



Exploring EFL Learners' and Teachers' perspectives in an International Online Exchange Program

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Abstract

In today's interconnected world, fostering intercultural understanding and language acquisition among young learners is increasingly vital. Online exchange programs have emerged as accessible alternatives to traditional exchanges, enabling students to interact globally and build intercultural competencies. This qualitative case study explores the perspectives of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers and students engaged in an intensive international online exchange program organized by *With The World Incorporation, Japan*. The study aimed to identify challenges faced by participants and the strategies employed to overcome them, offering a holistic understanding of the online exchange experience. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis, involving one teacher, a program coordinator, and actively participating students. Thematic analysis revealed challenges such as technical and connectivity issues, language proficiency barriers, sustaining engagement, scheduling conflicts, and cultural differences. Despite these obstacles, the program proved effective through proactive planning, strong technical and logistical support, psychologically safe and task-based pedagogy, engaging content, and continuous feedback. These findings align with established theories, including the digital divide, foreign language anxiety, and self-determination theory. The study highlights how adaptive strategies can transform barriers into opportunities to enhance English proficiency, promote intercultural understanding, and develop global competencies. The results provide practical implications for educators and program designers, emphasizing dynamic content, adaptive teaching approaches, and feedback mechanisms to optimize future online exchange initiatives.

Keywords: *Online exchange program, teachers' perspectives, students' perspectives, challenges, strategies*

Introduction

In today's interconnected world, fostering intercultural understanding and language acquisition among young learners has become increasingly vital. Developing intercultural communicative competence, as emphasized by Byram (2008), equips learners to navigate diverse cultural contexts and thrive in a global society. Intercultural education not only promotes empathy, respect for diversity, and critical thinking (Byram, 2008; Risager, 2007) but also enriches language learning through authentic communicative experiences (Sercu, 2005). Teachers play a pivotal role in creating inclusive environments that support such learning (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Yet, while traditional student exchange programs have long been viewed as effective in broadening students' worldviews and language skills (Brooks & Brooks, 2018), they are often hindered by high costs, travel restrictions, and logistical challenges.

The emergence of virtual exchange programs has been widely recognized as a promising alternative (Belz & Möller, 2013; O'Dowd, 2019). These initiatives leverage online platforms to enable students from diverse cultural backgrounds to interact without the barriers of physical mobility. Research has shown that virtual exchanges reduce inequities of access while supporting the development of intercultural competence, global awareness, and digital literacy (Helm, 2015; O'Dowd, 2018). Through synchronous and asynchronous interactions, students are able to reflect on their intercultural experiences and deepen their perspectives (Stickler & Hampel, 2015). Studies further suggest that integrating such exchanges into curricula strengthens empathy, critical thinking, and collaboration across cultural boundaries (Lewis & O'Dowd, 2016; Vinagre, 2016), while technological advances continue to expand their pedagogical potential (Belz, 2007). Nevertheless, research also highlights that the benefits of exchange—whether abroad or virtual—are uneven and often constrained.

Ang and Earley (2003) found that study abroad experiences, while impactful, can be limited by language barriers, restricted engagement with local communities, and reliance on expatriate networks. To maximize intercultural competence, they recommend comprehensive preparation, structured opportunities for immersion, and guided reflection. Similarly, Byram (2008) and Deardorff (2006) stress that meaningful intercultural learning requires more than exposure: it requires supportive environments and critical reflection. In the Indonesian EFL context, structured learning strategies have been shown to enhance speaking proficiency and learner autonomy (Mistar & Umamah, 2014), indicating the importance of intentional pedagogical design for maximizing benefits in both physical and online exchanges.

Despite this growing body of research, gaps remain. Much of the literature has focused on long-term study abroad or semester-long exchanges, with fewer studies examining the unique dynamics of short-term, recurring online programs (Kern, 2015; Liu et al., 2017; Emir & Yangın-Ekşi, 2024). Although studies have

documented improvements in language confidence, motivation, and intercultural understanding in online contexts (Jung, 2009; Lee, 2013; Helm, 2024), there is still limited qualitative insight into the specific challenges teachers and students face in practice (Hauck & Youngs, 2008; O'Dowd, 2018). Even less is known about which strategies participants themselves perceive as most effective in overcoming these challenges and sustaining meaningful engagement (O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016). Without such insider perspectives, efforts to refine virtual exchanges risk overlooking the realities of classroom implementation and learner experience.

To address this gap, the present study examines the Intensive International Online Exchange Program developed by With the World Incorporation Japan. Established in 2018, the organization partners with over 500 schools across 67 countries, promoting inquiry-based learning and intercultural collaboration around the Sustainable Development Goals (With the World Co., Ltd., n.d.). By focusing on the perspectives of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers and students who directly participate in this initiative, the study seeks to answer two key questions: (1) What challenges do EFL teachers and students perceive when engaging in the program? and (2) What strategies do they identify as effective for sustaining participation and intercultural learning?. The objective is to generate nuanced, context-specific insights that inform both theory and practice.

The novelty of this research rests in its emphasis on short-term, recurring online exchanges within an EFL context. Unlike many previous studies that describe virtual exchange in broad terms, this study provides a detailed account of the lived experiences of both teachers and learners. Such stakeholder-informed insights provide a more grounded understanding of the opportunities and challenges inherent in program implementation. By framing the investigation within a global initiative, the study advances scholarship on intercultural competence, online learning, and EFL pedagogy. At the same time, it offers practical recommendations to enhance the design and effectiveness of future international online exchange programs.

Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design, deemed most suitable for examining participants' experiences and perceptions in depth. A case study approach enabled a focused exploration of a phenomenon within a bounded system, capturing the nuances of both individual and collective experiences. This design enabled an understanding of how participants engaged with and made meaning of their involvement in an intercultural online exchange program. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Moser and Korstjens (2017) note, case studies provided a framework for exploring complex interactions within specific contexts. Instead of aiming for broad generalisation, the study emphasized the richness of lived experiences and the dynamic interplay of contextual, social, and pedagogical factors.

The participants were selected using purposive sampling (Tongco, 2007), with the primary criterion being direct involvement in the online exchange. The sample included one English teacher, one international program coordinator, and a group of eight students who were active in an extracurricular English club. To reflect varied perspectives, two particularly engaged students—one male and one female—were given more detailed attention in the analysis. This composition allowed for the triangulation of insights between teacher, coordinator, and learners while ensuring depth in the description of individual experiences (Morgan, 2019).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The interview protocols were adapted from Leong and Said's (2024) framework, covering aspects of preparation, challenges, strategies, and reflections. The teacher interview contained 18 questions, while the student interview contained 12, each lasting approximately two hours. Interviews were conducted both face-to-face and online to accommodate participants' availability. Member-checking procedures and the engagement of an external auditor were used to strengthen credibility.

Observations were carried out during the online exchange sessions to capture authentic interactions as they unfolded. An observation checklist adapted from Escobar Urmeneta (2024) guided the process, focusing on teacher competence, student participation, technology use, and intercultural communication. In addition, document analysis of lesson plans and instructional materials was conducted to compare intended objectives with classroom realities. Together, these techniques provided a comprehensive picture of how the program was designed, implemented, and experienced.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model: familiarisation, generating codes, developing themes, reviewing, defining, and reporting. An inductive approach allowed themes to emerge organically from the data, while deductive refinement ensured alignment with the study's objectives. Two overarching categories were developed: challenges, which encompassed issues of technology, language proficiency, motivation, scheduling, and intercultural communication; and strategies, which included proactive planning, technical and pedagogical support, motivational scaffolding, and adaptive feedback. Triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents reinforced the reliability of the findings and strengthened their interpretive validity. Through this systematic process of design, sampling, data collection, and analysis, the study generated an in-depth understanding of the obstacles and strategies that shape participation in an international online exchange program.

Findings

The study explored EFL teachers' and students' perspectives on *With The World Incorporation Japan's Intensive International Online Exchange Program*. Data were gathered through interviews with the Japanese coordinator, an Indonesian teacher, and student participants, complemented by classroom observations and document analysis. The analysis revealed two central themes: the challenges encountered during the program and the strategies employed to overcome them. These findings highlight the collaborative efforts of coordinators, teachers, and students in sustaining meaningful intercultural learning experiences.

1. Challenges of the Program

One of the most frequently cited challenges was technical disruption, which affected nearly every participant. The coordinator emphasized difficulties with unstable internet connections, device malfunctions, sound feedback, and time differences that sometimes led to miscalculated schedules. She explained:

"The challenges in managing the programs are dealing with connectivity, device issues, sound feedback because students joined in the same place without wearing earphones, and time differences which can affect unexpected problems related to participant attendance or miscalculated the time." (Coordinator's interview, June 10, 2025)

The local teacher confirmed these issues at the classroom level, noting that students were often disconnected or struggled to join virtual rooms, which created frustration. Students themselves echoed this, describing how missed sessions left them feeling anxious and behind. As one student shared:

"I have issues with my internet connection. Sometimes, the connection is unstable, and I get disconnected during essential discussions. That makes me miss some parts of the session and leaves me feeling left behind." (Student's interview, June 6, 2025, my translation)

Observation notes supported these accounts, showing how technical disruptions frequently interrupted the interaction flow and reduced students' ability to fully engage with the program.

Another major obstacle was students' limited proficiency in English. The coordinator highlighted shyness and lack of confidence, especially during the early sessions. According to her:

"The common challenges are initial shyness and language proficiency barriers. At the beginning, students usually feel shy to speak because of nervousness and language barrier, however, they can try to speak to each other along the time, which also assists with the learning assistance who encourage them to be active." (Coordinator interview, June 10, 2025)

The teacher added that accents, speed of speech, and occasional cultural misunderstandings intensified these difficulties. Students expressed their struggles in concrete terms:

"The most challenging part for me is understanding English quickly. Sometimes, the speaker speaks very fast, and I cannot catch all the words." (Student's interview, June 8, 2025, my translation)

Observation notes confirmed that many students reverted to their first language (L1) when tasks became challenging, and some hesitated to participate in extended discussions. While severe grammatical errors were not consistently observed, the tendency to avoid speaking revealed that proficiency and confidence remained central barriers to effective communication.

Engagement was another area of concern. The coordinator observed that some students turned off their cameras and stayed silent during sessions:

"The problem sometimes occurs if there is one or two students tend to be silent and turning off the camera. We would like everyone to be active in the group discussion or session and include everyone in the discussion, so we usually call the student directly if she/he has any opinion or question about the topic being discussed." (Coordinator's interview, June 10, 2025)

The teacher, however, emphasized that long sessions often caused boredom. At the same time, students described losing interest when activities were repetitive or when cultural topics, such as Japanese traditions, were unfamiliar to them. One student admitted:

"Yes, there are times when I feel bored, especially during group discussions and it takes a long time to respond to questions or when I don't really understand the topic. For example, about Japanese culture which I have no prior understanding of. It is hard to stay motivated because I feel like I can't contribute much to the discussion." (Student's interview, June 6, 2025, my translation)

These findings suggest that student motivation was closely linked to content relevance and task design.

Time management was another challenge, especially for the local teacher. While the coordinator noted time zone differences, the teacher had to navigate program sessions that clashed with regular school schedules. She explained:

"The activity was during school hours. Moreover, the schedule does not match. The students should leave the classroom when the programs were conducted. However, when the activity was on Friday, the boy (Muslim) should leave the session for prayer." (Teacher's interview, June 8, 2025)

Students also confirmed that overlapping schedules created conflicts with their schoolwork and religious commitments, showing how global coordination often overlooked local realities. Cultural differences served both as an opportunity and a challenge. The coordinator viewed them as learning moments, stressing the importance of respect:

"Each region/country has their different cultural background. Thus, we always ask all students to respect each other and create a comfortable session. For example, focus on listening while others are having presentations or speaking, not eating or playing during the session." (Coordinator's interview, June 10, 2025)

At the same time, some students struggled to engage with unfamiliar cultural topics, which sometimes led to feelings of boredom or confusion. Thus, while intercultural exposure was a key strength of the program, it also required careful scaffolding to maximize student engagement.

2. Strategies to Overcome Challenges

The findings also revealed that the program successfully developed and implemented a wide range of strategies to respond to these challenges. These strategies were collaborative, involving coordinators, teachers, and students alike. The program began with careful participant selection, considering students' English proficiency, age, and interests. This ensured more balanced groupings and minimized communication gaps. Orientation sessions were conducted prior to the program to familiarize students with the technical tools, program schedules, and rules. As the teacher explained:

"Yes, there was orientation before the sessions. The students and teacher were gathered in a Zoom meeting. They explained how the session ran, what should be prepared, the timetable, and the topic. It was really helpful for them that they had an insight about the program."

(Teacher's interview, June 8, 2025)

The coordinator required pre-session device checks and asked teachers to prepare backup devices in case of issues. She stated:

"Related to connection and technical issues, we will ask the teacher to provide additional devices in advance to avoid any issue occurring. We will ensure everything is running well before the session by conducting orientation and observing the students during the session."

(Coordinator's interview, June 10, 2025)

At the local level, the teacher adjusted her teaching schedule and requested permission from colleagues so students could participate. She explained:

"To manage my teaching schedule, I assigned tasks to my students and left the classroom to guide them at another location. I also requested permission from the teachers to leave their classrooms because they have to join With the World Inc. Japan's Intensive program."

(Teacher's interview, June 8, 2025)

The program incorporated task-based learning, requiring students to deliver presentations, conduct interviews, and complete collaborative projects. These tasks provided students with authentic opportunities to practice English while also learning about cultural content. Scaffolding was consistently applied through sentence starters, vocabulary lists, and simplified instructions, which helped students gradually build confidence. The use of small breakout rooms created more intimate spaces for discussion, reducing anxiety and increasing participation. The coordinator reinforced the importance of participation over accuracy:

"We also encourage students that the program is not to test their English proficiency. Instead, this program would like to practice their public speaking, experience an international discussion, and learn about each other's cultures. Thus, making grammar mistakes is totally okay, if students can try to be active." (Coordinator's interview, June 10, 2025)

Engagement was maintained through reminders, mandatory participation, and a variety of activities. The coordinator regularly followed up with schools to ensure attendance and task submission. Meanwhile, teachers provided encouragement and adapted activities to match students' proficiency levels. Students themselves reported feeling more confident after supportive feedback from peers and teachers:

"What made me feel more confident was previous practice with friends and teachers at school. Besides that, the friendly and respectful atmosphere in the online sessions made me feel safe trying to speak, even if there were many mistakes. The more I tried, the more I got used to it and became braver." (Student's interview, June 6, 2025, my translation)

Finally, the program integrated ongoing feedback mechanisms. Post-program meetings were conducted with teachers to evaluate both challenges and successes. The coordinator explained:

"Post-meeting will be conducted after the program finish, which aims to share feedback from With The World and teacher itself, also strengthen collaboration between teachers and With The World for future programs." (Coordinator's interview, June 10, 2025)

Teachers also reflected with their students after sessions, discussing barriers and encouraging them to propose solutions. This iterative process helped refine the program and sustain long-term improvement.

Discussion

This section discusses the perspectives of EFL teachers and students on With the World Incorporation Japan's Intensive International Online Exchange Program. The findings are interpreted in relation to relevant theories and prior research, providing deeper insights into the experiences of participants. Two overarching themes structure the discussion: the challenges faced in implementing the program and the strategies developed to overcome them. These themes illustrate how teachers, students, and coordinators worked to ensure meaningful engagement and learning.

1. Challenges in the Intensive International Online Exchange Program

Despite its promising design, the program encountered several obstacles. Key challenges included technical disruptions, limited language proficiency, low engagement, scheduling conflicts, and cultural gaps. While such difficulties are common in online and intercultural contexts, they significantly influenced learners' motivation and participation. Ultimately, these issues shaped the effectiveness of the program and its learning outcomes.

One of the most pressing challenges identified in the program was technical and connectivity problems. Students frequently faced unstable internet connections, slow feedback, malfunctioning devices, and difficulties in navigating online platforms. These issues often led to frustration and nervousness, with some learners feeling that their participation resulted in learning loss. The findings resonate with studies on the digital divide (Gorski, 2020; Warschauer, 2003), which highlight unequal access to reliable technology as a barrier to learning. They also reflect the concept of technostress (Brod, 1984; Salo & Pirkkalainen, 2020), which posits that technological challenges generate anxiety and reduce engagement.

A significant challenge that emerged in the program was language proficiency and communication barriers. Many students reported feelings of shyness and nervousness, which often hindered their ability to express themselves confidently. They also struggled to understand diverse accents, rapid speech, and informal expressions such as slang, which added to their difficulties. These problems reduced students' willingness to communicate, supporting research on foreign language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986) that highlights the impact of affective barriers on language learning. Furthermore, since intercultural exchanges require intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006), students' limited exposure and linguistic preparedness made meaningful interaction more challenging.

Engagement and motivation also emerged as significant challenges in the program. Several students expressed feelings of boredom, especially when activities were too lengthy, topics seemed irrelevant, or they lacked sufficient background knowledge. According to Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017), such conditions can reduce intrinsic motivation when learners' needs for competence, autonomy, or relatedness are not fulfilled. Flow Theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) also explains that boredom occurs when there is a mismatch between learners' skills and the task's difficulty. This was evident in the program when activities were not well aligned with students' level of preparedness.

In addition, logistical and scheduling conflicts created challenges. The program's sessions were often scheduled during regular school hours, placing extra burdens on teachers who had to manage student absences from their regular lessons. For instance, local teachers needed to negotiate with school administrators and balance program activities with cultural and religious practices, such as Friday prayers. This reflects the broader complexities of incorporating external programs into existing educational systems and underscores the importance of contextual and institutional factors in implementation (Scott, 2008).

Finally, cultural differences served as both a source of enrichment and challenge. While the exchange aimed to enhance intercultural understanding, students sometimes struggled to understand cultural nuances, such as accents, slang, or unfamiliar discussion topics. Lacking prior knowledge, some became disengaged. These findings align with theories of *cultural adaptation and adjustment* (Kim, 2001; Oberg, 1960), which suggest that unfamiliar cultural environments can evoke uncertainty, discomfort, and withdrawal before leading to eventual adaptation. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the program's challenges were multidimensional—technical, linguistic, motivational, logistical, and cultural. Importantly, each challenge is interrelated with the others, amplifying the difficulty of sustaining engagement and effective communication in an international online learning environment.

2. Strategies for Success in the Intensive International Online Exchange Program

To address these challenges, teachers, students, and coordinators adopted various strategies that supported the program's success. The approaches spanned proactive planning, technical and logistical assistance, and thoughtful pedagogical design. They also included efforts to sustain engagement and motivation throughout the sessions. Finally, continuous feedback was emphasized to refine and strengthen the overall implementation.

Proactive planning and preparation formed the foundation of the program. Careful matching of students based on age, grade level, and English proficiency helped create balanced and relevant groupings, reducing the risk of mismatched communication levels. This approach reflects the importance of learner grouping in supporting effective language learning across diverse individual differences (Mistar, 2002). It resonates with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the *Zone of Proximal Development*, where learners benefit from tasks that are slightly above their current level but still achievable with support. Mandatory orientations for both students and teachers also played a critical role, equipping participants with technical skills, clarifying program expectations, and reducing anxiety before live sessions. This directly addressed technostress (Brod, 1984) and aligns with the *Technology Acceptance Model* (David, 1989), which highlights the importance of perceived ease of use for user engagement.

The program also relied heavily on robust technical and logistical support. Pre-session device and connection checks were implemented, and teachers prepared additional devices as backups. These measures helped reduce disruptions and reflect awareness of the *digital divide* (Gorski, 2020; Warschauer, 2003). On the logistical side, teachers coordinated with schools to manage student absences and adjust schedules, including accommodating cultural practices. This illustrates the necessity of localized problem-solving within broader organizational frameworks (Scott, 2008).

Equally important was the program's intentional pedagogical and communicative design. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) principles (Long, 1985; Willis, 1996) guided the program, with activities such as presentations, interviews, and discussions requiring the use of meaningful language. Scaffolding techniques gradually increased the complexity of tasks, moving from individual to collaborative work. Small-group breakout rooms were especially effective in creating low-stress environments for communication, directly countering *foreign language anxiety* (Horwitz et al., 1986). Encouragement from teachers and coordinators to participate despite errors helped foster a sense of psychological safety, consistent with Krashen's (1985) *Affective Filter Hypothesis*. Additionally, cultural exchange segments and presentations were used to intentionally build *intercultural communicative competence* (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006).

Maintaining student interest required deliberate strategies for engagement and motivation. The program promoted personal relevance by allowing students to share aspects of their own culture and hometown, thereby fostering intrinsic motivation. These practices align with *Self-Determination Theory* (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017), which stresses autonomy and competence as key motivational drivers. The program's pacing and varied activities also helped prevent boredom, while teachers provided constant encouragement to sustain participation. Peer-level learning, where students realized that their international counterparts faced similar challenges, reduced anxiety and boosted confidence. This aligns with findings from recent studies, which show that supportive learning environments foster students' willingness to communicate (Lee, 2023; Ubaidillah et al., 2023).

Finally, continuous feedback and adaptive improvement ensured the program's ongoing development and improvement. Students and teachers provided feedback on satisfaction, topics, and logistical concerns, which coordinators used to refine future sessions. Post-program reflection meetings with teachers facilitated professional development and program adjustment. Such iterative practices reflect *formative evaluation* (Scriven, 1967) and action research cycles, where ongoing feedback drives both immediate and long-term improvements. Recent studies (Husnah et al., 2023; Lee, 2013; Ubaidillah et al., 2023) similarly underscore the importance of feedback in adapting pedagogical approaches to learners' needs.

These strategies demonstrate that success in international online exchanges requires careful integration of planning, technical readiness, pedagogical design, motivational support, and iterative improvement. Each element directly addressed the multifaceted challenges faced by students and teachers, enabling the program to achieve its goals of fostering linguistic competence and intercultural understanding.

Conclusion

This study critically examined the implementation of *With The World Incorporation Japan's Intensive International Online Exchange Program* from the perspectives of both teachers and students. The findings revealed that participants encountered complex challenges, including technical and connectivity issues, limited language proficiency, communication barriers, fluctuating motivation, scheduling conflicts, and intercultural adjustment. These challenges resonate with existing theoretical frameworks such as the digital divide (van Dijk, 2020), technostress (Tarafdar et al., 2019), foreign language anxiety (Horwitz, 2016), self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and intercultural competence frameworks (Byram, 2008).

Despite these constraints, the program demonstrated significant potential to enhance English proficiency, intercultural communication skills, and global awareness. Success was achieved through proactive planning, robust technical support, task-based pedagogical strategies, and continuous feedback mechanisms. Importantly, the program illustrated how an adaptive, collaborative, and theory-driven approach can transform barriers into opportunities for meaningful learning.

However, the conclusions of this study should be interpreted within certain limitations. First, the sample size was small, involving only one teacher, one coordinator, and two students, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Second, the data relied on self-reported experiences, which may introduce subjective bias. Third, the study focused on a single program within a specific context, so results may differ across other schools or cultural environments. Future research with larger and more diverse samples will be essential to validate and extend these findings.

This study adds to the expanding scholarship on virtual international exchange by offering empirical evidence of its challenges and strategies. It highlights the importance of embedding intercultural exchange within EFL education to enrich language learning. The findings also provide actionable recommendations for overcoming obstacles in program implementation. In doing so, the research offers practical guidance for educators, coordinators, and policymakers. Ultimately, it emphasizes the need to design online exchange initiatives that are both sustainable and impactful.

To strengthen future implementations of international online exchange programs, several comprehensive recommendations can be drawn from the findings of this study. For program coordinators and *With the World Incorporation Japan*, one of the most urgent priorities is ensuring technical stability. Conducting not only general but also individual internet speed and device checks prior to sessions would minimize disruptions that often hinder participation. Backup plans, such as providing alternative communication platforms (e.g., WhatsApp groups or cloud-shared recordings), should also be in place to ensure continuity in

the event of disruptions. Equally important is the matter of scheduling. Careful alignment across institutions is essential to ensure that academic and cultural calendars are synchronized, thereby preventing clashes with examinations, school activities, or religious commitments. This requires stronger collaboration and communication between Japanese coordinators, Indonesian teachers, and school administrators.

In terms of content and delivery, program activities could be diversified by incorporating more engaging and interactive formats such as simulations, role-playing debates, virtual field trips, or digital escape rooms. Such innovations have the potential to sustain student motivation, reduce boredom, and increase the authenticity of intercultural communication. Introducing cultural previews through short videos, infographics, or interactive quizzes can also enhance readiness and confidence before the exchange begins. In addition, learning assistants should receive more comprehensive training not only in technical facilitation but also in intercultural mediation, enabling them to effectively support shy or struggling students, clarify misunderstandings, and encourage active participation. Finally, program coordinators are encouraged to facilitate professional exchanges among teachers by creating formal communities of practice, webinars, or reflective workshops where educators can share best practices, discuss challenges, and co-develop strategies for program improvement.

For EFL teachers, the study emphasizes the importance of developing stronger technical troubleshooting skills to address standard connectivity, audio, or device issues promptly, thereby minimizing the loss of valuable time during sessions. Teachers are also encouraged to pre-teach key vocabulary, expressions, and cultural references during their regular classes, ensuring that students enter sessions with sufficient linguistic and cultural readiness. Guiding students through structured reflective practices after each session—through journals, peer discussions, or self-assessment checklists—can help them process their learning, identify strengths and weaknesses, and build long-term confidence in communication. Beyond these technical and pedagogical roles, teachers play a crucial part in fostering motivation by celebrating small achievements, encouraging risk-taking in speaking, and sustaining students' commitment to active participation throughout the program's duration.

School administrators likewise hold a pivotal role in sustaining international online exchange programs. They can strengthen institutional support by formally recognizing student participation, for instance, by including it in extracurricular records, transcripts, or certificates of achievement, thereby increasing the program's perceived value among students and parents. Ensuring reliable facilities is equally critical—stable internet connections, sufficient devices, and dedicated learning spaces should be made available, potentially through the creation of an "International Exchange Zone" or digital collaboration hub. Flexible timetabling is also necessary to prevent the exchange from interfering with core academic

activities. Furthermore, administrators are encouraged to invest in teacher professional development, particularly in areas such as online classroom management, intercultural facilitation, and global competence education. Celebrating student achievements publicly—through newsletters, school websites, or recognition ceremonies—can help foster a culture of global engagement that is sustainable within the school.

Ultimately, the success of the program relies heavily on the students' readiness, agency, and willingness to engage. They are encouraged to take ownership of their preparation by utilizing all available orientation resources, testing their devices in advance, and reviewing essential background knowledge prior to sessions. During the exchange, students should actively engage by listening attentively, taking notes, asking questions, and utilizing available tools such as chat functions or breakout rooms to maximize participation. Perhaps most importantly, students should embrace mistakes as natural and valuable parts of the learning process, reframing them as opportunities to practice, improve, and build lasting confidence in their English communication skills. With greater preparation, persistence, and openness to cultural diversity, students will be able to fully benefit from the transformative potential of international online exchange programs.

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