

# International Virtual Exchange Conference (IVEC) 2020 special issue: editorial

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We are pleased to bring you this Special Issue of the *Journal of Virtual Exchange*, the second such volume to publish articles resulting from the International Virtual Exchange Conference (IVEC) 2020<sup>3</sup>. This special issue includes five research articles presented at IVEC 2020 (<http://iveconference.org/2020-conference>) and a panel discussion. Each manuscript underwent double-blind review, which was then followed by rigorous editing and revising. Their work represents the amazing diversity that is blossoming in the field of Virtual Exchange (VE) as practitioners, academic administrators, and researchers realise its potential as well as its inevitable challenges.

VE research presented in this special issue ranges from the study of the impact of VE on language learning (uptake) (Feng et al.) to a complex, three-way project with a focus on physical and digital accessibility (Oswal et al.). While Bartsch et al. describe their new framework that combines inquiry-based learning with digital storytelling in VE, Ganassin et al. share their findings regarding the underexplored area of staff (administrators and instructors) perceptions of the role of VE in Internationalisation at Home (IaH). In this same vein, Ruther et al. report on their work in an assessment-based approach to VE programme building. Findings from longitudinal studies are also presented, providing evidence that VE research as a discipline is maturing.

Before we present each article, here we offer a snapshot of the themes and highlights you will find in the research articles in this special issue (Table 1). The articles cover VE activity in eight countries in seven disciplines. The studies demonstrate different VE designs, including cross-disciplinary, longitudinal, and three-party designs. Several key VE themes run through the manuscripts, including accessibility, intercultural competence, internationalisation, and sustainable development.

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3. Selected short papers from the IVEC2020 conference can be found here: Satar, M. (Ed.). (2021). *Virtual exchange: towards digital equity in internationalisation*. Research-publishing.net. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2021.53.9782490057955>

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**Table 1. Themes emerging from the research articles in this special issue**

| Countries   | Themes   |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• China (Ganassin et al., Feng et al.)</li> <li>• France (Ruther et al.)</li> <li>• Germany (Bartsch et al.)</li> <li>• Hungary (Oswal et al.)</li> <li>• Laos (Bartsch et al.)</li> <li>• Mexico (Ruther et al.)</li> <li>• UK (Ganassin et al.)</li> <li>• US (Oswal et al., Ruther et al., Feng et al.)</li> </ul>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessibility (physical and digital) (Oswal et al.)</li> <li>• Authentic collaborative learning (Oswal et al.)</li> <li>• Complex global challenges (Bartsch et al.)</li> <li>• Digital storytelling (Bartsch et al.)</li> <li>• Faculty/tutor/instructor development (Ruther et al., Ganassin et al.)</li> <li>• Focus on forum (Feng et al.)</li> <li>• Food consumption (Bartsch et al.)</li> <li>• (New) framework (FETA) (Bartsch et al.)</li> <li>• Group-based video chat (Feng et al.)</li> <li>• Inquiry-based learning (Bartsch et al.)</li> <li>• Institutionalising/Sustaining VE (Ruther et al., Ganassin et al.)</li> <li>• Intercultural competence (Ruther et al., Ganassin et al.)</li> <li>• Internationalisation (Ruther et al., Ganassin et al.)</li> <li>• Iterative design (Ruther et al., Oswal et al.)</li> <li>• Perceptions of staff (admins and instructors) (Ganassin et al.)</li> <li>• about the potential of VE (Ganassin et al.)</li> <li>• Student assessment (Ruther et al.)</li> <li>• Student expectations pre and post experience (Ruther et al., Oswal et al.)</li> </ul> |
| Disciplines   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English for academic purposes (Feng et al.)</li> <li>• English for business (Oswal et al.)</li> <li>• Food science (Bartsch et al.)</li> <li>• Language learning (Feng et al.)</li> <li>• Professional writing (Oswal et al.)</li> <li>• Teacher education (Bartsch et al.)</li> <li>• Technical communication (Oswal et al.)</li> </ul> |  |
| Designs   | Other Unique Elements  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross-disciplinary (Oswal et al., Bartsch et al.)</li> <li>• Longitudinal (Oswal et al., Ruther et al.)</li> <li>• Three-way exchange (Ruther et al., Oswal et al.)</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• COVID-19/pandemic (Bartsch et al.)</li> <li>• Community college (US) (Ruther et al.)</li> </ul>   |

Oswal, Palmer, and Koris open this special issue with an interdisciplinary collaboration between three higher education institutions in the EU and the US. The authors investigate improvement in awareness of disability and accessibility in business contexts. Drawing on various data sources including surveys, videoconferencing meeting minutes, and instructor notes, Oswal and colleagues document positive outcomes in both learners' awareness of disabilities and their willingness to find solutions to issues related to disabilities. As the authors highlight in their conclusions, projects

foregrounding issues of accessibility are key to ensuring “accessible education and information while contributing to the integration of people with disabilities in our global society”.

The second contribution in this issue explores feedback and uptake in online intercultural exchanges via videoconferencing. Feng, Shi, Hu, and Yu investigate different types of feedback offered by American students to their Chinese peers during their exchanges in English, as well as factors that impact successful uptake. Following a thorough literature review on feedback practices during incidental focus on form and uptake, Feng and colleagues describe the research context. Analysing verbatim transcripts of recorded interactions, the authors found that recasts, clarification requests, and translations were the most frequently used feedback types, and peer repair was more likely to lead to successful uptake.

With their VE project between higher education students from Laos and Germany, Bartsch, Kittirath, Müller, and Youyabouth address a global challenge: food consumption and sustainability. As an interdisciplinary exchange, their students explored and reflected on their food consumption practices through inquiry-based learning and were then asked to represent their narratives and subjective meanings through digital storytelling. Bartsch et al. present both quantitative and qualitative evidence on students’ development of consumer and sustainability competencies through the multimodal VE and argue for “a more systematic integration of VE into higher education” for global collaboration targeting global challenges.

In the next research article, Ruther, Jeffress, Shi, and Rabke offer an assessment-based approach to improve the quality of VE programmes through iterative VE design cycles. The authors report survey data collected over three years and explain how an external provider (Gazelle International) worked with a US community college supporting VE projects with France and Mexico. The external provider reviewed learning outcomes annually and offered teacher training and revisions to VE design. The findings indicate programme growth, improved learning outcomes, and institutionalisation of the VE programme. The authors encourage other institutions to explore their iterative, goal-oriented approach in their internationalisation efforts.

The final research article in this issue focuses on staff perspectives towards IaH through VE in China. Ganassin, Satar, and Regan investigate how internationalisation is perceived and the role of VE in this process within the context of Chinese higher education. The authors elicit administrator and teacher perspectives on the potential of VE for IaH through a series of training discussions. An interview with a Chinese instructor and their American VE partner sheds further light into a specific VE case between China and the USA. The authors report positive staff perspectives which suggest that VE can contribute to internationalisation and inclusive intercultural experiences in China. Their

conclusions highlight techno-political challenges and the need to establish mutual understandings for successful and respectful VE partnerships.

We end the special issue with a panel contribution by Bali, Goes, and Patankar with the skilful moderation of Haug exploring the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on VE. The panel presentation was certainly one of the popular sessions at IVEC 2020 and we are pleased to include their video contribution as part of this volume. Bali, Goes, and Patankar each offer their expertise and observations in their countries depicting a vivid picture of the lived realities in Egypt, Brazil, and India. Their reflections span across issues of access, equality, well-being, and wider educational concepts. In this volume, we present the panel video along with selected highlights from their conversation.

**Figure 1. A visualisation of the terms found in the abstracts of each research article**



In closing, we offer a visualisation of the terms found in the abstracts of each research article ([Figure 1](#)). The globe as the ‘container’ for the representation of the work that we do seems apt. At first glance, it is clear that students are at the heart of the work of VE! We invite you to increase the page display size to uncover and explore the many concepts discussed in these works.

We hope you find value in these articles. It has been our pleasure serving as co-editors of this special issue.

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