Learners’ expectations and satisfaction in an intercultural telecollaboration project

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Introduction
Telecollaboration is an “internet-based intercultural exchange between people of different cultural/national backgrounds set up in an institutional context with the aim of developing both language skills and intercultural communicative competence through structured tasks” (Guth and Helm, 2010). At the individual’s level, factors such as motivation and expectations can deeply affect the outcome of the exchange project (O’Dowd and Ritter, 2006). Although several studies focus on students’ level of satisfaction after conducting a telecollaboration, few of them compare their previous expectations with the perceived benefits.

Methodology
Nine Spanish-Speaking students from Universitat Politècnica de València (Spain) and five international students (Erasmus+ programme) engaged in synchronous and asynchronous activities with ten English-speaking students from Morgan State University (US). The project lasted six weeks. The main tools used were Zoom for the synchronous tasks and MeWe for the asynchronous ones. Participants filled in a pre- and post-survey on a 5-points Likert scale (1 = completely disagree; 5 = completely agree). Students were expected to meet once a week through Zoom in order to carry out role-play tasks, and to participate in cultural discussions on MeWe also on a weekly basis.

Results
- The general tendency of the means indicates that the participants’ level of satisfaction aligned with their expectations or even exceeded it. However, meeting once a week with their virtual partners (item 7) was more difficult than expected, as well as solving communication problems (item 9).
- The lower mean in item 4 demonstrates that using MeWe was easier than expected.
- All participants found the cultural topics discussed on MeWe interesting (43.7% - 4; 56.3% - 5).
- Students also felt at ease with their partners (18.7% - 3; 50% - 4; 31.3% - 5).

Data Analysis
The findings reveal that in terms of usefulness of the project in general, and of the synchronous and asynchronous activities in particular, the perceived benefits exceeded participants’ previous expectations. Regarding the tools used (i.e. Zoom and MeWe), the students’ predictions mostly aligned with their level of satisfaction.

Objective
The purpose of the study was to compare language learners’ expectations with the perceived benefits obtained after participating in a telecollaboration project.

Conclusion
- The findings reveal that in terms of usefulness of the project in general, and of the synchronous and asynchronous activities in particular, the perceived benefits exceeded participants’ previous expectations. Regarding the tools used (i.e. Zoom and MeWe), the students’ predictions mostly aligned with their level of satisfaction.
- On the other hand, arranging weekly meetings was harder than expected, which led to feelings of frustration for a couple of students. Despite this, the results obtained in this study corroborate those previously achieved by Gimeno (2018).
- The main limitation of our study is the small sample size. Also, the data analysed here corresponds to only the Spanish and Erasmus side. Future studies should compare the data of both groups of students in order to seek similarities or differences in terms of expectations and perceived benefits.
- Instructors should extensively get in touch before the telecollaboration project, and students may carry out introductory tasks where they explain to their virtual partners what their expectations towards the exchange are (O’Dowd and Ritter, 2006).

References