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Building Virtual Bridges through an Online International Exchange

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In the past two decades, virtual exchanges driven by technological advancement and a desire to promote engagement among students in different countries and advance intercultural understanding have become widespread globally. A mounting number of studies points to potential benefits of virtual exchanges such as increased autonomy, improved motivation, a sense of learner agency, enhanced intercultural awareness and understanding for students with different language abilities. Moreover, a growing body of literature reports on synchronous and asynchronous exchanges connecting different levels of students, mostly lasting several weeks or a whole semester or more. In this presentation, we report on a short-term synchronous virtual exchange undertaken between university students in Japan and Taiwan. First, we describe the process of implementing this exchange at the respective universities, the students who participated in this exchange, the activities they completed, and the technology used. Then, using reflective narratives from the three organizers, we consider the cognitive, emotional, and motivational benefits this exchange had on our students, the difficulties encountered as organizers of the exchange, and possible ways to improve and continue this exchange in the future. Finally, we present a general outline and tentative roadmap for other educators wishing to offer meaningful experiences through international intercultural exchanges for their students.

Keywords

International Exchange, Online, Intercultural Awareness, Motivation

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