

Enhancing Translation Students' Intercultural Competence: Affordances of Online Transnational Collaboration

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Abstract

Intercultural communication has evolved considerably throughout the digital era thanks to the availability and diversity of virtual communication platforms. Few research studies have explored the potential role of digital spaces in teaching translation courses. This paper reports an empirical study that explores the affordances of online transnational collaboration in reconstructing the identities of translation students. The study tested the potential of telecollaboration in teaching a course on translating literature with particular focus on translating for children. The total number of participants was 28 students from an Omani university. The participants completed translation tasks while involved in international telecollaborative projects with students from an American University. The study adopted the action research method with data collected from the students' translation tasks and reflections before, during, and after telecollaboration. The findings showed that the participants' intercultural competence developed following telecollaboration with their counterparts. The students' translation approach shifted from TT-oriented to ST-oriented with translation strategies that prioritized the cultural paradigms of the other culture. The students embraced the concept of global citizenship and achieved the course learning outcomes and graduate attributes of course syllabus. The results also highlighted the significance of online academic partnerships in improving translation students' intercultural communication skills.

Keywords: translation pedagogy, intercultural communicative competence, teaching literary translation, online telecollaborative projects, COVID-19, teaching translation online

1. Introduction

Teaching translation is a complex educational process during which instructors and learners encounter multifaceted impediments related to Translation Studies' interdisciplinary and empirical nature. Translation teachers should realize the importance of integrating theory with practice (Gentile, 1996; Kiraly, 2000; Perez, 2004). Gentile (1996) remarked that one challenge of teaching translation lies in the need to create a link between "the teaching of translation theory and the impact of this teaching on the practice of translation on our students, as students, and as future professionals in the field" (p.55). Kiraly (2000) observed that translators' ability to integrate theoretical knowledge with a translation act is a skill they acquire via practice and interactive encounters. Another source of challenge in teaching translation is pertinent to the need to integrate the principles and skills of intercultural competence with translator' learning and training (Angelone, 2016; Cnyrim, 2019; Grosman, 1994; Koskinen, 2015; Tomozeiu & Kumpulainen, 2016; Yarosh & Muies, 2011). Viewing translation as an intercultural communicative act (House, 2015; Snell-Hornby et al., 1997; Tomozeiu et al., 2018) requires an integration of intercultural communicative competence with translation education programs. Tomozeiu et al. (2016) defined translators' intercultural competence as the outcome of knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable a translator to communicate interculturally with resilience and professionalism in different situations and contexts.

Teaching translation virtually intensifies the challenges associated with translation pedagogy for reasons related to the teaching environment and the discipline's nature such as the use of outdated pedagogic practices, diminished interaction between learners and instructors, and students' heavy and uncritical use of Machine Translation (Omar, 2021a). During the pandemic, academic institutions around the world responded to the emergency condition and changed the mode of teaching regardless of the nature of taught courses. In the case of some courses that require merging theory with practice like translation courses, teaching online was not a smooth process as it did not respond to learners' expectations and clashed with teachers' conventional pedagogic practices that were not pertinent to the novel educational context enforced on all participants in the educational process at that time (Liu & Cheung, 2023).

Despite the various issues related to online translation education, teaching translation virtually is a blessing in disguise with both challenges and affordances. Although the cultural trend in Translation Studies bloomed around three decades ago with works published in the nineties of the twentieth century (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990; 1998; Venuti, 2000), very few studies addressed the influence of intercultural awareness on teaching and practicing translation (He, 2012). Similarly, while intercultural contact and communication prospered noticeably along the advancements of the digital era embodied by the diversity of and accessibility to digital communication

platforms, digital spaces have been hardly harnessed in various disciplines including teaching translation. Byram (1989; 1997) launched a thought-provoking pedagogic model which aimed at integrating intercultural competence with foreign language teaching. Byram's model embraced the affordances of digital transnational cooperation with the formal L2 educational process. The pandemic has mainstreamed online teaching, thus providing academic institutions with an opportunity to launch international academic cooperation initiatives and allowing researchers and instructors to test Byram's theoretical model empirically (Byram et al., 2013). At the outset of the pandemic, Salih and Omar (2021) conducted a study that tested Byram's model empirically to nurture EFL learners' intercultural competence.

In this study, translation students developed their intercultural competence skills following the implementation of a telecollaborative internationalization pilot project. The research paper reports an exploratory study of the affordances of telecollaboration in reconstructing the identities of translation students through virtual transnational collaborative translation projects. The study's objective is to test the efficacy of intercultural telecollaboration in teaching translation online and explore its affordances as an effective pedagogic model which allows translation instructors to integrate theoretical knowledge with professional practice in training translation students and enables translation learners to deconstruct their identities as intercultural negotiators and professional decision makers in translation processes and acts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Evolution of Translators' Intercultural Competence

Translators' intercultural competence is not a recent topic in the Translation Studies literature as the notion has evolved gradually since the end of the twentieth century (Grosman, 1994; Witte, 1994). Throughout the history of Translation Studies, the prominence of intercultural competence emerged and materialized in two turning points: first, before the beginning of the new millennium during the accelerated transformation towards a technologically interconnected globalized world (Shiyab, 2010); and second, after the COVID-19-triggered worldwide mutations that mainstreamed online education (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2000; de Wit & Altbach, 2021) and transformed it from "an alternative to a *fait accompli*" (Salih & Omar, 2020). During these two turning points, the driving factor that prompted the evolution of a new meme in the field of translation was the force of technology that has changed the nature and scope of communication worldwide ever since.

Highlighting the nature of translation as cross-cultural communication, Witte (1994) introduced the term 'translators' bicultural competence' as a prerequisite for any translation training or process. Translators' bicultural competence, as a notion, emerged from the understanding that translation involves interaction between two parties in a "communicative situation" (p. 72) that requires mediation between two individuals/communities from two distinct cultures with different cultural values. In other words, a translator's task is to interrelate the two cultures rather than obliterate one cultural paradigm at the expense of the other. Thus, a translator's bicultural competence refers to a translator's ability to work between the two cultures in question, which means that translators should have the competence to assess their target audience's knowledge about the other culture and estimate the impact of their translation on the receptors' behavioural patterns. Bicultural competence does not necessarily mean the adoption of a certain translation strategy like adaptation, foreignization, or simplification. Rather, this competence entails having the ability to "anticipate the possible effects different translation alternatives may have upon the target receptor" (p. 74).

This definition emphasizes the factor of consciousness in selecting specific translation strategies because biculturality means that a translator should be aware of the motives behind adopting a certain translation procedure based on its significance for the Source Text's (ST) culture or its impact on the Target Text's (TT) culture. In other words, translations which exoticize or adapt unconsciously fall short of facilitating communication between the source culture and target culture because they "fail to anticipate the ground on which the target text will fall" (p. 73), and they do not embody a translator's choice of an action. The view of translation as an action goes back to the tenets of functional translation theory known as *skopos* theory which considers translation as a calculated action with a communicative purpose, the success of which depends on the translator's ability to respond to the situational needs of his/her receptors (Vermeer, 1989). Baker and Saldanha (1998) defined *skopos* as "the intended purpose of the target text that determines translation methods and strategies" (p. 117). This definition stresses the centrality of consciousness in translators' choice of their procedures.

Grosman (1994) underscored the importance of developing translators' cross-cultural awareness defining this competence as the "body of knowledge about the possibilities and relevance of differences between cultures and literatures which must be integrated in the training of students of translation" (p. 51). Literary translation is a challenging task which requires translators to have an advanced level of intercultural awareness and competence, considering the richness of literary texts in cultural content (Omar, 2012; Omar, 2022). Grosman (1994) remarked that "Cross-cultural awareness is particularly important to those involved in the promotion of foreign literature, whether literary translators, critics and editors of literature in translation, teachers and students of foreign literatures, or those reading merely for pleasure" (p. 51). Children's literature differs from other types of literature in view of its sensitive and ancillary position that encourages translators to deal with it flexibly. The most common trend in translating literary works as children's literature is to domesticate them for cognitive reasons, i.e., to educate the readers and facilitate their understanding, and metacognitive reasons that include entertaining the readers and responding to the extralinguistic needs related to their age and sociocultural environment (Leonardi, 2020; Omar, 2021b).

Nonetheless, Grosman (1994) remarked that it is necessary for literary translators to develop their cross-cultural awareness "in order to reduce undue assimilation in literary translation" (p. 51). An instructor can raise the cross-cultural awareness of translation students by highlighting and comparing the differences between the ST's culture and TT's culture. This comparison allows students to learn about the

other culture without “without losing one’s own perspective” (p. 56) because an understanding of culturally embedded differences helps students to inspect the text and therefore suppress any attempts of assimilation. In a globalized era, suppressing the culture differences of the other is not always an option since it is an impediment to communication between individuals who live in a well-connected small village.

Assimilation is an attempt to appropriate cultural content as fits readers’ assumptions and expectations. Assimilation becomes rather risky when adopted by a translator because the translator’s reading will be transferred to TT’s receptors as though it were the actual meaning of the ST. This may consequently lead to misperceptions of target culture by TT readers (Grosman, 1994). To avoid assimilation, literary translators should develop the competence to reflect on their processing of TT’s cultural peculiarities. Yarosh & Muies (2011) remarked that intercultural training should embrace complementarity between the cognitive model (knowledge acquisition) and the empirical model (experimenting new concepts and behaviours). An understanding of the foundation of intercultural communication requires a dual approach that makes “trainees conscious of their culturally-conditioned attitudes and assumptions” (p. 42). Translators should develop their identities to accommodate the principle of autonomous learning and nurture their metacognitive ability to “acquire comparative knowledge of the cultures one is likely to work with” (p. 43).

2.2 An Empirical Model of Translators’ Intercultural Competence

The evolving scholarly interest in nurturing the intercultural competence of translation students/trainees has continued to flourish among translation researchers and instructors (Cnyrim, 2019; Klimczak-Pawlak, 2018; Mirzoyeva & Syurmen, 2016). Studies that tackled the topic from a translation pedagogy perspective attributed the significance of integrating intercultural competence with translation education to earlier research on models of translator competence which comprise, among several components, “the sensitivity and awareness of diversity to recognise the value of... the culture encoded in texts they may come to translate” (Klimczak-Pawlak, 2018, p. 107). Mirzoyeva and Syurmen (2016) posited that translation courses which aim to develop trainees’ intercultural competence have a theoretical design that does not provide learners with authentic opportunities to integrate the knowledge they acquire with professional practices. This study highlighted the poor representation of cultural content in translation course books and recommended developing course materials and assessment tools of intercultural competence as an essential construct in translation training programs.

Klimczak-Pawlak (2018) remarked that earlier translation competence models have implicit references to intercultural competence, which has left a negative impact on translation courses that lack “a precise definition and boundaries of IC” (p. 107). It is necessary for translation programs to integrate intercultural competence with their learning outcomes explicitly and practically. Cnyrim (2019) addressed the existing gap between theory and practice in translation pedagogy by involving students in authentic translation projects inside the classroom for the purpose of developing their intercultural competence gradually. The author demonstrated how students completing a translation education program at a German academic institution developed their intercultural competence by working on actual intra-university projects. This model allowed translation students to collaborate with students from the college of law to provide them with translations of materials needed for their coursework.

The rise in the voices of translation pedagogues who called for engaging translation students with authentic empirical projects was a prologue to pedagogic approaches that aimed to develop translators’ intercultural competence based on the concept of telecollaboration which prospered as an added value, distinctive feature of translator teaching and training in the 21st century (Krajka & Mariusz, 2017; Marczak, 2017; Rafieyan, 2016). Krajka and Mariusz (2017) defined educational telecollaboration as “a form of collaborative learning, enhanced with the implementation of Computer-Mediated-Communication (CMC) tools.” (p. 373). Telecollaborative educational projects are an optimal mode of translation education which allows translation students and teachers to co-construct all components of the educational process including course content, academic tasks, and learning outcomes. Belz (2003) remarked that telecollaboration is the application of institutional virtual exchange to facilitate intercultural communication under the supervision of an EFL language expert.

Rafieyan (2016) highlighted the impact of telecollaboration on improving the sociolinguistic knowledge of translation students. Exposing translation students to first-hand experiences with source language cultural content via institutionally-facilitated online intercultural contact positively impacts students’ translation of culturally rich content and promotes their pragmatic knowledge and understanding of Source Language sociocultural dimensions. In the empirical part, the study provided a statistical reading of data particularly the mean score obtained by learners and the time needed for translating culturally bound content without being consolidated with authentic examples from the students’ contributions.

Krajka and Mariusz (2017) accentuated the need for intercultural communicative competence as an indispensable trait of translators who assume the identity of potential professionals involved in “a translation task, which in itself is an act of intercultural mediation” (p. 372). The authors emphasized the significance of computer-mediated cooperative learning in providing authentic translator training that shifts “translation pedagogy from the ... teacher-centred model of teaching towards the learner-centered, learner-empowering collaborative model” (p. 374). The paper addressed the requirements and implications of incorporating telecollaborative tasks in translator teaching and evaluating the implementation of telecollaborative academic translation projects, concluding that the process is rife with affordances and hurdles on the levels of preparation, implementation, follow up as well as evaluation. The sources of challenge are related to the need to create synergy and balance between instruction and telecollaboration, synchronous time management (that allows for both instruction and follow up to trigger and support learners’ reflective practice) and asynchronous time management (to monitor and guide the progress of participants who are competing against the completion of telecollaborative tasks in the framework of different academic calendars), as

well as designing assessments that comprise an evaluation of the students' individual work and their contribution to telecollaborative projects.

Following the transformation to online education triggered by COVID-19 pandemic, telecollaboration prospered as an effective empirical model in developing learners' intercultural competence in different disciplines (Beecroft & Bauer, 2022; Salih & Omar, 2021) based on Byram's theoretical account on intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1989; 1997). Stankić and Begonja (2021) remarked that intercultural competence is one of the main competencies to be developed by translators, but this competency suffers from the lack of empirical representation and assessment in university translation curricula. The authors observed that intercultural competence comprises a set of skills which cannot be transferred from instructor(s) to learners directly. Such competencies should be "constructed through interpersonal interactions and collaboration... to strike the perfect balance between theoretical and practical knowledge" (p. 333).

Based on an experimental virtual collaboration project in which students from two different universities collaborated to translate a children poem, the researchers concluded that the main problems facing students on the level of intercultural competence were not related to identifying "prototypical elements of culture... For example, many teams decided to culturally adapt proper names of the target text, so that they fit the target culture and language and the expectations of children as potential readers of these poems" (p. 336). The problems were rather related to the students' level of communicative competence in terms of observing and dealing with levels of formality as one of the requirements of cross-cultural communication. The authors' analysis of students' progress was not supported with empirical examples that illustrate the affordances and hindrances of digital telecollaboration in translation pedagogy. In view of the empirical nature of the scholarly topic, substantiating the results and analysis with practical examples from students' tasks and reflections is highly significant since learners' reflections enhance the authenticity of collected data and results can be used as evidence that allows instructors to gauge the development in their learners' competencies (Salih & Omar, 2022a; 2022b; 2022c; 2023).

Beecroft & Bauer (2022) explored the potential of telecollaborative translation tasks in enhancing foreign language students' intercultural communicative competence. The authors view virtual exchange programs as an innovative approach to foreign language pedagogy within the framework of internationalization in UK and German higher education institutions following the pandemic. The authors discussed the challenges encountered in a telecollaborative translation course in terms of being complex and time consuming, and the empirically tested results revealed significant affordances of telecollaborative translation tasks in fostering the intercultural competence of foreign language users, both students and teachers (see also Salih & Omar, 2021).

This study is significant in its theoretical approach and empirical part, given the limited number of studies that adopted an experimental approach to translation pedagogy, particularly in the English/Arabic language combination, and the scarcity of research into developing translators' intercultural competence pedagogically (Tomozeiu et al., 2016). The paper explores a newly researched area in translation pedagogy in the twenty-first century to bridge an existing gap in the literature and answer the following questions:

1. Does online education provide an opportunity for effective intercultural teaching of a translation course?
2. What affordances can telecollaboration provide to promote the skills of translation students?
3. How can translation instructors assess the development in learners' intercultural competence?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research adopted an experimental study implemented based on a three-dimensional pedagogic model: Byram's (1989; 1997) theoretical framework on harnessing transnational telecollaborative projects to develop language learners' intercultural communicative competence, international telecollaboration between an Omani Higher Learning Institution (OHLI) and an American University, and action research methods. The pandemic allowed researchers and instructors to test Byram's model empirically upon the mainstreaming of online education which facilitated academic institutions' endeavours to launch virtual transnational cooperation. The first two pillars of this research: Byram's theoretical model and telecollaboration were employed as theoretical and institutional frameworks for the teaching process.

The third component of the research design, action research, was used for data collection and analysis during and after the end of teaching, considering the value of this research method in achieving the ILOs of courses and improving teaching effectiveness (Hubscher-Davidson, 2008; Massey et al., 2014; Oberg, 1990; Salih & Omar, 2022c). The action research method is valuable in effective online teaching considering the sudden, disruptive changes that affected the educational process during the pandemic (Kapenieks & Salite, 2012; Salih & Omar, 2022a; Salih & Omar, 2022b). The research methods were applied to a course on the translations of English literature into Arabic with a special focus on translating for children. One of the course learning outcomes was to 'recognize the complexities of cultural and pragmatic differences between the SL and TL and develop the competence to mediate between these differences in translating literature in line with a pre-defined skopos. The course was administered online during the COVID-19 emergency teaching when an OHLI launched pilot transnational collaboration with an American University, whereby cooperation occurred between the two instructors and their groups of learners from both universities.

3.2 Participants and Sources of Data

The study's participants were 28 OHLI translation students completing a major requirement course on translating English literature into Arabic. The participants formed a homogenous group of learners as they were all 3rd or 4th-year female Omani students majoring in BA in

Translation or English Language and Literature, and all participants had an advanced level in English language. CLOs comprised the need to nurture the students’ competence in mediating pragmatic and cross-cultural differences in translating literature.

Data were collected from students’ assignments, translation projects and reflections before, during, and after telecollaboration. The students completed two translation tasks. The first task was the translation of STs selected in collaboration with their American peers to be used by the latter as bilingual children’s materials in their service-learning training. In the second task, the students were required to translate selected parts of children’s short stories (accessed on URL: <https://americanliterature.com>) from English into Arabic. The translations were submitted to OHLI instructor along with students’ post-implementation reflections by the end of term.

3.3 Implementation Procedures & Phases

Research methods were implemented over four phases. CLOs comprised components that aimed to promote the students’ cognitive and metacognitive skills, including their knowledge about the main concepts used in literary translation, the problems and strategies of literary translation, and the role of pragmatic and cross-cultural differences in constructing translators’ professional identities. During the first phase, OHLI instructor exposed the students to the main concepts in literary translation such as skopos, domestication, foreignization, appropriateness, compensation, and others, and reinforced this exposure with practical examples from in-class discussions about English literary works translated into Arabic. During the implementation of phase 1 and after assigning each student a short story to translate, participants were asked to identify and explain their skopos, providing translations of the short stories’ titles and some examples whose translations posed challenges for them.

During the second phase, the researcher merged theory and practice in teaching translation by maintaining a balance between the study’s theoretical and empirical components. For instance, the instructor attempted to improve the learners’ translation skills by involving them in activities and other types of assessments inside the classroom and beyond and giving them constant feedback on their performance. Each student was assigned a task to translate a children’s short story from English into Arabic and submit the TTs by the end of term. Throughout participation in different assessments, the students were free to select their translation approach and procedures based on a skopos they identified before the beginning of the translation process, including decisions related to ST’s genre, stylistic features, target readers, publisher, and other considerations.

During the third phase, OHLI students were prepared for telecollaboration projects with their counterparts from the American university. The two instructors explained the telecollaboration steps to their students and provided them with lists of the names and contact details of their peers. The students were asked to initiate communication with their peers first via email, copying both instructors on their correspondence. At an advanced stage, the students maintained the communication process with their international peers via whatsapp chats and zoom meetings. Students from both universities were required to discuss the topics and texts for their virtual collaboration provided that the selected topics incorporated cultural content. During this phase and throughout classroom discussions, the students started to enquire about the possibility of changing the skopos selected before the beginning of telecollaboration, expressing their wish to use different translation procedures. The instructor recorded observations on the students’ change of trajectory and their remarks.

In phase four, the instructors worked as facilitators of the telecollaborative communication process by following up with their students whenever they met synchronously on the progress achieved while completing the translation tasks. During this phase, the students started submitting their complete translations of the texts assigned to them. Also, OHLI’s instructor was collecting data and writing observations and reflections on the students’ translation approaches and reflections before, during and after the telecollaboration project for an analysis and assessment of any progress in students’ level of intercultural competence by the end of term. The following table provides details about implementation procedures and phases.

Table 1. Implementation procedures and phases

Phase	Frequency	Implementation Procedures
Phase 1	First 8 weeks	Exposing the students to basic concepts in literary translation and reinforcing this exposure with practical examples from English literature translated into Arabic.
Phase 2	Continuously	a. OHLI instructor involved the students in translation activities and other assessments in the classroom and beyond.
	Continuously	B. Each student was assigned a children’s short story to translate into Arabic gradually and deliver by the end of the academic term
	Continuously	b. The students were free to choose their translation approach and procedures based on a predefined skopos
Phase 3	Last 8 weeks	a. Students from both HEIs were prepared for telecollaboration and asked to initiate and maintain communication
	Last 8 weeks	b. Students from both HEIs selected the STs for completing Task 2, while instructors worked as facilitators of telecollaboration synchronously
Phase 4	Continuously	a. OHLI’s instructor noted her observations and reflections on students’ translation approaches and reflections before, during and after telecollaboration.
		b. OHLI’s instructor collected data from students’ projects and reflections for ongoing analysis and assessment of their intercultural communication skills

4. Results and Discussion

At the end of the semester, data were collected and analysed to measure the impact of academic virtual exchange on developing

participants' (translation students') intercultural competence. The results revealed that before telecollaboration, the prevalent tendency among translation students was to select a target-culture-oriented skopos (domestication). Most students decided that their STs would be published by a local publisher to target local readers (Omani children). Therefore, the translation approach preferred by the students was the TT-oriented approach (Omar, 2020) which meant to appropriate the content and sometimes form of the STs. Within the frame of cultural appropriation, students used translation procedures like adaptation, deletion, or simplification (reduction) of culture-specific concepts and terms.

Following the initiation of telecollaboration, OHLI students showed a gradual change of trajectory in terms of their choice of skopos. Most students enquired about the possibility of changing their translation skopos by deciding to publish their TTs by an international publisher and address the publication to international readership (children who can read Arabic everywhere in the world). Accordingly, the learners' preference in terms of translation approach started to be dominated by the ST-oriented approach (foreignization) in which the students preserved the cultural content of their STs such as short stories titles, characters' names, cultural concepts, and practices, etc., using strategies like borrowing, calquing (literal translation on the level of the phrase), borrowing and amplification (for cognitive reasons), and others. Table 2 below provides the results in terms of the translation approaches selected by the students before and after telecollaboration.

Table 2. Students' categories by translation approach before and after telecollaboration

<i>Student's Categories</i>	<i>Students' No. Before Telecollaboration</i>	<i>Students' No. After Telecollaboration</i>
Participants with cognitive Problems	5 (17.8%)	2 (7.1%)
Participants who used foreignization	8 (28.5%)	22 (78.5%)
Participants who used domestication	15 (53.5%)	4 (14.2)

In Table 2 above, the students were classified in three categories according to their choice of translation approach and consistency between the selected translation approach or skopos (on the level of the text as a whole) and implemented translation procedures (on textual units' level). The first category comprises students with cognitive problems. This category represents students whose translations suffered from discrepancy between skopos and implemented translation procedures. For example, some students explained that they chose the TT-Oriented approach while providing sample translations of cultural content which was translated directly by borrowing or literal translation. The number of students in the first category dropped from 5 (17.80%) before telecollaboration to 2 (7.10%) after telecollaboration. The fact that this category of students diminished after the end of telecollaboration is a proof of improvement in the participants' cognitive competencies.

The second category of students represented participants who preferred the ST-oriented approach (foreignization). The number of students in this category increased from 8 students (28.5%) before transnational collaboration to 22 students (78.50%) following collaboration. Conversely, the number of students from the third category (those who used domestication) decreased from 15 students (53%) before implementation to 4 students (14.20%) after implementation. The following chart provides a visual representation of the results in the form of bars that show mutation in students' preferences of translation approaches and procedures before and after telecollaboration.

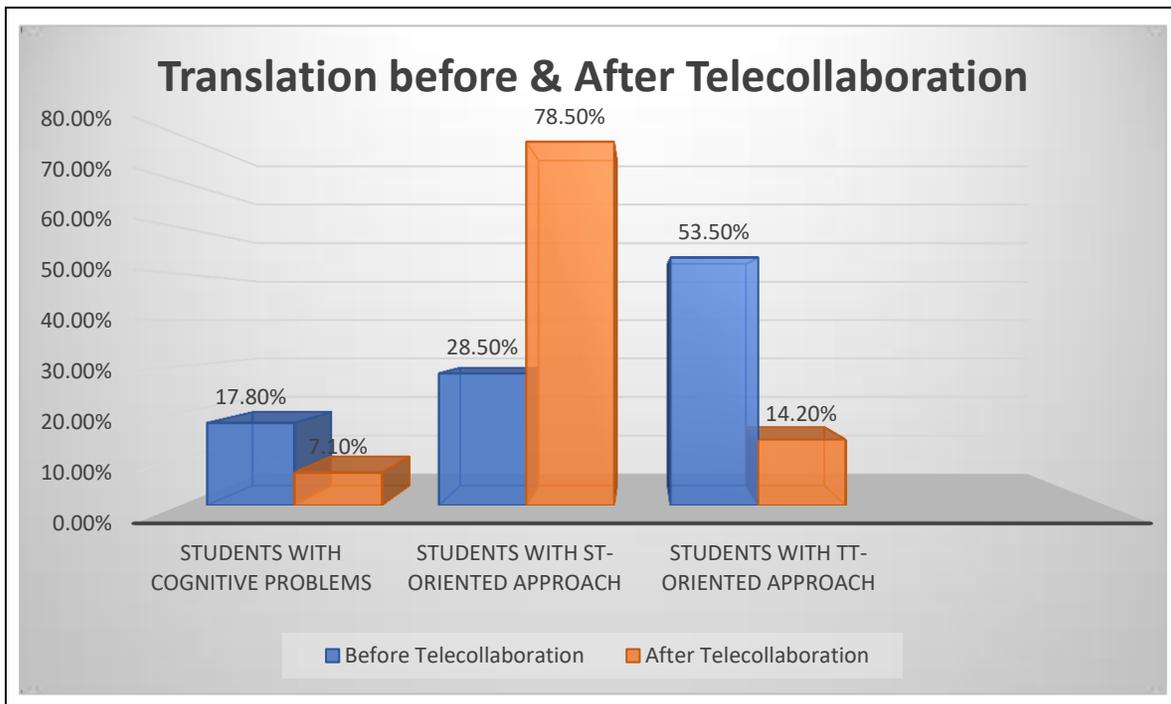


Chart 1. Comparison of Translation Approaches before & after Telecollaboration

4.1 Before Telecollaboration

As revealed in Table 2 and Chart 1 above, before telecollaboration, the tendency among translation students was to select a target-culture-oriented skopos that led to appropriating cultural references, characters’ names, and short stories’ titles. Translation students endeavoured to produce content that is appropriate to the target culture by deleting, adapting, and simplifying cultural references. One student reflected on this by saying, “I will use deletion because the culture of the ST is different, and I will translate it to Muslims. I will omit cultural concepts such as *al-Kaneesa* (the church) and *al-Maseeh* (Jesus Christ)”. Another student commented on her choice of skopos by saying, “I will adapt words to make them acceptable to children. I will change Christmas into *al-Eid* because both have the same meaning and make people happy. I adapt and simplify to help the children understand”. These remarks show that the participants approached the STs’ from the perspective of their culture (Target Culture), out of their belief that children’s literature should reflect the cultural paradigms of the target group to avoid exposing them to alien cultural concepts and practices. Interestingly, some words were adapted to indirect equivalents in the TL although they have common direct equivalents in the students’ language. Examples include the words ‘dog, pumpkin, winter, etc.). This shows the students’ subconscious tendency to adapt every ST’s unit. Table 3 below provides examples of students’ preliminary translations before telecollaboration.

Table 3. Examples from students’ translations before telecollaboration

ST Unit	TT Unit	Transliteration & back translation
Brownie	بدر	<i>Badr</i> (common Arabic name in children’s cartoons)
Papa Panov’s Christmas	عيد الفطر السعيد للعم جدو	<i>Eid al-Fitr al-Saeed lil- ‘am Jiddo. ‘am Jiddo</i> (‘uncle Jiddo’ is a common character name in Arabic children’s literature, and <i>Eid al-Fitr</i> , Festival of Breaking the Fast, is a religious occasion celebrated by Muslims)
Time between Thanksgiving and the New Year	فترة ما بين عيد الفطر وعيد الأضحى	<i>Fatrat ma bayna Eid al-Fitr wa Eid al-Adha</i> (time between <i>Eid al-Fitr</i> , Festival of Breaking the Fast, and <i>Eid al-Adha</i> , Festival of Sacrifice, two religious occasions celebrated by Muslims)
Pumpkin	البقرة الطموحة	<i>Al-baqara al-tamooha</i> (The Ambitious Cow)
The Fir-Tree	شجرة الطلح	<i>Shajarat al-talh</i> (Acacia Tree, grows in Oman’s coastal areas & hills)
Christmas	حفلة عيد الميلاد	<i>Haflat Eid al-Milaad</i> (The Birthday Party)
Pines	شجرة الصبار	<i>Shajarat al-sabbar</i> (cactus tree)
Jungle	وادي الدريات	<i>Wadi al-Darbat</i> (<i>Darbat Valley, a green valley surrounded by spectacular hills in Dhofar, Oman</i>)
Dog	عنزة	<i>‘anza</i> (goat)
Winter	فصل الخريف	<i>Fasl al-Khareef</i> (Monsoon Season)

Throughout the first phase, the students provided a written account of their translation approach, preliminary translations of short stories’ titles, and examples of the translation of culture-specific content. These were collected by OHLI instructor who classified the students into three categories and counted the number of students in each category (as explained earlier) for further analysis. The reflections below reveal that most students adapted the STs’ cultural content to address challenges dealing with the presence of cultural-specific content, which is the main concern for translators of children’s literature, and this observation is in line with the literature’s account on children’s literature (Leonardi, 2020; Omar, 2021b).

A few students justified their choice of domestication on cognitive grounds or stylistic grounds. The students’ reflections show that they had presuppositions about the identity of their TTs’ readers based on their native language, Arabic. Domesticating the STs’ cultural content to make it acceptable to their own cultural norms, the students decided to alienate their target readers from any possible variation in their identities or socio-cultural setting. The fact that the target readers’ native language is Arabic does not mean that all of them are Moslems or live in a socio-cultural environment that has limited interaction with individuals from differing cultural backgrounds. This result shows that the students’ level of intercultural competence was still underdeveloped at this phase as they tended to assimilate the STs’ cultural paradigms with the requirements of their sociocultural environment. This result validates Grosman’s (1994) observation on the necessity to train literary translators to develop their intercultural competence. The following table provides examples from students’ reflections on their translation approach and procedures before telecollaboration.

Table 4. Students’ reflections before telecollaboration

Translation Issue	Reflections before implementation
Cognitive: Difficult concepts Metacognitive: Stylistic aspects	I will adapt the TT-oriented approach because I want to make the text closer to the TL reader and let them understand it without difficulties; and I want to produce the same effect of the ST which is a poem
Metacognitive: Cultural concepts	I will transfer some events like Christmas and types of food to make them suite Gulf cultures. I will also delete cultural concepts like ‘Mary, Joseph and Bethlehem’
Metacognitive: Cultural concepts	Because I decided to choose the TT-oriented approach, I will use strategies such as adaptation which aims to achieve equivalence that can be appreciated within the target language readers
Metacognitive: Cultural concepts cultural norms	I am dealing with two different cultures which have different religious concepts, habits, etc. so, I need to make it as natural as it is in the TL. The TT-oriented approach keeps strange norms away from the hegemony of ideology that affects readers
Metacognitive:	There are some ideological issues in translating the text because cultures have different ways in celebrating. I will

Cultural concepts	domesticate the text by summarizing, changing, and deleting some parts. There are some things which I will omit
Cultural norms	because they are not acceptable or appropriate in our culture like church and Christ
Cognitive:	I will adopt the TT-oriented approach because I want to make the text closer to the TL readers and let them
Difficult concepts	understand it easily without facing difficulties and at the same time have the same effect
Metacognitive:	
Cultural concepts	
Metacognitive:	My text is written to different target readers who have a different culture, so I decided to make some changes
Cultural norms	without distorting the meaning
Cognitive:	I have chosen domestication because my target readers are children so I should simplify the text as much as I can
Difficult concepts	
Cognitive:	I will adapt words to make them acceptable to the children. I will change Christmas into <i>al-Eid</i> because both have
Difficult concepts	the same meaning and make people happy. I adapt and simplify to help the children understand”
Metacognitive:	
Cultural concepts	
Metacognitive	I will use deletion because the culture of the ST is different, and I will translate it to Muslims. I will omit cultural
Cultural Concepts	concepts such as <i>Kanisa</i> (church) and <i>Masih</i> (Christ)
Metacognitive:	My text is written to different target readers who have a different culture, so I decided to make some changes
Cultural Concepts	without distorting the meaning. I have used the TT-oriented approach to make the story more effective and
	acceptable as if it was written in Arabic. Transferring cultural concepts to Arabic may affect the children’s beliefs
Metacognitive:	I will use free translation to be allowed to make some changes without distorting the meaning. I will change the
Cultural concepts	names of characters. Also, I will change places and some events to make them suitable to the culture and
Stylistic aspects	principles of the Omani people. I will also add some events to make the story more enjoyable
Metacognitive:	One of the problems is culturally sensitive words which are not appropriate in our culture. So, I will adapt them to
Cultural concepts	make them acceptable in our culture.
Cognitive:	One problem is translating the names of characters. I have solved this issue by adapting them to make it easy to
Difficult words	children to pronounce them. Also, these names are not used in our culture; so, it was better to replace them by
Metacognitive:	names more familiar for us
Cultural words	

4.2 During Telecollaboration

Throughout transnational collaboration, translation students showed signs of change in trajectory regarding their choice of skopos. They developed an interest in the ST-oriented approach which aims to preserve the STs’ content (titles, characters’ names, cognitive content, cultural concepts, etc.). This was evident in the students’ questions and remarks during classroom discussions. In response to a follow-up question by OHLI instructor on the best approach to translate children’s literature, one student observed that “*Translating children’s literature by domestication seems both right and wrong at the same time*”, while another student remarked “*both domestication and foreignization are appropriate for translating children’s literature*”. At an advanced stage, the students started to pose questions in the classroom like, “Is domestication a constant appropriate approach to translating English literature into Arabic? Who are our readers? Where do our readers live?”

Students’ reflections show the progressive transformation in their identities as professional translators with nurtured competence to use their knowledge of translation theories critically and practically. Also, the students’ reflections show that they developed an interest in the other culture to the extent they started to compare their culture with the STs’ culture. For instance, one student stated, ‘*Christmas celebration takes places in the evening, while Eid al-Fitr celebration happens in the morning. But both make people gather to spend happy times together*’. This observation highlights a positive development in the students’ intercultural competence, and the reflection is consistent with the finding of earlier research that a translator succeeds in avoiding assimilation once they start to compare the ST’s culture with the TT’s culture (Grosman, 1994). Table 5 below provides more examples about students’ reflections during classroom discussions throughout telecollaboration.

Table 5. Students’ remarks during classroom discussions throughout telecollaboration

Acquired competence	Students’ Remarks
Critical thinking	Using the ST-oriented approach to translate children’s literature does not seem to be wrong after all
Critical thinking	Translating children’s literature by domestication seems both right and wrong at the same time.
Critical thinking	Is domestication a constant appropriate approach that must be used in translating English literature into Arabic?
Intercultural competence	Who are our readers? Where do our readers live? Our readers live in a culturally diverse environment (foreignization becomes a means to build their knowledge)
Pragmatic competence	Both domestication and foreignization are appropriate for translating children’s literature
Intercultural competence	Christmas celebration takes places in the evening, while Eid al-Fitr celebration happens in the morning. But both make people gather to spend happy times together

4.3 After Telecollaboration

Following the implementation of telecollaboration, most students (78.50%) adopted the ST-oriented approach to give prominence to the target culture’s values and norms. One student said, “*I used the ST-Oriented approach because I want to educate my readers about other*

cultures and values”. Another student observed, “I want the children to learn more about other religions and understand the differences between Christianity and Islam. This will help them in their interaction and make them more educated in the future...”. A third student explained “I chose the ST-Oriented approach to translate the short story because I do not want to make changes and also, I want to entertain the readers and let them feel every single word and enjoy reading it”. The following table provides examples from students’ translations after collaboration.

Table 6. Examples from students’ translations after telecollaboration

ST examples	TT examples	Transliteration & back translation
Christmas	عيد ميلاد المسيح	<i>Eid Milaad al-Mashih</i> (Christ’s Birthday)
Santa Claus	سانتا كلوز	<i>Santa Clos</i> (Santa Claus)
How Christmas came to Santa Maria Flats	كيف جاء كريسماس إلى شقق سانتا ماريا	<i>Kayfa Ja’a Christmas to Shuqaq Santa Maria</i> (How Christmas came to Santa Maria Flats)
Sun-bonnet	قلنسوة	<i>Qulunsuwa</i> (Sun-bonnet)
Winter	فصل الشتاء	<i>Fasl al-shita’</i> (Winter Season)
Time between Thanksgiving and the New Year	فترة ما بين عيد الشكر ورأس السنة	<i>Fatrat ma bayna Eid al-Shukr wa Ra’s al-Sanah</i> (time between Thanksgiving and the New Year)
Dog	كلب	<i>Kalb</i> (dog)
Aunt Hannah	العمة هنا	<i>Al-Amma Hana</i> (Aunt Hannah)
Jimmy	جيمي	<i>Jimy</i> (Jimmy)
Betsey	بيتسي	<i>Beetsi</i> (Betsey)
Jungle	الغابة	<i>Al-ghaba</i> (jungle)
Pines	شجرة الصنوبر	<i>Shajarat al-Sanawbar</i> (Pines)

The table above highlights the transformation in the students’ translation procedures. Instead of using deletion, adaptation, simplification, etc., the students resorted to strategies such as borrowing, calque, or calque and amplification to enhance the cognitive or metacognitive knowledge of their readers. For instance, the students borrowed cultural concepts like ‘Santa Claus’ and ‘Christmas’ and foreign names of characters such as ‘Aunt Hannah’ and ‘Jimmy’. Some students translated ‘Christmas’ and ‘Thanksgiving’ literally, while others decided to translate Christmas using calque and amplification as ‘Christ’s Birthday’. Also, unlike the procedures adopted in the pilot implementation phase, the students preserved references that have direct equivalents in the target language such as the words ‘dog, winter, jungle, etc. The participants’ reflections in Table 7 explain their motives behind the mutation in their translation preferences.

Table 7. Students’ reflections after collaboration

Motive	Student’s reflections After telecollaboration
Cognitive value	I used the ST-Oriented approach because I want to educate my readers about other cultures and values
Cognitive and metacognitive (intercultural competence)	I want the children to learn more about other religions and understand the differences between Christianity and Islam. This will help them in their interaction and make them more educated in the future
Cognitive and metacognitive (intercultural competence)	In my translation, I will be using the ST-oriented approach. I will not apply many changes because I want my readers to know about other cultures and to improve their language
Cognitive	I want my readers to expand their vocabulary by learning new words. Therefore, I will use literal translation and borrowing
Cognitive	Borrowing new concepts from another language helps the TL readers improve their language and expand their vocabulary
Cognitive and metacognitive (pragmatic)	I chose the ST-oriented approach to translate the short story because I don’t want to make changes, and also I want to entertain the readers and let them feel every single word and enjoy reading it
Unconscious translation	I looked on google for an equivalence in Arabic of the word <i>santa</i> but I did not find any, so I borrowed the word
Cognitive and metacognitive (intercultural competence)	I will translate the story to all children who speak Arabic in the world. My purpose is to educate them (improve their knowledge) about different cultures in the world and entertain them
Cognitive and pragmatic	My purpose behind this translation is to educate and entertain the children and so to help them improve their reading, grammar and vocabulary
Cognitive	I will preserve cultural words but I will add some phrases which suite the education and skills of the readers
Unconscious translation	I borrowed the word ‘Christmas’ into Arabic, instead of translating it as ‘Eid al-Milad’ (the birthday) which is ambiguous. The word ‘Christmas’ is clearer for the readers
Pragmatic competence	I did not change because my readers are Arab children all over the world so the text will not be strange to all of them
Cognitive	I paid attention to the culture because my skopos is to improve the knowledge of readers about other cultures which they are not familiar with
Cognitive and metacognitive	To make the children aware of what is going on in other cultures and to become open-minded children to the whole world, they should have a look at stories that enhance their creative understanding

The reflections in the table above substantiate the progress achieved in the learners’ cognitive and metacognitive competencies, including students’ ability to embrace the principles of autonomous learning, critical thinking, intercultural competence as well as global citizenship. After successful implementation of telecollaboration, the students started to act as professional translators who recognize the influence of

their translation approach and strategies on TT's readers. This result consolidates Witte's (1994) notion of biculturality. In the context of the empirical nature of this study, biculturality means to be able to make translation choices that respond to the receptors' needs, not only as Arabic language little readers, but also as individuals who may have a heterogeneous cultural identity to that of the translators and live in a culturally diverse social environment and globalized world. For example, one student said she used the ST-oriented approach 'to make the children aware of what is going on in other cultures and to become open-minded children to the whole world, they should have a look at stories that enhance their creative understanding', and another student stated 'I will translate the story to all children who speak Arabic in the world. My purpose is to educate them (improve their knowledge) about different cultures in the world and entertain them.'

It is worth noting that the criteria for assessing the progress in students' intercultural competence is not their choice of foreignization or domestication, per se. The progress achieved is measured by the translators' skill to act neutrally, professionally, as well as consciously and recognize the motives behind the choice of certain procedures. As Witte (1994) remarked, translators who foreignize or domesticate unconsciously are not successful in effective cross-cultural communication because they act without realizing the ultimate impact of their translation strategies on the target readers. The results showed that two students out of 28 suffered from the problem of choosing their translation strategy subconsciously, and these were cases of students who encountered cognitive problems in understanding course content (see Table 2). One student said, 'I looked on google for an equivalent in Arabic of the word Santa, but I did not find any, so I borrowed the word'. Another student stated, 'I borrowed the word 'Christmas' into Arabic, instead of translating it as 'Eid al-Milad' (the birthday) which is ambiguous. The word 'Christmas' is clearer for the readers.'

It is evident from the students' reflections after transnational collaboration that they became more sensitive and aware of cultural diversity and the need to take consideration of this diversity in making translation choices. One student remarked, 'I paid attention to the culture because my skopos is to improve the knowledge of readers about other cultures which they are not familiar with.' Another student stated, 'I want the children to learn more about other religions and understand the differences between Christianity and Islam. This will help them in their interaction and make them more educated in the future'. This is in line with the findings of Klimczak-Pawlak (2018) and Yarosh and Muies (2011) that the empirical approach to translator training raises translation students' consciousness about their cultural bias and preconceived ideas about the other and enhances their comparative knowledge and relativity in approaching the ST's cultures.

The results emphasized the effectiveness of online academic partnership in promoting the pedagogical practice of online translation teaching and improving translation students' intercultural communication skills. After international telecollaboration, OHLI translation students' intercultural communicative competence improved noticeably. This result is in harmony with the findings of earlier research on nurturing learners' intercultural competence (Beecroft & Bauer, 2022; Krajka & Mariusz, 2017; Marczak, 2017; Rafieyan, 2016; Salih & Omar, 2021). The fact that the students' approaches to translating the STs changed, although the target readers age group remained the same, proves how translation students deconstructed their professional identities following virtual exchange collaboration with participants from the target culture. After telecollaboration, most students adopted the ST-Oriented approach and prioritized the other culture's values and patterns, which is a significant finding that falls within the scope of course learning outcomes and program learning outcomes and strengthens the students' values of global citizenship (Salih & Omar, 2021; Salih & Omar, 2022b), thus achieving one of the most important graduate attributes of the course syllabus.

5. Conclusion

This paper explored the possibility of teaching a translation course online in the framework of transnational virtual collaboration. Despite the hindrances associated with online teaching of translation regarding the diminished level of verbal student/teacher synchronous interaction, the use of online teaching platforms can be maximized by incorporating an element of international telecollaboration and action research methodology with the teaching process. To become competent intercultural communicators, translation students need to develop several skills that enhance their global citizenship competencies. These skills include the promotion of their intercultural sensitivity, autonomous learning, as well as reflective and critical thinking. The study displayed the value of online cross-cultural collaboration in deconstructing and reconstructing translation students' identities in a way which allows them to play an effective and more informed role in cross-cultural communication.

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