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UniBRIDGE Indonesian:  
Quasi in-country experience through telecollaboration

Abstract

This study discusses how web conferencing and other social media engender authentic language and intercultural learning, both integrated within, and moving beyond, formal studies. First, we explore the dynamics of and student experiences with UniBRIDGE online learning exchanges between Australian Indonesian-language and Indonesian English-language university students. We then consider how these telecollaborative, e-tandem interactions enhance foreign language acquisition through engaging students in a rich bilingual language learning community with native speaker peers. In particular, we examine student acquisition of important sociolinguistic and intercultural competencies. This study concludes that the quasi in-country experiences of UniBRIDGE both augment classroom learning and function as a substitute to, and preparation for, living and study in-country.

1. Introduction

UniBRIDGE uses Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to facilitate language and (inter)cultural learning interactions between Australian students of Indonesian language and Indonesian English language students. These exchange activities centre on live web conferences supported by other social media. The students from beginners through to advanced language levels study at Nusa Cendana University (Undana) in Kupang, Indonesia; Charles Darwin University (CDU) Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia; the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC), Queensland, Australia; and Murdoch University, Perth, Western Australia.¹

This study presents the advantages of UniBRIDGE telecollaboration as a quasi in-country experience of native speaker learning communities in overcoming some limitations of home-country classroom-based foreign language learning. Telecollaborative attributes—such as encouraging student learning independence and motivation, and enhancing listening-speaking, socio-linguistic, and intercultural skills and confidence—were highlighted recently by Perez-Hernandez (2014). In exploring such enhanced learning experiences for UniBRIDGE students, this study positions telecollaboration amongst other modes of language learning, in particular as a complement bridging conventional classroom learning and study abroad experiences.
UniBRIDGE telecollaboration addresses two recognised needs in Australian university language programs. First, there is a global drive to develop more creative and effective online course content and delivery, both for on-campus and distance education (ICEF 2014). In particular, telecollaboration can meet the need for more authentic synchronous speaking and listening practise (Chen and Wang 2008: 98). Second, Australian universities are responding to newly invigorated government policies, such as the ‘Australia in the Asia Century White Paper’ (Australian Government 2012) and ‘New Colombo Plan’ (2013), to broaden student Asia literacy, particularly in studying languages. These policies mention online and in-country programs in advancing Indonesian studies as one priority area. In efforts to lift Asian language studies across campus the consortium of Innovative Research Universities (2013: 7), for example, is encouraging student mobility, pre-mobility, and mobility substitute initiatives, citing UniBRIDGE as an example.

Lagging behind a surging enthusiasm for digital, online, social media centred, enhancements to language learning is rigorous critical assessment of the pedagogical implications (Salaberry 2001; Williams 2014). Research in this area is, however, gathering pace, as outlined in an informative survey of current theoretical and methodological approaches across the spectrum of second language acquisition, psycholinguistics, and intercultural studies (Dooley and O’Dowd 2012). The scope of this study, however, is more practical than theoretical, exploring the efficacy of UniBRIDGE telecollaborative solutions to the limitations experienced in classroom-based language teaching.2

2. Student meeting places and learning communities

The ‘Uni BRIDGE Australia-Indonesia’ Wikispaces site3 is the central platform through which students from multiple language levels and universities are enrolled, are able to access web conferencing, and present their work. Wikispaces, designed for educational use, is a space on the Web where students and teachers can share work and ideas, pictures and links, videos and media.4 While university Learning Management Systems (LMS) that house language programs have similar features, they generally restrict access to students enrolled in a specific course at the relevant home institution. In contrast, Wikispaces allows easy membership to anyone from anywhere, and was thus the preferred option for the UniBRIDGE project.

In the Wikispaces ‘projects’ area students are grouped according to language proficiency levels and institutional affiliation. These groups have links to individual Australian and Indonesian student journals where students introduce themselves: describing, for example, where they live, family, studies, work, hobbies and interests. Here, students also present their learning and insights on language and culture, including any communication difficulties (whether intercultural or logistical). They write in the target language, but sometimes use their own language for clarification. They also advise one another on language improvement, annotating samples of work with an ‘add comment’ tool. The journal is a portfolio showcasing their interactions.
and engagement in learning activities, whether topics of personal interest or ones related to learning materials or assessment tasks.

A snapshot of an Australian student’s journal (‘Alison’; see Appendix 1) includes entries related to advanced level topics on work and culture that nicely encapsulate the possible variety and extent of student learning exchanges. There is a photo of a Perth ANZAC Day parade with her granddaughter holding a banner alongside marchers representing Australia-East Timorese wartime connections. The photo was used in a web conference conversation comparing Easter time celebrations. Indonesian students Stephanus and Rosalin similarly shared photos of Easter Parade floats they helped decorate in Kupang. Alison’s journal also includes a link to an archived recording of an assessed oral presentation comparing working conditions in Australia and Indonesia. The web conference presentation includes a question and answer session with an Indonesian student audience. The snapshot also shows Alison’s notes on Indonesian cultural history, annotated with language tips.

The core UniBRIDGE learning activity involves regular student discussions in Blackboard Collaborate web conferencing rooms. These venues, referred to as BBC rooms 1 and 2, are powerful tools for synchronous collaborative interaction. Students arrange times to meet here and chat in real-time using audio, video and text. To enrich their discussions, students can draw or type on a whiteboard, upload photos or PowerPoint presentations, share files, share applications on their desktop, or tour websites together. Archived recordings of these multimodal sessions can be accessed anytime for playback by students and staff.

These small student-centred web gatherings contrast with formal online tutorials or lectures, where student participation is usually lacklustre and passive. As Sun (2011: 431-437, 440) asserts, web classes that try to imitate the physical classroom are often ineffective, marred by technological, logistical and pedagogical difficulties. Many of these shortcomings can be minimised in small group web conferencing where students have more choice about who and when they meet, and have more autonomy on what and how they learn.

Weekly Saturday morning drop-in sessions provide momentum for student interactions and foster the development of small group learning communities. All students can gather in the main room of BBC room 1 to chat. Staff frequently also ‘drop in’, to lend encouragement and help with language. Students who wish to talk in pairs or smaller groups can use the ‘breakout rooms’ facility. The other BBC Room 2 is also available, particularly for rehearsing or recording assessment tasks.

Learning is most effective with structured small group work, rather than whole class or individual work (Sun 2011: 436-437). One successful model involves two Indonesian and two Australian students meeting regularly. Individuals take turns as group moderator to manage discussions and encourage members to participate actively timing the equal use of English and Indonesian. Such group work develops graduate attributes in leadership, teamwork and intercultural communications. Indonesian student Petrus enthused about such groupwork in his journal:
Today both of Undana university (Meliana and i) and CDU University (Peter and David) practiced English and Indonesian a lot. ...we spoke for about 2 hours. ... I was the moderator and led the discussion. The topic for our discussion today is about streets and buildings [a topic in the Australian students’ beginner Indonesian curriculum]. I was the first speaker and told a lot in English about the streets and buildings in Kupang city. As a moderator i gave the chance to anyone to give some question based on my explanation of the topic... My feeling at the end of our discussion i was very exciting that i could be a moderator and led our group discussion. I did not think before that i could do it but finally i could.

David’s journal entry concurs:

Petrus kept us all on track. ...the way we organised ourselves into discussion groups was beneficial. ...we have all come out the wiser.

For assessed oral presentations, Australian students prepare a topic from their formal learning materials to present to a small audience of Indonesian peers who accept an open invitation to attend. Images, usually PowerPoint slides, support the presentation, which is followed by prepared and spontaneous questions from the audience.

Both the small group conversations and oral presentations are beneficial as learning activities and assessment tasks. For assessment purposes, the lecturer can either attend or watch an archived recording. Often in preparing for these activities, particularly the oral presentations, the Australian students enjoy lengthy tutoring sessions with their Indonesian counterparts. Beginner student Steven is amazed by the selfless attention he received from the Indonesian students:

My very first session with Petrus lasted circa four hours. Following that session, I have now had many lengthy sessions with Dorkas, in particular, and my most recent was a conversational hour or two with Fransisca.

Young Indonesian students are not used to thinking critically, as recognised in many studies of Indonesian education by Björk (2005), Dall (2012) and others. However, the Undana students relished the challenge to address these discussion topics more deeply and analytically. Several commented that they needed to do background research on topics like multiculturalism or labour relations to prepare for the Australian student presentations. Inevitably the ensuing discussions are comparative, so that students become more knowledgeable about both their own and the target culture.

Motivated students also often meet in the BBC rooms for extracurricular discussions. During one semester break, for example, Australian and Indonesian students gave presentations to each other on cricket, tap dancing, and traditional culture in central Flores. On other occasions interactions are less structured and formal: discussing common interests, including soccer, diving, pets, k-pop music, or special events, such as birthdays and weddings. For example, embedded in Indonesian
student Dorkas’ journal is a recording of her and another student celebrating Alison’s birthday with her via webcam (see Appendix 2). Alison reflects:

I had a very emotional birthday this year sitting on a beach down in Denmark [South of Perth] being sung Happy Birthday to by the Undana students. A birthday that I will never forget.

Several students develop personal relationships. Beginning student Dennis sent Indonesian student Rosalin a dictionary and souvenirs. Others have already visited or intend visiting their peers in eastern Indonesia. Indonesian student Yohana hopes to show beginner Indonesian and marine biology student Cathy the great diving spots on her home island, Alor. Yohana’s journal entry excitedly recalls their BBC room conversation whilst Cathy was visiting family in Denmark. Cathy showed Yohana a sunfish, and taught her some Danish.

Students also meet through the UniBRIDGE Facebook Group. Facebook is a familiar means of day-to-day communications for Australian and Indonesian students who have free or inexpensive access through their mobile phones. Specifically, it helps students arrange quickly and conveniently times to meet in the web conference rooms. Many students also use their personal Facebook accounts to interact socially. Conversations on Facebook, text chatting, and emails can be pasted in student journals, adding evidence of their learning interactions. In these various small group interactions, students also encourage and support each other across language levels and universities. Students with similar interests or living in the same area can form small communities. For example, three beginners and advanced students from CDU and Murdoch University residing in Perth met, both online and physically, to study and socialise.

To maintain student participation and, ultimately, retention rates, online programs such as UniBRIDGE must cater for clusters of individuals, pairs and small groups within a loose network of student learning communities (Sun 2011: 440). Coordinating students is initially quite time-demanding for staff but the required input abates as the exchange settles in. UniBRIDGE has recently enlisted Indonesian and Australian students as coordinators, which ensures a student-driven program whilst also reducing load on academic staff.

Maintaining motivation and participation levels is of central concern, with only the self-motivated 25% of students regularly active. Participation rates do, however, increase with periodic assessment tasks. In any case, even the most active students are frustrated by technological incompatibilities, unreliable connectivity, and communicating and time tabling difficulties. With the Indonesian students in particular gender and wealth differences can also affect access and equity of use. Furthermore, whilst some students are distracted by, others have an aversion towards, ICT and social media. Due to lack of confidence, laziness or frustration some students revert to chatting on Facebook rather than focussed web conferencing. Moreover, a few students with negative perceptions or experiences with social media are reluctant or refuse to participate. One student threatened to withdraw.
from the course finding language study difficult enough without the extra burden of learning ICT.

Such technological, communications, logistical, and perceptual difficulties are well documented in several telecollaboration studies by Spijkerbosch (2013), Sun (2011) and others. UniBRIDGE tries various strategies to overcome these challenges (Curtis and Lobo 2012). So far it seems the most effective way to increase participation rates is through Integrating UniBRIDGE activities with formal curricula, such as through worksheet guided discussions and assessed oral presentations based on what the students are studying in class. However, it is difficult to make such activities obligatory due to the above-mentioned challenges. As such, UniBRIDGE activities are best designed and presented within the course syllabus as an appealing option to students; effective, enjoyable, rewarding and less burdensome than regular study and assessment tasks.

The prospect of in-country visits also aids student motivation. In January, 2013, two Australian students, Peter and Robert, visited their Indonesian counterparts in Kupang. Then, in February to March 2013, two Undana students, Dorkas and Petrus, visited their Australian student friends in Sydney and Canberra. These four students, voted by their peers as the most motivated and engaged, were rewarded program travel subsidies to make their visits possible. This was a good investment because the students then became coordinators; mentors, recruiting, assisting and encouraging new students. More Australian and Indonesian students are participating in subsidised exchange visits in 2014, and a three-week intensive in-country language and cultural program has now been integrated into UniBRIDGE. The inaugural June-July 2014 program ran with 11 Australian students studying at Undana, with their Indonesian counterparts accompanying them as ‘buddies’ during after-class cultural and social activities. The prior learning and relationship-building created by the online UniBRIDGE interactions thus help prepare for, and are then consolidated by, in-country study.

In summary, formal UniBRIDGE learning interactions align with central pedagogical principles in distance language learning. Focussing on web conferencing with ‘meaning-based tasks’ in small group conversations and oral presentations, UniBRIDGE covers the primary principles for effective L2 language acquisition, as identified in Chen and Wang (2008: 101). Less formal UniBRIDGE learning interactions promote enduring friendships and relationships vital in developing language and intercultural learning strategies. As Indonesian linguist and languages advocate Dr Phillip Mahnken observes:

language attitude and motivation are just as important in successful acquisition as language learning and teaching techniques. Rewarding relationships—through language exchange—with interesting and generous Indonesians is a powerful, real, human incentive to keep learning Indonesian language in ways that textbooks and lectures cannot provide [Personal communication 10/7/2014].
Overall, the combination of formal and informal interactions also meets Guichon’s (2009: 170) criteria of engaging students emotionally and cognitively with learning experiences and feedback tailored to individual needs (see Sun 2011: 431). With UniBRIDGE, these (distance) language learning principles are greatly enhanced by peer interactions (Sun 2011: 439), all the more so because they involve native speakers living in the target language communities. The following section explores how this benefits student acquisition of sociolinguistic and intercultural skills, providing an alternative to, or preparation for, in-country study.

3. Approaching an in-country experience

The reason I went on UniBridge was that I felt the best way to learn a new language was to hear the native speakers and speak to them in their own language. Because I am not in a position to be able to do this ... [James, beginner].

For some of us, [online study] is the only way we could hope to improve... our language capabilities. Not everyone can afford to travel and live ‘insitu’ locations ... [Craig, beginner].

Ninety percent of CDU’s Indonesian language students study independently online. They are scattered throughout Australia from major cities to rural towns. Their conventional learning materials offer limited, mainly asynchronous and contrived listening and speaking practice, with a smattering of cultural information. Weekly live web classes help bring students together, but even the most engaging and interactive classes must ration individual language practice. Most students have little or no contact with Indonesians in Australia, and have visited Indonesia either briefly or not at all.

Our partner Indonesian students studying English have limited active learning of the language and very superficial cultural understanding. Most have completed the compulsory first year General English subject. Many of these young students come from poor families in remote islands and rural communities. Most board near campus on the city fringe and have no contact with Kupang’s few foreign visitors. None would normally have an opportunity to visit Australia.

UniBRIDGE converts these apparent disadvantages of isolation into strengths. Through live web conferencing, students of both countries act as native speaker language and cultural informants engaging with each other about their lived experiences and taking ownership of the language. These genuine learning interactions contrast with detached artificial generalisations common to textbooks and classroom lessons (Hassall 2013: 2).

You discuss specific local things relevant to each of you, not textbook or media generalised or stereotyped [Alison, advanced].

UniBRIDGE participants gain regular, real interactions with a variety of native speakers discussing a diversity of topics. These interactions supplement often conventionalised
and restricted discourse in traditional classrooms. Belz and Kinginger note, for example, how classrooms inhibit students internalising appropriate address form use:

Learners’ own social identity is rarely at stake in classroom interaction. Without access to meaningful interaction where the maintenance of good social relations takes on significance for learners, it is difficult for them to develop a sense of the social importance of address forms (Belz and Kinginger 2002: 193).

In contrast, UniBRIDGE student discourses are a broader spectrum of sociocultural situations in which the students experience real social consequences. Their investment in collaborative behaviour, such as mutual assistance, acceptance and respect, enhances language development. Their lived learning experiences can be characterised as not just a process of language acquisition, but also participation and apprenticeship (Belz and Kinginger 2003: 641) in a bilingual learning environment.

3.1 (Socio)linguistic competencies

UniBRIDGE’s sociable native speaker peer interactions augment conventional classroom learning to strengthen student proficiency in pronunciation, speaking, listening, conversation and appropriate word use. In a class, pronunciation practice is often limited to mimicking model dialogues and tensely recording oral tests. Useful language patterns learnt in class can be practised and internalised in a more relaxed atmosphere in which student peers patiently and sympathetically correct one another:

Frans and Markus were extremely helpful... correcting my pronunciation and grammar. My pronunciation was okay until that little red [recording] light came on! [Alison, advanced].

In natural, friendly situations the students quickly gain confidence in speaking, knowing what they are expressing really can be understood by native speakers.

The conversations with UNDANA students were real, not just the reading of a dialogue. This made the conversations much more interesting and I felt much more motivated to speak ... [From pilot program survey].

In the classroom students become accustomed to their teachers’ and fellow students’ speech. Through UniBRIDGE, however, they are exposed to a variety of native speaker accents, speech speeds, and ways of expression.

Fluency in listening and understanding a conversation (on some occasions... at the talker’s normal conversational speed ... ) has also improved ... [David, intermediate].

As explained in section 2, the students learn to manage group conversations, negotiating participation and asking and answering questions in both informal conversation and formal forums. They also repeatedly use expressions for making
or changing appointments, interjecting, asking for clarification, expressing opinions, agreement or disagreement, taking leave, and excusing lateness.

[I learnt] how to make my friends feel comfortable with our conversation without offending them. For example, make the correct greetings [from pilot program survey].

In a classroom students may use limited vocabulary and be unaware of common synonyms; their selective vocabulary can be unnatural in certain contexts. By contrast, UniBRIDGE students have learnt from their native speaker peers synonyms, such as those for friend, and how to differentiate uses of such words as feel and think, like and happy, and own and have.

[The Undana student] patiently corrected my Bahasa [Indonesia], and had a bit of a giggle at my incorrect way of saying my daughter got a haircut (although I had thought it was almost verbatim from our workbook!!!!) Maybe so, but in real life Indonesian not everything is universal, I guess the language is fluid from place to place!! I knew that about slang, but was surprised it came down to things like haircuts! [Sarah, intermediate].

For expedience, address forms are reduced to codified grammar in textbooks and classroom interactions. However, Belz and Kinginger explain that the use of appropriate address terms amongst speakers is contingent on fluid social relations and situations (including social status, ethnicity, location and purpose of interaction). “It is not rules that must be acquired, but awareness of complexity, sensitivity to social cues...” (Belz and Kinginger 2002: 209). “Mistakes can evoke confusion, misunderstanding, or irritation” (Belz and Kinginger 2003: 589).

From the outset, many Indonesian language texts and classes instil use of the neutral anda as a default ‘you’ (Hassall 2013: 112). In real life, however, anda is uncommon, especially as people become familiar with one another. Appropriate titles before names better recognise the value of people and their relationships. In textbooks the use of honorifics is often limited to those used in Java by Indonesia’s dominant ethnic group; a Javanese would address a student friend not as anda ‘you’, but as ‘older brother’ mas David or ‘older sister’ mbak Sarah. However, UniBRIDGE students soon discover that in Kupang, instead of the alien Javanese mas/mbak, the standard Indonesian equivalents (ka)Kak David or kak/nona Sarah are used. Older Australian students must also accept being addressed with a respectful title in front of their names, such as Bu ‘Mother’ or Pak ‘Father’, as in Bu Alison, or Pak James, and address their young Indonesian counterparts as a ‘younger sibling’, (a)dik, as in dik Dorkas or dik Simon. When asked in the pilot program survey, “The greatest cultural insight, change, or challenge for me was ...” the most frequent responses concerned socially correct use of second person pronouns and address terms, and related issues of appropriate greetings and language according to age. These students understood address forms were critical to conveying appropriate levels of politeness, but, nevertheless, even the most responsive students registered some discomfort in using them:
I have found it difficult being referred to as Ibu Alison. When I message Simon I now sign off Ibu Alison but it still feels strange when comparing how people address you in Australia only by first name [Alison, advanced].

Hassall (2013) found that in-country student acquisition of address forms, particularly for second person, was inconsistent. Of concern was the habitual use of well-established classroom generalisations, such as anda, that block sensitivity to sociolinguistic nuance. Hassall (2013: 15) suggests remedial teaching on correct use of kin/address terms during the initial stages of in-country study. However, early mitigation is preferable than trying to undo entrenched incorrect linguistic usage. The concurrence of UniBRIDGE with classroom teaching allows even beginner students to shape what they learn about address forms through a variety of real life interactions.

Hassall (2013: 14) also believes the status of students living in-country as ‘alien’ or bulé ‘whitey’ affects their inclination to correct themselves or obtain correction. They can feel less need for culturally appropriate address forms because of their aloofness towards a society where they are often treated as privileged strangers. Tolerating the students as privileged outsiders or tamu ‘guests’, locals are also not inclined to correct student language. By contrast, the UniBRIDGE Indonesian and Australian students meet in cyberspace as relative equals on neutral terrain. The Australians are not bulé strangers in a foreign land. Interacting as peers, the students recognise each other as experienced informants in the target language and culture, and usually sympathise with each other as learners of a foreign language and culture. The students have a vested interest in assisting each other. Most students want to relate as naturally as possible to their peers, with whom they have developed friendships, mutual respect and empathy. Therefore, both sides correct each other in a gentle, supportive climate—for some less confronting than being corrected in class.

### 3.2 Intercultural understanding and in-country readiness

The students’ (inter)cultural insights and experiences through UniBRIDGE compares well with those obtained in-country. Of course they are not as visceral as physically being in Kupang: for example, being able to smell durian fruit or clove cigarettes, experiencing the frightening conditions in a public hospital, enjoying roasted fish at a lively harbour-side night market, or riding the crammed colourful mini buses, reverberating with heavy metal music. However, UniBRIDGE does enable close relationships and focused discussions on social and cultural topics of mutual interest with student peers in the target language communities:

I am probably older than [the Indonesian students’] grandmothers but I have a son the same age as Simon and complained to my own son recently that I talk more football to Simon who is 1000’s of miles away than I do to my own son [Tanya, beginner].

Certainly some UniBRIDGE students are much less engaged than others, but some in-country students too may make minimal contact with native speakers. This is
especially so with those who choose to stay in hotels in tourist enclaves, mixing mainly with fellow Australian students outside of class.

As already noted in Section 2, UniBRIDGE provides many formal and informal opportunities for both Australian and Indonesian students to increase intercultural awareness. The Australian students in particular developed empathy and understanding of the Undana students’ humble living conditions.

... only tears can explained their hardships in life, with very little rations to live on each day, the complexity of modern technology which is very costly, they had to remain apart from their families basically until they finish their studies (although they still live in region of timor). It’s hard to imagine going to school hungry [Aisya, advanced student, from Malaysia].

Coming to terms with Indonesian spirituality and religiosity is common to both UniBRIDGE and in-country students. The Australian students were taken by how naturally the Indonesian UniBRIDGE students express their spirituality, and the importance of relations and obligations within the group, friends, family and community. Several Australian students commented on how they learnt to more easily appreciate the less material or individualistic. In the 2013 in-country program I oversaw in Lombok, students in a lower intermediate class struggled with their topic on religion. Many rarely discussed religious concepts and issues in English, let alone in Indonesian. However, as the UniBRIDGE students quickly discovered, the spiritual and physical worlds are equally important for their Indonesian counterparts.

From my talks with Undana students whether in English or Indonesian there are often religious references or phrases or references to God. For me this was interesting as a lot of my previous study of Indonesia has focused on the ‘secular’ nature of Indonesian politics and society [Peter, advanced].

The most successful students forge relationships imbued with intercultural understanding and mutual respect. Over 85% of peer program survey respondents said they wished to visit one another in their local communities, and to explore more deeply the target culture/country. These sentiment were encapsulated by the following respondent:

I intend to visit my friends who have helped me and taught me how to speak bahasa Indonesia. I intend to visit Kupang and learn more about Indonesian culture and how to improve my bahasa Indonesia. I would love to live and work in Indonesia. [Peer program survey].

UniBRIDGE conversations and friendships prepare students for future in-country stays, by giving them clearer, more confident expectations of what the experience will be like, and how to conduct themselves. They also know they will be welcomed and well looked after when they visit:

Today i’m very happy to hear the good news of Kak Belinda. Kak Belinda tells me that on Tuesday next week, She will visit Indonesia. and She also plans to come
to NTT (East Nusa Tenggara). aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa... i want to scream because i was so happy. My heart wanted to jump out when i heard the good news from kak Belinda. i Hope and i will await the arrival of Kak Belinda in Kupang. [Rosalin].

4. Conclusion

This study argues that, by providing a bilingual environment in which the language and cultural learning experiences and skills acquisition are similar to that experienced by students studying in-country, UniBRIDGE fills the gap between Australian classroom and in-country experiences (illustrated in Table 1). As such, a UniBRIDGE-style program can play a significant role in both augmenting foreign language classroom teaching, and as either an alternative to or preparation for in-country study.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Bridging the gap}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
Australian classroom & UniBRIDGE & In-country study \\
In-country study & & \\
\hline
Physical & Web conferencing & Short & long term stay \\
& /or virtual & social media & \\
\hline
Foreign language environment & bilingual environment & Second language environment \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

These online facilitated native speaker student-peer interactions make language and cultural learning an enjoyable, yet challenging, lived experience, complementing classroom and textbook learning. Indeed, several Australian and Indonesian students participating in UniBRIDGE moved beyond their immediate goal of learning the language and culture to establishing enduring and valued social relationships.

[UniBRIDGE] became more than an educational tool, it became a social gathering of friends whom i hope to visit one day and hopefully one day visit me. [Dennis, beginner]

This study argues that UniBRIDGE has succeeded as a proof of concept. Nevertheless, further fine-grained research is required to investigate more thoroughly how and to what depth these UniBRIDGE interactions enrich language proficiencies, including sociolinguistic skills, and intercultural understandings. Furthermore, the main challenge for UniBRIDGE is to more fully engage the majority of students, not just the most motivated and confident. This can only be achieved through adequate resourcing to make UniBRIDGE easier for students to use as a seamless component of their language program. Some logistical and technological challenges to this include equality in access, reliable connectivity, efficiency in communicating and scheduling activities, and user support. There is also a need to develop sound pedagogical strategies in integrating telecollaborative activities into formal curriculum and assessment tasks.
Notes

1. UniBRIDGE grew from the 2012 CDU-Undana BRIDGE University Pilot program. Both projects were funded by the Australia-Indonesia Institute and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and supported by the Asia Education Foundation, which also runs the successful Australia-Asia BRIDGE School Partnerships (see http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/teachers/bridge_school_partnerships/bridge_school_partnerships_landing_page.html). Thanks to past and present UniBRIDGE team members, and to Dr Phillip Mahnken and Dr Paul Black, for their valuable input into this study. Thanks also to the UniBRIDGE students referred to by pseudonyms in this study, who generously gave permission for their work and reflections on the program to be quoted.

2. For instance, anecdotal student feedback on the program in the form of journal entries and personal communications with the program team during 2012 and 2013 are corroborated by a pilot program survey completed in September 2012. The sample size was small with only nine (35%) Australian students and 17 (64%) Indonesian students responding, but the survey was always intended as a practical device, rather than research tool, to assist program development and improvements. As such, this combined evidence is more indicative than conclusive. More substantial evidence requires rigorous qualitative and quantitative data collection (Dooly and O’Dowd 2012).


4. See http://www.wikispaces.com/content/frontpage.

5. ANZAC Day is a national day of remembrance in Australia (and New Zealand). It is held on 25 April, the day of the landing at Gallipoli of the ANZAC (Australia and New Zealand Army Corps), which led to their first major casualties of in World War 1.

6. 64% of the pilot program survey respondents reported they spent an hour or more per week on web-conference listening-speaking practise. However, it is likely that many of those who responded to the survey were the more engaged students.

References


Appendix 1: Snapshot of Alison’s journal

Today, I and [redacted] made a happy birthday words, picture, and song for ibu [redacted] using Voicethreads. We hope she likes it. And all the Undana Students said happy birthday to ibu [redacted]. We talked with ibu [redacted] from CDU at that day and it was her birthday. She was in the beach and she met some guys in that beach and that guys talked a little bit in Indonesian just said hi and goodbye because they were going to leave ibu [redacted]. I asked [redacted] to sing a birthday song for ibu [redacted]. Actually I couldn’t sing it and the net is excellent. But it’s not the same with the time before when we talked with ibu [redacted] because the net was not good so we couldn’t hear what she said. Hopefully, we can talk again with ibu [redacted].

Appendix 2: Snapshot of Dorkas’ journal

[Image of a text document with a slide from a presentation and a screenshot of a social media conversation]

Here is a direct link to the recording of week 6 oral presentation on ‘Manusia hidup perlu uang satu’.

[Image of a social media conversation with a message from Richard Curtis]

Hi [redacted] in formal Indonesian ‘ini’ or ‘itu’ don’t replace the object or actor on their own. Better to say ‘hal ini’.