

Using Telecollaboration to Develop English Learners' Intercultural Competence in the Chinese Context

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Abstract—One of the most recent concerns of foreign language education is intercultural competence, which has been recognized as one of its major objectives due to the increasingly globalized context. Intercultural competence was even incorporated in the National Standards of Teaching Quality for Undergraduate English Majors issued by the Ministry of Education of China in 2015. Telecollaboration is argued to be an effective tool to develop students' intercultural competence, especially in the post-epidemic era, in which face-to-face intercultural communication seems increasingly difficult to realize. Based on Chinese scholars' assessment framework, the research aims to explore effective ways to improve English learners' intercultural competence by carrying out an empirical study of intercultural engagement among 30 junior English major students at Hebei Finance University in China. They were paired up with 27 students who majored in graphic design at Ibrahim Sultan Polytechnic in Malaysia and communicated through WeChat on given culture topics for six weeks. Quantitative data was collected through pre- and post-project self-evaluative questionnaires, and analyzed by SPSS paired samples T-test analysis. Qualitative data was collected through reflective journals and post-project interviews and analyzed by content analysis. The results show the telecollaboration project between Chinese and Malaysian students benefited the development of Chinese English majors' intercultural competence.

Index Terms—intercultural competence, telecollaboration, English major, Chinese context, AIC-CCS

I. INTRODUCTION

Along with the fast development of globalization and economic integration, the modern era has featured an increase in intercultural communication (Alsahil, 2016). It has become unprecedentedly significant for language learners to become intercultural speakers (Byram, 1997) and be equipped with intercultural competence. In recent years, the development of intercultural competence has been the main concern of EFL education (Lee, 2011). It has also been highly advocated in the English language teaching field in China (Deardorff & Kulich, 2017; Gu, 2016; Kulich, 2015; Lei, 2021; Wu et al., 2013).

It is common sense that intercultural interaction would be the best way to improve the cultural experience and improve intercultural competence. Going abroad used to be the only way to realize it (Stickler, 2011). However, in the current post-epidemic era, going abroad seems increasingly unrealistic. Thanks to Internet technology advances, especially the emergence of Web 2.0 tools and the popular use of social media, online intercultural exchange or telecollaboration enables learners to be engaged in more rich, open, spontaneous interactions than ever before (Elorza, 2008). And there is a huge increase in the study of the role of telecollaboration on intercultural competence development (Belz, 2007; Godwin-Jones, 2019; Hsu, 2019; O'Dowd & Dooley, 2020).

With the aim of exploring the effects of telecollaboration on the development of Chinese English major students' intercultural competence, this study designs a telecollaboration project to engage 30 Chinese students at Hebei Finance University and 27 Malaysian students in Ibrahim Sultan Polytechnic. Specifically, the research aims to answer the following two questions:

1. What are Chinese participants' perceptions toward the project?
2. How does the Chinese-Malaysian telecollaboration project contribute to the development of Chinese participants' intercultural competence?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This part focused on the two constructs of the study: intercultural competence and telecollaboration. Specifically, concepts and assessments of intercultural competence, definition, and tools of telecollaboration are reviewed.

A. *Studies on Intercultural Competence*

The concept of intercultural competence first appeared in the 1970s when Hymes (1972) first defined it as the ability to use grammatical competence in a communicative situation, leading scholars to pay attention to communication studies in language learning. Over the past several decades, various terms, definitions, and models have been proposed from different aspects. Intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1993), intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997), intercultural mindfulness (Chamberlin-Quinlisk, 2005), intercultural competence (Fantini, 2006), cross-cultural mindfulness (Knutson, 2006), etc. have been successively proposed. The present study adopted intercultural competence due to its popularity in research in the field (Deardorff & Jones, 2009; Khasanova, 2020; Luo & Chan, 2022; Zhang & Zhou, 2019).

At present, there is still no commonly agreed comprehensive definition for intercultural competence since the abstract and complex nature of its two constructs: culture and competence (Schulz, 2007). Byram (1997) defined intercultural competence as the ability to understand the relationship of different cultures and interpret among different cultures. Deardorff (2008) suggested a notion of intercultural competence after comparing and analyzing a collection of views, which has become a highly agreed one: “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 33). Although a universal agreement hasn’t been reached, it is commonly acknowledged that one’s own culture is also included in intercultural competence in addition to understanding the other’s culture (Izmaylova, 2017).

In addition, some scholars have also proposed models of the composition of intercultural competence from different perspectives, among which Byram’s (1997) model is commonly regarded as the most influential one (Deardorff, 2006; Wu et al., 2013). According to Byram (1997), intercultural competence mainly encompasses five components: attitude, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. For each of the five components, Byram (1997) clarified its objectives, making his model widely used and referred to as a guideline to study and assess intercultural competence (Hoff, 2020; O’Dowd, 2007; Wu et al., 2013; Yang, 2014).

Complexity and controversy also exist when it comes to the assessment of intercultural competence. Some scholars attribute it to the lack of a unified definition and model (Matsuo, 2012). Others blame the insufficiency of sophisticated statistical analysis methods and samples (Van de Vijver & Leung, 2009). Despite argumentative ideas, both quantitative and qualitative tools have been proposed. Self-assessment tools such as The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) (Hammer & Bennett, 2009), and Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (Chen, 2000) were reported to be used for quantitative analysis of the development of intercultural competence (Dong et al., 2008; Jankowski, 2019; Paige et al., 2003). Qualitative tools such as portfolios, ethnography, interviews and observation were also popularly adopted in the intercultural competence assessment (Fornara, 2018; Jin, 2013; Lee, 2009). An increasing number of researchers (Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2009) have advocated using both methods to make complement to each other.

In China, studies on intercultural competence have seen a significant increase in the past twenty years. Some scholars (Wu et al., 2013; Yang & Zhuang, 2007) have been striving to enrich intercultural competence composition and dimensions. In Yang and Zhuang’s (2007) study, knowledge competence, practical communication competence, acculturation competence and global consciousness competence were incorporated into the framework of intercultural competence. Wu et al. (2013) expanded Byram’s (1997) framework to six factors: knowledge of self, knowledge of others, attitude, intercultural communicative skills, intercultural cognitive skills and awareness. Regarding the assessment method of intercultural competence, few studies have been found in the Chinese context. The most worth noting is the scale proposed by Wu Weiping and her colleagues. Short for AIC-CCS, the Assessment of Intercultural Competence for Chinese College Students was specially designed for college students in the Chinese context based on a large-scale empirical study. 28 items belonging to six factors were included in the scale (Wu et al., 2013).

B. *Studies on Telecollaboration*

Telecollaboration was first put forward by Warschauer (1996) and it has been increasingly popular in research along with the development of Internet technologies (O’Dowd, 2012). Other terms have also been widely used such as online intercultural exchanges (O’Dowd, 2007; Thorn, 2010), and computer-mediated communication. Definitions have been proposed with various focuses. However, subjects and media are necessary elements. Guth and Helm (2010) defined it as an exchange process among people of different cultural backgrounds based on the Internet. In the view of O’Dowd (2012), telecollaboration can develop language learners’ language skills and intercultural competence by bringing them together with the help of online communication tools. In terms of tools used in telecollaboration, both asynchronous communication tools (Chase, 2007; Chun, 2011; O’Dowd, 2003) and synchronous communication tools have been popularly practiced worldwide.

With regard to models of telecollaboration, two models are mostly practiced, i.e. the e-tandem model and the intercultural model (O’Dowd, 2016). The e-tandem model has been widely implemented since the beginning of the online intercultural exchange. It’s a bilingual exchange in which two native speakers of different languages communicate with the aim to learn each other’s language. Therefore, the language used is half-half and it’s featured by learners’ autonomy (Helm, 2015). In recent years, due to theoretical and practical needs, it has been increasingly advocated to extend telecollaboration to three or more languages with cultural learning as the focus. Intercultural competence has attracted more attention in the studies of telecollaboration (O’Dowd, 2016). A large number of

empirical studies were done in which telecollaboration was implemented to improve language learners' intercultural competence (Godwin-Jones, 2019; Schenker, 2012; Üzümlü et al., 2020). However, the majority of telecollaboration projects had been designed in western classrooms in Northern America and Europe, with a "disappointingly small" (O'Dowd, 2016, p. 25) number involving Asian contexts.

In sum, few studies have been done regarding telecollaboration to develop language learners' intercultural competence in the Chinese context. There is an urgent need to enrich studies in this field.

III. METHODOLOGY

The current research aims to investigate the perceptions of Chinese participants and how the Chinese-Malaysian WeChat telecollaboration project exerts influence on the development of Chinese English major students' intercultural competence by engaging 30 Chinese English major students and 27 Malaysian students. In order to realize the aim, a convergent mixed research method (Creswell, 2018) was adopted.

A. Research Procedure

The research was carried out in the course *Intercultural Communication* for junior English major students at Hebei Finance University. Thirty students (26 girls and four boys) were paired up with twenty-seven (13 girls and 14 boys) students from Ibrahim Sultan Polytechnic who majored in Graphic Design one-on-one with three groups two-on-one. They communicated in English with each other for six weeks with every week a given cultural topic at ten p.m. Saturday through WeChat. They also had the freedom to reschedule occasionally or communicate other topics after they finished the given topics. The research selected the topics, taking into account participants' interests from a questionnaire. Finally, the weekly topics were ice-breaking, college life, typical food, festivals, family relations, and religion.

B. Research Instruments

To answer the research questions, the present research made use of questionnaires, reflective journals and interviews as primary research instruments. The questionnaire adopted is named Assessment of Intercultural Competence of Chinese College Students, short for AIC-CCS (Wu et al., 2013), and it was designed specially to evaluate the intercultural competence of Chinese college students. Mainly influenced by Byram's (1997) multi-dimensional model of intercultural competence, AIC-CCS is a self-assessment scale composed of 28 items into six main factors: knowledge of self, knowledge of others, attitudes, intercultural communicative skills, intercultural cognitive skills, and awareness. All 30 Chinese participants were asked to select from "very low" to "very high", representing 1 to 5 scores respectively. The questionnaire was sent both before and after the experiment to see the changes in students' intercultural competence.

Reflective journals were required of Chinese participants to be handed in every week. The researcher gave guidelines to specify the requirements of writing, which are mainly designed to collect Chinese participants' perceptions toward the project as well as gains and obstacles in the communication process.

Post-project interviews were implemented with all of 30 Chinese participants. Questions were asked centering on the six factors in the questionnaire, their attitudes and obstacles in the project.

C. Data Collection and Analysis

Details for data collection and analysis to answer the two research questions are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Research Question	Data Collection	Data Analysis
1. What are Chinese participants' perceptions toward the project?	Reflective journals, interview	Content analysis
2. How does the Chinese-Malaysian telecollaboration project contribute to the development of Chinese students' intercultural competence?	Questionnaires, journals, interview	Paired samples T-test Content analysis

For quantitative data in the research, data was mainly collected through pre- and post-project questionnaires. The questionnaires were sent to the 30 Chinese participants and then received through the class WeChat group. The collected data was then imported into SPSS 22.0 software to run a mean-variance analysis, the results of which show each participant's intercultural competence score. Then paired samples T-test was operated to explore the development of Chinese participants' overall intercultural competence and the six variables in AIC-CCS after the telecollaboration intervention.

For qualitative data, a semi-structured interview was carried out to triangulate the results from questionnaires. First, all 30 Chinese participants were interviewed about the six factors of intercultural competence in the questionnaire and participants' change of attitudes and difficulties in the process. In addition, the Chinese participants were required to

hand in a 600-word reflective journal every week to summarize their communication process and describe their feelings about the project. Qualitative data then were collected through content analysis.

IV. FINDINGS

A. *Chinese Participants' Perceptions Toward the Project*

When asked about the overall impression and gain on the project, all the Chinese participants responded with positive comments as they thought it was helpful to “learn Malaysian culture”, “know more of Chinese culture”, “enhance intercultural competence”, “learn to respect”, “make friends”, “improve English skills”. As Deng said in the interview that “I think it is pretty good on the whole. I would like to communicate with my partner when I’m in pressure to make myself relieved.” Liu mentioned “I feel good to make a friend through the project. Besides I have learned some cultural knowledge of Malaysia. I knew nothing about Malaysia before.” Wang said that this had been her first time to communicate one-on-one with a foreigner, so that she was fond of the feeling of freshness and excitement brought by the project. It is also surprisingly found that many participants mentioned language improvement despite the fact that English acted only as a lingua franca and language learning was not within the research objectives. Especially they deeply experienced the differences between standard English learned in class and oral English frequently used in oral conversations in reality. The results from interviews are triangulated by that from Chinese participants’ reflective journals. Zhang wrote in her first journal “My partner Luva said that rather than recite English words, they make conversations in English in daily life, and gradually they see improvement in English”. She discussed methods to learn English with her partner. Wang mentioned in her second journal that she knew some new words from her partner and she believed the project could enlarge her vocabulary and give her a chance to experience Malaysian English accent. She also summarized her first communication process as “joyful and successful” and in her view, “this is not only an opportunity for self-improvement, but also a process of promoting cultural exchanges”.

Concerning prospects of continuous communication, in the interview, all Chinese participants expressed optimistic prospects on the relationship with their partners. They all hoped that the intercultural communication could last on the condition that their partners were willing to continue to communicate. However, some participants also put forward their concerns for future communication since some lost touch with their partners as soon as the project ended. The reasons mainly lay in “personality disharmony”, “infrequent use of WeChat”, “heavy schedule of both sides”, “decreased interest and attention”. Song mentioned in the interview that “My partner is a boy and maybe he’s uneasy to talk to a girl”. The same problem existed in Chen and his partner. Nevertheless, Liu and her male partner seemed to have greatly enjoyed their communication since they made full use of the functions of WeChat to video call, voice call, send videos, messages, emojis, sending comments and likes in each other’s moments. Around three quarters of Chinese participants complained about the inconvenience of the use of WeChat for their Malaysian partners. Even though they downloaded WeChat, many Malaysian participants use it only at project-specified time every week. Therefore, Chinese participants were upset about the continuous use of their partners without requirements and instructions of their lecturer. Another obstacle met in the process was time arrangements. The last four weeks coincided with final exam preparation for Chinese participants, and some Chinese participants also complained about the infrequent interaction of their Malaysian partners because of heavy workload in the study. Deng talked about this in the interview that “My partner and I interacted a lot during the first two weeks. From the third week on, he responded me with fewer words since he said he was to take exams”. This problem was spontaneously mentioned in both interviews and the last four weeks’ journals that “The feeling of freshness and exactment seemed to have weakened week by week”.

In summary, Chinese participants hold positive and optimistic perceptions on the project and acknowledged the project had brought them numerous benefits. However, there were still some problems and obstacles in implementing the project.

B. *Development of Chinese Students' Intercultural Competence*

(a). *Quantitative Data Analysis*

Pre-project and post-project questionnaires were sent to and received from all the 30 Chinese participants. It was hypothesized that students’ self-assessed intercultural competence level would be higher as a result of their intercultural interactions in the telecollaboration process. Among the six variables in AIC-CCS, data for overall intercultural competence, knowledge of others, intercultural communicative skills and awareness were normally distributed, thus suitable for paired samples T-test (See Table 2). Whereas, data for knowledge of self, attitude, intercultural cognitive skills didn’t conform to normal distribution, thus allowing for nonparametric Wilcoxon signed rank test (See Table 3).

TABLE 2
RESULTS OF PAIRED SAMPLES T TEST

Variable	Paired Samples T Test					
		<i>M</i>	<i>Std.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
Overall intercultural competence	pre-	3.13	0.380	-4.901	29	.000
	post-	3.57	0.485			
Knowledge of others	pre-	2.41	0.539	-7.317	29	.000
	post-	3.33	0.619			
Intercultural communicative skills	pre-	3.22	0.544	-3.546	29	.001
	post-	3.60	0.530			
Awareness	pre-	3.37	0.765	-1.552	29	.131
	post-	3.62	0.605			

As seen from Table 2, regarding Chinese participants' overall intercultural competence, the post-project intercultural competence mean score was higher ($M=3.57$, $SD=0.485$) than pre-project intercultural competence mean score ($M=3.13$, $SD=0.380$). A significant difference after the implementation of the project was observed ($P<0.05$). Considering $t(29)=-4.901$, we have enough evidence to suggest that the project contributed to the increase of Chinese students' overall intercultural competence. About knowledge of others, the post-project mean score was higher ($M=3.33$, $SD=0.619$) than pre-project score ($M=2.41$, $SD=0.539$). The value for paired samples t test was at $p<0.05$, indicating a significant change after the implementation of the project for knowledge of other. With $t(29)=-7.317$, it was suggested that the project contributed to the increase of Chinese participants' knowledge of others. For intercultural communicative skills, Chinese participants' post-project score was higher ($M=3.60$, $SD=0.530$) than pre-project score ($M=3.22$, $SD=0.544$). The project elicited a significant difference for Chinese students' intercultural communicative skills ($p<0.05$). With $t(29)=-3.546$, it can be concluded that the project contributed to the increase of Chinese participants' intercultural communicative skills. However, about the variable awareness, despite the fact that the post-project score was higher ($M=3.63$, $SD=0.605$) than pre-project score ($M=3.37$, $SD=0.765$), the result of a paired samples t test was $p>0.05$, signifying no significant difference after the implementation of the project for awareness. Therefore, it is concluded that the project hasn't contributed to the increase of Chinese participants' awareness.

TABLE 3
RESULTS OF WILCOXON SIGNED RANK TEST

Variable	Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test					
		<i>M</i>	<i>Std.</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
Knowledge of self	pre-	3.12	0.476	3.00	-2.097	0.036
	post-	3.46	0.634			
attitude	pre-	4.39	0.662	4.67	-1.451	0.147
	post-	4.13	0.720			
Intercultural cognitive skills	pre-	3.02	0.531	3.00	-2.835	0.005
	post-	3.52	0.648			

We can see in Table 3 that in terms of the variable knowledge of self, the result for a Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test showed the six-week Chinese-Malaysian telecollaboration project elicited a statistically significant change among Chinese students ($Z=-2.097$, $p<0.05$). With a higher post-project median score ($Mdn=3.46$) than that of pre-project ($Mdn=3.12$), it can be suggested that the telecollaboration intervention has led to an increase of Chinese participants' knowledge of self. For the variable attitude, the statistics presented in Table 3 showed there was no significant difference after the implementation of the telecollaboration project ($Z=-1.451$, $p>0.05$). Both the pre-project mean score for attitude ($M=4.39$, $SD=0.662$) and post-project mean score for attitude ($M=4.13$, $SD=0.720$) are very high, indicating high levels of Chinese participants' attitude toward intercultural communication both before and after the telecollaboration intervention. Regarding the variable intercultural cognitive skills, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test revealed a significant change among Chinese participants after the telecollaboration intervention ($Z=-2.835$, $p<0.05$). Considering that the post-project median score ($Mdn=3.52$) was higher than the pre-project median score ($Mdn=3.02$), an increase was suggested for intercultural cognitive skills among Chinese participants after the implementation of the telecollaboration project.

In summary, the analysis for the quantitative data from the pre-project and post-project self-evaluated questionnaires indicated that the six-week Chinese-Malaysian telecollaboration project contributed to the increase of Chinese students' intercultural competence as a whole. Specifically, four variables within the scope of intercultural competence were observed a significant increase after the intervention of the telecollaboration project, which were knowledge of self, knowledge of others, intercultural communicative skills and intercultural cognitive skills. Nevertheless, two variables attitude and awareness showed no significant change.

(b). *Qualitative Data Analysis*

Data from post-project interviews and journals also adds confidence to the quantitative data analysis results. Chinese participants have given positive responses on their development of knowledge of self, knowledge of others, intercultural communicative skills and intercultural cognitive skills.

1. *Knowledge of Self*

All Chinese subjects answered yes when asked whether the project had been helpful to learn more about Chinese culture. Since only after you have a comprehensive knowledge of your own culture, can you proceed smoothly in intercultural exchange. As is mentioned by Song in the interview that:

Yes, I have known more about Chinese culture. Because when I introduce my own culture to foreigners, I have to make it right. So I always search online before we start a given topic. For example, when we are to communicate about marriage, I searched a lot of information online about legal age, dowry, wedding rituals etc. because I'd never paid attention to that.

It clearly shows that the telecollaboration project has motivated Chinese participants to search for information on their own Chinese culture.

2. *Knowledge of Others*

All Chinese participants admitted an increase of knowledge of Malaysian culture through weekly communication with their Malaysian partners. Most Chinese participants knew little of Malaysian culture before the project. As in Xu's case, she couldn't distinguish Malaysia from the Maldives before the project. Liu mistakenly thought English was the mother tongue of Malaysia previously and Wang had no knowledge of religions popular in Malaysia. However, they all gained much more knowledge of Malaysian culture, especially related to the given topics. As Wei wrote in her fifth journal that "I can always absorb some new cultural knowledge of her country every week". Meanwhile, they were also proud of spreading Chinese culture to their Malaysian partners. For instance, Wang wrote the following example in her second journal:

My biggest feeling this week is that we can learn from each other's culture and increase our knowledge. When we communicate, we may not know much about some phenomena in the other's country. We can learn from each other to expand our knowledge. For example, when my partner doesn't understand the concept of the nuclear family, I can explain it to him so that he can also learn new knowledge. At the same time, this process is also a process of spreading different cultures. When I explain to him, I feel a little nervous but proud in my heart.

Through communication, Chinese participants have expanded their understanding of Malaysian culture, including some cultural knowledge that had never been heard of before the project for them. Wang wrote in her journal about Malaysian weddings as follows:

The wedding date is usually on Friday because Friday is a day of rest for Muslims and the wedding is presided over by the patriarch. Sunday is the official wedding day, and guests will be hosted on that day. This is the knowledge that I have never understood before. For the first time, I realized that the date of a wedding is also influenced by religion.

3. *Intercultural Communicative Skills*

In the communication process, Chinese participants spared no effort to show respect and politeness to their Malaysian participants as instructed by the researcher before the project started. As Song illustrated "I have learned to communicate with a foreigner with politeness and try not to offend them, especially their privacy". It was also mentioned by Wang in the interview to take language appropriateness into consideration. Li also talked about paying attention to cultural taboos in intercultural communication. The improvement of intercultural communicative skills is explicitly indicated in Liu's response as follows:

In the beginning, I didn't dare to ask questions because I was afraid of offending him. However, once I found he actually didn't mind at all, I began to interact more. I think foreigners may be also afraid of offending us. So, I believe I will be more open and braver in my future intercultural communication practice.

Some participants also summarized some techniques in intercultural communication. As Chen wrote in his second journal that:

In the process of communication, politeness is one of the most important [things]. Don't just ask someone something off the cuff. Be prepared and it will make them respect you more with fewer barriers in the communication process.

Chinese participants tried different ways to understand their partners' words to make the communication smoothly proceed. For example, the following statement shows how Zhang strived to communicate by searching and sending pictures:

When we talked about breakfast, I found it hard for me to translate Chinese food into English. So, I used some pictures searched online. And I sent a picture of porridge. The name of it in Malaysia is different from ours. They call it kuih pau.

4. *Intercultural Cognitive Skills*

In the interview, when Chinese participants were asked about how they dealt with cultural shock and conflicts in the communication process, they tended to have tried to reduce conflicts by asking and explaining. At the same time, they took advantage of various functions on WeChat such as videos, translation, sending pictures, links and emojis. For

example, Song and the other seven Chinese students thought highly of using the translation button on WeChat. Whenever there were new words, they would turn to the button to translate from English to Chinese to help them understand better. Song illustrated further as follows:

My partner told me he had six siblings in his family, which made me shocked. In China, it's quite rare to have so many children in a family. Then I told him that in China, a couple is only allowed to have two kids at most. He felt surprised, too. We then further communicated about the population, child policy, and cost of raising children. At last, both of us gain more understanding of it.

In this case, both Chinese and Malaysian partners turned culture shock into cultural understanding by explaining and interpreting. It shows that Chinese participants held positive attitudes in the face of cultural conflicts and strived to come up with active measures to reduce them.

V. CONCLUSION

The study aims to explore Chinese participants' perceptions of the Chinese-Malaysian WeChat telecollaboration and investigate how the project influences their intercultural competence. The findings indicate that Chinese participants give positive comments to the project on the whole mainly because the project helps to "learn Malaysian culture", "know more about Chinese culture", "enhance intercultural competence", "learn to respect", "make friends", "reduce pressure". They also hold optimistic prospects of continuous communication with their partners. Both quantitative and qualitative data show the telecollaboration project has led to the improvement of Chinese participants' overall intercultural competence as well as four variables knowledge of self, knowledge of others, intercultural communicative skills and intercultural cognitive skills.

Meanwhile, Chinese participants also have met problems in terms of "personality disharmony", "infrequent use of WeChat", "heavy schedule of both sides", and "decreased interest and attention". These problems show part of the limitations of the study.

This study has several limitations. First, to some extent, Malaysian participants' relatively infrequent use of WeChat posed difficulties in further communication between both parties. WeChat is a daily used software for Chinese participants, but for most Malaysian participants, their Chinese partners may be one of the few contact friends on WeChat. It led to a delayed reply. Second, this study only focused on the reflection and feelings of Chinese participants. However, Malaysian participants' perceptions also deserve attention. Responses from both sides can further add to the reliability of research results. Third, the telecollaboration project lasts only for six weeks, which is not long enough for further communication and analysis. Fourth, this study only takes the form of one-on-one cultural communication, varied forms such as group discussion, news releases and comments should also be taken into account.

Despite limitations, this research has provided some contributions to the study of telecollaboration to enhance intercultural competence. Specifically, it has enriched the empirical studies in the Chinese context. It has also extended the communication tool to WeChat and context to three languages with English as a lingua franca.

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