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Fostering Global Citizenship and SDG Integration through COIL in Ibero-America

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ABSTRACT: *This article examines the outcomes of COIL en Clave ODS para la Educación Superior en Iberoamérica, a five-week online training program developed by STAR Argentina to equip higher education professionals across Latin America, the Caribbean, and Spain with the tools to integrate global citizenship and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) initiatives. The program employed a flipped classroom model combined with live, interactive sessions to foster intercultural collaboration and sustainability-oriented pedagogy through active and participatory learning strategies. The analysis of post-program survey responses and reflections indicates successful integration of content and a significant increase in participants' confidence in designing intercultural, SDG-aligned COIL projects, thereby highlighting COIL as a potentially scalable strategy that supports educators in designing learning environments in which international students are positioned as active contributors to sustainability-oriented learning.*

Keywords: Collaborative online international learning (COIL), Global citizenship, Higher education, Online learning, Sustainability, Sustainable development goals (SDGs), Virtual exchange.

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BACKGROUND

As higher education institutions worldwide seek to respond to interconnected global challenges—including climate change, environmental degradation, and social inequality—there is increasing attention to forms of internationalization that extend beyond mobility and disciplinary instruction alone. Within this context, educators and international students are increasingly situated at the intersection of global learning, intercultural engagement, and sustainability-oriented education. These shifts have prompted growing interest in pedagogical models that foster cross-border collaboration while supporting the development of global competencies relevant to diverse educational and sociocultural contexts.

The *COIL en Clave ODS para la Educación Superior en Iberoamérica* program, developed by STAR Argentina, represents a faculty development initiative designed to address these emerging priorities. The program centers on educators as key agents in shaping inclusive and internationally engaged curricula by integrating Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Global Citizenship Education (GCE), and principles of sustainability. Through structured virtual exchange projects, participating educators collaborate transnationally to design learning activities that emphasize dialogue, intercultural communication, and socially relevant problem solving.

This educator-focused approach is particularly relevant for international students—defined in this study as individuals enrolled in higher education outside their country of citizenship—whose numbers reached approximately 6.9 million globally in 2022 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2024). While international students were not direct participants in the present study, the program explicitly positions them within educators' projected teaching practices and COIL designs.

By supporting faculty in developing pedagogical approaches that prioritize intercultural collaboration and sustainability, *COIL en Clave ODS* contributes to broader institutional efforts to increase international students' opportunities for meaningful engagement, dialogue, and participation in globally oriented learning environments.

INTRODUCTION

In an era marked by interconnected global challenges such as climate change, social inequality, and political polarization, higher education is increasingly expected to prepare students and educators to engage as informed and responsible global citizens (UNESCO, 2017). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4.7, emphasize the role of education in fostering global citizenship, sustainable development, and respect for cultural diversity as foundational elements of equitable and transformative learning (United Nations, 2015). Recent research suggests that engagement with global and sustainability-oriented education can enhance learners' environmental awareness, intercultural competence, and social responsibility (Torres et al., 2023).

Within this framework, education for sustainable development (ESD) and global citizenship education (GCE) have gained prominence as complementary approaches that support learners' capacity to critically engage with global issues and to understand the social, cultural, and environmental consequences of human action (Misiaszek, 2024). However, translating these frameworks into practice requires pedagogical models that are both accessible and scalable. Scholars have noted persistent gaps in institutional capacity—particularly in Global South contexts—to implement inclusive, sustainability-focused curricula, as well as limited opportunities for educators to engage in professional development that supports globally connected, SDG-aligned teaching (Amin et al., 2023; Sharma & Hernandez, 2023).

Collaborative online international learning (COIL) has emerged as a promising pedagogical strategy for addressing these challenges by enabling low-cost, technology-mediated collaboration across borders. Through structured virtual exchange, COIL can support intercultural dialogue, collaborative knowledge construction, and engagement with real-world global issues (Leask, 2015). When aligned with ESD and GCE principles, COIL holds particular potential for advancing equity-driven internationalization by expanding access to international learning opportunities beyond traditional mobility programs and positioning international students as active participants in globally oriented learning environments.

Despite growing interest in COIL, empirical research examining faculty development initiatives that integrate COIL with the SDGs—particularly in underrepresented regions—remains limited. Moreover, while international students are frequently identified as key stakeholders in internationalization efforts, their engagement is often discussed indirectly through pedagogical design rather than through direct participation in research. To address this gap, the present exploratory pilot study investigates COIL-based faculty development as a

mechanism for supporting more inclusive and sustainability-oriented teaching practices that place international students at the center of projected learning designs.

Specifically, this study examines educators' experiences in a COIL-oriented professional development program to explore how participation influences their confidence, pedagogical practices, and capacity to integrate the SDGs—particularly SDG 4.7—into their teaching. The study is guided by the following research questions:

- (1) How does participation in the *COIL en Clave ODS* program influence educators' confidence and capacity to integrate sustainable development goals into their teaching practices?
- (2) What professional and pedagogical transformations do educators report as a result of participating in the program?
- (3) To what extent can COIL serve as a scalable and inclusive strategy for advancing global citizenship education and internationalization in underrepresented higher education contexts, with international students positioned as future global change agents through pedagogical design?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) and Global Citizenship Education

Collaborative online international learning (COIL) has emerged as a key pedagogical approach for curriculum internationalization that expands access to intercultural learning beyond physical mobility (Rubin & Guth, 2015; Leask, 2015). COIL initiatives create structured virtual learning environments in which students and educators from different institutional and cultural contexts collaboratively design learning activities, engage in sustained intercultural dialogue, and address shared disciplinary or societal challenges. Unlike short-term virtual exchanges, COIL emphasizes curricular integration, reciprocity, and guided reflection as core design principles (O'Dowd, 2021).

COIL aligns closely with global citizenship education (GCE), which aims to develop learners' capacity to critically engage with global issues, recognize interconnectedness, and act responsibly at the local and global levels (UNESCO, 2017). While GCE provides a normative and ethical orientation—emphasizing social justice, equity, and global responsibility—COIL functions as a pedagogical mechanism through which these principles can be operationalized in classroom practice. Recent scholarship highlights the importance of intentionally aligning COIL design with GCE objectives to move beyond surface-level intercultural contact toward deeper critical engagement and learner agency (Torres et al., 2023; Stein et al., 2022).

Empirical studies suggest that well-designed COIL experiences can enhance intercultural communication, perspective-taking, and critical digital literacy (de Wit & Hunter, 2015; O'Dowd, 2018; Higgins, 2024). More recent work conceptualizes COIL as a form of *digital intercultural learning* in which students

negotiate meaning, power relations, and knowledge production across cultural and linguistic boundaries (O’Dowd, 2021; Schaefer & Manchado-Nieto, 2025).

However, Amin et al. (2023) caution that without explicit integration of GCE and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), COIL risks reinforcing technical or instrumental approaches to internationalization rather than addressing global inequities. Within this growing body of scholarship, empirical attention to faculty development models—particularly those situated in Ibero-American higher education contexts—remains limited.

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and SDG Integration in Higher Education

The United Nations 2030 Agenda highlights the central role of education in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4.7, which calls for education that promotes global citizenship, sustainable lifestyles, human rights, and cultural diversity (United Nations, 2015). Education for sustainable development (ESD) seeks to equip learners with the competencies needed to critically understand complex global challenges and to act ethically and responsibly in response (UNESCO, 2017).

Recent studies indicate that higher education programs that explicitly integrate ESD increase learners’ awareness, ethical reasoning, and willingness to engage in sustainability-oriented action (Chasokela, 2024; UNESCO, 2023). Nevertheless, significant challenges remain, especially in institutions in the Global South, where structural constraints, limited professional development opportunities, and uneven access to international networks hinder the meaningful integration of the SDGs into curricula (Sharma & Hernandez, 2023). These barriers highlight the importance of faculty development initiatives that translate ESD principles into pedagogically actionable frameworks.

COIL as a Pedagogical Bridge between GCE, ESD, and Internationalization

Integrating COIL with GCE and ESD frameworks offers a promising pathway for advancing inclusive and equity-oriented internationalization in higher education (Misiaszek, 2024). Rather than positioning internationalization as synonymous with student mobility, COIL enables institutions to embed global learning within the curriculum while centering on sustainability and local relevance (Udoh & Workman, 2025). In this sense, López and Costa (2023) conceptualize COIL as a “third space” (Bhabha, 1994) in which dominant epistemologies can be interrogated and diverse perspectives legitimized through dialogic and collaborative learning.

Recent research has emphasized that such integration is most effective when supported by structured faculty development programs that address pedagogical design, power asymmetries, and ethical dimensions of virtual collaboration (Amin et al., 2023; Stein et al., 2022; Falasca, 2026). Studies of COIL-oriented professional learning communities report increased pedagogical innovation,

reflective teaching practices, and alignment between internationalization and sustainability goals (Torres et al., 2023; Leite, 2021).

At the same time, scholars caution that COIL's long-term sustainability depends on institutional commitment. De Wit (2020) argues that without integration into curricular frameworks, policy agendas, and recognition systems, COIL initiatives risk remaining peripheral. This highlights the need to examine faculty development as a strategic lever for embedding COIL, GCE, and ESD within higher education systems—particularly in underrepresented and resource-constrained contexts.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted an exploratory case study design to examine the outcomes of the *COIL en Clave ODS para la Educación Superior en Iberoamérica* faculty development program. The methodological approach was selected to capture both measurable shifts in participants' self-perceived competencies and richer qualitative insights into their professional and pedagogical experiences. Given the pilot nature of the initiative and the small, purposive sample, the study does not aim for statistical generalization but rather seeks to provide contextually grounded insights into COIL-based faculty development in underrepresented higher education settings.

To contextualize the methodological approach adopted in this exploratory study, the following section provides an overview of the *COIL en Clave ODS para la Educación Superior en Iberoamérica* program that served as the intervention under investigation. Describing the program's design, structure, and pedagogical foundations is essential for understanding the nature of participants' learning experiences and the instructional context within which data were generated.

Program Overview

The *COIL en Clave ODS* program integrated Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), Global Citizenship Education (GCE), and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as complementary frameworks to foster global competence, intercultural collaboration, and sustainability-oriented learning in higher education. Drawing on established research highlighting COIL's potential to internationalize the curriculum and promote meaningful cross-cultural engagement without requiring physical mobility, the program sought to create inclusive virtual spaces in which educators and students from diverse contexts could co-construct knowledge, critically engage with global issues, and reflect on their roles as active global citizens. By aligning its design with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—particularly SDG 4.7—the program aimed to empower participants to integrate global citizenship, sustainable development, and social justice into their teaching and institutional practices.

Guided by these principles, the program under review was implemented as a fully online initiative that ran from March 8 to April 5, 2025. It involved 15 educators representing seven countries—Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Spain, Mexico, and Peru—across a range of disciplinary backgrounds, including STEM, social sciences, foreign languages, and the humanities (see Table 1 for a complete demographic and disciplinary profile of all the participants). Structured around three key modules, the program combined asynchronous activities with five synchronous Zoom sessions covering the following thematic areas:

1. Principles of Global Education and Active Learning Approaches – This module focused on foundational concepts of global education, emphasizing methodologies such as flipped classrooms, problem-based learning (PBL), and challenge-based learning.
2. Introduction to the Sustainable Development Goals and COIL Design – Participants were introduced to the SDGs and guided through the pre-, during-, and post-phases of COIL implementation.
3. Future challenges and opportunities – The final module fostered reflection on institutional barriers, regional constraints, and strategies for sustaining international collaboration.

Program participants were selected on the basis of a detailed needs assessment survey and a letter of recommendation that demonstrated their commitment to empowering international students as global change agents in their communities and future professions. Once admitted, they were expected to engage actively with all course components, complete asynchronous assignments in Google Classroom, and participate fully in synchronous discussions. Program completion required the submission and presentation of a draft COIL project aligned with one or more SDGs. Projects were evaluated via a rubric emphasizing clarity, feasibility, and alignment with SDG 4.7.

The program was designed and coordinated by the STAR Country Director for Argentina, with the support of the Country Directors for Spain and Mexico. It was facilitated by a diverse team of four professionals from Honduras, Mexico, Colombia, and Spain, and it featured two guest speakers from Colombia with extensive expertise in COIL design and implementation. To ensure continuity and sustained impact, facilitators remained available to support participants for four weeks after the program's official end, encouraging the implementation of projects and the submission of follow-up reports.

Building on this collaborative and inclusive foundation, the initiative was intentionally structured to include underrepresented educators and foster equitable transnational dialogue. It focused not only on building capacity but also on advancing educational justice across borders. In addition to being a methodological framework, COIL served as a transformative space to reimagine education as a driver of social and environmental justice. Throughout the program, participants reflected on their local teaching contexts, explored active

pedagogies such as flipped classrooms and problem-based learning, and collaboratively designed SDG-aligned virtual exchanges to enable international students to become drivers of positive global change.

Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using an online Google Form. The surveys consisted of two complementary components:

1. Likert-scale items designed to assess participants' self-perceived confidence, pedagogical capacity, and ability to integrate collaborative online international learning (COIL) and sustainable development goals (SDGs)—particularly SDG 4.7—into their teaching practices. The items were organized around the three research questions and addressed constructs such as COIL-SDG project design, teaching confidence, professional development, and perceived impact on teaching international students.
2. Open-ended questions and reflective prompts that invited participants to elaborate on their learning experiences, perceived professional transformations, challenges encountered, and anticipated implications for their students and institutions.

The survey items were developed to align with the program's learning objectives and were informed by the literature on COIL, global citizenship education (GCE), and education for sustainable development (ESD). Content and face validity were supported by expert review from experienced COIL practitioners involved in the program design and facilitation, ensuring conceptual alignment among the instruments, the course content, and the research questions. Given the program's professional development focus, the survey items emphasized self-efficacy and pedagogical readiness rather than direct measures of behavioral change.

In addition to survey data, a key performance indicator was the successful design and submission of COIL project proposals aligned with at least one SDG. These proposals were displayed in a virtual gallery and served as evidence of participants' ability to apply the theoretical and practical knowledge introduced during the program (Falasca, 2025). The proposals were therefore included as an additional data source reflecting participants' engagement with COIL design and SDG integration.

Participants

The final sample comprised 15 higher education educators (9 female, 6 male) from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Spain who completed all program requirements and the survey instruments. The participants represented a range of disciplinary backgrounds, including STEM, social sciences, education, foreign languages, and the humanities. To protect anonymity, participants were assigned

identification codes (T1–T15). A demographic and disciplinary overview is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Participant Counts by Country, Institution, and Discipline (COIL 2025 Survey)

Country	University	Count	Discipline
Argentina	I.E.S. en Lenguas Vivas J.R.F.	1	English as a Foreign Language
Argentina	Instituto Superior Pbro. Dr. A. Sáenz	1	Discursive Practices/Written Communication
Argentina	Universidad Kennedy	1	Educational Psychology/Health Sciences/Social Sciences
Argentina	Universidad del Chubut, ISFD 1802	1	English Language Teaching/Didactics/Teacher Training/ Internationalization
Argentina	INSPT UTN	1	English as a Foreign Language
Chile	Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María	1	Engineering/STEM
Chile	UNIACC	1	English Language Teaching
Costa Rica	Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica	1	Educational Research
El Salvador	Universidad Modular Abierta	1	Criminal and Constitutional Law
Mexico	Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco	2	Sustainable Development/Social Responsibility/Green Marketing/Social Sciences/English as a Foreign Language/French
Peru	Universidad Autónoma del Perú y Universidad César Vallejo	1	Education/Social Responsibility
Perú	Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas	1	Applied Sciences/STEM/Business
Spain	Universidad de Vigo	2	Spanish as a Foreign Language/Spanish Literature/Business

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed via descriptive statistics (minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation) to summarize the participants' responses across key constructs related to the research questions. Given the sample size, no inferential statistical tests were conducted. The quantitative findings were used to contextualize participants' overall perceptions of learning outcomes and professional growth.

Qualitative data from open-ended responses were analyzed via thematic analysis, following an iterative process of coding, categorization, and interpretation. The responses were first read holistically to identify recurring patterns, and then grouped into thematic categories aligned with the study's research questions, including confidence development, pedagogical transformation, intercultural learning, and anticipated impact on international students. Representative excerpts were selected to illustrate each theme.

In addition to survey data, the successful design and submission of SDG-aligned COIL project proposals were treated as key performance indicators. These proposals, developed and presented by participants at the end of the program, were reviewed as supplementary qualitative evidence of participants' engagement with COIL design processes and SDG integration, complementing the survey findings. All procedures adhered to the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Code of Ethics (2011) and the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018), ensuring confidentiality, voluntary participation, and respect for participants.

RESULTS

This section presents the descriptive quantitative results and qualitative findings derived from the post-program survey and participant reflections. The results are organized according to the three research questions.

Quantitative Results

The quantitative findings are based on descriptive statistics calculated from the final program questionnaire ($N = 15$). Table 2 summarizes the minimum and maximum values, means, and standard deviations for each construct aligned with the research questions. The participants reported high mean scores across all the measured constructs. The highest mean values were observed for the acquisition of new ideas and perspectives ($M = 4.87$, $SD = .352$) and contribution to the community ($M = 4.87$, $SD = .516$). Lower variability was observed in constructs related to the COIL–SDG project design and integration, whereas confidence and integration of COIL–SDG in teaching international students showed greater dispersion.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistical Data from the Final Program Questionnaire

Construct	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Design of an effective COIL–SDG project (RQ1)	4	5	4.80	.414
Confidence (RQ1)	2	5	4.47	.990
Integration of COIL with other work (RQ1)	4	5	4.80	.414
Acquisition of new ideas and perspectives (RQ2)	4	5	4.87	.352
Professional development and sense of teaching purpose (RQ2)	4	5	4.80	.414
Teaching skills (RQ2)	3	5	4.73	.594
Integration of COIL–SDG in teaching international students (RQ3)	2	5	4.47	.834
Implementation of COIL–SDG project (RQ3)	4	5	4.53	.516
Contribution to the community (RQ3)	3	5	4.87	.516

Qualitative Results

The qualitative analysis of the open-ended survey responses yielded several recurring themes aligned with the research questions: (1) the integration of the SDGs into teaching practices, (2) professional and pedagogical development, and (3) perceived implications for students and communities.

Integration of the SDGs into Teaching Practice (RQ1)

The participants described increased familiarity with SDG 4.7 and reported intentions to incorporate global citizenship and sustainability themes into their courses. One participant noted that the program supported reflection on how to address global citizenship education in classroom practice:

“The program helped me better understand SDG 4.7 because it explored different aspects of global citizenship education. It gave us time to reflect on how to bring these topics into the classroom and share useful strategies and approaches to use with students.” (T15)

Another participant highlighted the relevance of SDG integration within their disciplinary context:

“This program was key to helping me better understand SDG 4.7... Through intercultural collaboration, I developed new teaching tools to bring these ideas into the classroom.” (T4)

All participants reported having designed or planned a COIL project aligned with at least one SDG. Frequently referenced goals included SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

Professional and Pedagogical Development (RQ2)

The participants described changes in their teaching approaches, professional perspectives, and sense of purpose. Several respondents referenced shifts toward more participatory and reflective pedagogies:

“This program encouraged me to begin a journey to change my teaching practices.” (T10)

Others emphasized the value of engaging with colleagues from different national and disciplinary contexts:

“Participating in this training offered an opportunity for educational improvement and interaction with teachers from different countries.” (T3)

The participants also reported acquiring new methodological and technological tools and described increased motivation and confidence in designing COIL-based learning activities.

Perceived Implications for Students and Communities (RQ3)

Most participants referred to the anticipated implications of their COIL project designs for international students and, in some cases, for broader local communities. These references focused primarily on student engagement, intercultural interaction, and the application of course content to real-world sustainability challenges. Among the 15 participants, 13 reported plans to revise learning activities to increase student participation and collaboration within international teams.

One participant noted an intention to adjust classroom activities to foster greater student involvement:

“I believe I will improve activities and get students to be more involved.” (T1)

Others described designing COIL projects that emphasized collaboration across institutions and contexts, often linked to specific SDGs:

“My plan is to partner with educational institutions to apply the strategies designed, ensuring that students have access to more inclusive, high-quality learning experiences.” (T5)

The participants also referred to the use of digital tools and virtual collaboration to connect students from different cultural and national backgrounds. These planned interactions were described as opportunities for students to exchange perspectives, address shared challenges, and relate disciplinary content to broader social and environmental issues. Several respondents highlighted the intention to incorporate project-based or challenge-based activities oriented toward community relevance.

In addition to anticipated outcomes, participants identified challenges associated with implementing COIL projects, particularly in relation to time constraints, contextual adaptation, and the integration of students into international collaborations. These challenges were commonly described alongside references to peer support and facilitator guidance during the program. For example, one participant stated:

“One of the challenges was incorporating students.” (T1)

Another participant noted:

“The biggest challenge was thinking about the final product and its relevance for the local community.” (T10)

Summary of Results

Across quantitative and qualitative data sources, participants reported high levels of engagement with COIL–SDG integration, professional development, and COIL project design. Descriptive statistics revealed consistently high mean scores across constructs related to confidence, the acquisition of new ideas and perspectives, and the perceived integration of COIL and SDG principles into teaching practice.

Qualitative responses documented participants’ reflections on pedagogical change, including shifts toward more participatory and collaborative approaches, increased attention to global citizenship and sustainability themes, and experiences of intercultural collaboration with colleagues from diverse institutional and national contexts. The participants also outlined anticipated applications of COIL projects within their teaching settings, including student collaboration, community-oriented activities, and SDG-aligned learning tasks.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERATIONAL STUDENTS

This study examined the outcomes of a COIL-based faculty development program intentionally aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a particular emphasis on SDG 4.7 and global citizenship education. Overall, the findings suggest that participation in the *COIL en Clave ODS program* supported educators’ self-reported confidence, pedagogical capacity, and professional orientation toward sustainability-focused and intercultural teaching practices. These outcomes align with prior research highlighting the role of faculty development in advancing internationalization and global learning agendas, particularly in contexts where access to traditional mobility programs is limited (Leask, 2015; Sharma & Hernandez, 2023; Falasca, 2026).

Although international students were not direct participants in the professional development activities or data collection procedures of this study, they were intentionally positioned as central actors within the COIL projects designed by educators. Accordingly, interpretations of student outcomes should be understood as anticipated pedagogical impacts mediated through faculty practice rather than as direct empirical evidence of international students’ experiences.

Faculty Capacity for COIL–SDG Integration (RQ1)

With respect to Research Question 1, participants reported increased familiarity with SDG 4.7 and greater confidence in integrating sustainability and global citizenship themes into their teaching through COIL design. Rather than treating

the SDGs as abstract policy frameworks, educators described developing concrete project ideas that connected disciplinary content, intercultural collaboration, and locally relevant sustainability challenges. This finding reinforces previous scholarship suggesting that COIL can function as a practical pedagogical bridge between global frameworks and classroom-level implementation (López & Costa, 2023).

Within these emerging pedagogical designs, international students were consistently envisioned as collaborators and contributors rather than as passive recipients of content. While student learning was not directly measured, educators' project plans reflected contemporary models of international education that emphasize participation, reciprocity, and agency through intercultural and sustainability-oriented collaboration (Misiaszek, 2024).

Professional and Pedagogical Transformation (RQ2)

Findings related to Research Question 2 point to perceived professional and pedagogical shifts among participants, particularly in relation to reflective practice, intercultural engagement, and teaching purposes. Educators described the program as an opportunity to reassess existing instructional approaches and explore more participatory, student-centered pedagogies. This aligns with prior research indicating that engagement in COIL and global citizenship initiatives can foster pedagogical innovation and renewed professional motivation (Amin et al., 2023; Torres et al., 2023).

The participants also reported adopting or planning to adopt instructional strategies such as problem-based learning, collaborative project work, and digitally mediated intercultural exchanges. Although the study does not assess student learning outcomes, these pedagogical orientations are frequently associated with learning environments that support engagement, dialogue, and inclusion—conditions that are particularly salient for international students navigating diverse academic and cultural contexts (Abe et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2024). In this sense, reported professional transformations may contribute to instructional conditions that are more conducive to meaningful international student participation.

Implications for Equity and Internationalization (RQ3)

In relation to Research Question 3, participants' reflections highlight COIL as a potentially inclusive approach to internationalization, particularly within underrepresented higher education contexts. The program's virtual format was perceived as reducing barriers related to cost, geography, and access—constraints that disproportionately affect institutions and learners in the Global South. These perceptions are consistent with emerging literature positioning COIL as a complementary model for international engagement rather than a replacement for physical mobility (De Wit, 2020; Misiaszek, 2024).

Most participants emphasized the importance of designing COIL projects that foreground local realities, multilingual interactions, and SDG-oriented problem

solving. Such approaches may offer international students learning experiences that are more contextually grounded and responsive than traditional models centered exclusively on physical mobility. However, these implications remain grounded in educators' intentions and project designs rather than in direct evidence of students' experiences.

Institutional Considerations and Sustainability

Several participants highlighted the need for sustained institutional support to ensure the continuity and impact of COIL initiatives. This finding echoes broader discussions in the internationalization literature regarding the importance of embedding virtual exchange within institutional policies, curricula, and reward structures (De Wit, 2020). While the program fostered individual educators' capacity and innovation, longer-term impacts likely depend on structural conditions, including leadership support, workload recognition, and opportunities for ongoing mentoring and collaboration.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this exploratory study. First, the data were derived from a relatively small, self-selected sample of educators participating in a short-term faculty development program, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Second, the findings are based on self-reported perceptions rather than observational or longitudinal measures of pedagogical change. Most notably, international students were not direct participants in the study; therefore, no empirical claims can be made regarding student learning outcomes or experiences.

Future research would benefit from incorporating international students' perspectives through mixed methods or longitudinal designs that examine how COIL-informed pedagogical practices are enacted in classrooms and how they shape students' engagement, learning, and sense of agency over time. Comparative studies across institutional and regional contexts, as well as research examining institutional conditions that support the sustainability of COIL initiatives, would further strengthen the understanding of COIL's role in equity-driven internationalization.

CONCLUSION

This pilot initiative provides exploratory evidence that collaborative online international learning (COIL), when intentionally designed and grounded in principles of global education, can serve as an accessible approach to advancing sustainability and global citizenship within higher education. By foregrounding SDG 4.7 and fostering pedagogical innovation through international collaboration, the *COIL en Clave ODS para la Educación Superior en Iberoamérica* program supported educators from Latin America, the Caribbean,

and Spain in developing COIL projects oriented toward intercultural learning and sustainability-focused teaching.

Through its inclusive and flexible structure, the program enabled participants—many of whom reported limited access to traditional internationalization opportunities—to connect across borders, exchange perspectives, and co-design educational experiences intended for implementation with international and local students. The SDG-aligned COIL projects developed by participants reflect increased confidence in COIL design and a strengthened commitment to teaching practices grounded in equity, intercultural understanding, and sustainability.

An important contribution of this initiative lies in its potential multiplier effect. By equipping faculty with pedagogical tools and frameworks to design inclusive, globally oriented learning environments, the program may indirectly shape how international students experience engagement, collaboration, and global learning. While student outcomes were not examined in this study, participants consistently positioned students as active contributors within their COIL designs, envisioning learning experiences that emphasize intercultural dialogue, collaborative problem solving, and engagement with real-world sustainability challenges. Such approaches align with broader educational goals associated with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2024).

As higher education institutions increasingly seek to align curricular and internationalization strategies with the SDGs, initiatives such as *COIL en Clave ODS* offer a promising and cost-effective pathway for curricular innovation. They illustrate how internationalization can be advanced through intentional virtual collaboration rather than relying exclusively on physical mobility, particularly in resource-constrained contexts (Leask, 2015). This perspective is consistent with recent findings indicating that curriculum-embedded virtual exchange can foster intercultural competence and expand access to international learning opportunities (Cuevas Álvarez et al., 2025).

Sustained investment in faculty development—particularly in regions historically underrepresented in global partnerships—will be critical to extending the reach and impact of initiatives that shape international students' learning experiences. Institutional commitment to integrating COIL within broader strategic frameworks, together with follow-up support and systematic evaluation, may help ensure the long-term sustainability of pedagogical models that promote meaningful international student engagement. Overall, by strengthening educators' capacity to design inclusive, intercultural, and globally oriented learning environments, COIL-based faculty development initiatives represent a meaningful step toward enhancing how international students participate in, contribute to, and benefit from globally connected higher education initiatives.

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