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EDITORIAL DESK

All the glory and honour be to the creator of the universe for the 4th and the 5th volumes of the West African Journal of Educational Administration and Planning (WAJEAP). The consistency of publication is worthy of glory. The papers emanated from the presentations made by scholars across Africa who attended the conference in Pretoria. The conference was held between the 4th and 11th of July 2025 in collaboration with the African Academic Research Forum. The volumes 4 and 5 publications were products of that well attended conference.

I urge everyone to get copies of volumes 4 and 5 for an enriching deep knowledge on Administration, leadership and planning.

Prof. M. O. B. Mohammed FNAEAP,
Head, Editorial Team

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CROSSING BORDERS: GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT THROUGH COLLABORATIVE ONLINE INTERNATIONAL LEARNING

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Abstract

Collaborative Online International Learning is a way for faculty and students in higher education to cross borders for global engagement while remaining in place. This article contains descriptions of three collaborative learning experiences that were planned, implemented, and evaluated among faculty and students in Ecuador and in the United States. The descriptive research design was employed. Population consisted all graduates, doctoral and undergraduate students in nursing, writing and science courses who were purposively sampled. Data were collected using Likert-scale, the ASK-G scale, the Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Checklist, and COIL perception scale, analyzed using descriptive statistics. Finding indicated consistent improvements in cultural awareness, knowledge, skills, competence and positive perceptions of the COIL experience. Information is provided to guide others who want to plan, implement, and evaluate their own Collaborative Online International Learning experiences for global engagement.

Keywords: Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), global engagement, higher education

Introduction

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) experiences are designed to facilitate global engagement. Developed in the early 2000s, the COIL methodology is used by faculty and students to make international connections as part of course work. This is possible through online and virtual engagement. This global engagement is cost-effective and readily available through technologies already used by most places of higher education around the world (SUNY COIL, n.d. a). This article contains descriptions of three collaborative learning experiences that were planned, implemented, and evaluated among faculty and students in Ecuador and in the United States. The first COIL was implemented in Fall 2021. The students were graduate students in a program educating nurses for advanced practice in mental health in the United States and undergraduate students taking a writing and rhetoric course in Ecuador. The COIL was designed for the development of global understandings of culture, diversity and inclusion in mental health (Hammonds & Newman, 2023). The second COIL was implemented in Fall 2023. The students were in a doctoral program for nurses in the United States and undergraduate students taking a course in scientific inquiry. The COIL was designed around mental health problems associated with environmental justice issues (Newman et al., 2024). This was followed, in Fall 2024, with a COIL scaffolding on the COIL from Fall 2023. The students were the same students from the doctoral program in the United States, though there was a new group of undergraduate students taking the course in scientific inquiry. The COIL was designed to positively impact mental health in Ecuador in areas with environmental justice stressors.

Theoretical Framework

The COIL methodology was the theoretical framework for each of the COIL experiences. The methodology requires the involvement of faculty and students from places of higher education in two different countries. The COIL takes place between two courses, one at each place of higher education. The courses can be from the same discipline, for example, two English courses. Or, they can be from different disciplines, for example, a nursing course and an English course. The faculty from each of the courses collaborate to create the content that will be part of both courses, creating the space for the interaction between all students and the desired learning. During the course work, the students in both courses collaborate through discussions and a project. Credit is assigned in both courses for participation in the COIL as part of grading (COIL, n.d. b). The COILs are designed to facilitate learning and working as a team and to facilitate cross-cultural understanding. The COIL has a project done by the participants together. The project is presented as an intercultural collaboration at the end of the COIL (COIL, n.d. c). Rozo-Garcia et al. (2024) developed a scale to measure the perception of student participants in COIL experiences. This was utilized in the third COIL in Fall 2024.

Other methodologies and models may be included in the underpinnings for COIL. Leininger's Theory of Culture Care Diversity and Universality, also called Culture Care Theory (CCT), was central to the COILs. It is a theory of nursing that is based on cultural congruence (Leininger, 2002). Cultural understanding and congruence were implicit in all three of the COILs. For the Fall 2021 COIL, this was measured using evaluations based on the specific objectives that were developed by the faculty for the experience and approved through the University of South Alabama, United States, for continuing education credit. In the Fall 2023 COIL, this was measured with the Awareness, Knowledge, Skills General Scale (ASK-G) ((Domenech Rodriguez et al., 2022, used with permission). For the Fall 2024 COIL, assessment was with the Cultural Competence Self-assessment Checklist (Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society, 2015).

Literature Review

Mental Health

Mental health is understood as a continuum ranging from no mental health symptoms to severe mental health symptoms (Peter et al., 2021). The World Health Organization (WHO) regards mental health as coping with daily stressors, functioning in productive ways, and contributing to the community. Vulnerabilities to mental health problems include situations beyond the control of individuals that may negatively impact mental health (World Health Organization, 2021). Environmental justice issues are mental health vulnerabilities.

Environmental Justice and Mental Health

Mental Health Problems

Aylward et al. (2022, p. 34) identified, "trauma, anxiety, depression, suicide, and substance use", as mental health problems associated with the environment and exacerbated by social vulnerabilities. A specific type of anxiety, climate anxiety, is experienced by many people. This may progress to a generalized anxiety disorder. Some use anxiety to fuel pro-environmental activities (Hereen et al., 2023). Exposure to environmental neurotoxins such as pesticides may cause psychiatric sequelae (Reuben et al., 2022). There are increased incarcerations in areas with high carbon emissions, another type of pollution, along with substance use disorders, recidivism, and mental health morbidity (Smith et al., 2022). Natural disasters are associated with a wide variety of mental health problems such as substance use, sadness, grief, adjustment disorders, decreased ability to function, family conflicts, decreased self-esteem, poverty, despair, shock, symptoms of post traumatic mental health problems, and

psychosis (Castaldelli-Maia & Bhugra, 2022). Some people experience ecological grief (Guinto et al., 2021). Others with environmental issues experience frustration related to a general lack of response to their needs (Dory et al., 2017). Among children and adolescents, environmental stressors may initiate or exacerbate separation anxiety and school behavior problems (Uddin et al., 2021).

Environmental Problems

Climate change is much in the media. It has been found to negatively impact mental health (Aylward et al., 2022). Climate related hazards were also discussed by James (2022), along with instability of land use, forced migration, armed conflict, and inequalities of social and demographic concerns. With climate change comes extreme weather which affects mental health (Walinski et al., 2023). Extreme weather is only one cause of natural disasters that impact mental health. Weather and other natural disasters, tornados, hurricanes, volcanic activity, floods and more result in loss of employment, disruption of community services, and even refugee status among victims, challenging mental health (Castaldelli-Maia & Bhugra, 2022). Another issue is exposure to neurotoxins such as pesticides and heavy metals lurking in the environment. These exposures may cause or exacerbate psychiatric problems through the neurological system (Reuben et al., 2022). Other pollutants, such as carbon emissions, increase mental health morbidity (Smith et al., 2022),

The Covid-19 pandemic was a global environmental concern that affected physical and mental health tremendously (Watts et al., 2020). The mental health problems associated with the Covid-19 pandemic are covered extensively in Hammonds (2024). These were exacerbated by disparities in the social determinants of health for those of advanced age, those with comorbidities, those with negative socio-economic factors, those living in institutional settings, the unvaccinated, and children and adolescents, among others. Houssain et al. (2020) regarded the pandemic co-occurring pandemic of Covid-19 and mental health problems.

Methods

The COIL methodology was utilized for each of the three COILs. The COIL methodology included the following for each COIL: There were two places of higher education in two countries. These were the University of South Alabama in Mobile, Alabama, United States and Universidad San Francisco de Quito, Ecuador. The faculty were Dr. Linda Sue Hammonds and Dr. Melanie Baker in the United States and Dr. Sara Newman in Ecuador. The faculty collaborated to develop the COIL. The students collaborated across national and cultural borders via technology to complete the COIL which included course material, discussion, and a project. The project was presented to a wider audience. Students were assigned credit for participation in the COIL.

Courses

Fall 2021	Fall 2023	Fall 2024
Graduate Level Nursing Course and Undergraduate Writing and Rhetoric Course	Doctoral Level Nursing Course and Undergraduate Science Course	Doctoral Level Nursing Course and Undergraduate Science Course

Objectives

Fall 2021	Fall 2023	Fall 2024
1. The student will identify and discuss at least one way	General COIL Objectives	<i>General COIL Objectives</i>

<p>in which their thinking about eugenics, research, and cultural bias has changed in a positive way, and how they will apply the change in scholarly activities.</p> <p>2. The student will identify and discuss at least one way in which their thinking about cultural bias in research has changed in a positive way, and how they will apply the change in scholarly activities.</p> <p>3. The student will identify and discuss at least one way in which their thinking about culture and illness has changed in a positive way, and how they will apply the change in daily life.</p> <p>4. The student will identify and discuss at least one way in which their thinking about institutional care policies that impact diversity and inclusion has changed in a positive way, and how they will apply the change in daily life.</p> <p>The final objective was to create an educational poster about diversity and inclusion in mental health and present it at a virtual mini-conference.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students from Ecuador and USA will form a team. 2. Students will collaborate while learning about environmental justice issues. 3. Students will engage in meaningful discussion. 4. Students will present their projects to each other. <p>Diversity and Inclusion Objective</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will experience increased cultural awareness, skills, and knowledge as measured by pre course Cultural Awareness Survey scores and post course Survey Scores utilizing tailored questions adopted from the Awareness, Knowledge, Skills-General (ASK-G) Scale (Rodriguez, 2022). <p>Environmental Justice Objective</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will experience increased understanding of and ability to respond to environmental justice issues and their impact on mental health. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students from Ecuador and USA will interact in digital environments. 2. Students will engage in collaborative work in multicultural teams to achieve objectives. 3. Students will reflect on differences and similarities with peers during collaboration. <p>Transcultural Objective</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will experience increased cultural competence in: awareness, skills, and knowledge as measured by three (3) pre- and post-Module Self-assessment Checklists adopted from the Greater Vancouver Island Multicultural Society (2022). <p>Mental Health in area with Environmental Justice Issues Objective</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Multicultural teams will develop educational materials to positively impact mental health in Ecuador in areas impacted by environmental issues.
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Projects

Fall 2021	Fall 2023	Fall 2024
<p>Students were divided into small groups with members from both countries. Posters were created about diversity and inclusion in mental health by each group.</p>	<p>The doctoral students created projects individually for a quality improvement project for future implementation with the aim of positively impacting mental health for patients</p>	<p>Students were divided into small groups with members from both countries. Educational materials were created to support mental health in an area with environmental injustice in Ecuador. These were</p>

	affected by environmental injustice.	translated into Spanish by the Ecuadoran students.
	Undergraduate students individually created an informational poster about a mental health problem related to an environmental justice issue.	

Presentation of Projects

Fall 2021	Fall 2023	Fall 2024
A virtual mini-conference was held for presentation of the projects. Other faculty and students from both universities were invited to attend.	Students presented the posters to each other and the faculty in a group discussion. The doctoral students presented their projects and posters to the Scientific Review Committee at the university in the United States to be reviewed for future implementation.	The doctoral students presented the outcomes of their mental health/environmental justice projects in a virtual Scholars Day event to which other faculty, students, and the public were invited. The educational materials were presented at the same Scholars Day event.

Outcomes

Fall 2021

A Likert-type scale was developed with the University of South Alabama to determine if the objectives of the COIL were met. According to scale, 0 was not applicable, and scores 1-3 indicated a continuum from disagree to agree. There were 34 students. Of them, 32 indicated that they fully agreed that they met each objective. There were 2 students who indicated a score of 2 for one objective each (Hammonds & Newman, 2023). The objectives indicated earlier in this article were met.

Fall 2023

The initial scores on the ASK-G, at the beginning of the COIL, ranged from 14 to 20 points for all students. The mean was 17.7 points. The doctoral students had a mean of 18.3 points. The undergraduate students had a mean of 16.7 points. A higher score is an indicator of higher cultural knowledge and awareness. At the end of the COIL there were increased scores. The final range was from 17 to 20 points. There was a mean of 18.9 points for all students, an improvement of 6%. The mean for the doctoral students was 19 points, an improvement of 4%. The mean for the undergraduate students was 18.7 points, an improvement of 10% (Newman et al., 2025). The objectives indicated earlier in this article were met.

Fall 2024

The Cultural Competence Self-assessment Checklist was used throughout the COIL experience. At the beginning of the COIL, the assessment of 40 questions was administered to all COIL participants. The average of the scores was 15.93/40 and higher scores indicate higher cultural competence. After the initial assessment, an online icebreaker discussion where the Ecuadoran students introduced cultural themes for mental health and environmental justice issues was implemented. This was designed to facilitate multi-cultural

discussion in preparation for group work to create educational materials to promote mental health in Ecuador. The full assessment was administered after the activity. The average of the scores was 25.46/40 after the icebreaker activity.

Small groups of Ecuadoran and American students worked together to create educational materials in 11 topic areas for use by programs at Universidad San Francisco de Quito to promote mental health. The topic areas were: bullying, caregiver support, discrimination, education for family members-adolescent mental health, education for family members-mood disorders, effective communication, mental health-reducing risk for illness, mental health in Ecuador, prevention of gender-based violence, self-esteem, and stigma. The students created posters and brochures in both English and Spanish. After this small group work, the Cultural Competence Self-assessment Checklist was administered. This time, the average of the scores was 31.01/40.

A Scholars Event was held at the end of the COIL. The event was held via Zoom. Other students and faculty from both universities were invited to attend, along with the families and friends of the presenters. The Scholars Event included reports of the outcomes of the quality improvement projects that were planned by the DNP students during the COIL in Fall 2023 and the presentation of the educational materials from the COIL in Fall 2024. After the Scholars Event, the average of the scores on the Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Checklist was 31.1/40. There was a rise in the average of the scores after each COIL activity.

In addition, the Scale to Measure Student Perception in Collaborative Online International Learning by Rozo-Garcia et al., was administered to the students at the end of the COIL (2024). The average of the scores was 87.45/100, indicating positive perceptions of the COIL experience in 3 areas: interactions in the online environment, the collaboration in the multi-cultural teams, and peer reflection on similarities and differences among the participants (Rozo-Garcia et al., 2024). Again, the objectives indicated earlier in this article were met.

Discussion

The COIL experiences were beneficial for the students who participated in them. The COILs contributed to the educational experiences in the classes at each university, and the students received academic credit for their work in the COIL experiences. The university level education of the participants was enhanced by the COILS as global experiences without the expenditures associated with traditional study abroad experiences, enabling more students to have a global experience. The COIL activities provided opportunities for learning about and with a different cultural. The COIL experiences promoted intercultural understanding, cultural awareness, and cultural competence. The COIL experiences of Fall 2023 and Fall 2024 contributed to increased mental health in the United States through quality improvement projects and in Ecuador through educational materials.

Conclusion

COILS are effective global experiences that connect faculty and students at universities in different countries. These experiences enhance the learning of the participants and increase intercultural understanding, cultural awareness, and cultural competence. COILS, like the COIL in Fall 2023 and the COIL in Fall 2024, may have a positive impact on real world problems in both countries participating in the COILs. The impact is large without actually travelling to another country for study, making the experience valuable for students who would not be able participate in a traditional study abroad program.

Recommendations

We recommend that all university faculty seek out information about COIL and participate in a COIL experience with their students. Information can be found at the SUNY COIL website: SUNY COIL. The outcomes of COIL experiences can be found in peer-reviewed journals about education, and other journals such as those for nursing and nursing education. Practical information may be gleaned from conference presentations. The benefits of a COIL experience are many and they are appropriate for university students at any level and in every country.

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