

# DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE THROUGH VIRTUAL EXCHANGE: INSIGHTS FROM A U.S.–LATIN AMERICAN COLLABORATION

## Authors

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## Introduction

### • Context and importance

- In an increasingly globalized world, intercultural competence, the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultural differences, is essential for leadership and collaboration in agricultural and life sciences (Deardorff, 2006; Tucker et al., 2014).

### • Role of virtual exchanges (VE)

- VE initiatives foster communication skills, cultural awareness, and teamwork among students from different cultural contexts.

### • Challenges in Latin America

- Despite their potential, VE programs face challenges in Latin America, including limited technological infrastructure and faculty unfamiliarity with student-centered pedagogies (Ramírez, 2022).

## Purpose and Objectives

Explore how a VE between U.S. and Latin American university students supports the development of intercultural competence. Three objectives:

1. Describe changes in students' attitudes toward cultural differences following the exchange.
2. Explore how students reflect on communication and empathy in intercultural settings.
3. Identify key insights gained about culture, identity, and self-awareness.

## Theoretical Framework

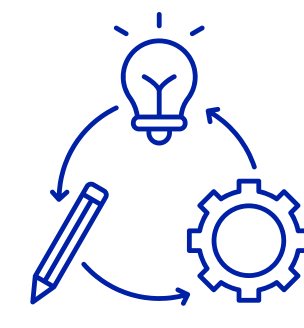


Transformative Learning (TL)  
Mezirow (2000)



Experiential Learning Theory  
(Kolb, 1984)

## Methodology



### Design

Convergent mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2014)



### Participants

Quantitative: 63  
Qualitative: 24



### Data Collection

**Quantitative:** Pre/post surveys using adapted A.S.K.S2 instrument  
**Qualitative:** Semi-structured interviews and post-activity debriefing session.



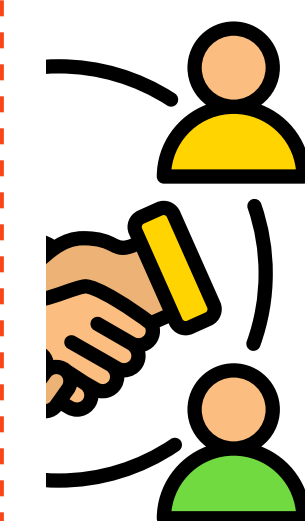
### Analysis

**Quantitative:** Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test  
**Qualitative:** Open and pattern coding

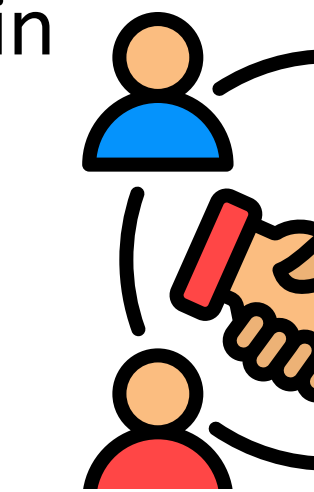
## Results

### Objective 1. Cultural Differences

Quantitative results showed modest increases in openness and minimal changes in curiosity. U.S. students increased in Openness 2 ( $Z = -2.45$ ,  $p = .01$ ), and LA students increased in Openness 1 ( $Z = -3.027$ ,  $p = .001$ ); no other measures showed significant change.



“I realized how different our daily routines are, but also how similar our goals can be”.



### Objective 2. Communication and Empathy

LA students showed significant gains in communication skills ( $Z = -2.255$ ,  $p = .024$ ;  $Z = -2.295$ ,  $p = .020$ ) and one empathy measure ( $Z = -2.079$ ,  $p = .040$ ). U.S. students showed no significant quantitative changes. Qualitatively, both groups developed adaptive communication strategies, such as slowing speech, rephrasing, using gestures, and employing translation tools.



“I had to rethink how I explain things so others could really understand me”.



### Objective 3. Self-awareness

Quantitatively, U.S. students showed no changes, while LA students demonstrated significant gains in cultural difference ( $Z = -2.729$ ,  $p = .006$ ) and self-awareness ( $Z = -2.726$ ,  $p = .006$ ). Qualitative findings showed that U.S. students reflected on their cultural values, and LA students strengthened their cultural identity and pride.



“It led me to value my cultural identity more... and make our cultural identity better known”.



## Conclusions

- U.S. students showed modest intercultural gains, while Latin American students demonstrated stronger improvements in openness, communication, cultural knowledge, and self-awareness.
- Both groups showed upward trends, suggesting continued growth beyond the VE.
- Qualitative data revealed deeper self-reflection, greater awareness of cultural complexity and personal biases, and increased confidence in intercultural communication.
- The mixed-methods design captured both measurable changes and subtle transformative learning processes.

## Recommendations and Implications

- **Implications for agricultural and extension education**
  - VE is a scalable and inclusive alternative to traditional study abroad, particularly in contexts where student mobility or financial resources are limited.
- **Benefits for educators and extension professionals**
  - Educators and extension professionals can integrate VE to better prepare students and practitioners to work effectively in culturally diverse agricultural and community settings.
- **Curricular integration**
  - Embedding VE within agricultural communication, leadership, and development curricula can expand equitable access to intercultural learning.

## References & Additional Resources

