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COLLABORATIVE ONLINE INTERNATIONAL LEARNING IN LEGAL EDUCATION: A POLISH-UKRAINIAN CASE STUDY

As legal education adapts to the globalized legal industry, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) emerges as an effective approach to fostering legal knowledge and transferable skills. This study examines the COIL project for law students from Ukraine and Poland, focusing on its influence on academic performance, employability, and professional growth. The findings highlight COIL's benefits in promoting authentic content learning, enhancing intercultural and digital skills, and boosting student motivation. However, the study also identifies challenges such as differing academic cultures, communication barriers, and varying participant expectations. The research emphasizes COIL's potential to enrich legal English instruction, strengthen digital teaching skills, and promote collaboration between academic institutions. Recommendations are provided to improve COIL project design, with a focus on inclusivity, structured teamwork, and institutional support, ensuring better learning outcomes and enhanced professional development.

Key words: Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), legal education, English for specific purposes, task-based learning, soft skills.

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СПІЛЬНЕ МІЖНАРОДНЕ ОНЛАЙН-НАВЧАННЯ У СФЕРІ ЮРИДИЧНОЇ ОСВІТИ: ПОЛЬСЬКО-УКРАЇНСЬКИЙ ПРИКЛАД

Оскільки юридична освіта адаптується до глобалізації в правовій сфері, спільне міжнародне онлайн-навчання (далі – СМОН) стає ефективним підходом до розвитку правових знань і м'яких навичок. У цьому дослідженні проаналізовано проєкт СМОН для студентів-правників з України та Польщі з огляду на його вплив на академічну успішність, працевлаштування та професійне зростання. Отримані результати підкреслюють переваги методики СМОН для роботи з автентичним матеріалом, покращення міжкультурних і цифрових навичок, а також для підвищення мотивації студентів. Проте дослідження також визначає такі труднощі, як різниця в академічній культурі, комунікаційні бар'єри та різні очікування учасників. Дослідження підкреслює потенціал СМОН для навчання правничої англійської мови, зміцнення цифрових навичок викладання та сприяння співпраці між закладами освіти. Авторами надано рекомендації щодо створення проєктів СМОН з ак-

центом на інклюзивність, структуровану командну роботу та інституційну підтримку, що забезпечуватиме кращі результати навчання та професійний розвиток.

Ключові слова: спільне міжнародне онлайн-навчання (СМОН), юридична освіта, англійська для спеціальних цілей, навчання на основі завдань, м'які навички.

Introduction. In an increasingly interconnected legal world, lawyers must possess not only a strong foundation in legal knowledge, but also a diverse set of professional skills that enable them to navigate complex, cross-border legal challenges.

As legal education evolves, university-level language learning and teaching are adapting their methodologies to align with the demands of the modern legal industry. Approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and Cooperative Language Learning (CLL) have transformed legal language education by emphasizing practical application and student engagement. These methods gain an even greater international and intercultural dimension when implemented through Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), which connects students from different legal and linguistic backgrounds.

COIL projects have emerged as a powerful tool to bridge theoretical knowledge and practical skill-building. These projects provide law students with the opportunity to engage in international collaboration, conduct comparative legal analysis, refine their ability to communicate complex legal issues across jurisdictions and thus enhance their employability in today's workplace. A key advantage of COIL projects is that they allow students to gain international and intercultural communication experience without the need to travel, making global learning more accessible and inclusive. Traditional exchange programs can be financially and logistically challenging, limiting opportunities for many students. COIL overcomes these barriers by enabling cross-border collaboration in a virtual environment, where students engage in legal research, discussions, and teamwork across different jurisdictions. This cost-effective and flexible approach ensures that a wider range of students – regardless of financial means

or geographic location – can acquire essential digital collaboration skills, intercultural awareness, and adaptability, all of which are critical in today's global legal profession.

A particularly relevant dimension of COIL initiative is its role in fostering mutual legal understanding between law students from the European Union and Ukraine. Given Ukraine's prospects of EU integration, it is crucial for future Ukrainian lawyers to deepen their knowledge of EU lawmaking traditions and sector-specific legislation. At the same time, law students from EU countries benefit from collaborating with their Ukrainian counterparts, gaining insight into Ukraine's legal education system and the challenges of legal harmonization in the context of EU enlargement. By facilitating such exchanges, COIL projects serve not only as a tool for skill development but also as a platform for fostering legal cooperation and preparing students for the realities of an expanding European legal space.

Analysis of Recent Publications. Task-based learning (TBL) has emerged as an approach emphasizing the completion of meaningful tasks to facilitate language acquisition and skills development [8]. L. Heng and H.-C. Yeh indicate that TBL not only enhances linguistic competencies but also fosters transferable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and collaboration – attributes highly valued in the modern job market [6]. A study exploring task-based projects found that students reported improved literacy competencies, increased motivation, and a heightened ability to apply acquired knowledge in diverse contexts.

The integration of TBL within higher education learning environments, including extracurricular activities, proved to significantly improve learning outcomes [9]. There is also a strong correlation between students' participation in extracurricular activities and their future employability prospects. According to M. Moxey and E. Simpkin [12], par-

ticipation in extracurricular activities has been linked to enhanced employability, with studies suggesting that these engagements provide practical experiences that bridge the gap between academic learning and professional application.

Engaging in extracurricular learning, particularly in international and collaborative formats like COIL, allows students to develop transferable skills such as problem-solving, teamwork, leadership, and intercultural communication [4] – key competencies sought after by employers. Research by D. Jackson and R. Bridgstock [7] highlights that while curricular learning provides essential academic knowledge, co-curricular and extracurricular experiences play a crucial role in enhancing graduate employability by offering opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts. These activities help students build professional networks and gain confidence in cross-border communication.

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) offers a benefit of connecting students across borders to engage in joint projects, enriching their intercultural communication skills and global awareness [2]. Such experiences are instrumental in preparing students for the global workforce, as they mirror real-world scenarios where cross-cultural collaboration is essential. COIL as a format makes learning process easier. Even though on the part of facilitators it requires a significant amount of effort and motivation as well as re-modelling of methodology in order to match the purpose of teaching and reach the learning outcomes [10], non-monetary return of investments in COIL assessed by the teachers and students proved to be very high [1; 11].

COIL's flexibility allows it to be implemented in both curricular and extracurricular formats, accommodating diverse educational structures and student needs. While traditionally embedded within formal coursework, COIL can also function as an extracurricular initiative [3], offering additional avenues for learners to develop essential skills outside the conventional classroom setting. This adaptability ensures that a broader spectrum of students can benefit from international

collaborative experiences, regardless of their academic schedules. Institutions have recognized this potential, with some developing COIL programs that operate independently of standard curricula, thereby providing enriched learning opportunities that complement formal education [5].

In this research COIL is viewed as a pedagogical strategy that offers a framework of PBL methodology via online tools and can be implemented through both synchronous and asynchronous modes of learning with the help of digital learning tools. The synergy of task-based learning and international online collaborations, particularly through flexible models like COIL, plays a significant role in equipping students with the transferable skills necessary for employability. By embracing both curricular and extracurricular implementations, educational institutions can offer comprehensive platforms that prepare students to navigate and succeed in an increasingly interconnected world. Integrating TBL and COIL into legal education, including through extracurricular activities, equips future lawyers with the necessary skills and experiences, providing them with opportunities to engage in international collaboration and intercultural learning outside the standard curriculum, to help students excel in a globalized legal environment.

The **purpose** of this research therefore is to analyse the experience of the extracurricular ESP COIL project, which incorporated the law students from a Polish and a Ukrainian universities, and to provide recommendations for refinement of such projects from the perspective of inclusivity and institutional support. The authors intend to outline the benefits and challenges of integrating a COIL project into Legal English courses which students and instructors are exposed to, and to illustrate how legal educators and institutions can leverage online collaboration to better prepare students for the demands of modern legal practice.

Results and Discussion. The paper provides the description of various aspects of COIL preparation based on the experience of an eight-week extracurricular COIL pro-

ject designed by the Legal English instructors of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv and Nicolaus Copernicus University Centre for Foreign Languages in Toruń for students of law degree programmes in 2023/2024 academic year. The study will examine key aspects of COIL course design, including collaboration methods, time management, the role of facilitators, major challenges, and student feedback. It will also highlight best practices that ensure a practical approach to designing effective COIL programs.

COIL project design and methodology

Key elements of course design include the study program, target audience, and teaching resources. When developing a COIL project, it is crucial to consider differences in study programs between partner institutions and variations in academic calendars. These discrepancies may make a short, online collaborative learning module in the form of extra-curricular teamwork sessions a more viable option. This format offers additional opportunities, particularly for high-achieving students, whose participation can enhance both their academic performance and future career prospects. By attracting motivated students who consciously choose to engage in the project, this approach fosters commitment and active participation.

The project, integrated into Legal English courses, focused on the legal implications of cybersecurity – a topic of growing significance amid increasing cyber threats, particularly in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war. EU legislation plays a crucial role in maintaining peace and justice within member states and candidate countries, making familiarity with the EU legislative process essential for law students. As part of the project, students from Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv and Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń collaborated to analyse the EU Cyber Solidarity Act and its implementation into national cybersecurity legislation in Poland and Ukraine.

At the introductory stage, students were given some reading to map their potential areas of interest. We believe that involving students in the project design process can foster a

greater sense of responsibility, independence, and engagement, making their contributions more meaningful and aligned with their academic and professional interests.

The COIL project aimed to develop the following skills: legal research and analysis of the current EU legislation and its implementation in domestic law in the area of cyber security, comparative study of law applications in Poland and Ukraine (hard skills), mediation and communication skills through communicating ideas orally and in writing in collaborative teams (soft skills) as well as digital skills.

The main concept behind designing the teamwork was to give students an opportunity to assume responsibility for their own learning, allow them confront different perspectives, critically assess them and reach compromise with the minimum intervention of teachers/facilitators who mainly provided instructions on how to proceed with the project tasks and offered space for brainstorming ideas. This approach enabled effective collaboration, and honed social skills and decision making, which seem indispensable in the AI times and are highly appreciated in employees.

Extracurricular short ESP modules target specific learning outcomes that can give students the feeling of achievement and increase their confidence about being equipped with the necessary skills. The learning outcome of the TSNUK / NCU ESP project 20023-2024 was to lay out the results of the group research and discussion in the form of an article published in an academic journal. Students volunteered to write on the following topics: “Specific Features of the Structure and the Language of the Proposal for Cyber Solidarity Act”, “Addressing Challenges in Implementing Domestic Cybersecurity Laws”, “Challenges of Domestic Cybersecurity Laws Implementation: Polish and Ukrainian Experience”. When working on the articles the students were assisted by the teachers/facilitators, who provided guidelines on structuring and proofreading their texts. Besides, the fact that the results of their collaborative effort were accepted for publication in a journal proved the quality of their work. Additio-

nally, students received certificates of participation, which serve as a valuable addition to their CVs.

After completing the project, it is important to encourage participants to provide feedback on their experience and level of satisfaction. This feedback is essential for refining the design of future COIL projects and ensuring continuous improvement. Notably, student responses highlighted a gap between instructors' expectations and students' perceived benefits. For instance, in the survey conducted for this project, most students did not consider legal analysis skills or improving English-speaking confidence to be the most valuable outcomes. Instead, they emphasized the intercultural and digital skills gained through academic networking as the most significant benefits of their participation.

Designing and structuring a COIL project requires careful planning, clear organization, and the selection of an effective digital platform to facilitate seamless collaboration. COIL methodology allows for incorporating various communication channels, enabling both synchronous and asynchronous interactions through different LMS tools. Ideally, student teams develop projects independently while following the guidance of instructors/facilitators. The extracurricular format provides greater flexibility in time management; however, it is crucial to structure the project into phases, ensuring adequate time for task completion. A well-designed e-learning environment plays a key role in effective online collaboration.

For this project, MS Teams was used as the primary platform, offering real-time communication, document sharing, and storage, allowing team members to access and modify files at any time. During synchronous sessions on MS Teams the students were exposed to facilitator-led activities, including expert tutorials, explanations of the learning process, and task instructions. These were followed by a combination of synchronous and asynchronous independent team work, with ongoing support from teachers/facilitators.

All learning resources, including webinars, presentations, reading lists, phase-specific

instructions, student assignments, and project outcomes, were stored in sub-channels within MS Teams assigned for each student team. Using institutional e-learning platforms such as MS Teams or Moodle ensures transparency and better project organization.

Benefits and challenges of COIL for students

Collaboration in COIL projects operates on multiple levels and can be analysed from different perspectives. For law students, who may one day handle the harmonization of domestic and EU law, working on cases that examine legal application across jurisdictions is an invaluable experience. Understanding different legal frameworks and developing problem-solving strategies for reconciling diverse legal approaches prepares students to address global legal challenges. The opportunity to gain an intercultural outlook is one of the most significant benefits of COIL projects.

One potential challenge is communication breakdowns within student teams. It is essential that facilitators should play a key role in establishing communication protocols at the start of the project and developing crisis response strategies to ensure smooth collaboration.

Beyond formal coursework, extracurricular online projects that bring together students from different countries further enhance learning outcomes and motivation. Participation in student-led initiatives, such as legal research collaborations, policy drafting exercises, and international debate forums, provides hands-on experience that complements classroom learning. These activities foster a sense of global community, strengthen professional networking, and develop real-world problem-solving skills, all of which are crucial for future careers in international law. Moreover, the flexible and engaging nature of these projects keeps students highly motivated, enabling them to explore legal topics beyond their standard curricula while collaborating with peers from diverse legal systems.

Benefits of COIL for instructors

While COIL projects offer significant advantages for students, they also provide valuable professional and pedagogical benefits

for Legal English instructors. By engaging in international collaborative teaching, instructors gain exposure to diverse legal systems, teaching methodologies, and linguistic variations in legal discourse, which helps refine their approach to Legal English instruction, allowing them to incorporate authentic legal texts and real-world cases into their curricula.

Another key benefit of COIL for instructors is the enhanced authenticity of language learning. Teaching legal language in an international setting moves beyond theoretical exercises, allowing students to engage in real-world legal communication scenarios, such as negotiations, legal analysis, and comparative legal discussions. This approach strengthens students' ability to use legal English in professional contexts, while also encouraging instructors to develop dynamic, skills-based teaching materials aligned with the evolving demands of global legal practice.

Additionally, COIL fosters professional development and networking opportunities for instructors. Collaborating with international colleagues introduces educators to new teaching strategies, technological tools, and interdisciplinary approaches to Legal English instruction. This exchange of best practices encourages co-development of instructional materials, joint research projects, and even co-authored academic publications in the field of legal language pedagogy.

Another significant advantage is the development of digital teaching competencies. As Legal English instructors engage in online, cross-border collaboration, they master digital tools, including virtual discussion platforms, collaborative legal research databases, and online legal writing tools. These skills not only enhance the delivery of COIL-based courses but also equip instructors to create engaging hybrid or online learning experiences for students in other contexts.

Finally, COIL provides instructors with opportunities to engage with legal professionals and institutions beyond their home countries, ensuring that their teaching remains relevant and aligned with current international legal trends. For educators working

with students from EU candidate countries, such as Ukraine, COIL offers insight into the legal harmonization process, enabling them to better prepare students for future careers in international law.

Challenges of COIL for instructors

However, it is essential to address the challenges that instructors and students may encounter in international online collaboration projects. Cultural differences can lead to varying perceptions of time, diverse approaches to building teacher-student rapport, distinct communication styles, and differing levels of directness in expressing expectations. Nevertheless, with experience, understanding and adapting to a partner's academic culture becomes more manageable.

Another common concern with short extracurricular project modules is that, despite their initial promise as valuable platforms for academic exchange, they can often become unexpectedly time-consuming, requiring significant effort from both students and instructors. Thus, successfully mediating roles and responsibilities ensures fairness in workload distribution.

Recommendations boost effectiveness of COIL

Effective project management is essential for the success of a COIL project, and several key recommendations can help ensure a well-structured, efficient, and goal-oriented collaboration.

Clearly defining project stages and allocating appropriate time to each phase is crucial. This applies not only to the pre-implementation stage, where facilitators design resources, establish an effective e-learning environment, and clarify their roles, but also to the project's active phases and the evaluation and feedback stage upon completion.

Successful project design requires mapping similarities and differences in language instruction across partner universities while balancing the expectations and effort of facilitators. Assigning roles based on skills, experience, and preferences fosters a smooth collaboration, while openness to different perspectives and diplomatic communication are key to overcoming challenges.

Since students need time to build rapport with their team members, it is essential to establish clear communication channels, task divisions, and deadlines before the project begins. Facilitators play a crucial role in overseeing the learning and collaboration process, intervening when necessary to address challenges such as breakdowns in communication, task difficulties, or missed deadlines.

As an extracurricular initiative, COIL offers flexibility in achieving learning objectives and allows facilitators to explore innovative approaches to student engagement. However, facilitators must remain adaptable to last-minute changes while ensuring that the project remains on track.

Integrating both synchronous and asynchronous teamwork fosters independent learning and provides students with a dynamic educational experience. Additionally, maintaining virtual communication outside of scheduled meetings is essential for sustained engagement. Facilitators must consistently monitor team progress and provide support as needed to ensure a successful collaboration.

The effective use of LMS tools should be reinforced by IT support from the host university, ensuring that all learning materials are stored in a centralized location for easy access and self-study. Additionally, institutional support is essential in involving subject-matter experts from the faculty and IT specialists to enhance the project's academic and technical quality. Given the undeniable role of COIL projects in increasing universities' global visibility, institutions should consider investing more resources in course planning, curriculum design, and the establishment of new international partnerships. Furthermore, providing incentives for educators who engage in COIL initiatives would serve as both recognition of their additional efforts and encouragement to explore innovative pedagogical approaches.

Conclusions. The implementation of task-based COIL projects in legal education provides significant benefits for both students and instructors, enhancing not only language proficiency but also key lawyer skills necessary for professional success in a globalized legal industry. By engaging in international on-

line collaboration, students develop essential competencies such as legal analysis, critical thinking, intercultural communication, and digital literacy. These projects offer an authentic learning environment where students can apply their knowledge to real-world legal issues, strengthening their ability to navigate the complexities of transnational legal practice. Furthermore, COIL's flexible structure allows students to participate in meaningful academic exchanges without the financial and logistical challenges of physical mobility.

From an instructional perspective, COIL fosters professional growth by exposing educators to diverse legal systems, teaching methodologies, and interdisciplinary approaches. It encourages the co-development of course materials, facilitates comparative legal discussions, and promotes the use of digital tools for online collaboration. While the extracurricular nature of COIL projects presents organizational and time-management challenges, careful course design, institutional support, and structured facilitation ensure a productive and rewarding learning experience. Additionally, integrating COIL into legal education aligns with modern pedagogical trends, emphasizing task-based learning, content-based instruction, and authentic engagement with legal discourse.

Moving forward, universities should further recognize the value of COIL initiatives by investing in their development, encouraging faculty participation, and expanding international partnerships. As legal education continues to evolve in response to globalization and EU integration processes, such projects provide law students with an opportunity to engage in cross-border legal analysis, fostering a deeper understanding of both domestic and international legal frameworks. Strengthening COIL as a regular educational practice will not only enhance student employability but also reinforce the role of universities as hubs of international academic cooperation in legal studies.

Future research could explore the broader impact of COIL projects on students' academic achievement, career choices, and employability prospects. Investigating how

participation in such initiatives influences students' motivation to engage in other academic projects and enhances their overall performance and assessment outcomes would provide valuable insights for educators. Additionally, further studies could examine the extent to which COIL experiences shape

students' career decisions by offering opportunities to connect with legal professionals. Lastly, research could assess how COIL participation strengthens students' employability by fostering essential soft skills such as leadership, time management, and organizational abilities.

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