students demonstrated more enthusiasm to explore new ideas in B-10 (t=-2.88, p<.05). In C-6, KU students reported experiencing a significantly higher language barrier when

communicating with their peers (t=-4.75, p<.01). Additionally, according to responses to C-9, they felt more overwhelmed speaking English (t=-3.00, p<.05).

At the same time, it was found that DCU students performed better at communicating with their peers than KU students in the COIL sessions; the statistically significant difference is found in response to B-1 (t=2.72, p<.05). Furthermore, based on the response to B-12, it appears that DCU students are more receptive to new challenges and learning opportunities (t=2.08, p<.1). Regarding C-12, which asked about confidence levels in language abilities, it is clear that DCU students feel significantly more confident with their language skills (t=1.96, p<.1).

4.2　Analysis of Student Self-Evaluations

4.2.1　Students' Self-Assessed Language Skills and Perception of COIL-based classes

How much students took away from the COIL program was highly dependent on their speaking skills, as indicated in Table 4. Students with higher self-assessed speaking abilities were more interested in studying abroad in the future relative to students with weaker skills (corr (A-1, B-6); r=.59, p<.05). They were also more unfazed by their mistakes (corr (A-1, B-7); r=.58, p<.05), learned more from their mistakes (corr (A-1, B-11); r=.59, p<.05) and didn't feel as bad when they could not answer a question (corr (A-1, B-14); r=-.65, p<.05).

Table 4 Correlation Between Students' Self-Assessed Language Skills
and Perception of COIL-based classes

	B-1	B-2	B-3	B-4	B-5	B-6	B-7	B-8
A-1 Speaking	.52*	-.09	-.09	-.30	-.10	.59**	.58**	.26
A-2 Writing	.11	-.10	.20	-.09	.23	.45	.11	-.23
A-3 Reading	-.21	-.38	-.38	.02	-.11	.17	.46	-.15
A-4 Listening	.51*	0	.23	.05	.20	.35	.39	.20

	B-9	B-10	B-11	B-12	B-13	B-14	B-15	B-16
A-1 Speaking	-.51*	.33	.59**	.41	.12	-.65**	.08	.53*
A-2 Writing	-.35	.15	.45	.47	-.13	-.22	.22	.19
A-3 Reading	-.26	-.03	.17	-.42	-.05	-.13	.18	-.04
A-4 Listening	-.18	.26	.35	.20	.16	-.41	.35	.44

*p<.1,**p<.05,***p<.01

Correlations at slightly lower statistical confidence levels were also discovered between students' self-assessments of speaking (corr (A-1, B-1); *r*=.52, *p*<.1) and listening (corr (A-4, B-1); *r*=.51, *p*<.1) skills and their self-perceived communication level with peers throughout the COIL session. In addition, higher speaking skills tended to be associated with lower challenges in speaking up in a group setting (corr (A-1, B-9); *r*=-.51, *p*<.1), while also being positively correlated with asking questions more to their classmates (corr (A-1, B-16); *r*=.53, *p*<.1).

4.2.2　Students' Self-Assessed Language Skills and Their Language Learning Experience

Table 5 illustrates a robust connection between students' self-evaluation of their speaking skills and their communication efficiency (corr (A-1, C-7); *r*=.79, *p*<.01). Likewise, an exceptionally significant correlation was found between their ability to speak and their lack of language barriers (corr (A-1, C-8); *r*=.75, *p*<.01). Furthermore, their speaking ability demonstrates a connection with their confidence in their language skills (corr (A-1, C-12); *r*=.73, *p*<.01). In addition, the study has revealed a strong correlation between students' reading proficiency and their contentment with their current language ability (corr (A-3, C-3); *r*=.72, *p*<.01).

The students' self-assessments of their speaking and listening abilities demonstrated high correlations when questioned about any difficulties in speaking with their classmates (corr (A-1, C-4); *r*=.60, *p*<.05 and corr (A-4, C-4); *r*=.68, *p*<.05, respectively). In addition, a high correlation was seen between their speaking proficiency and their perception of their communication skills being good (corr (A-1, C-11); *r*=.58, *p*<.05). Similarly, their enjoyment of studying the language (corr (A-4, C-5); *r*=.58, *p*<.05) and their ability to communicate smoothly (corr (A-4, C-7); *r*=.60, *p*<.05) were strongly correlated with their listening skills.

There were also statistically significant correlations found between the speaking abilities of students and being overwhelmed about speaking in English or Japanese (corr (A-1, C-9); *r*=-.51, *p*<.1), as well as their level of anxiety when communicating with peers (corr (A-1, C-10); *r*=-.50, *p*<.1). In both cases, higher speaking proficiency is associated with lower negative feelings. Moreover, students who better evaluated their own listening skills tend to have a lower perception of struggling with language barriers (corr (A-4, C-8); *r*=.50, *p*<.1).

Table 5 Correlation Between Students' Self-Assessed Language Skills
and Their Language Learning Experience

	C-1	C-2	C-3	C-4	C-5	C-6	C-7	C-8	C-9	C-10	C-11	C-12
A-1 Speaking	.36	.35	.40	.60**	.35	-.31	.79***	.75***	-.51*	-.50*	.58**	.73***
A-2 Writing	-.12	-.05	.00	.40	-.05	-.23	.39	.32	-.47	-.04	.04	.46
A-3 Reading	.15	-.30	.72***	.05	-.30	.44	.10	.08	.44	.13	.16	.03
A-4 Listening	-.07	.23	.37	.68**	.58**	.00	.60**	.50*	-.36	-.41	.19	.48

*$p<.1$,**$p<.05$,***$p<.01$

5. Discussion

The present study examined students' perceptions and experiences concerning COIL-based classes and language acquisition. Comparative analysis was conducted to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the two institutions. Furthermore, we investigated the correlation between students' self-assessed proficiencies in speaking, writing, reading, and listening and two key aspects: COIL-based classes and language learning experience.

5.1　Comparative Analysis

Based on our research, comparable levels of confidence in speaking, writing, and listening were observed among students from KU and DCU, with the exception of reading, where KU students were found to be more confident. Additionally, our findings indicate that KU students are more inclined towards COIL-based classes, whereas DCU students report feeling more self-assured in their language learning experience. Here, we will further explore these findings to gain a better understanding.

5.1.1　COIL Experience

KU students demonstrated similar confidence levels as DCU students; however, they encountered challenges when delivering presentations to their peers (B-4). This may be due to their limited experience in public speaking, as their language education did not offer them sufficient training (Ogawa, 2017:55). Instead, KU students tended to focus more on reading, which resulted in them feeling notably more confident in those skills compared to DCU students.

According to DCU students, they believe they communicated effectively with their peers during the COIL sessions (B-1) and enjoyed learning new things (B-12). However, KU students displayed higher satisfaction with the COIL program and were less affected by their mistakes than DCU students (B-7). One KU student shared that the COIL experience encouraged them to work harder despite difficulties communicating with their

DCU classmates. It is vital for educators to recognize that struggling to comprehend does not necessarily indicate a lack of effort or interest on the student's part.

The following comments are select excerpts from student evaluations of the course:

Student's comments from KU (translated into English)
- "The theme choice was excellent and allowed me to learn about Ireland."
- "It would be beneficial to have a Japanese representative speak about Ireland and an Irish representative speak about Japan. The conversation would be lively and engaging.
- "[The conversation topic] '*Ireland Past and Present*' was difficult to follow regarding its specific regions and age. It would have been preferable for the scope to be more focused. However, it was interesting to observe the variations that can occur within a common theme."
- "I found some economic, environmental, and job-related phrases confusing."

Student's comments from DCU (Original)
- "Some topics were a bit difficult to discuss, e.g., business in Japan."
- "I enjoyed all the topics. I felt all of them were relevant to our current situations as students intending to go abroad, and they were not too simple, so they presented good challenges in terms of research."
- "They were broad topics, which allowed for many divergences in conversation among students, which is good."
- "Most of the topics were great. However, I felt the economic and environmental issues topic was difficult for both parties to develop into."
- "They were interesting and topical to discuss."
- "The topics were very interesting. I did not realize we had so many things in common. The most surprising thing for me was learning that Japanese people water the concrete outside their houses sometimes."

Based on the above excerpts, it is evident that the discussion topic had a generally positive impact on both KU and DCU students. Some DCU students found the topics appropriately challenging, requiring good research skills, particularly those with a business background. KU students having a higher confidence level in their COIL experience compared to DCU students could be attributed to the fact that online classes offer a more comfortable and private space in contrast to face-to-face interactions. On the other hand, DCU students might have grown accustomed to the opportunity to interact

in-person with their Japanese peers. In addition to accommodating an active Japanese society, DCU provides modules where DCU students and Japanese exchange students work together. Therefore, exploring unique features that differentiate COIL from such on-campus activities may possibly enhance the value of COIL sessions for both KU and DCU students.

5.1.2 Language Learning Experience

Regarding the language learning experiences, results indicate that KU students experienced greater language barriers when communicating with DCU classmates: "I felt that there was a significant language barrier when communicating with my DCU classmates (C-6)." One possible reason for these difficulties could be a lack of understanding of what the other person said. Alternatively, it could be due to insufficient foreign language skills on one or both sides, resulting in challenges with comprehension and communication. The feeling of being overwhelmed when communicating in English for KU students (C-9) may also be related to C-6, as KU students may find it more challenging to converse with foreigners, leading to communication issues. However, DCU students appear to have no trouble speaking, regardless of their proficiency level. This may be due to their confidence in speaking, as evidenced by the response, "I was confident with my Japanese language ability (C-12)."

Although HEIs in Ireland "operate autonomously enjoying academic freedom and designing their courses and modules" (Kelly and Bruen, 2015: 154), DCU, as a European university, is conscious of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) "can-do" or "action-oriented" approach (The Council of Europe, 2020: 28). The latest governmental strategy for foreign language education in Ireland is modeled on CEFR to a substantial extent. While this strategy statement does not restrict the way foreign languages are taught in HEIs, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) strategizes to create a more "engaging learning environment" in foreign language classes (DES, 2020:8) and aims to increase students' "communicative proficiency." (DES, 2020: 20).

In contrast, Japan has experienced innovative changes in the last decade, shifting its focus from primarily teaching grammar and vocabulary to emphasizing a more hands-on learning approach. However, it is clear that students in Japan still face difficulties, especially when it comes to speaking (Inoue, 1998; Imura, 2003; Ogawa, 2017:55). The emphasis on "teaching through written words: 'Visual Teaching' and the sole focus on 'English for entrance examinations'" in traditional English education in Japan may be contributing to this issue (Ogawa, 2017:63).

5.2　Correlation Analysis

After a comprehensive analysis of the self-assessment results for the student's language ability, it was determined that their speaking skills displayed the most significant correlation in relation to their evaluation of the COIL program and language learning experiences. In addition, their listening skills also displayed a noteworthy connection. These findings can be attributed to the implementation of a communication-based class that facilitated online interactions between KU and DCU students. Here, we will delve deeper into these findings to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

5.2.1　Correlation on COIL Experience

We explored how students' self-evaluation of their language skills impacted their connection with their COIL experience. Based on our findings in 4.2.1, we can assume that their speaking skills significantly influenced their performance during the COIL sessions (B-7, 11, and 14). Furthermore, students expressed satisfaction with their COIL experience and even noted that it influenced their decision to study abroad (B-6).

　　Students at KU generally are at an "independent user" *B1* level on the CEFR scale.[1] This level of proficiency has significantly impacted their enjoyment and success in their COIL experience, as shown in the results (B-9). Although it was assumed that they could effectively engage in COIL, the students showed lower confidence in speaking during the class (B-1). Despite their extensive study experience, KU students may have varying capabilities and require more familiarity with practical speaking situations to succeed comprehensively. As a result, there were instances where the classroom remained silent at the start of class.

　　On the other hand, the "action-oriented" approach (The Council of Europe, 2020: 28), which DCU employs in many language modules, helps learners to become capable of completing various tasks in the target language, which may have contributed to the student's confidence in speaking (B-1). While some DCU students are at the *A2* level (basic elementary-intermediate), it is important that students who are less confident in their language skills can still benefit from their COIL experience without feeling insecure. This would be considered a great success.

　　COIL-based classes are a valuable chance for students to enhance their speaking abilities and communicate effectively with their peers, as evidenced by the results.

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[1] The CEFR scale is divided into six levels; "the developmental stages of language learner from "basic user" (levels *A1* and *A2*), through "independent user" (*B1* and *B2*) to "proficient user" (levels *C1* and *C2*)." (DES, 2020: 20)

Therefore, it could be said that the successful implementation of COIL-based classes can be worthwhile only if it caters to students' diverse needs.

5.2.2　Correlation on Their Language Learning Experience

Our study examined the relationship between students' self-assessed confidence in the four language skills and their language learning experience. Results showed significant correlations between students' speaking self-assessment and language learning experiences. However, it is essential to recognize that listening is equally vital for effective communication. The study's findings reveal that student's listening self-assessment, as demonstrated in C-4, C-7, and C-8, were associated with successful communication.

During the course, there were moments when students communicated with each other without fully comprehending the questions being asked. One such situation occurred during a discussion in English on employment, where the term "probationary period" was not clearly understood by some of the KU students. This resulted in confusion for some KU students, who eventually gave up and were left wondering about the conversation. One of the aims of the KU-DCU COIL sessions was to offer students a platform to communicate with each other with minimal teacher supervision. Besides talking, students resorted to gestures and drawings to convey their messages. Such experiences allowed students to experience the problems of language barriers firsthand and incentivized them to seek ways to overcome these obstacles.

In the future, it may be beneficial to have a more concrete co-syllabus and clarify learning outcomes during each session. Adding a problem-based learning approach session for students to discuss and find solutions for communication obstacles encountered during their COIL experience may also play a big part.

6.　Conclusion

This paper explored the international awareness of KU-DCU students who participated in COIL sessions, specifically in interdisciplinary topics relating to economics and interculturalism. Upon conducting a comparative analysis of the two universities, notable discrepancies were observed regarding how students perceived the effectiveness of COIL-based classes and their language learning experience. While students from KU and DCU exhibited comparable levels of confidence in their speaking, writing, and listening abilities, it was observed that KU students had greater confidence in their reading skills. Additionally, it was noted that KU students displayed a stronger inclination towards their COIL experience, whereas DCU students reported greater confidence in their overall

language learning experience. The differences in the pedagogies employed in Japan and Ireland for language acquisition may be driving these differences.

Further, we analyzed the correlation between students' self-evaluated language skills - speaking, writing, reading, and listening - and indicators of the two categories: COIL-based classes and language learning experiences. A thorough evaluation of the student's language proficiency self-assessment revealed that their speaking skills exhibited the strongest link to their COIL experience and language learning experiences. Moreover, their listening abilities also showed a notable association. These outcomes display the incorporation of a communication-oriented class that enabled online interactions among KU and DCU students.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted KU and DCU students' opportunities to study abroad. However, implementing the COIL method between the two institutions generated student excitement. Despite KU and DCU returning to pre-COVID standards in course delivery and international mobility, the KU-DCU COIL sessions still provide students a valuable opportunity to interact and exchange knowledge with their peers from their target country.

While virtual classrooms have many benefits, there are also unresolved issues, such as scheduling issues due to differences in time zones and academic calendars, which have been a common challenge in past telecollaborative projects (Çiftçi and Savaş, 2018: 291). However, the academic calendar and time difference between KU and DCU were successfully overcome, making the creation of a syllabus feasible. Additionally, KU included a 5th-period class to make the most of daylight savings time in Ireland, effectively resolving the time difference issue.

It is important to note that the findings of this study are limited by the small number of subjects. However, it would be interesting to explore the effect of KU-DCU COIL on individual learning motivation and its efficacy for students planning to study abroad in future studies.

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