

The aim of the project is to develop transferable communication skills in English through an interactive learning infrastructure. It links academic and non-academic worlds, provides opportunities for training and re-training and reflects the needs of practice.

The programme objectives will be achieved by setting up and running virtual trans-national and transversal study circles:

1. by developing training and learning materials for academic and professional purposes
2. by making effective use of advanced technological resources for authentic communication tasks
3. by creating an internationally accessible virtual learning environment (through the development and use of an open subject village web-site and by matching the academic outcomes with the needs of prospective employees).

It will also create opportunities for further training and re-training in transnational communication for professionals, in practicing essential and desirable skills in interviews, providing space for the development of equal opportunities communication.

Videoconferencing – Final Feedback by Participants

Respondents: 13 international students (Chinese, Japanese, French, Dutch, Ukranian etc.) from the University of Aberystwith, Wales, UK (yellow) and 7 Czech students of Law or Social Sciences from Masaryk University Brno, Czech Republic (dark red)

VCs IN GENERAL

Why have you chosen this course?

- Firstly, try the thing I never try before. Secondly, I think it's useful for my job in future
- To improve my English
- Because I was interested in improve my English communication ability
- To enjoy discussion
- It was on timetable
- To meet new activities, new people, new ideas and practice English
- It is an opportunity to try something new (have never participated in a VC before), meet new people and practice communication skills.
- And after 2 semesters of legal English, I wanted a change
- I need to speak English – I am not very well and when I speak with Czech people I try to use Czech words – they understand and for me it is easier

Was it the first time you've participated in a videoconference (VC)?

- Yes – 12
- No – it was the 5th time – 1
- Yes – 6
- No, in English yes.

What have you learnt from participating in the VC course on: the language level

- It helps me with communication
- Well, their English are really good, this push me improve my english
- I learnt to choose the appropriate language suitable for different situations
- To understand people with different accents
- For new expressions
- It is not important to have excellent English but to communicate

the social skills level

- Pose and wait others to speak
- I learnt from the group world
- Approaching everybody differently
- I am very at high level regarding social skills already

the multicultural level

- I have already in a multi-cultural situation, so do not feel anything about it
- It is very interesting to have several cultures and each people had a different register and different accents
- For me, it was interesting to know different cultures, but sometimes the subject was not suitable for me. It was difficult and I had not tiny idea about certain subject. It made me hard to talk and I felt nervous to be a fish out of water.
- Customs from other countries
- There are no differences between young people
- It was exactly what I expected.

the technical level

- Interesting technology
- A little bit but has also not really my interest
- It doesn't always work and we must go on our presentation despite of technical problems
- Zooming in ?!
- The world is relatively small thanks to technology and easily connectible (when there are resources for it)

VC PARTNERS

What was the most interesting thing you learnt about the people you communicated with?

- Way of life and culture of Brno
- Patience and culture differences
- They speak quite good English
- Difference of cultures
- Their academic level, their way of thinking
- The most interesting thing I learnt about the people I communicated with is that we are all nervous and that they don't judge us
- Nothing special, they are guys just like us
- The character of Czech people is really different (vs. Italian...), everybody is other and very interesting
- That despite being in the UK for a long time, their English is rather poor
- You never know what to expect
- It was very interesting to hear other views on topics we already know
- Your people are the same no matter where they are from

How has the "virtual audience" affected the communication/presentation?

- I think it is the same as speaking in front of the real audience
- We can see each other quite clear, I mean their faces, maybe a little bit too formal
- It makes me a little bit difficult to concentrate on conversation, maybe, I was nervous to it
- Harder to interact, much less non-verbal interaction
- Talking slowly, waiting for their reactions
- Well, when the sound or the pictures was stuck or blurry, it was really hard to communicate or ask questions
- You have to take care that you "behave" well in front of your audience. It's not like a normal eye-to-eye conversation
- Hasn't much, it was like communicating with them in one room

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Did you find it easy to contribute to discussions?

- I found it was not easy to contribute to discussion
- Yes, because even if I am not very good in English I like to talk about issues and I have always been interested in the discussion
- First it wasn't but I found it getting better (but still difficult, of course)
- Yes, that was not a problem at all
- Mainly yes
- Depended on the questions – some were incomprehensible
- Yes. I think that most of the time I had something to say. I had also enough time to express my views.
- Yes, I did, I enjoyed it.

Do you think that some of the skills you've developed due to the participation in this course will help you in your future carrier? Which skills?

- I think that the participation will help me in my future carrier. The skills are how to do a presentation.
- Yes, I will be quite confident in VC, at least I know what it is and I have done it before
- To talk to some audience is not easy generally. In that case, I had good experience, but I am not sure it will help me
- Yes, improve my understanding and patience with other people
- I don't think so, but possible I improved my communication skills
- Surely – the presentation skills – they are very important for a lawyer
- Chairing a discussion – meeting

**THE LEARNING CURVE OF VIDEOCONFERENCING
HOW THE STUDENTS SEE IT**



This poster introduces a survey into student attitudes towards videoconferencing as a new mode of classroom interaction.

The data was obtained through a series of questionnaires, observations and interviews mapping out what students learnt from the experience of participating in a videoconference and what they felt about using this new means of communication to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds.

All of those interviewed were students at the tertiary level. Two groups were undergraduates from Masaryk University in the Czech Republic, one consisting of law students, the other of students of social sciences. They were interacting with two groups of exchange students, mostly European and Asian, currently studying or preparing to study at the University of Aberystwith in Wales, UK.

The working language was English, but communication in a foreign language was not the only obstacle the participants had to overcome. They had to acquire a special set of social skills, develop multi-cultural awareness, a technical background, to quote just a few.

Respondents: 13 international students (Chinese, Japanese, French, Dutch, Ukranian etc.) from the University of Aberystwith, Wales, UK and 7 Czech students of Law or Social Sciences from Masaryk University Brno, Czech Republic. English was not their native language. As becomes apparent from the answers, they were of different levels of sophistication and mastery of the language.

Note: the students' answers are provided unedited

What advice would you give to other students thinking about taking part in a videoconferencing course?

- To try to take part in discussion. To do active listening even if you are nervous
- It is a nice experience. You will perform better. Whether in an interview or in any a face-to-face situation if you come to a VC
- If you are interested in communication, it will be good experience for you
- Listen carefully
- It will help you! You get new experience which you can't get other. It is fun but learning too. You know people from many countries
- It's not only about you being able to talk/discuss in English, but it is about you being able to understand as well
- I would persuade them to take part
- Take it easy, stay cool – it's fun

LAST BUT NOT LEAST

Is there anything you dislike about videoconferencing?

- Sometimes difficult to understand what they are talking about
- Too sensitive and offensive topic
- Technical constraints
- No, it is a whole new way of communicating
- Not dislike but difficult
- My mood – I was nervous – but it is about me, about VC no.
- They have been quite long, overrunning the time of the lesson
- No, I was always looking forward to the next video conference. Maybe I don't like the technical problems sometimes

What was the most unexpected/surprising thing you've learnt from the whole experience?

- Not to panic
- That even if my English is not so good I can communicate anyway
- You can really involve the people on the other side in discussion
- Even though we are speaking, conferencing force to stop when time is over. I think we need conclusion of conferencing
- That not all people are interested in their human rights and what is going on around them :-)
- That our language knowledge (of English) was on the same or even a better level than the knowledge of the students who are studying in Wales

• What was the most unexpected/surprising thing you've learnt from the whole experience?
This academic level of some Czech students.

• Any other comments/suggestions?
The VC should pay us a flight to Brno every week instead of the VC.

• What was the most memorable moment?
When our video didn't work. It's horrible.

• What was the most unexpected/surprising thing you've learnt from the whole experience?
That I can even if my English is not so good, I can communicate anyway!



SUMMARY

The results of this study indicate that students see VC as a new, exciting and modern means of communication, and, at the same time, a motivating method of learning/teaching a foreign language. They are excited about new opportunities to develop communication skills and learn about different cultures through direct interaction with their VC partners. They appreciate the novelty of this means of communication - in each group, there was only 1 person who had previous experience with VC.

The students feel that participating in VC helps them develop self-confidence -- they learn that they are able to communicate, even though their English, and that of their VC partners, is not perfect. VC encourages the development of interpersonal skills in intercultural communication, placing more emphasis on language fluency than precision. Precision, however, has been found by students to be equally important because its lack hinders communication -- already more restricted than face-to-face interaction in the first place.

Participants practise language skills in general, and communication (speaking and listening) skills in particular, in a real world context. Equally important, they also develop other skills that are crucial for the successful operation of modern professionals, namely the ability to combine social, multicultural, and technical skills in a foreign-language environment. Last but not least, the tasks students engage in prior to and during VCs -- presentations on professional topics -- significantly promote teamwork and students abilities to constructively contribute to a shared goal. In this way, the practice of videoconferencing for foreign language learners helps prepare students for real-life challenges facing university graduates in the modern world, e.g. their efficient involvement in multinational companies.

To conclude, let me quote one of the participants' advice for his/her fellow students: "It is a very good opportunity to practice a lot of things. Do it!!!"