RESEARCH ARTICLE

Enhancing intercultural communication via the ENACT Web App in language teaching

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Abstract

Digital language learning provides an immersive context for language learners to engage in intercultural communication (Liaw, 2019; Dooly & Vinagre, 2021). This study investigates the impact of a digital tool, the ENACT web app (Communities, Languages, and Activities), on intercultural language learning from the pre-service English language teachers' perspective. The ENACT web app, which embraces the intercultural, digital, and communication skills of language learners, aims to develop the intercultural awareness and understanding of language learners through two-way knowledge-generating task-based activities. Ten pre-service English language teachers, who participated in the project as workshop facilitators, were initially engaged with the web app as users by completing a 2-week online training. After the training, they facilitated intercultural pairs in producing cultural activities in a task-based digital learning pedagogy in 3-5 hour sessions. They also completed final reflection papers at the end of the entire project engagement as a culminating product. To this end, this study presents mixed-method research with quantitative survey data and qualitative reflections of the pre-service teachers: (1) descriptive scores from pre and post-training responses to digital skills assessment and cultural awareness questionnaires, (2) reflective answers to open-ended questions about their gains in the e-portfolio in the middle and end of the online training, and (3) final reflection papers on intercultural understanding after the facilitation of the workshops. The survey findings showed that the pre-service teachers increased their cultural and digital knowledge through digital materials on the web platform. The thematic analysis of the reflections also indicated that they found the use of the task-based language teaching methodology effective in offering an interactive learning experience and enhancing learner involvement. The study suggests that integrating cultural tasks into the curriculum for language learning offers real-life learning experiences and contributes to both the language and content knowledge of the students.

Introduction

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has drawn researchers' and practitioners' attention since the 1980s (e.g. Doughty & Long, 2003; Ortega, 2009; Skehan, 2003). The origin of the TBLT can be traced back to Dewey's (1938, as cited in Thomas, 2013) work on experiential learning, representing a paradigm shift of conventional perspectives in language teaching, in particular concerning the use of meaningful, contextualized and authentic problem-based tasks in language teaching (Bygate, 2016; Long, 2015; Prabhu,1987)). Grounded in a usage-based and interaction approach to language learning, TBLT emphasizes the importance of experience and learner engagement in authentic interactions. To this end, authenticity is a key factor in TBLT in terms of the way teachers design tasks for learners (González-Lloret & Ortega, 2014; Kessler et al., 2021; Lai & Li, 2011; Littlewood, 2004; Nunan, 2004; Richards, 2005). To enhance the authenticity of the tasks and materials in language teaching, teachers must be able to design daily-life or real-world tasks and tasks should require learners to focus on meaning, have a clear outcome, and provide opportunities for interaction, thinking, and problem-solving (Ellis, 2003, 2009, 2017). In comparison to the other language teaching methodologies, TBLT appears to provide an ideal context for the use of technological innovations in language learning, as the technology-mediated TBLT promotes involvement around tasks in which learners use the target language for meaning-making (Gonzáles-Lloret, 2017; Lai & Li, 2011; Samuda & Bygate, 2008). Adopting a task-based language teaching methodology, our aim in this study is to investigate the impact of the ENACT web app on developing intercultural understanding of the pre-service English language teachers. The significance of the study is to increase the authenticity of language instruction by developing teacher candidates' intercultural competence through digital tools so that students can practice the target language in more context-rich environments. The study may contribute to the field by developing intercultural and digital competencies of both teachers and students.

Technology-mediated task-based language teaching

Digital technologies have become an integral component of modern society in many countries, making immense changes in almost every aspect of life, including health, education and environmental issues. Language education in this regard is no exception. Indeed, the last two decades have witnessed a growing body of research examining

computer-assisted language learning (CALL), aiming to integrate technology into the language learning classroom (e.g. Doughty & Long, 2003; Egbert, 2005; Lai & Li, 2011; Petersen & Sachs, 2015). CALL involves a wide variety of technological applications in language teaching, ranging from virtual learning to interactive whiteboards and mobile learning environments (Schmid, 2009; Shield & Kukulska-Hulme, 2008). For many years, there appears to be a consensus among researchers that advances in information and communication technologies provide valuable sources that we use to communicate, create and spread new information in schools. In an early study, Davis and Tearle (1999), for instance, argue that digital technologies have the potential to make a profound impact on strengthening teaching and motivating and engaging students. For Daniels (2002), digital technologies have paved the way for creating more student-centered learning settings. Similarly, Smith (2004) maintains that the use of technological tools provides learners with opportunities to negotiate for meaning, receive feedback and produce output. While in his previous work, Kessler (2013) emphasized the friendlier and diverse use of today's digital technologies than before, not only in the form of text and images but also in audio, videos and many other mediums available in social media tools, more recently, Kessler (2018) has pointed out that language teachers have access to many effective options for using technology to enhance their teaching skills. That is, teachers can select authentic and meaningful language content and present it to learners in and out of class (Egbert, Hanson-Smith, & Chao, 2007). In more specific terms, such technological advances allow teachers to create opportunities for learners to record their voices to improve pronunciation, which might later be accompanied by feedback from peers and other instructors. Cornillie and Desmet (2016) argue that technology-based activities and mini-games can improve learners' mastery of specific patterns, along with immediate feedback on their responses. These activities can be goal-directed in that learners will be able to practice their language skills. With a focus on writing in the form of digital stories by learners of Spanish in an advanced writing course, the Oskoz and Elola study (2014) note that producing digital stories allowed learners to go beyond conventional modes of presentation and interaction as they had a chance to include images and sounds as well as time for reflection. This is very much in line with Reinders & Hubbard's (2012) perspective that the integration of digital tools and activities also makes it possible for

learners to work together and construct knowledge collaboratively, which, in turn, supports them in developing autonomy over their own learning.

All these developments in language teaching have led to a shift toward the use of technology in the implementation of TBLT (e.g. Chong & Reinders, 2020; Ortega, 2009; Tavakoli, Lotfi & Biria, 2019; Ziegler, 2016). González-Lloret and Ziegler (2022) emphasized that technology-mediated tasks enable students to engage in authentic and meaningful interactions in EFL contexts where L1 speakers may have limited interactional opportunities to use the target language. In a way, technology-mediated TBLT can facilitate target language use through meaningful and authentic tasks that require engagement with peers. As has been discussed in detail in various work, the primary characteristic of TBLT is the *task* (Ellis, 2003, 2009, 2017). TBLT's learner-focused and experiential features are accomplished through learner engagement with real-life target language tasks which are believed to foster language acquisition (Van den Branden 2006). The research studies on the technology-mediated TBLT reveal that technology supports an increase in the amount of language production during task performance. For instance, the discourse in synchronous interaction was found to be similar to face-to-face conversation, and the discourse in asynchronous discussions was more restricted and resembled the initiation-response-feedback discourse found in teacher-centered classrooms (Sotillo, 2000). Furthermore, from a learner agency perspective, Lankshear & Knobel (2011) highlighted the importance of web-based technologies like blogs and wikis in language learners' creative skills.

Creating learner-centered classrooms has a crucial role in contemporary language teaching methodologies. Yamada (2009) reported that both the number of turns produced by learners and the number of L2 expressions increased when they communicated online. Levy and Stockwell (2006) have also indicated that technology-mediated tasks can maximize language learning opportunities outside of the classroom and create contexts for "genuineness" in interaction. They have shown that the use of technology can lead to active engagement and L2 communication. For example, the increased processing time with the use of L2 makes learners proofread and self-correct their language output and increases their attention to linguistic aspects of language in online communicative contexts, such as in digital games (Reinders & Wattana, 2015).

As is known, a common weakness of communicative approaches to foreign language teaching is a neglect of the intercultural dimension in language learning. In designing appropriate tasks in technology-mediated environments, task performance is mediated by technology because task performance in this environment is not just about language performance, but rather involves digital literacy, communicative competency, and intercultural understanding (East, 2012; Lamy, 2004; Kramsch & Thorne, 2002).

Although there are differences in social conventions and communication patterns, these differences can be motivating to communicate with learners from another culture using English as the lingua franca via technology. Technology-mediated tasks facilitate interaction among peers, and also encourage learners to interact with their teacher using technological tools. In addition, communication via technological means can facilitate scaffolding among learners because learners are more willing to ask questions and negotiate meaning (Park & Slater, 2014; Tsai, 2011).

Given the scope of the current study with a focus on the use of digital technologies in higher education, it will be useful to combine our discussion on TBLT with the notion of intercultural awareness in higher education students, from whom the data analyzed in this study come.

Undoubtedly, advances in digital technologies have also exerted a profound impact on higher education, particularly concerning internationalization processes, the aim of which is to integrate an international, intercultural and global dimension into the education of future generations. An important outcome of internationalization efforts in higher education is closely associated with educating interculturally competent students (Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2000). Given the diverse, multilingual and multicultural nature of almost all nations in today's world, training interculturally competent students constitutes a desired outcome of education and internationalization. The relevant question here is what exactly it means to be interculturally competent, a research area that has received much attention in the literature for over three decades (e.g. Byram, 1997). From various perspectives, intercultural communication competence refers to the ability to conduct effective and appropriate communication with others, while negotiating each other's cultural identities in a multilingual, multicultural, and diverse setting (e.g. Beebe, Beebe, & Redmond, 1999; Byram, 1997; Chen & Starosta, 1996,

1999; Fantini, 2000, among others). Interculturally competent individuals know how to handle interactions and achieve their communication goals by respecting different worldviews and cultural values. Considering internationalization trends in higher education, the importance of intercultural communication competence in today's multicultural and diverse communities is reflected in the increasing demands to equip young students with the ability to acknowledge, respect, tolerate and embrace cultural differences. As noted by Fantini (2000), 'Positive contact with other world views provides opportunities for individuals to experience a shift of perspective and an appreciation for both the diversity and commonalities among human beings' (p.30). This is compatible with the primary motivation behind higher education student involvement in this study.

Methodology

This study aims to explore the impact of technological applications on the intercultural understanding of pre-service English language teachers, with special reference to the use of the ENACT web app developed within the scope of an international project. The main aim of the project was to create and enhance communication between migrant and home community members in multicultural societies of today's globalized world through the integration of digital literacy, culture, and language. Four higher education institutions from four different countries were involved in the project and conducted intercultural and intergenerational workshops, bringing members of different cultures and generations to contribute to an online library of activities on the ENACT web app. The web app and more information about the ENACT project are available at https://enacteuropa.com/. This section is followed by the results of the data and their discussion.

Participants

The participants in this study were 10 facilitators who were senior-year undergraduate students in an English language teaching program. The ENACT project aimed at recruiting 10 facilitators at each participating higher education institution from among undergraduate students. The institutional principal investigator announced and introduced the project, inviting volunteer students to take part as facilitators. Ten

volunteer senior undergraduate students agreed to participate as facilitators. A total of eight facilitators completed online workshops. The ENACT project also aimed at the recognition of participation in the project at the higher education level. Therefore, the facilitators were offered to receive credits for their facilitator activities in their school teaching practicum course in the undergraduate program. Hence, one of the facilitators received credits for the ENACT project participation in the practicum course based on the evaluation of reflections throughout the project engagement. Random pseudonyms are assigned to each participant in the direct quotations presented in the qualitative data for the anonymization of data.

Data Collection

The data presented in this study were collected throughout the facilitator involvement stages of the ENACT project. The involvement process started with the online facilitator training program in early March 2021. Due to the COVID-19 conditions, the facilitator training program was conducted online over two weeks with synchronous and asynchronous events. The program mainly aimed at training the facilitators regarding potential areas of assistance and challenges in the communication of intercultural and intergenerational pairs while facilitating the ENACT app use and activity creation for the participants. To this end, the facilitators experienced the stages of an ENACT workshop as participants using the ENACT app and creating activities with partners from other cultures and languages from the four partner countries. The training also involved small discussions and interactive case studies for potential areas of difficulty such as conflict management or netiquette issues using web resources. A summary of the data collection sources and tools used in this study is provided in Table 1.

Table 1.

Data collection tools

Data source	Purpose	Duration
Digital competency survey	To observe the participants' progress in knowledge and awareness regarding the use of digital tools to create language and cultural learning materials	Before and after the two-week online facilitator training, the fill-out duration is not specified
Intercultural awareness survey	To observe the participants' progress in knowledge and awareness regarding the concepts of culture and language	Before and after the two-week online facilitator

		training, the fill-out duration is not specified
E-portfolios	To observe the participants' detailed reflections and interpretations of their experiences in depth around specified themes such as intercultural awareness, and digital competency, referring to particular cases or events they can report	At the end of week 1 and week 2 of the two-week online facilitator training
Final reflection papers	To observe the participants' focused interpretation of their experiences after facilitating intercultural workshops, a cumulative recollection of their involvement in the project	After all the intercultural workshops are completed

The facilitators filled out the e-portfolios in the form of short reflective diaries to note and reflect on their experience throughout the two-week training. They also filled out the digital competency and intercultural awareness questionnaires before and after the training.

Figure 1.

The timeline for the facilitator involvement in the ENACT

The workshop training involved each facilitator interacting with one intercultural pair to discover the ENACT app and create an activity of their own in the platform over three to four sessions while stimulating awareness-raising conversations and reflections on the experience. The ENACT web app cultural activity library involves the completed and published activities during the workshops that the participants in this study facilitated as part of project engagement. The activity library is available at https://enacteuropa.com/all-content

The facilitators also completed an overall reflection paper after completing their workshop sessions. They were asked to report their gains and opinions after the

experience regarding transversal skills (e.g., collaboration, conflict management, intercultural communication, etc.), field-specific skills (e.g., language learning, education, language teaching, etc.), and an overall evaluation of their experience. These reflection papers were also used for analysis in this paper.

The digital competency survey in the study comprises nine subheadings, exploring the participants' navigation skills in digital environments and how they evaluate, manage and develop digital content. Moreover, the statements used in the survey also aim to yield information about interacting and sharing through digital technologies. More importantly, the survey also aimed to reveal the participants' perspectives on their behavioral norms and know-how while using digital technologies, including their awareness and commitment to developing and integrating digital content as well as understanding copyright issues in digital environments.

The intercultural awareness questionnaire included items searching for opinions on the perceptions of the definitions of culture and language. The main aim was to find out the changes in the participants' opinions before and after the ENACT experience. The facilitators filled out the questionnaire before and after the online training programme, for which they were matched with a facilitator trainee from another partner country. The second part of the questionnaire aimed at the perceptions regarding their intercultural ENACT partner's language and culture before and after the experience.

Data Analysis

The current study was conducted following a mixed-methods paradigm involving both qualitative and quantitative data types to obtain insights regarding the research problem. The quantitative data were obtained through two surveys with items rated on a Likert-scale format. The evidence for the construct validity of the surveys is established in the theoretical frameworks presented in the ENACT project. The digital competency survey was largely developed based on the DigiComp V2.0 framework while the intercultural awareness questionnaire was developed based on previous assessment tools for attitudes towards cultures, languages, and cultural activities (Satar et al., 2022). Evidence for reliability also lies in the previous implementations of both surveys with data drawn from a larger group of participants as part of the intellectual outputs of the ENACT project, although the current study's dataset cannot provide an

efficient sample size for statistical calculations due to its nature. The internal reliability of the digital competency survey was examined using Cronbach's alphas before and after co-production workshops with a total of 78 international migrant and home community participants. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .939 and .950 before and after the workshop participation respectively (Satar et al., forthcoming). The intercultural awareness questionnaire was checked for test-retest reliability with Spearman rank correlation coefficients using data from 40 international participants, with moderate to strong correlations between the items from pre to post-workshop administration (Satar et al., 2022, p.19).

The coding steps in the qualitative data started with extensive reading of the data sets. All the textual data were pre-coded and divided into segments of categories. Then the categories were narrowed down by reducing the categories to the most recurring themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). To determine the common themes, the interpretative phenomenological approach was employed (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018). Throughout the analysis, an inductive approach was established to analyze the data to investigate the research questions. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the participants provided feedback about the transcriptions of their own interview data. Informed consent forms were obtained from the participants and the ethical committee approved the study.

Findings

Table 2 presents the average self-ratings of the facilitators before and after the facilitator training on a 4-point Likert scale. The ratings for the items before and after the facilitator training indicate an overall increase in the awareness and capabilities the facilitators gained regarding the digital literacy outcomes of the ENACT project. Although the number of facilitators filling out the questionnaire after the workshop decreased in number, the scores are reported for an overall indication of the trend in the items reflecting the target improvement areas of the ENACT project. The largest difference from pre- to post-training is observed in items 2, 6, 7, and 8, with an increase from below 3 points to 3.5 points from pre- to post-training, while the remaining items received 3 points and above even before the training. These rising items tap into skills in evaluating the credibility of online content, issues of netiquette and copyright, creating online

materials in various formats (e.g., video, sound, image), using different applications, and modifying existing material in various ways.

Table 3 below presents the self-ratings of the facilitators to the intercultural awareness questionnaire on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 point representing "strongly disagree" and 5 points representing "strongly agree". The items reflect the target areas of improvement regarding intercultural awareness in the ENACT Project. The overall ratings indicate changes in the facilitators' perspectives about the definitions of culture and language, and perceptions of culture.

Table 2

Digital Competency Survey

Item	Pre-training (*N* = 6)	Post-training (*N* = 2)
1. **Browsing, searching and filtering data, information and digital content:** To articulate information needs, to search for data, information and content in digital environments, to access and navigate between them. To create and update personal search strategies	3.2	3.5
2. **Evaluating data, information and digital content:** To analyse, compare and critically evaluate the credibility and reliability of sources of data, information and digital content. To analyse, interpret and critically evaluate the data, information and digital content.	2.5	3.5
3. **Managing data, information and digital content:** To organise, store and retrieve data, information, and content in digital environments. To organise and process them in a structured environment.	3.2	3.5
4. **Interacting through digital technologies:** To interact through a variety of digital technologies and to understand appropriate digital communication means for a given context.	3.5	3.5
5. **Sharing through digital technologies:** To share data, information and digital content with others through appropriate digital technologies. To act as an intermediary, to know about referencing and attribution practices.	3.8	3.5
6. **Netiquette:** To be aware of behavioural norms and know-how while using digital technologies and interacting in digital environments. To adapt communication strategies to the specific audience and to be aware of cultural and generational diversity in digital environments.	2.8	3.5
7. **Developing content:** To create and edit digital content in different formats, to express oneself through digital means.	2.7	3
8. **Integrating and re-elaborating digital content:** To modify, renew, improve and integrate information and content into an existing body of knowledge to create new, original and relevant content and knowledge.	2.5	3.5
9. **Copyright and licenses:** To understand how copyright and licenses apply to data, digital information and content.	3	3.5

The second section on the table presents the items regarding the facilitators' international partners to try out the ENACT app pretending users to co-create ENACT app activities. They responded to the last items regarding their experiences with those international partners with whom they created an ENACT app activity while experiencing intercultural communication over the app use. The ratings to these items increased by 0.3 to 1.5 points from pre- to post-training, indicating that facilitators noticed differences in languages and cultures between themselves and their partners while gaining more knowledge and familiarity from their languages and cultures.

Table 3

Dimensions Intercultural awareness questionnaire

Item	Pre-training (*N* = 5)	Post-training (*N* = 2)
1. My language is the same as my culture.	3.6	2
2. I can tell a person's culture from their choice of clothes.	3.2	2.5
3. I like learning about other cultures.	4.6	4.5
4. I know many languages.	3.2	4
5. Language learning is easy for me.	4	4
6. I am a good language learner.	4.3	4.5
7. I like learning languages.	4.6	5
8. Language learning can be fun.	4.6	5
Do you know who you will work with (your partner) to co-produce a cultural activity on the ENACT app? If yes, please complete this section. Please indicate which one best describes what you think/feel about these statements:		
9. I am familiar with my partner's culture(s).	3	3.5
10. I know at least one of my partner's cultural activities.	3	4.5
11. I can understand my partner's first language.	2.2	3
12. I know a few words in my partner's first language.	2.8	4
13. I would like to meet other people from my partner's culture(s).	4	4
14. My partner and I have similarities in our culture or cultural activities.	2.8	2.5
15. My partner and I have similarities in our languages.	2.2	2

Our analysis of the qualitative data in this study appears to be compatible with the quantitative data presented above. This is the primary motivation behind the next section, where we focus on the participants' remarks on task-based learning and the relationship between language and culture and its implications for language teaching.

Increasing perspectives on language and culture in language teaching and learning

The qualitative and quantitative data analysis in this study contribute to several areas in the extant literature on language teaching. First, the data analyzed in this study have shown that even in an extremely difficult period of Covid-19 during which the students and teachers experienced almost complete lockdown in almost every part of the world (UNICEF, 2022), including the Turkish context, it was still possible for the higher education students to benefit from intercultural exchanges that they conducted with their partners. This is explicitly expressed in the following quotes from one of the participants of the study:

> "The best part of the training was that I had a chance to meet with many people from different countries, cultures. It was really nice to try to get to know each other and each other's culture, as well. I am glad to be a part of this project as I think though everything has to be changed from the beginning **due to covid,** the online training was highly well-structured. At first, I was a little bit scared as it seemed long per day, however, it turned out to be a super great experience!" (İnci, e-portfolio from online training).

Despite the fact that the pandemic-related school closures that caused many disadvantages for millions of students worldwide (UNICEF, 2022; König & Frey, 2022), it is still important to emphasize academic, social and knowledge acquisition the participants of this study have gained through the ENACT web app. However, this does not rule out the importance of academic learning the participants could have gained through conventional face-to-face instruction. The following quote from one of the participants explicitly expresses the importance of more interaction in face-to-face settings:

> "I met new people as many as possible; however, I would expect to spend more time talking to them. That might be caused by the virus, though. If the programme had been held on **face-to-face settings**, we could have interacted more. Still, it felt amazing to discuss different issues and topics in an international setting during breakout rooms' gatherings." (İlke, Final Reflection Paper).

Second, the participants in this study assessed their learning patterns and expressed self-perceived reflections on digital skills and intercultural awareness skills, along with task-based learning. In regard to intercultural awareness, they appeared to be rather positive in their expanding knowledge, particularly in learning about other cultures (Table 2, Item 3), the highest rank on the scale both in pre-training and post-training (4,6-4,5 out of 5, respectively). The same applies to Item 13, where the

participants assessed their openness to meet from different cultures (4 – 4 out of 5). In some reflections, the participants described their experiences of meeting from different cultures as an eye-opening opportunity. One respondent, particularly, referred to the complex nature of culture in the following quotes, not only in terms of defining culture but also using intercultural perspectives in interaction, collaboration and sharing views and perspectives.

> "I learned that culture is not something that I can define. Yet, it is something that I define by being who I am. Therefore, it's a truly complex matter and we should carefully approach this topic. We need to socialize. It's very basic. That is the fundamental of Culture and what I learned through my Facilitator experience. As a newbie linguist and a skilled teacher, I had the chance to witness a dialogue between the children of two different cultures. Their interaction, thought forming, collaboration, sharing, commenting, criticizing… These were all amusing and fruitful to observe. I learned how to share with other facilitators…" (Ekin, Final Reflection Paper)

On similar grounds, another participant attempted to combine his theoretical knowledge on culture and intercultural awareness with the practice he experienced while using the ENACT app.

> "I learned about different theories explaining culture, and I thought about how I could define culture. I did practice translation, especially for designing the cultural activity. I am now able to think about the intrinsic relationship between culture and the languages we speak, and whether they reflect our cultural background. Also, I learned about the artifacts in other cultures." (Oğuz, e-portfolio from online training)

This appears to have been further corroborated in the following three reflections, where the participants, on the one hand, focused on selecting cultural materials and the accompanying activities, and their personal awareness of the link between culture and language learning.

> "During the material selection and activity preparation phase, I became much more aware of the critical notions in language learning. By grasping the importance of inviting learners with an unfamiliar world of words in a meaningful way, I paid much more attention to language teaching & learning…I find this term very precious as it reminds me of amazing sessions that we learned from one another by carrying our cultures with us and sharing many things to share our cultures." (İnci, Final Reflection Paper).

> "Working with such a group made me feel part of a transnational project where I felt I was contributing and learning a lot. It helped build a certain awareness towards languages and culture, and helped with learning how to research materials for such activities. [...] Yes, I definitely felt like I was part of a team. We were 2 people, me and my peer, and we first got to know each other informally a bit in order to create a sense of rapport; then moved on to talking about the project and what we would do. I really liked brainstorming and working together, using languages and culture." (Füsun, e-portfolio from online training)

> "I was able to learn a lot about intercultural communication. In my pair, one of the students (M) came from Kosovo and spoke several languages including Serbian, Turkish, English, and

296

Albanian. The other student (E) was Turkish and she was only exposed to English as a foreign language. They were friends from the prep year and they were happy to see each other again thanks to this co-production workshop. They were eager to communicate with each other and during this time I was able to facilitate the communication between each member such that they would ask culturally-relevant questions to each other. They were often curious about the other cultural practices and they had a lot of opportunities to compare and contrast the two cultures. About intercultural communication, I also learned from them that sharing the same class with another person who comes from a different culture is highly beneficial for learning a new language. They said this was because they became more motivated and tolerated and developed positive attitudes toward other cultures and languages. I also took some notes of their answers in order to elaborate on them later." (Oğuz, Final Reflection Paper)

Such positive experiences on using the ENACT app with a culture-based model of learning overall indicate that the participants benefitted immensely during the conduct of the study.

Third, the participants were able to express their perspectives on the use of task-based methodology in language learning, a significant pillar of the ENACT project, the participants were expected to make progress on. One participant specifically referred to her prior knowledge on the use of task-based methodology:

"As a student of FLED department, I was familiar with the concept of TBLT. It gave me an opportunity to apply the knowledge while producing my cultural activity." (Arda, Final Reflection Paper)

Data analyzed in this study also demonstrated that in addition to academic gains, the participants had a chance to reflect on their teaching skills and interpersonal communication skills. This becomes apparent in the following quotes:

"I think I developed my competencies a lot in terms of cultural studies. I learned something new from each of my group mates and this was a great experience for me. As we also worked on **conflict management** by discussing which situations we may come across with and how to solve them. Thanks to those discussions, I feel much more prepared to be a facilitator for the upcoming training." (İnci, e-portfolio from online training).

"I learned that intercultural groups necessitate certain teacher qualities: respect, appreciation, and sensitivity. The teacher should pay special attention to what they say relating to the culture of the student and try to make appropriate comments." (Oğuz, Final Reflection Paper).

"I do not have any experience in this area (intercultural communication) yet; nevertheless, I joined some international courses through online platforms, soon I will be teaching at an international school, and I am looking forward to discovering my strengths and weaknesses with international students and colleagues." (İlke, Final Reflection Paper)

The first quote above highlights the importance of not only arriving at a better understanding of cultural studies and intercultural awareness but also the participant's consciousness about her personal traits of conflict management. The second quote, on

the other hand, emphasizes a teacher candidate's awareness of teacher qualities, elements of which necessitate respect, appreciation and sensitivity. The third quote is also important in terms of showing how the participant is eager to become aware of her strengths and weaknesses during the process. This should be taken as an asset for a young teacher candidate.

Last but not least, data analyzed in this study also indicate that the participants are well aware of the main tenets of the ENACT project, which aims to combine cultural elements with language teaching in a digital environment. This is explicitly seen in the following reflection:

> "Using the Internet as a socially responsible concept and providing a new dimension of culture and language interaction was at the heart of ENACT Project. I have learned and practiced applying the same values of kindness, openness and respect." (İlke, Final Reflection Paper)

Discussion and Conclusion

Since language cannot be isolated from the community and its speakers, culture becomes an inherent part of language learning. Knowing the significance of English as a global language, one of the primary aims of English language teaching is to improve learners' intercultural skills to increase communication among people (Kramsch, 2009). To prepare teacher candidates for making more socioculturally informed and interculturally engaged pedagogical decisions, intercultural awareness needs to be incorporated into language teacher education programs. Teacher candidates work more on designing intercultural tasks to promote authenticity in language learning. Engagement with the intercultural dimension of language learning facilitates involvement by improving L2 proficiency (Doğançay-Aktuna, 2005; Gedik-Bal & Savaş, 2022).

In line with previous studies on the relationship between language and culture and its implications for language teaching, our study demonstrates that the participants highlighted the importance of culture and interaction in learning contexts. Given that language is not only a means of communication but also a powerful tool used for social interactions, it is imperative to emphasize the intertwined nature of the connection between language and culture, as in a way culture is interpreted and mediated through language (e.g. Kramsch, 1995). Various studies in the literature have placed much

emphasis on the inevitable relationship between culture and language as well as language learning (Byram, 1993; Byram et al., 2017; Diaz, 1012; Duranti, 1997; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013), and this study is no exception in that it provided supporting evidence from the participants, who were higher education students with the aim of becoming interculturally competent. Our findings indicated that the participants appeared to be well-equipped to conduct an online cultural workshop, while at the same time questioning and reasoning their practical and theoretical knowledge on various issues such as the close link between culture and language, digital technologies, task-based learning, as well as personal traits such as intercultural communication competence and conflict resolution skills. Given that we all live in a more globalized world where we are more likely to interact with multilingual and multicultural individuals from diverse communities (e.g. Beebe, Beebe, & Redmond, 1999; Byram, 1997; Chen & Starosta, 1996, 1999; Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2000), the participants of this study with their raised consciousness in intercultural awareness felt enabled to address the needs of their learner pairs and support them throughout the cultural activities. These practices are compatible with raising interculturally competent students as part of the internationalization efforts in higher education institutions (Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2000).

From a technological perspective, the participants of this study perceived the ENACT app as a positive learning opportunity for developing cross-cultural awareness and gaining intercultural citizenship in Byram et al's words (Byram et al, 2017). They experienced this digital tool as an opportunity not only to become more aware of establishing intercultural communication with people from different cultures but also to put their academic knowledge into actual practice during the cultural sessions that they had with the partner pairs. In some cases, they helped the learner pairs communicate, create and shape a joint cultural activity. In others, they provided feedback and solved some cross-cultural miscommunications during the workshops, while observing the learner pairs active engagement and language practice in a cultural context, though not purely focussing on the reception and the use of the language. These findings are also in line with previous studies on information and communication technologies that support learner-centered approaches where the learners take ownership of their learning during the learning process (e.g. Davis & Tearle, 1999; Kessler, 2018; Yamada, 2009).

Moreover, there is no doubt that as new technologies emerge, further research is needed to understand the impact of incorporating tasks and technology-mediated TBLT on language learning. There is a need to employ a more comprehensive guiding framework for technology-enhanced TBLT. There is also a need to search for successful implementation of technology-enhanced TBLT for learner preparation and teacher training. Engagement with a more integrated role in cultural knowledge leads some teachers to reflect more on integrating language and culture (Lai & Li, 2011). Recent research indicates that technology-mediated tasks are authentic and simulate real-life tasks and TBLT is a successful mediator of intercultural dimension (East, 2012), however, the participants of this study expressed a preference for face-to-face contexts over online platforms to enhance interaction and share cultural information.

Given that there is limited research that examines higher education students' development that incorporates both digital and intercultural awareness outcomes, the results of this study have the potential to shed light on pre-service teacher educators in particular those interested in adopting a technology and task-based model of intercultural development. Within the curriculum used in teacher education programs, the content of school experience and language teaching methods courses can be revised with an emphasis on digital and intercultural learning. Further practice is encouraged in practicum schools. The emphasis on digital and intercultural learning can also be integrated into the Community Learning Practices (Service Learning) course that is offered in the first year of the undergraduate program. Teacher candidates combine their theoretical and practical knowledge through collaborative experience in the community. Through service learning practices, teacher candidates can support their academic, digital, and professional development as well as their intercultural communication competencies.

Ethics Committee Permission Information

This research study was conducted with the Research Ethics Committee approval of Boğaziçi University, dated 18.12.2020, and numbered E-84391427-050.01.04-20432.

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Appendices

Appendix A. E-portfolio template for the online facilitator training

Co-production Workshop Facilitator Training e-Portfolio

Introduction

Why a facilitator e-Portfolio?

A portfolio is a set of materials, interactions and reflections that you collect during your training and which you consider evidence of your efforts, progress and learning. Gathering and reflecting on experiences in a portfolio will

- help raise your awareness for what happened during your training and
- help you gain a deeper understanding of the value of being part of the ENACT project team.

What is in this e-Portfolio?

The e-Portfolio begins with an Introduction. After the introduction are two sections of questions that ask you to think about your experience in your training and to provide examples of experiences and learning in four areas:

- Transversal skills (digital skills, intercultural collaboration, confidence)
- Field-specific skills (translation, education, cultural studies, conflict management etc)
- Team work and research skills (transnational collaboration, ethics, research procedures)
- Overall evaluations of the training

How to complete this portfolio?

During the training:

1. <u>At the end of Week 1 and Week 2</u> reply to the questions asked for.
2. Include examples from your interaction to illustrate what you are saying. You may cut and paste examples from text-chats, comments on forums, pictures, screenshots from video interactions, or text from Google docs or the other types of technology you and your partners used to communicate.
3. Explain why you selected these examples, why you think they are important, and what you learned from them.

At the end of the training:

1. Save the final copy and submit your portfolio to the ENACT project team by email

Timeline

Complete Portfolio Questions for Week One by: **8 March 2021, Monday**

Complete Portfolio Questions for Week Two by: **15 March 2021, Monday**

Submit Portfolio by: **15 March 2021, Monday**

- *In all sections, write about what happened and what you thought or felt.*
- *Do not forget to include **examples** from your interaction to illustrate what you are saying.*
- *Answers can include **copy/paste pieces of your interactions, pictures, add screenshots, sound bites, photos, drawings, online posters or other things you created during the training**. Or you can simply write about something that happened during your training.*
- *Explain **why** you selected these examples (why are they important for you), and **what you learned from them**.*

Share as much or as little as you see appropriate. Focus on highlights of the training for you.

As you write, please follow these steps: Describe + Reflect + (Re-)evaluate: what, if anything, would you do differently next time?

Section A. Transversal skills

Transversal skills are skills that can be used in a wide variety of situations and work settings. These are not related to a particular job, task, academic discipline or area of knowledge. Write about **your**

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experiences of developing your transversal skills such as digital skills, intercultural communication and collaboration, confidence, public speaking, etc. Please give examples and as much detail as you can.

Section B. Field-specific skills

Field-specific skills are skills that allow you excel in a particular job. Write about **your experiences of developing your field-specific skills such as translation, education, cultural studies, conflict management, etc.** Please give examples and as much detail as you can.

Section C. Team work and research skills

During your training were there times when you felt you were part of a transnational project team and developed your research skills and awareness?

1. Write about who were in the training group, what you accomplished together, and your role in training group. Did you feel you were part of a team? What was good about being part of a team?

2. Were you able to express your thoughts and feelings to others easily? Was there a time when you felt the most socially and emotionally involved in the group? Who do you think you understood/know best? Why?

3. What have you learned about research ethics and procedures

Section D. Your overall evaluation of the week 1 training

1. **What was the best aspect of the training for you?**
2. **What is your opinion of the materials, platforms, and content used in Week 1 of this training?**
3. **How can Week 1 of this training be improved?**

Appendix B. Final reflection paper templates the facilitators completed after the workshops

Co-production Workshop Facilitator Final Reflection Paper

- *In all sections, write about what happened and what you thought or felt.*
- *Do not forget to include **examples** from your interaction to illustrate what you are saying.*
- *Answers can include **copy/paste pieces of your interactions, pictures, add screenshots, sound bites, photos, drawings, online posters or other things you created during the training**. Or you can simply **write about something** that happened during your training.*
- *Explain **why** you selected these examples (why are they important for you), and **what you learned from them**.*

Share as much or as little as you see appropriate. Focus on highlights of the training for you.

As you write, please follow these steps: Describe + Reflect + (Re-)evaluate: what, if anything, would you do differently next time?

Section A. Transversal skills

Transversal skills are skills that can be used in a wide variety of situations and work settings. These are not related to a particular job, task, academic discipline or area of knowledge.

Write about **your experiences of developing your transversal skills:**

- b. **digital skills:**
- c. **intercultural communication:**
- d. **collaboration:**
- e. **confidence:**
- f. **public speaking**

Please give examples and as much detail as you can.

Section B. Field-specific skills

Field-specific skills are skills that allow you excel in a particular job. Write about **your experiences of developing your field-specific skills:**

- a. **language learning:**
- b. **teaching:**
- c. **online teaching:**
- d. **leadership:**
- e. **education:**
- f. **intercultural education:**
- g. **conflict management:**

Please give examples and as much detail as you can.

Section C. Ethics and research skills

What have you learned about digital ethics/netiquette and procedures?

Section D. Your overall evaluation of the workshop facilitation and other suggestions/comments if you have any:

1. What was the best aspect of the ENACT project for you?
2. How can the ENACT app be improved?