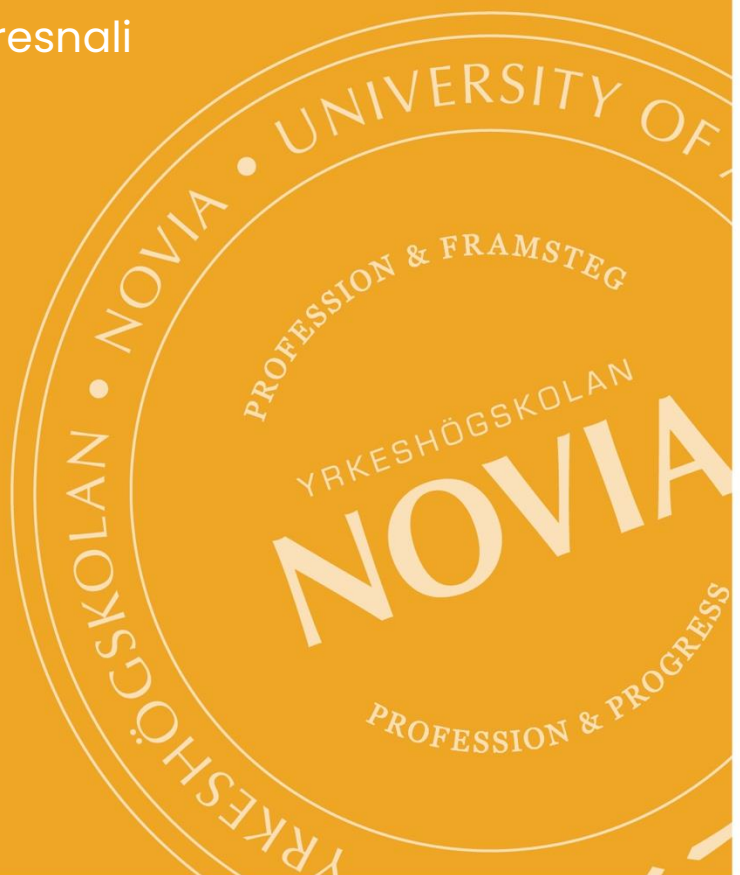


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Perception of Learning Through Collaboration in a Cross-Cultural Setting: A Case Study of Novia UAS and Lambung Mangkurat University

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Abstract

Higher Educational Institutions play an important role in helping students acquire knowledge and skills so as to become useful in the society and corporate world. One way that students and teachers acquire diverse knowledge is learning collaboratively through cross-cultural settings. The aim of this paper is to find out how students and teachers perceive learning through collaboration in a cross-cultural setting and if students and teachers benefit from the cross-cultural learning program. The case study included some selected students and teachers from Novia University of Applied Sciences (Novia UAS) in Vaasa, Finland, and Lambung Mangkurat University (ULM) in Banjarmasin, Indonesia. The study employed the use of primary data of students' and teachers' written reflections and a questionnaire to collect data from respondents. A total of eight teachers and six students from Novia UAS and ULM participated in the project, whereas five teachers and six students were selected to participate in short mobilities.

A simple random sampling was adopted to select the respondents. Again, open ended questions were used in the questionnaire. The study focused on the participating teachers and students in the collaborative programs between Novia UAS in Finland and ULM in Indonesia. The research deduced that both students and teachers understand the concept of learning through cross-cultural settings. It is, therefore, recommended that more cross-cultural programs should be organized regularly to enhance students' knowledge about students and academics from other schools and countries.

1 Introduction

Collaborative learning is a widely used practical teaching method because its educational potential is still not fully exploited in everyday classes. Currently, more and more researchers are devoting themselves to collaborative learning (Cheng, 2021). Culture has a significant impact on teaching and learning, and cultural aspects such as power distance, individualism, cooperation, competition, and openness have a significant impact on education. Different aspects of European and Asian culture have different and significant impacts on teaching and learning. Therefore, cross-cultural differences in cooperative learning are also evident. Compared to competitive and individualized learning, collaborative learning allows students to participate in group activities and share knowledge and ideas, but it is mostly student-centered (Kumi et al., 2017; Laal et al., 2012). Although cultural backgrounds differ, teachers often play the same role as facilitators. Therefore, although students are primarily in charge of collaborative learning classrooms, teachers also hold an important position that cannot be ignored. Teachers and students with different cultural backgrounds will inevitably influence the style and effectiveness of collaborative learning.

Collaborative learning is an educational method used in a variety of fields that allows learners to solve problems, complete tasks, and create products together. This approach involves learners of different ability levels working together in groups to achieve a common goal. Collaborative learning and peer tutoring in a university setting can have a positive impact on helping students maintain constant motivation and student attachment. It also helps reduce the number of dropouts and promotes greater regularity in academics.

Teaching and learning have evolved over the years. Although the use of lectures remains the dominant teaching format in educational institutions (Felder & Brent, 2005), students need to be active learners, and traditional teaching styles may be less suitable. This requires an alternative teaching mode, namely collaborative learning, to promote active learning among students. Why is collaborative learning so interesting? In this global and digitally connected world, we need to equip students with 21st century skills such as critical thinking, interpersonal communication, collaboration skills, and global awareness to develop the next generation of innovators and creative thinkers. (Johnson, Johnson, Roseth & Shin, 2014).

To develop these skills, educational institutions should consider using innovative teaching methods that inspire a passion for learning and provide active learning opportunities for students (OECD, 2005; Saavedra & Opfer, 2017). Previous studies have shown that collaborative learning is one of the most important teaching and learning strategies to achieve this goal (Felder & Brent, 2007; Loh & Teoh, 2017; Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010). Although collaborative learning is particularly valued in current educational pedagogy and contemporary scholarship, far less has been written to provide a literature review of collaborative learning in higher education. In essence, it is necessary to summarize previous research on collaborative learning in higher education to provide a historical overview of this particular field of research.

European educational institutions are continuously strengthening and expanding their study abroad programs, international studies, intercultural learning, and cross-border education and services, thereby promoting global learning, cultural competency, and global effectiveness (Coryell et al., 2014; Landorff et al., 2018; Verzera, 2018). A variety of joint programs, partnerships for international programs and curriculum development, collaborative research, cross-border education, and intercultural service learning are developed and operated both organisationally and individually (Mercer et al., 2017). Asian countries such as Indonesia are actively implementing educational reforms by learning from Europe, the United States and Canada, improving the quality of education, and promoting the knowledge economy (Rungfamai, 2019). Western learning-centered, collaborative, experiential, and research-oriented teaching and learning practices have

also gained popularity in the East as a global standard (Golding, 2018; Trinh, 2018). More and more Westerners are being invited as experts to bring their theories and practices to Asian countries.

However, little is known about how academics and students at Finnish and Indonesian universities maintain cross-cultural exchanges, develop global sensibilities in academic cooperation. For instance, how does language and sociocultural background influence teaching and research in cross-cultural settings? How is knowledge recognized, constructed, and exchanged? It reminds us that “adult educators in the United States must develop social and pedagogical understandings of learning, knowledge, and supportive practices that go beyond their own Western cultural influences” (Coryell, 2013). Studying in a cross-cultural environment is likely to have more benefits for both students, teachers, and the university as a whole. With this in mind, a research study was conducted to uncover perceptions of learning through collaboration in cross-cultural settings.

This paper makes a contribution to existing literature. First, the paper contributes to existing knowledge about learning through collaboration in a cross-cultural setting. Again, the results are important for Higher Education Institutions and students both in developed and developing countries.

The following is the synopsis of the paper: The next section addresses the review of the literature, research methodologies and data results and analysis are presented in sections three and four respectively. The final section contains conclusions and policy recommendations.

1.1 Research Objectives and Questions

The aim of this research work is to find out how students and teachers at Novia UAS and ULM perceive learning through collaboration in a cross-cultural setting and if students and teachers benefit from the cross-cultural learning program.

The research focused on providing answers to the following questions: (1) what is students' and teachers' understanding of learning through collaboration in a cross-cultural setting? (2) To what extent have teachers and students benefited from the cross-cultural learning program?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition and elements underlying collaborative learning across cultures

A scenario in which two or more people attempt to learn something together is known as collaborative learning. People who participate in collaborative learning make use of each other's abilities and resources, in contrast to those who learn alone. For example, seeking information from one another, assessing one another's concepts, and keeping an eye on each other's work (Chen et al., 2018; Barkley et al., 2014). More precisely, the theory of collaborative learning holds that knowledge can be generated within a population when individuals actively engage in experience-sharing and asymmetric role-playing. Stated differently, collaborative learning describes methods and settings where students work together on a project where everyone is responsible for and dependent upon one another. These encompass both in-person and virtual talks, such as those held in online forums and chat rooms. Methods for examining collaborative learning processes include statistical discourse analysis and conversation analysis (Veldman et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2021). Therefore, groups of students working together to find understanding, meaning, or answers, or to create an item or product of their learning, are common examples of collaborative learning. Furthermore, there is debate over whether the collaborative learning paradigm is more advantageous than detrimental because it reinterprets the conventional student-teacher connection in the classroom. Collaborative writing, group projects, cooperative

problem solving, discussions, study groups, and other activities are examples of collaborative learning activities (Barkley et al., 2014).

Teachers and academics have given collaborative learning a significant attention over the past few decades (Fu et al., 2018). Collaborative learning is completely, self-designed in purpose and structure, and students take full responsibility for their learning (Barkley et al., 2014). Simply put, students have more autonomy and teachers provide minimal guidance. Collaborative learning is a more explicit and structured learning format that allows teachers to carefully create highly structured and well-organized learning environments that require the active participation of each student to be involved in any given task. The teacher's basic job is to set goals, plan and structure tasks, and divide students into group roles so that they can work together towards a common goal (Slavin, 2012). When groups are working on a task, the teacher should act as a coach or facilitator, moving from group to group and monitoring the learning process. Teachers should also provide students with ongoing feedback and evaluation of group progress.

2.2 Benefits of Collaborative Learning in a Cross-cultural Setting

Research already tells a lot about the benefits of collaborative learning. Academic benefits include knowledge acquisition and increased intellectual and academic ability. Essentially, collaborative learning allows students to play a more passive role by observing task of other students and a more active role in the learning process. Many studies have shown that active learning is more effective than passive learning in promoting deep understanding of material between two cultural studies. Millis & Cottell (1998) also emphasized that collaborative learning is an educational approach that allows students to further develop higher order thinking skills in a culturally diverse environment. This improves students' attitudes towards learning, which in turn increases content knowledge retention (Johnson et al., 2014; Porter, 2006; Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010; Thanh, Gillies, & Renshaw, 2008). Collaborative learning also allows students to analyse problems from multiple perspectives, allowing them to think more complexly. For students who are too shy to ask questions to their teachers, collaborative learning provides a platform to ask their peers for clarification. Some studies have shown that students learn better through peer explanations because they are able to translate the teacher's words into conversations with their peers. During the sharing process, more proficient students improve the clarity of their thinking by connecting and synthesizing information from different sources. All of these can increase understanding through active thinking and explanation (Johnson et al., 2014). Additionally, through the mutual exchange of ideas, opinions, and perspectives, students are encouraged to think critically in an academic context (Slavin, 2012), thereby broadening their horizons (Barkley et al., 2005; Cavanagh, 2011; Colac, 2015; Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010). Not surprisingly, in literature there is a strong positive relationship between collaborative learning and academic performance (Colak, 2015; Du, 2015; Porter, 2006; Slavin, 2014).

In addition to academic benefits, emotional benefits also include the emotional aspects of learning, such as gratitude, enthusiasm, motivation, and values, which make a person more deeply engaged in their own learning. The person becomes more dedicated and independent (Du, 2016). When students work cooperatively in classroom activities, they can create a comfortable social atmosphere. As students interact with each other, the closeness and support they receive from their peers makes them feel like they are part of a group. This makes students feel engaged not only in their own learning goals but also in the group learning goals (Carcolini, 2017; Gillies, 2003; James, 2018; Seng, 2014). In the long term, students are more likely to experience higher levels of self-efficacy, self-esteem, and satisfaction (Barkley et al., 2005; Cavanagh, 2011; Porter, 2006; Slavin, 2014). Collaborative learning can also help enrich autonomous learning experiences, increasing learning choice and flexibility (Johnson et al., 2013, 2014; Millis & Cottell, 1998; Seng,

2014). For most students, self-directed learning motivates them to persevere in the face of challenges. Further research has proven that when students are able to learn independently, they are more motivated and naturally enjoy learning more (Thanh, Gillies & Renshaw, 2008). Over time, they become more comfortable learning new things and find motivation to continue learning (Du, 2016; Johnson et al., 2014). This may explain why students feel that their personal ego, strength, confidence, and level of autonomy have increased after participating in cooperative learning.

The benefits of social skills include the ability to get along with others in an acceptable and appropriate manner. While learning is a complex individual process, it is also a social process (Felder & Brent, 2007). Collaborative learning allows students to interact with other students in a variety of ways. To complete group assignments, students must engage in group interactions constructively and respect each other as distinct, unique individuals. These social interactions require strong interpersonal social and collaborative skills (Cavanagh, 2011; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Shimazoe & Aldrich, 2010; Thanh, Gillies, & Renshaw, 2008). These skills enable students to trust each other in teams and solve problems together. Collaborative learning can also provide students with a context for using social language, reading social cues and sharing ideas. Furthermore, collaborative learning gives learners the opportunity to see things from another person's perspective (Gokhale, 1995; Lim, 2004; Yager, 2000). By collaborating with other members of the group, students gain insight into what others are feeling and thinking and are able to respect the opinions of others. From there, students can learn various interpersonal negotiation strategies that they can use with their colleagues to resolve disagreements in a constructive way. Therefore, empirical studies have found that collaborative learning is critical to the development of students' social skills and abilities (Cavanagh, 2011; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Seng, 2014; Slavin, 2014). Ultimately, students who are satisfied with themselves and their social skills are more likely to form diverse and mutually beneficial relationships.

2.3 Collaborative Learning in Higher Education

In university contexts, collaborative learning has been considered cross-nationally. Although there are many studies proving that collaborative learning is an effective learning strategy, most studies have been conducted in Western countries, particularly the United States, Europe, and Australia (Cavanagh, 2011; Herrmann, 2014; Roseth, Johnson & Johnson, 2008). Claimed to have yielded positive results in Western research, collaborative learning soon became adopted in other parts of the world, including Asia (Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, China, etc.), the Middle East, and Africa. Tadesse and Gillies (2015) investigated the satisfaction and opinions of Ethiopian university students and teachers regarding collaborative learning. Neo (2005) integrated collaborative learning into a multimedia project to measure its impact on student learning in Malaysia. Loh and Teo (2017) investigated the effectiveness of collaborative learning to engage Singaporean students. Singh (2013) and Malatji (2016) investigated the benefits of collaborative learning on the cognitive abilities of South African students. Tombak and Altun (2016) investigated Turkish university students' motivation for collaborative learning and Thanh et al. (2008) and Tran (2014) investigated teachers' and students' perceptions of the use of collaborative learning in Vietnamese universities. These studies provide concrete evidence that collaborative learning is being used in higher education in other parts of the world outside of the Western world. The results of the research concluded that collaborative learning is effective, and that other HEIs should also adopt this mechanism.

As more universities integrate collaborative learning, Johnson and Johnson (2014) argue that higher education not only challenges students to master knowledge content, but also challenges students to analyse and accept multiple opinions from their peers, and also argue that cooperation in different groups should be encouraged. This is particularly important where the implementation of collaborative learning in higher education has shown promising results (Cavanagh, 2011; Colak,

2015; Hammond, Bithell, Jones, & Bidgood, 2010; Herrmann, 2014; Ho, Watkins, & Kelly, 2001; Kelly & Fetherston, 2008; Malatji, 2016; Tadesse & Gillies, 2015; Thanh, Gillies & Renshaw, 2008; Tran, 2014). Researchers suggest that students are more mature and have higher cognitive thinking skills. However, for some students, entrenched learning styles are a barrier to successfully navigating collaborative learning. There can be various reasons for this: scanty promising results include teachers and students not receiving sufficient training in collaborative learning, differences in understanding and perception of collaborative learning, barriers imposed by educational institutions, and even cultural differences that differentiate teaching and learning.

2.4 Collaborative Learning in Europe and Asian Cultures

Research shows that culture has a significant impact on learning and teaching. Collaborative learning as a teaching method is likely to be influenced by culture, and researchers have focused on collaborative learning in European and Asian cultures.

Zhu's et al. (2010) research investigated the influence of cultural environment and school organizational culture characteristics on the implementation of computer-assisted collaborative learning. The researchers recruited middle school students from China and Belgium from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Computer-assisted collaborative learning represents a unique combination of technical, social, and educational contexts. Additionally, this study used a school culture scale and a questionnaire to explore students' and teachers' views and implementation of computer-supported cooperative learning, respectively. There are big differences between Belgian schools and Chinese schools. This study showed that cultural aspects of the school environment have a significant impact on the implementation of computer-assisted collaborative learning. An open attitude towards change and diversity is the most effective element for computer-assisted collaborative learning. Therefore, Chinese students may be better suited for competitive learning, where there is competition between groups, and Belgian students may be better suited for cooperative learning. Additionally, Chinese students may need additional guidance in collaborative learning. Cross and Hitchcock (2007), found that most Asian students were more likely to work independently than their Western counterparts. If they are unable to complete a task on their own, they are more likely to seek help from a teacher rather than discuss the problem with a classmate or colleague. Many researchers also pointed out that personal background influences Asian students. Natural collaborative learning and brainstorming are less common among them, but this does not exclude collaborative learning strategies (Lei & Kahn 2012). Therefore, he pointed out that differences in background may affect the effectiveness of collaborative learning. Combined with Zhu's et al. (2010) research, it can be seen that when middle school students with Eastern and Western cultural backgrounds engage in collaborative learning, different cultural aspects have a certain influence on collaborative learning.

Zhu (2013) conducted a study aimed at examining the satisfaction and performance of online collaborative learning with students from two different cultural backgrounds. All students in both environments were randomly assigned to groups of 6 to 8 students. The same lecturer gave the lectures during the research period. After each lecture, student groups were given an online discussion assignment. All participants completed a cultural environment survey based on Wang's questionnaire to analyse cultural factors in the online learning environment (Wang, 2004). The findings suggest that students' preference for online collaborative learning may be related to cultural differences. The power distance between teachers and students in the Chinese context seems to indicate greater power distance at the same level as for secondary students. Chinese students are more competitive than Belgian students. At the same time, there were significant differences in Chinese and Belgian students' satisfaction with online collaborative learning, and students' perceptions of collaborative learning were positively correlated with their online performance in group work. In innovative computer-based learning environments, culture is an

important factor influencing student satisfaction and academic performance. Although Chinese university students are highly independent, they still need guidance from teachers, just like middle school students. Belgian students appear to be participating more independently in collaborative learning at this stage. This showed that collaboration in Western and Eastern cultures are actually different.

2.5 Relevant Factors in Cross-cultural Collaborative Learning

Different cultural backgrounds of students can affect collaboration, and many related factors also affect cross-cultural collaborative learning. Differences between Eastern and Western cultures lead to differences in collaborative learning styles and teachers' ways of thinking, and appear to have an impact on cross-cultural collaborative learning. A deeper understanding of teachers' ideas can make collaborative learning more effective. Zhu et al. (2010) aimed to understand teachers' views on the role of teachers in higher education and on adopting social constructivist teaching methods. Study participants included faculties from Beijing Normal University and Capital Normal University from China, and Ghent University from Belgium. In this study, interviews focused on teachers' views on the use of computer-assisted learning in higher education, the role of teachers, teachers' views on teaching and learning in the context of the social constructivist paradigm, and teachers' views on online collaborative learning. It was done at the same time, a questionnaire was used to understand the cultural environment of collaborative learning and the teaching styles of teachers from different backgrounds. Research shows that the adoption of social constructivism, computer-assisted learning, and online collaborative learning may be related to cultural differences. Chinese culture reflects a high degree of power distance compared to other cultures, and teacher-student relationships are also affected. In both cultures, teachers consider themselves facilitators or school leaders. Chinese teachers are more likely to provide leadership and guidance, while Belgian teachers are more likely to provide supervision and support. They pointed out that competition exists not only among students but also among teachers. Regardless of the role a teacher plays, competition in Chinese language education is very fierce. It also means that highly competitive teachers may take on multiple teaching roles and use different teaching methods. Current educational systems, institutional environments, and socio-economic influences must also be taken into account to identify differences that may impact teaching and learning. Therefore, different cultures have different roles for teachers. However, teachers need to be more creative in collaborative learning or work primarily as assistants. Chinese language teachers in particular need to change their thinking and roles in order to respond to the reform. As traditional cultural aspects alone are not enough, teachers may try to focus on other aspects. They can also strive to make timely changes to their instructional design to accommodate students from different cultural backgrounds.

In collaborative learning, the role of the teacher is influenced by the role of the students. A study by Gu et al. (2017) investigated the relationship between cultural factors and the role of cooperating students in two universities in China and the United States. Participants were graduate students from American and Chinese universities in their respective courses designing and developing educational games for K-12 students. The Chinese students had software development skills, while the American students had instructional design skills, so they were excited to work together. This experiment combined elements of collaboration between different roles and lesson design. They observed the roles students played collaboratively and coded these roles using a collaborative learning computer-assisted role coding scheme. The results of the study revealed clear cultural differences in cooperative learning, particularly in the roles students take on. Chinese students tended to take on the roles of discussants, questioners, and challengers, whereas American students actively took on the roles of supporters, initiators, and timers. The correlation between students' roles in the collaborative learning process also confirmed that these cultural characteristics have a significant relationship with the relevant roles in collaboration. Based on this

article, it can be summarized that Chinese students do not seem to be very good at engaging in cooperative learning because they may have relatively competitive roles. This places higher demands on teachers. Unlike American teachers, Chinese teachers sometimes need to give students additional training to get used to cooperative learning, or the teachers themselves play different roles to tell students what to do.

3. Methodology

Earl (2002) defined methodology as a planned and logical process, a way of investigating either personally or through any techniques used by a researcher, in order to collect facts from a specified number of people on a particular problem. That means the procedure has to be orderly and thorough. Research design is the blueprint that involves an experiment, observation, interviews, and the analysis of records, some amalgamation of these. Descriptive research was used to gain insight into responses. As the purpose of this paper is an explorative study because the paper seeks to find the perception of some students and teachers at Novia UAS and ULM on understanding on learning through collaboration in a cross-cultural setting and how the collaboration contributes to learning. A qualitative research method is used. Case studies can be conducted on a single case, multiple cases or embedded cases (Yin, 2016) Qualitative research gathers participants' experiences, perceptions, and behavior. This study is a single case study of about their understanding on collaborative learning. In future, the study will widen the scope to include more students and teachers. Novia UAS and ULM project cooperation, and it is chosen as the most suitable design for the purpose. Again, a simple random sampling technique was used with the target population of students and teachers from Novia University of Applied Sciences and Lambung Mangkurat University. Simple random sampling is a type of probability sampling in which the researcher randomly selects a subset of participants from a population.

A sample size of 11 respondents selected from the total population of 14 was used with three students selected from each university, three teachers from ULM and two teachers from Novia UAS. Furthermore, a questionnaire was used in this research to collect the data from the participants. According to Olsson and Sørensen (2021), different data collection methods were used in case studies, and the researchers follow or participate in the process of a certain case. The data collection was based on qualitative questionnaire with open-ended questions, students and teachers personal written feedback and online workshops for teachers.

4.0 Results and Data Discussion

This chapter presents analysis and findings of the study as set out in the research methodology. The study findings are presented on perception on learning through collaboration in a cross-cultural setting with Novia and ULM as case study. The data was gathered from the questionnaire as the research instrument and reflections from the participants on the activities of the project. The questionnaire was designed in line with the objectives of the study. Further, a reflection from the participants on the activities of the project was presented to give a clear picture about the project.

4.1. The results from the questionnaire

The paper's fourth chapter talks about the analysis and interpretation of data gathered from the questionnaire. The questionnaire was categorized into two groups: one for students and one for teachers. The results of the questionnaire are expressed in the table below:

Table 1 Student Responses

Questions	Novia UAS Students	ULM Students
Do you have any understanding about learning through collaboration in a cross-cultural setting?	Yes: 3 No: 0	Yes: 3 No: 0
What is your understanding on learning through collaboration in a cross-cultural setting?	- Learning about different cultures through studying - Collaborative studies	- Enhancing learning from different cultural backgrounds
Have you benefited from the cross-cultural learning program?	Yes: 3 No: 0	Yes: 3 No: 0
How did you benefit from the cross-cultural learning program?	- Learned how to work directly with foreign students. - Facilitated teamwork by minimizing cultural conflicts.	- Was able to evaluate my listening and speaking skills in English. - Understand other student perspectives regardless of culture.
Analyse and give your opinion on the realization of the planned activities in the project	- The project was very good, very timely for implementation. -Gathers more experiences	- The program was productive
What are challenges encountered during the project period and if so, how were they resolved?	- Division of tasks - Completion of the project	- Language communication challenge

Source: Field Survey December, 2023

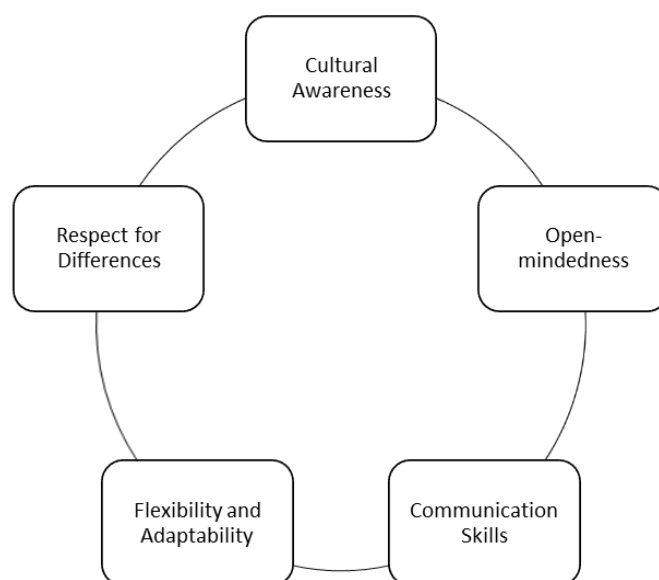
From Table 1 all six (6) students expressed that they understand learning through collaboration in cross-cultural settings. This therefore, means that students had exposure to cross-cultural learning. Again, students were given the opportunity to express their understanding about cross-cultural learning in their own words. The majority responded that it is learning in collaboration with different cultures through studying. Regarding whether or not students have benefited from the cross-cultural learning program between Novia UAS and Lambung Mangkurat University, the total majority of the 6 students responded yes. Moreover, respondent students expressed in the questionnaire that they really benefited from cross-cultural learning and that the program helped them to evaluate their listening and speaking of the English language. The program also offered the students a possibility to learn from students in other cultures. This statement agrees with Golding (2018) who argued that learning through cross-culture benefits students in diverse ways through effective communication and new learning skills.

Again, students from Novia UAS and ULM were asked to analyse and give their opinion on the realization of the planned activities in the project. The main response, among other things, was that the project was very good, very timely for implementation. Also, that the project was productive. Colak (2015) asserts that a project based on collaborative learning in a cross-cultural setting gives experiences and diverse cultural practices and educational learning skills.

Finally, respondent students from both Novia UAS and ULM were asked about challenges encountered during the project period and if so, how they were resolved. The response was that there were challenges in communication in the English language among the students, division of tasks, and completion of the project based on time constraints. As inferred by Biggs (2011) due to different cultural backgrounds, challenges associated with different ways of studying in class, time zone differences and different learning approach. Thus, per the response both students in Novia UAS and ULM have a common understanding about learning collaboration through a cross-cultural setting.

From the responses of the students base on the questionnaire sent, learning through cross culture setting has numerous benefits for students. The benefit are communication, cultural awareness, respect for differences, flexibility and adaptability and open-mindedness. The diagram below outlines the benefit of cross cultural learning for students

Figure 1 Benefit of Cross cultural learning for students



Source: Authors' Construction

The table below is a depiction of teacher's responses on their understanding about cross cultural learning.

Table 2 Teachers Responses

Question	Novia UAS Teachers	ULM Teachers
Do you have any understanding about learning through collaboration in a cross-cultural setting?	Yes: 3 No: 0	Yes: 2 No: 0
What is your understanding on learning through collaboration in a cross-cultural setting?	- Interacting with different students of cultural backgrounds.	- Developing cultural understanding of different backgrounds.
Do students benefit from the cross-cultural learning program?	Yes: 3 No: 0	Yes: 2 No: 0
How have students benefited from the cross-cultural learning program?	- Exposure to various cultural situations likely	- Cultural competency, network

	broadened the students' view.	with classmates in other countries.
How often does the school organise cross-cultural learning programs with other schools in a year?	Not Often	Not Regular
How do you reflect on the coordination of the collaboration in terms of roles and commitment of partner institutions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Internal coordination was very minimal, from management to teachers and between teachers, as well as in student recruitment. - It was better, but student enrollment is still constrained. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Novia's commitment is very strong, not only in terms of funding but also in terms of its seriousness in designing joint programs and sharing knowledge.
Analyse and give your opinion on the realization of the planned activities in the project (the two courses, the visits incl. Business- and cultural activities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cooperation between the two institutions was good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seeing Novia's classroom and facilities in person offers insightful knowledge about their teaching methods.
Were there any challenges encountered during the project period and if so, how were they resolved?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The scheduling of online meetings was impacted by time zone differences, requiring flexible scheduling and asynchronous communication techniques to accommodate participants from both areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Due to the considerable Time difference between Vaasa/Finland and Indonesia, synchronous communication and coordination proved to be difficult for both teachers and students. - Language communication adaptation.
Are there any best practice examples that you would like to share?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The exemplified best practices in subject design, as both institutions crafted courses that address contemporary issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guest lectures from industry professionals contribute to a best practice example by bringing real-world insights and expertise directly into the educational environment.

Source: Field Survey December, 2023

From Table 2 all five teachers expressed that they have full understanding of learning through collaboration in cross-cultural settings. Therefore, it means that teachers have knowledge about cross-cultural learning. Again, teachers were given the opportunity to express their understanding about cross-cultural learning. The majority of the teachers responded that it is learning collaboration and interacting with different students of cultural backgrounds. In addition, respondent teachers were asked if students benefit from the cross-cultural learning program between Novia UAS and ULM. All five teachers from both institutions responded yes to the question. This means that teachers have observed how beneficial and helpful the project was to students.

Further, teachers were asked how students benefited from the cross-cultural project. The response was that student exposure to various cultural situations likely broadened the students' views, cultural competency, and network with classmates in other countries. Gu (2017), asserted the importance of learning through cross-culture in a digitalised world which grants students more exposure on different cultural learnings. Regarding the question 'How often does the school organise cross-cultural learning programs with other schools in a year?', the teachers' response was that the school does not organise such programs often. This means that the school does not prioritize cross-cultural programs.

Again, reflecting on the coordination of the collaboration in terms of roles and commitment of partner institutions the teachers were of the view that internal coordination was very minimal, from management to teachers and between teachers, as well as in student recruitment. The collaboration and commitment with the partner school was better but student enrollment was constrained as asserted by the teachers. The opinion of the teachers was sorted on the question about the realization of the planned activities in the project (the two courses, the visits including Business- and cultural activities). The respondent teachers said that seeing the classroom of Novia UAS and other facilities was insightful, the cooperation was good and in-person interaction forged a good bond.

Regarding the challenges faced, the teachers raised the issue of time zone difference between Novia UAS and ULM which affected the synchronization of the meetings. Finally, the teachers were asked about the best practice examples to be recommended. The response was that guest lecturers from the industry should be part of the facilitation of the cross-cultural learning programs. In addition to the responses of the teachers based on the questionnaire received, a reflection of the joint project from the participants was expressed in details. This enable both teachers and student to fully express their views about the joint project.

4.2. Reflections from the participants on the activities of the project

This part summarizes the reflections and experiences from the project participants (students and teachers) regarding joining two online courses and mobilities from Vaasa, Finland, to Banjarmasin, Indonesia, and vice versa.

When the first joint course was created, technical problems regarding the course implementation started to occur, already during participant registrations. "Strategic Business Communication and Sustainable Business: A Cross-Cultural Indonesia and Finland Perspective" was offered to both Finnish and Indonesian students and it was delivered as an online course through Novia's existing systems and infrastructure that were technologically advanced. As a result, the method of student identification for Novia's account activation was a specified requirement that created difficulties for the Indonesian partners, mainly because communication operators between Finland and Indonesia were blocking, for example, SMS texts and emails.

Another pain point was the chosen timing for the course, firstly because it was not aligned with the normal course registration period, neither for Indonesian nor for Finnish students, making their schedules full of other courses or lectures and keeping the participation level low, and secondly because the course's start was partly during Indonesian students' Ramadan holidays and the course's end coincided with Finnish students' summer jobs, causing a high number of dropouts.

Besides the study and meeting tools that were used during the pilot course, that were unfamiliar to the Indonesian partners, additional feedback from Novia UAS teachers included that (a) the level of teaching should be adapted to the level of language and technical skills of the course participants, since for this case compromises had to be made on the content of the course, and (b) the optional lectures should have been compulsory, since the opportunity for more discussions, knowledge and cultural sharing was partly missed.

All of the above points and remarks were taken into consideration when Novia UAS and ULM jointly designed the second online course titled "International Business Environment: Indonesia and Finland in Focus", and as a result, the timing was more optimal, the participation of students was (a lot) higher, and the course completion rate was very satisfactory. This time, the suitability of chosen students was carefully examined by both institutions beforehand and the anticipated workload was described in detail from the beginning of the course. The assignments were created in a way that their progress could be built up gradually every week and it was followed up on a regular basis, so the students were able to keep up with their tasks and eventually completed the course. The second course also focused on entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial mindset and sustainability in cross-cultural settings, featuring company representatives or experts from both countries, who gave valuable insights to the course content through guest lecturing in their area of expertise. The project helped teachers develop and use an innovative operational model within the joint online courses, that included (1) co-creation of the entire content that was outside the main curriculum of each institution, (2) co-teaching of subjects based on one's own field of expertise, (3) finding solutions to practical issues regarding the course timetable, such as the significant time difference between Finland and Indonesia and local holidays being at different periods, (4) selecting suitable students based on one's own potential, commitment and language skills, (5) sharing responsibilities of monitoring students' weekly assignments, (6) taking part in their final assessment, (7) learning from each other by observing different teaching methods, which adds to mutual respect and cultural understanding and (8) benefiting from guest lectures given by industry professionals, who brought real-world and hands-on examples to complement the academic perspective in education.

The project included an inbound and an outbound mobility for selected students and teachers, the first taking place from Finland to Indonesia and the second from Indonesia to Finland. The participants in both group visits reported their reflections based on various perspectives. The first field trip to ULM in Indonesia took place around one year after the project activities initiated. The student and teacher group from Novia UAS traveled for 36 hours with consecutive transit flights and stopovers. At least for the Finnish students, it was their first time travelling to Asia. The second field trip took place around four months after the first one, and it was time for selected students and teachers from ULM to visit Novia UAS and experience the long hour travelling. In the same way, at least for the Indonesian students, it was their first time travelling to Northern Europe. All participants reported that they were excited and grateful for being part of this collaborative project and being able to participate in the field visits. The hosting universities arranged such versatile program and the activities were numerous. It was difficult for the participants to fully grasp their experiences in the country they visited in their ten-day stay.

Students from Finland that visited the partner university ULM in Banjarmasin, Indonesia, mentioned that their memories will be forever full of the hospitality and kindness of the people they met in Indonesia, referring to both students from campus and other people around the city. A big impression for them was the different scenery and climate from what they were used to have in Finland, with big contrasts being the rivers surrounding the city, high humidity in the atmosphere and the rainy season causing floods and transportation difficulties. When travelling by boat further from the campus area and city, students noticed people living in underdeveloped areas and faced strong culture contrasts by observing how diverse the society in Banjarmasin could be, in infrastructure, buildings, schools and the general way of living. Students also noticed how strong the religious aspect was in everyday life, and also said that it was difficult to adapt to such different culinary traditions, including rice meals for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Students also visited companies in the area, namely in the textile industry, where they could take part in the sewing and decorating process of a traditional Indonesian textile cloth, and in the field of mass production of palm oil, where they also visited a palm plantation. At the end of their trip, the group made a cultural visit to places where indigenous people live in tribes and they mentioned that they got a real culture shock, when they hiked through different villages and got to witness how people live there, in such different conditions from what they had previously got used to see in the main city.

Students from Indonesia that visited Novia UAS in Vaasa, Finland, mentioned that it was one of the best experiences in their lives and emphasized particularly Finland's nature and climate during late winter and early spring. One student commented that it was a moving moment, after waiting for so long, that they could finally feel how it was when the snow hit their face and body or how it was to lie down on a pile of snow. Students took part in several activities around the Novia campus. They gave presentations to local students and lecturers, they toured classrooms, sites and laboratories with technologically advanced equipment and attended meetings and seminars. Outside campus, they participated in special activities during Vaasa Energy Week. Both students and teachers joined company visits in the area to observe how sustainability measures were implemented in company operations: a waste recycling company, where they also got the chance to network with other visiting groups from Zambia and Romania; an engineering company of power plants that is a global leader in innovative technologies, focusing on sustainability solutions; an environmental friendly ship, one of the most energy efficient passenger ferries in the world, that took them on a ride from Vaasa, Finland, to Umea, Sweden, and back. During Vaasa Energy Week, the guests from ULM got the opportunity to represent their country in a big networking event, where they had their own stand representing Indonesia and offered local delicacies to visitors from other country delegations or to local Finnish people. Students mentioned that it was a nice experience to represent Indonesia and, at the same time, meet people from other countries and try their own unique foods. At the end of their trip, the group made a cultural visit to Vaasa's countryside and joined activities like ice fishing on the frozen sea, ice skating as well as eating locally made familiar food from Indonesia but also traditional food from Finland, with meat from elk.

It can easily be concluded that the project activities, especially the mobilities and the joint courses, made a significant impact on students' and teachers' awareness of cross-culture and on their ability to learn from each other. While the participants learned a lot about each other's education, system, culture and food, they also pointed out many differences between the two countries that got them to value certain things that they normally just take for granted in their everyday lives. As one student summarized, these differences are the unique and charming characteristics of each country, and they are there to make people respect and learn from each other.

5. Conclusion and policy recommendation

The main objective of this paper was to find out how students and teachers perceived learning through collaboration in a cross-cultural setting and whether students and teachers benefited from the cross-cultural learning program. The case study included some selected students and teachers from Novia UAS and ULM who were part of the “Digital Business and Entrepreneurship with a Sustainability Approach - Learning through Collaborations in a Cross-cultural Setting” project during the period 2021-2023.

From the data gathered through the questionnaire both teachers and students affirm that they understood learning through collaboration in a cross-cultural setting. They also expressed the perception that collaborative learning helps in developing cultural understanding of different backgrounds of students. It can be concluded that the cross-cultural learning concept has been fully understood as a result of the project between Novia UAS and ULM.

Finally, from the data gathered through the questionnaire it was deduced that both students and teachers benefited from learning through collaboration in a cross-cultural setting. Some of the benefits were that students were able to evaluate their listening and speaking skills in English, understand other student perspectives regardless of culture, and learned how to work directly with foreign students. Previous studies conducted by Cheng (2021) and Johnson (2021) highlighted the importance of collaborative learning. This study affirms what the previous study highlighted, and that more and more teachers and students have become aware of the benefits of collaborative learning.

In light of the above information, it was found that the school does not often organise cross-cultural programs. Thus, it is recommended that school management organise cross-cultural programs regularly with other schools to help students and teachers adapt to different cultural learning and academic activities. In addition, more students should be motivated to be part of cross-cultural educational programs. Finally, financial resources should be available to help schools organise cross-cultural educational programs to help both school and students become culturally diverse in their academic programs.

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