

“Glocal Education” Through Virtual Exchange? Training Pre-Service EFL Teachers to Connect Their Local Classrooms to the World and Back

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Abstract

A key goal of global education in language teaching is to “have students ‘think globally and act locally’” (Cates, 2013, p. 278) – an idea in line with the concept of glocality. Virtual exchange – i.e. connecting learners with different lingua-cultural backgrounds over extended periods of time via digital communication technologies (The EVALUATE Group, 2019) – is a promising approach towards this aim. O’Dowd suggests designing such exchanges following a “transnational model” (2019) in which learners collaborate on shared tasks based on local and global real-world problems using a lingua franca. These ideas are compatible with European policy discourses on global education (Schreiber & Siegel, 2016), aiming at supporting learners in becoming agents of change in an increasingly globalized world. Within the context of a trilateral project between universities in Germany, Turkey, and Sweden, this paper explores how global education can be integrated into foreign language teaching with the help of virtual exchanges through a synthesis of two models of virtual exchange (O’Dowd & Ware, 2009; O’Dowd, 2019) and the complex competence task approach (Hallet, 2012) to task-based language teaching. A transnational virtual exchange between these universities exemplifies how such a telecollaborative project can be implemented. During the exchange, pre-service EFL teachers compare and analyze cultural practices and educational frameworks to design tasks dealing with global issues that can be implemented in their respective local classrooms through virtual exchange.

Keywords

virtual exchange; telecollaboration; foreign language teaching; task-based language teaching; global education

Introduction

Foreign language¹ teachers and researchers advocating for incorporating issues of global education into foreign language

teaching (FLT) deem physical mobility, such as school trips and exchange programs, a considerable step towards ‘internationalizing’ local classrooms. Cates, for example, organized

¹ Although this paper focuses on settings in which English is taught as a foreign language, the author encourages teachers of English as a second language to ponder the potential benefits of virtual exchange

for their profession. VE can be applied in all Teaching English to Speakers of Foreign Languages (TESOL) contexts.

"an *Asian Youth Forum* (AYF) which brings together students from across Asia to build friendships, break down stereotypes, and discuss global issues all through the medium of English-as-an-Asian language" (2004, p. 3). In a similar vein, education policymakers around the world set goals to significantly increase student mobility rates: in Europe, for example, the Bologna Declaration of 1999 aimed at achieving a 20% international mobility rate among all higher education students from 49 countries by 2020. In the United States, comparable targets were formulated by the Institute of International Education (De Wit, 2016, p. 72). However, even before the Coronavirus pandemic led to major restrictions on student mobility programs (International Association of Universities, 2020), only a minority of students participated in them: both in Europe and the US, the rate of students who attained credits towards their degrees from study abroad programs rested around only 10% (De Wit, 2016, p. 72; Eurydice, 2020). Given the potential benefits of transnational communication and transcultural contact towards the reduction of barriers between peoples, nations, and regions (Li, 2013), there is an urgent need to offer more opportunities for learners to engage in such praxis. With the discussion of a teacher education project between three universities, this paper proposes transnational virtual exchanges via computer-mediated communication (CMC) as a viable complement to physical mobility programs for fostering global competences.

The project described in this paper follows modern models of virtual exchange (VE) – a specific approach of CMC with an emphasis on sustained collaboration between learners with different lingua-cultural backgrounds across geographic distances (O'Dowd, 2018). Between October 2020 and February 2021, pre-service teachers (PSTs) of English as a Foreign

Language (EFL) from the University of Göttingen, Germany, Uppsala University, Sweden, and Hacettepe University, Turkey participate in a trilateral VE project. This exchange focuses on the collaborative creation of EFL teaching sequences and classroom materials dealing with global issues within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as declared by the United Nations (2015). Over multiple months of close collaboration in transnational teams, this project aims to develop the PSTs' English language, intercultural, digital-pedagogical, and global competences. By participating in a VE, they learn to design and implement their own VEs with EFL learners in secondary education in a manner that agrees with their respective local or regional educational policies. Through this cross-border collaboration on the common struggles and interests of EFL teachers in the 21st century, the PSTs find ways to meaningfully integrate global topics and voices in their local classrooms.

As this exchange had not started at the time of writing, this paper outlines the theoretical foundation of our project as well as specific steps taken towards its implementation. We begin by contextualizing global education within traditions of FLT, followed by a discussion of the VE approach and its potential to support global education aims in FLT. We then discuss how approaches to task-based language teaching (TBLT) can further support integration of global education in FLT, also within the context of VE design. The final section details the implementation process to-date, including challenges and solutions, and the structure of the VE.

Global Education and Foreign Language Teaching

Efforts to integrate global education into FLT gained more widespread momentum in the 1980s and are often founded on the idea that foreign languages enable learners to actively participate in transnational discourses on global issues like climate change or the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic (Cates, 2013). Foreign language competences can enable learners to understand relevant texts – including news reports, political statements, or scientific publications – and empower them to participate and interact in global activist networks like the *Fridays for Future* movement (Freitag-Hild, 2019, p. 5). English is considered especially relevant in this regard due to its status as the most widespread lingua franca in the world (Cates, 2004; Elsner, 2018), which is why EFL teachers and researchers in particular have been looking for ways to design “international classroom[s]” (Cates, 2004, p. 1) that account for the goals of global education. For our trilateral project, we subscribe to Cates’ division of these goals across four domains:

1. **knowledge** about world countries and cultures, and about global problems, their causes and solutions;
2. **skills** of critical thinking, cross-cultural communication, cooperative problem solving, conflict resolution, and the ability to see issues from multiple perspectives;
3. **attitudes** of global awareness, cultural appreciation, respect for diversity, and empathy;
4. **action**: the final aim of global learning is to have

students ‘think globally and act locally’. (Cates, 2013, p. 278)

Three modern approaches to FLT that offer promising interfaces for the integration of global education approaches are communicative language teaching, content orientation, and the concept of the “intercultural speaker” (Freitag-Hild, 2018, p. 164). In the 1970s, the communicative turn in FLT in Germany led to a departure from an excessive emphasis on pattern drills, grammatical rules, text-based translation exercises and native speaker-like pronunciation practice – that is, a strong focus on linguistic form – to instead concentrate on enabling learners to “actively use the foreign language in meaningful communicative situations” (Elsner, 2018, p. 19). Language learners were no longer expected to merely improve their skills to listen, read, speak, and write in a foreign language but to develop their communicative and intercultural competences. Following Weinert’s definition, competences encompass both declarative and procedural knowledge, skills, strategies and – crucially – motivational, volitional, affective, and social aspects (2001). The goal is thus for students to learn to use the target language respectfully in communicative situations while also developing an open and curious attitude that supports their *willingness* to engage with speakers from other lingua-cultural backgrounds (Byram, 1997).

Providing language learners with relevant content to discuss and negotiate is a key step towards creating opportunities in which meaningful communication can take place within the confines of a brick-and-mortar classroom (Kolb & Raith, 2018, p. 203). Proponents of global education in FLT suggest that such content-based teaching should focus on global issues, e.g. through discussions of human rights, environmental issues, or world peace (Cates, 2004, p. 2) as meaningful comprehension of and participation within these

transnational discourses requires foreign language competences (Hallet, 2013).

Another step towards global education in FLT is enabling target-language communication with people from different lingua-cultural backgrounds, e.g. with the help of physical mobility (Cates, 2004, p. 3). However, even without the severe mobility restrictions in the wake of COVID-19, several reasons keep students from engaging in study abroad visits. These include insufficient funds, a lack of time set aside for exchanges within existing educational programs, the absence of opportunities such as established exchange partnerships between institutions, or a lack of interest on the part of individual students (O'Dowd, 2006, p.10). Thus, there is a need to ensure that more students can experience learning environments based on authentic lingua-cultural exchanges. Virtual exchange, "an innovative and new pedagogical technique" (The Stevens Initiative, 2020, p. 4), strives to be a more inclusive and less expensive alternative and complement to physical mobility programs that can reach a wider audience of students by leveraging the affordances of modern information and communications technology (ICT) for learning (Jager, Nissen, Helm, Baroni, & Rousset, 2019, p. 29).

Virtual Exchange, Telecollaboration, and FLT

A growing body of research supports the idea that engaging learners in VE projects can lead to learning outcomes in line with the goals of current approaches to FLT. These include the development of learners' receptive and productive competences, their lexical knowledge, grammatical accuracy, and confidence, as well as their intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (The EVALUATE Group, 2019; The Stevens Initiative,

2020). Due to its status as a relatively new pedagogic approach, researchers and practitioners refer to the practice by many names, including telecollaboration, online intercultural exchange (OIE) (O'Dowd, 2007), and collaborative online international learning (COIL) (Guth & Rubin, 2015). While telecollaboration remains a dominant designation in the context of FLT, virtual exchange is increasingly being used and understood as the main umbrella term which is why this paper uses both terms synonymously (O'Dowd, 2018, p. 5).

Virtual exchange is defined as the practice of connecting learners with different lingua-cultural backgrounds over extended periods of time via digital communication technologies as an integrated part of their curriculum and under guidance from experts (The EVALUATE Group, 2019). While VE is increasingly applied in a wide variety of contexts beyond language learning, FLT practitioners generally choose to implement VEs to foster their students' "foreign language competence, intercultural communicative competence and digital competence" (O'Dowd, 2018, p. 6). Based on interactionist and sociocultural theories of language acquisition, VEs are viewed as a way "to facilitate negotiation of meaning ... [and] to provide authentic experiences of intercultural communication" (O'Dowd, Sauro, & Spector-Cohen., 2019, p. 147), whereas use of technology to such communicative ends is considered to foster digital literacy. In the context of teacher education, VE can thus be a tool to develop technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) (The EVALUATE Group, 2019) which includes the "ability to design technology-based tasks [and] the competence of pedagogically informed tool choice and integration" (Hauck, Müller-Hartmann, Rienties, & Rogaten, 2020, p. 30). Research indicates an "interdependence between multimodal communicative

competence and intercultural communicative competence development in telecollaboration” (ibid., p. 8): if learners are proficient in choosing and using technology for intercultural communication and understanding in VE settings, they are “likely to experience comparatively higher levels of intercultural knowledge gain” (Hauck, 2007, p. 221). Sadler (2020) summarizes the potential of VE as follows:

As educators, one of our goals should be to encourage our students to attain a better sense of ‘the other’, and telecollaborative exchanges are one of our best tools to do so. By connecting individuals across the world and getting to know them and their cultures they may shift from ‘others’ to friends. (Sadler, 2020, p. 224)

Despite its educational potential, VE remains an uncommon practice in higher education, conducted only by a minority of practitioners. Chief reasons are a lack of awareness among stakeholders and insufficient support structures for interested parties (Jager et al., 2019). While VE is considered to be easier to realize than physical exchange programs (Li, 2013), effective implementation depends on more than the existence of a reliable ICT infrastructure: practitioners need to establish and maintain working relationships with distant partners and design their exchanges not only in a way that is compatible across time zones and calendars, but also in agreement with the respective syllabi, learning goals, understandings of pedagogy, and needs of all participants. Conducting the necessary needs analysis and effectively merging curricula across national borders is a time- and labor-intensive endeavor (Sadler, 2020).

The choice of modes of communication is a key consideration for VE practitioners. An exchange can take place both synchronously or asynchronously via different modalities, including text-based (e.g. instant messaging or internet forums) or audiovisual (e.g. video conferencing). These engagements generally last multiple weeks to months to facilitate trusting relationships between all participants (Corbett, 2007) and to allow for ample time for “inclusive, intercultural collaboration and dialogue, that bridges differences and distances and inspires action with a long term positive impact” (Jager et al., 2019, p. 8).

In line with the tenets of learner orientation – an approach to FLT that seeks to develop learner autonomy by aligning instruction with the preferences, dispositions, interests, and identities of individual learners (Bonnet, 2018) – the diverse sets of VE participants and their respective needs are at the center of each telecollaborative project. VEs in this way follow “the philosophy of dialogue where participants are the main recipients and the main drivers of knowledge; ... [they] will be seeking mutual understanding and co-creating knowledge, based on their own experiences” (Jager et al., 2019, p. 8).

To reach as many learners as possible, Guth stresses the need for explicit curricular integration of VE (2016, p. 96). Ideally, this process goes beyond offering VE as a voluntary ‘add-on’ and instead setting it up as an integral part of existing classes and an opportunity to receive “academic recognition” (The EVALUATE Group, 2019, p. 109). In higher education, this can be realized by having students earn credits towards completion of their degree by participating in classes involving VE.

The ambitious goals of VE are not an automatic result of mere contact between students from different countries through ICT. Carefully structured exchange sequences ensure

the desired learning outcomes. A well-established approach is the *progressive exchange model* (O'Dowd & Ware, 2009) which consists of "three interrelated tasks which move from information exchange to comparing and analysing cultural practices and finally to working on a collaborative product" (O'Dowd, 2007, p. 40). The first stage acts as an 'icebreaker' phase in which participants exchange personal information with each other to establish a trusting online environment. The second phase, focused on comparison and analysis, usually requires a greater deal of linguistic and cultural negotiation of meaning in that participants "carry out comparisons or critical analyses of cultural products from [all participating] cultures" (O'Dowd & Ware, 2009, p. 175). This phase provides opportunities for participants to "develop their ability to communicate effectively in intercultural contexts" (The EVALUATE Group, 2019, p. 13). The final stage is the collaborative creation of a shared product, such as co-authored essays, joint digital presentations, or lesson plans. Agreeing on an outcome within transnational teams generally demands the highest level of negotiation of meaning, which is why this phase usually aims to foster abilities to think and analyze critically and to collaborate in diverse groups (ibid.).

Beyond designing and implementing VEs in ways that support their learning goals, teachers should act as facilitators that motivate and support participants. In a study on the role of mentoring in VE, O'Dowd et al. discuss that learners "report further learning and reflection" when teachers actively react to situations and critical incidents as they arise during the international exchange by openly discussing these moments in the local classroom (2019, p. 169). According to Grau and Turula (2019), experiential learning through participation in VE is a suitable approach to develop the necessary

"telecollaborative competences" (O'Dowd, 2015) of PSTs.

Virtual Exchange for Global Education?

While VE has been shown to be an effective tool for the development of intercultural communicative competence (O'Dowd, 2007) – e.g. attitudes like openness and curiosity, knowledge about cultural practices, and skills to successfully interact in cross-cultural communication (Byram, 1997, pp. 49-55) – it is less frequently discussed in the explicit context of global education, especially among FLT practitioners and researchers.

From a business studies perspective – another major subject area for VE next to FLT (O'Dowd, 2018) – Li (2013) conducted an experimental study on the development of global competences during a telecollaborative exchange between American and Chinese students. The study acknowledges that "the higher education community has not yet reached an agreement on the operational definition of global competence" (ibid., p. 126), prompting the researchers to develop an instrument to measure global competence development in areas including understanding of global issues, cross-cultural communication skills, and appreciation of cultural diversity (Li, 2013, pp. 130-131). Results indicated improvements among all participants in the treatment group which shows that VE can act as an efficient and relatively inexpensive tool to foster global competences (Li, 2013, pp. 138-139).

However, the model at the center of Li's study only accounts for three dimensions – attitudes, skills, and knowledge (2013, pp. 130-131) –, omitting the fourth domain of global education goals: instigating action. With his *transnational model of virtual exchange for global citizenship education*, O'Dowd (2019) supports the notion that VE has the potential to foster competences in line with both Li's concept

and, in particular, the aims of global education, stressing the need to also account for the action domain. With reference to Byram's distinction between pre-political and political levels of intercultural action (2008, pp. 212-213), O'Dowd defines the desired types of action as follows:

[G]lobal or intercultural citizenship approaches [...] involve learners either instigating change in their own societies based on their collaborations with members of other cultures or actually working with members of other cultures as a transnational group in order to take action about an issue which is common to both societies. (O'Dowd, 2019, p. 21)

O'Dowd's *transnational model* presents characteristics that VEs should possess to increase their effectiveness. The model thus addresses shortcomings of traditional, often bilingual and bicultural VE projects resulting in superficial exchanges between participants with "limited success in the development of intercultural awareness and understanding" (ibid., 4). Citing Kramsch, he stresses that "[i]t is no longer appropriate to give students a tourist-like competence to exchange information with native speakers of national languages within well-defined national cultures" (Kramsch, 2008, p. 251 in O'Dowd, 2019, p. 8). Instead, the model seeks to address the needs of current language learners who are "increasingly likely to use a language such as English ... with non-native speakers as a lingua franca in their future employment" (ibid., p. 7). With respect to global inclusivity, an increased focus on lingua franca exchanges increases the likelihood that "language educators working in countries where

their national languages are less in demand [engage in VE praxis]" (ibid.). To these ends, O'Dowd proposes seven criteria to guide VE design. These criteria significantly informed the design of our trilateral VE project:

- Creating opportunities for rich intercultural interaction which can include but is not limited to bicultural/bilingual comparison

- Establishing partnerships across a wide range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds and using lingua franca for communication with these partners

- Encouraging learners to engage with themes which are of social and political relevance in both partners' societies

- Enabling students to work with their international partners to undertake action and change in their respective local and global communities

- Including ample opportunities for guided reflection of the intercultural encounters in the classroom

- Being integrated and recognised part of course work and institutional academic activity

- Increasing awareness to how intercultural communication is mediated by online technologies and how social media can shape the creation and interpretation of messages. (O'Dowd, 2019, p. 23)

Task-Based Language Teaching and Complex Competence Tasks

Whereas the models presented above offer important guidance for larger design elements of VEs, the TBLT approach provides valuable input on task design specifics. We propose a specific approach to TBLT – the complex competence task (CCT) concept (Hallet, 2013) – as a promising framework for the design of transnational VEs dealing with global issues.

TBLT is an FLT approach that “emphasizes the importance of engaging learners’ natural abilities for acquiring language incidentally as they engage with language as a meaning-making tool” (Ellis, Skehan, Li, Shintani, & Lambert, 2020: 1). The focus is less on linguistic form and more on successful communication, e.g. as required when using English as a shared lingua franca to complete tasks within a transnational VE. In such a setting, flawless grammar may not be required for two or more students with different first languages to understand each other in order to complete their task. In this context, a task is “an activity in which a person engages in order to attain an objective, and which necessitates the use of language” (Van den Branden, 2006, p. 4). Grammar drills and contextless translation exercises, by contrast, are not considered tasks in this sense. O’Dowd supports the value of task-based designs in VE: “research has proven that ... the negotiation of meaning and the resultant learner modifications are much more prevalent in goal-oriented, task-based interaction than in usual conversation” (Pellettieri, 200, p. 64 in O’Dowd, 2007, p. 11).

Hallet’s CCT concept is a TBLT approach based on the premise that self-actualization and the ability to participate in sociocultural and political processes in the globalized reality of the 21st century necessitates the command of foreign languages. Therefore, a central objective of all formal education should

be the development of foreign language discourse competences (Hallet, 2013, p. 3), i.e. “the ability to actively, critically and adequately participate in oral and written communication” (Elsner, 2018, p. 31).

Hallet posits six key characteristics of CCTs that should inform task designs to foster such competences. In line with the principle of content orientation, CCTs should explicitly deal with topics and issues that are both relevant to the learners and topical. In secondary education, such topics could for example be the issue of climate change and the school strikes enacted by young *Fridays for Future* activists, or the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the education and social life of young learners.

Second, CCTs should mirror the complexity of these real-world discourses by tasking the learners with conceptualizing potential solutions for real-world problems. This also means that students should be asked to work with authentic materials through a variety of multimodal media, including newspaper articles, diagrams, or video documentaries.

As “commonly accepted language learning theories ... suggest that languages are learned best in complex communicative situations (Elsner, 2018, p. 20), CCTs aim to develop the learners’ competences in an integrated manner by demanding the students to make use of both productive and receptive competences while working on the CCT. Additionally, CCTs offer “scaffolding” that supports learners if need be (Hallet, 2013, p. 5), e.g. in the form of learning strategies or lexical information.

Fourth, CCTs target the initiation of three types of processes: cognitive processes are necessary for understanding the complex contents; linguistic-discursive processes center around linguistic expression and negotiations of linguistic meanings; and social-interactive processes related to the negotiation of cultural

meaning and agreement with peers for the purpose of problem solving and, ultimately, task completion.

While CCTs always contain an overarching task culminating in the creation of a final product, they neither provide a ‘model solution’, nor is there only a single correct answer given the underlying complexity of respective problems. Instead, CCTs only specify the generic form of the final product, e.g. “wall display, essay, dialogue” (ibid.) while encouraging learners to find a variety of potential solutions.

Finally, CCTs support learners in creating this product by structuring their work process with a clear task instruction that outlines subordinate activities. For example, if learners are tasked with creating their own video report on water pollution, sub-tasks could consist of guided web research, conducting interviews, and perusal of classroom materials provided by the teacher (Hallet, 2013, pp. 4-5).

Conceptual Overlap between CCT and VE for Global Education

The design of the teaching project discussed in this paper rests on the assumption that there is significant conceptual overlap between the CCT concept, modern models of VE, and global education. This section briefly highlights key connections between them to explain the rationale informing our design decisions.

Both the *progressive exchange model* and the concept of the CCT put major focus on the creation of a final product. The integrated approach to competence development inherent to CCTs, as well as the explicit goal to initiate social-interactional processes among learners, lend themselves well to tasks designed with pair- and teamwork in mind. Such interaction is an

inherent quality of modern approaches to VE, especially the third phase of the *progressive exchange model*.

O’Dowd’s *transnational model* stresses the need to confront VE participants with real-world issues that are relevant and meaningful to all participants. This is in line with the first characteristic of a CCT: topicality and relevance. As a fundamentally learner-oriented approach to task design, the CCT concept emphasizes the importance of connecting local classrooms with world problems and, ideally, enabling students to participate in actual discourses, e.g. if the final goal of their CCT is to create a flyer to inform about local ecological issues related to climate change or aspects of ethical consumption. Further, both the CCT concept and O’Dowd’s *transnational model* define the foreign language as a communicative tool to be used by learners with common interests and problems to find potential solutions. Consequently, spelling mistakes or grammatical inaccuracies do not automatically result in a lower grade if learners still understand each other despite linguistic or cultural differences and geographic distances.

Finally, Hallet’s concept contributes to a blurring of the lines between language-focused instruction and content-focused instruction. With its emphasis on content-based instruction, the CCT concept aligns with the idea of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). CLIL is “a dual focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language” (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010, p. 1) that aims to prepare students for life and work in a globalized society, to teach “values of tolerance and respect”, and to immerse learners in the target language in a way that stresses “effective communication, motivating them to learn languages by using them for real practical purposes” (Elsner, 2018, p. 35). In Germany, CLIL-based instruction has been growing in

popularity since at least the 1990s (Rönneper & Bopré, 2015, pp. 66-67). Due to its intrinsic focus on world issues and the relationships between local, regional, and global spatial scales, geography remains the subject most frequently taught in CLIL settings (Streifinger, 2013, p. 13). Therefore, we chose to collaborate with PSTs of geography for our project.

Putting a Transnational VE on Global Education for Pre-Service EFL Teachers into Practice

The final section of this paper describes and discusses the process to date of designing and implementing a transnational VE for future EFL teachers at the University of Göttingen with partners in Turkey and Sweden. After an overview of the goals behind this endeavor, we describe the design decisions informing our VE, followed by a discussion of the implementation process.

The first goal is to offer our student teachers more opportunities for international experiences that require them to use their future language of instruction in authentic contexts. While all PSTs at the University of Göttingen are required to study or teach abroad for at least three months prior to graduation, most students opt to spend this time in the United Kingdom or the United States. Our exchange aims for them and their international colleagues to experience English as a lingua franca by working with other non-native speakers. Beyond fostering their linguistic competences, we seek to develop their intercultural and digital-pedagogical competences through participation in the VE, thus enabling them to conduct their own transnational VEs in their future careers as EFL teachers. Together with the PSTs, we aim to explore the idea of using VE as a tool to introduce global education into language classrooms.

Design Principles of the Transnational VE

To engage our participants in a VE that is both relevant to them while also being in line with global education goals and modern telecollaborative approaches, we decided that the transnational teams – consisting exclusively of non-native speakers of English communicating in a lingua franca – collaborate on the design of their own EFL teaching sequences in accordance with CCT principles. As future EFL teachers, designing lesson plans is a relevant competence area in their workplace. The materials are to be designed as VE projects in secondary education. Thus, the students are required to choose topics that are not only relevant to them but also their future learners. To ensure this, and in line with German and European education policy recommendations for promoting global education in secondary schools (Schreiber & Siege, 2016), we chose the SDGs set by the United Nations as the framework that informs the contents of their CCTs. Since these goals are intended as “the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all” (United Nations, 2015), the PSTs can refer to the SDGs as they discuss problems that are of relevance both in their local contexts and for the entire world. For example, goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) may act as a framework for PSTs to discuss how their local realities are impacted by the global COVID-19 crisis and what they can learn from each other – ranging from personal strategies for staying in touch with friends and family to broader questions of government responses and global mobility. Likewise, goal 13 (Climate Action) can frame exchanges of both local solutions to reduce carbon emissions on an individual scale as well as policies enacted by governments that could be adapted to other regional contexts.

As per the *progressive exchange model*, our exchange begins with an introductory phase

with ‘icebreaker’ activities. The subsequent comparison and analysis phase requires PSTs to investigate two areas of cultural practice: first, they are tasked with comparing common approaches to teaching EFL in their respective contexts as well as requirements set by local and national education policies to identify similarities and differences. This lays the groundwork for designing lesson plans and teaching materials in a way that is compatible with the contexts of every participant in each transnational team. Second, they conduct a comparable activity to discuss global issues from their local perspectives. Students are tasked with reaching an agreement on a specific global issue that is relevant to every participant of a given transnational team, and exchanging information, e.g. local attempts at dealing with a given problem. These two phases serve as a preparation for the final phase: the collaborative design of a specific task sequence by each transnational team. Based on their own VE experience and with the help of previous discussions as well as theoretical input on global education and CCT by the teacher trainers, the content and design of these task sequences is expected to feature elements of CCT, VE good practice, and global education prominently. As per O’Dowd’s *transnational model*, the project thus prepares PSTs to “undertake action” (2019, p. 23) in their future workplaces by transforming their local EFL classrooms into ‘glocal spaces’ where global problems can be discussed between local learners and with people from all over the world.

Organizational Obstacles and Solutions

Finding partners and fitting the needs and schedules of everyone within the framework of a joint VE project is a major challenge (Sadler, 2018). In line with O’Dowd’s *transnational model*, a key criterion for our project was to find

at least two partner classes of future EFL teachers who are non-native speakers of English. Two strategies proved successful for this purpose. First, we leveraged an existing network – the U4Society Network (2020) – to contact international offices and foreign language researchers at partner universities. Dr. Stellan Sundh of Uppsala University agreed to participate with undergraduate PSTs of EFL taking an introduction to FLT class. Through a virtual partnering fair organized by UNICollaboration (O’Dowd, 2018) we connected with Semih Ekin of Hacettepe University in Ankara who was searching for VE research partners.

Mismatch between academic calendars proved a major challenge in merging the three groups of learners: at the University of Göttingen, classes in the winter term take place from end of October until mid-February; the course in Sweden begins in early December and ends in mid-January; and the term at Hacettepe University ranges from the end of September until mid-January. Another major hurdle was the degree of flexibility regarding the content each group of students was required to cover in this timeframe. Following the *transnational model*, our goal was integrating the VE as an inherent class component for all students to increase their motivation to participate. In Göttingen, we created a new class for this purpose which we integrated within our existing curriculum as an elective for students in the local Master of Education program. The module in which we placed the course required us to give students a number grade based on a final presentation and a written reflection paper. At Uppsala University, the introductory class is an established and densely structured seminar that requires students to submit three deliverables – a school year plan, an extended teaching sequence, and a detailed lesson plan – within a relatively short time span. In contrast to

Göttingen, Uppsala students can only either pass or fail this class. The students at Hacettepe University are volunteers who can receive extra credit by participating in the exchange if they choose to enroll in an internship course. Despite remaining differences between the exact curricular integration, all participants can receive credits within their existing academic programs.

Due to an uneven number of participating EFL student teachers from each institution, we decided to group the students in small transnational teams generally consisting of two students from Germany and one each from Sweden and Turkey. While all participants from the latter two institutions are advanced undergraduate students, the Swedish participants participate in the exchange during their first introduction to EFL didactics. Almost all students from Göttingen are enrolled in the local Master of Education program. Therefore, we planned this exchange on the assumption that the Swedish participants are the least experienced in FLT, whereas the Göttingen students constitute the didactic experts in the context of the VE. In addition, seven of the Göttingen students are on track to also become either teachers of geography or politics – two subjects that are increasingly being taught in CLIL settings at German schools (Rönneper & Bopré, 2015). As such, we expect them to be better prepared to meet the challenge of integrating global education in their task designs.

Lastly, we required central platforms to enable both synchronous and asynchronous communication between all participants. Since all teacher trainers involved in setting up the project had extensive experience in using Zoom in classroom settings, we settled on this software for synchronous communication. A Google Classroom serves as a central hub for

asynchronous communication and to host materials.

Structure and Content of the VE

We accounted for the differences in availability, capacity, experience, demands, and needs among our participants by dividing the exchange into two overarching phases, each structured in accordance with the *progressive exchange model*: A joint web conference open for all participants acts as an introduction to the project and its goals in early November. Since we cannot expect all Swedish PSTs to be available at this point, this session is recorded and made available in the Google Classroom. In the first month, students from Ankara and Göttingen communicate both synchronously and asynchronously by engaging in icebreaker activities, comparison and analysis tasks (as detailed above), and two weeks of collaboration to draft a first CCT version. A task instruction sheet for all participants offers details on the specific activities and deliverables to ensure that each transnational team meets in a synchronous video call at least once per week.

The Swedish PSTs join the project in week five by participating in a second round of icebreaker activities. Due to the high workload in their local class, we chose to integrate them into the transnational teams without expecting them to contribute directly to the creation of the CCTs. Instead, they are tasked with providing direct feedback on the work of the Turkish and German students throughout the exchange, and vice versa. Additionally, the Swedish students are also tasked with finding ways to account for the SDGs when designing their own classroom materials. Thus, all students are expected to benefit from the variety of local perspectives on global problems within the transnational teams.

A joint meeting in the fifth week is dedicated to feedback training. Based on the

comparison and analysis conducted by the PSTs on good practice in EFL didactics, as well as the CCT concept, the goal of this session is to create an evaluation rubric to assess the teaching materials designed throughout the VE. This rubric is intended as a bridge between the curricular demands made on the students by their respective education policies while also establishing a transnationally agreed-upon framework of EFL best practice. During this session, the teacher trainers act as facilitators that guide the discussion between the PSTs. As the most experienced PSTs, the German students will give brief presentations of model CCTs published in a German journal on EFL didactics (Hallet, 2013) to initiate the discussion.

Throughout weeks six, seven, and eight, the teams continue working on their respective teaching materials. In each week, a joint meeting serves as an opportunity to check each team's progress as pairs of transnational teams engage in discussions and provide feedback to each other.

While the local course at Uppsala University ends after the last of these three meetings, Swedish students can continue supporting their transnational teammates as they finalize their CCTs in weeks nine and ten. The VE ends in the eleventh week when every team submits their finalized CCTs to the online platform. As part of their examination, the students from Göttingen will present the results of their teamwork in the local classroom.

The *transnational model* proposes explicit opportunities for reflection of the VE experience. Therefore, students from all institutions will meet in their local classrooms throughout the exchange. Guided by their respective teacher trainer, PSTs discuss moments of success or problems including misunderstandings or communicative breakdowns. To further foster their reflective

competences, participants write entries into a guided portfolio throughout the project.

Finally, an expert workshop and exemplary materials complete the “scaffolding” (Hallet, 2013, p. 6) offered to participants to support them while designing their own materials. Instructed by Robert O’Dowd, a “prolific [VE researcher]” (Stevens Initiative, 2020, p. 7), the virtual workshop gives the PSTs an opportunity to discuss their ideas with an experienced practitioner. The model materials given to participants are designed by three advanced students at the University of Göttingen with a background in teaching EFL and geography.

Looking Ahead

Surkamp and Viebrock emphasize that “English language teachers need to become *agents of change* who actively respond to the demands posed by globalisation, multilingualism or digitalization and use these developments for innovative teaching approaches” (2018, p. ix). Likewise, O’Dowd’s *transnational model of virtual exchange*, the global education approach, and Hallet’s concept of the CCT all stress the need to enable learners – including students in teacher training programs – to actively participate in societal discourses and “to undertake action and change in their respective local and global communities” (O’Dowd, 2019, p. 23). This paper discussed VE as a promising approach to achieve these goals. Our teaching project aims to support future teachers of EFL to ‘do their part’ as telecollaborative teachers who integrate VE in secondary education to foster global education by opening their local classrooms to learners from all over the world. As an effort to a sustainable integration of VE praxis at the University of Göttingen, we intend to apply this approach to telecollaborative projects with changing partner institutions in future

semesters, including universities in Israel and Belgium.

Future research conducted by the Teaching English as a Foreign Language section of the University of Göttingen, project partners, and student teachers enrolled in the local Master of Education program intends to investigate aspects including the development of ICC, TPACK, and global competences.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks the Ministry of Science and Culture (MWK) of the German federal state of Lower Saxony for funding of the project “Konzeptualisierung einer neuen Lehrveranstaltung ‘Using Virtual Exchange to Foster Global Education in Foreign Language Teaching’” through its “Innovation plus” program.

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