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Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) on Laudato Si': Ecuador and Argentina Campaigning Together

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ABSTRACT: *The concept of Integral Ecology, introduced in Laudato Si', highlights the interdependence of humanity, society, and nature, calling for shared global responsibility and sustainable lifestyles. In this context, forty-six communication students and four professors from Ecuador and Argentina participated in a six-week collaborative online international learning (COIL) project, "University Laudato Si'" (2023), integrating the service learning (SL) methodology. Participants were able to co-design and implement an international sustainability campaign adapted to diverse cultural and social contexts. The study adopts a qualitative design, analyzing students' videos, final presentations, and written reflections. This triangulation identified learning outcomes and collaborative dynamics in both international and local campaigning. The findings indicate that international teamwork enhanced participation, interaction, and intercultural understanding while empowering students to assume leadership roles as promoters of global citizenship committed to sustainability and social responsibility.*

Keywords: COIL, Global Citizenship Education, Integral Ecology, Service Learning, Sustainability

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INTRODUCTION

This article introduces collaborative online international learning (COIL) and the importance of sustainability campaigning as the twin conceptual pillars underpinning the present study, which draws on a joint course in which communication students from Ecuador and Argentina developed collaborative campaigns during the last trimester of 2023.

COIL has emerged as a powerful model for facilitating digitally mediated intercultural exchange and collaborative knowledge construction across borders (Marsee & Pineda Hoyos, 2025; Miller & Ali, 2025; Romero-Archila, 2025; Rubin, 2017). Moreover, sustainability campaigning—defined here as organized, participatory efforts to advocate for environmental and social justice—has gained urgency in response to global challenges such as climate change and resource depletion (Aguilar et al., 2021; Filho et al., 2025; UNESCO, 2020).

Examining these concepts together highlights how virtual, cross-cultural learning environments, facilitated through a participatory COIL framework, can foster critical engagement with sustainability. Such settings enable communication students to design, implement and assess campaigns that address local and global concerns aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (CEPAL, 2017; United Nations, 2025) while applying and extending the knowledge they have previously acquired.

This article investigates how COIL, as a pedagogical approach, can support the development of international sustainability initiatives that can be put into practice and how campaigning, in turn, can amplify COIL's transformative potential. A critical stance is maintained throughout, stressing issues of equity, representation, and access while clearly contextualizing both the practices examined and the participants involved.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teamwork is widely recognized as a key soft skill in the workplace (De Prada et al., 2022), and mastering it is increasingly essential for graduates in any professional field and is essential for those pursuing careers in communication and public relations. To address this demand, many universities now embed collaborative practices throughout their curricula, using group projects and other active learning strategies to help students develop both interpersonal and organizational abilities. However, cultivating teamwork competence in online environments remains especially challenging, particularly when trying to preserve the rich interaction, spontaneous dialog, and peer-to-peer learning that typically emerge in face-to-face settings (Navío-Marco et al., 2025; Syynimaa et al., 2024). These challenges call for deliberate instructional design, effective digital tools, and continuous facilitation to ensure that virtual collaboration achieves the proposed learning outcomes, which could even exceed those of traditional classrooms.

Regarded as a cornerstone of higher education, teamwork fosters collaboration, communication, problem-solving, and leadership skills that employers consistently rank as essential for the workplace. Although often used interchangeably, teamwork and group work differ in scope and emphasis. Group work usually focuses on completing a task with limited role definition or sustained interaction, whereas teamwork requires structured coordination, shared accountability, and interpersonal skills development. This distinction reflects the demands of professional contexts, where collaboration depends on both outcomes and relational dynamics (Francis et al., 2025).

Extending this distinction, teamwork can also be understood as a collective process. Meyers et al. (2023) describe 'collective strengths' as the shared awareness, trust, and coordination of members' strengths to enable effective collaboration. This perspective reinforces that teamwork relies on alignment within the collective, moving beyond individual contributions to a shared capacity for performance. Recognizing and valuing each team member's distinctive abilities fosters a positive view of the group's collective strengths. This appreciation often leads to behaviors that enhance overall performance, as members feel a shared responsibility to contribute and to support one another, even when individual differences are modest. By focusing on both their own capabilities and those of their peers, team members build rapport, empathy, and trust, which in turn strengthens collegiality and fosters smoother, more productive collaboration.

However, effective teamwork is far from guaranteed. In both professional and academic settings, breakdowns in group dynamics can undermine learning outcomes and project quality. Drawing on multiple studies, Zainuri & Huda (2023) identify common sources of imbalance, including weak communication structures, excessive criticism and conflict, disorganized or uneven contributions, breaches of academic integrity, and a lack of accountability and mutual trust. Such challenges highlight the need for strategies focusing on clear role definitions and structured and well-organized communication channels and forms as well as mechanisms for conflict resolution that could cultivate truly collaborative teams.

COIL relies on teamwork, in which the quality of outcomes depends as much on collective performance as on individual ability. Teams carry shared accountability and must draw on members' distinct strengths to achieve high performance. For example, a typical COIL course leveraging information and communication technologies (ICTs) to connect participants from different institutions in different countries with diverse cultural backgrounds may begin by sharing individual skills such as digital editing, data visualization, or language proficiency. Recognizing these strengths enables the group to assign tasks strategically, even though they have never met face-to-face, leading to more efficient collaboration and a stronger sense of collective responsibility.

The COIL methodology can combine synchronous meetings with asynchronous activities, offering educators considerable flexibility to design creative and interactive learning experiences that foster both teamwork and intercultural understanding. Beyond teamwork, a central competence developed in COIL is intercultural competence, which has become essential for effective interaction in an increasingly globalized world. Globalization involves a dense network of social, economic, and cultural exchanges that connect actors at the local, national, regional, and transnational levels. Within this broad phenomenon, internationalization refers to more deliberate and strategic processes, particularly in higher education, where institutions build cross-border partnerships and design specific initiatives to integrate global perspectives into curricula. By positioning students within these dynamics, COIL not only strengthens intercultural competence involving cultural diversity awareness, adaptability, and critical reflection.

The field of intercultural competence seeks to understand how individuals adapt and interact effectively across cultural boundaries. It involves not only linguistic ability but also attitudes of openness, cultural knowledge, and the ability to interpret and relate across contexts. However, many studies on intercultural competence examine only communication competence and linguistic ability in second language acquisition (e.g., Chau et al., 2024). It is important to recognize that intercultural competence goes beyond language and extends past binary North–South global exchanges, encompassing diverse opportunities for cultural exchange and conflict resolution (Goldstein, 2025).

As reported by Awad & Trenchs-Parera (2024), over the past forty years, numerous models for developing and assessing intercultural competence have emerged. Their study focuses on an understudied context, namely, students from

the Global South in intercultural settings. The authors identified four broad dimensions of intercultural competence: knowledge, attitudes, skills, and values.

In terms of knowledge, participants emphasized both an understanding of culture-specific information in their own and other cultures and sociolinguistic knowledge in first and foreign languages. The attitudinal dimension proved to be the most diverse, encompassing respect for other cultures, appreciation of similarities and acceptance of differences, curiosity and interest in intercultural topics, openness to interacting and living with people from other cultures, readiness to suspend judgment, and the dispelling of preconceived notions. The skills dimension included the ability to observe cultural elements, analyze and interpret them, express critical intercultural issues, and question one's own attitudes and practices. Finally, the values dimension was reflected in the endorsement of equality and peaceful coexistence, as well as in the motivation for positive change in oneself, society, and the wider world.

On the other hand, the dimensions of intercultural competence resonate with the framework of global citizenship education (GCE), which has expanded significantly in recent years in response to the demands of globalization and the urgent need to address ongoing environmental degradation.

Global Citizenship Education

The GCE has emerged as a key educational approach for addressing intertwined social, political, and environmental challenges (UNESCO, 2025). Rather than limiting itself to traditional civic education within national borders, the GCE emphasizes cultivating a sense of belonging to a broader human community and recognizing the interdependence and eco-dependence that shape global realities. From critical and decolonial perspectives, the GCE also invites learners to question dominant narratives of globalization and to imagine more equitable and sustainable alternatives (Calvo-Salvador & Fueyo Gutiérrez, 2025). In this sense, UNESCO stresses that GCEs empower people of all ages “to make a meaningful impact in their communities”. The GCE not only equips individuals with analytical tools to understand phenomena such as climate change, inequality, or hate speech but also fosters values of solidarity, justice, and collective responsibility, encouraging transformative action across cultural and national boundaries. Terogo (2026) suggested that universities need more critical and meaningful engagement with global challenges to truly promote GCEs within internationalization efforts. In this context, South–South COIL collaborations provide an important opportunity to develop more equitable and locally grounded international partnerships.

It can be claimed that the year 2015 was when global citizenship awareness and education were consolidated: in May, Pope Francis launched the encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*; the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were launched by the United Nations in September, and the Paris Climate Agreement was signed in December.

The Encyclical *Laudato Si'* - “On Care for Our Common Home” is a landmark document that positions ecological concerns at the heart of Catholic social

teaching. The encyclical moves beyond a purely technocratic or utilitarian understanding of stewardship, instead emphasizing an ethic of care rooted in human dignity and responsibility for creation. As Crabbé (2023, p.1) observes, “the relatively technocratic stewardship ethical perspective, which goes back to the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers, has been replaced or, at least, refined into the ethics of care.” This shift is significant because it reframes environmental responsibility not only as a managerial task but also as a moral and relational commitment that integrates social justice, cultural diversity, and ecological sustainability. In doing so, *Laudato Si’* broadens the discourse on sustainability by highlighting the interconnectedness of environmental, economic, and social issues and by calling for a collective response that connects science, ethics, and spirituality.

The core of *Laudato Si’* is integral ecology, calling for a restoration of ecological equilibrium and expanding environmental education (Mobilla, 2023). Five years later, in October 2020, the Pope signed his next encyclical letter. *Fratelli tutti* underscores the need to understand human relationships within the horizon of justice and fraternity, envisioning a world grounded in solidarity. Unlike *Laudato Si’*, which focuses on care for the earth and our common home, this encyclical is directed primarily toward people, their interactions, and the ethical responsibility to build more inclusive societies. In this sense, it rejects what Pope Francis has called the “globalization of indifference” and instead advocates for a “globalization of fraternity,” where empathy and mutual care define global coexistence (Sachs, 2021).

Extending this discussion, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda, adopted in 2015 by 193 United Nations member states, represent a transformative joint effort that seeks to redefine the concept of development by focusing on people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnerships—the five “Ps” that frame the SDGs. In academic settings, the SDGs provide a critical framework for advancing university social responsibility. In Latin America, institutional models have proliferated through the combined influence of public policy, supranational organizations, and academic research, giving rise to working groups focused on the social dimension of higher education, programs for the defense of human rights, the promotion of the SDGs, and scholarships designed to strengthen values, principles, and civic capacities. Moreover, universities have developed collaborative programs with local socioeconomic environments, reinforcing their role as agents of sustainable development (Corrales Gaitero et al., 2021).

Finally, in the same year, 2015, the Paris Climate Agreement was signed, representing a significant international effort to confront climate change. While it has been widely criticized for its nonbinding commitments, its limited ambition in aiming to restrict warming to 1.5°C rather than 2°C, and its overly vague language, scholars such as Kirsch (2023) argue that the COVID-19 pandemic brought the agreement—framed in a “future perfect” social imaginary—into sharper focus and helped to accelerate climate action. Since its adoption, the Paris Agreement has generated momentum toward renewable energy, underscores the

need to phase out fossil fuels, and highlights the urgency of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Preparing students to engage with the complex realities of a culturally diverse world that is shaped by inequality and environmental degradation requires fostering knowledge, skills, and values rooted in solidarity and justice across both local and global contexts. In the following sections, we present and analyze the COIL *Laudato Si'*, which emphasizes interdependence and eco-dependence, underscoring that sustainability cannot be achieved through technological or economic measures alone. Rather, it demands ethical reflection and collective responsibility as the foundation for transformative change.

METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to examine the implementation of a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) project. The case study approach was considered appropriate because it allowed an in-depth exploration of the educational dynamics and intercultural interactions generated by the joint course developed between the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador (PUCE) and the Universidad Católica de Santa Fe (UCSF) in Argentina.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling and included undergraduate students from courses directly involved in the project. At PUCE, 22 students were drawn from the classes of Communication for Social Change and Communication Campaigns, while at UCSF, 18 students were enrolled in Integrated Media Advertising, and 7 students were in Audiovisual Production and Institutional Press Strategies. Six mixed international groups were formed across both institutions to ensure collaborative work. Four faculty members, 2 from each university, participated as facilitators, guiding the process and ensuring alignment with the pedagogical objectives of the project.

Data Collection

Data collection combined multiple sources. Information was gathered through synchronous and asynchronous COIL sessions, including webinars, hybrid meetings, and group workshops, as well as through the materials produced during campaign planning and execution. In addition, COIL was combined with service learning (SL).

SL is an educational approach characterized by its duality. As explained by Jacoby (2016), the hyphen reflects the balanced relationship between learning and service, highlighting that educational growth occurs through service activities, while the service itself is enriched by the learning process. Both learning and service evolve concurrently, with each reinforcing the other. Critical thinking is at the core of SL; reflection activities on the service developed are an integral part of this approach.

Students' reflections were collected to capture perspectives on their learning experiences. These sources provided complementary evidence of the pedagogical processes and interactions taking place throughout the project. In particular, the

testimonies cited in this article were collected through a reflection on the four conditions of interculturality outlined by Álvarez González (2011) in a critical analysis of international cooperation.

Data analysis followed a thematic coding approach. Codes were developed both deductively, on the basis of the theoretical framework of GCE and intercultural competence, and inductively, from the content of students' reflections and collaborative work. NVivo software was used to assist in organizing and systematizing the data, ensuring rigor in the identification of themes and patterns.

The NVivo workflow proceeded in four steps: (1) Data preparation: all team reflections, campaign briefs, reels/scripts, audiovisual records, and final presentations were imported into NVivo as separate sources and then grouped by team (six international groups) and data type (reflection/product/presentation); (2) Codebook development: a preliminary codebook was constructed deductively from the study's theoretical anchors (SL & COIL), defining each code, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and example excerpts; (3) Iterative coding: two rounds of coding were conducted. Round 1 applied the deductive scheme to all sources and generated memos on emergent patterns; Round 2 refined the codebook by merging overlapping nodes, splitting broad codes, and adding inductive nodes grounded in students' language (Figure 1); (4) Theme derivation: themes were constructed to explain the interrelation between the campaigns and the theoretical background of the learning approaches (SL & COIL).

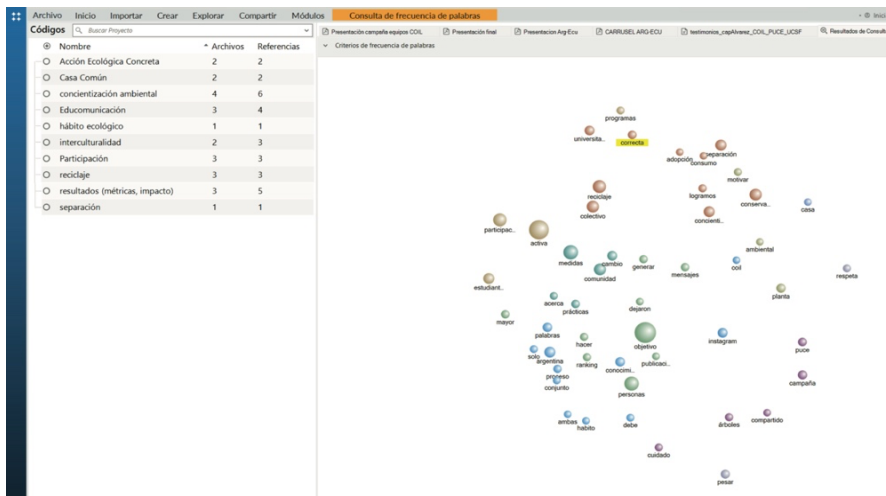


Figure 1: Second coding round using NVivo

Students were informed of the educational objectives of the initiative and how their work might be analyzed for research purposes. While participation in the course activities was needed, confidentiality and anonymity were ensured in

the reporting of findings, and all the data were treated in accordance with institutional ethical standards.

RESULTS

In October 2022, the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador (PUCE) hosted the IX Conference of the University Network for the Care of the Common Home (RUC) in Quito. The event brought together the provosts of PUCE and the Universidad Católica de Santa Fe (UCSF), along with 40 other members of the network. The conference established a foundation for promoting integral ecology across Catholic universities, where both PUCE and UCSF were involved. In this context, during the second semester of 2023, the COIL “University Laudato Si” was jointly implemented to address sustainability challenges affecting both Ecuador and Argentina from different perspectives.

The pedagogical approach was a combination of COIL & SL, engaging all students in the design and implementation of an international communication campaign aligned with the principles of *Laudato Si’* and the SDGs.

The reason to adopt SL in this international venue is that it integrates the academic learning process with community engagement projects. Furthermore, SL emphasizes structured reflection, linking classroom knowledge to real-life needs and framing education in partnership with the community. Rather than simple volunteerism, it adopts a philosophy of reciprocity and social justice, ensuring that learning outcomes are intentional and planned. Typical projects progress through five stages—motivation, assessment, design, execution, and closure—supported by ongoing reflection, evaluation, and systematization, all aimed at fostering both student development and tangible social impact (Tapia, 2022)

Five essential elements of SL (PVE, 2020) were considered for implementing the campaign.

- **Learning:** Students apply the skills and content of specific courses—Communication for Social Change and Communication Campaigns at PUCE and Integrated Media Advertising, Audiovisual Production, and Institutional Press Strategies at UCSF.
- **Service:** Activities address real needs by promoting sustainable behavior within the university community, initiated by the students themselves.
- **Intentionality:** Learning outcomes are explicitly linked to the activities carried out during the campaign, which address activity performance, social media metrics, survey results, and reflections on learning achievements.
- **Participation:** Students take the lead in planning, organizing, executing, and evaluating their campaigns.
- **Reflection and Critical Thinking:** Continuous analysis ensures alignment with the SDGs and *Laudato Si’*, guiding every stage of the campaign.

There are two complementary elements provided by the COIL framework:

- **Teamwork:** It is among the most valued professional soft skills and works effectively in globally connected, location-independent teams.

- Intercultural competence: Through direct interaction and joint participation, students cultivate empathy, mutual recognition, and shared learning with their international peers.

The project was structured around a series of synchronous and asynchronous activities designed to facilitate intercultural collaboration and knowledge exchange. In October, the first hybrid COIL session was held simultaneously in Quito, Ecuador, and Santa Fe, Argentina. Students participated on campuses in classrooms equipped with interactive screens, although many also connected through their own devices to join breakout group sessions. Table 1 outlines the planning and key activities of the first COIL session. In line with COIL recommendations, the opening session included icebreaker activities, which proved valuable and were carried out using interactive presentation and polling tools. This initial meeting also introduced students to the methodology, established six international working groups, and initiated collective reflection on the concept of the “common home.” Each group defined its identity, selected a spokesperson, and prepared guiding questions for the upcoming academic webinars.

Table 1: Structure of the COIL–Laudato Si’ (First Session)

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Format</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
Hybrid COIL session (PUCE & UCSF)	Synchronous, hybrid (on campus with interactive screens + personal devices)	Launch of project, intercultural connection
Icebreaker activities	Interactive tools (presentation + polling, e.g., Mentimeter)	Facilitate engagement and build group rapport
Conformation of 6 international groups	Breakout rooms	Establish working groups and assign roles
Group identity definition	Group discussion	Create cohesion and ownership of the project
Selection of spokespersons	Group decision	Ensure representation and communication in plenary
Preparation of guiding questions	Collaborative work	Support upcoming academic webinars on “common home”

Two thematic webinars followed. The first, *Nuestra Casa Común en una Encíclica* (Our Common Home in an Encyclical), featured academic authorities and specialists from both universities, who discussed the ethical, spiritual, and international dimensions of *Laudato Si’*. The second webinar, *Creatividad en campañas ambientales* (Creative Approaches to Environmental Campaigns), involved practitioners from the creative industry and research, who provided feedback on students’ preliminary campaign ideas. During this session, groups

presented one-minute “elevator pitches” of their proposals and received professional recommendations to refine their strategies.

Following these preparatory activities, the students advanced into the planning and execution stages of the campaign. PUCE students attended a session led by the Head of Communications of the UNDP Quito Office, during which they engaged in a series of activities focused on the 17 SDGs and youth-led action proposals that helped shape their sustainability campaigns. Guided by their instructors, each group developed a campaign brief, identified key messages, selected media channels, and designed digital activation strategies that accompanied the in-site campaign.

Table 2: EcoRutaPUCE 2023 Stands and Activities

Stand	Theme/Concept	Objective	Activity Type
<i>Camino Embrujado</i> (Haunted Path)	Halloween as a metaphor for environmental crisis	Raise awareness of ecological threats as the “real terror”	Thematic corridor with dramatizations and messages
<i>Apadrina una planta</i> (Adopt a Plant)	Care for the common home	Foster responsibility and commitment through symbolic adoption	Distribution of plants to participants
<i>Juego ECO</i> (Eco Game)	SDG awareness	Teach participants about the 17 SDGs in an interactive way	Pilot interactive game designed by students
<i>Siembra tu árbol</i> (Plant Your Tree)	Reforestation and carbon reduction	Encourage students to contribute to lowering carbon footprints	Tree planting activity in collaboration with the ecology club
<i>Día de Muertos: aleja de la muerte a nuestro planeta</i> (Day of the Dead: Keep Our Planet Alive)	Linking tradition and sustainability	Show how small actions can prevent ecological collapse	Cultural display with sustainability messages
<i>Punto Gira – progreso verde</i> (Green Progress Recycling Point)	Waste reduction and recycling	Promote responsible waste management on campus	Interactive stand at recycling station

Campaign implementation on the campus took place only at PUCE. Students named this campaign: *EcoRuta PUCE* (PUCE EcoPath). There were six interactive stands distributed across the campus, combining creative

communication strategies with hands-on activities to encourage sustainability. The objective was to position PUCE as a Laudato Si' university by promoting behavioral changes within the campus community in line with integral ecology and framed in the SDGs. (Table 2)

The “ecological path” (*EcoRuta*) served as a metaphor for the ideal journey in which each participant visited all six stands. To encourage engagement, students introduced a passport system allowing visitors to collect a stamp at each stand, with the final reward of adopting a plant. This gamification strategy not only increased participation but also encouraged students and staff to experience sustainability as an active and collective practice. These activities were documented through audiovisual records and later amplified on social media, extending their reach and visibility.

While students in Quito developed the on-campus campaign, their teams in Argentina were involved in producing the reels for advertising their campaigns, as the campaign was complemented by a social media dissemination plan designed to extend visibility beyond physical activation and create continuity across Ecuador and Argentina. Despite the contextual differences between the two universities, there was a shared intention to align the online campaign and unify messaging at the international level.

In Argentina, students from both Integrated Media Advertising and Audiovisual Communication started with the production of a bite-sized digital media form and reels for social media. During the preproduction stage, they worked on the idea, shaping it through an audiovisual script, which was later taken to production, that is, to filming. The students went out in groups to record with their own mobile devices. The subsequent stage of postproduction involved editing and assembling, the addition of special effects, color treatment, and sound.



Figure 2: Group presentation on “Our Common Home”. COIL 09.11.2023

The project concluded with a virtual final session (Figure 2), which was entirely conducted by students, who presented the results of the six campaigns,

including campaign activities, social media metrics, survey results, and reflections on learning achievements. The concept of “our common home” resonated in all six campaigns with different approaches within the call to the action of each digital piece.

Notably, at PUCE, the class could not be held in a regular classroom because of a COVID-19 exposure alert, and as a precaution, the activity was moved to a virtual format. Nevertheless, many students chose to come to campus and participate in the session using their own devices from the university’s gardens and other open-air spaces. When asked why they made this choice, the students explained that it was for the sake of teamwork. They preferred to deliver their presentations in groups, with their peers physically present around them. In Argentina, by contrast, students and faculty participated from their devices while they gathered in the university auditorium. However, as in Quito, they worked in groups, sharing one or two devices while remaining in the same physical space.

Academic authorities and internationalization staff from both universities participated virtually in the closing session. This was the first time a COIL project of this scale had been carried out, particularly in the months following the COVID-19 lockdown, and it therefore attracted considerable attention and support at both universities. Faculty members provided feedback, and students shared recommendations for future iterations of the project. This closing event served not only as an evaluation of the campaigns but also as a collective reflection on the intercultural and sustainability dimensions that guided the initiative.

Overall, the COIL highlights how students can integrate creativity, cultural traditions, and ecological awareness into practical communication campaigns. By engaging the university community through symbolic, playful, and interactive actions, the campaign advanced both the educational goals of the COIL project and the institutional vision of PUCE as a sustainable, Laudato Si’-inspired university.

DISCUSSION

The COIL–Laudato Si’ project demonstrated how collaborative online methodologies can successfully integrate global citizenship education, intercultural competence, and sustainability into higher education practices. The structured sequence of hybrid sessions, webinars, and group projects created opportunities for students from Ecuador and Argentina to address shared challenges while acknowledging their distinct cultural contexts.

A key finding from the project was the development of intercultural competence, as shown in Table 3. Working in cross-national teams required students to negotiate differences in language use, academic practices, and cultural expectations. Testimonies highlighted that even within a shared Spanish language, differences in vocabulary, verb conjugation, and communication styles became points of learning rather than obstacles. As one student reflected, the diversity of perspectives “made the final product something new, which was only possible owing to the contributions of both cultures”. This aligns with theoretical

models of interculturality, which emphasize diversity, willingness to engage, transformation through interaction, and the creation of new outcomes.

Table 3: Students’ testimonies and intercultural learning outcomes

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Testimony*</i>
Language and cultural diversity	Students discovered differences in vocabulary, expressions, and communication styles even within a shared language.	<i>“Even though we spoke Spanish, we realized that words and verb conjugations could be very different, and we had to adapt to understand each other.”</i>
Willingness to collaborate	Openness and commitment were crucial to overcome initial concerns and work productively across contexts.	<i>“Although we had concerns and difficulties, the work let us be free, connect with others, and build something new through dialog and openness.”</i>
Transformation through collaboration	The final outcomes were shaped by contributions from both cultures, producing results no single group could have achieved alone.	<i>“The final product was not what we imagined at the beginning, but something new that only emerged thanks to the contributions of both cultures.”</i>
Shared responsibility and solidarity	Students reflected on collective responsibility for sustainability and the common good.	<i>“This experience helped me see that building sustainability requires everyone’s participation, not just individual effort.”</i>

*Note. Excerpt of students’ reflections, free translation.

This experience also highlights persistent issues of digital equity in South–South COIL contexts. Differences in access to devices, connectivity, and physical learning spaces shaped how students participated and collaborated. Rather than undermining the project, these constraints fostered adaptive strategies, such as shared devices and collective presence, underscoring that digital inclusion remains a structural challenge that must be addressed in future COIL designs.

The project also reinforced the role of higher education in advancing sustainability. Students developed their activities with the framework of the 17 SDGs and generated youth-centered proposals that directly informed their campaign designs. This practical engagement helped students connect abstract sustainability goals with concrete communication strategies, resulting in campaigns adapted to both Ecuadorian and Argentinian contexts. As one

participant noted, “We realized that the same message had to be adapted to each context, but the values behind it remained universal”.

Because the working conditions of the groups differed between Argentina and Ecuador, several teams were able to complement each other effectively. For example, the group in Ecuador that implemented the “Haunted Path” campaign did so on the basis of surveys carried out by their peers in Argentina to assess how young people managed household waste and garbage. Drawing on the warning about improper resource management revealed by those surveys, they designed this themed corridor featuring dramatizations and cautionary messages.

Integrating SL allowed students to link academic content with real-world impact and to move beyond classroom discussions into actions with measurable social relevance.

Students emphasized the value of cocreation, adaptability, and shared responsibility, indicating that intercultural collaboration often involved compromise but also led to richer, more innovative outputs. One testimony captured this experience: “although we had concerns and difficulties, the work let us be free, connect with others, and build something new through dialog and openness”.

The project was particularly significant for the course of Communication for Social Change (CCS), as the field of CCS is a branch of communication studies grounded in genuine participation. It goes beyond mere contact or occasional interaction to require the full, active engagement of all stakeholders in processes of dialog, decision-making, and action (Vega et al., 2024). Within the campaign context, this approach positioned students not as passive recipients of information but as central agents of transformation.

From a strategic communication perspective, the primary learning outcome of the Communication Campaigns course centered on understanding and addressing the distinct needs of the audience. Students were encouraged to analyze audience characteristics to design messages and select channels that would be most effective for each group. This approach emphasized that successful campaigns do not rely on a one-size-fits-all strategy; rather, they require careful segmentation, targeted messaging, and an awareness of audience perceptions and motivations. By engaging with these considerations, students developed both analytical and practical skills, learning to balance creativity with strategic planning to achieve meaningful communication outcomes.

Although platform analytics were collected and presented by student teams, not all groups retained complete exports of reach and interactions; therefore, engagement is discussed qualitatively and reported as a limitation for future iterations.

Placing students at the heart of academic life is particularly relevant to the initiatives inspired by *Laudato Si'*, which call for ecological awareness and integral human development. Efforts to create a “*Laudato Si'* university” therefore must originate with students themselves, who assume responsibility for imagining and implementing change while receiving the guidance and mentorship of their instructors. Through this model, students engage in participatory planning, cocreate communication strategies, and lead projects that translate environmental

and social principles into tangible practices on campuses and in surrounding communities.

Overall, the COIL–Laudato Si’ project illustrates how combining intercultural collaboration with sustainability education can generate transformative learning experiences. It highlights the potential of Catholic universities in Latin America to act as laboratories for integral ecology, where students develop both technical communication skills and ethical capacities of solidarity, justice, and care for the common home.

However, this does not mean that all the work flowed without complications. In general, as observed at the outset, teamwork tends to generate a certain degree of resistance among participants, and this project was no exception. As one of the professors remarked during the closing session, “Despite all the difficulties inherent in any collaborative effort: scheduling conflicts, differing availabilities here and there, despite all of that, we reached a successful conclusion. One learns from the hustle and, although there were moments of tension, I am pleasantly surprised by the final products and by everyone’s commitment.”

Implications

Using a qualitative case study methodology, the project analyzed the experiences of undergraduate students who participated in a series of hybrid sessions, academic webinars, and the design of sustainability-focused communication campaigns. Data collection included synchronous and asynchronous activities, campaign products, and student reflections, which were thematically analyzed to identify outcomes related to intercultural competence, global citizenship education, and sustainability.

The results indicate that the project successfully fostered intercultural collaboration by engaging students from two cultural contexts in joint reflection and collective action. Students developed greater awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity, practiced negotiations and shared decision-making, and experienced the transformative potential of intercultural teamwork. The integration of sustainability through *Laudato Si’* and the SDGs further provided a meaningful framework that connected academic learning with real-world challenges. Students designed communication campaigns demonstrated how local and global perspectives can be combined to promote values of solidarity, justice, and care for the common home.

By linking COIL methodology with SL, the project contributes to the growing field of GCEs, offering evidence of how international collaboration can be embedded within regular university curricula. These findings show that universities in Latin America play a unique role in advancing integral ecology, intercultural dialog, and the ethical dimensions of sustainability.

The COIL allowed students not only to develop teamwork and collaboration skills but also to express pride in the outcomes. They described a sense of ownership over international students and gained many insights from the professors’ teamwork to develop the course.

In South–South COIL settings, digital equity is not only a matter of connectivity but also of participation conditions: device quality, shared access, and the availability of institutional spaces shape who can lead production tasks (editing, uploading, analytics) and therefore influence authorship and learning opportunities. In this project, students mitigated constraints through collective presence and device sharing, but the experience also revealed that equitable COIL design requires institutional provisioning (loan devices, editing stations, connectivity support) and explicit role rotation to avoid hidden digital labor asymmetries.

This South–South COIL was successfully implemented, highlighting the potential of South–South initiatives that foster mutual learning, cultural exchange, and collective problem solving. Participants gained insights not only into their own practices but also into the perspectives and approaches of their international peers with whom they imagined together a better world.

Future projects should aim to scale up this model by incorporating additional institutional partners and diversifying disciplinary perspectives. In Argentina, students from the second and third years worked together in an intergenerational challenging learning experience. It involved not only the experience of working with international partners but also the experience of collaborating with peers from different academic levels.

Global citizenship education could benefit from this intercultural practice and, when combined with internationalization, provides important insights for collaborative work. Combining both online and offline activities strengthens learning outcomes. While interactive digital tools are essential for maximizing international student engagement, synchronous activities with groups of students working together in different spaces—rather than alone in front of a screen at home—produced positive results.

Ultimately, initiatives such as the COIL–Laudato Si’ project highlight the importance of preparing students not only as professionals but also as global citizens capable of contributing to sustainable and inclusive futures.

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