

Climate Movements virtual exchange as an internationalisation at home initiative in France

Alexandra Reynolds¹

Abstract

Virtual exchange has widened internationalisation to more inclusive internationalisation at home initiatives. This study is set in a higher education context where 122 students from a public university in southwestern France took part in *Sharing Perspectives Foundation's* flagship *Climate Movements* virtual exchange. In this context, L1 French learners of English, who majored in the hard sciences, interacted on a weekly basis with other students worldwide on the sensitive topic of climate change, marking the critical turn of virtual exchange projects (Helm, 2016; O'Dowd, 2016, 2018; Zečević & Milekić, 2022). The data (questionnaire responses, reflective journal entries and interview transcripts) were collected into textual corpora and read for repeated emergent themes through conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The perceptions of the participants strongly suggest that *Climate Movements* virtual exchange is pivotal to internationalisation at home initiatives carried out in English as a second language.

Keywords: virtual exchange, English as a medium of instruction through virtual exchange, internationalisation at home, French higher education

1. Université de Bordeaux; alexandra.reynolds@u-bordeaux.fr; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9758-5735>

1. Introduction

Virtual exchange (VE) as a formal, and institutionalized form of online learning enables learners to interact and collaborate with other learners in distant locations using “online communication technologies under the guidance of teachers or trained facilitators” (O’Dowd, 2016, p. 291). VE in European higher education has an “overarching objective to bring together youth from across Europe in order to foster their sense of European identity and encourage democratic participation of youth” (Millner, 2020, p. 2).

The implications of the role of VE in the internationalisation of universities are based on a number of factors. For those European universities that do not have a high intake of international students at undergraduate level, VE offers opportunities to develop language and intercultural skills in a virtual multilingual environment at home. Research has also shown that study abroad (SA) is not necessarily the apex of language improvement, and that at home (AH) contexts can be just as effective for learning English (Köylü & Tracy-Ventura, 2022). This study therefore aligns itself with contexts where language learning occurs within a process of internationalisation at home. Internationalisation at home is understood as the “purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments” (Beelen & Jones, 2015, p. 69).

One such VE context is the *Climate Movements* VE, which focuses on humanity’s biggest challenge today: climate change. *Climate Movements* VE allows youth from different countries and backgrounds to learn about climate change and environmentally responsible behaviour. *Climate Movements* VE also enables students to participate in an intercultural exchange program without leaving home. *Climate Movements* VE combines the synchronous element of weekly facilitated online meetings in English, with the asynchronous activities of video commenting and vlogging so that learners can produce language in interconnected and meaningful ways even though they are at a distance from each other.

In terms of content learning, the programme of the *Climate Movements* VE enables students to study topics including the causes and effects of climate change, environmental discriminations, environmentally responsible behaviour, and solutions to climate change. The assignments and activities help students to develop a variety of digital, critical, and communicational skills (including empathic listening, negotiating and cooperating).

VE at a public university in southwest France provides students with the opportunity to interact with other speakers of English who are also students. These other speakers of English can be learners of English or they can use English as their first language. Outgoing student exchange numbers from French universities are still low; in keeping with the global figure of only 10% of an elite being able to travel abroad on mobility schemes (de Wit, 2020). There are opportunities for students from France to go abroad but those who actually do remain a small number. This may either be because their English is not good enough or because of socio-economic reasons. The Erasmus mobility funds do not cover the real total costs of mobility (and only cover part of the costs). This therefore reinforces the importance of having VE opportunities (for those who cannot afford to go abroad, for example). Outside of the institutional context however, learners have increasing opportunities to interact in authentic ways in English with other speakers worldwide, either through social media or online activities such as gaming (Peake & Reynolds, 2020).

2. *Climate Movements* for internationalisation initiatives using VE

The theme of *Climate Movements* VE is relevant to internationalisation on many levels. First, the topic of climate change is relevant to all nations. For example, the Earth's warming temperatures are one of many indicators of our climate change's impact on human and animal health, economics, and politics (Kumar et al., 2012). Young people are particularly concerned about the issues related to climate change and wish to better understand them as university students for both their professional and personal futures (Eyraud, 2020). This is why the institution has categorised *Climate Movements* as part of its internationalisation syllabus.

Secondly, learning through an online VE programme is sustainable in itself in terms of lowering the carbon impact of student travel (Versteijlen et al., 2017). Learning about climate change without creating surplus carbon emissions by travelling is one of the ways students can both study and tackle climate change through VE. By discussing climate change with other students from around the world, the participants are also able to discuss the issue through multiples stories (see results section) and perspectives. *Climate Movements* VE guides students to “theorize climate change socioculturally, epistemologically and ontologically” (Goulah, 2017, p. 109) while they also develop their “language, literacies and content knowledge relative to climate science” (p. 109). This is summarised by the climate change course descriptor published by the Sharing Perspectives Foundation (SPF) announcing their *Climate Movements* VE Spring 2022:

Climate Movements is the international Virtual Exchange that focuses on key debates around Climate Movements. As young people mobilize around one of humanity's biggest questions, this course asks: what is the impact of Climate Movements on the planet, political action and the movement of people? ([Sharing Perspectives Foundation, 2022](#), Climate Movement Course Overview)

Transnational VEs such as *Climate Movements* VE are relevant to internationalisation at home initiatives because they can be categorised as Global Citizenship Education (GCE). GCEs “offer particularly rich contexts for eliciting critical interculturality while also engaging participants in promoting change for social improvement” ([Glimäng, 2022](#), p. 63). By bringing different learners together from different locations, it is hoped that intercultural competence will be developed. Intercultural competence is a complex and multi-layered skill set involving knowledge, and attitudinal dispositions including an increased socio-cultural awareness of otherness ([Deardorff & Jones, 2009](#), [Kramsch, 2006](#); [O’Dowd, 2011](#); [O’Dowd & Lewis, 2007](#)). Previous research has shown the potential of VE for intercultural learning in an international context because VE creates relational spaces in which participants meet, interact, and learn about one another. This means that in VE the participants need to interpret the meaning-making context which they are themselves part of.

3. *Climate Movements* VE for English as a second language

The need to link TESOL (Teaching English as a Second or Other Language) with the planet's climate crisis has been raised by [Goulah \(2017\)](#). TESOL should strive towards the creation of an eco-ethical consciousness ([Goulah, 2017](#); [Martusewicz et al., 2014](#)), and go beyond “just standards-based language and content curriculum” ([Goulah, 2017](#), p. 90). This should involve critical language skills to address the complex issues related to climate change and ecological education. *Climate Movements* helps students to define climate change in multiple ways, addressing topics such as migration in relation to climate change, sustainable farming practices, natural disasters (fires/flooding), and climate change activism. Although climate change is about science, participants learn that climate change is as much about science as it is about “culture, values and ideology” ([Hoffman, 2012](#)). The *Climate Movements* VE also addresses the topic of displaced people, as climate change impacts “racially, ethnically and linguistically marginalized communities” more than others ([Goulah, 2017](#), p. 92).

In such VE projects, students share a common ‘target’ language, here English as a lingua franca (ELF) ([Kohn, 2018](#)) and a target ‘goal’: to learn about climate change in a multi-cultural environment. In

ELF interactions, which already dominate the scene of international political discussions on climate change (i.e., United Nations Climate Change Conferences – COP), ELF enables participants to build communities of practice to tackle climate change. The argument for the value of ELF exchanges in English language contexts is based on the premise that ELF exchanges are more common than interactions between smaller circles of speakers who share English as a first language (Hultgren, 2020; Kachru, 1982). This is because English as a second language (L2) is the English that is the most spoken in the world (Bolton & Kachru, 2006; Hultgren, 2020). L2 speakers of English forge new identities through a process of building a sense of ‘self’ by developing and making sense of new patterns of meaning in ELF interactions (Van Compernelle & McGregor, 2016, p. 64). In recent years, the merit of ELF interactions in exchange programs in general, be they study abroad or through VE, has been discussed in the literature (Borràs, 2023; Köylü, 2023; Köylü & Tracy-Ventura, 2022). These contexts have been shown to be as effective for the development of English skills as L1 English contexts and have certain advantages for learner identities (Köylü & Tracy-Ventura, 2022).

4. Methods

The present qualitative study contemplates how this VE facilitated advanced language and content learning. This paper will outline the relevance of *Climate Movements* VE for internationalisation at home initiatives in France where English language progression is also a key learning objective of internationalisation. The data were collected into textual corpora and read for repeated emergent themes through conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The research questions were framed according to learner expectations and gains. The gains were identified according to the multicultural context and in terms of both language and content learning.

4.1. Research questions

The research questions of this study were as follows:

1. What did the students expect to gain from the VE?
2. How did the VE contribute to language gains in the eyes of the participants?
3. What did the students learn about climate change?
4. How did the VE enable a critical approach to *Climate Movements*?
5. What were the limitations of the VE?

5. The VE student: participant profiles

The participants in this ethnographic study were French-speaking science major students (average age 23) who took part in the *Climate Movements* VE programme on the initiative of a French higher education internationalisation programme.² The participating cohorts, totalling 122 students, were spread over three years: 2020, 83 students; 2021, 19 students; 2022, 20 students. The students could enrol on a voluntary basis, with the recommendation of having a minimum B2 level³ to be able to engage in conversations about climate change.

This study was ethnographic in nature because the researcher was part of the community of learning in which this study was conducted. Ethnography in the field of socio-linguistics applies a mixed approach to data collection, including the interaction between the researcher and the participants, and the emphasis of collecting participant descriptions and explanations rather than testing hypotheses (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). A key aspect of ethnography incorporates how the researcher influences their study group. In this case, by taking into account the role of the researcher, who acted as a mentor for the study group. The researcher had access to the participants by definition of her role as a language and internationalisation coordinator. The researcher's role in the institution is to encourage and help students who want to take part in Internationalisation at home projects. The research questions were designed to assess what the participants felt they had learned from the experience.

6. Procedure

The nine-week *Climate Movements* VE consisted of weekly synchronous meetings (conducted on Zoom) with a mixed group of students from the seven participating universities.⁴ Prior to the weekly meetings, the students watched a video and commented on the video on an online platform. The entire group met with a facilitator once a week. In this particular VE, the students did not meet each other outside of these weekly meetings. Subsequent to the weekly meetings, the students completed an online journal with their reflections on how the meeting went on that particular day. Towards

2. NewDEAL Project (2018). French National Agency for Research: Agence Nationale de la Recherche, project number ANR-17-NCUN-0006.

3. CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) proficiency levels referred to in this study: Beginner (A1-A2), Intermediate (B1-B2), Advanced (C1-C2).

4. The participating institutions were from the following countries (anonymity has been provided to the institutions): France (two institutions: one in Paris and one in southwestern France), Italy, Syria, Palestine, Algeria and Egypt. This study concerns the participants from the university in southwestern France only.

the end of the course, the students were asked to conduct an interview with someone in their local community about climate change and film it.

The students were assessed by the programme organisers using the following criteria: attendance points (40%), reflection points in the journal entries (15%), lecture comment points (15%), filmed interview of a person local to their area who was not participating in the VE (30%). The evaluation was based on participation and task completion rather than on the quality of the English. At the end of the programme participants are awarded credits⁵ on the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) from the participating French university and Erasmus+ digital badges⁶ from SPF to acknowledge these digital-communicative skills.

The VE was managed by a third party non-governmental organisation (NGO) called *Sharing Perspectives Foundation*. SPF can be categorised as a service-provider for enabling VE exchanges (O'Dowd, 2018) for participating member institutions. Within the context of this study, we will be referring to the participating students from the French public university in southwestern France only.

At this university from southwestern France, students wishing to enrol in *Climate Movements* VE are exempt from the traditional English program and are separated from their peers. The *Climate Movements* VE student becomes part of another virtual community of practice (García, 2009; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Van Compernelle & McGregor, 2016). Being isolated from their local peer group (during their *Climate Movements* VE exchange) and having to get by on their own, to some extent, is in keeping with representations of a physical exchange programme for its features of 'distancing'. In terms of learning management, the *Climate Movements* learner was responsible for their timetable, schedule, workload and progression.

6.1. Data collection instruments

The students completed a pre- and post-course questionnaire to assess whether student expectations met with the outcomes. Before, during, and after the *Climate Movements* programme, the participants emailed the researcher with questions, concerns or feedback in an unprompted manner. In keeping with an ethnographic approach, the researcher accompanied the participants throughout the third-

5. 3 ECTS

6. If the student achieved over 75%, they were awarded Erasmus Plus digital badges by SPF.

party led programme, of which she was not a teacher. The researcher met with the students individually or in small groups throughout their *Climate Movements* programme.

The data were collected using questionnaires, learner journals (which were part of the course assessment), interviews and email exchanges with the participating students. The pre- and post-course questionnaires contained a mixture of 5-point Likert attitudinal questions, tick-box options that the participants could tick if they agreed with the statement proposed and open reflective questions about their learner experiences (text boxes). The researcher also used email correspondence and interviews to achieve an analysis of the participants' *Climate Movements* experience through member checking (Cahour, 2006; Harvey, 2014). Member checking involves a process of co-constructive and collaborative reflection between the researcher and her participants.

Once the VE was completed, the participants who wished to do so were invited to share a copy of their weekly reflective journal entries with the researcher. Fifty percent of the participants decided to share their reflective journals with their researcher, although it must be noted that these were copies of the same reflective journals which were sent to SPF course managers as part of their course and were hence not 'private' reflective journals. Completing the learner journal was therefore part of the course assessment (by SPF only). For the purposes of this study, the journals were used to inform the discussion of this paper.

Learner reflective journals may be open (Bailey et al., 1996), or, as in this case, guided (Block, 2007) where the participants were asked to reflect on specific questions. The reflective journal entries were guided by the SPF course managers so that broad impressions of the discussion groups were given (questions of the type: For this week, what particularly struck you about today's seminar?).

The research design of this present study preferred longer and more personalized written and oral interactions with the participants. This enabled the researcher to track the participants at different stages of their VE journey (from recruitment, learner objectives, difficulties along the way, to final remarks).

7. Data analysis

The data analysis enabled understandings of learner experience through the qualitative analysis of the data. The data were collected into textual corpora (questionnaire responses, emails, reflective journal entries, and interviews transcripts) and read for repeated emergent themes. The pre-course

questionnaires were read to establish the most representative student expectations, namely through the students' responses to "why do you wish to enrol on *Climate Movements VE*?" Learning outcomes were evaluated by means of the post-course anonymous questionnaire which asked students for their feedback after they had completed the VE.

The journal entries were read and coded by researcher to assess repeated emergent themes such as *learning about climate change* (keywords: climate change, floods, migration, natural disasters), *Altered Worldviews* (keywords: 'different opinions' and 'point of view' + 'change' + 'evolve'), *Community of Practise formation* (keywords: 'feeling shy', 'getting to know each other' and 'feeling more confident'). The codes related to the participants' learner experience of VE, in general, were based on previous learning codes established by the same author in previous VE run by SPF (Reynolds, 2020; Reynolds, 2021). For this present study concerning climate change, other additional themes were created deductively by the research: Climate/Floods/Migration/Natural disasters. These codes were taken from the course programme announcing each weekly topic under discussion. The aim was to gain a better understanding of *Climate Movements VE* as a learner experience.

As the learner journals progressed from week one to week nine, they gave valuable information about how the learners' identities progressed during the program. The reflective journals therefore told us much about how individuals positioned themselves to their group; in addition to whether their learning expectations were met. The reflective journal entries revealed common threads, namely a shift in attitude towards the others in the group and towards the topic of climate change under discussion. The weekly meetings were strongly topic driven, and the participants told the researcher that the facilitators helped them to keep to the topic.

The reflective journals enabled the participants to describe what they had learned about their intercultural group in terms of knowledge, experience and language gain. Concerning these topics, the participants focused on the experience of interacting with an intercultural group rather than on learning content by heart. Knowledge gains were therefore assessed outside of the students' scientific disciplines. This coincided with the interviews where the participants described how their attitudes had changed. A change of attitude coincides with gaining a greater awareness of cultural diversity, hence developing intercultural competence.

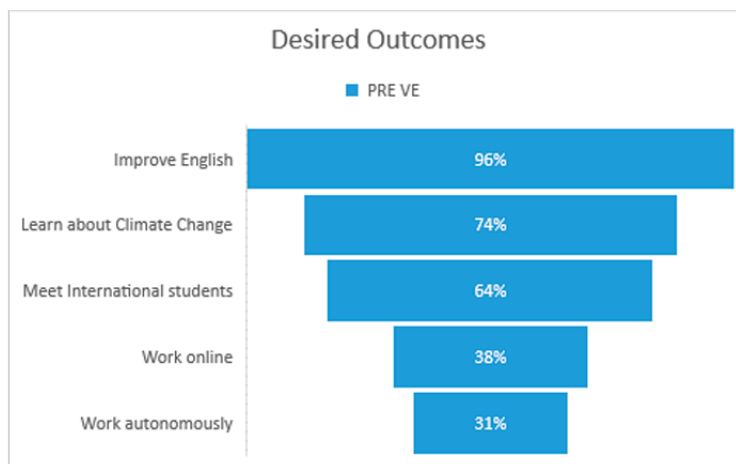
8. Results

8.1. RQ1: Student expectations regarding gains from the VE

The first research question aimed to establish what the students expected to gain from the VE programme. All of the participants had decided to enrol on *Climate Movements* VE on a voluntary basis instead of attending their usual English course.

As can be seen in [Figure 1](#), the findings in the pre-course questionnaire show their expectations as follows:

Figure 1. Student expectations reported in the pre-course questionnaire (80.95% response rate of n=122) presented in percentages. Tick boxes with multiple answers possible (i.e., can tick all, some, or none of the options).



Through the readings of the student's subsequent open written responses (in the questionnaires and journals), their expectations can be refined as follows:

1. A desire to improve their *oral English proficiency* (without necessarily being evaluated on their English language skills).
2. Learn specifically about *the topic of climate change*.

3. A desire to talk to other people from *different countries*.

The post-course questionnaire (65.5% response rate of n=122) revealed that the three highest scoring pre-course expectations were generally met, if not surpassed (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Pre- and post-course online questionnaire to determine student expectations and outcomes

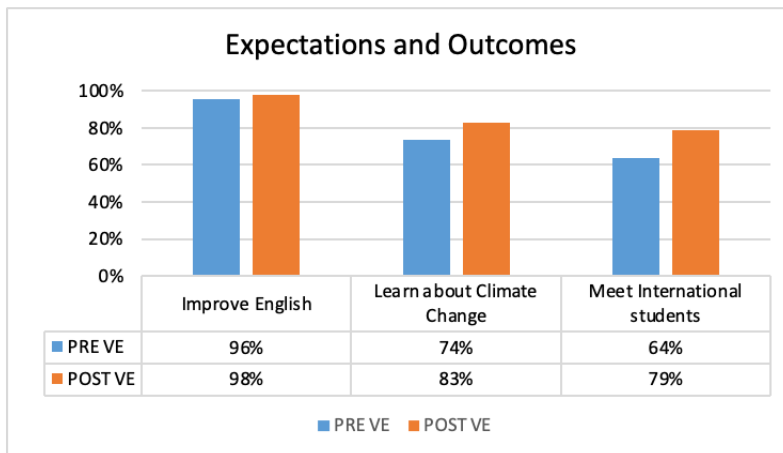


Table 1. Post-course student satisfaction survey

Post-course survey (65.5% response rate)	
I would recommend this IaH course to another student.	93.9%
I would like to enrol on an IaH course again next year	88.8%
I was generally satisfied with this IaH course.	85%

85% of the participants were generally satisfied with the *Climate Movements* VE course (on a 5-point Likert scale, see Table 1). The general satisfaction result is used to assess whether the students felt they had made the right choice when selecting this internationalisation at home programme of learning. It should be noted, however, that general satisfaction does not necessarily mean that oral proficiency, intercultural competence, and content knowledge improved.

8.2. RQ2: English language gains

The second research question focused on the language gains as described by the self-assessments of the participants. The findings show that the VE helped the participants to improve their English oral skills. This result was gained from the post-VE questionnaire where 98% answered that their oral English had improved thanks to the VE (see Figure 2: tick box to express an ‘agree’ item among a list of other items). This improvement was a self-assessment of language progression, rather than a tested progression.

Being more able to state contrary opinions to a given topic also improved on general academic discourse and rhetorical tools. The academic discourse improvement was measured through readings of their learner journals (see examples below) where students reused climate change vocabulary they had learnt during the programme and critically analysed how they positioned themselves when talking to other students during the weekly online meetings.

This sense of improvement can be explained by a shift in how students conceptualized language competence. That is to say, the students’ language improvement expectations shifted once they had interacted with other speakers of English. We can see that their expectations of what they understood by linguistic gains may have shifted once they found themselves accommodating to other speakers of English who did not speak French. The journal entries combined with the post-questionnaire data showed that students were capable of a more nuanced interpretation of the “oral English proficiency” they had referred to in expectation 1. This shift occurred from a general desire to “improve oral English skills” (pre-course) to more nuanced reports of how they negotiated meaning and accommodated to other speakers of English during the VE. Experiencing *Climate Movements* VE made the participants activate the skills that they already had and made them more understanding of a wider range of English speakers and accents, as can be seen in the post-questionnaire responses below (author’s emphasis in bold, throughout):

As opposed to my previous English class, this program was **not about learning English**. The majority of participants had learned English as a second language so it was interesting to hear all the **different accents**. There was no teacher but only facilitator, so it was all about learning from videos and discussion between the participants.⁷

7. None of the excerpts used in the examples have been translated by the author as they were taken from the students’ journals and interviews which were written and conducted in English. Emphasis added.

Thanks to VE program we could speak with **people from different cultures who didn't speak our first language.**

This program allowed me to talk to people from around the world, with **different backgrounds**, about a topic I would not necessarily learn about during my studies. It has forced me to talk about a difficult topic and to **get out of my comfort zone.**

When the participants initially stated that they wanted their “oral English skills to improve” prior to the course, we hypothesized that what they meant by this was to improve aspects of formal functional language. We believe therefore, that subsequent to the study, their impressions of what it means to be a legitimate speaker of English may have shifted. Students refer, above, to the program not being about “learning English” but learning how to be a functional user of English. Speaking and listening to people with different accents (to French) and learning about climate change is what the participants mean when they refer to being “outside of their comfort zone”.

In terms of language learning, this VE adopts an (ELF) approach to English use, where students create “their own version of [English] in their minds, hearts and behaviour” (Kohn, 2018, p. 4). It is because English is a global language that programmes such as *Climate Movements* can operate with students from all over the world, enabling speakers to meet, who would otherwise not have been able to interact (Hultgren, 2020, p. 11). The combination of being able to interact with students from multiple geographical contexts with a topic of heightened interest for young people today results in meaningful and authentic discussions which are directly applicable to their lives (Pinner, 2016).

In this sense, “improving English oral proficiency” was not related to tested language proficiency, but to student self-assessments of being able to interact with speakers worldwide in a lingua franca in relation to the topic of climate change. Self-assessment of English language progression is described by one student as follows:

Communicating with people all around the world did improve my communication skills and even if it's sometimes hard to understand what people want to say I can say that I progressed. I'm not afraid anymore to express myself in a foreign language in front of people and that's a good point!

8.3. RQ3: Learning about climate change

The third research question aimed to discover what the participants had learned about the topic of climate change. Previous studies have shown the interest of the theme of climate change for higher education (Delavan, 2020; Goulah, 2017; McKeown & Down, 2022). How students frame their learning experience of climate change through VE is in keeping with the intercultural nature of VE. Intercultural skills come into play in the students' shared 'climate stories' in the discussion below. The participants show how affected they were by the natural disasters described by their group members during the synchronous meet-up sessions. For example, "a German girl talked about flood issues in her regions, an Egyptian girl talked about water rarefaction...I felt that we were all concerned by climate change."

The participants learnt about the different effects that climate change can have on different countries and how it affects people and the economy. Many of the participants had experienced climate change firsthand and their climate stories create a sombre tone to the learner reflective journals, as one student expressed in her journal below:

The most touching story was that of a colleague who lost a family member in a flood, which we were all very sorry about.

The topics covered referred to specific manifestations of climate change and tended to cover one specific aspect per session. One such session covered the topic of the movement of people, also referred to as migration due to climate change (hence *Climate Movements*). Four separate journal accounts below show the key word '**migration**' and how they were discussed by the four participants:

I learned a lot today thanks to the experiences about **migration** shared by the other students. We see that we have different experiences and points of view because we come from different countries. But we can find similarities in those stories.

Today's session was about **migrations** linked to climate change. The most challenging moment in today's session was a debate about videos that we had to watch to prepare the session. We talked about **migrations** related to climate change and how it is so confused in today's societies. Differentiating migrations and movements due to climate change is quite challenging.

Others have also shared stories about their own reasons for **migration** in relation to climate change or how the economy of their country was affected. After this discussion, one thing is clear: climate change has changed everyone's lives, but in different ways.

Some people had to run away from their countries because of local climate change. That led to another discussion about **migrations** due to climate change.

Although the *Climate Movements* VE was a motor for reflection and concern, the participants nevertheless remained positive about how to tackle climate change and engaged actively with brainstorming solutions. The four journal extracts below show how the participants referred specifically to the key word '**solutions**' or gave practical examples (underlined in the examples) of sustainable actions:

Each of us shared our vision about the **solutions** presented in the resources. I got to understand the students' points of view on the solutions, and their opinions helped me to have another vision that I didn't have myself.

We discussed whether electric cars and **solutions** involving technology are truly useful to help with climate change. I also enjoyed the teamwork (when we were in smaller groups). We talked about **solutions** to avoid the use of cars, smart cities, and legal solutions to help with climate change.

Everyone brought up different ideas, like someone talking about how their business major could lead to them creating brands around the idea of recycling and sustainability.

Towards the end of the session, two of our group colleagues have shown us eco-friendly products they use that are even affordable such as toothpaste pills, toothbrush detachable heads and shampoo bars that are also travel-friendly.

Although the topic of climate change can be upsetting and challenging, encouraging discussions about possible positive actions are voiced with a degree of fatalism below:

After the session, I felt more confidence for the ecological transition coming (we're gonna see what happens!).

One of the sessions was devoted to the topic of climate activism. The students had an sympathetic approach to climate activism as can be seen from the two following journal extracts referring to the topic of '**activism**'.

The most interesting thing about this session was to put yourself in the shoes of an **activist** group and respond to environmental issues.

How activists are imprisoned or killed for their beliefs. It was surprising to see how aggressive people/states can be towards climate **activists**.

8.4. *Climates Movements VE*

The fourth research question assessed how the participants developed critical thinking skills through VE. The findings show that all of the participants described that their attitudes to climate change worldwide had changed profoundly, subsequent to the programme. A change of attitude was described using the word "surprised", associated with a reflective comment related to a changing "thought process" (highlighted by "I never thought", "I have realised" and "my point of view has been altered"). These highlights referring to transformative and critical learning are summarized by one student below in their post-course questionnaire response:

I think my point of view has been altered by our debates, I have found myself trying to see the bigger picture more often than before in my everyday life.

Becoming a member of a *Climate Movements* community of practice involves an agreed approach of 'open-mindedness', 'respect' and 'listening', as can be seen in these interview transcripts with three different learners:

I liked the fact that we didn't agree on everything and that we still talked respectfully.

We listen to each other's views with interest.

Everyone in the group inspires me, as they all have their own stories to tell and unique views on the world, and those are all equally fascinating.

In her last reflective journal entry, one participant expressed sadness at having to leave the group:

It is going to be the last one, it is kinda sad ... It almost feels as if I felt nostalgic for a place I've never been to.

This participant refers to "place" as experience, rather than as a location 'she has never been to'. Although this sentiment about nostalgia for a (virtual) place was specific to this one participant, this powerful comment attributes a special validity to the group and their exchanges.

8.5. RQ5: Limitations of the Climate Movements VE

The final research question aimed to highlight any limitations of the programme itself, in terms of pedagogy and management. The main limitations of the *Climate Movements VE* were described by the participants as being related to the technical challenges related to telecollaboration rather than to the course content itself. This was described as "connection issues", "internet platform bugs" and technical services' "answer time". These technical limitations were also found in [Reynolds \(2020\)](#) and [Van de Oudeweetering & Decuyper \(2023\)](#).

The participants generally had a critical approach to their learning experience and were encouraged to be critical of the pedagogical organisation by both SPF and the researcher. One participant reflects that session six was a little too similar to session five and that this made the session repetitive. It would be misleading to claim that all the synchronous meetings were packed with non-stop talk. As in other face-to-face interactions, the pace of the discussion could differ, with the occasional "awkward silence".

Some comment was made about online interaction in general. For example, one participant referred to the limitation of *Climate Movements* VE providing “no other environment” in which to interact with her peers. Here, she was comparing *Climate Movements* VE to her other learning environments, where she could interact further with her classmates outside of the classroom. Despite the virtual nature of the exchange, the participants did nevertheless develop a sense of community within their virtual groups. This was perhaps because this multi-institutional VE operates on a system where there is no ‘host’ country and no ‘visitor or foreigner’ (which is the case in physical study abroad schemes).

As the weekly interactions occurred on ZOOM, students noted that the ZOOM breakout-room function was particularly conducive to ‘intimate’ discussions, and enabled students to “talk about the subject of the session in more depth, but also share personal experiences.”

9. Discussion

Student expectations were established over two years with consistent results showing the same expectations over this time (Reynolds, 2020; Reynolds, 2021). The alignment with the expectations and the outcomes is consistent with previous studies of the VE provided by SPF (Baroni et al., 2019; Hoskins & Reynolds, 2020; Reynolds, 2020; Reynolds, 2022; Van de Oudeweetering & Decuyper, 2023).

The qualitative results referring to a change of attitude stated above are in keeping with definitions of learner agency in relation to transformative learning (Kreber et al., 2007). Transformative learning is understood as “the process of becoming more conscious and gaining in self-awareness and self-knowledge, as one that comes about primarily through critical reflection” (Kreber et al., 2007, p. 28). Both the context and the content of the *Climate Movements* VE provide a local setting (home) from which to reassess the global by interacting with others through VE. This process is described as *glocalization* (Glimäng, 2022; Guilherme & Menezes de Souza, 2019) as an ongoing process of “challenging the single narrative” (Glimäng, 2022, p. 65) which is what internationalisation at home initiatives strive towards. The transformative shifts from the local to the global are operated from a community of practice. The steps towards glocalization in this case are taken from the virtual community of practice created by the VE.

The critical process shown in the results in relation to RQ4 (Thinking critically about *Climate Movements* through VE) involves gaining confidence during meaningful and interesting interactions

with others. The interactions draw the participants' cumulative and shared identities, including attitudinal and emotional responses to their peers (the affect). Many of the participants described having 'no opinions' or not being able to state an opinion prior to the VE. By listening to others, some of the participants described understanding political issues relating to climate change better, which in turn made them more capable and confident to voice opinions which they had been previously reluctant to give. A better understanding of a subject matter should enable more confidence in stating an opinion about it.

It can be argued that a growth in confidence in the participants also came from finding better footing in conversational skills in general. The complex footing that occurs in face-to-face interactions is referred to in the literature as positioning to macro social processes and ideas (Bamberg, 2004; De Fina, 2013; Georgakopoulou, 2007). *Climate Movements* VE creates intimate closed groups of members (of approximately ten people on Zoom) which also operate on conditions of structure, face, and rules of conduct (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1959). In this sense, community may be understood in relation to a developing sense of belonging to a (virtual) community of practice (Wenger, 1999). Being part of this *Climate Movements* VE community was described as showing respect for other's people's views. The process hopefully culminates in the participants being better prepared to engage in interactions on the topic of climate change with other people in the future.

Becoming a member of a new group was a key positive element of the programme and ties in to this aspect of physical study abroad schemes. In both physical and virtual mobility, meeting new people is one of the most memorable aspects of an exchange. The VE participants could refer to 'place' as experience, rather than as location. This reassessment of our understanding of location in global online communities has been referred to in other studies of those of who have experienced VE. In keeping with Kramsch's (2006) notion of 'third places' in relation to the multilingual subject, participants could express their L2-selves⁸ through the special online place created by *Climate Movements* VE. The validity the participants attribute to the group and their exchanges shows that interactions, be they virtual or otherwise, are validated by their speakers as authentic in relation to the meaning they attribute to them. In addition, references to place, referred to as *topographical indexes* by Van de Oudeweetering and Decuyper (2023), create "connections and bordering practices between geographical units, people, and political states" (p.11).

8. L2-self is a term used by Dörnyei (2009) to refer to the new identity(ies) second language speakers develop in an additional language.

10. Conclusion and implications

Students from the participating university from southwestern France demonstrated dynamic learning about climate change which they conferred to the researcher through questionnaires, written journal accounts, emails and interviews. Perceived learning included language acquisition specifically related to climate change terminology, increased knowledge of the diverse aspects of climate change which they gained mainly through listening and speaking. Additionally, the participants displayed transformed perspectives and value-creative actions toward climate change resulting in their learning (Goulah, 2017). This contributed to an eco-ethical consciousness which was better informed after the course. The unit fostered communicative competence using ELF, and critical thinking at an academic level.

The drawbacks of the *Climate Movements* programme for the French university are that it remains accessible only to those who have reached sufficient proficiency in English (B2 level). This language condition is given so that our students are able to engage (in English) with other students from other universities. Places on VE are also generally limited, meaning that currently, only about 10% of our student population can take part in a VE. This is because we have approximately 1200 students in the first undergraduate year and we do not have enough institutional partners to cater for all of these students. We therefore create VE for a minority of students on a selection and optional basis. Future research into how to make VE more accessible to big cohorts of mixed level students would therefore be welcome.

The practical implications of this study have resulted in a more solid foundation of *Climate Movements* VE, and other VE projects as credited courses at this French university. By including *Climate Movements* VE, as well as other VE in operation at this French university, the institution is also identifying courses relevant to an international curriculum, and hence making them visible (Leask, 2015). Subsequent to this study, VE has been accepted as a broad approach to internationalisation at home from which more students should benefit.

It would have been valuable to compare the French university's student perceptions with those of the other participating universities (to which we did not have access for confidentiality reasons). In this respect, the thematic codes found in this study could be compared to other participant groups. Future use of these same codes by other researchers would test inter-coder reliability, so that we could see if multiple analysts interpret the codes in the same way.

Another drawback of the study is that it did not include a control group of non-VE students studying climate change. Considering the results of this present study, we can suppose that the control group would not have benefited from these wider climate change stories, nor would they have been able to develop their ELF communication skills with an L1 French speaking group only.

In terms of the language improvement reported by the participants, this study, and future studies, could benefit from more fine-tuned categories of language competence, such as the competence of being a ‘functional’ speaker of English within a context of “professionalism, sensitivity, caring and understanding” (Yanaprasart & Melo-Pfeifer, 2019, p. 11). This type of competence extends to current understandings of what a successful ELF interaction involves in VE (Zečević & Milekić, 2022). In this case ELF interactions in VE are considered fluid and variable (Jenkins, 2015; Zečević & Milekić, 2022).

The experiment hopefully responds favourably to calls to create an eco-ethical consciousness within the field of international education in the 21st century. The European Commission’s decision to fund another iteration (2023-26) of this VE programme under the new project name of CliVEx (Climate Justice VE) is the acknowledgment of educational managers’ continued work towards this goal.

References

- Bailey, K. M., Bergthold, B., Braunstein, B., Jagodzinski Fleischman, N., Holbrook, M. P., Tuman, J., Waissbluth, X., & Zambo, L. J. (1996). The language learner’s autobiography: Examining the “apprenticeship of observation”. In D. Freeman & J. Richards (Eds.), *Teacher Learning in Language Teachers*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bamberg, M. (2004). Talk, small stories, and adolescent identities. *Human development*, 47(6), 366-369.
- Baroni, A., Dooly, M., García, P. G., Guth, S., Hauck, M., Helm, F., Lewis, T., Mueller-Hartmann, A., O’Dowd, R., & Rienties, B. (2019). *Evaluating the impact of virtual exchange on initial teacher education: A European policy experiment*. Research-publishing. net.
- Beelen, J., & Jones, E. (2015). Redefining Internationalization at Home. In A. Curaj, L. Matei, R. Pricopie, J. Salmi, & P. Scott (Eds.), *The European higher education area: Between critical reflections and future policies* (pp. 59-72). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20877-0_5
- Block, D. (2007). The rise of identity in SLA research, post Firth and Wagner (1997). *The Modern Language Journal*, 91(s1), 863-876.
- Bolton, K., & Kachru, B. B. (2006). *World Englishes: Critical concepts in linguistics*. Routledge. <https://books.google.fr/books?id=Z3mydCcllYYC>
- Borràs, J. (2023). Comparing L2 learning outcomes in traditional and English as a lingua franca study abroad contexts. *The Language Learning Journal*, 52(4), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2023.2193581>

- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- Cahour, B. (2006). *L'expérience vécue des utilisateurs: Pourquoi l'étudier et comment*. Actes du colloque CITE.
- Deardorff, D. K., & Jones, E. (2009). *Intercultural competence*. Sage.
- De Fina, A. (2013). Positioning level 3: Connecting local identity displays to macro social processes. *Narrative Inquiry*, 23(1), 40-61.
- De Wit, H. (2020). Internationalization of Higher Education: The need for a more ethical and qualitative approach. *Journal of International Students*, 10(1), i-iv. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v10i1.1893>
- Delavan, M. G. (2020). Earth democracy as empowerment for TESOL students and educators: Though the crisis speaks English, Englishes can become a commons language of sustainability. In J. Goulah & J. Katunich (Eds.), *TESOL and sustainability: English language teaching in the Anthropocene era* (pp. 19-40). Bloomsbury Academic.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2009). *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self*. Multilingual Matters.
- Eyraud, K. E. (2020). A place-based ecopedagogy for an English for academic purposes program. In J. Goulah & J. Katunich (Eds.), *TESOL and sustainability: English language teaching in the Anthropocene era* (pp. 151-175). Bloomsbury Academic.
- García, O. (2009). *Bilingual education in the 21st century: A global perspective*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Georgakopoulou, A. (2007). *Small stories, interaction, and identities* (Vol. 8). John Benjamins.
- Glimäng, M. R. (2022). Safe/brave spaces in virtual exchange on sustainability. *Journal of Virtual Exchange*, 5, 61-81. <https://doi.org/10.21827/jve.5.38369>
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Anchor.
- Goulah, J. (2017). Climate change and TESOL: Language, literacies, and the creation of eco-ethical consciousness. *TESOL Quarterly*, 51(1), 90-114. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.277>
- Guilherme, M., & Menezes de Souza, L. M. T. (2019). Introduction: Glocal languages, the South answering back. In M. Guilherme & L. M. T. Menezes de Souza (Eds.), *Glocal languages and critical intercultural awareness* (p. 1-13). Routledge.
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2007). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. Routledge.
- Harvey, L. (2014). Beyond member-checking: A dialogic approach to the research interview. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 38(1), 23-38. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2014.914487>
- Helm, F. (2016). Facilitated dialogue in online intercultural exchange. In R. O'Dowd & T. Lewis (Eds.), *Online intercultural exchange: policy, pedagogy, practice*. Routledge.
- Hoffman, A. J. (2012). Climate science as culture war (Ross School of Business Paper 1361). *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 10(4), 30-37.
- Hoskins, L., & Reynolds, A. (2020). Implementing E+ VE at the University of Bordeaux within English for specific purposes courses. In F. Helm & A. Beaven (Eds.), *Designing and implementing virtual exchange – A collection of case studies* (pp. 179-190). Research-publishing.net.
- Hsieh, H.-F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277-1288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>

- Hultgren, A. K. (2020). Global English: From “Tyrannosaurus Rex” to “Red Herring”. *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, 19(3), 10-34.
- Jenkins, J. (2015). Repositioning English and multilingualism in English as a Lingua Franca. *Englishes in Practice*, 2(3), 49-85. <https://doi.org/10.1515/eip-2015-0003>
- Kachru, B. B. (1982). *The other tongue: English across cultures*. University of Illinois Press.
- Kohn, K. (2018). Towards the reconciliation of ELF and EFL: Theoretical issues and pedagogical challenges. *English as a lingua franca in EFL contexts*. Multilingual Matters.
- Köylü, Z. (2023). The ERASMUS sojourn: Does the destination country or pre-departure proficiency impact oral proficiency gains? *The Language Learning Journal*, 51(1), 48-60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2021.1930112>
- Köylü, Z., & Tracy-Ventura, N. (2022). Learning English in today’s Global World: A comparative study of at home, Anglophone and Lingua Franca study abroad. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 44(5), 1330-1355. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263121000917>
- Kramsch, C. (2006). The multilingual subject. *International journal of applied linguistics*, 16(1), 97-110.
- Kreber, C., Klampfleitner, M., McCune, V., Bayne, S., & Knottenbelt, M. (2007). What do you mean by “authentic”? A comparative review of the literature on conceptions of authenticity in teaching. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 58(1), 22-43.
- Kumar, S., Himanshu, S. K., & Gupta, K. K. (2012). Effect of global warming on mankind – A review. *International Research Journal of Environment Sciences*, 1(4), 56-59.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Leask, B. (2015). *Internationalizing the curriculum*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315716954>
- Martusewicz, R. A., Edmundson, J., & Lupinacci, J. (2014). *Ecojustice education: Toward diverse, democratic, and sustainable communities*. Routledge.
- McKeown, R., & Down, L. (2022). A critical reflection on online teaching for sustainability. *Sustainability*, 14(21), 13905.
- Millner, S. C. (2020). The Sharing Perspectives Foundation: A case study in blended mobility. In F. Helm & A. Beaven (Eds.), *Designing and implementing virtual exchange – A collection of case studies* (pp. 155-166). Research-publishing.
- NewDEAL. (2018). *NewDEAL Project*. <https://www.u-bordeaux.fr/en/about-us/our-strategy/institutional-projects/new-deal>
- O’Dowd, R. (2011). Intercultural communicative competence through telecollaboration. In J. Jackson (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of language and intercultural communication* (pp. 342-358). Routledge.
- O’Dowd, R. (2016). Emerging trends and new directions in telecollaborative learning. *Calico Journal*, 33(3), 291-310.
- O’Dowd, R. (2018). From telecollaboration to virtual exchange: State-of-the-art and the role of UNICollaboration in moving forward. *Journal of Virtual Exchange*, 1, 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2018.jve.1>
- O’Dowd, R., & Lewis, T. (2007). *Online intercultural exchange. An introduction for foreign language teachers*. Clevedon.
- Peake, J., & Reynolds, A. (2020). “There’s a sniper on that hill!”: Gaming in English as a global language environment. *Angles. New Perspectives on the Anglophone World*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.4000/angles.3237>
- Pinner, R. S. (2016). Reconceptualising authenticity for English as a global language. *Multilingual Matters*, 208, 29-95.

- Reynolds, A. (2020). Erasmus virtual exchange as an authentic learner experience. In M. Hauck & A. Müller-Hartmann (Eds.), *Virtual exchange and 21st century teacher education: short papers from the 2019 EVALUATE conference* (pp. 85-99). Research-publishing.net. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2020.46.1135>
- Reynolds, A. (2021). Widening language and pedagogical perspectives through virtual exchange [TAPP-Virtual exchange]. In E. Arnó, M. Aguilar, J. Borràs, G. Mancho, B. Moncada, & D. Tatzl (Eds.), *Multilingual academic and professional communication in a networked world. Proceedings of AELFE-TAPP 2021 (19th AELFE Conference, 2nd TAPP Conference). Vilanova i la Geltrú (Barcelona), 7-9 July 2021*. Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya.
- Reynolds, A. (2022). EMI through virtual exchange at Bordeaux University. *Journal of Virtual Exchange*, 5, 49-60. <https://doi.org/10.21827/jve.5.37479>
- Sharing Perspectives Foundation (2022). Climate Movements Fall 22. <https://sharingperspectivesfoundation.com/courses-overview/>
- Van Compernelle, R. A., & McGregor, J. (2016). *Authenticity, language and interaction in second language contexts*. Multilingual Matters.
- Van de Oudeweetering, K., & Decuypere, M. (2023). Interrogating “the nation” in European online education: Topological forms and movements. *European Educational Research Journal*, 22(5), 607-625. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14749041221148234>
- Versteijlen, M., Salgado, F. P., Groesbeek, M. J., & Counotte, A. (2017). Pros and cons of online education as a measure to reduce carbon emissions in higher education in the Netherlands. *Current opinion in environmental sustainability*, 28, 80-89. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2017.09.004>
- Wenger, E. (1999). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press.
- Yanaprasart, P., & Melo-Pfeifer, S. (2019). Students' perceptions of authenticity of plurilingual non-native teachers in multilingual higher education settings: An exploratory and comparative case study of Geneva and Hamburg. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 9(3), 3. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2019.1597749>
- Zečević, S. M., & Milekić, L. M. T. (2022). Telecollaboration as an ELF environment in the global age. *Зборник радова Филозофског факултета у Приштини*, 52(3). <https://doi.org/10.5937/zrffp52-39509>

Published by [University of Groningen Press](#) | UGP, a not-for-profit press
Groningen, The Netherlands | UGP@rug.nl

© 2024 UNICollaboration (collective work)
© 2024 by Authors (individual work)

Journal of Virtual Exchange 2024
Special Issue on Global Perspectives on Virtual Exchange for University Internationalisation
Edited by Judith Borràs, Lidia Gallego-Balsà, and Elisabet Arnó-Macia

Publication date: 2024/07/01

Journal of Virtual Exchange (JVE) is an online, open-access, peer-reviewed journal aimed at practitioners and researchers in the field known variously as virtual exchange, telecollaboration, or online intercultural exchange. It is the official journal of [UNICollaboration](#), the international academic organisation dedicated to supporting and promoting telecollaboration and virtual exchange in higher-level education.

Rights. The whole volume is published under the Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International licence ([CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](#)); individual articles may have a different licence. Under the CC BY-NC-ND licence, the volume is freely available online for anybody to read, download, copy, and redistribute provided that the author(s), editorial team, and publisher are properly cited. Commercial use and derivative works are, however, not permitted.

Disclaimer. University of Groningen Press does not take any responsibility for the content of the pages written by the authors of this article. The authors have recognised that the work described was not published before, or that it was not under consideration for publication elsewhere. While the information in this article is believed to be true and accurate on the date of its going to press, neither UniCollaboration nor University of Groningen Press can accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions. Additionally, the publisher makes no warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein. While University of Groningen Press is committed to publishing works of integrity, the words are the authors' alone.

Trademark notice. Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Copyrighted material. Every effort has been made by the editorial team to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyrighted material in this article. In the event of errors or omissions, please notify the publisher of any corrections that will need to be incorporated in future editions of this article.

Typeset by [LINE UP Boek en Media](#)

Note fonts are open source. All Noto fonts are published under the SIL Open Font License, Version 1.1. Noto is a trademark of Google Inc.

ISSN: 2647-4832 (online only)