Enhancing intercultural communicative competence through online foreign language exchange: Taiwanese students′ experiences

Wen-Chuan Lin
Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages, Taiwan

Jian-Shiung Shie
Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages, Taiwan

Prue Holmes
School of Education, Durham University, UK

Abstract

From cross-cultural and comparative perspectives, this paper reports on a study which investigated students' experiences of intercultural and foreign language learning through a six-month online language exchange project involving 30 Taiwanese secondary students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) and 10 British secondary students learning Mandarin. The paper focuses on the Taiwanese participants' intercultural learning process and progress through online interactions on a class blog. Survey questionnaires were designed to examine the participants' perceptions of intercultural and English learning online. Qualitative data collected through classroom observations, online materials, reflection logs and interviews were analyzed and employed to explore students' experiences. The findings indicate that students perceived development of both their English abilities and their intercultural communicative competence as a result of meaningful online peer interactions. However, intriguing emerging differences of learning attitudes between students from Taiwan and England were found, reflecting contrastive educational cultures between the two countries. This study aims to explore the processes of foreign language learning and intercultural interactions mediated by internet communication tools. Results shed light on the interaction between cultural heterogeneity and language communication. Suggestions are made about the future practice of online language exchanges and relevant next steps in researching this area.

Key Words: EFL; intercultural communicative competence; comparative education; Taiwan

INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on a six-month online language exchange project between secondary school students in Taiwan and England which investigated their

experiences of intercultural and foreign language learning. In recent years, due to rapid globalization, interaction between people within the same or different cultures has intensified. In Taiwan, public recognition of the importance of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) has been escalating as industries have recognized the need to compete within global markets in which trade is predominantly carried out in English. Therefore, the growth in demand for, and supply of, English language education in Taiwanese school settings is mounting. In Britain, the recent addition of Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) to the curriculum reflects shifts in geopolitical and economic priorities. However, there is a widespread view that foreign language learning and teaching in both Taiwan and Britain have historically had limited success (Jones, 2007; Lin & Byram, 2016). Nevertheless, the advance of information technology in recent decades may be having some impact on the learning of foreign languages, such as EFL and CFL, in an online interactional environment.

Many studies demonstrate positive impacts from applying computer-assisted or mediated teaching and learning to foreign languages (e.g., Chen & Yang, 2014; Lin & Yang, 2011; Warschauer & Kern, 2000; Yang, 2011). In particular, efforts have been made to engage language learners in either bilateral telecollaborative exchanges or multilateral approaches to intercultural learning. However, documented drawbacks for the online exchange of language learning suggest that critical cultural awareness (Guilherme, 2000) is needed to enhance students' critical intercultural competences (Byram, 1997, 2009). Arguably, learners from various cultural backgrounds are facing cultural boundaries during the process of online social interaction. Whether and how language learners cross those boundaries and carry out meaning negotiation are worthy of investigation.

Through exploring students' perceptions of intercultural and foreign language learning, this study intends to broaden the understanding of interactions between language and culture. In addition, the cross-cultural comparative framework employed here allows the examination of the processes and participants' perceptions of foreign language intercultural interaction mediated by internet communication tools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

EFL learning in Taiwan: The context

English has played a pivotal role in education in Taiwan. English as an international language has become vital to its economy in terms of providing access to the world community which is key to success in Taiwan's economic globalization and modernization. It is generally believed that speaking better English fuels upward occupational and social mobility and the pressure to improve is heavy on all learners (Lin, 2008; Lin & Byram, 2016). Nevertheless, there are issues associated with learning this traditionally important foreign language. Documented issues are the social phenomenon of resources discrepancy (Lin, 2008; Lin & Ivinson, 2012) and urban-rural divide (Chang, 2002; Lin, 2008). Learning English is not equal for students from different social and cultural backgrounds resulting in efforts to reduce the "English divide". One of these efforts has been the use of web-based learning approaches.

Web-based language learning and peer interaction

Computer-mediated communication (CMC), computer-assisted language learning

(CALL) and foreign language uses of telecollaboration (interaction mediated by internet communication tools) have become important pedagogical tools that integrate information technology into language learning (Fotos & Browne, 2004; Ware & O'Dowd, 2008). This online peer interaction for language learning is supported by several theoretical frameworks, such as, collaborative learning theory, Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), and socio-cultural theory (e.g., Lin, 2008) or cultural-historical and activity theory (e.g., Throne, 2003). A common thread to these theories is the notion that learning takes place not in an isolated individual mind, but among people (Lin, 2008; Lin & Ivinson, 2012), in the society (Rogoff, 1990) or within communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

This interactional activity is also conceptualized as a meaning-negotiation process because peer interaction on an online platform includes responding, negotiating internally and socially, arguing against points, adding to evolving ideas, and offering alternative perspectives in the process of solving authentic tasks (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Ware and O'Dowd (2008), in their study of telecollaboration, argued that "negotiation of meaning is seen as a natural and automatic process as interlocutors seek to understand and clarify eachothers' utterances" (p. 44). In recent years, efforts have also been made to engage language learners in either traditional binary schema of bilateral telecollaborative exchanges (O'Dowd, 2005; Yang, 2011) or multilateral approach to intercultural learning (Hauck, 2007; Hauck & Youngs, 2008) whereby meaning negotiation processes are made available and investigated.

However, there are some documented drawbacks for bilateral or multilateral exchange in language learning. A problem for bilateral partnerships is an inherent risk that participants will see themselves and their partners as representatives of a given culture. Moreover, in the contemporary world, experience of culture is increasingly diversified rather than mono-national. Participants no longer fit exactly into the traditional binary schema of bilateral telecollaborative exchanges (Lewis, Chanier & Youngs, 2011). This is why learners' relationships with their own and others' languages and cultures are more complex and therefore deserve learners' critical awareness (Byram, 1997; East, 2012).

Intercultural communicative competence in foreign language learning

Language learning is a social, psychological and cultural process that involves issues pertaining to practice, community and identity (Smagorinsky, 2011). Recently, more attention has been paid to the importance of developing learners' intercultural competence or awareness in foreign language learning (Byram, 1997; Guilherme, 2000). O'Dowd (2007) argued that telecollaborative activities have the potential to support the development of students' intercultural communicative competence. In human communication within or across cultures, navigating cultural differences requires competence in negotiating differences properly using language, or relating efficiently to otherness (Byram, 1997; East, 2012). This inter-cultural meaning negotiation should move beyond the merely linguistic to include the intercultural (East, 2012).

Byram (1997), in his framework for intercultural communicative competence (ICC model), argued that it is crucial to create a critical space to interpret culture from the perspective of the learners and their target interlocutors to facilitate the development of knowledge in interaction. This critical space, or as Guilherme (2000) termed it, critical cultural awareness, encourages learners to "reflect critically on the

values, beliefs, and behaviors of their own society…through a comparative study of other societies" (Byram, 2009, p. 323). The use of technology to promote online interaction may create that critical space for enhancing students' language and intercultural competences.

To explore students' perceptions of intercultural and foreign language learning through online peer interaction, this study asked the following research questions:

1. What are students' perceptions of EFL learning through this online class blog project?
2. Are there any differences between students' intercultural communicative competence before and after the project?

METHODS

This study employed questionnaires, observations and interviews. This paper focuses primarily on the perceptions and reflections of the Taiwanese participants.

Settings and participants

The participants consisted of 30 8th grade students (aged 13) in a pull-out bilingual class in a junior high school in southern Taiwan and 10 Year 10 students (aged 14) from a school in south-west England. The Taiwanese participants had been learning English as a foreign language for five years. Two of them previously lived in the United States and have native-like English abilities and foreign cultural experiences. Most of them had passed the elementary level of English proficiency in GEPT (General English Proficiency Test in Taiwan) and an English language placement test before enrolling. By comparison with their school peers, these students were advanced learners with competent English language skills. Their English language instructor and home room teacher, Teacher Maggie (pseudonym), also participated in this study. The UK participants had completed a two-week taster course of Mandarin Chinese and culture taught by the first author in the summer of 2013. They demonstrated strong interest in learning Mandarin and its associated culture, and volunteered to join this study. Student participants from both countries interacted via a class blog (Kids' Blog, see Figure 1) from January to June, 2014. The topics dealt with in the blog and the activities carried out by students are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Students' blog activities

Months	Activities
January	• Students chose ten items that best represent their culture.
	• For each item they created a riddle with three clues.
February	• Taiwanese students posted their riddles at Kids' Blog. British students tried to guess the answers.
	• Taiwanese students sent local cultural artifacts in a box (e.g., calligraphy pens) to England.
March	• British students opened the cultural box from Taiwan.
	• British and Taiwanese students discussed the contents of the cultural box via Kids' Blog.
April	• British students posted their riddles at Kids' Blog. Taiwanese students tried to guess the answers.
	• British students sent their cultural items to Taiwan.

May	• Taiwanese students opened the cultural box from the UK. • Taiwanese and British students discussed the contents of the cultural box via Kids' Blog.
June	• Students picked out the foreign item that appealed to them most, wrote a short article about it, and shared it with their peers at Kids' Blog. • Students talked to their peers, using Skype or other video-conferencing tools.

Research instruments and analysis

The Taiwanese participants, who are the focus of this paper, completed a reflective questionnaire (Appendix) in their own language (Chinese) at the beginning and (with minor rewording) the end of the project to evaluate their initial perceptions of the blog activity and to reflect upon their language and intercultural learning, respectively. The questionnaire consisting of5-Likert scale and open-ended questions regarding students' online interactional experiences, was modified from Chen and Yang's (2014) study of multilateral intercultural communication among secondary students in Taiwan. The questionnaire assessed students' experiences and perceptions of online blog practice at the levels of knowledge, attitudes and skills, following Byram's ICC model, and helped them reflect on their learning processes (Table 3). The researcher (first author) also observed relevant activities and conducted a .focus group interview (8 volunteers) and case interviews at the end of the project (all in Chinese). The students' learning journals and blog texts were collected and analyzed. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was employed to generate themes guided by the research questions and the issues which emerged from a review of the research literature.

The class blog, Kids' Blog (http://kidblog.org/EnglishMandarin/) was used for classroom activities sharing (via posts and comments) and cultural exchange in Taiwan and England (Figure 1). Students from Taiwan were randomly assigned into 10 groups (three students in each) in order to communicate with their secondary peers from England. The British participants were not separated into groups, but were encouraged to freely post or respond to questions on the blog.

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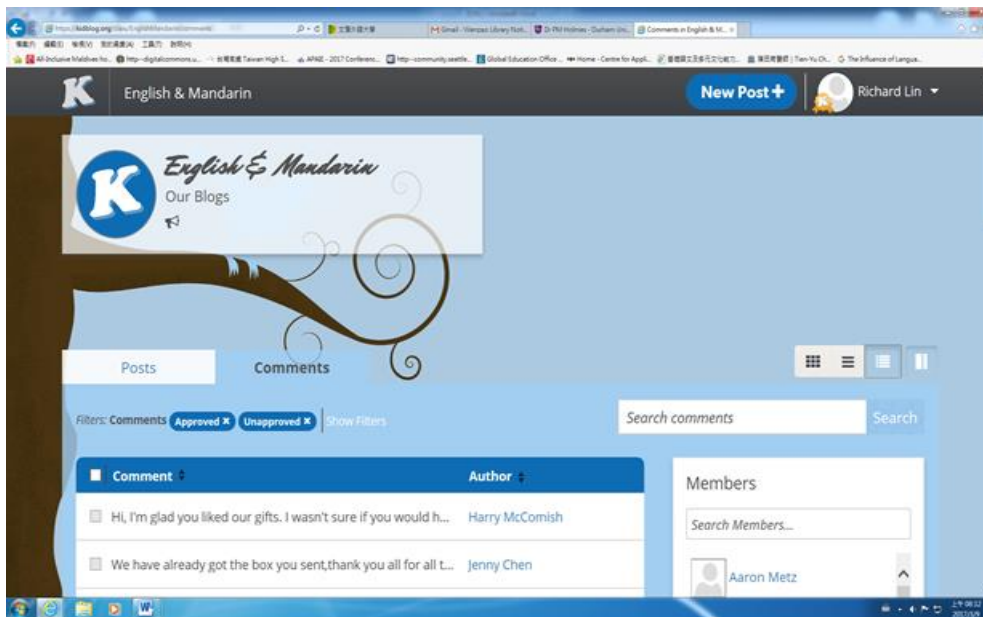
Fgure 1: The web page of Kids' Blog (http://kidblog.org/EnglishMandarin/)

Research procedures

Beginning in January 2014, students greeted each other on the blog by introducing themselves and continued interacting asynchronously until the end of June. For the purpose of cultural exchange, peers introduced local cultural events to the partner school, such as the Taiwanese Tomb-sweeping and Dragon-Boat Festival versus Pancake Day and Easter in England. Furthermore, cultural artifacts (e.g., foods, cards and souvenirs) were delivered to the partner schools. These artefacts were used primarily as mediational tools to facilitate cultural reflection and interaction. For the Taiwanese students, a mid-term workshop was held by the researcher, to ignite students' reflections and critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997), and provide clarifications regarding British cultural events and people's behaviors mentioned in the blog.

The online exchange processes were semi-structured, allowing students to create their interaction and content while remaining focused on language learning and cultural sharing. Throughout the process, classroom teachers (e.g., Teacher Maggie) and the researcher were also invited to take part in the discussion on the blog. In recognition of the importance of ethical considerations, informed consent was collected from all participants and their identities, including those of the teacher(s), have been kept confidential, using pseudonyms throughout the paper.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Due to limited space, the findings discussed here focus on the Taiwanese students' reflective questionnaires and qualitative data. First, students' perceptions of English learning and intercultural communicative competence arepresented briefly, then three themes which emerged from the process of the class blog activity are discussed in more depth.

Development of English learning during blog practice

As a "pull-out" class whose English abilities are relative better than those of their school peers, the Taiwanese participants perceived that this blog activity helped them use English to communicate with foreign peers effectively and, at the same time, helped develop their English capacity. For example, when they were asked at the end of the project if this activity assisted them in improving their reading and writing in English, over 80 per cent of them responded positively (including *agree* and *strongly agree* responses) in the post test (87% and 83% respectively for reading and writing). Also, 84 per cent reported that the blog enabled them to express their own opinions in English effectively (Table 2).

Table 2: Taiwanese participants' perceptions of how blog practice may help them learn English (n = 30)

	Strongly disagree	*Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Agree*	*Strongly agree*
It helps me develop English reading ability.					
Beginning	0%	7%	16%	60%	17%
End	0%	3%	10%	60%	27%
Difference	--	-4%	-6%	--	+10%
It helps me develop English writing skill.					
Beginning	0%	7%	23%	50%	20%
End	0%	0%	17%	63%	20%
Difference	--	-7%	-6%	+13%	--
It helps me express my own opinions in English.					
Beginning	0%	3%	13%	67%	17%
End	0%	3%	13%	40%	44%
Difference	--	--	--	-27%	+27%

Development of intercultural communicative competence

In general, students were very positive towards the perceived learning effect at all three levels of ICC development. For example, at the knowledge level, when participants were asked whether this activity helped them to know different countries and understand associated foreign cultures, 95 per cent provided affirmative responses (Table 3). At the level of attitudes, when participants were asked whether this activity helped them to view their own and others′ cultures from various perspectives, 84 per cent provided affirmative responses at the end of the project(a 34 per cent increase from the beginning of the project). At the level of skills, when participants were asked whether this activity helped them develop thinking skills and promote the ability of critical inquiry on culture, over 60 per cent of them provided affirmative responses.

Table 3: Taiwanese participants' perceptions of the blog practice at three different levels

	Strongly disagree	*Disagree*	*Neutral*	*Agree*	*Strongly agree*
Helps me know different countries and understand associated foreign cultures. (Knowledge)					
Beginning	0%	0%	7%	77%	16%
End	0%	0%	7%	57%	40%

Difference	--	--	--	-20%	+24%
Helps me view my own and other cultures from various perspectives. (Attitudes)					
Beginning	0%	0%	50%	37%	13%
End	0%	0%	16%	67%	17%
Difference	--	--	-34%	+30%	+4%
Helps me develop thinking skills & promote the ability of critical inquiry on culture. (Skills)					
Beginning	0%	7%	37%	43%	13%
End	0%	3%	30%	57%	10%
Difference	--	-3%	-7%	+14%	-3%

Meaningful interactions enhance intercultural communicative competence

The data support O'Dowd's (2007) assertion that telecollaborative activities have the potential to support the development of students' intercultural communicative competence. The students perceived a growth in intercultural communicative competence in all three levels through meaningful interactions with social partners (Table 2). Such development is evident in students' blog texts. For example, at the beginning of the project, students undertook a form of knowledge exchange through introducing their school cultures and later on discovered the similarities and differences of school life in Taiwan and England.

One of the British students, Henry, had been an active participant in the class blog, describing his everyday school routine and providing personal feelings about such school lessons as "…*very fun and are often varied*". He then continued to say "*We get lots of homework, do you?*" (see Table 4) with a tag question to prompt responses. This description and question successfully raised Taiwanese students' interests. Jack from Taiwan, replied "*Both our schools give us a lot of homework and my school almost have (has) tests everyday!*" Jack was trying to emphasize that homework and quizzes are viewed as everyday life in most secondary schools in Taiwan. This indicates that the Taiwanese students see themselves as having a different school life to that in England.

Table 4: Knowledge exchange on class blog

Henry (England)	January 22, 2014 at 12:40 AM
My school has four lessons a day each lasting 1:15 with half an hour for tutor. My Monday looks like this…The lessons are very fun and are often varied. What sort of subjects do you have? We get lots of homework, do you?	
Jack (Taiwan)	January 30, 2014 at 1:45 AM
We learn many subjects like Chinese…and Art. There are even more but I think this is enough for you to know. Both our schools give us a lot of homework and my school almost has tests everyday!	

In terms of attitudes, as indicated in Table 3, over 90 per cent of the Taiwanese students confirmed that this project helped them appreciate different cultures with open attitudes. This is evident in Kelly's interview account. Kelly is Taiwanese but

was born and lived in the US for 8 years before moving to Taiwan. She used primarily American English since childhood and had never encountered British people or British English. She said:

> *...when I knew that we are doing a project with students from the UK, I was afraid that I can't understand their British English. But I was still excited to talk to them...the only thing I knew was British people are a little bit more serious than Americans.... But I realized that they are pretty funny and very friendly...they are super polite.... I found that there's not too big difference between our English and we can communicate very smoothly.* (Interview: Nov. 11th, 2014, translated)

In fact, Kelly was "*nervous*" in the beginning because of her American English which is more informal or colloquial. She was afraid that her British peers would use British English which is different from hers. After a few months of interaction, she realized there was no problem for them to understand each other, demonstrating students' growing appreciation towards different cultures with open attitudes through this project.

In terms of skills, it is interesting to discover that this activity also helped students to develop knowledge of and skills for clarifying certain cultural stereotypes about British people and their language. As Kelly pointed out, her image of British people was that they are "*a little bit more serious than Americans*". However, she discovered that they are "*pretty funny and very friendly*". More importantly, they are "*super polite*", in her own words. For she now understood that British students tend to be very polite, using "sorry" and "thanks" a lot on the class blog. This is evident in Henry's blog response to a Taiwanese student when he replied "*Allow me to say that your English is very good. I wish I was as good at languages as you are*" (Posted on February 12, 2014 at 9:15 AM). This demonstrates that the British peers are trying to be polite as is their cultural norm. This cultural stereotype of British people's politeness appeared to be justified, to some extent, during the process of the blog activity.

Meaningful peer interactions help learning to take place

The results show that this class blog interaction helped learning to take place in both intercultural communicative competence and foreign language acquisition. When the Taiwanese students were asked about their perceptions of taking part in this class blog activity in which they interacted with British peers, they reported as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Students' perceptions of class blog activity (Group Interview: June 11, 2014, translated)

Students	Learning	Responses and feedback
S1	motivation	Um... much fun indeed...feel like we can connect people living so far away even though we don't know each other.
S2	openness	...see this activity as something innovative and makes me feel very interested, and then tries not to reject it.
S3	curiosity	...very *happy*, because U.K. sounds very high class.

S4	cultural learning	Same as S1, I feel like I am so cool…and feel like very proud when I'm home. U.K. sounds like very posh, it's just cool!
S5	cultural learning	Yeah...a lot of fun...feel like they are very high standard. They just talk to you with frequent apologies… things like that...Very polite!

According to the findings from the group interview, students demonstrated very positive perceptions of this class blog activity. However, some students, maybe due to a kind of cultural stereotype of the United Kingdom, considered it as very high class (S3), and thus felt it was cool to interact with peers from England. More interestingly, they felt very proud because the U.K. sounds very posh (S4) and very high standard (S5).

This collective image of the British peers as being very high class was interpreted by Teacher Maggie as a typical stereotypical image of Britain. As she pointed out:

Students feel that England is very high class. It may [be] because we used to interact with peers from India…and also with Poland before…so this sense of England being "high class" may not [be] because of a comparison with India or Poland…these students have been growing up in an environment where media, books sending out the message that the Western world, including the U.K., are great countries. Naturally, they have this stereotype and feel like England is very cool and high class. (Interview: Oct 23, 2014, translated)

Apart from a traditional stereotype of old colonial Britain which is usually learnt from the history textbook in Taiwan, the wide-spread use of English as a *lingua franca* also contributes to this image. Furthermore, the use of English as the major medium of conversation during the blog practice may have exacerbated such cultural stereotyping.

In fact, this project provides students with an invaluable opportunity for developing the critical cultural awareness described by Guilherme (2000) where learners can reflect critically on the values and beliefs of their own society through a comparative study of other societies (as described by Byram, 2009). Taiwanese students' critical reflection on the cultural stereotype of the polite British people is one of the examples we will discuss below.

Through this project, the Taiwanese students experienced a traditional, yet positive side of the stereotype of British politeness. As one of the students (S5) revealed in the group interview, "*they just talk to you with frequent* "apologies…*Very polite*!" This is echoed by Kelly's experience when she revealed that these English peers are "*super polite*". Furthermore, as Vygotsky (1981) put it, cognitive functions originate in social interaction and that learning is not merely an installation of new knowledge by the individual learners; "it is the process by which learners are integrated into a knowledge community" (Woo & Reeves, 2007, p.18). The class blog became a knowledge community where meaningful social interactions allow foreign culture learning to take place. In this project, the existing cultural stereotype of British people being polite was not only clarified but also justified, to some extent, during the process of social learning online.

Pondering different cultures: Reflections from the teacher and the researcher

Contrastive educational cultures between Taiwan and England emerged in this project and are worthy of attention. The British counterparts posted more topics on the blog than their Taiwanese peers. One of the British bloggers, Henry, posted 19 messages and 54 responses during the process and was the most active student. On the contrary, the highest number of posts initiated by any Taiwanese student was 4 and the highest number of responses was 20. As Teacher Maggie pointed out in her interview:

> ...since I hoped students could interact more with the UK peers, I requested them to post messages, so I have analyzed the numbers of text they posted and responses, and simultaneously take a look at the ones from the British side. I found a huge gap...the British pupils posted a lot [of] messages actively....whenever they were having activities or holidays they will share with our Taiwanese students.... But our students were more passive, and less likely to initiate the post. (Interview: Oct 23, 2014, translated)

In Taiwan, the secondary school (i.e., junior high) life is one of a competitive culture where tests are everyday practice and a very tight school schedule is usually the norm, along with attending after school lessons (i.e., cram schools) on a weekly or daily basis for some (Lin, 2008). In consequence Taiwanese students tend to become passive due to a tedious learning process. As Teacher Maggie confessed when referring to writing cards for English peers during the activity of exchanging cultural artefacts, "*in fact, our students did not write the cards autonomously...they were persuaded by me...actually it took me a lot time collecting the cards...some students were very passive and really needed to be pushed* (Interview: Oct 23, 2014, translated).

However, Teacher Maggie's reflection may be attributable to the verbal passiveness students in of Taiwanese culture. In fact, since Teacher Maggie just requested the students to post messages without telling them what messages to post, it could be argued, in line with O'Dowd (2007), that there were still substantial emergences of contents and patterns of natural telecollaboration between Taiwanese students and their social partners, potentially supporting the development of students' intercultural communicative competence.

The contrast between Taiwanese passivity and British autonomy can also be captured in Taiwanese students' accounts. Helen pointed out that the British students have lots of holidays: *"They can spend lots of time on the blog whereas we Taiwanese students have very tight schedule cramming including on Sundays...with this tight daily schedule, we are usually being reminded to post message on the blog by our teacher (Maggie) as homework."* (Interview: Nov 12, 2014, translated) This confession and explanation were echoed by Kelly who agreed with Helen that the blog activity was considered by them as a required "*mission*". Only after the mission was completed could she freely browse other information on the blog truly for fun. Kelly revealed that she was surprised to know that their British peers attended this project voluntarily. She said in a complaining tone of voice:

> For us, we post or comment just for finishing homework. I usually check through Kidblog after my "mission" is complete and leave some comments or read something I'm interested in. I really like how their school works (England), they give students who want to join this project a chance to do it, so they will really put effort in this project and care about it. Not like us, everyone HAS TO do it. (Interview: Nov 12, 2014,

translated)

The emerging differences of students' motivations and attitudes towards this project may be due to dissimilar educational cultures between the two countries. Teacher Maggie offered her observation as follows;

> *...I have been thinking about what makes this difference...maybe it's because our students are usually forced to accept answers from teachers during the educational process. In class, teachers tend to ask students questions without allowing more time for them to think. Correct answers are usually given directly by the teachers.* (Interview: Oct 23, 2014 translated)

As Maggie pointed out, Taiwanese secondary school culture usually forces students to accept standardized answers from teachers. Students are seldom encouraged to be inquisitive or to formulate their own critical thinking patterns until they attend higher education. Partly because of a general respectful culture in Asian countries such as Taiwan, classroom teachers are not often challenged by students. With such an overt power relationship between teachers and students as a social norm, passive learning cultures seem to dominate in secondary schools in Taiwan. Although the investigation of educational cultures is not the focus of this paper, the emerging diversified national or educational cultures that seem to impact on foreign language learning are worth future investigation.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the processes of foreign language learning and intercultural interactions between secondary school students in Taiwan and England which are mediated by internet communication tools by employing multiple research methods including questionnaires, observations and interviews. The study shows that the Taiwanese students perceived that they developed their English ability and intercultural communicative competence through meaningful social interactions at knowledge, attitude and skill levels. However, differences of learning attitudes between the two groups were also found and this variance may reflect contrastive educational cultures between the two countries.

Using a cross-cultural comparative framework the study shows that blog practice developed participants' intercultural and foreign language competence. This meaning negotiation across different cultures moved beyond the merely linguistic to include the intercultural, as suggested by East (2012). In particular, through meaningful social interactions with their British peers, the Taiwanese students grasped the opportunity to clarify and thus justify some of their existing stereotypes towards British culture and its language.

About the authors
Wen-Chuan Lin is an associate professor and Head of the English Department at Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages, Taiwan. His research interests include

intercultural studies and EFL learning issues from the perspectives of Vygotskian Socio-cultural Theory.

Jian-Shiung Shie is a professor in the Department of English at Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages, Taiwan. In 2014 he served as Chief Investigator of the integrated project "Language use and cultural border crossing: Reading, translation, and cross-cultural communication", funded by Wenzao Ursuline University of Languages (RDRS–102001) of which the present article is a partial result.

Prue Holmes is a reader and Director of Postgraduate Research in the School of Education, Durham University, UK. She researches and teaches language and intercultural communication, and has participated in many research projects on these topics. Her teaching experience includes intercultural communication at the University of Waikato, New Zealand, and EFL teacher education in Italy, China, and Hong Kong.

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Appendix: The questionnaire used at the beginning and the end of the project with Taiwanese participants (translated from the original Chinese version)

Part I: Overall reflection of the project

Please circle the number that best describes your own experience of participation.

(A: Strongly disagree/B: Disagree/C: Neutral/D: Agree/E: Strongly agree)

	A	B	C	D	E
1. I looked forward to this cross-cultural learning at the time of joining the project.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I think this online learning approach can improve my English.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I enjoy using Internet to engage in cross-cultural communication.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I think the project can expand my learning horizon.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I think there's no problem for me to learn through the tasks of the program.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I am very happy to participate and will gain a great sense of accomplishment when completing the project.	1	2	3	4	5

7. I think the project at the <u>knowledge</u> level……

(1) Helps me gain authentic information.	1	2	3	4	5
(2) Helps me know different countries and understand associated foreign cultures.	1	2	3	4	5
(3) Helps me know that each country has its own unique culture and values.	1	2	3	4	5
(4) Helps me know that every country has its own social problems.	1	2	3	4	5
(5) Helps me understand that despite cultural differences, different countries have something in common.	1	2	3	4	5
(6) Helps me understand the factors leading to each country's unique culture.	1	2	3	4	5
(7) Helps me know more about my own culture.	1	2	3	4	5

8. I think the project at the <u>attitude</u> level……

(1) Raises my curiosity about cultural diversity in various countries.	1	2	3	4	5
(2) Helps me view other cultures from various perspectives.	1	2	3	4	5
(3) Allows me to enjoy different cultures with a more open attitude.	1	2	3	4	5
(4) Allows me reflect on and question Taiwanese culture from learning different countries' cultures.	1	2	3	4	5
(5) Allows me to expect more culture learning and more in-depth exchange opportunities.	1	2	3	4	5

9. I think the project at the <u>skill</u> level……

(1) Helps to develop thinking skills and to promote ability of critical inquiry on culture.	1	2	3	4	5
(2) Helps to develop ability in exploring cultural issues.	1	2	3	4	5
(3) Helps to cultivate ability in reflecting on self-culture.	1	2	3	4	5
(4) Helps to develop ability in collecting and analyzing information.	1	2	3	4	5
(5) Helps to develop ability in communicating with foreign	1	2	3	4	5

	partners.					
(6)	Helps to enhance ability in using information technology.	1	2	3	4	5

Please circle the number that best describes your own experience of participation.

(A: Strongly disagree/B: Disagree/C: Neutral/D: Agree/E: Strongly agree)	A	B	C	D	E
10. I think the program at the <u>English Learning</u> level……					
(1) Allows me to learn to communicate with foreign partners in English.	1	2	3	4	5
(2) Helps me develop English reading ability.	1	2	3	4	5
(3) Helps me develop English writing skills.	1	2	3	4	5
(4) Helps me express my own opinions in English.	1	2	3	4	5
(5) Allows me to learn a lot of English words, not solely from the textbooks.	1	2	3	4	5
(6) Makes me aware of my own weakness in English ability.	1	2	3	4	5
(7) Allows me to understand the importance of English proficiency in cross culture communication.	1	2	3	4	5
(8) Allows me to have more interest in learning English.	1	2	3	4	5

Part II: Reflection of the project

(A) Teaching activities

(A: Strongly disagree/B: Disagree/C: Neutral/D: Agree/E: Strongly agree)	A	B	C	D	E
1. The activity can help us complete the tasks of cross-cultural communication successfully.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The activity can help us reflect on our own learning process.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The activity is properly designed so that we know what we are doing.	1	2	3	4	5
4. The activity can help us correct mistakes and enhance the quality of cross-cultural communication.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Each stage of the activity can guide us to think about and gradually complete the tasks of intercultural communication.	1	2	3	4	5
6. There is enough time for me to complete the project without pressure.	1	2	3	4	5
7. The teachers can provide assistance and advice to help us solve problems.	1	2	3	4	5

(B) The use of Blog network platform through Kids Blog	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**
1. I can improve my English by observing my classmates' work.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I can keep up with the progress of the project by saving information online.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I can save personal study record and keep track of my own learning situation.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I can speak freely while exchanging opinions with my peers.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Allows me to exchange opinions with more peers fully.	1	2	3	4	5

Part III: Self reflecting on the learning process
(A) Assessment of self-performance

1. **Through the project, I feel that I have made significant progress in the following areas.** *(A: Strongly disagree/B: Disagree/C: Neutral/D: Agree/E: Strongly agree)*	A	B	C	D	E
(1) Using information technology	1	2	3	4	5
(2) English reading	1	2	3	4	5
(3) English writing	1	2	3	4	5
(4) English vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5
(5) Data collection	1	2	3	4	5
(6) Information comparison and analysis	1	2	3	4	5
(7) Summary writing	1	2	3	4	5
(8) Critical thinking	1	2	3	4	5
(9) Multicultural understanding	1	2	3	4	5

(B) Perceptions of participating in the project in order to learn English (multiple choices)

□1.Happy   □2.Painful   □3.Relaxed   □4.Tough   □5.Sense of accomplishment
□6.Frustrated □7.Confident   □8.Confused   □9.High-spirited   □10.Pressed □11.Expectant
□12.Nervous □13.Curious   □14.Fun   □15.Interesting   □16.Others _____

Part IV: Cultural Understanding (Open-ended questions)

(A) What is your overall understanding of British culture so far?

(B) What are the differences (culture, values and school education) between Taiwan and England?

(C) What is your general feeling toward English culture while taking part in the project? Is there anything surprising in terms of learning? What attitudes may be good for you when encountering different cultures?

(D) Do you think cultures can be divided into "high" vs. "low"? When you first heard about interacting with British students, did you feel that the country was more advanced than Taiwan or better than other countries?

(E) Do you think this project can help you understand different cultures? If yes, why? There are many cultural learning approaches. How different is this project from traditional classroom learning/teaching in comprehending various cultures?