

VIRTUAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND ACADEMIC LANGUAGE SKILLS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: *This paper examines the role of language in two virtual exchanges that took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, between a public university in Spain and two partner universities in the U.S. The exchanges focused on English literature and cultural studies and aimed to enhance intercultural competence, cross-cultural understanding, and skills in English-language literary analysis. The students were able to develop their skills in critical thinking, investigate relevant topics regarding gender, race, and identity, enhance technological competence and digital professionalism, sharpen interpersonal communication and teamwork skills, and improve their use of English for academic purposes. The interactions took place entirely online, in English, and both synchronously and asynchronously. The paper discusses how the English language impacted communication and group work in the international student teams.*

Keywords: *English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), literature and cultural studies, international virtual exchange, intercultural and digital competence, language skills*