

Research Paper

Leveraging Asynchronous Online Learning to Deliver Intercultural Learning Outcomes in an EAP Program: Lessons for Future Practice

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Abstract

Having the intercultural communication skills required to navigate diverse communities is imperative, especially for international students. English for academic purposes (EAP) programs are one support offered in a wide range of contexts across post-secondary institutions in Canada to help students use English as an additional language (EAL) with their socialization into their new communities. However, there has been a lacuna in the research regarding how to meaningfully deliver intercultural communication outcomes in crowded EAP curricula. Drawing on a theoretical framework involving literature on EAP in Canada, additional language socialization, and intercultural communicative competence, this qualitative study presented the pedagogical strategies and implications of using online asynchronous intercultural learning outcomes in an EAP program in British Columbia, Canada. Data were generated from online questionnaires, student e-portfolios, focus groups, and individual interviews with students and graduate teaching assistant participants. Identified meaningful units of text in the data were coded, and the codes were gathered together into overarching and supporting themes. The findings point to the benefits of leveraging online platforms to find space for intercultural learning outcomes in EAP and key imperatives for delivery.

Introduction

The processes related to internationalization at post-secondary institutions in Canada have led to growing numbers of international undergraduate students from diverse backgrounds who use English as an additional language (EAL) at universities where the instruction and administration are carried out in English (Macdonald, 2019; Statistics Canada, 2016; Universities Canada, 2014). This trend brings to the fore the long-held understanding in education of the importance for all fields to integrate cultural learning into course curricula (Coulby, 2006). Including intercultural outcomes is seen as one way to enhance students' educational experiences, support a positive classroom climate on multicultural campuses (Cruickshank et al., 2012), and support the integration of international students and local students. Moreover, fostering these skills can adequately equip students with the skills they will need to thrive in diverse work and social environments during and after their studies (European Commission, 2013; UNESCO, 2013).

Making intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (Byram, 1997; 2021) a central feature and aim of overall learning outcomes in English for academic purposes programs (EAP) at Canadian universities is particularly important. Students in these programs typically aim to establish rewarding intercultural relationships and prepare for life on diverse campuses and in the broader global society (Van Houten & Shelton, 2018). In general, EAP programs focus on the communicative needs of students in academic and community contexts to prepare EAP students

for post-secondary studies in English (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002; MacDonald, 2016; Van Viegen & Russell, 2019). This process often involves developing students' linguistic and cultural knowledge while also facilitating their transition and socialization into the culture of higher education in Canada (Douglas et al., 2022; Hyland, 2006; Marshall, 2024).

Moreover, for many of these students, pursuing their undergraduate studies in Canada represents a significant moment of transformation, bringing with it not only linguistic challenges but also challenges related to other areas of their lives, including homesickness, loneliness, and cultural differences (Zhang & Zhou, 2010; Zhou & Zhang, 2019) as well as social isolation (Douglas et al., 2022). Learners with emerging levels of intercultural competence may have a difficult time engaging in group work and may be less able to apply critical thinking skills, which can have negative impacts on their self-efficacy (a sense of competence) and academic success (Jacob & Greggo, 2001; Martin, 2016). In particular, studies (Myles & Cheng, 2003; Tweedie & Kim, 2015) have shown that EAP students may feel that their EAP programs do not adequately support the development of intercultural skills necessary for them to learn more about local culture and participate in the wider university community.

Despite the identified need to develop intercultural skills, intercultural learning outcomes in EAP settings are often overlooked in the Canadian context (Douglas & Rsvold, 2018). Moreover, when they are included, it can be done superficially (Young & Sachdev, 2011). One way to provide space for more intercultural learning outcomes has been to leverage asynchronous learning via online platforms. These platforms are seen as effective tools to provide flexible multimodal asynchronous learning opportunities through the use of videos, discussion boards, and quizzes to teach skills and content that might not fit into the time constraints of in-person class time (Foung & Kwan, 2023; Surtees & Yamamoto, 2021). It is important for EAP programs to align learning outcomes with the realities of students' academic and social worlds in post-secondary settings (Raymond & Parks, 2002). To enhance their comfort and mental wellness in these settings (Cheng & Fox, 2008), this study aims to explore the benefits of online asynchronous ICC learning outcomes on EAL development and student participants' socialization into campus and local communities by identifying the materials and activities that most resonated with the students. This study aims to provide insight into how EAP programs in Canada can better approach ICC outcomes in the future.

Literature Review

Additional Language Socialization

Additional language socialization is helpful when examining the potential impacts of teaching approaches. Additional language socialization helps to explore the multidirectional processes by which multilingual students develop additional language skills, build cultural understanding, and negotiate their identities (Duff & Talmy, 2011; Duff et al., 2019; Duff & Anderson, 2015). Research drawing on an additional language socialization framework recognizes the importance of investigating language and culture together within the context of their production (Ochs, 1996; Watson-Gegeo, 2004). Moreover, it emphasizes the role various affordances play in mediative language learning and cultural knowledge (Duff, 2007). These affordances can be teacher-led scaffolded instruction and consciousness-raising (Duff, 2010) or outside of the classroom and

across of variety of modes (Morita, 2004; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015). In other cases, students might be left to independently figure out how to gain access to communities (Okuda & Anderson, 2018).

Attending university in a new country is an important period of transition for multilingual students, and additional language learning is an ongoing and nonlinear process that is experienced differently by each individual (Larsen-Freeman, 2015). At various stages of the process, individuals exercise agency by choosing to, or not to, adopt certain practices of that group, with the potential goal of gaining legitimacy in that group and with the effect of impacting the people with whom they interact as well as being impacted themselves (Duff, 2007; Duff & Anderson, 2015; Ochs & Schieffelin, 2017).

ICC as a Crucial Skill at Canadian Universities

On its own, intercultural competence is viewed as an ongoing developmental process that is never fully attained, with motivation, knowledge, and skills all playing a role in how one becomes more empathetic, ethnorelative, and adaptive in intercultural interaction (Deardorff, 2006). However, the concept of ICC more deeply explores one's ability to "interact with a member of a different social group in another language" (Byram, 2021, p. 19). A frequently cited model of ICC relevant to this study is Byram's (1997, 2021) compositional model of ICC. The model contains three language-oriented components: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, and discourse competence. These components are enhanced by the four intercultural elements (savoirs) of knowledge, education, attitudes, and skills. According to the model, linguistic competence involves the learner's ability to employ the standard form of the target language. Sociolinguistic competence relates to the learner's ability to interpret and create meaning in interactions. Discourse competence highlights the learner's ability to create intercultural texts while simultaneously leveraging their cultural knowledge, strategies for interpreting, knowledge of real-world language, and ability to navigate the cultural conventions of the target community.

Enhanced sociocultural development in EAP programs is one area of need outlined in the literature. These learning outcomes are seen as valuable as they may help students to better cope with the challenges of intercultural communication after leaving their EAP programs (Keefe & Shi, 2017; Landry, 2023b). Consequently, there have been growing calls for including opportunities for intercultural interactions and other supports to develop social and intercultural skills in EAP programs (Douglas et al., 2022; Tweedie & Kim, 2015) as these types of skills can promote social engagement and connections leading to overall growth (Fox et al, 2014, Ranson, 2016).

Fostering ICC in the EAP Classroom

EAP programs in the Canadian context vary in terms of their delivery and aims (Douglas & Landry, 2021; MacDonald, 2016; Marshall, 2024). However, many of these programs adopt content-based instruction (CBI), which aims to integrate the teaching of content with language-teaching aims (Brinton et al., 2004; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Courses on the CBI spectrum can be content-driven "immersion programs" or more language-driven "theme-based

language programs” (Lyster, 2017, p. 2). The power of CBI is that it allows for both the inclusion of relevant and meaningful subject matter and opportunities for linguistic development in EAP settings (Brinton et al., 2004; Kim, 2006).

Although some EAP teachers might not feel comfortable talking about culture or feel that they lack the expertise (Bickley et al., 2014), many strategies for developing ICC in EAP programs have been discussed in the literature. One common feature of ICC learning outcomes is their focus on building both cultural knowledge and communication strategies (Byram, 2021; Godwin-Jones, 2013; Risager, 1991; Singh & Doherty, 2004). There is also a large emphasis placed on developing the skill of critical reflection mentioned in the research. Critical reflection as a skill has been viewed as crucial to the developmental process, and reflective tasks should be conducted in an ongoing manner (Kramersch, 2009; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Reflection is seen as quite valuable in that learners often draw on funds of knowledge as they engage with others in a variety of contexts and make themselves more understandable to others when using language (Arnold et al., 2013). Funds of knowledge include linguistic or other resources acquired through the learner’s experiences that can be leveraged to foster learning (González, et al., 2005). Another prevalent strategy present in the literature is the use of intercultural exchanges. These exchanges can be facilitated in a classroom context either in-person or online (Bhowmik & Chaudhuri, 2021; Douglas, 2015; Douglas et al., 2022; Garson, 2017; Jund, 2010). Online exchanges have also been used to afford ICC learning experiences in an asynchronous manner through online intercultural exchanges (Çiftçi, 2016; Galante, 2015; Lee & Song, 2019; Lewis & O’Dowd, 2016; Wu & Li, 2019; Zhang & Zhou, 2019). Another approach cited in the literature is the use of critical incidents (Byram, 2021; Hiratsuka, et al., 2016; Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Snow, 2015). According to Kumaravadivelu (2008), these activities involve role plays or situational discussions that compel learners to consider the space between their initial beliefs and what they have observed or learned. Others (Roberts et al., 2000; Senyshyn, 2019; Urban, 2012) have maintained that students can further enhance their ICC by learning to observe more and develop skills in ethnography.

Research Question

Past research has examined the inclusion of intercultural learning outcomes in EAP programs (e.g., Tweedie & Kim, 2015) and the benefits of online platforms (e.g., Surtees & Yamamoto, 2021), but there has been little investigation regarding students’ perspectives on the efficacy of particular approaches or materials. This study aims to build on existing research to understand the efficacy and key teaching and learning implications of including online asynchronous ICC modules in an EAP program. The goal is to answer the following research question: What activities and materials in the online modules were most beneficial from the perspectives of the student participants regarding their EAL development and additional language socialization?

The Study

Study Context

This study took place in an EAP program at a research-intensive English-medium university in a growing multicultural metropolitan area of British Columbia. The students in the study were

undergraduate students who were enrolled in the EAP program at Mountainside University¹ (MU) as a pathway to work toward the language proficiency requirements of their respective undergraduate programs. The courses in the EAP program are credit-bearing. Students enrolled in the program can register for up to two additional credit-bearing courses connected to their undergraduate studies. The program contains two levels (Level 1 and Level 2), and the students in this current study were enrolled in Level 2. To meet the admission requirements for Level 2, students are required to have the language proficiency equivalent of IETLS 6.0–6.5 or TOEFL iBT 80–89. Upon successfully completing Level 2, students meet the MU’s English language proficiency requirements for full entry into their programs. The overarching aims of the program are to support students’ English proficiency development and afford opportunities for them to become engaged in the campus and local community.

The EAP program draws on principles of theme-based learning and delivers learning outcomes through a combination of synchronous classroom learning and asynchronous online learning along with tutoring sessions, and language labs. The program uses a paired-skills approach. The students study reading and writing classes (6 hours per week) and listening and speaking classes (6 hours per week). In addition, the students also complete 3 hours of online asynchronous learning. The online work is divided into two subjects: Campus Life Skills (sometimes referred to as CSS by GTAs and students) and Intercultural Communicative Competence. The students dedicate approximately 1.5 hours to complete each module. The program also provides 3 hours of language labs, which are used to create opportunities for the students to become actively engaged in campus and local communities. In total, the students complete 20 hours of weekly EAP activities in the program, totalling approximately 240 hours of EAP instruction per semester.

The ICC Modules in this Study

As mentioned above, the students completed approximately 1.5 hours of asynchronous learning tasks each week. The curriculum for the ICC modules included a series of learning outcomes that closely aligned with the five dimensions of intercultural communication from Byram’s (1997; 2021) model of ICC, and the attitudes, knowledge, skills, and outcomes present in Deardorff’s (2004; 2006) pyramid model of and process model of intercultural competence. There were five modules, and each module was completed over two weeks. The modules were introduced to each class during the first week of classes, and the students started the modules in the second week. An overview of the core tasks is provided in Appendix A. The submissions for each week were assessed as pass/fail using a single-factor rubric (see Appendix B). In designing the modules, importance was placed on ensuring that the content suited the local needs of the students and drew on the principles of multimodality, accessibility, and representation in the design process (Surtees & Yamamoto, 2021).

Participants and Recruitment

Students from two cohorts of EAP Level 2 were approached to participate in the study. The first recruitment occurred in November of the September–December Fall semester. These students completed EAP Level 2 and the ICC modules in the Fall semester. The second recruitment

¹ A pseudonym

period took place in March for the January–April Winter semester. These students completed the EAP Level 2 and the ICC modules from January to April. In total, thirty-six ($n=36$) students participated in the study. Moreover, two Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), who served as the instructors and facilitated the ICC modules in each semester of the academic year in which this research took place, were also recruited as participants.

Data Collection

Due to the importance of designing research to fit the goals, questions, and context of a study (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017), case study methodology was used in this study to explore a specific group of students' experiences with an educational innovation. Case study research design aims to provide a "rich contextualization and a deep, inductive analysis of data" from the research site (Duff, 2013, p. 1). Consistent with the principles of case study methodology (Merriam, 1998; Miles et. al, 2014; Yin, 2009), multiple tools were used to collect data: a qualitative questionnaire, focus groups, individual interviews, and document analysis of the student e-Portfolios. The aim of using multiple instruments was to provide a holistic understanding of the participants' lived experiences as well as to achieve greater reliability and enhance the trustworthiness of the findings (Duff, 2020). To gauge the proximal impacts of the modules, the qualitative questionnaires were administered at the end of each semester, and the two focus groups were each conducted shortly after the students had completed the EAP program and started their full-time studies in their subsequent programs. To illuminate potential distal impacts, individual interviews were conducted with two students after they had completed a full semester outside of the EAP program. The interviews with the GTAs ($n=2$) were conducted in May and June after all of the students had finished their EAP programs and the grade appeals deadline had passed.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using an approach to thematic analysis informed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022) and approaches used in studies exploring similar research areas to the current study (Douglas, 2015; Douglas, 2020; Douglas et al., 2020; Douglas et al., 2022; Pilin et al, 2020; Riley & Douglas, 2016). Extracts of data that were viewed as meaningful to the research question were assigned codes. These codes were subsequently assigned categories and placed under overarching themes containing a central idea. In some cases, supporting themes were used to help contribute to the salience of a particular overarching theme. Qualitative narrative accounts were then reported in the findings to convey the lived experiences of the learners in their voices. Minor typographic and sentence structure issues were revised slightly to facilitate reading of the extracts.

Results

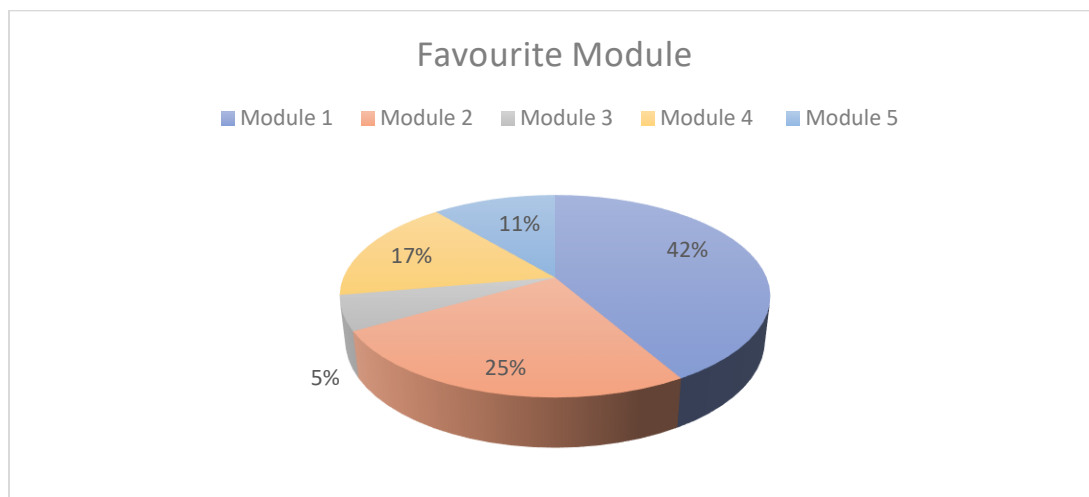
Student Reflections on the General Benefits of the Modules

There was a prevalent thread in the data that the modules were generally beneficial to the students. Participant 19 expressed that the online lessons "helped me a lot." Participant 34 stated that they "really enjoyed all of the components of the class and did my best to learn, practise and

engage in communications to improve in all areas.” Similarly, Participant 5 noted in their questionnaire that they “really enjoyed them” and did not see them as “homework” adding that they “saw them as activities that helped me grow as a person and professional.” Figure 1 below shows that the students found Modules 1 and 2 as the most engaging. Regarding Module 1, some participants mentioned that they saw value in learning about new cultures. Participant 26 reflected that module one allowed them to “learn more about the culture that I don’t know.” Participant 22 wrote on the questionnaire “I enjoyed learning cultural differences and similarities.” Similarly, Participant 3 commented that they “know more about others’ cultures.” More participants corroborated this general increased knowledge of other cultures, with Participant 36 noting “I learned something new about how other people think about aspects of culture, and knowing some invisible aspects in our life.” Regarding Module 2, Participant 15 focused on the importance of understanding visible and invisible culture, writing that they “seldom noticed it before.”

Figure 1

Favourite Module



In terms of the platform and delivery, there appeared to be both benefits and drawbacks. Some of the students saw value in having the opportunity to familiarize themselves with a new way to study. For example, Participant 9 commented during a focus group “Before I came here, I never heard about the navigator. [name of learning management system]. I never heard about the modules. And it’s, yeah, as far as I don’t know what modules, what is a syllabus. ((laughs)).” Echoing the potential impact of online asynchronous study might have had on other courses and their academic transition, Participant 4 commented in the focus group:

I’ll say the most helpful thing that EAP gave me is that it kinda get me used to the online courses and stuff. ‘Cause back in [name of home country], there’s nothing such as online courses. It’s kind of a transition thing.

However, there were also drawbacks identified in the data, and these are explored more deeply in section the *task set-up* section below. Overall, there appeared to be opposing views

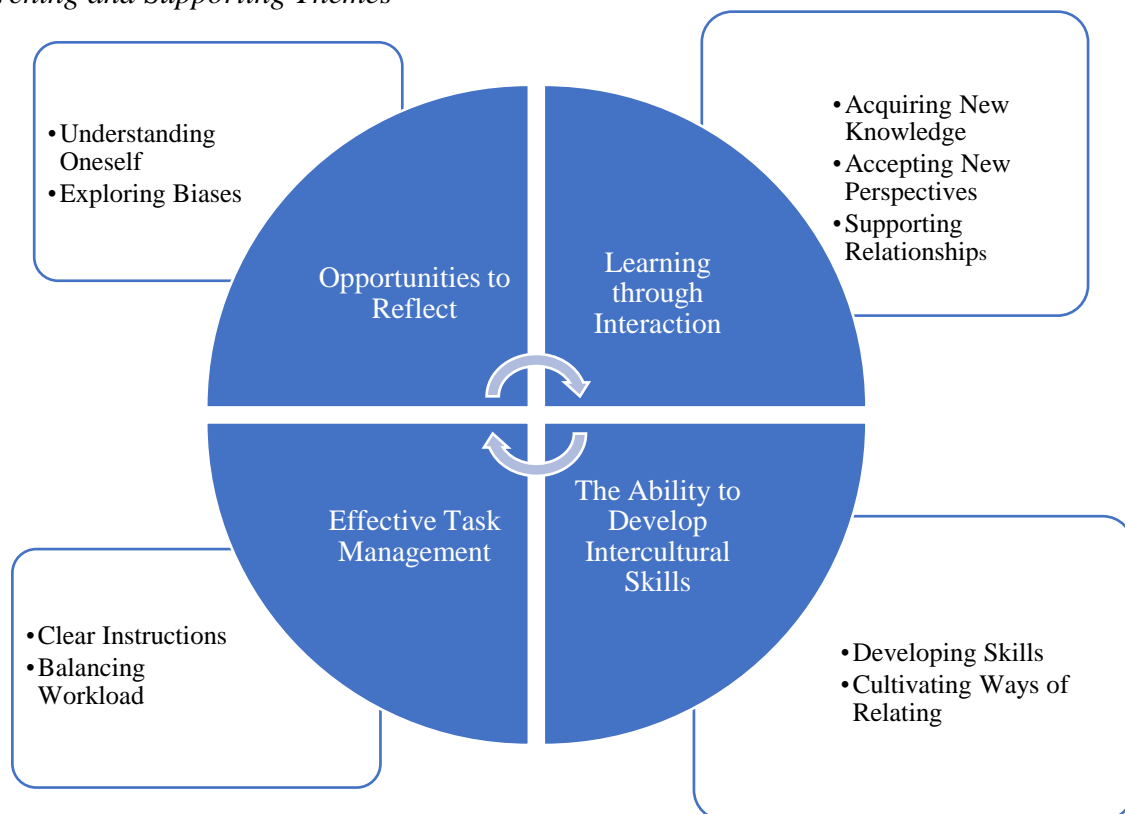
regarding online learning versus in-person learning. For example, Participant 14 commented that “it would have been better if it was in class.” However, Participant 6 wrote about the benefits of online asynchronous study writing on their questionnaire that “online learning is a kind of learning, sometimes even better than in-person.” In addition, Participant 34 appeared to see the overall benefits of online learning stating that “even though I’m an online student, all the components of the class were effectively explained and detailed to improve my English skills.”

Findings Related to Module Tasks and Activities

In addition to the general comments about the overall benefits of the modules, four interconnected overarching themes and supporting themes were identified in the data relating to specific tasks and materials in the online modules. As outlined below in Figure 2, the overarching themes are *opportunities to reflect*, *learning through interaction*, *the ability to develop communication skills*, and *effective task management*.

Figure 2

Overarching and Supporting Themes



Opportunities to Reflect

An overarching theme identified in the data was related to the perceived importance of having *opportunities to reflect*. The supporting themes was *knowledge of self* and *challenging biases*.

Understanding Oneself

One supporting theme related to the overarching theme of *opportunities to reflect* was *knowledge of self*. In particular, the students in the study seemed to view the modules as opportunities to reflect more about themselves and their interactions with interlocutors from diverse backgrounds. For example, Participant 4 wrote in the questionnaire that they “learned to think about what kind of things are counted as part of the culture, makes me feel like I have more understanding of myself.” Similarly, Participant 21 wrote on the questionnaire that “when I touch with new things, I would link these with culture aspects and think about culture related to me.”

Challenging Biases

Also related to the overarching theme of *opportunities to reflect* was a strong supporting theme of *challenging biases*. The students appeared to benefit from the opportunities to reflect afforded in the module tasks and challenge some of their current perspectives. For example, Participant 20 noted in their questionnaire that they “learned to question myself.” Participant 8 also reflected that “by being introduced to other cultures, you open yourself to new ways of thinking. This makes you second guess your ideologies from your own country.” Participant 14 also acknowledged the ongoing nature of this process of critical reflection writing on their questionnaire that “learning never ends, and I have to be more critical and question myself all the time.” Similarly, during their individual interview, Participant 22 explained how they leverage their critical thinking skills in intercultural communication and commented:

You shouldn't act like you're 100 percent, right and then other's opinions are 100 percent wrong. So, in order to filter the wrong information, or in order to evaluate other people's information, I think, yeah, critical thinking skills are like always necessary. And they're gonna help me in the future.

Similarly, Participant 5 wrote, “I think that when you learn from another culture of different ways of thinking it's almost impossible to stay with the same ideology with which you started.”

Learning through Interaction

Another overarching theme that was identified in the data was *learning through interaction*. The central organizing idea of this overarching theme contained the supporting themes of *acquiring new knowledge, accepting perspectives, and supporting relationships*.

Acquiring New Knowledge

A supporting theme related to the overarching theme of *learning through interaction* was *new knowledge*. It seemed important for the activities to have high levels of interaction to afford new knowledge about different cultures. In particular, Participant 17 commented that the interactive tasks gave them “chances to compare and contrast different cultures.” In particular, Participant 14 noted in their questionnaire that “throughout the different modules, we had to read our classmates' work and stories which has increased my way of listening to them and understanding.” Similar sentiments dealing with learning from others were expressed in the

focus groups. In the same focus group, Participant 21 noted that “there are a lot of modules which we need to work together with somebody else.” She continued and further noted that the cultural diversity of the EAP class included “students from multiple cultural backgrounds” and that in working with diverse others, they “got to know more about the different cultures.”

The activity that asked students to find news stories from their home country related to local issues in Canada and sharing these connections on the discussion board seemed to be a particularly beneficial task. In their focus group, Participant 21 mentioned the beneficial nature of this activity commenting:

We had a module which asked us to talk about an event or news in our own country and compare it with the things in [name of the city where the study took place]. And, for that module, I can see we need to compare the different cultures and the things happening in different countries.

Accepting Different Perspectives

Another supporting theme related to the overarching theme of *learning through interaction* was *accepting different perspectives*. In particular, some participants seemed to connect interactive tasks with becoming more open-minded. Participant 28 reflected on the questionnaire that finding differences between cultures gave them “different perspectives.” Participant 36 commented on their questionnaire that “I am more receptive when facing some cultural differences.” Moreover, Participant 34, who completed EAP Level 2 remotely from their home country due to the Covid-19 pandemic seemed to value having the opportunity to be exposed to and learn about other cultures in the modules. In the second focus group, they commented:

Well for me, this is the first time that I have been involved with people who are mainly from Asia because I come from [country’s name]. So, it’s a Latin American country. And, it was great to see the difference between the cultures of people that are from other parts of the world, like, as I said before, their perception of things.

This thread of acceptance through sharing appeared to be also felt by Participant 10 who wrote that activities that helped them become able to understand different cultures enabled them to “become much acceptable towards others from different cultures.”

Supporting Relationships

A final supporting theme related to the overarching theme of *learning through interaction* was *supporting relationships*. There appeared to be a general sense that the tasks supported their ability to socialize. For example, Participant 4, said that submitting a video about visible and invisible aspects of their national culture and how those aspects relate to their identities was supporting relationships. They noted that students were able to “see people from different countries ... and the cultures. You can see some kind of avoidance to the cultural differences and, so you can avoid the problems.” In another questionnaire response, Participant 34 expressed the value of building knowledge with their peers in the modules writing that “it allowed me to

understand my classmates' perception of situations that were happening in their countries and that were relatable to mine. I feel it was a module that helped us feel engaged with each other." Participant 9, seemed to indicate that the activities in the modules served as a way for them to learn more about their broader social networks beyond the EAP classroom. She stated that she would "ask roommates or friends" about the themes discussed in the module.

Developing Intercultural Skills

Another overarching theme related to the research question evident in the data was *developing intercultural skills*. The central organizing idea of this overarching theme contained the supporting themes of *developing skills and cultivating new ways of relating*.

Developing Skills

For example, Participant 34 explained in the second focus group that the modules helped them "expand my knowledge in intercultural communication and culture and how to socialize with others." Being able to enhance observation skills appeared to be important. Participant 34 believed, "By being able to visualize my classmates' perceptions and way of engaging in the discussions for the modules; my ability to observe the contrast between behaviours has improved." Participant 20 mentioned the importance of noticing "differences between Canada and China" and Participant 30 felt that it was important to "peers' cultures."

Recognizing and using different styles of communication was a further area of development prevalent in the data. In particular, Participant 30 wrote, "In my opinion, it is important to be a good listener and also be able to understand other people's communication styles because they can be very different from one another." A member of the first focus group (Participant 3) shared a similar view stating the modules teach the students "direct and indirect communication like that. And, we have like a chance to record our videos and practise with our friends, so that kind of thing makes it truly affects me 'cause it lets me like how can you communicate with others."

Also related to communication styles, Participant 28 commented on the importance of commenting in the asynchronous discussion boards explaining in that focus group that this process helped them to "practise using indirect or direct ways to answer them or make a conversation with others. And, that helps a lot." Analysis of the critical incidents task in One meaningful task appeared to be the critical incidents exercise in Module 3.2. The task asked the students to decide whether they would use a direct or indirect communication style to express their point of view. Reflecting on their rationale for choosing to alter their communication style in the situations presented in the task, Participant 3 wrote in their e-portfolio:

For the group work, the main purpose was to get the work done properly rather than make friends with my group mates. As a result, I would tell the member straightforwardly that he or she had to make more contributions to our project as well as the consequences if it did not cooperate. What I was expecting was simply for the members to get involved in our group.

Cultivating Ways of Relating

A final supporting theme related to the overarching theme of developing *communication skills* was *ways of relating*. An activity that required students to make a news story from their country relatable to someone from the local area appeared to be meaningful to the students. Some of the news topics the students found relevant to locals that were presented in their e-Portfolio submissions for Module 4 included topics such as gender equality, national parks and nature, democratic values, constitutional monarchies, charity, crime, and environmental protection. For example, Participant 4 wrote about acts of charity in their e-portfolio submission as a universality that people experience which can be used to help individuals from different cultures relate to one another noting:

An 11-year-old Abbotsford girl, with the help of a friend, has so far raised more than \$2,500 for Ukraine after initially setting out to collect \$50. Hailey Townsend is selling handmade bracelets, bookmarks and other donated items from a stand outside her home (Hopes, 2022). She is very sympathetic and kind, and she collected money for Ukraine through her and her friends' efforts. She is like the people in China who donate money to some areas that had disasters. Even though \$2,500 is not a huge amount of money, it is the right thing we need to do.

Participant 22 also seemed to view this task as an opportunity to learn about different ways of expressing oneself in writing and relating with others stating:

And, we also had an activity where we had to say something that happened in our country and how we can translate it to someone from other parts. So, I also got to understand and learn a lot about their ways of seeing things and things that were happening in their own country. So, I also saw a lot of differences between writing and how they express themselves.

In their individual interview, Participant 22, raised an activity they retrospectively viewed as relevant saying "I think it was related to news from your country. Yeah. It was pretty interesting that I was able to see other countries' news and then the students' own perspectives on that news. I still remember it pretty vividly."

Memes were another task that the students found particularly rewarding. In particular, Participant 23 rationalized her choice of her favourite module because she liked to "talk to others more and learn more about their ideas." Participant 6 wrote on their questionnaire that they liked the modules because they could "make meme pictures and see others' work, they are so interesting." Memes seemed to be a way for them to balance academics with emotional well-being. They commented that memes "can make me happy, so I will be successful on campus, like mental health." In their written description of their meme, Participant 22 reflected that:

In my opinion, memes help build relationships and communities. This is because memes are not only funny but also can help people notice some social issues. Through memes, we can see what is going on in the world. For instance, when something goes viral, people make memes related to the topic to grab people's attention. Memes make it easier

for us to talk about things we are not familiar with or things that seem uncomfortable to discuss.

Similar sentiments were echoed by Participant 28 who commented in their focus group that memes help a lot because they make use of English to think without our first language, and that's the most helpful thing for us. They continued adding that memes can help them "speak English more logically, and that can improve our English. They concluded their thoughts on memes by stating that they "can make me happy" and improve "mental health so I will be successful on campus."

Effective Task Management

Another overarching theme that was identified in the data related to the students' concern over *task management*. The central organizing idea of this overarching theme contained the supporting themes of *clear instructions* and *balancing workloads*.

Task Set-up

One supporting theme related to the overarching theme of *effective task management* was *clear instructions*. In particular, the students in this study seemed to feel that clear communication between them and the GTAs regarding assignment details and deadlines impacted their overall asynchronous online learning experience. For example, Participant 9 wrote on their questionnaire that it was "a little hard to find at first because it's [the workload for the week] always not in the *To-Do List* or *Assignments* [widgets in the online course shell]." Participant 9 elaborated on this during the first focus group stating "I don't know if anything go wrong with the system actually, but the ICC module is not listed on the *To-Do List*." Participant 34 also shared some of the negative impacts caused by poor communication during the second focus group, explaining:

Well, I just want to share for the final thoughts that I think the ICC modules were for me a commitment of a daily uh- weekly work because in my experience, I didn't submit the first week on time, and that was because I didn't expect that I had to do that each week. So then, after that situation happened to me, I started to submit everything on time, and I understood like I always knew each week that I had to do ICC modules.

Such experiences seemed to lead to further time management challenges, with Participant 4 seemingly corroborating the sense of unclear expectations adding that they "just agree with what you guys says. I had to, I had to finish the assignment for like 6 weeks in the last three days of class." ((laughter)). Similar sentiments were echoed by a student who wrote on the questionnaire that "face-to-face lessons would have been much better because sometimes it's really hard to get the idea of the topic via online class" while another student suggested that the EAP program could "maybe make it easier to keep track [of]" module tasks.

The GTAs who facilitated the course suggested that some initial in-person interaction at the beginning to introduce the modules and expectations would have positively impacted buy-in. GTA commented:

Well, the challenge was that it was so entirely asynchronous that I lamented that I didn't get to have an opportunity to introduce it and frame it as something that *'You're gonna really look forward to this. You're gonna love it. You're gonna learn from it.'* to create a little bit of inspiration going in the door. And, I lamented that I didn't have that opportunity. I felt that would have pushed the learning a little bit further, the expectation of learning.

They went on to add:

I almost think that that 15-minute window at the beginning of the unit, and I say 15 because then you'd get like a 30, you know might include an introduction to that final one saying *'I just want you to know this is coming.'* to put it on people's on their radar mentally so that they're aware that they're going to do something really new and interesting and so they don't get to that end and think *'Well, this is- you know what I've got- I've got other things to do and I can't.'*

GTA 2 also saw the value of this in-person contact as positive for both GTAs and students saying:

Well, most of the students, and obviously this is coming out of COVID, but one thing they obviously always want, they wanted this for CSS too, is to be able to have more collaboration in person. So, I don't know if there would ever be like, not necessarily every week, but maybe every two weeks or every three weeks, just have a moment where they can still have those sessions, have those same assignments potentially, but come together with one another.

Balancing Workload

Another supporting theme related to the overarching theme of *effective task management* was achieving balance concerning workload. The student participants' responses also seemed to indicate that the asynchronous online modules presented some challenges. One challenge that was salient in the data was workload. Two students commented on their least favourite module, with Participant 1 stating that "there's too much work to do" and Participant 35 commenting that there was "a lot of work to do." These sentiments were conveyed in the first focus group. When discussing the time and effort dedicated to completing some module tasks, one of the participants mentioned during a focus group:

Participant 3: Well actually, when I dislike doing the assignment like recording videos or audio. It takes so much time, but I mean that is at that moment. But, looking back, right now, I think it really benefits me a lot.

Researcher: But in the moment, it feels like a lot of work. ((implying question))

Participant 3: Uh, yeah. ((laughter))

In the same focus group, Participant 21 mentioned that they had "already finished the EAP course. I think the module, the assignment about the ICC module could be a little more difficult and complicated. Then, I think that would be better." Other members of the focus group

showed disapproval with gasps and murmurs of “*No.*” Participant 9 seemed to comment on the fear of overloading future students with work and commented:

EAP already has five parts, like listening, speaking, writing and reading, and ICC, CSS, and lab. But it also already has many—like much work to do, but don’t make it more difficult for them. Yeah. ((laughs))

The above exchange is interesting to me because, in saying “don’t make it more difficult for them” she was viewing me less as a researcher and more as a participant, acknowledging my role as the person in the module videos and the designer of the modules. However, she still felt comfortable to share this view. When I invited the participants to share any further comments about the modules the same participant added:

Yeah, it’s just like, I don’t wanna academic all the time, especially for the beginners. Like, you just get into another country and get in touch with another new culture like that. So—but just don’t push students too hard.

Participant 3 followed up on this point. She suggested that the focus of the modules should be on social interaction emphasized the importance of “balance” and stressed that “the topic [of the modules] is communication.” Further emphasis on the importance of balance was identified in the e-portfolio task that asked the students to write a letter to their future selves four years into the future. In particular, Participant 3 wrote “Thanks for being so hardworking and passionate about our studies. I know you have tried your best to maintain your academic performance and social life.” Participant 34 wrote in her letter to herself to “be responsible but don’t forget to enjoy, make friends, do more volunteer work, try different food and explore all the different parts of Canada.”

Discussion and Implications

There has been a growing understanding of the importance of embedding intercultural learning outcomes in EAP curricula (e.g., Douglas et al., 2022). However, curricular constraints make the process challenging. Consequently, this study aimed to uncover key features of ICC learning outcomes EAP practitioners should consider when designing activities and materials by exploring students’ perspectives of online ICC modules in an EAP program. Overall, the students seemed to perceive the modules as beneficial to their studies in EAP and life on and off campus.

The findings seem to reveal the importance of having opportunities to reflect. In particular, the data highlight the importance of drawing on the learner’s knowledge resources as starting points in the instructional approach and providing opportunities to carry over this knowledge and previous performances to different contexts. The findings appear to echo the findings of other studies showing that activities which encourage the students to reflect on existing knowledge and experiences can make the language and other learning outcomes meaningful for them (Arnold et al., 2013; Landry, 2019). Another interesting finding related to the students’ perceived importance of being able to critically reflect and challenge biases. These findings are similar to those of Galante’s (2015) study which found that knowledge of self and

one's cultural identity contributed to overall intercultural awareness. Being open to new perspectives and being both curious about and knowledgeable of cultural knowledge is particularly important in the Canadian context, particularly since ethnocentric views (on both sides of these debates) often play a role in cultural misunderstandings and conflict on university campuses in Canada (Zhang & Zhou, 2010).

The findings of this study also point to the need for ICC approaches to provide opportunities for students to interact and construct knowledge together. It appeared that the modules played an important role in EAL development by curating the necessary opportunities for meaningful interaction required for EAL development (Duff et al., 2019). For example, the student participants' perceptions of the interactions on the discussion board as students shared and commented on one another's work in many ways offer insight into how the students built relationships and symbolic capital through this location of learning (Byram et al., 2002). In particular, this study seems to establish the importance of providing students with skills to relate to others across a variety of mediums, with memes representing a powerful tool for both intercultural communication and overall well-being.

The importance of developing intercultural skills was also a significant finding. The students expressed the value of building skills that supported their intercultural interactions and enabled them to relate with others. Similar to Jund's (2010) study which explored in-person intercultural discussion groups, the interactions in the online modules seem to have encouraged the participants to become more curious about other cultural similarities and differences and provided opportunities for the students in the study to both reflect on the rationale behind their behaviours and find commonalities rather than focus on essentialist comparisons. Critical incident exercises appeared to be quite beneficial to the students. These findings closely relate to Ranson's (2016) study on metanoia, which Ranson described as a life-changing event or a small success that leads to feelings of achievement and empowerment. The students in this study appeared to use the affordances provided in the ICC modules to increase their intercultural awareness and their ability to see events through various lenses, thus supporting their additional language development and their ability to navigate intercultural interaction.

To fully leverage the power of online asynchronous modules and make them more meaningful for students, the findings point to some key imperatives. The first imperative is that the modules would have benefited from being more effectively introduced and managed. Although the modules were supposed to be introduced in the first week, this was not done or needed to be more elaborate. Accounts from both students and GTAs speak to the need for some in-person facilitation to generate ongoing buy-in from the students through the use of initial in-person introductions and touch points throughout the semester. This strategy is consistent with Surtees and Yamamoto's (2021) findings which highlighted the importance of teachers properly orientating learners into asynchronous online modules and checking up on them regularly to ensure proper buy-in. This need implies that online spaces are cultural artifacts of their own (Thorne, 2003). One implication of this understanding might be to arrange individual orientation sessions for asynchronous modules at the beginning of the term accompanied by semi-regular check-in during office hours to ensure the students and instructors are on the same page. Alternatively, lab time could be dedicated for students to work through module activities in person with the GTA. Moreover, live sessions and teacher meetings could be used as venues

where teachers can share experiences and teaching ideas and support one another throughout the term (Bickley et al., 2014). This implication is similar to concerns expressed in Ruest's (2020) investigation into the autobiographies of intercultural encounters. In that study, both teachers and students needed additional support with their understanding of ICC.

Limitations and Future Directions

This current study investigated the impact of online asynchronous ICC modules in an EAP program on students' language development and additional language socialization. This study builds on existing research related to ICC in EAP by demonstrating that asynchronous online modules can be meaningful to additional language socialization if they contain opportunities to reflect, generate new knowledge through interaction, afford opportunities to build skills, and are managed effectively by facilitators. Although this current inquiry seems to have established a clear approach for EAP practitioners to follow and examples of possible tasks to incorporate, there are some limitations of the study to address. First, these are findings related to two cohorts of EAP students in a specific context at a particular point in time. While readers might find the findings presented transferrable, the limited sample size does not make the finding generalizable.

In addition, if there had been more than two students, and perhaps more than just the two TAs, involved in individual interviews, the data would have been more robust. Perhaps future studies could seek to include a large number of participants to strengthen the results. Secondly, the study focused on EAP students transitioning into their first year of undergraduate studies and did not track the extended distal impacts of the modules on the trajectory of their entire undergraduate program. Third, this current study sought to highlight the role of online asynchronous learning in ICC development and not an in-person or hybrid approach. Finally, this current study aimed to gain a better understanding of student perspectives of the modules alone and did not fully explore the experiences of the GTAs who facilitated the modules and illuminate any implications these experiences might have for professional development.

The purpose of this study was to present student views on asynchronous online ICC modules in an EAP program to help illuminate the most meaningful elements for students. Future research into ICC in EAP could build on these findings in a variety of ways to help further inform the field. One avenue could be to explore the impacts of similar modules more experimentally by recruiting a larger sample size and conducting pre- and post-intervention testing. In particular, future studies could draw on instruments such as Bennet's (1986) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) or Hammer et al.'s (2003) Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). Another line of inquiry for researchers might be to make similar studies more longitudinal. Such an investigation could track the students throughout their undergraduate careers and perhaps reveal which tasks were more meaningful at various points along this trajectory. Researchers interested in EAP and ICC could also look at how intercultural learning outcomes can be more carefully crafted to suit a particular discipline. For example, a study could look to explore the use of ICC modules in undergraduate engineering co-op programs. A final direction for further inquiry could seek to further unpack how to best support EAP practitioners with their own ICC and ability to effectively teach ICC in EAP in online or hybrid environments through various professional development opportunities.

Conclusions

This current study explored student perspectives on ICC learning outcomes completed in asynchronous online modules in an EAP course. The study's findings help to contribute to the literature on ICC in EAP by revealing how the key features of *opportunities to reflect, learning through interaction, the ability to develop communication skills, and effective task management* seemed to play a role in enhancing the students' learning experience, language development, and additional language socialization. Although this is only one group of students in a particular EAP program in British Columbia, the results point to the benefits of leveraging online asynchronous modules as a platform to facilitate ICC development in EAP programming in a way that avoids overloading the boat and accounts for the desires of many EAP programs and students to find opportunities for ICC development without overburdening the students and detracting from other areas of their lives.

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Appendix A: ICC Modules Outline

ICC Modules Outline

Modules (x5)	Online Lessons (x10)	Learning Outcome	Essential Question	Assessment	Teaching and Learning Experience
Module 1: What is invisible and visible culture?	Sept. 13-17	Students will be able to identify invisible and visible elements of their cultural backgrounds.	What are some of the visible and invisible elements of your cultural background?	1-minute video reports posted to a discussion board, with students commenting on 2 of their classmates’ posts.	Watch a short video on culture and a short video modelling the video assignment
	Sept. 20-24	Students will be able to identify invisible and visible elements of the local culture.	What are some of the visible and invisible elements of the local culture in [City]?	Poster with cultural images uploaded to a discussion board, with students commenting on 2 of their classmates’ posts.	Watch a video about [MU].
Module 2: What are the cultural symbols of particular groups?	Sept. 27 – Oct. 1	Students will be able to identify the use of symbols in cultural expression.	What are some common symbols groups use?	Video discussion post about symbols that represent a particular group, with students commenting on 2 of their classmates’ posts.	Watch a video about gamer culture
	Oct. 4-8	Students will be able to identify the use of symbols online.	How are cultural symbols used online?	Students create memes, with comments on 2 of their classmates’ posts.	Watch a video about culture and memes.

Module 3: What is the difference between direct and indirect communication?	Oct. 11-15	Students will be able to notice examples of direct and indirect communication.	What are the different ways to communicate directly and indirectly?	A written post on the discussion board, with students commenting on 2 of their classmates' posts.	Watch a video on communication styles.
	Oct. 18-22	Students will be able to make communication more or less direct.	How can people adapt their communication styles in different situations?	1-minute audio report explaining how they would use different levels of directness to resolve miscommunication in a situation, with students commenting on 2 of their classmates' posts.	Read role-plays situations and critical incidents.
Module 4: What are ways to show understanding and relate to others?	Oct. 25-29	Students will be able to use active listening strategies to understand others.	What are active listening strategies, and why are they important in intercultural interaction?	A recorded role-play completed in pairs posted on the discussion board, with students commenting on 2 of their classmates' posts	Watch a video about active listening techniques.
	Nov. 1-5	Students will be able to take aspects of their own culture and relate them to others.	How can individuals make aspects of their cultural background relevant to others from a different cultural background?	A 100-150 word description of a news story made relevant to someone from [City] posted in the discussion board, with students commenting on 2 of their classmates' posts.	Read proverbs and a short text about being ethnorelative and relating to others
Independent Study Week Nov. 8-12					
Module 5: What are some ways to join and shape the communities around us?	Nov. 15-20	Students will be able to imagine themselves as a member of a desired community.	What is my imagined future self?	1-minute audio reports posted to a discussion board, with comments on 2 classmates' posts.	Watch a presentation about the future imagined self.

	Nov. 22-26	Students will be able to join communities around them and shape how that community interacts with them.	How can I join and shape the communities around me?	Graphic organizer with 100-150 written description of a 4-section chart posted to blogs with comments on 2 classmates' posts.	Read a short blog post about cultural diversity and inclusion.
Week 12 Nov. 29 - Dec. 8 Students ensure they have submitted all of their Portfolio Assessments.					

Appendix B: Single Factor Rubric

Rubric

<p>Incomplete (Things to improve next time)</p>	<p>You will be assessed on ...</p>	<p>Complete (Things that were good)</p>
<p>Task Completion</p> <p>The Discussion Board was completed on time and met the criteria related to the overall task(s), length, and format as stated in the instructions (two items and their connection to your identity and group).</p>		
<p>Post Content</p> <p>The post contains images that demonstrate the student's understanding of symbols of a specific group.</p>		
<p>Comments</p> <p>The student commented on two posts from other students. The student's comments i) referred to the main point of the posts, ii) showed a personal connection to each student's post, and iii) expanded the discussion by making a suggestion or asking a question.</p>		



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