Uncorking Connections:

A COIL Experience in wine tourism and cultural exchange between Portugal and Japan

Criando laços:

Uma Experiência COIL no enoturismo e no intercâmbio cultural entre Portugal e Japão

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ABSTRACT: This article explores the implementation and outcomes of a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) project entitled "Cultural Crossroads: Wine and Tourism Collaboration Between Portugal and Japan." The project aimed to foster intercultural competence, enhance language proficiency, and develop collaborative skills among second-year wine tourism students from a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in Portugal and students from an English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) class on Global Citizenship at a Japanese University through a shared exploration of cultural and professional practices.

The project was structured into four main phases: introductory activities to build rapport, collaborative virtual tours of cultural landmarks, an in-depth examination of winemaking processes in Portugal and Japan, and reflective tasks to reinforce learning. Participants engaged in creative and interactive tasks using digital tools such as Padlet, Google Earth, and Zoom, allowing them to collaborate across time zones and cultural boundaries.

Key results included improved linguistic accuracy and fluency in English, a deeper understanding of each other's cultural and professional traditions, and stronger collaboration skills. This project highlights the potential of COIL as an innovative pedagogical approach to integrating real-world applications into language and cultural education, particularly in fields like tourism. By connecting

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students from two different continents, the initiative provided students with a meaningful and practical opportunity to get ready for international challenges in their future professions.

KEYWORDS: Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), Higher Education Institutions (HEI), English for (Wine) Tourism, Intercultural communication, pedagogical innovation

RESUMO: Este artigo reflete acerca da implementação e dos resultados de um projeto Online de Aprendizagem Colaborativa em Contexto Internacional (COIL), intitulado "Cultural Crossroads: Wine and Tourism Collaboration Between Portugal and Japan". O projeto teve como objetivo promover a competência intercultural, aperfeiçoar a proficiência linguística e desenvolver competências de colaboração entre estudantes do segundo ano do CTeSP em Enoturismo de uma Instituição de Ensino Superior (IES) em Portugal e estudantes de uma UC de Inglês como Meio de Instrução (EMI) sobre Cidadania Global de uma universidade japonesa, por meio de uma exploração conjunta de práticas culturais e profissionais.

O projeto foi estruturado em quatro fases principais: atividades de quebra-gelo, visitas virtuais colaborativas por marcos culturais, um estudo sobre os processos de vinificação em Portugal e no Japão e tarefas reflexivas para reforçar a aprendizagem. Os participantes realizaram atividades criativas e interativas utilizando ferramentas digitais como o Padlet, Google Earth e Zoom, permitindo-lhes colaborar em diferentes fusos horários e contextos culturais.

Os principais resultados incluíram melhoria em termos de correção e fluência em inglês, uma compreensão mais profunda das tradições culturais e profissionais de cada país e o fortalecimento das competências de colaboração. Este projeto destaca o potencial do COIL como uma abordagem pedagógica inovadora para integrar aspetos do mundo real na educação linguística e cultural, especialmente em áreas como o turismo. Ao aproximar estudantes de dois continentes diferentes, a iniciativa proporcionou uma oportunidade significativa e prática para os preparar para desafios internacionais nas suas futuras profissões.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Aprendizagem Colaborativa *Online* em Contexto Internacional (COIL), Instituições de Ensino Superior (IES), Inglês para (Eno)Turismo, Comunicação Intercultural, Inovação Pedagógica.

1. Introduction

> Future tourism professionals should be prepared to use a foreign language as a necessary means of intercultural communication to present their thoughts, ideas or comments and communicate correctly not only with their superiors or with colleagues and business partners, but also with the guests, clients, visitors. That is why foreign languages serve as an important tool as well as a special mechanism for effective cooperation. Proficiency in foreign languages affects the formation of professional competences of future tourism specialists. (Babushko, Halytska, & Solovei, 2020, p. 235)

For anyone working in the globalized tourism industry, which depends on interactions between individuals from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, intercultural communication is crucial. Proficiency in the language is necessary for negotiating differences, but so is a thorough comprehension of cultural norms, customs, and values. Particularly in tourism, where personal connections and shared experiences are central, the ability to communicate effectively across cultures has become a critical competency for professionals aiming to deliver meaningful, authentic, and unforgettable experiences to international clients. As the quote that begins this article emphasizes, this need goes beyond interpersonal interactions to include building relationships and teamwork in cross-cultural teams, negotiating with international partners, and adjusting to the expectations of clients from diverse cultural contexts. According to Montoya Reyes (2024) and Poznanskyy & Davis (2021), education in general and foreign language classes in particular are essential for preparing people to succeed in a highly competitive and interconnected industry by giving them the tools to understand and overcome cultural differences.

The "Cultural Crossroads: Wine and Tourism Collaboration Between Portugal and Japan" COIL project exemplifies how pedagogical innovation can provide meaningful opportunities for students to engage with peers from distant countries. By fostering interaction between Portuguese students specializing in Wine Tourism and Japanese students enrolled in a Global Citizenship course, the project served as a platform for co-constructing knowledge and developing essential skills. Through structured virtual interactions that focused on English for tourism and winemaking, two fields deeply intertwined with heritage and identity, students were encouraged to explore each other's countries, geographies, traditions and perspectives. Virtual tours and comparative studies of winemaking techniques were among the activities that helped students improve their English, enhance cross-cultural communication, and develop professional skills that are essential in the international travel and tourism sector.

Within the larger context of computer-assisted language learning (CALL), this paper explores the role of the COIL project in developing a postdigital classroom that seamlessly combined digital tools with language and collaborative learning (Eren, 2023). By leveraging platforms like Zoom, Padlet, and Google Earth, the project transcended geographical boundaries, enabling participants to

explore the spatial dimensions of learning in both digital and physical contexts. The use of CALL principles enhanced the potential of COIL to facilitate authentic virtual interactions, fostering the development of language skills and intercultural competence in tandem.

The initiative not only highlights the potential of postdigital education to transform traditional classrooms but also addresses the challenges of implementing such models, including time zone differences, digital literacy, and cultural nuances. Ultimately, the project demonstrates the power of COIL to prepare tourism students for the complexities of a globalized, technology-driven industry.

2. Overview of COIL as an innovative pedagogical approach

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) is an innovative educational approach that enables students and teaching staff from at least two countries to collaborate on shared projects through virtual platforms. Unlike traditional study abroad programs, which are often limited to a small percentage of students due to barriers such as financial constraints, language proficiency, and family or even job responsibilities, COIL offers opportunities for intercultural learning without the need for physical travel. Actually, according to Galan-Lominchar et al. (2024), data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2023 reveals that only 2.4% of the 220 million higher education students worldwide take part in mobility programs. This limited access highlights the potential of COIL projects as an effective means of reaching a broader audience. By embracing the concept of Internationalization at Home (IaH), COIL allows students to engage in intercultural learning and collaboration without the geographic and economic limitations that often prevent participation in traditional international mobility programs (Liu & Shirley, 2021).

While often referred to by many nomenclatures, such as telecollaboration, online intercultural exchange, or as part of the broader virtual exchange framework, COIL stands out for its strong emphasis on collaborative learning, as Hackett et al. (2024, 1078) argue. COIL has been argued to sit under the umbrella term of Virtual Exchange (VE) – a broader range of similar practices (O'Dowd, 2021) and is often used interchangeably with this term. However, the design of COIL courses, with their strong focus on collaborative learning, is often very different to other VE practices, which may involve little or no collaborative work. Labeling all of these practices as Virtual Exchange can lead to both educators and researchers having difficulty identifying and distinguishing COIL from other VE initiatives.

Coined by the State University of New York (SUNY) in 2006, COIL has grown into a distinctive and impactful educational method: a central feature distinguishing COIL is the co-construction and co-facilitation of courses. This ensures that tasks are carefully designed to promote meaningful collaboration, intercultural engagement, and curriculum alignment. Tasks may be synchronous, requiring real-time interaction during live sessions, or asynchronous, allowing students

to work flexibly across time zones while maintaining active engagement. This duality guarantees that practical difficulties, like different time zones or schedules, will not prevent group learning. Additionally, COIL may incorporate assessment as a core component, with collaborative outputs often contributing to course grades. Students are evaluated not only on their individual efforts but also on their ability to engage with peers, produce joint outcomes, and reflect on their intercultural and collaborative experiences. This structured integration of assessment further differentiates COIL from other VE practices, ensuring that participation directly contributes to academic achievement and reinforces learning objectives.

This flexibility has allowed COIL to evolve into a powerful pedagogical tool that not only promotes language skills and mutual understanding but also equips students with essential skills to succeed in the connected world of today (Amante, 2021). These include problem-solving, cultural adaptability, and teamwork, all of which are increasingly valued in a globalized workforce. Besides this, these programs offer valuable opportunities to foster learner autonomy and digital literacy as students engage with complex, technology-mediated environments.

However, like any innovative approach, COIL implementation is not devoid of challenges (Helm, 2015). Differences in academic calendars, class sizes, motivational levels of participants, institutional policies, and language proficiencies can hinder seamless collaboration. Additionally, disparities in technological infrastructure and access, combined with limited teacher training in digital competencies, may impact program effectiveness (Barbosa & Ferreira-Lopes, 2021). These challenges highlight the need for deliberate planning, adaptability, and support from institutions and teaching staff to ensure successful implementation.

Fostering intercultural sensitivity and mutual understanding among participants also requires intentional facilitation and sustained effort. Addressing potential power imbalances and cultural biases that may emerge during collaboration is crucial to promoting equitable participation and achieving the program's educational goals. Establishing clear communication protocols, employing diverse pedagogical strategies, and incorporating regular feedback mechanisms can significantly enhance engagement and inclusivity.

Moreover, institutions must prioritize the development of supportive policies, allocate sufficient resources, and invest in professional development opportunities for teaching staff. This ensures they are equipped with the necessary digital skills and intercultural competence to lead effective virtual exchanges or COIL projects. By adopting a holistic approach to these challenges, COIL programs can more effectively fulfill their potential to enrich global learning experiences and foster meaningful, transformative connections across cultural and geographical boundaries.

As reminded by Barbosa and Ferreira-Lopes, the COIL approach is not necessarily associated with language teaching: "Along the last decades, the scope of telecollaboration has been extended

and now includes exchanges between groups of participants who are not necessarily all language students, but also teachers or students of other subjects such as communication and business." (2021, p. 562). In fact, recent trends indicate a growing adoption of COIL across various course units, including those in the fields of business, health sciences, and teacher education. Advancements in technology, such as videoconferencing and virtual collaboration tools, such as Padlet, Miro, Flip (formerly Flipgrid) and Mentimeter, have also enhanced the interactive and experiential aspects of COIL programs.

Despite not being inherently tied to language teaching as mentioned, COIL has proven to be a valuable framework for lessons in Applied English, particularly in contexts like tourism education, where language and intercultural communication intersect. For students of tourism, engaging in English-medium COIL projects offers a practical, immersive environment to refine their language skills while collaborating with peers from different cultural and study backgrounds. This dual focus on linguistic and intercultural proficiency makes COIL an ideal tool for applied learning, as it situates language use within authentic, real-world contexts.

In the context of wine tourism, where both cultural heritage and professional expertise are so important, COIL facilitates a unique interplay of language, culture, and subject-specific knowledge. Students are not merely learning English in isolation but are using it as a medium to explore, share, and co-create knowledge about their respective traditions, industries, and local contexts. Activities like virtual tours and discussions about winemaking processes provide fertile ground for practicing specialized vocabulary, honing presentation skills, and engaging in meaningful dialogue with international partners.

Moreover, COIL projects inherently encourage reflective practice. By interacting with peers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, students gain insights into their own communication styles and biases, fostering greater cultural awareness and adaptability. These experiences not only prepare them for future careers in the international tourism industry but also enrich their personal and professional growth (Lin, 2023).

The "Cultural Crossroads: Wine and Tourism Collaboration Between Portugal and Japan" project exemplifies how COIL can be a part of Applied English lessons to bridge academic content with intercultural exchange. This approach aligns seamlessly with the goals of Applied English II within Wine Tourism Education, as the following section will make clear.

3. Methodology

This section details the methodological framework and rationale for integrating COIL into the Applied English II course, part of the Wine Tourism program at the Polytechnic University of Viseu

(IPV). The methodology includes the structure and phases of the project, tools and platforms used, participants, and the evaluation approach.

3.1. Rationale for integrating COIL into Applied English II lessons within the Course of Wine Tourism

This COIL project was specifically designed to be part of the Applied English II curriculum. This course unit plays a crucial role in the two-year higher professional course in Wine Tourism, taught at the School of Technology and Management, Polytechnic University of Viseu (known as IPV). Delivered in the first semester of the second year, it built upon a structured progression of language and content learning: students first developed a foundation in general English Language, followed by Applied English I, which introduced tourism concepts in English, including types of tourism, specifically gastronomy and the pairing of food and wine. In Applied English II, students moved toward more specialized topics, by studying tour guiding, wine estate tours and other wine-related experiences, culminating in an exploration of the vine cycle and the winemaking process. This progression ensures that students develop both general and field-specific competencies in English. Actually, the learning outcomes of Applied English II were designed to align with both professional and linguistic goals. Students were expected to:

- Interpret and produce descriptive and promotional texts relevant to the wine tourism industry;
- Use technical vocabulary related to wine tourism, including topics such as natural, historical, and cultural heritage, as well as winemaking (harvesting, production, and tasting);
- Orally describe daily tasks performed by wine tourism professionals and communicate fluently in English, adapting their language to different contexts;
- Develop teamwork skills and actively participate in exchanges of information on diverse topics.

The curriculum emphasized technical vocabulary for tourism, key language functions (explaining, promoting, presenting, planning, and describing), and essential grammatical structures (e.g., passive voice, discourse markers). This comprehensive approach was further supported by a teaching methodology centered on theoretical and practical lessons that prioritized speaking skills, using visuals, videos, CALL and COIL-based activities to encourage active participation.

By collaborating with six students from an English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) class on Global Citizenship at Setsunan University in Japan, a group of eight second-year IPV students gained unique opportunities to explore each other's geographies, cultural heritage, and approaches to the tourism industry. Portugal, known for its renowned wine heritage, and Japan, celebrated for its sake brewing traditions, offered a rich context for intercultural dialogue. The integration of COIL into the

curriculum provided a unique and innovative learning experience, enabling students to enhance their intercultural communication skills while gaining deeper insights into the (wine) tourism industry.

3.2. Case Study Methodology

For this article, a case study methodology was adopted to facilitate a thorough exploration of the specific context in which the COIL project was implemented. As postulated by Leidner and Jarvenpaa (1993, p. 28), "Case study research is appropriate in situations where the research question involves a 'how', 'why', or exploratory 'what' question, the investigator has no control over actual behavioural events, and the focus is on contemporary as opposed to historical phenomenon".

Case studies are highly effective for both exploratory and explanatory research, as they enable the researcher to delve deeply into the complexities of the subject's activities, capturing a rich and detailed understanding of their processes and outcomes. This qualitative approach is especially valuable in contexts where limited prior research exists or where the theoretical foundation is still developing, making it an ideal choice for investigating innovative projects in foreign languages (Amante, 2022), like this COIL initiative. Particularly in this COIL project, the methodology centered on a corpus analysis of the materials created by students during the collaboration, including their written and oral productions. Direct observation of their interactions and participation further enriched the dataset, offering insights into the communicative and professional skills they developed. The COIL project was carefully structured into four main distinct phases to ensure a logical progression of activities and objectives, which will be detailed in the sections that follow.

Phase 1: Introduction and Ice-Breaking (Weeks 1–2)

The project began with introductory activities to foster intercultural exchange and build rapport among participants. Students from IPV and Setsunan University introduced themselves through Padlet, sharing personal, geographic, and cultural details such as their hometowns, favorite foods, and cultural landmarks. These introductions were accompanied by visuals and brief videos. Students engaged with their counterparts' posts by asking questions and exchanging comments, creating a foundation for collaborative work.

Phase 2: Tour Guiding Collaboration (Weeks 3–5)

In this phase, students collaborated in mixed-nationality groups to present cultural landmarks from Portugal and Japan. Each group selected one landmark from each country and created virtual tours using tools like Google Earth, Canva, or PowerPoint to present to their counterparts. The tours incorporated historical and cultural details, as well as fun facts, and were presented during live Zoom sessions held outside the classroom, followed by a Q&A period. This phase culminated in a live Zoom in-class session, which included a Mentimeter activity to enhance interactivity and gather real-time feedback from students.

Phase 3: Winemaking Process and Cultural Exchange (Weeks 6–8)

The third phase focused on the winemaking traditions of both countries. Portuguese students prepared posters on the winemaking process in Portugal, while Japanese students created posters on cultural events and traditions surrounding sake and sake brewing, emphasizing its historical significance and role in Japanese celebrations. These materials were uploaded to Padlet, once again serving as a collaborative platform for sharing and discussion. Students actively engaged by commenting on each other's work, drawing comparisons, and contrasting the similarities and differences between Portuguese and Japanese practices. This interactive exchange enriched their understanding of the cultural, historical, and professional dimensions of winemaking and sake brewing, while also cultivating intercultural communication and critical thinking skills.

Phase 4: Reflection and conclusion (Weeks 9–10)

The final phase emphasized reflection and project closure. Students posted their reflections on a Padlet wall, discussing their learning experiences, challenges faced, and how they overcame them. This activity encouraged deeper insights into their intercultural exchanges.

Thus, we can say that the materials and activities analyzed included videos, posters, virtual guided tours through Zoom, and reflections, providing a rich corpus for linguistic and intercultural analysis. Assessment within the course was designed to ensure a holistic and comprehensive evaluation of students' learning. The COIL project, reflecting its central role in the curriculum, accounted for 40% of the final grade, emphasizing the importance of intercultural collaboration and practical application of skills. Students were also assessed through oral production tasks (20%) and two written tests (20% each), which balanced their performance across spoken and written communication. This multifaceted assessment structure encouraged students to actively engage in all aspects of the course, integrating theoretical knowledge with practical application.

Evaluation criteria were carefully designed to capture a broad range of competencies essential for the course's objectives. Participation was a key factor, with active involvement in all phases of the project being crucial. Collaboration skills were also highlighted, as students were expected to work effectively with peers from different cultural backgrounds. Creativity played a significant role, particularly in tasks such as designing virtual tours and winemaking presentations, while cultural awareness was assessed through the students' ability to demonstrate understanding and appreciation of the traditions and practices of both countries.

Linguistic accuracy and fluency were equally important, with assessment focusing on the correct use of grammar and technical vocabulary, as well as the smooth and coherent expression of ideas in both written and oral formats. The ability to effectively integrate and cite academic or professional sources was another critical criterion, ensuring that students' work was grounded in

reliable information. Finally, reflective tasks were assessed based on the depth of insight they demonstrated, encouraging students to critically analyze their learning experiences.

For students who were unable to meet attendance requirements or succeed in the continuous assessment, alternative pathways were provided through written and oral exams, ensuring fairness and multiple opportunities for evaluation.

As part of the methodology, the project underwent an ethical review by the Ethics Board at the Polytechnic University of Viseu (IPV). The initiative received formal approval, with a positive assessment issued under reference number 33/SUB/2024. This endorsement ensured that the project adhered to ethical standards, safeguarding the participants' rights and well-being throughout the research and implementation process.

3.3. Practical Implications

By integrating COIL into Applied English II, the course allowed students to simulate real-world tasks in the tourism field, such as planning and organizing guided tours, welcoming tourists, and interpreting cultural and historical heritage.

In the next section, the results and discussion will delve into the outcomes of this approach, highlighting the benefits of COIL for developing intercultural competence and industry-relevant skills. The findings will further analyze the impact of the case study methodology and corpus analysis in assessing students' progression and the overall success of the project.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1.a. The first task of the project, where students introduced themselves through short videos shared on Padlet, served as an effective ice-breaking activity. Its main purpose was to foster a sense of community among participants by encouraging them to share their backgrounds, interests, and what they hoped to gain from the project. Through these exchanges, the task aimed to build trust, spark curiosity, and lay the foundation for collaboration in the following stages of the project.

The platform's interactive features, such as the ability to upload visuals and provide detailed comments, added depth to the task. The inclusion of videos and additional photos enriched the presentations, allowing students to get acquainted with new faces and pronunciations. This multimodal approach supported the development of both language and digital literacy skills.

A closer examination of the videos, as well as of the students' comments and interactions highlights some recurring themes: many students shared personal details about their lives, such as their hometowns, cultural roots, and linguistic abilities. For instance, some students elaborated on their multicultural experiences, like speaking multiple languages or living in diverse regions, which enriched the cultural exchange. Additionally, hobbies and interests formed a significant part of the

introductions, with students discussing topics like baking, music preferences, and favorite movies. Notable examples include one Portuguese student's love for making cakes decorated with anime-inspired designs, such as "Naruto," and another's recommendation of Japanese music bands like "Mrs. Green Apple." These shared interests not only allowed for personal connections but also created a lively and engaging environment.

Travel aspirations were another common topic, with students expressing enthusiasm for exploring new places and sharing past travel experiences. Destinations such as Canada, Singapore, France, Japan, and Portugal were mentioned, sparking conversations about cultural similarities and differences. These exchanges reflected the students' curiosity and their eagerness to learn from one another, which is essential for the success of an international collaborative project.

However, some challenges and areas for improvement emerged during the task. A few students encountered technical difficulties, such as inaccessible video links or permission issues, which created barriers to participation. Addressing such issues promptly enhanced inclusivity and ensured smoother interactions. Another observed limitation was the varying depth and clarity of the introductions. While some students provided thoughtful, detailed insights into their goals and interests, others kept their contributions shorter and more superficial. These differences go beyond logistical and engagement-related challenges and are related to deeper intercultural complexities that also surfaced during the activity. Differences in communication styles, levels of self-disclosure, and cultural expectations influenced how students presented themselves and interacted with others. Some participants, for instance, were more reserved in sharing personal information due to cultural norms, while others openly discussed their backgrounds and aspirations. This inconsistency highlights the need for clearer guidelines, such as a structured outline for the videos, to help participants focus on key aspects like their learning objectives and how their background connects to the project, but we cannot forget that there are cultural differences and should avoid imposing a one-size-fits-all approach to participation. Moreover, while many students commented on their peers' videos, the level of engagement was inconsistent. Encouraging every participant to respond to at least two peers could further strengthen the sense of connection and interaction.

The purpose of the task extended beyond simple introductions. It provided a platform for cultural exchange, as students learned about each other's traditions, lifestyles, and unique perspectives. For instance, conversations about music, food, and local customs promoted mutual understanding and curiosity. Additionally, the task allowed participants to practice valuable communication skills, such as organizing their thoughts and presenting themselves effectively, skills that are crucial in both academic and professional contexts.

Overall, the 'Student Introductions' task successfully met its goals of breaking the ice and establishing meaningful connections among participants. While there were minor challenges, the activity provided a strong starting point for building trust and camaraderie within the group.

4.1.b Still within the first phase, the *Hometown & Culture Board* allowed students to engage in intercultural communication by showcasing their hometowns and cultural highlights through visual and written materials shared on Padlet, as seen in Fig. 1. The task encouraged the use of specific language structures, technical vocabulary, cultural insights, and peer feedback, all of which contributed to the students' linguistic and intercultural development.
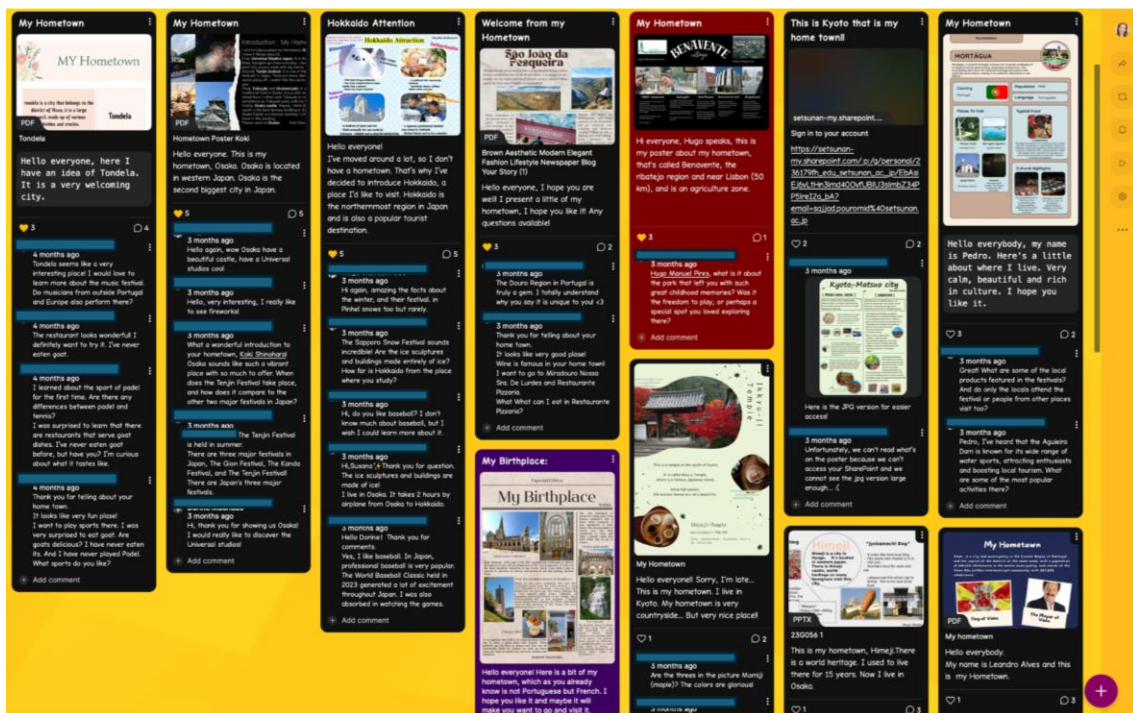
Figure 1 – Hometown and Culture Padlet Wall (task 2)

We notice that students employed a range of descriptive language and technical vocabulary to highlight cultural landmarks, traditions, and regional characteristics. Commonly used structures included comparative language (e.g., "Hokkaido is the northernmost region in Japan"; "Their pastries are the best…"), descriptive phrases (e.g., "a very welcoming city"; "near Lisbon and famous for…"), and explanations of unique aspects of their hometowns, such as historical landmarks and culinary specialties. Focusing particularly on the posters by IPV students, for instance, the Douro region was described as a gem for its cultural and natural beauty. A student's hometown, S. João da Pesqueira, was highlighted in her poster as a wine-producing area, enabling her to refer to technical vocabulary such as "vineyards," "harvest," and "wine tastings." Culinary specialties also featured prominently in other Portuguese cities, with references to traditional goat dishes and, among other examples of a diverse regional cuisine, octopus. Many students described local restaurants and their offerings, making use of terms like "traditional gastronomy," "specialty dishes," and "regional flavors." These

efforts aligned with the task's emphasis on tourism-related language, particularly in describing food experiences as an integral part of cultural heritage. The grammatical structures employed were varied and almost always appropriate, with students using the passive voice (e.g., "… this magnificent Cathedral is known…"; "Lampantana is made with sheep meat roasted in a clay dish in a wood-fired oven and is served with 'peeled' potatoes and greens"), and sequencing markers ("firstly," "then," "finally") to organize their posters effectively. Japanese students also incorporated grammatical structures like the passive voice (e.g., "The ice sculptures and buildings are made of ice!"; "Additionally, this bridge is depicted in the anime film 'Detective Conan: The Scarlet Letter.'") and discourse markers ("Meanwhile," "In addition") to create coherent paragraphs.

Despite these strengths, several language mistakes were noted, particularly among the Portuguese students, often stemming from interference with their native language. For example, in "The Cine-Theatre, a oldest cultural build of the village, and this build is good for cultural events," multiple errors can be identified, including incorrect article use ("a oldest" instead of "the oldest"), awkward phrasing ("build" instead of "building"), and redundancy ("and this build is good…"). Another example, "The 25 april park is a homage a 25 of April the revolution that change the dictatorship an Democratic regim on 25 of april 1974," displays several issues: capitalization inconsistency, incorrect preposition use ("a homage a" instead of "a homage to"), verb tense error ("change" instead of "changed"), and spelling inaccuracies ("regim" instead of "regime," "an Democratic" instead of "a Democratic").

Japanese students also displayed occasional errors, such as singular/plural, tense inconsistencies and vague and awkward structures (e.g., "Many foreigner go there every day. I had been went USJ once a week with my friend"; "The more destroy this, the more divine will come true.").

Errors in article use, prepositions, and subject-verb agreement were recurring issues across both groups, which were addressed in class through activities such as mistake-spotting exercises and peer-correction tasks aimed at fostering linguistic awareness. These exercises allowed students to develop a more critical approach to their writing and provided opportunities to practice correcting their errors in context. According to Aba Sha'ar, Waluyo and Rofiah (2025, p. 5), "There is a consensus in the literature […] that the integration of Padlet empowers students' active engagement with their mistakes and turns them into valuable opportunities for improvement."

Regarding interculturality, the task proved highly effective in promoting cultural exchange and intercomprehension. As previously mentioned, Portuguese students shared details about winemaking traditions, goat-based dishes, which sparked curiosity among their Japanese counterparts, and historical landmarks, such as the Miradouro Nossa Senhora de Lurdes. One student highlighted the Aguieira Dam, noting its popularity for water sports, which provided a unique

perspective on the region's natural attractions. The reference to padel, a lesser-known sport in Japan, prompted meaningful exchanges as students compared it to the globally recognized sport of tennis. This allowed participants to explore differences in recreational activities and national preferences.

On the other hand, Portuguese students learned about Japanese professional baseball's cultural prominence and its connection to national pride. Japanese students also introduced their peers to culturally significant events such as the Tenjin Festival, known for its vibrant stalls and fireworks, and the Sapporo Snow Festival, celebrated for its intricate ice sculptures. This exchange not only broadened cultural awareness but also highlighted the similarities and differences between the two countries' approaches to heritage and tourism. By sharing personal stories and reflections, students were encouraged to think critically about their own cultural identities and the role of tourism in preserving and promoting cultural traditions. Additionally, the dialogue fostered a deeper appreciation of the diversity and richness of global cultures, underlining the importance of intercultural communication in an increasingly connected world.

Peer feedback played a crucial role in fostering engagement and critical thinking. Comments were generally inquisitive and reflective, such as "What are some of the local products featured in the festivals?" and "I was very surprised to eat goat. Are goats delicious? I have never eaten its. And I have never played Padel. What sports do you like?" This level of interaction encouraged students to elaborate on their posters, address specific questions, and express curiosity and appreciation, fostering a supportive atmosphere. For example, one student remarked on the beauty of the Douro Region and expressed a desire to visit Portugal, while another highlighted the appeal of Japanese maple trees (Momiji).

This task also revealed students' growing confidence in expressing their ideas. For instance, participants used personal anecdotes to establish a connection with their audience, such as sharing childhood memories of specific landmarks or traditions. These stories added an emotional layer to the presentations, making them more relatable and engaging. Moreover, the task served as a practical application of key language functions, such as describing, explaining, and promoting, which are essential in the field of tourism. The emphasis on intercultural communication aligned with the course's goals, equipping students with skills that are highly relevant to professional contexts.

4.2. The third task, in phase two, of the COIL project revolved around the creation and presentation of virtual tours, where students selected landmarks from their home countries and prepared a guided experience to showcase their cultural heritage. This activity combined creative, technological, and communicative aspects, allowing students to delve into the history and significance of iconic locations while engaging with their peers in an interactive and collaborative manner.

Students used various tools, such as Google Earth, Canva, and PowerPoint to design and prepare their virtual tours. These platforms enabled them to combine visuals, facts, and narratives into compelling presentations. The tours included a rich array of details, such as the historical and cultural importance of landmarks and intriguing facts that brought the sites to life. Following the creation of the tours, students presented their work in a Zoom session, taking their peers on a virtual journey through their chosen locations. For this purpose, the participants were divided into three groups, two of them with three IPV students and two Setsunan counterparts, and one with four students, two per institution. With their institutional emails exchanged, they started coordinating schedules. While most groups managed to navigate scheduling challenges successfully by resorting to Instagram chat, one group struggled to find a suitable time for both Portuguese and Japanese students due to time zone differences and their own commitments. The Japanese students made considerable efforts to adjust their schedules, but coordinating with the two Portuguese students remained extremely difficult. Despite the Professors' attempts to facilitate collaboration, there was much resistance, and real-time communication proved to be highly challenging, if not entirely unfeasible. Ultimately, this group created a short video about Viseu, which, while well-produced, lacked the interactive elements seen in the other groups' presentations. This challenge underscores the importance of flexibility and clear coordination when working across different time zones.

Figure 2 - A guided tour of Viseu, Portugal, by one of the groups (task 3)

The other two groups delivered more interactive virtual tours. One group focused on landmarks in Viseu, Portugal, including the Grão Vasco Museum, which showcases Portuguese art from the 16th century (cf. Fig. 2); Feira de S. Mateus, known as the oldest fair in Viseu, offering a vibrant mix of food, crafts, and entertainment; the Rossio Square, famous for its traditional tile panels; and the city's stunning cathedral. Their tour was guided by a PowerPoint presentation that provided a structured and engaging experience. Another IPV group chose to take Japanese students on a tour of Coimbra, a historically rich Portuguese city, and by using Google Maps and Google Earth they

highlighted its iconic university with its stunning Joanina Library, a masterpiece of baroque architecture; the Botanical Garden, a serene haven of biodiversity; and other historical landmarks. Both presentations were well-researched and gave students a vivid glimpse into Portuguese culture. In return, Japanese students introduced Portuguese participants to Arashiyama, a scenic district in Kyoto City known for its Togetsu Bridge and tranquil bamboo forest, as well as various attractions in Osaka and Kyoto, such as temples, ponds, and cultural sites. These virtual tours offered Portuguese students a chance to immerse themselves in the beauty and cultural richness of Japan, sparking meaningful cultural exchange.

Despite the overall success, several challenges arose during the activity. Shyness was a recurring problem, with students sometimes hesitant to speak or ask questions. Some students took on more dominant roles, as cultural differences influenced participation dynamics. Some of the Portuguese students tended to be more talkative, while the majority of Japanese students, though highly committed, were once again more reserved. Additionally, accents and language differences occasionally led to misunderstandings, requiring patience and clarification. Technical difficulties, such as internet connectivity issues, further complicated the experience. However, the most significant challenge was the time zone difference, which made scheduling meetings a logistical hurdle. Nevertheless, the groups demonstrated perseverance and creativity in overcoming these barriers.

This task culminated in a class-wide Zoom meeting, where all groups shared their experiences and insights. This session was held during class time for the Portuguese students, while the Japanese students participated from home, late at night. Mentimeter was used to facilitate discussions, enabling students to reflect on their findings and engage in thoughtful dialogue. The meeting provided an excellent platform for cross-cultural learning, allowing students to compare their landmarks and cultures while sharing their perspectives on the overall activity.

The virtual tour task succeeded in achieving its objectives by fostering cultural awareness, enhancing collaboration, and developing students' technological and presentation skills. It highlighted the beauty of cultural exchange and the importance of overcoming logistical and communication challenges in international collaboration. Future iterations of this activity could benefit from improved coordination tools to address time zone differences, clearer guidelines for fostering interactivity, and strategies to encourage more confident participation. Despite the challenges, the task was a valuable and enriching experience that deepened students' appreciation of each other's cultures.

4.3. The task that followed, related to the winemaking/sake brewing process, provided another opportunity for intercultural collaboration and interdisciplinary learning. Students made a significant effort to use domain-specific terminology and technical language in their discussions and posters,

which were again posted on Padlet. Portuguese students used precise terms such as "fermentation," "grape varieties," "clarification to remove any remaining solids," and "aging barrels" to describe their winemaking practices, while Japanese students mirrored this approach with vocabulary like "polishing rice," and "koji mold" in the context of sake production. The task encouraged students to expand their lexicon and use discipline-specific language effectively, which aligned with the project's broader goal of improving technical communication skills.

Grammatical structures varied across participants, with both groups relying heavily on the passive voice to explain processes, as we will see in the examples below. The sequencing of ideas was again effectively supported by cohesive devices and connectors, reflecting an understanding of logical organization in procedural texts. However, some recurring mistakes were noted, particularly with article use, preposition errors, occasional issues with verb agreement (e.g., "there is 2 ways"), possessive vs. contraction confusion and verb tense consistency (e.g., "its time to harvest"; "Finally red wine its filtered and bottled for market and is selling on diversly stores, hypermarkets, supermarkets, restaurants hotels and more"). These mistakes were subsequently addressed in class through collaborative error-spotting and corrective feedback exercises, just like in previous tasks.

It is important to note that the task's focus on winemaking and sake brewing not only allowed students to engage with cultural traditions but also bridged science and humanities in an interdisciplinary context. Students researched chemical processes like fermentation and the role of microorganisms, showcasing an ability to synthesize scientific knowledge into accessible explanations (e.g., "Early sake was made using primitive methods like *kuchikami-zake* (chewing rice to start fermentation). Later, the use of koji mold improved efficiency"; "Saliva contains enzymes (especially amylase) that break down the starches in rice and grains into sugars, initiating the fermentation process. These sugars are then converted into alcohol by yeast. In ancient Japan, *kuchikamizake* was used in sacred rituals and festivals, symbolically connecting the gods and people"). Additionally, Portuguese students highlighted the cultural relevance of winemaking in regional festivals, local economies, and tourism, while Japanese students explored sake's spiritual and ceremonial importance in Shinto rituals (e.g., "Shinto Shrines: Preserved sake's spiritual role in rituals, such as offerings to deities").

This interdisciplinary approach enriched the students' understanding of how technical knowledge intersects with cultural identity, making the activity more engaging and meaningful. By presenting their findings through posters and discussions on Padlet, students practiced integrating technical details with cultural details, which enhanced their ability to communicate complex ideas in an approachable manner.

Feedback played a central role in the task, both from peers and instructors. Students shared insights about similarities and differences in winemaking practices and asked personal questions

("e.g., Thank you for your thoughtful and easy to read flyer!! What is the most famous wine in Portugal?? Does anyone make it at home? My dad makes plum wine") or others to know more about each other's culture (e.g., Do people in Portugal drink every day?? Also do you eat anything with wine?? I'm interested in Portugal wine culture...). The question about daily wine consumption may have stemmed from cultural perceptions of European drinking habits, as well as curiosity about whether wine plays a role in everyday life. Japanese students also expressed curiosity about the variety of grape species and climate-specific practices in Portugal (e.g., "Does the taste change depending on the season? The taste of Japanese sake varies depending on the season"), while Portuguese students inquired about the traditional tools and methods used in sake brewing. These exchanges facilitated deeper learning by encouraging students to reflect on their own cultural practices through an external lens.

Besides that, peer feedback also highlighted the importance of clear visuals and concise explanations in technical presentations. Students learned to balance detailed information with accessible language, ensuring their posters were both informative and visually engaging. Instructors provided additional feedback on linguistic accuracy, technical depth, and overall coherence, further improving the quality of the outputs.

This task underscored the role of cultural exchange in promoting mutual understanding and respect. By comparing winemaking and sake brewing, students identified parallels in how both countries value these traditions as an integral part of their heritage. At the same time, they appreciated unique differences, such as the symbolic connection between sake and Japanese spirituality versus the socioeconomic significance of winemaking in Portugal.

This activity not only broadened students' cultural horizons but also encouraged them to reflect on the interplay between tradition and innovation. For example, discussions touched upon modern advancements in winemaking and brewing techniques, illustrating how both nations preserve their traditions while adapting to contemporary demands.

4.4. Finally, the COIL project culminated with a reflection on the learning experience. Participants were tasked with contributing to a collaborative Padlet wall, where they shared their perspectives on the cultural insights they gained, the challenges they encountered, and the strategies they used to overcome them.

One recurring theme in students' posts was an appreciation for the diversity of cultural practices and values. Portuguese students expressed fascination with Japanese traditions, such as the meticulous preparation involved in sake brewing and the significance of national festivals like the Sapporo Snow Festival. Japanese participants, in turn, highlighted their newfound understanding of Portuguese winemaking traditions, particularly the emphasis on regional pride and community in the production of wines like those from the Douro Valley. Both groups acknowledged that exploring

these topics deepened their appreciation for each other's cultures while drawing attention to universal themes such as the importance of heritage and craftsmanship.

A second key theme revolved around the challenges of communication and collaboration. Many participants reflected on the difficulty of conveying abstract cultural concepts in a foreign language, which required patience, creativity, sometimes translation, and the use of visuals or analogies (e.g., "It was very difficult to communicate using limited English. (I knew very little English). But I gained specialized knowledge that I wouldn't have learned in class"; "I learned that even Japanese is difficult to translate into English. How to communicate the schedule, easily communicated to the other person"; "The pronunciation of Portuguese people was different from the English pronunciation of Japanese speakers, making it difficult to understand. Since I couldn't catch everything, I used the chat to somehow convey my message"). Misunderstandings occasionally arose but were often resolved through collaborative problem-solving. Students also noted that the asynchronous nature of communication sometimes created delays, but they appreciated the flexibility it provided for more thoughtful responses (e.g., "My biggest challenge was English. I still have to improve my English expression. It was also challenging to find a time to communicate, we both received Padlet notifications during the night and when we wanted to talk by email etc it was difficult. But we managed to communicate and it was the most important").

The reflective posts revealed common linguistic challenges among students, particularly in the use of grammar and sentence structure. For instance, errors related to prepositions, incorrect verb formation and tense inconsistency (e.g., "This experience give more information about Japan and I can improve my English skills, for me the good part of the experience is the zoom meeting session because can used my English skills and improved these skills on real time") were frequently noted. Despite these errors, the reflections were largely coherent, and students demonstrated noticeable improvement compared to earlier phases of the project. The peer feedback mechanism played a crucial role in enhancing language accuracy, as, in class, students offered constructive suggestions to their peers.

The joint reflection task provided a fitting conclusion to the project, tying together linguistic, cultural, and interpersonal dimensions. By encouraging students to articulate their experiences and engage with their peers' perspectives, the activity not only reinforced the project's learning objectives but also fostered a sense of shared accomplishment. This fourth phase demonstrated that reflection is not merely an endpoint but a springboard for continued intercultural engagement and personal growth.

At the end of the process, IPV students had to deliver a written portfolio and to present it in class. It served as a comprehensive compilation of all tasks completed throughout the project, including detailed accounts of the wine- and sake-making processes, the cultural exchange surrounding sports, and reflections on heritage and tourism.

The oral presentation component allowed students to showcase their work and reflections in a dynamic and engaging format. Participants creatively highlighted their posters, videos, and group discussions on Zoom while sharing insights into the cultural parallels and contrasts they discovered.

5. Conclusion and implications

This COIL project successfully demonstrated the potential of intercultural collaboration in promoting linguistic, cultural, and professional competencies among students. Through tasks such as tour guiding, comparing winemaking and sake-brewing processes, and reflecting on shared experiences, participants engaged in meaningful synchronous and asynchronous dialogues that enhanced their understanding of each other's cultures while improving their English proficiency. This initiative was particularly relevant for the Portuguese Wine Tourism students, whose future job positions require effective communication with tourists, in English. As Kelmendi and Hysenaj (2024, p. 1404) remind us, "In the field of English for Tourism, students' focus falls in analyzing the required skills and needs for adequacy in their job position which is necessarily related to communicating with tourists who have a different cultural background compared to that of the employee. This makes English a prerequisite for all employees of this sector".

Despite its successes, the project was not without challenges, as we made clear throughout this study. Time zone differences made scheduling difficult, with some students struggling to find common meeting times despite considerable efforts to adjust. Technical difficulties, such as unstable internet connections and issues accessing materials, further complicated collaboration. Additionally, cultural differences influenced participation, with some students feeling hesitant to engage due to varying communication styles and levels of self-disclosure. In some cases, power imbalances emerged within groups, where certain students took on more dominant roles while others remained more reserved or passive. It is important to recognize and respect these differences, ensuring that all participants feel valued and encouraged to contribute within their culturally bound and personally comfortable levels of engagement. The limited success of one group's collaboration, despite professor intervention, exemplifies the complexity of fostering meaningful engagement in virtual settings and highlights the need for a culturally sensitive approach to ensure all participants feel equally empowered and included.

The project also revealed key linguistic and cultural patterns that emerged during interactions. On the linguistic side, common issues included article usage, subject-verb agreement, and, among others, tense inconsistencies. On the cultural side, tasks fostered rich exchanges about regional traditions, festivals, sports, and culinary practices, creating opportunities for students to reflect on their own cultural identities while learning about others.

This COIL initiative illustrated the transformative power of virtual exchange in fostering intercultural competence, a critical skill in today's globalized world (Chanwaiwit & Mori, 2024). By engaging with peers from different cultural backgrounds, students gained insights into tourism, heritage, and professional communication that extended far beyond the classroom. The tasks also encouraged the development of professional skills such as collaborative problem-solving, digital literacy, and public speaking, which are essential in industries like tourism, hospitality, and international relations.

The project's focus on specialized content, such as the winemaking process and tourism promotion, further underscored the importance of integrating domain-specific knowledge into language learning. This interdisciplinary approach not only deepened students' understanding of their own and their peers' cultural contexts but also prepared them to navigate complex professional environments in their future careers.

The success of this COIL project highlights its relevance for teaching English in tourism and other specialized fields. The integration of authentic, context-specific tasks provided students with practical opportunities to apply their language skills in real-world scenarios. This suggests that similar projects can be highly effective in equipping students with the communication and cultural awareness skills required in globalized industries.

The project also illustrated the importance of technology in overcoming barriers related to geography and culture. Virtual platforms allowed students to collaborate across time zones, exchange ideas asynchronously, and engage with multimedia content, all of which are critical for modern professional environments. Within the framework of computer-assisted language learning (Tafazoli & Picard, 2023), this COIL project exemplified how technology-based teaching and learning options can transform language classrooms.

The inclusion of reflective activities, such as Padlet discussions and written portfolios, underscored the value of metacognition in language learning. Students were not only able to identify their mistakes but also reflect on how they overcame challenges, which is a critical skill for lifelong learning and professional development (Amante, 2024).

5.1. Recommendations for future projects

Building on the lessons learned from this project, future COIL initiatives in similar contexts could benefit from the following recommendations:

• Incorporate more scaffolded feedback: while reflection and peer feedback were integral, additional structured teacher feedback, particularly on recurring linguistic issues, could enhance language acquisition.

• Promote greater synchronous interaction: although asynchronous communication was effective, more synchronous activities than the group guided tours through Zoom, or the videoconference with the two classes together, such as other live group discussions or joint presentations, could further enhance intercultural dialogue and teamwork.

• Include assessment of soft skills: evaluating skills such as adaptability, cultural sensitivity, and teamwork could provide a more holistic view of student development.

By adopting these strategies, COIL projects can continue to serve as a dynamic framework for fostering intercultural competence, linguistic proficiency, and professional readiness, making them invaluable in specialized educational contexts like English for tourism.

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