Teletandem and the development of intercultural communicative competence: Reflections from the ClerKing project

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Article Info	Abstract
  Research Article	Numerous studies worldwide have reported on the usefulness of teletandem projects in the development intercultural communicative competence (ICC). However, not much literature is available from projects including Jamaica or other Anglophone Caribbean islands. This is due in part to the lack of systematic incorporation of teletandem in academic curricula at the different levels of the education system. This paper reports on phase 3 of ClerKing – a 10-week teletandem project that occurred between Applied Foreign Language students of English from Clermont Auvergne University in France and Modern Language students of French from the University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica, which aimed to develop students' ICC. Twenty-six students discussed different cultural and intercultural topics in pairs via WhatsApp and videoconferencing platforms (Skype, Zoom) in both French and English. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse data collected from pre and post-questionnaires and learning and reflective journal entries. Findings show that, according to students, language barrier, cultural differences, technological and logistical issues, and individual factors can affect ICC. Other major findings reveal that most students' initial representation of the target culture improved significantly by the end of the project, especially for Francophone students who had very limited knowledge of Jamaica. Additionally, the findings imply a correlation between the topics discussed and the richness of the intercultural exchange. This study has implications for conceptualisers of teletandem projects, as well as higher education stakeholders in Jamaica who are responsible for curriculum development. **Keywords:** Teletandem, intercultural communicative competence, global competence, ClerKing, WhatsApp

1. Introduction

The constant evolution of technology provides numerous opportunities for teaching and learning, both in-person and online. This also means that both students and teachers can collaborate and communicate with peers and colleagues who are in geographically distant locations. As the world becomes even more globalised, education programmes should also evolve to prepare students to cultivate the requisite skills

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that will allow them to function *glocally* – globally and locally – and live harmoniously with others. Madden et al. (2021) note that due to the perpetual rise in globalisation and migration and the propagation of online interactions across cultures, education systems ought to be more proactive and intentional in implementing curricula that will help foster the intercultural communicative competence (ICC) of students, who are the current and future citizens. Teletandem offers the potential to cultivate these skills.

Teletandem (Telles & Vassallo, 2006), Tandem (Karjalarinen et al., 2013) or E-tandem (El-Hariri, 2017) is a form of telecollaboration, which is "a virtual, collaborative and autonomous context for learning foreign languages in which two students help each other to learn their own languages (or language of proficiency)" (Telles, 2015, p. 604). Russell (2022) adds that, among computer-assisted language learner (CALL) scholars, teletandem involves using technology-based media such as text, audio, and/or video with the sole objective of helping each respective interlocutor to learn the native or proficient language and culture of the other partner through reciprocal cooperation (Guanoluisa & Viera, 2021).

Over the past two decades, numerous studies have been conducted across the world concerning teletandem projects and their usefulness in developing ICC. However, not much data is available from the Jamaican or wider Anglophone Caribbean perspective. Consequently, a teletandem project named ClerKing, which represents Clermont-Ferrand, France and Kingston, Jamaica, and which is part of a wider doctoral study in language sciences, was piloted in different phases to bring European and Caribbean language learners together. This paper seeks to bridge the data gap, and through exploratory content analysis, it aims to address the following questions:

1. What are students' perceptions of factors that can affect cross-cultural communication?

2. To what extent have students developed or demonstrated ICC in the ClerKing project?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Benefits and challenges associated with teletandem

Extensive international research studies have recorded positive outcomes of using teletandem collaborative projects when learning languages, especially among learners who have few or limited opportunities for authentic communication with native speakers of a target language and culture. In general, teletandem is well received by learners because it has a positive impact on L2 development. Tandem improves students' oral competence, as well lexical, syntactical and sociolinguistic knowledge (Candel-Mora et al., 2020; Coşkun, 2023; Montaner-Villalba et al., 2022). Additionally, tandem helps students develop negotiation, adaptive and collaborative skills, as they attempt to fulfil the partnership conditions (Aranha & Rampazzo, 2022; Madden, 2022). Furthermore, students gain culture-specific knowledge and develop their pragmatic competence (Di Sarno García et al., 2023; Madden et al., 2021). Moreover, tandem projects allow students to develop social skills, such as patience, empathy, tolerance, turn-taking, and a better attitude and appreciation towards learning a new language and culture (Batunan et al., 2023; Canga Alonso, 2012; Madden et al., 2021). However, despite the numerous benefits of teletandem, researchers have also noted some drawbacks. Guanoluisa and Viera (2021) posit that tandem partners may share untrustworthy information due to their educational or cultural backgrounds. Incompatibility between partners, including low proficiency levels, could also be an issue, and this could cause participants to feel uncomfortable during language exchanges (Guanoluisa & Viera, 2021; Toscu, 2021). In addition, personal and institutional calendars, coupled with time-zone challenges, can affect the outcome of teletandem (Madden, 2022; Orsini-Jones et al., 2020). Furthermore, Madden et al. (2021) note that when students of different cultures meet in a "contact zone" – where they grapple with different ideas and values systems (Pratt, 1991) – this can result in intercultural friction and bring tandem projects to a halt. Other areas of concern encompass logistical and technical problems, including internet connectivity (Wu et al., 2022), while O'Dowd and Ritter (2006) provide an extensive list of why communication fails in tandem sessions.

2.2 Critical teletandem/telecollaboration

There is a stream of literature concerning communicative language teaching (CLT) from a historical perspective that is critical of its development for not adhering to its original objectives of achieving social justice and political education, especially due to the demand for efficiency and accountability, as noted by Kramsch (2006), which is due to the overemphasis of language for a purpose (Byram, 2014). In recent years, however, some developments have been achieved through intercultural approaches and components of sociocultural policy, such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001). Helm (2013) notes that teletandem or telecollaborative learning frequently circumvents more complex aspects and, instead, deals with easy ideas about casual matters like music and travelling, which cause the perpetuation of shallow cultural understandings. Kramsch (2014) and O'Dowd (2016) regard these interactions as a way in which the CLT transformation agenda is not achieved and, instead, cultural differences are approached superficially.

Additionally, there is the need to move away from superficial cultural exchanges in CLT and teletandem towards a more critical and transformative one. It is apparent that traditional CLT has been blamed for such an instrumental reason of language acquisition that social justice and critical engagement are not centre-stage concerns (Kramsch, 2006; Byram, 2014). However, recent attempts like critical telecollaboration (O'Dowd, 2016) have tried to fill this gap. Displacing such ideas as the neutrality of technology, the importance of native speakers, or the limits of sociocultural competence, Helm (2016) suggests that critical telecollaboration should encourage people to care about engaging in the differences between cultures and politics. The Soliya dialogues and other projects concerning historical tensions such as the Falklands conflict (Helm, 2016; Porto, 2014) show the possibilities of these projects to encourage discussion, reflection, and international citizenship, and bring back language education to its intended critical purposes. If intercultural communication is approached differently, then teachers will be able to engage the students into critical political telecollaboration. This means questioning the common sense that online interaction promotes more understanding, that a native speaker is an ideal communicative partner or that technology itself is unbiased (Helm, 2016). Different cross-border programmes exemplify this change. For instance, Soliya, a US-founded organisation, seeks to foster dialogue between students from the USA and Arab/Muslim countries (Helm, 2016) or, in the case of the Falklands War, arrange collaborative projects devoted to the history of the conflict (Porto, 2014), or exchange students and co-work at a distance on political or ethnic issues and stereotypes (Benabdallah & Messadia, 2016). The purpose of these programmes is to be able to provide students with higher levels of critical literacy and understanding, as well as for conflict resolution, respect for diversity, and being a global citizen, by engaging them in diverse learning opportunities.

Nonetheless, Madden (2022) illustrates that teletandem can highlight tension between local and global values, especially when controversial topics are being debated and students are reluctant to suspend their personal or local beliefs to evaluate their interlocutors' and other worldviews with openness and an absence of judgment. Notwithstanding, he argues that it is through direct interaction with otherness that students' limited or closed worldview is challenged and they will eventually arrive at a "turning point" where they begin to enlarge their perspectives. Despite calling for careful consideration when choosing controversial topics for teletandem projects, Madden argues that foreign language education must be intentional about creating pedagogical scenarios in which students can develop their ICC. He, however, advises project

coordinators to prepare students ahead of teletandem as this could help reduce possible culture shocks and engender inclusive reflection (Madden, 2022).

2.3 Recent studies incorporating teletandem/telecollaboration

Figueiredo's (2024) study aimed to explore the use of project pedagogy in teletandem sessions. The study involved 10 Brazilian students majoring in Spanish at the Universidade Federal de Goiás (UFG) and 10 Argentine students from the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo and the Universidad de Buenos Aires. The students shared that they valued the opportunity to interact with native speakers, which helped them learn new vocabulary, cultural aspects, and improve their language skills. They also stated that the teletandem sessions provided a supportive environment, reducing the fear of making mistakes and increasing confidence in speaking the target language. Additionally, the students said the collaborative project work allowed them to reflect on real-world issues in both countries, enhancing their intercultural competence and social awareness.

Batunan et al. (2023) conducted a study to explore teachers' perceptions of telecollaboration and illustrate how telecollaboration promotes English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers' ICC. This study engaged teachers from public and private schools in Indonesia and teachers from other countries in the outer and expanding circle of EFL, such as Belarus, Japan, and Myanmar. Qualitative interpretive analysis was used to analyse data from three Indonesian participants, which comprised observations, post-session reflections, and video-recorded interviews. The findings indicate that participating teachers formed positive views about telecollaboration through their sharing of transforming beliefs and attitudes towards interculturality in EFL teaching and learning. In addition, they have started to incorporate philosophies of ICC in their current teaching practice and hope to continue doing so.

Cavalari and Aranha (2022) explored how learning diaries can be used for formative assessment to guide teaching and learning processes in teletandem. The study involved university students from São Paulo State University (UNESP), Brasil who participated in teletandem exchanges with students from the United Kingdom and the United States of America between 2016 and 2020. The study found that feedback on diaries helped regulate the teaching-learning process by encouraging reflection and autonomous learning, and that teachers reinforced teletandem principles like reciprocity and intercultural competence through feedback. The feedback from the diaries also helped to integrate telecollaborative practice with face-to-face lessons, creating a coherent learning experience.

Lee (2020) reported on a Spanish-American telecollaborative project through which students created blogs, VoiceThread presentations, and video chats for intercultural exchanges during a semester. Using qualitative data collection, the study examined the extent to which Web 2.0-mediated learning could contribute to learners' ICC development. According to the findings, students demonstrated the skills outlined in Byram's ICC model. Students showed positive attitudes and curiosity towards the target culture and gained new culture-specific knowledge. They also displayed skills of discovery and interaction that assisted them to build critical cultural awareness.

2.4 Frameworks of Intercultural Communicative Competence

In the literature, there are varying definitions of ICC, and alternative terms include cross-cultural adaptation, intercultural sensitivity, multicultural competence, global competence, etc. (Sinicrope, Norris, & Watanabe, 2007). However, the consensus from many experts in the applied linguistics field is that ICC

involves communicating effectively in the L2 and demonstrating specific attitudes, skills, values, and knowledge about a particular culture (Deardorff, 2006; Moeller & Nugent, 2014). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) expands on this notion, adding that ICC is the capacity to "examine local, global, and intercultural issues, to understand and appreciate the perspectives and world views of others, to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development" (OECD, 2018, p. 4).

Both Byram's (1997) and Deardorff's (2006) models of ICC have been exemplary to teletandem projects. Byram's model encompasses five elements or *savoirs*: (1) *Savoirs* (knowledge): knowledge of self and other and of interactions, individual and societal. This involves the intercultural speaker's insight into "social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction" (p. 51). (2) *Savoir-être*: attitudes, relativising self, and valuing others. This speaks to "curiosity and openness" in addition to having a "readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own" (p. 50). (3) *Savoir comprendre/communiquer*: skills of interpreting and relating. This concerns one's ability to "interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it, and relate it to documents from one's own" (p. 52). (4) S*avoir apprendre/faire*: skills of discovering and/or interacting. This surrounds the ability to "acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes, and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction" (p. 52). (5) *Savoir s'engager*: political education and critical cultural awareness. This pertains to the ability to "evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices, and products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (p. 53).

Deardorff's model of ICC takes the form of a pyramid. The first layer comprises the requisite attitudes (respect, openness, curiosity) that an individual needs to cultivate and demonstrate in order to communicate openly and effectively in intercultural contexts. The next layer is shared between knowledge and comprehension and skills. Knowledge encapsulates cultural self-awareness, deep understanding and knowledge of culture, culture-specific information, and sociolinguistic awareness, while skills include listening, observing, interpreting, analysing, evaluating, and relating. Both aspects are co-dependent to achieve the desired internal and external outcomes that are the two final layers of the pyramid. Internal outcome seeks to create citizens who are adaptable and flexible, and who engage in ethnorelativism and demonstrate empathy, while external outcome involves conducting oneself suitably – based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes – to achieve one's objectives to a certain degree.

Both Byram's (1997) and Deardorff's (2006) models of ICC contain words such as openness and curiosity to explain their view that an individual must be open to learning about new belief systems, values, and worldviews in order to participate in relationships of equality and co-exist harmoniously.

In his conceptualised framework of ICC for Jamaican L2 learners (see Figure 1), Madden (2022) distributes 22 competences across three domains, namely interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive. Madden places the intrapersonal circle at the centre of the figure to reinforce the importance of self-awareness in human interaction. He argues that "if an individual is not intra-personally competent, he or she will not be able to effectively cultivate and demonstrate most of the other skills listed under the other two headings" (p. 7); hence, the centre circle connects directly with the other two. Similarly, the interpersonal and cognitive domains are linked to show their interdependence on each other. The competences in the blue rectangle – multiculturalism, adaptability, and information and communication technology (ICT) literacy – are among

the most essential ones required to operate glocally. According to Madden, "a multilingual person, who is adaptable and competent in ICT skills, is likely to have positive outcomes from cross-cultural interactions" (p. 8).
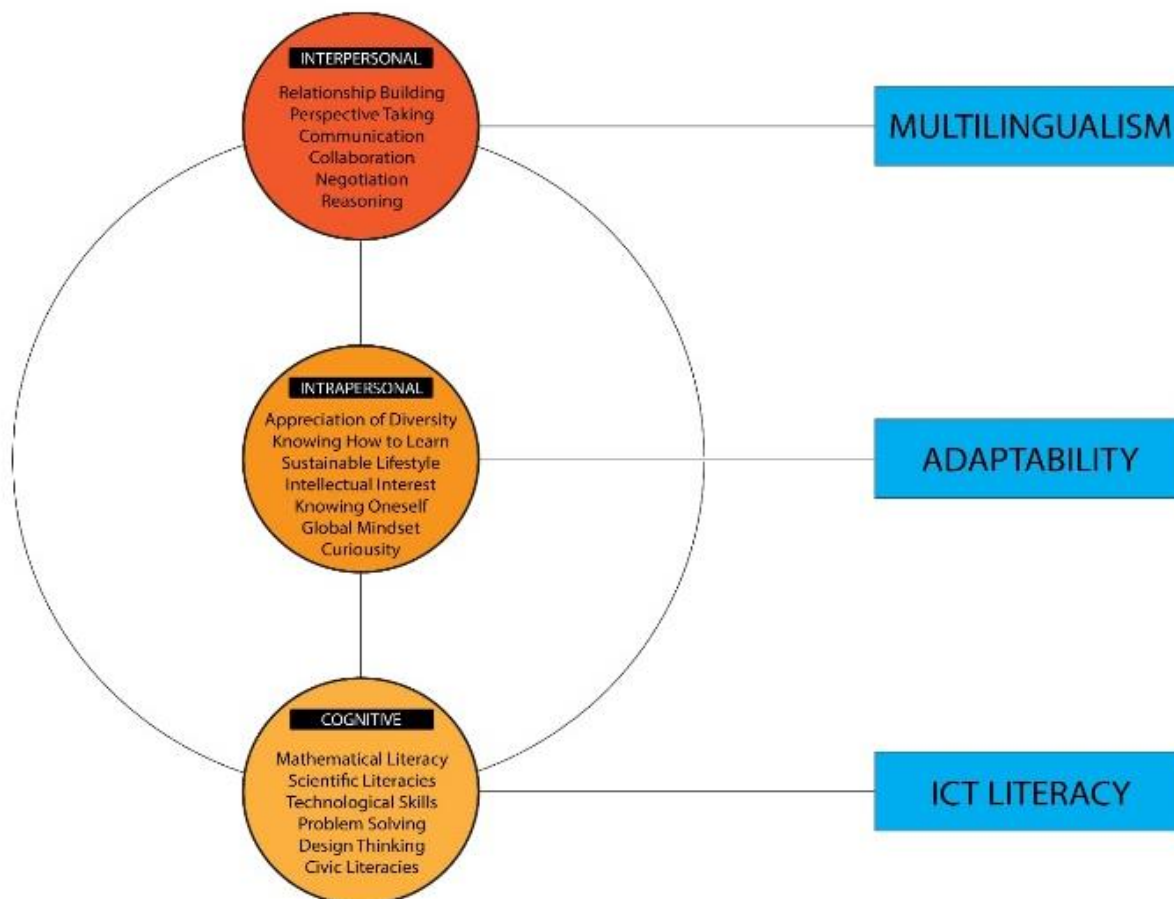
Figure 1. Intercultural communicative competence framework for Jamaicans (Madden, 2022, p. 8)

3. Methodology

This study reports on phase 3 of ClerKing – a 10-week teletandem project, which occurred between Applied Foreign Languages students of English from Clermont Auvergne University (UCA) in Clermont-Ferrand, France and Modern Languages students of French from the University of the West indies (UWI), Mona, Kingston, Jamaica. As detailed in Table 1 (topics) and Table 2 (pedagogic and communication scenario) below, 26 undergraduate students discussed different cultural and intercultural topics weekly in pairs for one hour in French and/or English via WhatsApp and videoconferencing platforms such as Skype and Zoom. After each conversation, participants from both institutions had to complete a learning journal, and at the end of the project, participants from UCA had to complete a reflexive journal. The journals required them to indicate their linguistic, cultural, and intercultural gains and to reflect on their level of participation.

Table 1. Weekly topics discussed in Phase 3 of ClerKing

Week	Topic discussed
1	Getting to know you
2	Geography (climate, natural disaster, important sites)
3	Important moments in the history of your country
4	Culture, customs, stereotypes
5	Politics (similarities & differences between the two systems)
6	Jamaican Creole & regional languages
7	Festivals, celebrations, national fetes
8	French/Jamaican literature
9	Multiculturalism
10	Taboo topics in your culture

Table 2. Summary of pedagogic and communication scenario in Phase 3 of ClerKing

Parameters	Descriptions
Interlocutors in the communication scenario	13 students from UCA and 13 from UWI, Mona
Status of interlocutors	Interdependent and symmetrical
Pairing	1 UCA to 1 UWI based on profile submitted prior to the start of the project
Objective of exchanges	Linguistic, cultural, and intercultural development
Tasks	Discuss weekly topics with partner then complete learning and reflexive journal (where applicable)
Language of interaction	English and French
Temporality of interaction	Synchronous and asynchronous Synchronous: 1hr/week (30 mins in English, 30 mins in French) Asynchronous: throughout the project
Platforms used	WhatsApp: synchronous and asynchronous communication Skype/Zoom: synchronous communication

3.1. Research Model/Design

This study employed a qualitative approach, combining questionnaires and learning journals to examine learners' perceptions of factors that can affect cross-cultural interactions as well as their declarations of development of intercultural communicative competence. This design facilitated the triangulation of data, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings by cross-referencing the data received. Qualitative research is often used in humanities, social and behavioural sciences to improve one's understanding of people's cultures, belief systems, values, and the relationship between human experiences and various situations, as well as it helps to develop theories that describe these different experiences (Holloway & Galvin, 2016; Wuest, 2012). By using this design, the study provides insights not only in students' perceptions of factors that impact intercultural communication but also critical information that can guide the conceptualisation and implementation of futuristic teletandem projects.

3.2. Participants/Sampling

Twenty-six students between the ages of 18 and 25 participated in the study. However, only 23 of them completed the questionnaires. Table 3 provides further demographic details of the respondents.

Table 3. Students' demographic information in Phase 3 of ClerKing

Institution	Student background	Course and Language level
University Clermont Auvergne (UCA)	French native (N=9) Albanian (N=1) Russian (N=1) Portuguese (N=1)	Open Learning Project (OPL) B2-C2 in English
University of the West Indies (UWI), Mona	Jamaican native (N=10) Barbadian (N=1)	French Language IIIA A2-B2 in French

UCA students were between B2 and C2 in English on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, while UWI students were between A2 and B2 in French. Students were paired based on a short biography submitted before the start of the project, which included their demographic and linguistic background, as well as likes and interests. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants as the students were already integrated in courses in which the teletandem project was specifically embedded. UCA students took the course Open Learning Project, which sought to expose learners to critical issues affecting the world, while UWI students followed the course French Language IIIA, which aimed at improving learners' grammar and other linguistics skills through a variety of topics covered throughout the course. Etikan et al. (2016) note that purposive sampling, which is also referred to as judgment sampling, is "the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses" (p. 2). With this technique, the researcher establishes what needs to be known and seeks out people who can and are willing to provide the requisite information due to their knowledge or experience (Bernard, 2002). Patton (2002) highlights that purposive sampling is typical of qualitative research to identify and select information-rich sources. This entails identifying and selecting individuals or groups who are proficient and well-informed about a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Purposive sampling also considers the availability and willingness of samples to participate, and their ability to articulate their experiences and perspectives in a reflective manner.

3.3. Instruments/Materials

The present study used a pre- and post-project questionnaire (see sample questions in Appendix A and B) and learning and reflective journals for data collection. The pre-project questionnaire comprised 16 items, which elicited participants' responses to demographic, linguistic, technological and cross-cultural interaction variables. Specifically, there were questions related to their familiarity, usage and perceptions of social media in L2 learning and acquisition, factors that can affect intercultural communication, and their initial representations of the target country/culture being studied. The post-project questionnaire contained 22 items that targeted participants' usage of different technological platforms, coordination, linguistic, cultural and intercultural gains, as well as their subsequent representation of the target country/culture within the context of the teletandem project. The lead researcher designed both questionnaires. The learning and reflective journals were used to document systematic linguistic, cultural and intercultural gains, which serve as a means of validity.

3.4. Procedure

Prior to the start of the project, course facilitators from both UCA and UWI met virtually and conducted a series of meetings to decide on the pedagogical and communication scenarios for the project. These are plans that outline the expectations of and instructions for the learner to follow throughout a course of study (Madden & Foucher, 2019). Nissen (2006) notes that the pedagogical scenario includes the aims of the project, previous and desirous skills, and all the resources and tools made accessible to the student to accomplish the proposed tasks and activities, while the communication scenario details all the likely forms of interactions that the student has at his or her disposal in the online project.

Once the format of the project was confirmed, students were paired based on a brief biography submitted to ensure that those with the closest interests were teamed. Once the project was launched, students were given the pre-project questionnaire to complete over a two-week period. Throughout the project, they completed learning journals after their weekly interactions via WhatsApp and/or videoconferencing, and at the end of the project, UCA students had a reflexive journal to complete. All journal entries were submitted at the end of the project. Additionally, students from both institutions were given the post-project questionnaire to complete within a two-week period.

3.5. Data Analysis

The data collected were analysed using qualitative content analysis. Marying (2023) states that this form of analysis enables a systematic analysis of textual material. Preiser et al. (2021) highlights that 'text' refers to a variety of phenomena such as "descriptions, accounts, opinions and feelings that are conveyed in a variety of representations, not only as letters on a white page or screen" as "qualitative data can be represented in words, pictures and even sounds" (p. 270). Preiser et al. (2021) add that the general purpose of qualitative content analysis is to make more noticeable the numerous forms of 'meaning' that emerge through various methods of analysis.

Once the data were received, a thorough analysis was carried out in different phases to determine certain codes, which were further refined through MAXQDA Analytics software.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Factors that can affect intercultural communication

When asked in the pre-project questionnaire about factors that could affect intercultural communication, students listed a number of considerations (see excerpts below) such as: (a) language barrier, ranging from vocabulary limitation, accent and pronunciation, syntax, speed and fluency, and translation differences; (b) cultural differences, such as communication styles, non-verbal communication, cultural norms and values and different worldviews; (c) technological and logistical factors such as internet connectivity and time differences; and (d) other factors such as one's personality and level of open-mindedness.

Participant 1: "The different points of view linked to the different culture can affect the communication because we don't necessarily know what the other person is referring to."

Participant 2: "The language barrier and the misunderstandings it may entail, difficulty in understanding each other."

Participant 3: "Differences in culture and mentality can sometimes be an obstacle."

Participant 4: "If the person has an open mind or not. If they are reluctant to share and talk, the discussion will go nowhere. There's also the problem of vocabulary. It's easy enough to play around grammar or verb tenses to be understood, but it's harder to get your point across if you do not have the right noun or adjective to describe what you mean."

Participant 5: "There are technological problems, such as the lack of internet or devices. Differences in culture and values can also hinder effective communication."

Participant 6: "I think time differences can affect communication as one person in another country might be busy when the other person is not because of the difference in time."

4.2 Pre-project perceptions of target country/culture

Similarly, prior to launching into the project, students gave their representations of the respective target countries (France and Jamaica), which were quite varied. Many UCA students acknowledged that they have very limited knowledge of the island but provided stereotypical responses (see Table 3), which include tranquillity, notable cultural, sport and musical icons, environmental and natural resources, and a country

with a vibrant culture and history. Similarly, UWI students provided customary representations of France (see Table 3), such as historical figures and events, art and architecture, language of love, notable gastronomy, haute couture and social etiquette.

Table 3. Excerpts of students' pre-project representations of Jamaica and France

Excerpt 1	"Jamaica represents peace."
Excerpt 2	"Jamaica represents sun, beach and music."
Excerpt 3	"To me it's a rather influential Caribbean island. I have the usual popular cliché about it like the music, the weather and famous sportsmen but it also represent more in term of history and its past, and its resilience."
Excerpt 4	"When I hear Jamaica for the first time I think about Bob Marley, sunny tropical beaches, weed (even if I don't smoke)."
Excerpt 5	"When I think about France, I think about Paris and its architecture… I also think about colonialism and the fact that former colonies of France should be able to reap their rewards there, as they have been terribly exploited."
Excerpt 6	"France is a developed country with great cuisine, beautiful cities, and landscape, home to exquisite clothes designs and fashion…"
Excerpt 7	"France represents the opportunity to explore a world and culture beyond my own, and to gain a different perspective."
Excerpt 8	"France represents the cradle of the French language, the country of the civilizing missing, but at the same time, France represents a country that has advanced in many areas."

4.3 Post-project representations of target country/culture

In their post-project questionnaire, 100% of the respondents (N=19) mentioned that they have acquired cultural gains from their interactions, compared to 68.4% who indicated that they have experienced linguistic gains. Although from a cultural and intercultural perspective, some students maintained their initial perceptions of the target country, others made discoveries (See Table 4), especially due to the different topics discussed.

Table 4. Excerpts of students' post-project representations of Jamaica and France

Excerpt 1	"A positive representation. Jamaica is a country full of values."
Excerpt 2	"Less stereotypical representation."
Excerpt 3	"It is bigger than I thought, and multicultural."
Excerpt 4	"Jamaica is a very cultural country with lots of events and celebrations, but there is still a lot of conflict among the population.
Excerpt 5	"It is no longer thought of as somewhat of a utopia, but rather as somewhere where various issues are present, just like everywhere else in the world."
Excerpt 6	"They have many different cultures within the overarching 'French Culture'."
Excerpt 7	"…I think they are a very liberated society because they have more choices in their educational direction and so on."
Excerpt 8	"It is still the same, like a dream. This project makes me want to go there even more."

The evolution in representation of Jamaica and Jamaican culture by UCA students is also documented in the end-of-project reflexive journal in which they noted that ClerKing has allowed students "to remove the clichés" they had on Jamaica and "to come out with a beautiful vision" of the country and its inhabitants. One participant summarised her experienced in this manner: "The exchanges allowed me to develop my general culture by learning new things about a country and a culture that I barely knew before that." Additionally, "they allowed me to realise how wonderful the Jamaican culture is, that Jamaicans try to be happy in all circumstances, which makes me put a lot into perspective."

The students' knowledge of the target culture was further enhanced by the various topics discussed throughout the project, as seen in the experts of their self-declared gains in the post-project questionnaire.

Table 5. Excerpts of students' self-reported cultural gains from phase 3 of the ClerKing project

Excerpt 1	"Jamaica celebrates many things, and religion is an important part of politics and culture in general."
Excerpt 2	"Jamaica has two seasons, we have the same taboos, I know more Jamaican heroes..."
Excerpt 3	"In France, we don't know much about Jamaican culture, so this enabled me to learn more about it, such as the fact that they are practically all Christians."
Excerpt 4	"How to behave in Barbados (an example that stuck with me: you must never open the saucepans in someone else's kitchen, even a family friend, it's very frowned upon. Whereas in France it's considered almost a compliment, or at least well accepted), but also how to keep an open mind with people from other cultures."
Excerpt 5	"I've learnt more about how the French interact with each other, certain stereotypes and historic aspects of their culture."
Excerpt 6	"The French give three kisses instead of two and being polite is very important to the French."
Excerpt 7	"I learnt that French people are a bit nonchalant to their surroundings but express themselves through different arts. Also, very blunt (knew this already but this project gave me the opportunity to experience it)."
Excerpt 8	"I did not know there are not many black persons in Russia. I also did not know about their political situation."

The findings reveal that students are conscious of numerous factors that could affect a teletandem project, whether through personal estimation or lived experiences. The students' responses highlight four major categories of factors impacting intercultural communication:

A. Language barriers: This category encompasses various aspects beyond simple vocabulary limitations to include other linguistics elements such as pronunciation (accent), syntax (grammatical structures), speed and fluency of speech, and the challenges of accurate translation as significant obstacles. In their study involving English as a lingua franca telecollaboration, Kohn and Hoffstaedter (2017) highlight that learners are prone to facing various issues throughout their interactions such as the proper delivery of certain words. Nevertheless, Madden et al. (2021) found that telecollaborative projects "aid in the development of language skills, such as vocabulary and grammar development, as well as pronunciation" (p. 212).

B. Cultural differences: This category extends beyond mere differences in etiquette and acknowledges the profound impact of varying communication styles (direct vs indirect), non-verbal cues (body language, gestures), deeply ingrained cultural norms and values, and fundamentally different worldviews shaping perceptions and interactions. This aspect supports findings from O'Dowd and Ritter (2006), who, on an interactional level, identified that elements such as cultural differences in communication styles and behaviours, including attitudes and the use of humour or figurative language, can lead to failed communication.

C. Technological and logistical issues: This category specifically highlights the practical challenges of internet connectivity and time-zone differences as significant barriers to effective communication. Helm (2015) alludes to these elements, noting that telecollaborative projects should consider mediating technology and their design, the overall organisation of students' courses to include their timetables and contact hours. Yang (2020) emphasized that time difference can have a major impact on telecollaborative projects, especially between cultures that share significantly different geographical locations. In her study between American and Korean university learners, she noted that although the students were able to work individually in their preferred time, "the time differences seemed to significantly affect frequency in their communication" (p. 37). Madden and Ashby (2021) who found that "challenges related to the time

difference, internet connectivity, schedules, and misunderstanding can negatively affect a telecollaborative project" further support this (p. 205).

D. Individual factors: This is perhaps the most nuanced category, highlighting the role of individual personality traits and, crucially, the level of open-mindedness as critical influencers. A willingness to engage, understand, and appreciate diverse perspectives is shown as directly affecting successful communication. This is at the core of ICC, which is to critically assess glocal intercultural issues, appreciate diverse perspectives, and engage in open and effective communication with people from different backgrounds (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Madden, 2022; OECD, 2018).

The responses provided by the students demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the factors that can affect intercultural communication, moving beyond simplistic views. They indicated both the concrete (language, technology) and the abstract (cultural perspectives, individual attitudes) challenges involved. The analysis highlights a clear recognition of the complexities and the multifaceted nature of successful cross-cultural interaction, underscoring the need for both linguistic proficiency and cultural sensitivity. The emphasis on open-mindedness highlights the importance of a receptive and adaptive attitude in successful cross-cultural communication.

Concerning students' perceptions of the target cultures – Jamaica and France – the analysis reveals shifts in understanding and the impact of teletandem projects on preconceived notions.

The pre-project perceptions reveal a reliance on stereotypes and limited first-hand knowledge, particularly among UCA students regarding Jamaica. The responses fall into predictable patterns:

Jamaica: Responses are heavily influenced by stereotypical imagery: tranquillity, beaches, music (Bob Marley), and general positive vibes (as supported by Madden et al., in press). While some acknowledge limited knowledge, the dominant theme is the romanticised representation of Jamaica as a tropical paradise. Even the more nuanced response (Excerpt 3, Table 3) still starts with a "usual popular cliché" before adding historical and resilient aspects. This indicates a reliance on readily available, potentially limited, portrayals. Nevertheless, the responses are not surprising, as the students did not have much prior exposure of the target culture coming into the project.

France: On the other hand, the UWI students' pre-project views of France demonstrate a more comprehensive, albeit still somewhat stereotypical, understanding. They listed elements such as historical events, art, architecture, cuisine, fashion, and language. The focus is on established cultural markers rather than individual experiences. This suggests familiarity through exposure to French culture via education and media. Understandably, the UWI students have had prior exposure to French and French culture whether at the secondary or university level.

Interestingly, the post-project responses highlight a significant shift in understanding, particularly regarding Jamaica. The 100% reporting of cultural gains (compared to 68.4% linguistic gains) reveals the project's success in fostering cultural understanding. The responses demonstrate:

Jamaica: A notable shift away from stereotypes is evident. Students begin to see beyond the superficial, acknowledging complexity and internal conflict (Excerpt 4, Table 4). The "utopia" perception is replaced by a more realistic view (Excerpt 5, Table 4). The emphasis shifts from simplistic tropes to an appreciation of cultural richness, values, and internal societal dynamics. The reflexive journal entries further support this, highlighting a move from clichés to a more "beautiful vision". This reflects a deeper engagement with the complexity of Jamaican culture.

France: The post-project responses on France show less dramatic change but still offer some evolution. The discovery of internal cultural diversity (Excerpt 6, Table 4) and a more liberated society (Excerpt 7, Table 4) suggests the project broadened the students' understanding beyond the typical tourist perspective.

The comparison of pre- and post-project responses highlights the project's effectiveness in fostering intercultural understanding, which is a primary objective of teletandem projects. The initial reliance on stereotypes, particularly concerning Jamaica, was successfully challenged. The project facilitated a deeper engagement with the target cultures, moving beyond surface-level perceptions to a richer and more nuanced understanding – an aim of critical telecollaboration (Madden, 2022). The strong emphasis on cultural gains over linguistic gains (in the post-project questionnaire) suggests the project's success in altering students' perspectives rather than simply improving language skills. This indicates a successful intercultural learning experience that effectively challenged existing preconceptions and fostered a more nuanced, appreciative understanding of both Jamaica and France. The qualitative data from the reflexive journals strongly corroborates these findings.

Similarly, the experts in Table 5 demonstrated the acquisition of specific cultural knowledge related to both Jamaica and France. The examples illustrate a move beyond stereotypes towards a deeper comprehension of cultural nuances and practices. UCA students gained insights into the role of religion in Jamaican politics and culture (Excerpt 1), learnt about seasonal patterns, shared cultural taboos (Excerpt 2), and discovered the dominant Christian faith (Excerpt 3). Excerpt 4, though seemingly about Barbados, highlights the project's success in promoting cross-cultural comparisons and emphasizing the importance of understanding diverse cultural norms (even within the Caribbean). UWI students learnt about French social etiquette, such as the customary three-kiss greeting (Excerpt 6), the importance of politeness (Excerpt 6), and a perceived nonchalance towards their surroundings, coupled with artistic expression (Excerpt 7). The mention of a lack of knowledge about black representation in Russia (Excerpt 8) demonstrates that the project broadened their understanding beyond the initial focus on France and Jamaica.

The data supports existing research, which posits that teletandem is useful in developing students' ICC. Teletandem equips participants with the postulation of culture and interculturality (Üzüm et al., 2020), improves culture-specific knowledge (Madden et al., 2021), and cultivates students' appreciation towards learning a new language and culture (Batunan et al., 2023). Contrary to several other telecollaborative projects, phase 3 of ClerKing not only allowed for the impartation of factual information but it also fostered a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity and the importance of intercultural sensitivity. However, the success of this phase was also dependent on students' ability and willingness to engage in cross-cultural interactions with a certain degree of openness and curiosity, as established in both Byram's (1997) and Deardorff's (2006) models of ICC. This is further supported by Madden's (2022) framework of ICC, which equally places emphasis on effective interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Furthermore, the topics discussed in the project played an important role in knowledge-sharing, perspective-taking, and intercultural positioning. It means, therefore, that conceptualisers of telecollaborative projects are to be mindful of the topics that they give students to discuss. Even though some of them may lead to intercultural friction (Madden, 2022), it is necessary to expose students to topics that will enhance their reflective skills and assess their own perspectives on intercultural issues.

5. Conclusion

The study assessed students' perceptions of factors that can affect cross-cultural communication and the extent to which they have developed ICC in the ClerKing teletandem project. Major findings reveal four primary categories that can affect intercultural communication: (i) language barrier – grammar, tenses, fluency, limited vocabulary, mistranslation, and figurative language; (ii) cultural difference – communication styles, including verbal and non-verbal communication, values, norms, and worldviews; (iii) technical and logistical issues – internet connectivity, differences in time zones and personal and academic schedules; and (iv) individual factors – personality trait, level of open-mindedness, and appreciation for diversity. These factors recognise the complex and multifaceted nature of intercultural interaction, emphasizing the need for both linguistic proficiency and cultural sensitivity. Concerning the development of ICC, the findings also reveal that all the respondents experienced intercultural development in a personal manner, whether through moving beyond stereotypical representations of the target culture to

a more critical perspective, or the attainment of culture-specific knowledge and awareness. The study also shows that the richness of teletandem projects is also dependent on the topics discussed. Topics such as geography, heroes, religion, and taboos were particularly referenced in students' self-reported gains. It is necessary for teletandem projects to incorporate topics that will propel students to engage in critical reflection, as opposed to having mere surface conversations. Furthermore, the study reports that learners who are not necessarily from the target cultures being studied, or those who are bicultural, bring an added advantage to teletandem projects, as they share perspectives from more than one viewpoint. Moreover, the success of teletandem lies within students' demonstrating key skills and attitudes, such as being adaptable and open-minded, especially when interacting with opposite cultures with a significantly different time zone.

6. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Despite the gains recorded, the study is limited in that the findings do not allow for generalisations, especially given the small number of participants. In addition, UWI students were not asked to submit a summative reflective journal to have an even broader understanding of their views of the project. Furthermore, the time difference between Jamaica and France affected the quality of exchanges between some of the students. Notwithstanding, the overall data was sufficient. With regard to future research, it would be interesting to implement teletandem projects across different universities in Jamaica and other Anglophone Caribbean islands to explore the affordances that it could provide for students. Consequently, it might be useful to explore critical telecollaboration for specific purposes and have partnering students examine glocal issues and create a project to address the various phenomena.

7. Acknowledgements

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Appendices

A – Pre-project questionnaire

Place of birth (optional)

If you are a foreign student, for how long have you been in France?

Native language

Other languages practised and their level (A1-C2)

Write down five (5) words that come to mind when you hear the words Skype, WhatsApp, and Zoom.

Do you use the three social media mentioned above? Select yes or no.

How often do you use these social media? (very regularly, fairly regularly, not regularly, never)

For what reasons do you use these social media? (private, professional, academic)

Have you ever used social media to communicate with persons of a different language and culture? If yes, which social network/s and for what purpose/s?

In your opinion, what factors can affect communication with someone of another language and culure?

What aspects of foreign language (English or French) are you most concerned about? (For example, accent, fluency, tenses, vocabulary, etc.)

In your opinion, what can social media bring to the learning of a foreign language?

What does Jamaica represent for you? (for Clermontois students) / What does France represent for you? (for Jamaican students)

B – Post-project questionnaire

Did you use any other technological platform apart from WhatsApp? If yes, which one(s)? What for?

How often did you consult the weekly discussion guides in the WhatsApp group? (very frequently, regularly, faily regularly, never)

Did you find these resources to be useful? Why?

With regard to WhatsApp, which of the following communication features did you use during the project? (text, voice message, voice call, video call)

How often did you use this/these feature(s)? (very regularly, regularly, fairly regularly, never)

What do you think about the choice of WhatsApp to do a project of this type?

Did you do all the tasks given? Yes or No (converse with your partner, complete the learning journals, do the interview) Why?

On a scale of 1 to 9 (1 being the lowest and 9 the highest), rank the following themes from the most interesting to the least interesting.

Did you use the two languages recommended (English and French)? Yes/No

Did you find your partner's level in French/English to be lower, similar, or greater compared to your level in English/French? Did this have any effect on your conversations? How?

What do you think about the duration of the project and the period in which it was done?

What do you think about the posture/role of the coordinators of the project?

How do you feel about the exchanges had?

Did you encounter any comprehension problems between you and your partner? Yes/No. If yes, cite some examples.

Do you believe that you have gained any linguistic knowledge? If yes, cite some examples.

Do you believe that you have gained any cultural knowledge? If yes, cite some examples.

After having participated in the project, what is your representation of France/Jamaica?