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An international perspective on digitalization and interculturality**

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## 1. Introduction

„In our world today, which is characterized by mobility and migration, digitalization and globalization, the ability to communicate and interact with people across languages and cultures has become a key competence” (Freitag-Hild 2018, 163).

This quote indicates how our society nowadays is shaped by many changes. Digitalization and globalization cause major sociocultural consequences and to deal with those, communication is crucial. But what does this mean specifically for teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL)? As mobility, migration, digitalization and globalization are international processes, English as the lingua franca is of utter importance. Consequently, part of a (future) EFL teacher’s role is preparing their students to become active members of a global society regarding digitalization and interculturality by using English. That this world is closely connected has been shown most recently by the outbreak of Covid-19 and the resulting pandemic. This affected all aspects of the daily life of global citizens including EFL education. Moving towards a post Covid-19 era now, EFL teachers must react to recent challenges and find new ways of implementing relevant topics such as digitalization and interculturality in their classroom. This paper aims to find out how teaching EFL should look like in a post Covid-19 era in regard to digital tools, cultural awareness and teaching methods.

In the first part of this paper, there will be an overview of important aspects for teaching EFL according to recent literature. These aspects will also be linked to teaching EFL during the Covid-19 pandemic. Starting with the overall topic of teaching EFL, there will be a description of characteristics of a good language teacher as well as an overview of challenges and objectives of the EFL classroom nowadays. This leads to the relevant topics of digitalization, interculturality and teaching methods. Each of these will be elaborated further in separate chapters. Finally, in the context of teaching methods, the approach of telecollaboration will be explained as an option to address these topics in the EFL classroom which leads to the research of this paper.

The second part of this paper consists of qualitative research using thematic analysis (Braun/ Clarke 2006) to describe the findings of guided written reflections from German and Israeli participants of a telecollaboration. Through this collaboration, an international perspective on the aim of this paper can be guaranteed. The overall topics consisted of digital tools, cultural awareness and teaching methods. According to the purpose of this paper, the following research questions were of interest:

1. Which teaching methods do students think would be beneficial for the EFL classroom?
2. What did EFL students learn about cultural awareness after an international collaboration?
3. What do students think about the use of digital tools in an EFL classroom?

After describing the research methodology and the findings, the answers to the research questions will be elaborated in the discussion chapter. The outlook and the conclusion chapter will close this paper.

## 2. Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

In a globalized world, communication among different nationalities is highly important. Resulting from this, one must be able to speak English as it is the lingua franca and therefore the most commonly used language worldwide. Consequently, teaching EFL is essential to equip students to be active members of a globalized world (cf. Elsner 2018, 18).

However, not just anybody who speaks English can also teach English as the profession of teaching EFL demands different competences and skills (cf. Richards 2011, 27). Adding to this, EFL teachers also face certain challenges. Kumaravadivelu (2012, x) states that “the fast evolving global society with its incessant and increased flows of peoples, goods and ideas across the world is placing huge responsibilities” on educators. Because of this, EFL teachers must respond to fast-changing dynamics due to globalization and digitalization which can lead to challenges in the EFL classroom (cf. Viebrock 2018, 52) such as the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. Hence, the following chapter will focus on characteristics of a good English language teacher according to Richards’ (2011) core dimensions of good language teaching practice. Having described this, it is important to look at the current teaching objectives of EFL as well as their challenges. These will then be linked to the particular teaching situation during the Covid-19 pandemic as well.

### 2.1 Characteristics of a Good EFL Teacher

“What are the essential characteristics of a good language teacher?” (Viebrock 2018, 39). This question might be asked quite frequently especially when new EFL teachers start to carry out this profession. The unique aspect about this question is that by entering the field, there has already been a fair amount of experiential knowledge like being in school as a student or doing several teaching practicums (cf. *ibid.*, 40). Therefore, new teachers already have their “personal beliefs, individual assumptions or unjustified conclusions” (*ibid.*) which influence their choices regarding teaching methods and contents. Consequently, the experiential knowledge deeply

affects the way of teaching EFL (cf. *ibid.*). Taking the formal academic education into account as well, Lewis (1993, 32) speaks of the teacher's mind-set which is "partly explicit, based on information given to the teacher", nevertheless, "much of it is implicit, based on the teacher's self-image, value system and even prejudice". Adding to this, teachers' mind-sets will not likely be changed easily even though they might be confronted with evidence against their principles. In fact, referring to Lewis (1993), Viebrock (2018, 41) states that "the teacher's mind-set is extremely stable and difficult to change". At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic however, EFL teachers were confronted with new situations as schools were being closed. Suddenly, new ways of teaching such as distance learning had to be implemented overnight. This certainly challenged teachers to adapt their mind-sets to new ways of teaching EFL (cf. Goetz 2020, 2).

Consequently, teachers must be able to reflect their own mind-sets and re-evaluate their practices on a regular basis. According to Bach (2013) key qualifications such as flexibility, openness and a sense of adventurousness are crucial for reflecting one's own actions as a teacher (cf. *ibid.*, 306, see also Viebrock 2018, 41). This seems especially important when thinking about adapting to new teaching situations while living in a global pandemic. Besides such reflective practices, other values like respect towards students also seem to be important for teachers. Grimm et al. (2015, 21) claim that good teachers should be "professionals who create an atmosphere of mutual respect in the classroom, the school and beyond". By this means, everyone should feel safe and respected. This is also crucial for a virtual classroom like a video conference during times where learning in the EFL classroom is not possible. While these values are valid for every subject taught in school, looking deeper into teaching EFL, Richards (2011) explains ten core dimensions of good language teaching practice and expertise. The following is a brief description of this model.

**Language Proficiency:** EFL teachers should be role models for authentic language use. They should teach everything in the target language while giving the appropriate amount of input according to their students' level of understanding. Moreover, they give many examples of words and grammatical structures, and correct the students' language. As most EFL teachers are not native English speakers, an EFL teacher needs to have reached a certain "threshold proficiency level" (Richards 2011, 3) in the target language. Additionally, according to research, an EFL teacher's confidence is highly related to their level of language proficiency (cf. *ibid.*)

**Content knowledge:** Richards (2011, 5) defines this dimension as "what teachers need to know about what they teach (including what they know about language teaching itself), and

constitutes knowledge that would not be shared by teachers of other subject areas”. Nevertheless, it is often discussed what exactly the subject matter of teaching EFL consists of. Richards (2011) names three aspects of content knowledge: Disciplinary knowledge (academic knowledge about the field of teaching EFL), pedagogical content knowledge (knowledge of practical issues in teaching EFL), and, referring to Koehler and Mishra (2009), technological pedagogical content (using technology appropriately for teaching practice). Therefore, an EFL teacher should choose suitable materials, understand learners’ needs and use technology appropriately (cf. Viebrock 2018, 44).

**Teaching Skills:** This dimension deals with the “repertoire of techniques and routines” (Richards 2011, 9) of an EFL teacher to manage a lesson well. These teaching skills help opening a lesson, introducing and explaining a new task, checking students’ understanding as well as ending a lesson (cf. *ibid.*). Here, the teacher’s mind-set affects the choice of routines and techniques which is why they should reflect their action on a regular basis (cf. Viebrock 2018, 46).

**Contextual knowledge:** Sociocultural perspectives on teaching EFL highlight the importance of situated learning. Every EFL classroom takes place in a specific context which “shape[s] how learning takes place” (Richards 2011, 11). Hence, it is important to know about the setting, norms, values, and habits an EFL classroom is situated in. Within the classroom, it is also important to understand classroom dynamics which could be influenced by the learners’ cultural, social, economic, and educational backgrounds (cf. Viebrock 2018, 46).

**The language teacher’s identity:** When first entering the field of teaching EFL, teachers must find their role as a teacher and their individual teacher’s identity. This is a process where “many factors, including personal biography, culture, working conditions, age, gender, and the school and classroom culture” (Richards 2011, 14) shape how teachers see themselves. Especially in the beginning, this process can cause stress and anxiety among new EFL teachers (cf. *ibid.*).

**Learner-focused teaching:** The goal of teaching should be “to facilitate student learning” (Richards 2011, 16). This means that the focus should be on the students rather than on the teacher’s performance. Thus, EFL teachers must understand that students have both social and learning needs in the EFL classroom. This can be done through creating a warm and friendly atmosphere for learners and using group-based activities addressing students’ interests (cf. *ibid.*, 18).

**Pedagogical reasoning skills:** When teaching a certain subject matter in the EFL classroom, various decisions must be made regarding planning the lesson, choosing the right material or the overall teaching methods (cf. Viebrock 2018, 47). These pedagogical reasoning skills develop over time. Nevertheless, new EFL teachers can benefit from experienced teachers through collaboration like team teaching or shared planning (cf. Richards 2011, 21).

**Theorizing from practice:** Richards (2011, 22) states that this dimension describes the “development of a personal system of knowledge, beliefs, and understandings drawn from our practical experience of teaching”. By this, EFL teachers evaluate and reflect on their practices in order to learn about language teaching. From this, teaching principles emerge and eventually a teaching philosophy develops (cf. *ibid.*, 23).

**Membership of a community of practice:** Although usually only one EFL teacher is responsible in the classroom, teachers should not neglect the benefits of collaboration with other teachers. A group of people who share “common interests, values and responsibilities” (Viebrock 2018, 48) can work towards the same goals. Through collaboration, every participant can benefit from shared knowledge and skills to resolve issues at the workplace and integrate change where necessary. This can be achieved through team teaching, peer observation and coaching as well as action research (cf. Richards 2011, 26). While Richards (2011) focuses on colleagues working in their schools, Viebrock (2018) states that a community of practice can consist of every EFL teacher even if they are still at university.

**Professionalism:** Richards (2011, 27) highlights that teaching EFL is “a profession, which means that English teaching is seen as a career in a field of educational specialization”. Taking this into account, EFL teachers should be familiar with the standards of the profession and work towards professional competence (cf. Viebrock 2018, 44). In all this, they should consciously and systematically reflect on their practices and experiences (cf. Richards 2011, 28).

Considering teaching EFL during a global pandemic, Richards’ (2011) aspects about dimensions of good language teaching practice and expertise are important, too. Especially contextual knowledge (Richards 2011) seems to be crucial for making good teaching choices regarding the current teaching situation. Yet, apart from teaching proficiency and professionalism, all dimensions had to be adapted by EFL teachers to the new global situation. The importance of content knowledge in terms of digitalization has increased significantly, and therefore, the pedagogical reasoning skills had to be reassessed as the context of teaching EFL had changed. Even teaching skills like opening a lesson or explaining a task had to go through some changes. In all this, the teacher’s identity was faced with some challenges too, as the role

of a teacher in a pandemic had not been defined clearly. The well-known principles and their personal teaching philosophy had to be re-evaluated. Theorizing from practice was essential for gaining insights about new teaching situations. Additionally, to practice learner-focused teaching, teachers had to deal with new teaching conditions where they could not easily assess what their students needed and how to involve them properly. With all these challenges in mind, virtual membership of a community of practice might be helpful as teachers could reflect on issues together and eventually resolve them.

In general, there are many important aspects an EFL teacher needs to consider when striving to be a good language teacher. Nevertheless, finding their teacher's identity with their individual teacher mind-set, is a process which should continuously be reflected as it highly affects the choices of how to teach EFL. Having defined what it means to be a good EFL teacher, who also is capable of teaching appropriately during the Covid-19 pandemic, the focus now lies on the discussion of the overall objectives of teaching EFL as well as its challenges.

## 2.2 Objectives and Challenges of Teaching EFL

When EFL started as an obligatory subject in schools in Germany, the focus was on form rather than on meaning. This changed in the late 1970s when educators and linguists understood the importance of communication for learning a foreign language (cf. Elsner 2018, 17). As a result, grammatical rules and pronunciation should now be learned in order to use language "appropriately for different communicative purposes such as making requests, giving advice, making suggestions, describing wishes and needs, and so on" (Richards 2006, 3). Today's EFL classroom focuses therefore on meaning rather than on form. To be precise, when thinking about the four language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing, students should "actively use the foreign language in meaningful communicative situations for a clear goal: The development of communicative competence" (Elsner 2018, 19). Hence, communicative competence is highly important for the EFL classroom.

**Communicative competence** includes different dimensions. Canale and Swain (1980) categorized these dimensions as the following:

- Grammatical competence
- Sociolinguistic competence
- Discourse competence
- Strategic competence

Richards (2006) defines the dimensions of communicative competence as knowledge about how to use language appropriately according to the context, how to adapt language when confronted with different communication partners in different settings, the ability to communicate despite of language barriers and knowledge about how to work with different types of texts such as reports or narratives (cf. *ibid.*, 3). Elsner (2018) explains that these dimensions of communicative competence are still relevant, yet there have been also changes over the last twenty years in how communication has developed throughout society. Besides the medium of pen and paper as well as face-to-face conversations, nowadays, communication can also take place online through different digital tools (cf. *ibid.*, 20). Social distancing due to safety precautions against the Covid-19 virus demonstrated how important these technical advancements are. Regarding the fast-changing globalized world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, an increased interest of intercultural communicative competence (Byram 1997) is also important to meet the needs of everyday life. Adding to this, the appropriate choice of teaching methods and approaches is quite important as well.

Thus, besides communicative competences as objective for the EFL classroom, Elsner (2018) defines media competence, intercultural competence, and methodological competence as the main objectives of teaching EFL (cf. *ibid.*, 20). Surely, these objectives come with great challenges for the EFL teacher, too. A more detailed account of these objectives as well as their challenges and how the Covid-19 pandemic added into this is given in the following section.

**Media competence** is crucial for communicating and acting in a digital world and therefore, participating actively in society (cf. KMK 2016). In the strategy paper of the Standing Conference (KMK 2016) on education in a digital world (original title: *Strategie der Kultusministerkonferenz – Bildung in der digitalen Welt*), teachers are encouraged to think about an adequate media education for their students (cf. *ibid.*). Considering this, there is a differentiation between learning through digital media and learning about it. Only if teachers and students know how to handle digital tools appropriately and what possible risks they can bear, they are able to use digital tools correctly (cf. *ibid.*, 11). This is crucial for students' media competence.

However, this can be quite challenging. Viebrock (2018, 54) states that technical advancement puts “tremendous challenges on teachers of English as a foreign language and their educators, but also contribute[s] to the vitality of the profession”. As technology develops quickly, teachers need to be open and flexible in order to adapt digital tools into teaching in the best way possible. Moreover, in times of distance learning, the use of digital tools is necessary to teach

students effectively. This can be especially challenging when the use of digital tools has never been part of a teacher's mind-set, as Goetz (2020, 7) describes in her qualitative research about teachers in the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, it can also be challenging when a teacher likes to use digital tools but does not reflect on their potential benefits and disadvantages for teaching EFL (cf. Schmidt/ Strasser 2018, 218). As described previously, the use of digital tools in the EFL lesson should be considered carefully. For this, advantages and disadvantages regarding teaching EFL need to be elaborated. As a benefit of possible online communication, EFL teachers should think about how they can use this to connect their students with real speakers of the target language. In times of social distancing, this can also be beneficial for their social needs. Nevertheless, digital communication follows other rules and therefore, to "deal with this and turn it into a valuable learning experience is another challenge for the teacher" (Viebrock 2018, 54). How these challenges can be dealt with, will be described in chapter 3.

Another relevant objective regarding living in a globalized world that goes alongside the communicative competence, is the **intercultural communicative competence** (Byram 1997). As the connection between communication and culture is obvious, this fact needs to be addressed in the EFL classroom as well. Elsner (2018, 20) defines intercultural awareness as "the knowledge and attitude about one's own and other cultures and the skills to apply cultural knowledge in intercultural encounters in a virtually and actually interconnected world" (ibid.). Therefore, students should learn how to interact with others in a respectful manner. As Elsner (2018) indicates, these interactions also can happen through digital tools making cultural encounters more accessible. Especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, the bonding and solidarity across communities, nations and the globe was made clear by having to deal with the same virus.

Diversity can bring many benefits, nevertheless, for EFL teachers this can also be a great challenge. Bach (2015) characterizes EFL teachers as agents of global change who must manage different social contexts which can change at any time in their classroom. Besides being flexible, EFL teachers must also be open-minded for new ways of teaching in order to meet the needs of their socially changing classroom. Viebrock (2018, 52) emphasizes that "teachers can no longer rely on clear-cut and established models of language teaching, but have to demonstrate perceptual competences, context sensitivity and a sense of situational relevance". Thus, EFL teachers must know their students well in order to make good pedagogical choices. Overall, teachers should raise their own cultural awareness as well as their students'. This will be described further in chapter 4.

Lastly, the **methodological competence** focuses on how to learn the target language optimally. While teaching methods were seen as separated practices in the 1990s and earlier, now the focus is more on “complex communicative situations in which a learner needs to apply a combination of different skills and knowledge” (Elsner 2018, 20). Consequently, new methods and approaches become popular and the overall focus shifts to more holistic and learner-centered approaches with the overall aim of enabling students to learn the target language independently (cf. *ibid.* 20f.). Not least through the experiences which were made during the Covid-19 pandemic, EFL teachers must reflect on how to teach the target language best and then, adapt their methods accordingly. This leads to a much more flexible approach in using teaching methods for their EFL classroom (cf. Viebrock 2018, 52ff.).

Besides the benefits of choosing from a range of different teaching methods, there are also challenges. Especially for new EFL teachers who are still in the process of developing their teacher’s identity by finding teaching principles and a personal teaching philosophy, this can be quite overwhelming. Nevertheless, for EFL teachers a critical stance on methods and methodology is crucial to meet the needs of their students. (cf. Viebrock 2018, 52). In order to make good choices one should know both the learning conditions in the EFL classroom (whether the physical or the virtual one) as well as current teaching methods. This will be described further in chapter 5.

In summary, besides the relevance of these teaching objectives, they will also bring forth a number of challenges. Teaching EFL in a globalized world can be demanding even out of the context of a pandemic. Adding to this, teachers should re-evaluate their practices and rethink their teacher mind-set according to their context on a regular basis in order to meet the needs of their students. In an EFL classroom situated in a globalized world, the ways of communicating have changed by evolving into media competence, cultural communicative competence as well as methodological competence. Hence, in the following part of this paper digitalization, interculturality and teaching methodology in the EFL classroom will be discussed further.

### 3. Digitalization in the EFL Classroom

When looking at the EFL classroom “media have always been an essential part” (Schmidt/ Strasser 2018, 216) to help learners understand the target language in a multisensory way. This includes making use of analogue media like textbooks, the blackboard, and eventually the overhead projector. With the ongoing digitalization and the invention of computers, smartphones and tablets, digital media found their way into the EFL classroom (cf. *ibid.*). Chan (2011, 132) describes this process by stating that: “media are essentially realia to be brought into a classroom from the outside world in an attempt to make language activities appear more realistic, more interactive, and therefore, more meaningful”. Hence, the use of media in the EFL classroom can lead to a more authentic language environment.

Living in a digital age, digital media is part of everyday life, therefore, it is necessary to implement these in the EFL classroom to teach EFL appropriately. Schools closing and the resulting distance learning caused by the Covid-19 pandemic however increased the importance of using digital tools in the EFL classroom immensely.

#### 3.1 Media Didactics and Media Education

Taking the relevance of using digital tools in the EFL classroom into account, it is important to reflect on “how these tools can be methodologically exploited in order to achieve a learning goal” (Schmidt/ Strasser 2018, 218). Therefore, digital media should always be seen as tools which support the learning goal of the EFL lesson. Among the four subcategories of media pedagogy (media education, media didactics, media studies and media research), media didactics and media education are the most relevant for the EFL classroom. Schmidt and Strasser (2018, 218), referring to Grimm et. al. (2015, 199), define media didactics as the following:

*Media didactics is concerned with the functions, effects and forms of utilising media in teaching and learning scenarios. It aims at improving and optimising teaching and learning processes and the facilitation of self-directed acquisition of knowledge and competence.*

This definition emphasizes that media didactics look at how to implement media, especially digital media, in the best way possible to achieve the teachers’ goals for their lessons. Reflecting on the use of specific digital tools is important to make good pedagogical choices. Yet, analogue media should not be avoided, but rather be implemented in a reflective media system where both analogue and digital media support the teaching goals (cf. Schmidt/ Strasser 2018, 219f.).

Nevertheless, in this process of choosing the right digital tools, EFL teachers should also be aware of another subcategory of media pedagogy which is media education. Schmidt and Strasser (2018, 218), referring to Grimm et. al. (2015, 199), describe media education as the following: “**Media education** is concerned with ways of using media sensibly. It is centred on enabling individuals to reflect critically on their use of media”. Yet, EFL teachers must choose digital tools consciously first in order to help their students to reflect on their use of digital media.

De Florio-Hansen (2018, 139) explains the relation between media didactics and media education like this: “Media Didactis (*Mediendidaktik*) has to be completed by Media Education (*Medienerziehung*)”. Therefore, in order to use digital tools appropriately in the EFL classroom for instance when students “enrich their presentations through digital tools and communicate with learners of other classes or schools” (ibid.), students need to develop “a constructive and critical stance toward digitalization” (ibid.). Here, the EFL teacher needs to be a role model.

Especially regarding data privacy, teachers should make reflective choices of appropriate digital tools. Schmidt and Strasser (2018, 228) explain what EFL teachers should take into consideration:

*With respect to legal issues, it must be clearly determined and communicated which data, for which purposes and from which pre-determined users can be reviewed and analysed, which measures will be taken to protect user identity, how long the data will be stored in coordination with the established legal framework and standards and which opportunities a system offers the user to request the deletion of personal data.*

These considerations are crucial to protect students’ privacy in the EFL classroom as well as to implement media education. Other risks teachers should be aware of are dealing with fake news on the internet and, when dealing with communicating online, hate speech or cyberbullying (cf. De Florio-Hansen 2018, 224.). The KMK-Strategy paper (2016) emphasizes the importance of operating securely in a digital environment for students as well as teachers. Therefore, there should always be a reflective practice of carefully balancing the advantages and risks of digital tools and how to manage data storage and analysis (cf. ibid.).

### 3.2 Integrating Digital Tools into EFL Teaching

The overall aim of using digital tools consists of “their meaningful application in today’s TEFL classrooms in order to prepare students for living in a [digital] world” (de Florio-Hansen 2018, 201) as well as supporting teaching and learning EFL in the best way possible (cf. ibid.). This

means that teachers must equip and prepare their students to become active members in a globalized world in a digital age and, ensure that they teach EFL effectively.

There are different tools for the EFL classroom which could be beneficial in order to achieve this. De Florio-Hansen (2018, 203) names important tools like<sup>1</sup>:

- Interactive Whiteboards
- Textbooks and related learning software
- Learning management systems and Open Educational Resources
- Gamification
- Communication technology and social media

Yet, regarding distance learning caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, some tools are more suitable than others. For instance, an Interactive Whiteboard is limited to the classroom (at least the physical one) and therefore cannot be used for distance learning. However, when teaching EFL in the actual classroom, this can be a great tool to enrich EFL learning experiences through multimedia. Teachers need to be cautious though as they need time and training to acquire the appropriate usage. Furthermore, because of its various opportunities to show students different materials on the Interactive Whiteboard, there is a risk of going back to a more dominant teacher role, as de Florio-Hansen (2018, 204) states.

Regarding the use of textbooks, for many EFL teacher, this is considered to be the “overall basis of their lessons” (ibid., 205). On one hand, the textbook can give structure to the EFL classroom, but on the other hand, some unit parts might not be suitable for the class and, even worse, one might not “find enough time to enrich the textbook with other, possibly authentic, texts and multimedia tools” (ibid.). It can be beneficial to add digital tools in order to support the content of the textbooks as well as to motivate students. Puchta and Strasser (2016, 52ff.) explain effective ways of how to implement this and conclude that through the additional use of digital tools, students can experience the target language in a more authentic way. Additionally, many publishers created learning software complementing their textbooks (cf. De Florio-Hansen 2018, 206). When being confronted with distance learning, textbooks and additional digital tools can be beneficial for learning EFL, although the teacher should provide some sort of (digital) social interaction as well. De Florio-Hansen (2018, 207) explains that

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<sup>1</sup> This list is not complete as only those tools which serve the purpose of this paper are described here. For all tools, see De Florio-Hansen (2018, 203).

*learning software can in no way replace the tutorial functions of a teacher who is able to act pedagogically taking not only didactic, but also motivational and emotional aspects into account. Therefore learning software – provided it reaches its full potential – can be nothing more than a useful supplement.*

Additionally, the qualitative research from Goetz (2020) about distance learning in Germany, shows that the exclusive use of self-learning tasks, for instance in textbooks, is seen as inadequate without any interaction with the teacher or the classmates. Reasons for this could be lack of feedback, structure, and relationship with the teacher. However, it appears that many teachers in Germany followed exactly this path (cf. *ibid.*, 16).

Moving on to the next tool, De Florio-Hansen (2018) describes how learning management systems (LMS) can be beneficial for EFL teaching. This holds good for both settings: in the classroom and during distance learning. LMS are software applications which “provide learning content in a variety of forms and help students organize and track their learning” (*ibid.*, 209). Moreover, teachers can monitor learners’ progress and give individual feedback on students’ tasks. A popular LMS, among others, is “Moodle” (cf. *ibid.*, 210, <https://moodle.de/>). The integration of an LMS such as “Moodle” into the EFL classroom is called Blended Learning which “stands for a combination of off- and online learning” (*ibid.*). Regardless of their benefits, LMS should only support the learning environment and not substitute the EFL classroom (cf. *ibid.*). In her qualitative research about distance learning in Germany, Goetz (2020) shows that teachers struggle the most in putting together tasks that are easy to understand for their students without further explanation in class. In times of the Covid-19 pandemic, this could mean to establish additional video conferences to the LMS as social interaction is crucial.

Gamification is considered to be another great tool for teaching EFL. With regard to students’ socio-cultural context and the rising number of students who play video games, the motivational factor for students as well as the overall benefits for teaching EFL has been acknowledged. Schmidt and Strasser (2018, 229) explain gamification in the context of teaching EFL as follows:

*Elements and mechanisms which are familiar to students from games, such as levels and progress bars, missions, competition (leader boards), discovery (e.g. hidden treasure), rewards systems (e.g. badges, bonus levels, virtual goods) are used outside the gaming context, in this case in the field of foreign language learning.*

This can be implemented through various ways like smartphone apps or websites (cf. Schmidt/Strasser 2018, 229). It should be noted that a playful approach to teaching EFL and the implementation of learning games in the EFL classroom is not innovative (Klippel 1980). This approach of teaching EFL however can nowadays also be done digitally through appropriate tools. As gamification can be motivating and help to involve students more both in the EFL classroom and during distance learning, this can be beneficial. Especially for distance learning, EFL teachers can involve students much better in a video conference without losing their attention.

Finally, communication technology and social media play an important role in most students' and teachers' everyday lives. Hence, it should also be used for teaching purposes especially when thinking about communicating in the EFL classroom. There are some distinctions between the many ways of online communication like synchronous and asynchronous exchange. De Florio-Hansen (2018) argues that synchronous communication in English can be challenging for students which is why she states that most students would prefer asynchronous exchanges like writing an e-mail as they have time to think about their responses carefully (cf. De Florio-Hansen 2018, 216). Telecollaboration as a way of using synchronous communication in English can be beneficial for students. A more differentiated view will be examined when dealing with telecollaboration as a teaching method at the end of chapter 5.

In addition to writing e-mails, there is also the suggestion of implementing Internet Forums into the EFL classroom as an asynchronous way of communicating. These are online conversations about different topics which are publicly shared. Here, an EFL teacher needs to be aware of the unpredictable setting of a globally accessible platform. Therefore, it could be more beneficial to create a forum for one's students only (or when collaborating with others, include other groups of students as well). Regardless of what communication tools an EFL teacher uses, they should be aware of the importance of choosing an interesting topic suitable for their students (cf. *ibid.*).

However, during those times of the Covid-19 pandemic where physical social interaction was limited to the bare minimum, communicating online was not only crucial for the overall social life but also for teaching EFL. Regarding this and other digital tools for teaching, some countries were better prepared for online teaching than others. Germany for example, was not well prepared in terms of digitalization in schools and therefore could not provide potential technical devices for their students. As a consequence, not all students had the resources needed at home and were therefore disadvantaged. (cf. Goetz 2020, 11). Not only during such times,

but also when teaching EFL in schools, there is an overall shortage of appropriate devices in German schools. In conclusion, there needs to be a parallel process: On one hand, EFL teachers should learn how to choose appropriate digital tools for their EFL lessons by reflecting the benefits and risks of those tools regarding teaching EFL in the classroom as well as during distance learning. On the other hand, the school system needs to support students' media competence by providing appropriate technical devices for all students, whether they are in school or they learn from home.

#### 4. Interculturality in the EFL classroom

Being an active member in today's society means also participating in a globalized world. The Covid-19 pandemic shows how connected the world actually is. Hence, "the ability to participate in cultural discourses can be seen as a central educational goal of foreign language learning" (Freitag-Hild 2018, 163). Due to the ongoing digitalization, communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds for instance on social media is easily accessible. Through these digital tools, students can connect with other learners around the world. Therefore, teaching culture is highly relevant in the digital age especially when teaching EFL.

Taking this into consideration, teaching a foreign language is always combined with teaching another culture (Kramersch 1993). Hence, EFL teachers need to educate their students in the cultural context in which English takes place in order to use the target language appropriately. Freitag-Hild (2018, 159) claims that

*it is not only necessary to focus on language as a linguistic system, but that we also need to help our learners understand the **cultural contexts** which are reflected in the language and which are necessary to understand if they want to communicate successfully in a foreign language.*

To communicate well in the target language, one must be aware of the culture in which the language is situated. In foreign language education, this has been widely accepted. In contrast, it is not an easy task to define culture and how to teach it in the EFL classroom. There are countless attempts to explain what this complex construct is, yet there is an agreement on the concept of culture as a system of shared meanings (cf. Freitag-Hild 2018, 160). This definition resulted from Hall (1997) who concluded that: "culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is happening around them, and 'making sense' of the world in broadly similar ways" (ibid., 2). When he speaks of "broadly similar ways" (ibid.), this does not mean that all members of a culture necessarily share the same meanings in every topic but rather can

be diverse as well. Hence, when educating students in the respective cultural context, they should understand “cultures as complex, heterogenous entities” (Freitag-Hild (2018, 161).

As culture consists of various aspects, there are different dimensions of such a complex notion. Posner (2003, 47ff.) illustrates the following three dimensions of Cultural Semiotics:

- Material culture: texts and other artefacts
- Mental culture: ideas, conventions, values
- Social culture: individuals, social groups, society, institutions

These dimensions are not categorized separately but rather are closely linked. For instance, texts such as children’s books underlie the influence of ideas, conventions and values of a culture and how social groups of a culture interact with it (cf. Freitag-Hild 2018, 161). These categories are not only relevant for Cultural Studies but can also be used in the EFL classroom when choosing the appropriate materials and what they aim to represent. Therefore, Freitag-Hild (2018, 161) defines teaching culture in the EFL classroom as “exploring the ‘shared set of meanings’, the values, norms and ways of thinking of the participants of a cultural group, as well as the social and institutional forms in which they live”. Looking at the three dimensions of Cultural Semiotics, some are easier to integrate into the EFL classroom than others. Material culture is relatively simple to use in the EFL classroom by watching suitable films, reading books or listening to music from the respective culture. From this, mental culture like norms, ideas and beliefs can be interpreted and in a small extent experienced. Yet especially the authentic social culture with its individuals, social groups, society, and institutions, is challenging to bring to the classroom. Nevertheless, it is possible through school exchanges or telecollaboration (cf. *ibid.*).

With a new transcultural approach of “global education”, the focus on native speakers from countries where English is considered to be the first language shifts towards speakers from all countries using English as the lingua franca. The overall aim is to equip students to become “**responsible global citizens** and actively take part in shaping a better, shared future in the world” (Freitag-Hild 2018, 169). Therefore, global issues and international themes (cf. Lütge 2015) like climate change, human rights or peace studies find their ways into the EFL classroom. Current topics of the Covid-19 pandemic could be integrated as well.

When interacting with people of different cultural backgrounds, **Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)** (Byram 1997) is important. This is the ability to “communicate and interact with people who speak a different language and come from a

different cultural background” (Freitag-Hild 2018, 164). With the focus on meaning rather than on form in the EFL classroom, acquiring Communicative Competence was the overall aim. Now, in a globalized world where a society is greatly influenced by migration and mobility, this key aim developed into Intercultural Communicative Competence (cf. *ibid.*, 163f.). Therefore, the focus is on the cultural and social context in which communication takes place and for EFL teachers, this means equipping their students to be intercultural speakers (Byram 1977).

Byram (1997, 49ff.) describes the dimensions of how an intercultural speaker is characterized. According to him, an intercultural speaker needs to acquire attitudes, skills, and knowledge as well as critical cultural awareness. Taking a closer look, the attitudes of an intercultural speaker should be open and curious to other cultures as well as the willingness to relativizing own values as the universal way. Secondly, an intercultural speaker has knowledge of themselves, others and social groups and their social interactions in their own culture as well as in the respective culture. Thirdly, two types of skills are necessary. On one hand, one needs to acquire skills of interpreting the foreign culture and relate it to one’s own culture. On the other hand, one needs to acquire skills of discovery of the foreign culture (attitudes, knowledge, skills) and interaction with it in real-time communication. Last, but not least, an intercultural speaker needs critical cultural awareness and political education, in order to evaluate critically on basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices, and products in both cultures, in the own as well as in other cultures.

Other approaches on teaching culture also emphasize the changing of perspective like the German research group “Didaktik des Fremdverstehens” (cf. Bredella/ Christ 1995, 2007). They assume that “(1) there is a (cultural) gap which needs to be bridged and (2) in order to enable intercultural understanding, it is necessary to enter into a dialogue between ‘self’ and ‘other’” (Freitag-Hild 2018, 165). Such approaches understand that there are differences among cultures and that these can be overcome by interacting and communicating with each other. In this process, one must reflect and become aware of one’s perception and perspectives of the respective culture. Thereby, prejudices can be revealed and eventually, overcome. The overall goal of “Fremdverstehen” is “giving the ‘other’ a voice and at reconstructing his or her views and ways of seeing or interpreting the world” (*ibid.*, 166). However, one does not necessarily have to agree with the other point of view, yet it is important to change the perspective and reflect critically where one and others stand. This is a dynamic process which should happen in a dialogue with others (cf. *ibid.*)

Byram's model (1997) and the approaches of "Fremdverstehen" (Bredella/ Christ 1995, 2007) intend to help EFL teachers integrate ICC and overall cultural pedagogy into their lesson plans and settings. This is also important in order to meet the needs of a heterogenous EFL classroom where many students have a different cultural background. Nevertheless, developing ICC can be considered as a life-long learning process which EFL teachers should consciously work towards (cf. Freitag-Hild 2018, 164f.). Before describing telecollaboration as a suitable approach in developing ICC, in the following, there will be a closer look on teaching methodology, its development as well as current approaches and methods.

## 5. Teaching Methodology

When language teaching became a profession in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, besides others, applied linguistics worked towards developing "principles and procedures for the design of teaching methods and materials" (Richards/ Rodgers 2001, 1) which were based on the fields of linguistics as well as psychology. Richards and Rodgers (2001, 1) define this method concept as "the notion of a systematic set of teaching practices based on a particular theory of language and language learning". Hence, all teaching methods needed a specific groundwork. Especially in the beginnings of working on teaching methods, there were many applied linguists and EFL teachers, who ambitiously tried to find better theoretical and more effective methods than the ones that preceded it (cf. *ibid*). Results of this were many different teaching methods which could be characterized "by frequent change and innovation and by the development of sometimes competing language teaching ideologies" (*ibid*). This time marked the most active period in history of teaching methods. Examples of such teaching methods are Audiolingualism, Counseling-Learning, Situational Language Teaching, The Silent Way, Suggestopedia and Total Physical Response (TPR) (Richards/ Rodgers 2001, 245).

At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, applied linguists and language teachers agreed that newer and better teaching methods per se cannot be the cure for the problems regarding language teaching. So, their focus moved away from finding the perfect teaching method which had "a specific instructional design or system based on a particular theory of language and language learning" (Richards/ Rodgers 2001, 245). They rather focused on approaches which all have

*a core set of theories and beliefs about the nature of language, of language learning, and a derived set of principles for teaching a language. None of them, however, leads to a specific set of prescriptions and techniques to be used in teaching a language. They*

*allow for individual interpretation and application. They can be revised and updated over time as new practices emerge* (Richards/ Rodgers 2001, 245).

Therefore, approaches could be helpful for EFL teachers as they are not limited to one specific teaching model, but they rather can make use of different sources which could be used well when adapting to their own classroom or implementing them according to their individual needs (cf. Richards/ Rodgers 2001, 15f.). Also, approaches seem to be long-lasting as they allow to be changed as well. Nevertheless, this freedom can also be challenging for EFL teachers, especially when starting the profession, as they must make various decisions in order to choose appropriate ways of teaching EFL (cf. *ibid.*, 246ff.).

Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) identify a risk when EFL teachers try to implement every teaching method or approach into their classroom. They criticize that every method or approach follows a “coherent combinations of techniques and principles” (*ibid.*, 183) and if one just takes the best out of every method, it is eclectic but not structured. Therefore, they suggest that a teacher should know exactly what principles they wanted to embody in their profession, in order to make conscious choices about what to implement from different teaching methods. They call this “principled eclecticism” (*ibid.*) and define a teacher who follows this path like this: they “should be able to give reasons for why they do what they do” (*ibid.*). With this knowledge, it seems easier to choose teaching methods according to one’s own values and principles or in their words: “they are guided in any particular moment by a compass consisting of a set of values, some knowledge and experience, and a commitment to (particular) learning outcomes” (*ibid.*, 184). This does not happen overnight but is rather a development process (Freeman 1991) which happens in a dynamic process of acting and reflecting (cf. Larsen-Freeman/ Anderson 2011, 187). Hence, it is important to understand that one must try out new techniques, too, must evaluate these and make necessary adjustments in their EFL teaching. Therefore, reflecting their own teaching should be done by every teacher no matter how experienced they are. Consequently, teachers must be aware of the importance of the personal choices regarding their own values, their students’ needs and the overall situation in their individual classroom. (cf. *ibid.*).

Additionally, Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011, 182) emphasize the importance of “socio-political reasons or demands on teachers” when choosing appropriate teaching methods or approaches. Doff (2018, 5) also asks the question which method is the best “in terms of the most effective cost-benefit ratio for teachers and learners” and finds the answer in the dependence on “the era and cultural context” (*ibid.*). For instance, before the communicative

turn in the late 1970s, the focus was mainly on form like grammatical rules and vocabulary and therefore, the teaching methods who supported these principles like the grammar-translation method or the audiolingual method were highly suitable for teaching EFL. Nowadays, such methods would not be seen as acceptable as the focus is mainly on communicative competences (cf. Elsner 2018, 19). Also, regarding cultural context, some methods and approaches seem to not be suitable when thinking about the roles of teachers and students (cf. Richards/ Rodgers 2001, 248). Therefore, the context in which teaching EFL takes place, has a great impact on teaching methods and approaches.

### 5.1 Current Approaches for Teaching EFL

After explaining how to treat teaching methods consciously, in the following, there will be an overview of some specific approaches and methods which are relevant for nowadays' teaching. Examples for this are Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Project-Based Language Teaching (PBLT) and finally, telecollaboration. The following are by no means exhaustive but rather should give an overall perspective of current teaching methods.

**Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)** marks the beginning of the shift towards the importance of meaning rather than of form when teaching EFL. This shift reflects the development of an increasingly globalized world where communication among nations is important. Therefore, the education of learning EFL needed to change. For instance, Widdowson (1979) experienced that his students coming from secondary school were barely able to understand and express themselves in the target language in either written or spoken form and claimed that this is not acceptable. In his paper, he explains how important it is to use the target language in a meaningful and authentic context. He states: “we should think not only in terms of linguistic structures and situational settings, but also in terms of communicative acts” (Widdowson 1979, 119). Hence, students should understand the relevance of learning EFL by knowing the communicative value of it and thereby, be able to express themselves appropriately (cf. *ibid.*, 120). Soon, this approach became popular and impacted teaching EFL quite heavily and still is relevant up to this day. Richards and Rodgers (2001, 155) define CLT as an approach which “aims to (a) make communicative competence the goal of language teaching and (b) develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication”. In doing so, the overall focus is on fluency and not accuracy. However, as mentioned previously, there is not a specific teaching model that an EFL teacher needs to follow in order to implement this. Richards and

Rodgers (2001) believe that this is the reason for the approach becoming so popular as “practitioners from different educational traditions can identify with it, and consequently interpret it in different ways” (ibid., 157). Eventually, other approaches resulted from CLT and are based on the overall aim to develop communicative competence among students.

A quite recent approach is **Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)** which is currently popular for teaching EFL. It is a “dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language” (Mehisto et. al. 2008, 29). CLIL combines learning the target language with content from another subject matter like science or geography. In contrast to immersion where all subjects are taught in the target language, CLIL focuses on only a certain number of subjects. Schwab (2015, 11) speaks of “the idea of getting two for the price of one (i.e. acquiring a language in addition to developing a deeper understanding of subject content)”. Thereby cross-curricular teaching is possible. In order to understand the subject matter, students need multisensory input such as pictures or realia. This approach is not limited to a certain school type or age group but rather can be implemented in all areas of teaching EFL (cf. ibid., 10ff.).

Another popular approach is **Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)**. Richards and Rodgers (2001, 223) define TBLT as “an approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching”. The overall focus is on appropriate tasks for EFL learners and is therefore learner centered. Richards and Rodgers (2001, 224) define a task as “activity or goal that is carried out using language, such as finding a solution to a puzzle, reading a map and giving directions, making a telephone call, writing a letter [...]”. There are many other attempts to define what a task consists of and within this approach, there is no unity in understanding. Nunan (1989, 10) defines a task as “a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than on form”. This definition of a task demonstrates that TBLT can be seen as a development from CLT. TBLT tries to foster activities which emerged from principles like authentic language use in meaningful contexts. These tasks should be tailored to the needs of every student in the EFL classroom which results in the necessity of differentiation. This shows that tasks should overall facilitate learning the target language (cf. ibid.). Nevertheless, designing such tasks can be quite challenging for the EFL teacher.

Based on TBLT, **Project-Based Language Teaching (PBLT)** is another current approach for the EFL classroom. Rather than a task, it focuses more on the benefits of working on a project in the EFL classroom. The setting for this could vary between pair work and teamwork which

is organized learner centered. Therefore, in their group, students are responsible for their learning progress themselves. Savery (2006, 9) defines PBLT as “an instructional (and curricular) learner-centered approach that empowers learners to conduct research, integrate theory and practice, and apply knowledge and skills to develop a viable solution to a defined problem”. Hence, PBLT encourages collaboration with other group members in the EFL classroom to facilitate learning EFL while solving a particular problem. After the project is finished, it is important that an assessment takes place in order to profit the learning progress and review what has been done.

In addition, another recent approach is called **telecollaboration** which connects TBLT and PBLT while also focusing more on computer mediated communication (CMC) (cf. O’Dowd). As this approach can combine raising media competence as well as cultural competence and language skills, it has great potential to benefit the EFL classroom which will be explained in the following chapter.

## 5.2 Telecollaboration

Since the 1990’s, as part of Network-Based Language Teaching (NBLT), the idea of telecollaboration became a popular tool for foreign language educators (Guth/ Helm 2010). Besides telecollaboration, there are other terms for this notion as well such as Virtual Exchange, Online Intercultural Exchange or Collaborative Online International Learning (cf. O’Dowd 2015, 63). The theoretical groundwork consists of cognitive theories of second language acquisition (SLA) and sociocultural theories of language learning (cf. Helm 2017, 3). O’Dowd (2015, 63) defines telecollaboration as an

*application of online communication tools to connect classes of language learners in geographically distant locations with the aim of developing their foreign language skills and intercultural competence through collaborative tasks and project work.*

The definition highlights important aspects of telecollaboration. Therefore, it is about making use of digital tools to communicate with student of different cultural backgrounds. While they collaborate in multicultural groups on a project including different tasks, the student’s language skills and their intercultural communicative competence raises which is the overall goal of telecollaboration. In addition, Guth and Helm (2010, 14) explain the relevance of telecollaboration as well as adding another goal:

*The practice of telecollaboration responds to the complex demands that communication in today's world puts on foreign language learners by promoting the development of language skills, intercultural communicative competence and, we would argue, new online literacies.*

Guth and Helm (2010) therefore claim that telecollaboration is an appropriate method to implement in the EFL classroom situated in a globalized world where language skills, intercultural communicative competences and media competences are crucial. Referring to the technology advancements resulting in the Web 2.0, Guth and Helm suggest the notion of telecollaboration 2.0. They claim that “it marks the beginning of a gradual shift towards new pedagogies, approaches and contexts for language and intercultural learning” (ibid., 17).

The setting of a telecollaboration can be challenging for EFL teachers though, as they must be able to organize and execute such an online collaboration with pedagogical competences and the required technological skills. O’Dowd (2015) describes in detail what specific competences a telecollaboration teacher needs which are all based on the four characteristics of telecollaboration. The first characteristic is the focus on intercultural experience practically and theoretically. The second is the willingness to work with other teachers worldwide and therefore working towards their intercultural skills. The third is the idea of a long-term collaboration which fits perfectly in the ongoing EFL classroom activities. The last characteristic consists of the passive role of the EFL teacher during the telecollaboration as the students themselves should be active (cf. ibid., 66). Based on these characteristics, O’Dowd (2015) describes 40 competences of a telecollaborative teacher. In a nutshell, they consist of organizational, pedagogical and digital competence as well as attitudes and beliefs (cf. ibid.).

Besides organizational and pedagogical challenges, there are also the possibility of intercultural misunderstanding and communication breakdown within two groups of different cultural backgrounds (cf. O’Dowd 2017, 9). This might question the benefits of using telecollaboration in the EFL classroom. Belz (2002, 76) argues against it by claiming that “the clash of cultural faultlines in telecollaborative learning communities [...] should not be smoothed over or avoided [...]; indeed, they should be encouraged”. Hence, it is important to step out of the comfort zone by confronting students and teachers with different values and beliefs and therefore, reflect on their own as well as other perspectives. With this, participants of telecollaboration raise their cultural awareness and broaden their horizon.

This shows that the objectives as well as the challenges of the EFL classroom mentioned in this paper are all part of telecollaboration. As a good EFL teacher should be open-minded and self-reflected in terms of using digital tools and being cultural aware, they can develop these by aiming to be part of a telecollaboration. Especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, where communication as well as teaching took place online, telecollaboration is a great approach to foster media and cultural competence while communicating with others.

## 6. Research Methodology

Teaching EFL is a global issue since English is considered to be the lingua franca. Therefore, an international perspective on this profession can be beneficial for the field. Especially dealing with the same issues for teaching EFL caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, collaboration between different (future) teachers can be helpful to reflect teaching EFL in a post Covid-19 era. In order to realize this, a telecollaboration between participants from different cultural backgrounds seems to be appropriate. Hence, the analyzed data set consists of guided written reflections of participants from an intercultural telecollaboration.

This collaboration was part of the DIVA project, which stands for “Digital and International Virtual Academic Cooperation”. This project is being funded by DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst/ German Academic Exchange Service) and BMBF (Federal Ministry of Education and Research). There are three project partners which include the University of Education Ludwigsburg, Germany and the Kibbutzim College of Education, Technology and the Arts in Tel Aviv, Israel, as well as the Charles Darwin University in Darwin, Australia. The objectives of this project are to promote digital teaching, integrate innovative didactical approaches into existing curricula, methodologically implement blended mobility and to foster intercultural competences (cf. <https://diva-project.de/>). While the cooperation between participants from Ludwigsburg and Darwin focuses on general pedagogical questions, the cooperation between participants from Ludwigsburg and Tel Aviv focuses specifically on teaching EFL. Consequently, the data set for this research paper consists of written reflections from participants taking part in the telecollaboration between Israeli and German students.

Both groups took part in two deferred courses on “Teaching Methods” as the Israeli semester started earlier in the year than the German semester. Then, both groups met once a week in a collaboration over a period of four weeks. In total, there were eight groups mixed with students from both countries. To guarantee a smooth start into the telecollaboration, the groups were

organized beforehand. Furthermore, the participants were asked to upload a personal artifact on a digital bulletin board called “Padlet” (<https://padlet.com/>) in advance. In addition to that, they also had to pin their current location on a “Padlet” map.

In the first meeting, there was a brief introduction to the telecollaboration on the video platform “Zoom” (<https://zoom.us/>), followed by breakout rooms specifically for the different groups. The aim of the breakout room conversations was to get to know one another by talking about the personal artefacts as well as everyone’s location. After the first meeting, all students were asked to upload a professional artifact in preparation for the second online meeting. The reason for this task was to get the participants to talk about their professional identity as EFL teachers in their groups. The third meeting was intended to give participants the chance to have conversations about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on teaching EFL. In that week though, the outbreak of war in Israel happened, so the Israeli students had to live in shelters, causing uncertainty about future realizations of the telecollaboration. Even though this situation was remarkably difficult, many Israeli students chose to attend the third meeting on “Zoom”, and everybody agreed on continuing the telecollaboration. Besides such incisive political events, the goal of the third week was to discuss what the participants had learnt from the impact of Covid-19 on teaching EFL and what they wanted to leave behind. For the last session on “Zoom” the groups worked on a project of a principled framework for teaching EFL in the post Covid-19 era. After having collaborated with the other participants in intercultural groups, everybody was asked to give a guided written reflection on this experience. They should include some specific aspects about their views on cultural awareness, teaching methodology and the use of digital tools as these were the subject matters of their collaboration. Additionally, they were asked to describe how they wanted to implement their learnings into their (future) teaching.

In the following, the research aim and the specific research questions will be elaborated. These will guide the following research and finally, will be answered in the discussion chapter.

### 6.1 Research Aim and Research Questions

The main purpose of this research was to discover how EFL should be taught after the Covid-19 pandemic. According to this, cultural awareness, digitalization, and teaching methodology are especially important. In the following reasons for the latter assumptions will be explained further.

First of all, with such great changes resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, teaching methodology needs to change as well. There are many different approaches and methods for EFL, however some methods can be more suitable to the EFL classroom than others. Secondly, as EFL teacher it is important to implement cultural awareness into one's own lessons. The pandemic showed that we live in a globalized world, where same experiences as dealing with the same virus are shared. Yet living in a globalized world also means to see differences in cultures. This awareness is crucial for being an active member of a multicultural society as well as a multicultural classroom. Lastly, regarding the consequences of the worldwide lockdowns, schools were closed and therefore, schools depended on digitalization. Some countries were better prepared for these circumstances than others. Teachers should learn from this challenge by implementing digital tools into their classroom.

All these aspects lead to the following three research questions:

- (1) Which teaching methods do EFL teacher students think would be beneficial for the EFL classroom?
- (2) What did EFL teacher students learn about cultural awareness after an international collaboration?
- (3) What do EFL teacher students think about the use of digital tools in an EFL classroom?

In order to answer these questions, the data set of written reflections by German and Israeli students about their telecollaboration had been analyzed by the researcher. This process is described in more detail below.

## 6.2 Project Design

The telecollaboration took place within 45 minute long “Zoom” sessions over a period of four weeks. The research project participants consisted of 48 students who were organized in eight intercultural groups of five to seven students. Although both groups, students from Israel as well as from Germany, consisted of future EFL teachers, their study course differed.

The Israeli participants (N27) worked towards a post graduate certificate of education which is a multi-age track. This means that these students decided to take this course to start teaching EFL in primary and secondary school as a new profession. In order to do so, they attended the Kibbutzim College of Education, which is located in Tel Aviv, Israel. One requirement of this course is to already have acquired a degree. Hence, their ages ranged from mid-twenty to early sixty which meant that many of them were parents. As part of their study

course, they already taught EFL and had gained practical experience in teaching digitally during the Covid-19 pandemic.

All the German participants (N21) attended the University of Education (Pädagogische Hochschule) in Ludwigsburg, Germany, specializing to become teachers. Students were doing the master program aiming to become primary or secondary school teachers or teachers of special needs education. Apart from teaching EFL, all of them studied at least one more subject according to their specific school type. Most students were female. In contrast to their Israeli counterparts, the German participants were usually in their twenties and did not have the experience of teaching EFL digitally during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Prior to this telecollaboration, most students did not know much about each other's different cultural background. However, there were some exceptions from the Israeli students' side: A couple of Israeli students mentioned that their heritage was German. Nevertheless, none of the students had been part of an international telecollaboration of this kind before.

### 6.3 Data Collection Instrument and Data Analysis

The guided reflections of the participants were written after the telecollaboration. They had about two weeks to do this assignment which then had to be uploaded on the learning management system "Moodle". It should be noted that all students filled in a consent form agreeing to be part of research projects beforehand. In their guided written reflections, the students had been asked to reflect on their professional development of their understanding of teaching methodology, cultural awareness and digitalization. The participants were given the guidelines to not write more than two pages although some students did write more. While German students wrote their reflections individually, some Israeli students worked on their reflections as a group. The data set of this research paper consists of all guided written reflections.

As the data set for this research consists of subjective experiences of a telecollaboration, this paper utilizes qualitative analysis. Therefore, the thematic analysis methodology by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used. This methodology was chosen because the written reflections of the participants display their personal experiences and opinions about the telecollaboration between German and Israeli students. To categorize the data set, thematic analysis can be used as a suitable approach as it is "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (ibid., 79). Specifically, a combination of the deductive and semantic approach had been used as there were already some expectations on what to find in the data set. Hence,

the overall categories of cultural awareness, digitalization and teaching methods were not unanticipated by the researcher. Overall, the data set was analyzed by using the six-phase guide from Braun and Clarke (2006) to conduct thematic analysis which will be described in the following:

- Phase one: “familiarising yourself with your data” (ibid., 87) focuses on actively reading and re-reading the data and taking notes. Therefore, all written reflections had been read twice in order to get a good overview of the data set. Additionally, the MAXQDA 2020 software had been used as an analysis tool to organize first thoughts and ideas about the patterns of the data set.
- Phase two: “generating initial codes” (ibid., 87) focuses on finding codes which are interesting to the research in a systematic way. Hence, the software MAXQDA 2020 helped the researcher finding initial codes. In the beginning, these consisted of cultural awareness, digital tools, teaching methods, war in Israel, Covid-19, telecollaboration, important skills and values.
- Phase three: “searching for themes” (ibid., 87) focuses on developing themes out of the initial codes. Hence, the codes were used to identify themes across the data set and eventually, the themes developed, and quotes were collected.
- Phase four: “reviewing themes” focuses on reevaluating the possible themes (Braun/Clark 2006, 87). In this way, the identified themes get reviewed and are put into context.
- Phase five: “defining and naming themes” (ibid., 87) focuses on drawing a clear picture of each theme by explaining why this is interesting for the research. In this phase, finding a name for the themes and finding clarity what each theme stands for is essential.
- Phase six: “producing the report” (ibid., 87) focuses on telling the story of the data set. Here, the data set is finally being analyzed fully while telling a story about the data. Furthermore, the analysis is being linked to the literature as well as to the research question. This report can be found in the next two chapters (see 7. Findings and 8. Discussion).

Now that the research methodology of this paper has been described, the findings of the written reflections can be discussed in detail.

## 7. Findings

All the students answered the questions about their professional development regarding cultural awareness, teaching methodology, and the use of digital tools in terms of their own experience within their collaboration groups. Taking a closer look at the data set, the overall thematic categories are 1.) telecollaboration as a method to teach EFL, 2.) the personal approach of teaching methods, 3.) the importance of cultural awareness for teachers, and 4.) the reflective approach of using digital tools in the EFL classroom. These thematic categories are not absolute as there are various interrelations among these categories. Nevertheless, for the purpose of structure and clarity, they were analyzed in distinctive themes. Similar to Waldmann et al.'s (2019) research design, at the end of each quote, there will be the information provided whether it is from a German [G] or an Israeli [I] student.

Overall, the Covid-19 pandemic affected all of the participants whether studying in university or teaching at schools. All participants reflected on this global issue with regard to the EFL classroom but also with regard to teaching and learning in general. For them, it was interesting to see that even though they might not live in the same country, they still deal with the same difficulties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Something we all have in common now is the global pandemic of Covid-19 [G].

Looking at the post Covid-19 era, despite all the difficulties, the students described also benefits which resulted from the challenges teachers had to face during this time. There were many topics to discuss during this telecollaboration like using technology wisely, dealing with cultural awareness, and sharing thoughts and ideas on teaching methods while dealing with the same global issues such as a pandemic.

It is important to look at the corona pandemic not only in a negative way but perceiving all the progress and revolution it has to offer [G].

The Covid19-pandemic has forced us to develop new ways of teaching, especially with the help of digital tools [G].

There was a plethora of discussions ranging on how COVID-19 changed teaching and how teaching has changed as a whole. Everyone demonstrated much flexibility and a desire to use new digital tools regularly. We have acknowledged that successful peer-to-peer collaboration and active learning experience, requires new skills and behaviors especially when integrating with other cultures [I].

Based on their experience in the telecollaboration, the students' reflections on using teaching methods, the importance of cultural awareness and the use of digital tools will be described in the following.

### 7.1 Teaching Methods

When looking at teaching methods, there could be found two thematic categories: One of them deals specifically with the telecollaboration as a teaching method for the EFL classroom. The other one describes teaching methods in a broader context as this thematic category consists of the personal approach of teaching methods.

As all the students were part of the international telecollaboration, all of them reflected on this specific teaching method. In general, everybody taking part in the collaboration thought it was a good experience although there were some negative aspects mentioned as well. Nevertheless, the majority of the students described how they would implement telecollaboration into their own teaching.

Therefore, I consider the DIVA project to be enormously beneficial for use in teaching [G].

It was a fascinating experience to collaborate with the German students [I].

In detail, they described why it was a good experience. Many explained that it helped them professionally because they were able to exchange ideas and opinions about teaching as well as inspiring each other. They mentioned by working in a group they could benefit from each other's point of views. For them, it was interesting to see that even though they were not of the same cultural background, they still shared similar teaching goals. While sharing similarities, they also mentioned that it was beneficial to experience differences in order to get new perspectives on being a teacher in another country.

We were able to work together and collaborate on ideas and opinions – everyone had a platform to be heard. This way of collaborating is essential in teaching to let everyone have a turn and give insight because we can all learn from each other [I].

Nevertheless, our group collaboration experience showed that we do share similar thoughts and insights referring to our educational goals as teachers and educators [I].

When taking a closer look at international telecollaborations, many stated that it was very effective to raise cultural awareness, broaden their horizon and to build a strong bond with their group members which was beneficial for them not only professionally but also personally.

Many described their experience of the collaboration positive because they built a connection to each other very quickly.

The concept of collaboration with a different culture or country altogether is fascinating and highly efficient in raising tolerance, interpersonal relations with foreign students, and getting people together around a common goal [I].

It was a brilliant idea to create cohorts of students who interact virtually to connect theory and application, share teaching processes and personal reflections, scrutinize, debate, and share experiences, exchange ideas, and enduring bonds between 2 nations. And it always begins with connection between people [I].

Some students noted how nice it was just to talk about their situation while living in a pandemic and get to know different national ways of dealing with the same issues.

Especially with Corona-Pandemic, it was nice talking to other students about how they deal with online teaching and how their country is handling the pandemic [G].

I think that having these meetings during the pandemic can help you understand how being a student and teaching have been complex across borders during the pandemic, and it is somewhat comforting to know we all have common feelings about this [I].

Another great benefit of international telecollaboration which was mentioned by the students was the opportunity to use English in an authentic setting. By this, their language skills could improve. It should be noted that many of the German students described how nervous they had been about speaking English with the Israeli group but all of them stated that as soon as they met them, they could overcome this fear.

For me personally, an exchange with international students, either in person or through a telecollaboration project, is always a good and important experience in regards to learning and really using a foreign language while communicating [G].

I was relatively nervous and a little bit shy because I did not know what to expect [G].

In retrospect, my nervousness from the beginning was completely ungrounded. The four Israelis were unbelievably kind, open-hearted and appreciating [G].

One of the students described how the pandemic affected their plans for a semester abroad. Because of the international telecollaboration, they were still able to foster their cultural awareness and improve on their language skills although they noted that being in another country is incomparable. Yet they were still able to get to know another culture.

I had to cancel my semester abroad due to the current pandemic situation, so I was looking forward to this possibility fostering my cultural awareness. Of course, living and studying abroad for several months cannot be compared to four 45-minute online sessions but, even though, in my opinion I could improve [G].

The positive aspects about using telecollaboration have been mentioned far more often, nevertheless some of the participants also noted negative aspects about it. A lot of the students claimed that the collaboration could have been longer in order to be more beneficial. This was mentioned by many concerning both the length of the „Zoom“ sessions as well as the time span in which the collaboration took place. There was one participant claiming that it would have been more beneficial to collaborate with students with similar experiences in teaching in order to exchange practical knowledge.

If this were going on throughout the semester, we might actually learned from each other techniques for classroom management across cultures, learned what tools we all adopt, used and shared; discussed problems and advise in terms of material [I].

Unfortunately, like all the sessions before, this 45-minute-session span away [G].

There could have also been a way to match types/levels of experience people on both sides have. We felt like there was a fair amount of uncertainty/hesitation about who will take on what roles and what / how much each should contribute, especially from the German side [I].

Nevertheless, all participants noted that using telecollaboration could be beneficial for future EFL teaching. They said reasons for this were raising cultural awareness of students and improving their language skills. In addition to that, some stated that a telecollaboration would also be beneficial for their media competences. Specifically, the possibility to engage with other students through digital tools was seen as a great opportunity to foster those competences without leaving one's own country.

A collaboration with another school is greatly beneficial as not only cultural understanding is improved but the students' English skills can be practiced [G].

I would implement this interactive virtual experience in my own EFL classroom because I believe it can provide an opportunity for students to learn about different cultures through meaningful social interaction [I].

We live in a digital age where everyone is able to communicate with people from all over the world without actually being there [G].

Some students mentioned conditions for organizing such telecollaborations. First and foremost, the students need to have a chance to get to know their group members on a personal level. Moreover, the group work should have some sort of output which could be presented. Possible topics for such an output could be cultural differences like traditions, holidays, or traditional dishes. Talking about their schools and how learning is being organized there could be interesting too. One student even presented the idea of planning a school trip together with preferably another school which is not too far away. Some suggested working on a filming project together.

In our group the cultural divide often felt very small and even non-existent at times. The reason for this probably lies in the warm friendly atmosphere that our group developed instantly in our first meeting and that made me feel close to my teammates, both Israeli and German [G].

Going forward, I really hope to have the opportunity to implement a collaborative unit in my teaching practice with the objective of having my students communicate in English about basic personal topics (where you live, where you got to school, what you like to do, etc.) with students from other places in the world via zoom or FaceTime [I].

Another implementation that could work in the Sekundarstufe I would be a cooperation with another school from another country and then plan a “school trip” together. The country had to be nearby of course so the trip would not be too expensive, preferably the neighbor country [G].

The collaboration should offer some kind of outcome, which could be a group project in the form of a presentation, a portfolio etc. [G].

Implementing different projects to work on for several weeks and to present in the end might be an option for a tele-collaboration, like e.g. creating, filming and cutting their own learning/explicatory videos to a certain topic, after going through a little film workshop together [G].

On the other side, there were students who claimed that collaborating with an international group should mainly focus on having fun in order to practice their English especially when talking about primary school. This could be organized through online quizzes which could also help strengthen their media competences.

The collaboration should primarily be fun for the pupils and help them to socialize with other nations using English as some kind of vehicular language [G].

A couple of students formed the concept of starting an international collaboration right at the start of high school and continuing the collaboration until graduation. This would benefit the students’ cultural awareness and their ability to speak English in an authentic setting.

Additionally an exchange with international students online, especially on a regular basis, can lead to more open-mindedness and tolerance towards other people, communities and cultures because of the simple fact, that people get in touch with each other [G].

I would implement such a project in the beginning of high school and I would keep it up until the last year of school and e.g. set up a meeting every two weeks for two hours [G].

Many students liked the idea of collaborating with another class from another country by having pen pals. These could happen via e-mail or as actual letters. In doing so, vocabulary could be practiced and overall, their writing skills.

At the end of each topic (e.g. animals), the pupils could write an email to their pen pal using the new words they learned and ask questions they practiced in class (e.g. what's your favorite animal?) [G].

All in all, students liked their experience of telecollaboration and therefore, wanted to implement this teaching method into their own teaching. There were other teaching methods mentioned as well. Looking at those in the written reflection, there was the thematic category of the personal level of teaching methodology regarding teaching EFL.

First of all, due to the collaboration, students acknowledged that their teaching methods are quite similar even though they do not share the same cultural background. This was very beneficial for students and encouraged them in carrying on their profession.

Us not being all to different especially showed during our talks regarding teaching methodology [G].

I noticed right from the beginning that our teaching methods and set of values were similar and that to me was my favorite part of these sessions. Talking, listening, thinking about the pure, innocent and authentic reasons we are here as opposed to all of the hiccups in the system, culture, mentality is refreshing and made me feel good about being good [I].

In more detail, teaching methods seemed to be personal and had to adapt to every EFL classroom.

I understood that there is no right methodology. Every methodology has its pros and cons. Depending on the needs of the students or the goal of the lesson there is a better or less suitable methodology [G]

Specific teaching methods were named by the students although many stated that they did not have much time left to discuss this topic as the situation in Israel was so difficult (a further

description of the situation in Israel during the telecollaboration can be found in the findings of cultural awareness in this chapter).

Because of the re-outbreak of the Mideast conflict, we did not compare notes on teaching methodology as intensive as it was planned [G].

The most popular teaching methods used by the students were project-based learning (PBL), task-based learning teaching (TBLT) as well as the Communicative Language Approach (CLA). Many students concluded that speaking should be the focus of every EFL classroom.

Creating PBL experiences in collaboration with pupils abroad could give us an opportunity to apply what living in the 21st century is all about – learning and working in groups, brainstorming, researching, comparing different perspectives, finding solutions and ways to apply them [I].

For the implementation, I would focus on the teaching methodology of communicative language teaching and task-based language teaching [G].

For my further teaching I think it is more important to use the CLA than any other method, because it is more important that students are able to talk in English than whether the sentence was grammatically correct [G].

Other less mentioned methods were the use of Total Physical Response (TPR) and the implementation of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLILL). Older methods like the Grammar-Translation Method and the Audiolingual method were noted but not encouraged by the students as they wanted to focus more on communication.

Depending on the grade that is taught, similar methods and activities are used (e.g., TPR) [G].

Another method I would choose to implement is CLIL (Content and Language Integrated learning. This method would be useful in combination with the PBL mentioned before. The reason is that CLIL focuses on the language itself but also on the content [G].

Based on my experience with the Israelis I would rather apply the communicative language teaching approach than the audiolingual method in my teaching [G].

In addition to specific teaching methods, the majority of the students described important professional skills and important values a teacher should have. As they talked about professional skills a teacher should have, they named critical thinking, self-reflection, and the ability of teamwork. Furthermore, they said that it is important to plan and structure well, and to be open to new things. Nevertheless, one student mentioned that it takes time and experience to develop one's own professional identity. Another student highlighted the importance of

taking things easy from time to time and to never lose the joy of teaching as well as being optimistic even though there are many things to do as a teacher.

It is helpful when teaching students how to gain experience in collaboration and develop important skills such as critical thinking, self-reflection, and co-construction of knowledge [I].

It takes a long time to find your professional identity. You have to gain a lot of experiences yourself and above all do not stress yourself out [G].

There is always something to do. This can make teachers never come to rest and being dissatisfied with work and themselves. During the cooperation, I internalized to take things more easily, try to stay flexible in difficult situations, and have fun while teaching [G].

Many students also saw the importance of differentiation within their classes. Therefore, it is important to teach in different forms so that all students' needs, and their individual learning style can be met. The personal development of each child should be supported especially after learning in isolation caused by lockdown. All in all, the participants claimed that one crucial professional skill of a teacher would be knowing each student's needs and being able to choose the right teaching methods and materials to support their students.

Differentiation is very important and that children need to be seen and supported as individuals [G].

It is on us to choose the tools to suit our students needs [G].

In addition to that, many participants also noted, that a teacher should always be sensitive about their students' cultural backgrounds. One student realized after collaborating with the Israeli students who experienced severe consequences caused by war, that their students in Germany could possibly share such experiences as well. Therefore, they concluded a teacher should always be culturally aware and sensitive in their teaching.

While war is not something we are confronted with in our everyday lives in Germany, we should not forget that as teachers, we might have children in our classes who have such traumatic experiences with war [G].

The majority of the students also mentioned the importance of healthy relationships within the classroom. So, a professional skill for a teacher would be building and maintaining a strong bond between students and themselves as a teacher and encouraging bonds between the students as well. Altogether, many participants mentioned that in a classroom, there should be a relaxed and cordial atmosphere where everybody feels safe and respected.

Both sides agree and believe in the importance a strong bond between student and teacher for optimal learning success [I].

Since pupils spent a lot of time in classrooms, schools should be a place where students feel safe, happy and well looked after [G].

In describing the above, many students were frustrated with the obligation of grading their students. They stated that it hinders the personal development of their students and can discourage them easily.

We all agreed that grading is one of the most frustrating parts of teaching because school should not primarily be about that. School should be about developing the pupils' personalities by offering them a variety of possibilities to participate and learn in an as authentic real world scenarios as possible [G].

Some students noted that EFL teachers should also prepare their students to be active members of society. In order to do so, they should gain self-confidence, learn to be independent and to treat all people respectfully.

For me as a future teacher, it is important that teaching and learning do not only aim at performance but also prepare children for life. This includes the ability to act as confident, autonomous, responsible, and social persons within society [G].

[...] my students to become responsible global citizens that show tolerance, respect and acceptance towards each other and students with different cultural backgrounds [G].

Besides those professional skills, there had been mentioned many important values for teaching that go beyond a specific curriculum. According to most participants, values like acceptance, tolerance, openness and curiosity towards different cultures, appreciation of individuality, empathy, kindness, patience, courage, authenticity, and integrity are highly important. In order to develop those values, the teacher has to function as a role model to the students.

We all connected deeply to this idea that our students are like the flowers and plants in nature and must be planted, loved, and watered with empathy, knowledge and love [I].

The most important function as a teacher is to convey values like kindness, open-mindedness and acceptance and that it is not all about correct grammar or vocabulary [G].

It should be noted that some German students stated that the Israeli students inspired them regarding the above-mentioned values as they could already see the Israeli students embody all of those in their personality as a teacher. On this note, the German students thought the Israeli

students functioned as role models which then inspired them to focus on such important values too.

Some very significant teaching objectives in general are to me that my students will recognize the importance of features like kindness, open-mindedness, open-heartedness, acceptance, respect and appreciation. Those are all some of the features I found in the Israeli teachers' personalities [G].

After having described what students thought about teaching methods, in the following, there will be taken a closer look at their opinion of cultural awareness.

## 7.2 Cultural Awareness

In the previous chapter, it was noted that telecollaboration can benefit fostering cultural awareness. Looking more closely at cultural awareness in the data set, one of the thematic themes is the importance of cultural awareness for teachers. In almost all the written reflections, the participants stated that collaborating with students from another country was highly beneficial for them in raising their own cultural awareness and therefore, understanding the importance of it as an EFL teacher.

In order to be an active member of a society living in a globalized world, a number of students highlighted the importance of connecting cultures in general.

As our society continues to become more „global“, it will become increasingly important to take advantage of opportunities to connect with people from different parts the world [I].

Some students were able to explain what cultural awareness means to them. They noted that culture drives how one sees the world and interacts with the people in it, and that these cultural differences can sometimes bring barriers, but also great benefits.

As we understand that our culture impact and shape how we see the world; that differences are natural and that when we work with people from other cultures, we need to be aware of where, when, how and when our cultures may either help or hinder us in terms of communication and collaboration [I].

Nevertheless, we found a lot of similarities in the way we see things and we laughed a lot; therefore, I am sure that such a collaboration leads to more tolerance and open-mindedness and it broadens the mind a lot [G].

The students noted that this process of building cultural awareness by connecting with people from different cultures cannot be acquired through passivity. They described that this process needs to be active.

I feel like the DIVA project made me understand that cultural awareness is not something we are born with. It is something you experience after being in touch with other cultures. And by in touch I don't mean reading about them (even if that is helpful too). I mean actually getting in touch with people from other cultures or countries (in real life or online) and talk [G].

Although some participants noted that this active process of promoting cultural awareness is only possible when speaking with people abroad, many others asserted that for EFL teachers this process begins in the classroom. With many students growing up with multiple languages and diverse cultural backgrounds, cultural awareness is important for both teachers and students. Participants described that specifically EFL teachers must understand the importance of cultural awareness and act accordingly. Some stated that by teaching a foreign language, students should always understand the culture in which the language is spoken.

But the significance of realizing being “one world”, of being “all the same, no matter what race, ethnicity or religion” and the significance of living this acceptance begins not only in cross-country intercultural communication, it already begins in the classroom, it begins in every single encounter [G].

Looking back, the DIVA collaboration made clear to me that teaching a second language should always be connected with teaching cultural awareness [G].

Many experienced the close connection between cultural awareness and teaching a foreign language. Communicating with others in English in meaningful contexts, rather than having the option to quickly switch to their native language, was beneficial to both their language skills and their overall social skills.

Looking back, the DIVA collaboration made clear to me that teaching a second language should always be connected with teaching cultural awareness.

Getting familiar with new people, thus, probably creates intrinsic motivation for language acquisition [G].

Some students noted that all teachers must be role models for their students. In this case teachers can help students to see the importance of cultural awareness and work actively against hatred, envy or distrust against other cultures. Teachers should demonstrate how to act in a multicultural society by being tolerant, open-minded and acceptable.

Teaching your students acceptance and appreciation for other cultures, races or simply human beings begins in the teachers own personality [G].

Teachers should act out of cultural awareness in order to be a role-model for their students, literally living acceptance, tolerance and also openness and curiosity towards different cultures in their classroom [G].

When the telecollaboration started, several students did not know what to expect from the other group. Some described the feeling of not having anything in common or even having prejudices against the other culture at first. Specific prejudices were, for instance, that the German students appeared to be shy and timid. Additionally, some voiced concerns about the shared history. They were afraid of past issues impacting their group work.

Prior to our first encounter with our colleagues in Germany, we didn't necessarily feel there would be much in common between us, as they were not only strangers to us, but also part of a different country and culture [I].

The beginning of conversation was led by Israelis. The Germans were shy and it took them time to open up [I].

Though I was beyond excited to get to know the foreign students, I had some prejudices. Not the usual nasty ones that had prevailed for hundreds of years, but rather I thought they would dislike us and be very distant because of historical aspects [G].

A couple of Israeli students were of German descent. In fact, one Israeli student mentioned that their ancestors survived the Holocaust. This student expressed negative feelings towards Germans even though the student tried to be open-minded.

I am a third generation Holocaust survivor who grew up with German-wary parents, and though I have spent a lot of time in my life breaking down my parents' prejudices and barriers to come in touch with other souls, I am still initially triggered when I hear we are to collaborate with the „Germans“ [I].

This particular student mentioned a difficult situation in which the Israeli felt like being confronted with old prejudices. It started when the student wanted to tell their group members amusing anecdotes in their breakout session. The Israeli student told the group that because of their young students' hugs, the Israeli student suffered from getting lice on a regular basis. Additionally, the student mentioned that there were numerous snotty noses in the classroom. In reaction to the anecdotes, the group laughed. The student described that when another Israeli student from their group shared this story outside of the breakout room with everybody from the collaboration however, the student felt uncomfortable. They felt like they were confronted with prejudices against Jews all over again.

I cringed because I felt that this was playing into the way Germans saw Jews pre-WWII, the dirty Jews with the lice and the smeared snot and I left that first meeting with an uneasy feeling that I shouldn't have said that [I].

Nevertheless, the same student described the very positive experience of collaborating with this multicultural group and could therefore overcome the feeling of being prejudiced because of historical reasons. In general, most German and Israeli students described that once they had a chance to talk to each other in smaller groups, they were able to build a personal connection and overcome possible prejudices. Some students mentioned that they have experienced that prejudice never seem to be right. They noted that this is especially important when it comes to multicultural classrooms. Many took this experience as an opportunity to set a goal as EFL teachers to help their students develop cultural awareness.

That half a second of habitual stress was immediately relieved the moment I met this group of kind, talented, and sensitive young teachers [I].

The more you learn about one another, the less foreign they seem and the less prejudices arise [G].

What that has taught me, right off the bat, is that prejudices rarely ever turn out to be true. Something I knew but did not really seemed to have internalized [G].

Experiencing these differences helps to emphasize with my own pupils and reminds me to make many cultural experiences possible for them in class [G].

The majority of the students mentioned the value of sharing similarities despite their different cultural backgrounds. The most recognized similarity was that all participants will eventually become EFL teachers. Considering this, they mentioned professional similarities such as using the same teaching methods in the EFL classroom, sharing the same EFL teaching objectives as well as the same values. Additionally, participants described the similarity of sharing the same challenges, for instance, dealing with disciplinary issues or heterogeneity in the EFL classroom. Other shared challenges of the participants concerned the professional but also personal consequences due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet, they recognized another common ground which consisted of personal similarities such as hobbies, travelling and moral concepts.

Yet, quite quickly we discovered that as human beings we share similar ideas, interests, challenges (Covid-19), and relate to similar artifacts [I]!

The collaboration showed us that most teachers, even from different countries, face the same challenges, and benefit from sharing methods of teaching them [I].

We also shared similarities like the interest in travelling to Scotland [G].

In contrast, many students wrote about differences between the two student groups. Besides personal differences like age or teaching experience, the participants described cultural differences. Nevertheless, some admitted that differentiating between personal and cultural differences was not always easy.

The German students were substantially younger than us and just starting their professional career as us on the Israeli side were entering a new field after mastering one before with full careers in acting and design and running a household with kids [I].

I sometimes struggled to determine which differences between us were due to cultural differences and which ones are connected to the programs we are in and our different life stages [G].

Regarding the teaching profession, the participants recognized different prerequisites in the countries to become teachers. They realized while the German participants studied in university gaining theoretical knowledge for a long time, the Israeli participants gained practical experience in teaching EFL quite quickly. However, multiple participants recognized a difference between the reputation of German and Israeli teachers in the two countries. In Germany, the teaching profession appears to be respected and well-paid, whereas in Israel, teachers do not get the same respect and payment like in Germany. Moreover, the Israeli participants must pay high enrollment fees in order to study at university. The participants also reflected on different school settings such as the size of the classes. Recognizing these differences has broadened their horizons and helped them change the way they view their future profession.

The teacher education system in Israel is also completely different from the one in Germany. While in Germany there is a special degree program for teachers, the teacher training in Israel isn't that long and complicated. Therefore, the teacher job is not paid well there and not very valued [G].

Another topic of discussion was the fact that the Israeli students have to pay a high enrollment fee, whereas German students are able to study free of cost [G].

I found it very interesting to hear from already practicing teachers from another country and learn something about their culture and what some differences in teaching are (e.g. bigger classes, school on Saturday,...) [G].

The awareness that the profession of a teacher can be understood and lived differently in different countries is helpful to see my future job from a different kind of view [G].

Some participants mentioned linguistic differences between the native languages of the participants, which may lead to various difficulties in learning English in the two countries. They noted that the German language is similar to English. Hebrew, on the other hand, is very different from the English language which makes it more difficult to teach and learn English than it appears to be in Germany. This leads to different challenges for EFL teachers.

I felt that there were some differences between us as well: For the Germans, English is a sister language: They share (almost) the same alphabet, many words are similar and most importantly, they both play a central part in the Western World family. Israel as a whole and Hebrew in particular as a language, is very different from the English world and the English language in many ways. The way of writing (right to left), the alphabet and the vocabulary of Hebrew, are only few examples for these differences [I].

The participants talked about the Covid-19 pandemic and the school closures it caused. They saw differences between Israeli and German schools, as Israeli schools were better prepared for digitalization and distance learning. As a result, Israeli teachers seemed to use a lot of synchronous lessons via “Zoom”. German schools relied primarily on asynchronous learning. Even though all students shared the challenge of dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic, there were also different situations described in both countries. At the time of the collaboration, Israel had already reopened, while Germany was still under lockdown.

Although we German students did not teach during the pandemic, we did have some insights through our studies, jobs and conversations with befriended teachers and learners. In general, it became apparent that the Israelis pursued much more synchronous teaching models than we did in Germany. They were able to do so because of the more advanced digitization of schools in Israel. Even outside of a pandemic situation, supporting teaching with PowerPoint presentations, digital platforms and games is part of the everyday life of our group members in Israeli schools. Something that usually already fails at German schools due to a lack of possibilities to project one’s screen [G].

The Germans were under quarantine for the fourth time, and we (Israelis) just reopened our public space [I].

In terms of their personality differences, German students seemed to be more polite, respectful, structured and planned but also hold back and shy. In contrast, Israeli students seemed to be outgoing, spontaneous, expressive but also messy. However, especially the German students

found that the different personalities due to cultural background benefited themselves, such as being less stress and taking things easier. Furthermore, they mentioned aspects concerning different types of communication. For instance, it resulted in the question of when someone is considered to be rude. There was one incident where a participant expressed negative feelings towards a different communication style of one of their group members, yet the majority of the students reflected on a positive outcome experiencing cultural differences.

A significant part of our group's discussions were about comparing the structured, planned and organized German way of conducting things, in contrast to the spontaneous, restless, flexible and messy, Israeli way [I].

The students from Israel were less stressed about tasks or challenges in general. As well they took things more easily and with a good amount of humor. It seemed like they had accepted things like they were and did not make a big deal out of them [...]. During the cooperation, I internalized to take things more easily, try to stay flexible in difficult situations, and have fun while teaching [G].

Apart from politics, we also reflected on cultural differences about what is or isn't considered rude [I].

I appreciated her initiative and leadership in getting the work done, but did feel some kind of difference in communication style. In Japan, you would typically express fear of being rude and you would give a window of time to wait to get permission from the group before taking the liberty to do something. In Israel, I guess that you would not typically express this fear of appearing rude, or at least not at such length. Again, this person's communication style could be a matter of her personality, but it did stir curiosity in us about German culture [I].

Hence, it was very enriching to exchange thoughts with the Israeli students as their background is so different from ours [G].

Many students wrote about a major difference in relation to their life situation, namely the outbreak of war in Israel. Several Israeli reported how worried their German group members reacted and how they expressed their concern to their Israeli partners, even though they had never experienced being attacked by rockets and living in a bunker. In addition to differing political opinions on the war in Israel, participants indicated that they had respectful conversations because of their personal ties.

I think I speak for us all, that we felt loved, supported and understood during those intense weeks. It may be fair to say that perhaps not all our German counterparts agreed with what

Israel's stance was during war, however, they all saw us as human beings and no religion, or politics played any role in our discussions and connections [I].

Many German students noted that that they felt a big difference of hearing news about the war in Israel and, in contrast, knowing and talking to people who actually live there. As a result, the political events felt closer and more personal. Many German students described developing a better cultural awareness that was not just about different food, traditions or accommodations. As a result, they said this collaboration helped them broaden their horizons and motivated them to learn about topics outside their comfort zone. Some German students also spoke of how they would be working in their class with children who were also suffering the effects of war and how important it was to be culturally aware of that.

It was the first time for me to directly hear from people who are living in a war zone. This was a touching and emotional session and the proximity to the Mideast conflict was really shocking and touching to me [G].

It had a profound impact on me when the political situation in Israel came to a head and the students shared their experience with us. Although it was shocking what is going on in their direct environment, I experienced how different it was to hear this from someone familiar in comparison to the situation's coverage in the daily news. While war is not something we are confronted with in our everyday lives in Germany, we should not forget that as teachers, we might have children in our classes who have such traumatic experiences with war or flight [G].

Many of the participants claimed that not only the cultural awareness of the teachers should be raised, but also that of the students. This is not only important for interacting in school, but also in the globalized world. For this, teachers should help them build intercultural communicative competences.

In an increasingly interconnected and globalized world it is of uttermost importance for our students to learn about different cultures and how to interact with them [G].

I think the most important output is to make the students able to communicate in the world's increasing multicultural society [G].

DIVA is a clear evidence that an international collaboration in an educational context rises one's own cultural awareness and has an impact on the intercultural competence [G].

All participants indicated in their written reflections that they would like to bring what they learned in their own collaboration into their (future) teaching and create space for collaboration

with their students. Different ideas were described, such as starting a pen pal project via e-mail, organizing telecollaboration via “Zoom” or even visiting a school in another country.

Going forward, I really hope to have the opportunity to implement a collaborative unit in my teaching practice with the objective of having my students communicate in English about basic personal topics (where you live, where you got to school, what you like to do, etc.) with students from other places in the world via zoom or FaceTime [I].

I would also love to start a “penpal” project and give my students the opportunity to practice communicating with foreign students via email. This would give them the opportunity to enhance their English writing skills, as well as their speaking skills [I].

The learning effect of international collaborations when it comes to learning languages might be the most effective, if students get the chance to speak to native speakers on a regular basis and if we could also create plenty of opportunities for students to travel to the country of their collaboration partners [G].

In addition to using telecollaboration as an appropriate teaching method, many participants stated that they wanted to find other ways to promote cultural awareness in their classes. They were also able to describe specific ideas. For example, students with culturally diverse backgrounds could be encouraged to tell the class about how they celebrate different holidays or prepare different dishes. The participants also mentioned introducing more group work in class so that students from different cultural backgrounds can work together more often. Other examples of promoting cultural awareness would be stories, songs, and rhymes from different cultures that contain a lot of cultural information. In addition, there was an idea to create a special welcome slogan with many different languages to start the day.

I want to start little and implement more group work instead of frontal teaching for example. Then my students will have to learn working with everyone and accepting everyone, not only (with) their best friend(s). In my region schools often have very heterogenous classes because the students have different migration backgrounds. Such compositions will be perfect for teaching acceptance and appreciation [G].

I want to implement lots of storytelling and songs, which contains much cultural information [G].

I want to design the greeting in the beginning of a day in various languages [G].

The encounter with students of different cultural backgrounds was beneficial for all students. As a result, the majority of participants described their growth of cultural awareness after the telecollaboration. In general, almost everyone could name personal as well as professional

benefits of working with an intercultural group resulting in students mutual respect towards each other.

The awareness that the profession of a teacher can be understood and lived differently in different countries is helpful to see my future job from a different kind of view [G].

Getting to know our colleagues, understanding their passions, and taking the time to connect on a personal level helped us to gain mutual respect [I].

Even though I have always seen myself as a very open-minded and understanding person, I now feel like my intercultural competence and cultural awareness has increased [G].

After describing what the participants learned about cultural awareness, another important topic will be discussed. The findings on digital tools are presented below.

### 7.3 Digital Tools

Most students reflected on the use of digital tools in an EFL classroom. So, the thematic category is the reflective approach of using digital tools in the EFL classroom.

First, all participants described that the use of digital tools was crucial during the Covid-19 pandemic as school closures shifted the EFL classroom to the screen.

The Covid19-pandemic has forced us to develop new ways of teaching, especially with the help of digital tools [G].

Physical classrooms became suddenly digital classrooms [G].

The students described that this forced both teachers and students to work on their media competences. They had to develop a concept for digital lessons and the use of suitable tools from which they can now benefit.

The pandemic has not only shown the importance of having skills and competences when it comes to the use of digital media, but it has also broadened the horizon with regards to its benefits [G].

This "Covid" year as we know it has brought us so many challenges, having said that, it has also allowed us to think out of the box when it comes to using technology wisely. All the different interactive sites, linguistic game sites could be put to more use even after the Covid era [I].

Aside from the pandemic, many students have realized that using digital tools in the classroom is important as the world becomes more digital. Therefore, all teachers must prepare their students to actively and appropriately engage with digital tools.

Implementing digital tools in class is essential to prepare the students of today for the world of tomorrow[G].

We also shared our experience with digital tools and agreed that we cannot imagine teaching in the future without them [G].

Some students also saw the specific benefits of using digital tools for EFL teaching. They explained that digital tools can help especially in communicating with others in the target language. They also described how digital tools can help promote cultural awareness.

As a future English teacher, I see great potential in using digital tools like „Zoom“ and „Padlet“ as they aid communication with others in the target language [G].

I think that the use of these cross-cultural digital tools can help us build more empathy and broaden our perspectives and helps us have a better understanding of other countries and cultures, as well as similarities and differences giving room to cultural diversity in the classroom, especially if its a language teaching classroom [I].

In order to do this, some students acknowledged that teachers need to know how to use digital tools themselves. Therefore, they should know the advantages and disadvantages of digital tools in general, but also in relation to specific digital tools. Consequently, it is necessary to increase their own media skills, which is a lifelong process, as digital technology seems to evolve very quickly over time.

One should always be critical and not see digital interaction as a panacea. Every tool must continue to be critically scrutinized and tested [G].

Digital technologies progress at an incredible speed. As future teachers, we need to try to keep up with this pace and broaden our media competences enormously [G].

To elaborate on the disadvantages of using digital tools, many students indicated that not all students have access to devices such as laptops or iPads. This fact would widen the gap between those who have access and those who do not. Resources in the school seem to vary widely, and many students saw the need for change. During inclusion, students' resources at home also seemed to vary, leading to difficulties in using digital tools for students who did not have appropriate devices. Another difficulty was using their own phones for learning both at school and at home, as they were easily distracted and could not complete their task. To respond to these challenges, some students developed the idea for a device specifically designed for schools that would allow them to focus on the task at hand rather than personal use.

Not all schools are properly equipped to deal with these highly digitized tools [I].

The disadvantages are when not all students have access to iPads and laptops and it furthers the gap between those who are more and less affluent [I].

We came up with the excellent idea for a start-up: to invent the (cheap) School Phone, or maybe a tablet that doesn't include apps that distract the students [I].

Participants noted that when using digital tools, one should always consider the possible dangers. One must be aware of the risks of the Internet and exercise caution.

Students should be aware of the different dangers and risks the internet and is specific digital tools contain [G].

Potential dangers need to be addressed as well as exciting learning opportunities [G].

Some students mentioned wanting to operate and stay relevant in a digitized age, but at the same time feeling the urge to show students media away from the screen, such as books. In addition, students mentioned wanting to emphasize face-to-face interactions more because it is important to a child's development. Writing only with digital tools that have autocorrect turned on could leave students with little spelling and punctuation skills. Therefore, one student suggested writing with pen and paper as much as possible.

It was interesting to see that the same dilemma regarding our desire and need to be relevant, attractive, interesting and updated as teachers as well as our ambitions to expose our students to other tools and elements that are out of the screen (books, papers, one to one dialogue) is imminent to us all [I].

But using media as a communication tool leads to another problem because technologies automatically test and correct orthography and punctuation. Very likely students will have some difficulties with that while not using them. We should pay good attention to this challenge and give them many exercises with pen and paper [G].

Although digital tools can motivate students, the challenge is not to lose sight of why digital tools are relevant to instruction. Some students saw the challenge in using digital tools as not only staying relevant in a digitized world, but also knowing exactly what the instructional goal is and why that particular digital tool can help achieve it.

These tools could be misguided in the classroom, as the goal might be lost in all the games and virtual activities going on [I].

When it comes to teaching students at home with tools like Zoom because school is closed, many negative aspects were mentioned in the written reflections. Mostly, the personal connection between the teacher and their students would be missing, as well as the interaction

between peers. Other difficulties included reading body language, knowing if students have understood the task or if are done with it. There is also always the possibility of technical issues such as poor internet connection and distractions at home such as siblings, toys, or television. Additionally, some noted that children's concentration span is even shorter when teaching online.

Everyone is sitting in front of their screens but still there is no real connection and especially no interaction [G].

It should be mentioned that digital learning (especially learning form home) also comes with some disadvantages like technical problems, lack of eye and physical contact, distractions at home (e.g. siblings, toys or TV), poor internet connection, lack of technical equipment etc. Furthermore you often can't see what the students are doing or writing or if they are listening or not [G].

Our experiences showed that the concentration span of children is even shorter, and they get distracted faster, for example by family members disturbing the online lesson [G].

Many students also saw some disadvantages of the telecollaboration in terms of the digital group work. Sometimes there was a problem with the internet connection, or it was unclear who wanted to speak. Regarding the digital tools, one participant described that it was not easy to find their group members' contributions on "Padlet". Overall, however, the students were grateful for this digital group work and were convinced that without digital tools like "Zoom" this collaboration would not have been possible.

Sometimes there were quite heavy problems with the internet connections which made it hard for us to talk [G].

A kind of closeness gets lost unfortunately, but in our case the communication would not have been there at all without using zoom. Moreover, the transition from one conversational partner to another was sometimes a bit difficult, because it was not always predictable when someone was about to say something [G].

Regarding to the padlet (personal and professional artifact) I must say, due to the large number of students participating, it was unclear and confusing [G].

In addition to these disadvantages of using digital tools, many advantages were also mentioned in the written reflections. Overall, students noted that the use of digital tools can be very beneficial to the classroom if it is carefully selected. By selecting appropriate digital tools,

students can also work on their media competences, which is very important since most of them are active on various social media platforms.

When used properly, digital tools have many clear advantages [I].

Everyone agreed that implementing new digital tools in the classroom, offers the most advantages to keep students engaged and participating [I].

It is a very authentic way of teaching because digital media plays a big part in the students' everyday lives and it helps to foster digital media competence [G].

Although students cited disadvantages of digital group work, they were also able to identify advantages. Many said it was an easy way to work on documents or presentations with other group members.

It was very advantageous that every member of the group can work on the document at the same time and add different ideas [G].

Concerning the digital tools used in the DIVA project I really enjoyed working on an online powerpoint presentation together with my group and especially the break-out rooms.

In terms of collaborating with people from around the world, many participants saw the great benefit of using digital tools to organize a telecollaboration for their students. Many mentioned that digital platforms make it easier to schedule appointments because no one has to travel anywhere. As a result, students noted that digital tools allow their students to collaborate with people from other cultures easily and thus develop cultural awareness. They can even stay in touch with people from other countries thanks to the various social media platforms.

And since travelling with school classes is not only a financial matter but also difficult to organize and put into practice, it seems very necessary and reasonable to regularly create international collaborations online with the help of digital platforms [G].

For me as a future teacher, tele-collaboration or exchange programs are very important tools to teach and to get in touch with a foreign language. Especially tele-collaboration programs, where we can meet up online through e.g. Zoom make it a lot easier to stay in touch and to keep these collaborations going on a regular basis, even if we live far away from each other [G].

Digital tools are, if questioned critically, a great assistance to smoothly promote the acquisition of cultural awareness and intercultural competences [G].

Students saw great benefits in using digital tools for learning, such as quizzes or videos, as the playful approach could motivate their students. Other benefits of using digital tools could be to

reinforce or review knowledge. In addition, digital tools seem to help engage all students, even though they may not be at the same learning level.

These applications can help the students to check and review their knowledge in a playful and joyful way [G].

When used properly, digital tools have many clear advantages: these tools allow for differential teaching and learning of heterogeneous groups [I].

All students wrote down many specific digital tools that they used during the collaboration and that they found useful. Many indicated that that they learned many new digital tools which they plan to use in the future.

My repertoire of digital tools enlarged [G].

These and more tools I gratefully put into my teaching toolbox [G].

"Zoom" and "Padlet" were the most frequently mentioned digital tools. "Zoom" was seen as a great platform for distance learning as well as telecollaboration with students from around the world. In particular, the ability to go into breakout rooms made it easier to get to know a smaller group and work together on a project. The ability to share one's screen was also seen as beneficial. The other most frequently mentioned digital tool was "Padlet," which was seen as a great tool for written communication as well as for posting images of the artifacts from the first two meetings.

Zoom was an extremely beneficial tool. The plenary created curiosity and excitement of meeting a big group of peers abroad, and the breakout rooms created intimacy to get to know a smaller group [I].

The screensharing was a new experience to me, I had never done this before and it was a great experience for my media literacy [G].

For the DIVA-Project the Padlet platform was beneficial, since we could communicate easily and the pictures of the artifacts gave us the chance to get to know each other personally. Especially the comments function provided the opportunity for active exchange [G].

Many students mentioned using "WhatsApp" (<https://www.whatsapp.com/>) to talk to each other outside of collaboration dates. Especially after these four weeks, this was also a great tool to stay in touch. They also mentioned other digital tools to get in touch with people from all over the world, but the students of this telecollaboration preferred "WhatsApp".

Another tool which was used, which couldn't have been possible years ago, is the WhatsApp. Till this day I am still in touch with [names of two girls], and I find this connection to be such an eye opener for all of us, on a personal, but also a professional level [I].

Many students noted that Google applications such as "Google Slides" and "Google Document" ([www.drive.google.com](http://www.drive.google.com)) were very helpful when they wanted to work on their project at the same time. When brainstorming with students online, digital tools that create a word cloud can be helpful. Digital bulletin boards like "Padlet" also seemed to be appropriate.

This also applies for all Google tools which have proven their reliability when working in groups on presentations or other documents [G].

In assigning a project to them to do in small groups, we would have them use a word cloud generator [...] to brainstorm ideas, Padlet [...] to share with each other asynchronously, and Google Slides [...] to present [I].

Another popular digital tool among the participants was the app "Kahoot!" (<https://kahoot.com/>), which allows teachers to design their own quiz and play it with their students. Many participants wanted to incorporate this into their own EFL lessons as they saw great benefits. In addition, some mentioned other tools, but "Kahoot!" was mentioned most often.

I think gamified tools like for example Kahoot can be useful to deepen the learners knowledge [G].

Digital tools like quizzes and Kahoot not only internalize learning materials but are also a playful way to convey knowledge and skills [G].

For EFL teaching in general, students mentioned the advantages of learning management systems such as „Moodle“.

There are several sharing platforms, like Moodle, where materials, tasks, etc. can be uploaded and shared to be accessible for all [G].

Students mentioned not only specific digital tools, but also concrete ideas on how to incorporate them into their (future) teaching.

To continue the topic of digital tools, we would certainly adapt them into our curriculum planning [I].

For many, digital tools could be useful at the beginning of a lesson. Some mentioned the use of a word cloud generator, others noted that tools such as an online puzzle might be attractive for students to learn more about the topic.

JigsawPlanet: this adds to their curiosity and the product actually presents the lesson's topic in a fun and engaging way [I].

Many participants talked about producing videos and editing in school. While some stated that this was suitable for older students, others claimed that it was also possible for elementary school students.

Another option to use digital media in primary school would be the use of tablets to produce short films, for instance, stop-motion clips [G].

Creating videos is a great possibility for older children. They can be creative and choose a topic they are interested in [G].

Some participants wanted to use digital quizzes more frequently to review subject matter. Other reasons could be to engage students more and focus students' attention on a specific topic.

Students can also integrate a quiz via Quizlet to make the topic more interactive and therefore interesting to their classmates [G].

Digital tools seemed to be a great tool for collecting and communicating with each other about different ideas, results and tasks in the group. In addition, participants indicated that digital tools would be a great tool for presenting the results of their group work as well.

These sessions should be accompanied by a Padlet which is used as a tool to collect ideas, findings, exercises, results and so on. It is suitable because it is permanent, can be changed/elaborated by every student and adjusted by the teacher [G].

Students can upload, think about and comment other contributions and therefore just communicate with each other [G].

I think the Padlet platform is a great opportunity for students and pupils to present the result of a project they have been working on [G].

Some participants shared the idea of using a digital platform to store everything they learned in school. This could be done by both teachers and students.

Another idea is to decide on a platform (e.g. padlet) and create an online file for each topic together (teamwork: teacher and students) where all relevant information, pictures, videos, mind

maps etc. are uploaded and easily accessed and monitored. Everything learned in the classroom is also accessible online [G].

One participant suggested also talking to their students about the advantages and disadvantages of digital tools in order to reflect on their own use. This would strengthen their media competence and they would learn to distinguish whether a digital tool is good or bad for them. This could even be done with a guest speaker.

Clearly, we should widen the media competences of our students as well. Here we should make the usage and consumption of media with its pros and cons, the topic of some lessons. Fake news and proper resources are red hot and must be part of the curriculum to become critical media users as well. If we do not feel confident in this subject area, we can invite IT experts and manage it together [G].

Because the findings in this chapter describe what students reflected on in their written reflections, the following discussion chapter relates them to the research questions as well as to the literature presented in this paper.

## 8. Discussion

Since the purpose of this study was to find out what EFL teaching should look like in a post-Covid 19 era, three research questions were posed. As explained earlier, teaching methods, cultural awareness, and digital tools are important aspects of EFL teaching today. For this research, students in a cross-cultural telecollaboration between German and Israeli students were asked to share their opinions and experiences on these topics in their written reflections. In analyzing these reflections, the following three research questions were of interest:

- 1.) Which teaching methods do EFL teacher students think would be beneficial for the EFL classroom?
- 2.) What did EFL teacher students learn about cultural awareness after an international collaboration?
- 3.) What do EFL teacher students think about the use of digital tools in an EFL classroom?

After describing the research methodology as well as the findings of the written reflections through thematic analysis (Braun/ Clarke 2006) with the identified themes of 1.) telecollaboration as a method to teach EFL, 2.) the personal approach of teaching methods, 3.) the importance of cultural awareness for teachers, and 4.) the reflective approach of using digital tools in the EFL classroom, the research questions are now answered.

However, because this research used a qualitative analysis with subjective experiences of the participants, the results cannot be considered general answers for all situations. Rather, they provide a small glimpse into the opinions and beliefs of student teachers who collaborated on these topics with a group of students from a different cultural background. To find representative responses, further telecollaborations on the same topics and in the same settings might be helpful. Nonetheless, the results of this research can make a start in highlighting important aspects of the topics of teaching methods, cultural awareness, and digitization. The answers to the research questions are also related to the literature presented in this paper. Although the answers to the three questions could all be related, the results are presented in separate subsections for clarity.

### 8.1 Teaching Methods

Based on the choice of teaching methods in the post-Covid-19 period, the following question was asked:

Which teaching methods do EFL teacher students think would be beneficial for the EFL classroom?

To answer this question, the researcher found two thematic categories related to teaching methods based on the written reflections of participants in a cross-cultural telecollaboration: the first was telecollaboration as a method for EFL teaching and the second was the personal approach to teaching methods. What this means for answering the research question is explained in more detail below.

Since all students had experienced how telecollaboration works themselves, they were initially able to reflect quite well on what advantages but also risks this could bring to EFL teaching. Therefore, they were able to reflectively describe telecollaboration as a teaching method for their students by naming advantages and disadvantages, possible goals, and concrete ideas for implementation in their (future) EFL classes. The overall goals were to promote cultural awareness, improve language skills, and media competence. This evaluation process can help in making good pedagogical decisions, hence, they can explain "why they do what they do" (Larsen-Freeman/ Anderson 2011, 183), which also means that they can develop their pedagogical reasoning skills (cf. Richards 2011).

While it was not surprising that all students reflected on their own experiences of participating in telecollaboration, it was indeed surprising how almost all students described wanting to implement this teaching method into their own (future) EFL classrooms. Therefore, this

research shows how beneficial telecollaboration between two groups of student teachers from different cultural backgrounds can be, even though there might be a risk of intercultural misunderstanding or communication breakdown (cf. O'Dowd 2017, 9).

One of the most motivating factors for participants seemed to be the personal connections they made through this collaboration. Since many indicated that they quickly became friends with their group members as a result of the activities in the first session, this research shows the importance of giving participants enough time to really get to know each other. This seems to help tremendously in overcoming potential barriers and laying the groundwork for overall collaboration. Consequently, according to the results of this research, getting to know each other should be a priority when organizing a telecollaboration. This impacts the consideration of organizational and pedagogical competences of a telecollaboration teacher (O'Dowd (2015)). These personal connections between the intercultural group members then led to professional, as well as personal growth through new perspectives and the development of cultural awareness. The German students in particular emphasized the positive impact of the Israeli students on their professional development, as they had more experience in the teaching profession. However, one Israeli student felt that it would have been more beneficial to share practical ideas with similarly experienced teachers. Nonetheless, working on the same issues, such as teaching foreign languages during and after the Covid 19 pandemic, made students realize how beneficial membership in a community of practice can be (Richards 2011).

When the students thought about how they could introduce telecollaboration into EFL classes, they had several ideas about how to do it. They had specific ideas and topics they wanted to integrate. In addition to telecollaboration, many liked the idea of connecting their students with pen pals. It is not clear if they mentioned this idea because of the challenges that synchronous communication can pose for students, as De Florio-Hansen (2018) described. The way they wrote about this idea in their written reflections suggests that they wanted to add pen pals in EFL classes as another option. The fact that many saw so many benefits in cross-cultural telecollaboration also supports this interpretation. However, there are limitations to this research as it is only possible to make statements about future EFL teachers participating in telecollaboration, not about the students they will teach. Therefore, these experiences can only be related to future EFL teachers who are adults, and not to their future students who are still children or teenagers, as there is no evidence for this age group in this research.

In conclusion, when asked what teaching methods students consider beneficial for EFL teaching, telecollaboration can undoubtedly be considered as part of the answer, even though

their experiences cannot be directly applied to teaching as they represent different age groups. However, based on their positive experiences with cross-cultural telecollaboration, they can make good pedagogical choices to adapt to their individual (future) EFL teaching. If well organized, students can gain valuable cultural and digital experiences to enhance their intercultural communicative competence (Byram 1997) and media competence.

This can only partially serve as an answer to this research question, as participants also mentioned other teaching methods and related thoughts. Specifically, the second thematic category consists of the general personal approach to teaching methods. Participants emphasized the importance of adapting teaching methods to their students' needs. This shows that they understood that EFL teaching does not depend only on one particular teaching method, as Richards and Rodgers (2001) described.

Nevertheless, the participants mentioned specific teaching methods such as project-based learning (PBL), task-based learning (TBLT), and the communicative language approach (CLA) in general. Interestingly, these methods were directly related to telecollaboration, as they had to work together on a project and communicate in an authentic environment where communication was more important than form. They also mentioned other methods such as Total Physical Response (TPR) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLILL). In general, students in both groups were amazed at how similar the teaching methods were for EFL teaching, even though they did not share the same cultural background. However, the students did not describe these methods and approaches in detail but focused on general professional skills and personal values that they believed were important for a good EFL teacher.

By citing professional skills such as knowing the needs of their students, as well as self-reflection, teamwork skills, and open-mindedness, students mentioned some aspects of a good foreign language teacher according to Richards (2011). In addition, referring to a learner-centered focus (Richards 2011), many described the importance of a warm atmosphere in the classroom and that teacher-student relationships were critical to a good learning environment. Closely related to this, however, was the frustration of grading their students. They described that this felt contradictory because they wanted their students to feel safe and not be judged. Sensitivity was another important aspect of being a good EFL teacher, including cultural differences. For example, for the first time, many German students got in touch with people who had been directly affected by war. This led to an awareness of such issues and their cultural awareness developed further as they realized that they might have students in their EFL

classroom who had experienced similar severe consequences as their Israeli group members. Therefore, they understood that they would be interacting in a multicultural classroom due to “the fast evolving global society with its incessant and increased flows of peoples, goods and ideas” (Kumaravadivelu 2012, x).

In addition to professional skills, they also acknowledged the importance of personal values that strongly influence the teacher's mind-set (cf. Lewis 1993). They cited values such as acceptance, tolerance, openness, and curiosity about other cultures, all of which are associated with cultural awareness. Again, the Israeli students seemed to influence their German group members, as they stated they could see how they already embodied all of these important values. The students noted that developing one's teacher identity (Richards 2011) can be challenging, but some Germans mentioned how the Israeli students helped them approach this process more lightheartedly. Therefore, this study shows how collaboration can be especially beneficial for teachers about to enter the profession.

All in all, the students focused on two aspects when considering teaching methods: One was their personal experience with telecollaboration and how they thought it could be used in their (future) EFL teaching. All of them were sure that it has far more advantages than disadvantages and therefore considered telecollaboration as an extremely useful teaching method. The other aspect was the very personal approach to choosing the right teaching methods to meet the needs of the students in their classroom. They agreed that there does not seem to be a perfect method, but rather that they need to adapt it to each individual classroom. Nevertheless, many mentioned CLT as well as PBL and TBLT as appropriate teaching methods. In this regard, many emphasized the importance of communicating in the target language without focusing too much on grammar. Beyond teaching methods, all students recognized important skills and values that every teacher should have. By working with another group of students from another country, they were able to share their thoughts and inspire each other.

The research question was as follows: “Which teaching methods do EFL teacher students think would be beneficial for the EFL classroom?”, the answer includes specific teaching methods such as telecollaboration, CLT, PBL, and TBLT, although it should be noted that teaching methods are very personal and should be selected depending on the classroom and with the knowledge that there is no such thing as the perfect teaching method. In addition, incorporating teaching methods also requires important professional skills such as self-reflection and a good relationship with students, as well as values such as kindness, empathy, and tolerance, which should always be implemented in the EFL classroom.

## 8.2 Cultural Awareness

Moving on to the next topic, in order to find out what the participants of the telecollaboration thought of cultural awareness, the second research question was this:

What did EFL teacher students learn about cultural awareness after an international collaboration?

Analysis of the data set revealed that the importance of cultural awareness was the main theme of the teachers' written reflections. Cultural awareness, then, appears to be critical to EFL teaching in a post-Covid 19 era.

First, students understood the importance of actively interacting with others from different cultural backgrounds to create cultural awareness in the first place. To achieve this, telecollaboration or travel abroad can be great ways. However, many also saw the opportunity to focus on their own EFL classes, where there are already many students from diverse cultural backgrounds. If a teacher's goal is to create a good learning environment (Richards 2011), everyone should feel safe in the EFL classroom (cf. Chapter 8.1 Teaching Methods), and therefore cultural awareness among peers also seems crucial.

To educate their students to be culturally aware, teachers need to be role models, according to participants. Consequently, they need to show them how to behave like global citizens (cf. Lütge 2015) and foster their intercultural communicative competence (Byram 1997). Participants learned that as EFL teachers, they have the responsibility to educate their students to be intercultural speakers (Byram 1997), since English is the lingua franca in the world. In telecollaboration, they were able to develop an open and curious attitude toward another culture, they acquired knowledge about their own and another culture, and finally, they were able to communicate in real time with people from a different cultural background using digital tools (see Byram 1997). As a result, the participants seem to have developed into intercultural speakers themselves through telecollaboration, which they can now teach to their students.

It should be noted that in this study, assumptions such as these are based only on the students' own reflections on their own development. This clearly imposes limitations on this study, as there is no comparison of how they saw themselves prior to telecollaboration. There is also no guarantee of the development of cultural awareness in a telecollaboration in general. Waldmann et al. (2019, 182) state that "[t]he development of critical cultural awareness is certainly one of the most important goals of EIL [English as an International Language] instruction in a globalized world, but it is not automatically developed even after a cross-cultural learning

experience." However, since students were able to describe their development in great detail, the statements in the written reflections are interpreted as credible.

Another learning effect for student teachers from telecollaboration seemed to be an understanding of the close connection between teaching and learning a foreign language and cultural awareness (cf. Kramsch 1993). Thus, they learned that communicating with others in a foreign language also requires intercultural communicative competence (Byram 1997), which they acquired through telecollaboration. From this learning, they stated that they wanted to implement this for their students as well. In addition to the idea of telecollaboration in the EFL classroom, many other specific teaching ideas developed from this. In order to link language closely to cultural awareness, they wanted to incorporate stories, songs, and rhymes with rich cultural input (cf. Posner 2003, 47ff.).

In their telecollaboration, students also learned a lot about prejudice. Before they started working with their intercultural groups, many students described their own prejudices. These were immediately dissolved once they got to know each other on a personal level. Thus, the participants understood the importance of confronting themselves with other cultures in order to overcome possible prejudices. Particularly in the case of a telecollaboration between students from Israel and Germany, some tension was to be expected due to historical events. Indeed, one Israeli student described feeling prejudiced because of his religion. Yet, the same student reflected on how the telecollaboration positively impacted him, allowing him to overcome the feeling of being judged. Consequently, this study demonstrates the importance of not avoiding the possibility of intercultural misunderstandings (cf. O'Dowd 2017, 9), but rather encouraging such disputes in order to reflect on one's perspective and broaden one's horizons (cf. Belz 2002, 76). All in all, students learned to confront their prejudices through encounters with people from other cultural backgrounds and that prejudices are naturally reduced as a result.

After breaking down possible prejudices and barriers, the students were surprised at how many things they had in common. During this telecollaboration, the students learned that although they did not have the same passport, they did have personal similarities such as hobbies and professional similarities such as the teaching profession with its teaching methods. They also gained a sense of global connectedness as they dealt with the same virus during the Covid-19 pandemic. This realization brought the groups closer together and helped them connect on a personal level, which even led to students staying in touch with each other after the telecollaboration. Thinking about cultural semiotics and its three dimensions (Posner 2003), the students participating in this telecollaboration had valuable experiences with mental culture

with its ideas, values, and conventions, and social culture with its individuals and social groups. Since this does not usually happen authentically in the EFL classroom (Freitag-Hild 2018), students learned the importance of such encounters and understood the need to implement these settings in their own (future) EFL classrooms. The reasons for this are that it helps to raise their cultural awareness and the general realization that students from both groups are not so different from each other.

However, the students who participated in the telecollaboration also experienced cultural differences, such as being a teacher in another country or communicating with other group members. These differences broadened their horizons and helped them change their own perspectives to better understand the other side. They understood that there are cultural differences and that in order to understand each other, they need to engage in a dialogue between their perspective and the other perspective, which can also be seen in the "Didaktik des Fremdverstehens" (cf. Bredella/Christ 1995, 2007). For example, when students reflected on how to communicate during group work, students from one culture view being rude differently than students from another culture. In this process, one side understands its own stance on the issue and tries to understand the other side by giving it a voice (Freitag-Hild 2018, 166). However, in this study, the respective Israeli student did not agree with the other side, yet they went through the process of changing their perspective and reflecting critically. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether or not this occurred in a dialogue with the other student. In summary, students learned to deal with differences between students from other cultural backgrounds by changing their own perspectives and being open to attitudes that were not necessarily their own. It should be noted that many students also benefited from the cultural differences within their group. For example, German students emphasized that they were surprised by the Israeli attitude of taking things more lightly and that they were also less stressed as a result.

A great difference between both student groups was the outbreak of the war in Israel and its aftermath. While the German and Israeli students shared the same global issues due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the experience of being in shelters because of the war in Israel was something the student groups did not have in common. Nevertheless, the German students described how emotionally involved they were when they heard of the war in Israel. Many said they were concerned about their group members and that they learned how different it is to know people living in a war zone than just being told about the news without a personal connection. Without it, they would not have been so interested in the issues of another country. On the other side, Israeli students were touched by the messages from their German group

members about their well-being. This brought the two groups closer together even though they might have different political point of views regarding the war in Israel. This resulted in students learning about the importance of personal connections within a crisis and how beneficial this can be for both sides.

In summary, the students participating in this telecollaboration learned and experienced the importance of cultural awareness. Many stated that EFL teachers in particular should develop cultural awareness in order to teach another language. They should not only be a role model, but also provide many opportunities for their students to develop cultural awareness. There are many ways to do this, such as working with students from another country. They understood that the globalized world is closely interconnected and that it is therefore important to interact and communicate with each other, even though there may be cultural differences. They found that prejudices against others are usually wrong, but to find out if this is true or not, people need to communicate with each other. When this is done, they learned that there are many similarities between people from different cultures. But talking not only about similarities but also about differences can be helpful in understanding other cultures better. It broadens their horizons and creates mutual respect. This is something that teachers should first and foremost acquire personally before they teach their students.

In order to answer the research question about what EFL students learned about cultural awareness after an international collaboration, these aspects need to be mentioned after this research: First, they learned that they need to actively interact with people from different cultural backgrounds to raise their cultural awareness. This is important for teachers because they act as role models for their students, which is another learning process for them. They also understood that especially as EFL teachers, they are responsible for emphasizing the close connection between culture and language and helping their students develop intercultural communicative competence (Byram 1997). For this, they learned that breaking down prejudices can only be done through confronting themselves with people from another cultural background. They experienced that once a personal connection exists among different people, there can be many similarities among cultures. Nevertheless, differences in cultures are also important in order to broaden one's horizon and change one's perspective. This can result in a more reflected worldview as well as being inspired by others. In a nutshell, students experienced the importance of cultural awareness both professionally as well as personally.

### 8.3 Digital Tools

To find out what the German and Israeli students thought of digital tools, the third research question was:

What do EFL teacher students think about the use of digital tools in an EFL classroom?

After analyzing the data set, the theme regarding digitalization was the reflective approach of using digital tools in the EFL classroom. What this means and how this research question can be answered is explained below.

The students mentioned two main aspects why it is important to integrate digital tools into their own teaching. The first aspect is the ongoing global digitalization (cf. Schmidt/ Strasser 2018, 216) and the second aspect is more related to current events, namely the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. These aspects make clear how relevant it is to implement digital tools in EFL lessons. However, not only should digital tools be used to stay relevant, but rather students understood the importance of media didactics and media education (Grimm et. al. 2015, 199), which led them to claim that a reflective approach to digital tools is crucial. Therefore, they believe that the use of digital tools needs to be integrated into EFL teaching, even if they need to be carefully evaluated. They agreed that "a constructive and critical attitude towards digitalization" (De Florio-Hansen 2018, 139) is important. Students learned that they must first acquire media competence in order to teach their students. Only then can a teacher decide whether a particular digital tool is appropriate for their EFL teaching. Therefore, they need to act as role models to influence their students' attitudes towards digital tools. In the telecollaboration, they learned about different tools and were able to identify their risks and benefits, which they could describe in their written reflections. Resulting from this, the research shows a development of the students' media competence.

This statement also only refers to the subjective view of the participants. Evidence of an actual increase in media competence cannot be provided by this study, as no data was collected prior to the telecollaboration. This shows the limitations of this study. However, since all participants were able to describe their learning experiences in detail, the assumption of a developed media competence can be made credible.

When taking a closer look at the possible disadvantages of digital tools in EFL classes, students had many different thoughts and opinions, which shows how engaged they were with this topic. Many participants thought about the lack of resources such as technical devices at school, but also at home. As a solution, one group suggested the invention of a school phone that only

supports digital tools suitable for EFL teaching. By seeing a problem and already offering a solution, students seem to understand how to deal with difficulties. However, it is not certain if and when this invention will be available. Regarding the conditions of distance learning, students agreed that it cannot be the ideal solution for an EFL class because of the lack of technical equipment.

As Goetz (2020) analyzed in her qualitative analysis, students also saw the personal relationships between a teacher and her students suffering. They concluded that digital tools should not replace a teacher or the EFL classroom whenever possible, but rather support them (cf. De Florio-Hansen 2018). Students linked this to the importance of knowing exactly what they wanted to achieve by using certain digital tools. They were clear that the instructional goals of their classes should align with the use of these tools (cf. Schmidt/ Strasser 2018, 218). Students noted that potential dangers must also be carefully evaluated. According to the KMK strategy paper (2016), teachers and students need to operate safely in a digital environment and be aware of the possible dangers. However, they did not elaborate on what exactly the risks and dangers of the Internet are, such as student privacy, fake news, hate speech, or cyberbullying (cf. De Florio-Hansen 2018, 224).

In addition to evaluating the disadvantages, students, on the other hand, also saw the many advantages of digital tools for EFL teaching if they are chosen wisely. In this case, students felt that digital tools could be useful for teaching (see De Florio-Hansen 2018, 201). Especially during the lockdown caused by the Covid 19 pandemic, digital tools were helpful to continue teaching EFL, connect digitally, and better engage students. Even beyond the pandemic, digital tools help students connect with people from around the world without having to travel far. Many students reflected on how easy it is to meet and stay in touch with people from other countries by using digital media to communicate (see De Florio-Hansen 2018, 216). They were amazed that their experience of intercultural telecollaboration would not have been possible without digital tools. Therefore, they understood the importance of using digital tools to promote cultural awareness in EFL classes. In addition, students experienced the convenience of digital group work. When teachers use digital tools properly, they can also help their students with their media literacy and their overall use of digital tools. In addition, students saw the high motivational factor of using digital tools in EFL classes (Schmidt/ Strasser 2018). All in all, they felt that digital tools can develop their students' cultural awareness and media competence in a joyful way.

After critically reflecting on the use of digital tools by thinking about both the advantages and disadvantages, students also had specific digital tools in mind. Interestingly, they all named those tools that they had used for their own telecollaboration. For example, "Zoom" and "Padlet" were the most frequently mentioned tools. In general, they focused on learning management systems such as "Moodle," gamification such as "Kahoot!" and communication technology and social media such as "WhatsApp" (see De Florio-Hansen 2018). This suggests that a teacher can only understand the full potential of a tool if they first try it themselves. In addition, many students were grateful to be introduced to appropriate digital tools for EFL teaching. They found it beneficial to collaborate with other student teachers on important topics such as the use of digital tools. Through the telecollaboration, participating students received concrete ideas on how to incorporate digital tools into their own lessons, such as lesson openers, producing videos, engaging their students in quizzes, and more.

In summary, almost all students talked about using digital tools to organize an international telecollaboration with their students, as this experience seemed to be beneficial to them both professionally and personally. The details of what this might look like were discussed in the Teaching Methodology chapter. Overall, the majority of students understood that the use of digital tools is important to EFL teaching when critically reflected upon. Almost all students were able to identify disadvantages, such as not all students having the appropriate devices at school or at home. But if these disadvantages can be overcome, the use of digital tools also offers great advantages. They explained that such international collaboration would not have been possible without digital tools. There would also be many advantages for teaching, such as being engaging and motivating for students and appealing to different types of learners. Digital tools also offered great opportunities for working on creative products such as videos. In all of this, knowing appropriate digital tools is critical to achieve the teaching goal, which should always be clear.

So, what do students think about the use of digital tools in an EFL classroom?

Considering all the above aspects, the answer to the research question is as follows: According to this research, students consider it important to critically reflect on the use of digital tools because they should be the role models for their students. Only if they gained media competence, they could educate their students on this relevant topic. The advancing digitalization as well as the consequences of the global pandemic showed how important the use of digital tools was. Through telecollaboration, the participating students were able to evaluate them by naming both the disadvantages and the advantages of using digital tools in

general. More specifically, they were able to name digital tools and explain how they could be used in EFL classes. Overall, the use of digital tools could contribute to the promotion of cultural awareness as well as to the development of media competence. The students felt that this could be motivating for their students.

#### 8.4 Conclusion of Research

In summary, all participants were able to express their opinions and beliefs about teaching methods, cultural awareness, and digital tools after working on these topics with students from a different cultural background. After analyzing their reflections, the above research questions were answered. From the responses, firstly, they understood that teaching methods should be selected according to their EFL classroom. Overall, the importance of the personal approach of teaching methods was emphasized. However, students focused more on professional skills and important values that an EFL teacher should have. In addition, students saw the great potential of telecollaboration as a teaching method as it had a positive impact on them. Having experienced this teaching method themselves, they were able to identify both potential benefits and risks, and therefore were able to critically describe its implementation in EFL teaching. Second, after working with a cross-cultural group, the telecollaboration participants understood the importance of cultural awareness. They were able to reduce prejudice, identify similarities, and learned how to deal with differences between cultures. Since EFL teachers are role models, they wanted to educate their (future) students to be culturally aware. Finally, the student teachers learned about the reflective use of digital tools in EFL teaching. After engaging with different digital tools during the telecollaboration, they were able to identify advantages and disadvantages. Overall, the goals of teaching in the EFL classroom should be clear in order to select the appropriate digital tools that can best support the goals.

Since the purpose of this research was to find out what EFL teaching should look like in a post Covid-19 era, EFL teachers must think about teaching methods, cultural awareness as well as digital tools. As many teachers have been forced to teach their students using digital tools, this expertise can now be used for the EFL classroom in the post Covid-19 era. To raise their cultural awareness as we live in a globalized world, digital tools can also be used to connect students of different cultural backgrounds. This encounter can be beneficial in order to develop their cultural awareness as this research has shown. Overall, besides other teaching methods which fit to their EFL classroom, telecollaboration can be a great opportunity for EFL teachers to connect students of different cultural backgrounds digitally. Hence, their intercultural

communicative competence (Byram 1997) and their media competence can be developed which are necessary competences in a post Covid-19 era.

## 9. Outlook: An International Perspective on Digitalization and Interculturality in a post Covid-19 era

Up to this point, it is not clear when the post Covid-19 era begins. After dealing with this pandemic for over one and a half years however, there have been some credible assumptions of relevant topics which need to be addressed more specifically. Since this research has shown how important the aspects of cultural awareness and digitalization are, this should be implemented more consciously in EFL teaching. Telecollaboration seems to be a beneficial approach for this. For future research, it might be interesting to explore other constellations of intercultural groups thinking about the use of digital tools and the importance of cultural awareness. One possible idea would be to organize a cross-cultural telecollaboration between groups of students of the same age to more clearly identify cultural rather than age differences. Moreover, there are countless opportunities for collaboration with students from around the world that should continue to be used for research.

Specifically, for the students who participated in this telecollaboration, it may be of interest to follow up to see if they have implemented telecollaboration in their own teaching. Since they were able to describe both the benefits and limitations in their written reflections, this suggests that they would be well prepared. If students implemented a telecollaboration into their EFL classroom, their opinion after performing it with their students could be of interest. Possible changes of opinions and specific ideas regarding cultural awareness, digitalization and teaching methods could be identified by them filling out the same guided written reflections. In addition, it would be interesting to hear from students who have not yet implemented telecollaboration in their EFL classes. They could complete another written reflection on possible reasons for their decision not to do so.

In addition to telecollaboration, other approaches are needed to promote cultural awareness and media competence and to address teaching methods in general in the post-Covid 19 era. For EFL teaching in particular, new ways need to be found to meet the challenges of a globalized world by taking advantage of networking through digital tools. EFL teachers need more guidance and resources to help their students become members of a globalized society and to be more open to global change. As a result, all members of the EFL teaching staff need to find

ways to meet the needs of students in a post-Covid 19 era. Working together to find solutions to this complex problem is an important aspect of finding answers.

## 10. Conclusion

Ultimately, cultural awareness, digitalization and teaching methods are relevant topics for today's EFL classroom. Therefore, these aspects must be considered carefully when thinking about teaching EFL in a post Covid-19 era. The research questions of this paper were asked in order to find out what students thought of these aspects after an international collaboration. To review the research questions one last time, they consisted of the following:

- (1) Which teaching methods do EFL teacher students think would be beneficial for the EFL classroom?
- (2) What did EFL teacher students learn about cultural awareness after an international collaboration?
- (3) What do EFL teacher students think about the use of digital tools in an EFL classroom?

In a nutshell, this research has shown, that (1) teaching methods should be treated with a personal approach in order to meet the needs of the students. This underlines the fact that teaching EFL moved on from choosing one specific teaching method to a more flexible view on teaching methods and approaches. Besides its relevance, this can also cause great challenges for new EFL teachers as there is no guidance on choosing appropriate methods. Nevertheless, when EFL teachers are aware of their personal values and know of their professional skills, this can be used as their compass. Collaborating with other EFL teachers can help in this process as this research has shown. All in all, students understood the great benefits of using telecollaboration in the EFL classroom and had specific ideas how they wanted to implement this into their own (future) teaching. Additionally, they described that (2) through telecollaboration, cultural awareness can be developed which is important when teaching EFL. Students participating in such projects were able to break down their own prejudices, describe similarities as well as differences. They reflected on how important personal connections are in order to work effectively in an intercultural group. This experience led to the conclusion that connecting students with different cultural backgrounds can lead to increased cultural awareness. In this way, their intercultural communicative competences (Byram 1997) can be developed as well as preparing them to be active members of a global society. Finally, (3) students understood the importance of a reflective use of digital tools in the EFL classroom. They described advantages as well as disadvantages of implementing them into their own

teaching. In addition, they highlighted the fact that digital tools should only be used when the objectives are clearly defined. In this case, digital tools can support an EFL lesson. Because of the telecollaboration, they were able to name specific digital tools and were able to evaluate these. This led to specific ideas for their (future) EFL teaching. Looking at their written reflections, there can be the reasonable assumption that through the telecollaboration, they were able to improve their media competence.

What do these conclusions mean for the post-Covid-19 era? They show how interconnected the world is today and how important it is to prepare our students to become active members of a global society. They will need EFL teachers who act as role models and demonstrate both cultural awareness and media competence. To train their students in this regard as well, they will need to choose appropriate teaching methods. As elaborated in this research paper, telecollaboration is one possible approach to implement this accordingly.

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## 12. Appendix

Task description for the written reflections by Dr. Beverly Topaz and Prof. Dr. Götz Schwab (lecturer organizing the telecollaboration)

*TASK: Write not more than two pages on your experience with the collaboration.*

*Part 1 – Report on the process of collaboration with regard to your professional development in the field of (a) cultural awareness (b) teaching methodology (c) use of digital tools.*

*Part 2 – Write about how you would implement this experience in your own teaching with regard to (a) curriculum planning (b) teaching objectives (c) use of digital tools. If you feel you would not implement such an experience please explain why.*

## Verbindliche Versicherung

Hiermit versichere ich,

Name, Vorname: 

Matrikelnummer: 

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dass ich bei der vorliegenden

- Bachelorarbeit
- Masterarbeit
- schriftlichen Modulprüfung (Hausarbeit, Portfolio, etc.)

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