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In this column, we discuss the latest developments in ed-tech, as well as tried and tested apps and platforms, and the integration between teaching and technology. We invite readers to submit articles on their areas of interest. Please contact the editors before submitting.

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Implementing the COIL Project Using Various EdTech Tools

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With the rise of technology and globalization, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) has emerged as a promising pedagogical approach for fostering global citizenship and intercultural understanding. According to Shoji and Okura (2024), COIL brings students and professors from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds in a joint project to collaborate and interact using online communication platforms.

Drawing on this concept, a project leveraging on the principles of COIL's advantages was launched in 2022 to provide Japanese students an avenue to develop cross-cultural communication skills, interact with global English speakers, and learn about other cultures while sharing their own. This online language and culture exchange activity hosted selected participants from a prefectural high school in Kyoto and a partner institution in the Philippines for three consecutive years. Aside from that, it was also featured as one of the selected cases of JET-ALT initiatives in Kyoto Prefecture by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication (MIC, 2023). To conduct this project, a few web tools were used for communication, presentation, and collaboration.

Synchronous Communication Tools

All the synchronous online sessions of the COIL project were conducted via Zoom and Google Meet. These applications are known as leading platforms that offer advanced management features and essential meeting tools, such as screen sharing, in-meeting chats, customizable breakout rooms, polling, and live recording, on top of cross-platform access.

For virtual collaborative learning exchanges such as this one, various online communication tools like Zoom and Google Meet are some of the most effective options due to their seamless real-time conferencing features that give geographically dispersed participants a valuable opportunity to engage in international interactions.

Additionally, some of the factors of convenience in using these tools are the encryption and invite link features. Once the participants join the meeting rooms using invitation links or typing in meeting passcodes, they can easily have live interactions either through a web browser or the applications' downloaded version.

One of the most useful features of both applications for COIL implementation is the option for breakout room selection. Using this function, two to three students from each participating schools were grouped together to meet and greet, enjoy a more personal conversation, and discuss topics closely during the first part of the program. To maximize these interactions, the students rotated between breakout rooms every eight to 10 minutes, allowing them to be more familiar with their audience before their presentation for the next meeting.

In Figure 1, both web tools feature streamlined designs with intuitive interfaces for easier and more user-friendly access for students. However, it is also important to note that even if the basic plans of these apps offer enough access and functionality, it is highly recommended to use licensed accounts or pro subscriptions when conducting COIL sessions. This is because both Zoom and Google Meet have strict time and participant limits, and upgrading to paid plans to access them eliminates these caps.

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Figure 1

Screenshots of Zoom (Top) & Google Meet (Bottom) Use in Sessions



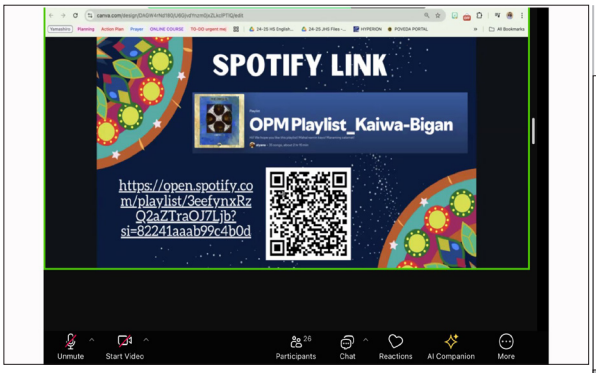
Digital Presentation Suite

Before each session, students were assigned to prepare and deliver presentations on cross-cultural topics including language, culture, and school life, etc. During the sessions, all the Japanese participants used Microsoft PowerPoint for preparing, drafting, and editing their slides, while their Filipino counterparts made use of Canva, a highly popular online graphic design platform that operates with a drag-and-drop interface. See Figure 2 for an example of each.

Figure 2

Screenshots of Students' Slides Using Microsoft PowerPoint (Top) & Canva (Bottom)





As there are two to three students assigned for each topic, the simultaneous editing feature of these platforms made it easier for the team to work on their slides concurrently. Both presentation tools support

- real-time collaborative editing, allowing multiple users to edit the slides at the same time,
- multi-media integration, offering users the options to insert and manipulate various media types easily, and
- cloud-based saving, ensuring accessibility from any device with an internet connection.

Collaborative Workspaces for Student Outputs

For collaborative content creation platforms, Google Slides and Padlet Sandbox were used during the breakout room sessions (Figure 3). These apps serve as flexible spaces for students to brainstorm their ideas, type in their questions, and co-author their contents with their peers.

Although both applications share the same functionality for creating and delivering structured presentations, Padlet Sandbox's strength lies in its free-form, flexible canvas for fast inputs using sticky notes, drawings, and other multimedia.

In the implemented COIL project, both apps were used as interactive whiteboards to facilitate the students' outputs, noting that there is no limit in creating Google Slides unless the Google Drive storage capacity is reached. Sandbox slides, however, are limited unless you are a paid Padlet user (see Figure 3).

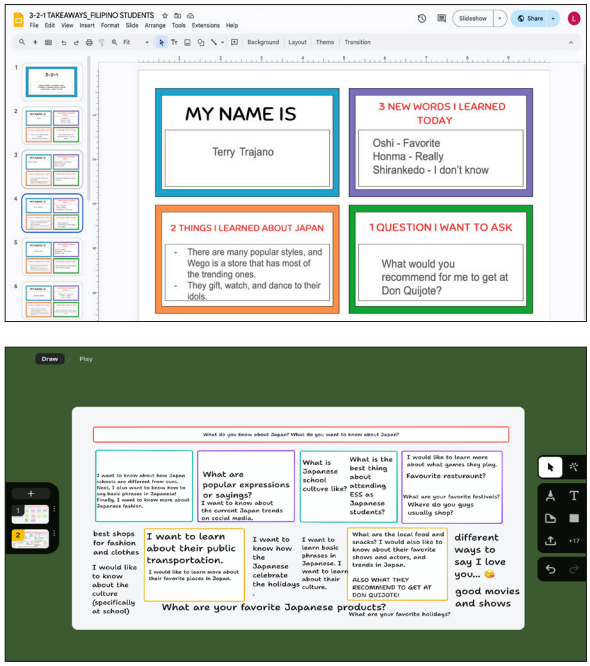
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Figure 3

Students' Outputs Using Google Slides (Top) and Padlet Sandbox (Bottom)



In writing the students' key takeaways, both Google Slides and Padlet Sandbox offer an effective, collaborative virtual space for immediate data collection and visible shared insights. For example, during the forum part of the session, the students shared what they knew and what they wanted to know more about their partner school's culture or country using the interactive whiteboard of Padlet Sandbox. Here, the students posted their ideas, which later became the springboard for the topics they presented at the second meeting. Of interest is the fact that the slides within the application are fully customizable, so students got to use digital sticky notes or graphic organizers to share their contents or ideas.

On the other hand, the Google Slides used during the reflection phase were pre-formatted with sections where the students can type in the new terminologies they have learned, some significant learning points from the presentations, and any remaining questions. We called this the "3-2-1 Exit Cards", which can be used to gauge students' level of understanding and provide the presenters with immediate feedback.

Conclusion

In essence, it is important to note that the success of COIL projects does not only rely on the number of web tools used, but on the strategic selection and implementation of the ones that best support the goals of cross-cultural activity; in a highly interconnected world, the deliberate use of technologies can transform the learning process and offer invaluable experiences to the students when used effectively.

References

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Shoji, S., & Okura, N. (2024). A collaborative online learning activity (COIL) between Japan and the United States of America on culture and language studies. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *15*(1), 9–15. https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1501.02

Improving Vocabulary Acquisition Through a Video Game Inspired Mechanic: Guided Inductive Reasoning

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Although gaming may be considered a universally passive activity, there are inherent game mechanics employed within *Chants of Sennaar* (Rundisk, 2023), *Tunic* (Tunic Team, 2022), and *Heaven's Vault* (Inkle, 2019) that, in the correct contextually constructed system, possess the ability to rapidly heighten language acquisition. These games utilize a fictitious language created by the developers as the centerpiece of their puzzle worlds. The task of these games is to uncover the meaning of these languages through pragmatically crafted situations that provide the player with an investigative and curiosity-inspiring experience. This is similar to the experience of a foreigner visiting a country that does not speak their language or a child learning their first language. These games pose a clever and effective teaching method