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Collaborative hybrid international learning: A Latin American contribution to more equitable mobility in international education

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Abstract

This article introduces Collaborative Hybrid International Learning (CHIL) as an Ecuadorian-originated response to persistent inequities in global educational mobility. Drawing from a Spring 2024 pilot co-taught by faculty at Universidad San Francisco de Quito (USFQ) in Ecuador and Cornell University in the U.S., we argue that CHIL combines the accessibility of virtual exchange with the immersion of reciprocal, short-term mobility to challenge dominant North-South study abroad flows. Grounded in critical internationalization studies and decolonial pedagogy, CHIL positions USFQ as an innovative institution that designs ethical, community-engaged programs. Using qualitative case study methodology, including student reflections, faculty interviews, planning documents, correspondence, and fieldnotes we document both the successes and challenges of this model. Findings highlight expanded mobility access for USFQ students, strengthened intercultural relationships, and more contextualized community engagement, alongside barriers related to visas, institutional infrastructure, and program timelines. We conclude by outlining implications for practice, policy, and replication, framing CHIL as a transformative contribution to more equitable international education.

Abstract in Spanish

Este artículo presenta el Aprendizaje Internacional Colaborativo Híbrido (Collaborative Hybrid International Learning, CHIL por sus siglas en inglés) como

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una respuesta originada en Ecuador frente a las inequidades persistentes en la movilidad educativa global. A partir de un programa piloto realizado en la primavera de 2024 y co-impartido por profesorado de la Universidad San Francisco de Quito (USFQ), en Ecuador, y de Cornell University, en Estados Unidos, sostenemos que CHIL combina la accesibilidad del intercambio virtual con la inmersión que ofrece la movilidad internacional de estancia corta y recíproca, con el fin de cuestionar los flujos dominantes de estudios en el extranjero entre el Norte Global y el Sur Global. Fundamentado en estudios críticos de internacionalización y en las pedagogías decoloniales, CHIL posiciona a la USFQ como una institución innovadora que diseña programas éticos de vinculación con la comunidad. Mediante una metodología cualitativa de estudio de caso, que incluye reflexiones estudiantiles, entrevistas con el profesorado, documentos de planificación, correspondencia y notas de campo, documentamos tanto los logros como los desafíos de este modelo. Los resultados destacan la ampliación del acceso a la movilidad internacional para estudiantes de la USFQ, el fortalecimiento de las relaciones interculturales y una vinculación con la comunidad más contextualizada, junto con barreras relacionadas con los visados, la infraestructura institucional y los tiempos de implementación del programa. Concluimos delineando implicaciones para la práctica, la formulación de políticas y la replicabilidad del modelo, enmarcando a CHIL como una contribución transformadora hacia una educación internacional más equitativa.

Keywords

Collaborative Hybrid International Learning; community engagement; decolonial pedagogy; equitable mobility; international education; Latin America; reciprocal exchange; study abroad; virtual exchange

Editorial note

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1. Introduction

Short-term study abroad has become a dominant model in international education, particularly among students from the Global North. Many U.S.-based students benefit from structured, faculty-led programs that provide global exposure without the cost or time commitment of semester-long mobility. Yet students in the Global South are far less likely to participate in reciprocal outbound experiences. Even at institutions that frequently host students from the Global North, resources and infrastructure to support their own students' mobility remain limited. This imbalance reflects a persistent inequity in non-

degree international education, where mobility flows primarily from North–North or North–South.

Meanwhile, universities worldwide have embraced virtual exchange models such as *Collaborative Online International Learning* (COIL) as a cost-effective way to internationalize curricula. COIL provides meaningful opportunities for students to collaborate across borders and develop intercultural competencies. However, it cannot fully replicate the immersion, relational learning, and community engagement that physical presence enables. Furthermore, online-only collaboration excludes the powerful experiential learning that comes from inhabiting the roles of both host and guest that comes from physical mobility/exchange, roles that help students critically engage with privilege, positionality, and ethics in cross-cultural contexts.

This article introduces *Collaborative Hybrid International Learning* (CHIL) as an Ecuadorian-originated response to these inequities. Drawing from a pilot program jointly taught by USFQ and Cornell University, we position CHIL as a methodology that combines the equity of virtual exchange with the transformative depth of physical mobility. Building on the COIL model but adding a hybrid, physical mobility component, CHIL centers equity, reciprocity, and community engagement through both online collaboration and short-term travel.

We argue that CHIL represents not only a methodological innovation but also a philosophical contribution rooted in Latin American pedagogical traditions that emphasize local leadership, service-learning, and intercultural dialogue. The article situates CHIL within the genealogy of virtual exchange models, presents a case study of the Spring 2024 Cornell–USFQ CHIL pilot, and outlines the successes, challenges, and implications for practice that emerged.

2. Conceptual and philosophical framework

International education research increasingly draws on critical internationalization studies, which examine how programs designed to foster global learning can inadvertently reproduce inequities in mobility, access, and voice (Andreotti, 2011; Stein, 2021). From this perspective, short-term study abroad programs - the most common form of mobility in U.S. higher education (Institute of International Education, 2023) - often reinforce unidirectional flows of students, knowledge, and resources from the Global North to the Global South. Students from the Global South, in turn, remain disproportionately excluded from short-term outbound mobility. CHIL seeks to address these asymmetries through both reciprocal online exchange and reciprocal opportunities for travel.

Building on this critical lens, CHIL also draws from decolonial pedagogies emphasizing knowledge co-production, relationality, and local context (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). The distinction between traditional *faculty-led* and CHIL's *faculty-hosted* approach illustrates this decolonial shift. In conventional short-term study abroad programs, visiting faculty design and direct the student experience, often privileging Global North epistemologies and overlooking local expertise. In the *faculty-hosted* model, by contrast, local faculty lead the engagement of visiting students, integrating long-standing community partnerships and prioritizing local pedagogical goals, which may differ from those of the visiting institution. This redistribution of authority not only fosters more ethical engagement but also challenges entrenched hierarchies in international education.

Together, the frameworks of critical internationalization and decolonial pedagogy position CHIL as more than an incremental adaptation of COIL or BIPs (Blended Intensive Programs). Rather, CHIL represents a Latin American-originated contribution to rethinking mobility in international education by prioritizing equity, reciprocity, local leadership, and community engagement as its central organizing principles.

3. Methodological genealogy of CHIL

Long before virtual exchange became a pandemic-era necessity, educators experimented with connecting students across geographic and cultural divides. While the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated virtual exchange's mainstreaming, its origins stretch back to the 1990s with what was called *telecollaboration*, when language teachers connected learners online with native speakers (O'Dowd, 2016). By the early 2000s, this evolved into *globally networked learning* (GNL) and *virtual exchange* (VE), which expanded into K–12 and higher education contexts (O'Dowd, 2016). *Collaborative Online International Learning* (COIL) emerged in 2006 with the establishment of the COIL Center at the State University of New York (SUNY), which became a global hub for training and partnership development. Co-author Julie Ficarra participated in these efforts as a partnership coordinator from 2013–2014.

A defining feature of COIL is its course-embedded design: faculty from two or more institutions co-teach linked courses, enabling students to collaborate across borders synchronously (e.g., via Zoom) or asynchronously (e.g., shared platforms like Padlet or Google Docs). Literature consistently highlights COIL's positive outcomes including gains in intercultural awareness, global engagement, and professional skills (Hackett et al., 2023; Vahed & Rodriguez, 2020) as well as its accessibility, as COIL typically incurs no additional tuition or travel costs.

The European Commission's (2024) *Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange (EVE)* further popularized this model by fostering intercultural dialogue and collaborative learning across member states. In its 2021 funding cycle, Erasmus+ introduced *Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs)* requiring both virtual and short-term physical mobility. BIPs formally institutionalized hybrid global learning across Europe, integrating academic credit and multi-institutional collaboration.

Like BIPs, *Collaborative Hybrid International Learning (CHIL)* integrates online collaboration with short-term travel but remains more flexible and pedagogy-driven. Rooted in equity, reciprocity, and community engagement, CHIL adapts to diverse institutional contexts and faculty partnerships. Its hybrid model involves at least one cohort traveling to meet their partner group in person during or after the virtual component. A *one-way CHIL* involves one cohort's travel (typically from the Global North to the Global South), while a *two-way CHIL*, as in our Cornell/USFQ case, facilitates reciprocal exchange, allowing students to experience both hosting and visiting. We view this two-way CHIL as a means of operationalizing calls for mutuality in international education and expanding equitable mobility opportunities for students in the Global South.

4. Methodology and ethical considerations

This study employs a qualitative case study design to examine the outcomes and dynamics of *Collaborative Hybrid International Learning (CHIL)* as implemented in the Spring 2024 Cornell–USFQ pilot. The case study approach is well-suited for an in-depth exploration of the multiple factors shaping this two-way short-term exchange program, particularly given its first-time implementation for all participants. As Creswell and Poth (2023) note, the case study method enables a holistic analysis of a bounded system and its contextual influences, making it particularly appropriate for examining new models of international education.

4.1. Case study design

This qualitative case study explores an “experimental” group of higher education students who voluntarily enrolled in CHIL-related courses rather than being randomly selected. It further examines the pedagogical, institutional, and logistical conditions that shaped the collaboration between Cornell University, a private Ivy League and land-grant research university in the United States, and Universidad San Francisco de Quito (USFQ), a private liberal arts university in Ecuador.

The CHIL program was developed within a broader initiative at Cornell - the Global Hubs - launched in 2021 to reimagine global engagement through multi-level, reciprocal partnerships. This initiative emphasizes long-term collaboration across teaching, research, and community engagement, moving beyond unidirectional or transactional models of mobility. Its goal is to co-create global learning opportunities by linking faculty, students, alumni, and community organizations in ways that position partnerships themselves, as opposed to externally established “centers”, as the active agents of engagement.

Within this framework, faculty from both universities co-designed the CHIL program around the comparative study of global development challenges and the role of community-based organizations in addressing them in the United States and Ecuador. The program integrated two parallel courses:

At Cornell University, *Community, Culture, and Development: From Quito, Ecuador to Upstate New York* was an upper-level elective with 13 undergraduate students from a range of majors. Non-Spanish speaking students were invited to additionally enroll in a one-credit Spanish “jumpstart” course.

At Universidad San Francisco de Quito (USFQ), the CHIL was embedded in a required *Service-Learning* course, part of the institution’s General Education curriculum as a liberal arts university. Ten students from various majors participated, each completing 85 hours of direct service and 16 reflection sessions focused on socioeconomic issues in Ecuador.

Together, the 23 participating students explored issues such as access to clean water and air, housing, food security, Indigenous sovereignty, and public health through a comparative, community-based lens. The CHIL structure combined online collaboration, two synchronous sessions, and week-long reciprocal travel to both countries, enabling direct engagement with peers and community partners.

4.2. Data sources

Data for this case study were collected through multiple sources, allowing for triangulation and a rich understanding of participants’ experiences and learning outcomes. As detailed below, primary data sources included course syllabus, student reflections, and faculty interviews and field notes.

Firstly, the USFQ syllabus included nine learning outcomes, such as analyzing poverty in Ecuador, examining the education and health systems, identifying forms of discrimination, defining gender and its social implications, and cultivating civic awareness and tolerance.

The Cornell syllabus included four outcomes emphasizing cross-cultural communication, the relationship between inequality and community development, intercultural sensitivity, and the ability to connect experiential learning with socio-political contexts.

Secondly, student reflections included pre-travel and post-travel essays, which provided insight into participants' evolving understandings of global citizenship, cultural humility, and community engagement.

Lastly, faculty interviews and field notes included planning meetings, emails, virtual sessions, and in-person program activities. All four faculty leaders (two from USFQ and two from Cornell) sat for an in-depth interview with graduate research assistant, Matias Flores, during the second week of the program (while in Ecuador).

Together, these sources support a nuanced analysis of how CHIL advances equitable global learning outcomes and fosters reciprocal institutional relationships.

5. Case study: The Cornell-USFQ CHIL pilot

5.1. Origins and institutional context

Cornell University is a private Ivy League and land-grant research university located in Ithaca, New York, in the United States. The CHIL pilot emerged from Cornell's *Global Hubs* initiative, launched in 2021 to reimagine global engagement through deep, multi-level partnerships with several universities around the world. Rather than centering on short-term mobility or faculty exchanges, the Global Hubs model emphasizes long-term, reciprocal collaboration across research, teaching, and public engagement. The underlying philosophy is that global learning should be *co-created* through equitable partnerships, rather than *exported* through externally operated "centers."

A key component of the initiative was the establishment of *Global Hubs Salons*, virtual meetings organized around shared global themes such as climate justice, democracy, and migration. These Salons created space for relationship-building and intellectual exchange across institutions. During one Salon, co-author Karla Díaz, Director of the Dragon Outreach Center at Universidad San Francisco de Quito (USFQ), a private liberal arts university in Ecuador, presented on USFQ's service-learning model and commitment to asset-based community engagement. Her presentation inspired co-author Julie Ficarra of Cornell University to initiate a collaboration. Together, they developed the idea for a COIL-based experience focused on comparing how

community-based organizations address global development challenges in each local context.

With additional faculty partners, including co-author Nascira Ramia, the team applied for and received an *International Cornell Curriculum (ICC) Development Grant* in August 2022. This grant funded a four-person faculty team to conduct reciprocal site visits, co-design course activities, and meet with each other's community organization partners. USFQ faculty visited Cornell in October 2022, followed by Cornell faculty's visit to Quito in March 2023. Between April and July 2023, the team finalized course design and began recruiting students for the first cohort in August 2023.

Funding for program implementation came from two sources: the *Polson Institute for Global Development* at Cornell, which covered lodging, food, and transportation for the Ecuadorian students during their visit to the U.S., and the *Latin American and Caribbean Studies Program (LACS)* within Cornell's Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies, which provided need-based travel support for Cornell participants. This combination of institutional and unit-level funding was critical to advancing the project's commitment to equitable access.

5.2. Courses and participants

At Universidad San Francisco de Quito (USFQ), the CHIL collaboration was embedded within a special English-language section of the required *Service-Learning* course. This course centers on understanding social issues in Ecuador and is mandatory for all USFQ students as part of their General Education curriculum. Because of long wait times for U.S. tourist visas, often exceeding one year, students were required to already possess a valid U.S. visa to participate. This constraint continues to be a structural barrier to truly equitable mobility. Ultimately, ten students from six academic majors enrolled in the course, all fluent in English. The course was co-taught by co-authors Karla Díaz and Nascira Ramia, with program coordination and logistical support provided by co-author Sol Palacios.

At Cornell University, co-author Julie Ficarra developed a new course titled *Culture, Communities, and Development: From Upstate New York to Quito, Ecuador* specifically for the CHIL collaboration. The course fulfilled general education requirements and, for many students, major or minor requirements in fields such as Global Development, Anthropology, and Public Policy. Thirteen undergraduate students from five departments enrolled. Dr. Ficarra co-taught the course with Dr. Sofía Villenas, Professor of Anthropology at Cornell.

Together, the two courses formed a single CHIL learning ecosystem, where both cohorts explored parallel themes—inequality, sustainability, and local development—while comparing how these issues manifest in their respective contexts.

5.3. Virtual collaboration component

The CHIL experience began with a virtual phase designed to build relationships and establish shared goals before travel. Students first introduced themselves asynchronously via *Padlet*, posting photos, biographies, and reflections on what they hoped to learn from their international peers. This was followed by a synchronous Zoom session in week three, where faculty introduced collaboration and facilitated structured icebreakers. Together, the students co-developed a set of collective learning goals for the semester.

Cornell students selected five development-related research themes relevant to both contexts based on their interests: Affordable Housing; Access to Clean Water and Air; Food Security; Indigenous Sovereignty; and Public Health.

Cornell students produced five short research briefs on the U.S. context, while USFQ students conducted parallel analyses in Ecuador. This parallel approach ensured that students first examined challenges in their own settings before engaging in comparative analysis. A second synchronous Zoom session in week six provided space to share preliminary findings and discuss similarities and contrasts between the two countries.

This design reflects a core principle of equitable international learning, that meaningful comparison begins with self-reflection and understanding. By investigating their own national and institutional contexts first, students developed a grounded awareness of the social, political, and policy conditions that shape realities in their *home context*. This approach not only positioned each group as knowledge producers rather than passive recipients of “foreign” expertise but also disrupted common hierarchies in North–South collaborations by valuing local perspectives as legitimate sites of analysis. When students later came together for comparative discussion, they did so from a position of mutual expertise, allowing for more balanced dialogue and nuanced interpretation of cross-national similarities and differences.

Following the sharing of each other’s research briefs, each binational group collaborated asynchronously using shared documents and digital platforms, like Canva, to create comparative research posters integrating both contexts. When USFQ students later traveled to Cornell, these posters were finalized in person and presented publicly at a campus-wide symposium. The

same posters were subsequently showcased during the Ecuador-based portion of the exchange during an event at USFQ.

5.4. Physical exchange component

The in-person exchange began in week nine of the 15-week semester, after eight weeks of virtual collaboration. The reciprocal mobility was structured so that each cohort experienced both roles, *host* and *guest*, within a single academic term. USFQ students first traveled to Ithaca, New York, during their Spring Break, where they were hosted by Cornell students and faculty for seven days. During their stay, they met with community-based organizations addressing housing insecurity, food access, and environmental justice in Upstate New York. They also attended guest lectures, shared meals in Cornell's dining halls, and joined social events with student organizations such as *La Asociación Latina de Cornell*.

At the end of the week, both cohorts traveled together from New York to Quito, Ecuador. There, Cornell students were hosted by USFQ faculty and peers. The group engaged in service-learning projects with USFQ's long-term community partners, connecting their fieldwork to the same development topics studied in the virtual phase. Reflection sessions, facilitated by USFQ faculty, helped students situate their experiences within broader social and cultural frameworks. Cornell students stayed together in a guest house but spent time in USFQ students' homes and communities, deepening intercultural understanding.

5.5. Faculty-hosted versus faculty-led models

Traditional short-term study abroad programs from the United States typically follow a *faculty-led* model, in which a U.S.-based professor directs all aspects of the course and its community engagement abroad. Such programs often rely on local partners to provide logistical or cultural support but leave little room for shared pedagogical authority. CHIL inverts this model by adopting a *faculty-hosted* structure. In this approach, local faculty at the host institution design and lead the visiting students' engagement with communities. The host institution determines how its long-standing partnerships are integrated into the visiting cohort's learning, thereby centering local priorities and expertise.

This structure offers a more ethical and sustainable approach to short-term global learning. Whereas visiting students' time in-country is necessarily limited, the host institution maintains ongoing relationships and longitudinal impact through continued engagement with community partners. For example, USFQ students volunteer with the same organizations where Cornell

students spend time during their visit for entire semesters, creating sustained benefits beyond any single short-term program. Cornell students, in turn, learn not only about Ecuadorian social challenges but also about USFQ's community engagement model itself, which is an important meta-lesson in how institutions in the Global South exercise leadership in socially responsible higher education and how this can (and does) look different than models of community engaged learning that they are used to in the U.S. context.

6. Findings: Successes, challenges, and opportunities

The Cornell-USFQ CHIL pilot demonstrated the potential of reciprocal hybrid learning to advance more equitable forms of international education. Both institutions, as well as the students and faculty involved, identified significant outcomes, particularly in expanding mobility access, deepening intercultural relationships, and supporting reflective learning on host-guest dynamics. At the same time, the project revealed persistent structural barriers related to visas, funding, and institutional infrastructure.

6.1. Student learning and growth

6.1.1. USFQ students

The most visible outcomes emerged through students' reflections on cultural adaptability, mutual learning, and civic responsibility. For USFQ students, the opportunity to visit an Ivy League university represented both a source of pride and a space to critically examine global inequalities in access and privilege. USFQ students described the experience as transformative in terms of their confidence, openness, and awareness of cultural difference:

My objective is to expand my intellectual capacity by engaging with the diverse insights of students at a U.S. university, acknowledging that a variety of perspectives can foster creativity and innovation. (ES3)

I find it fascinating that we will get to know a culture completely different from ours, learn about customs, and understand college life in the United States. Overall, it will be an opportunity to live together and experience a different perspective during the trip. (ES1)

Across reflections, USFQ students recognized the importance of adapting behaviors, communication styles, and expectations in order to collaborate effectively. This growing self-awareness was often expressed as a form of humility and openness to learning from others. As one participant noted, "Understanding and respecting these cultural differences are crucial for cooperation" (ES3). Such reflections echo the insights of Reynolds et al. (2021),

who argue that cultural adaptability involves more than just tolerance; it demands an active and reflective engagement with difference as a key dimension of transformative learning.

USFQ students also articulated the importance of motivation and empathy. Many viewed CHIL as an opportunity to strengthen their sense of global citizenship: “The U.S. university is a place of many cultures, which I know will be both enriching and challenging. I want to learn about, appreciate, and respect cultural differences to broaden my perspective” (ES4).

Several USFQ participants connected this growth to their emerging sense of agency and civic responsibility. Through service-learning and dialogue with community partners, students began to see themselves as contributors to positive social change:

His story of resilience in the face of adversity taught me the importance of empathy, human connection, and listening to diverse voices. It reaffirmed my belief in the power of service to create change and inspired me to continue advocating for social justice. (ES2)

After participating, my perspective on community service changed significantly. Working directly with communities, both domestically and internationally, and witnessing the impact of our actions made me appreciate how powerful community service can be. (ES2)

USFQ students’ reflections also revealed a growing recognition that civic responsibility extends beyond local contexts. They understood that awareness and reflection are as essential as direct action. As one student observed, “Even though it was shocking to see the situations these people face, it inspired me to help with social issues in my community” (ES3). Another added, “I gained confidence in making informed decisions by considering diverse perspectives” (ES2).

In summary, CHIL enabled USFQ students to develop intercultural adaptability, reflective awareness, and a sense of responsibility toward both local and global communities. More than a study abroad experience, the program facilitated identity growth, critical empathy, and civic imagination—key dimensions of ethical global learning.

6.1.2. Cornell students

Intercultural awareness and hospitality

Before traveling, Cornell students expressed enthusiasm for learning “outside the classroom” and curiosity about cultures, histories, and social issues beyond the United States. Many acknowledged their privilege as

travelers and framed the upcoming exchange as an opportunity to use that privilege responsibly. They anticipated broadening their perspectives on Indigenous knowledge, environmental sustainability, and development by experiencing life in Ecuador rather than through reading about it academically.

After the program, students described hospitality as a form of pedagogy. They emphasized that being welcomed into Ecuadorian homes, classrooms, and community spaces profoundly shaped their learning. This experience transformed their understanding of what it means to be a “guest,” revealing that intercultural learning is not simply about observation or study, but about being cared for, trusted, and included. Many described how USFQ students modeled openness and empathy, making the Cornell group feel like part of the community. Through this experience, students moved from cultural curiosity toward cultural humility by recognizing that intercultural exchange is sustained through generosity, care, and mutual respect.

Language, communication, and the ethics of accommodation

Prior to departure, most Cornell students identified their limited Spanish proficiency as a major concern. Post-program, they reflected on how language shaped the power dynamics of the experience. Several recognized that the burden of translation often fell on their USFQ counterparts, highlighting the asymmetry between common U.S. monolingualism and their Ecuadorian peer’s bilingualism. Students expressed discomfort with this imbalance and a renewed appreciation for the communicative labor of their hosts.

At the same time, they found creative ways to engage meaningfully despite linguistic barriers through gestures, shared meals, music, and play with community members. These instances reinforced the idea that communication is multi-layered and that connection is possible even without linguistic fluency. For many, the experience strengthened their motivation to learn additional languages and deepened their understanding of linguistic privilege as an ethical issue in cross-cultural work.

Rethinking service and the meaning of contribution

Before the program, students frequently used language about “helping” or “making a difference.” Afterward, their reflections revealed a shift from charity-oriented thinking to a more critical understanding of community engagement. They grappled with the limitations of short-term service projects and the risk of extractive or performative participation. Many questioned whether “direct service” - the model employed by USFQ and therefore how the service was structured in our *faculty-hosted* model, is the most ethical form of

contribution. They grappled, both during nightly debriefs while in Ecuador as well as in their post-program reflections, with the difference between “direct service” and learning with and from local communities, the “community engaged learning” model that Cornell employs. Some questioned whether their engagement should have focused more on capacity-building tasks, such as documentation or materials preparation, rather than direct face-to-face involvement with vulnerable populations.

However, in their post-program reflections these same students emphasized that even when material contributions are modest, as was the case with their limited time in service to a community-based organization or school, their presence could still be a meaningful form of solidarity. Students got to this place in their understanding through juxtaposing how they felt about the presence of their Ecuadorian peers in their own community in Upstate New York - which was overwhelmingly positive. When they shifted their mental framing from one that centered tangible “results” in the service setting to one that prioritized presence and connection, they began to see ethical community engagement in a new way.

Collaboration across difference

Students highlighted binational teamwork as one of the most rewarding aspects of the program. Working across cultures, languages, and disciplines required negotiation and adaptability. They learned to integrate multiple perspectives into joint research outputs, such as the comparative posters, and to value disagreement as a generative part of the process.

The structure of CHIL—combining asynchronous work, synchronous discussions, and in-person collaboration—encouraged a sustained, relational form of comparison. Rather than a one-time encounter, the experience unfolded over months of dialogue and co-production. Students noted that the social bonds built within their binational teams served as both a support system and a site of critical learning.

6.2. Faculty reflections: Rebalancing power and pedagogy

In interviews conducted by (then) graduate student assistant, Matias G. Flores (now Ph.D.) during and after the 2024 program the Ecuadorian faculty who hosted the U.S. cohort described CHIL as a transformative departure from traditional, one-sided mobility programs. Professor Díaz emphasized that this model responded to a long-standing aspiration within USFQ: “The goal was always for it to be two-way, because what usually happens is that many students come, but our students do not necessarily go.”

For the USFQ faculty, equity meant not only enabling Ecuadorian students to travel but also making such experiences financially and logistically feasible through targeted grants. However, they also acknowledged persistent barriers, particularly for Indigenous and lower-income students, who face systemic challenges such as restrictive visa processes.

From the Cornell perspective, this two-way design also marked a profound departure from the dominant U.S. model of short-term study abroad, where American institutions typically design the pedagogical goals and local partners or study abroad providers then facilitate. In contrast, using CHIL the Ecuadorian faculty determined *how* visiting Cornell students would engage with their long-standing community partners. This shift was both intellectually and logistically challenging for the Cornell faculty team as it required that we rethink what it means to lead a study abroad program but also to communicate this to our on-campus staff partners, as well as student participants, who were used to a very different operating model. However, it was this redistribution of authority and leadership that created the most meaningful moments of learning for both students and the Cornell faculty.

Both USFQ professors reflected on CHIL as an opportunity to *democratize learning*. As Professor Ramia noted prior to the start of the program, “We are going to learn from each other, and we are going to have equal opportunities for the U.S. students and the Ecuadorian students in this exchange.” They contrasted CHIL’s horizontality with prior experiences where Ecuador served primarily as a “learning site” for Global North students. As one faculty member explained:

The grant was built jointly—no one tried to tell the other what to do or how things should be. That’s rare, because in the past, it has always been about how we can serve you in your study programs, not about creating a horizontal exchange.

Another insight involved comparing models of community engagement. During site visits, Ecuadorian faculty observed how some community organizations in the U.S. were part of large coalitions capable of influencing public policy, something less common in Ecuador, where local initiatives tend to focus on meeting immediate needs. Professor Díaz reflected, “they reach levels of policy incidence—they even change public policies. Here, we are still at the level of unmet basic needs.”

These differences in community engagement also prompted reflection within the Cornell team. Seeing Ecuadorian students integrate sustained service-learning into their academic requirements challenged us to think critically about how civic engagement is structured, and sometimes siloed,

within U.S. universities. At Cornell, community-based learning is often elective and mediated by institutional partnerships, whereas at USFQ it is woven into the curriculum and grounded in direct, long-term relationships. This comparison revealed not only different levels of institutionalization, but different philosophies of community engagement.

Professor Ramia from USFQ noticed this difference as well, “At Cornell, they focus a lot on giving students tools of citizenship, while here we stay at that first step of empathizing with people.” By exposing students to both models, CHIL allowed students and faculty to examine how structural inequalities shape development and civic engagement comparatively across contexts.

The faculty team also shared stories of the exchange’s emotional impact. Professor Ficarra from Cornell was the most junior member of the bi-university faculty team and described feeling a sense of care and mentorship from her USFQ faculty colleagues that was made possible through CHIL. She wrote an email to a colleague describing it in this way:

Karla and Nascira have really taken me under their wing as we navigate this new terrain together. We are trying to develop this new ambitious model and I’m trying to figure out what this means for identifying the right sources of campus support. But also on a human level I’ve been able to talk to them about what it means to do international education work as a working mom with young kids. I feel like that fabric of connection that we are trying to develop through the program for our students, I am feeling through their mentorship of me as a member of the faculty team.

Finally, both Cornell and USFQ faculty reflected on the logistical challenges inherent in implementing a new model of exchange. USFQ’s administrative infrastructure was designed primarily to facilitate the hosting of visiting student groups and faculty - they have operated successfully for many years as a study abroad provider. Meanwhile Cornell’s offices were much less accustomed to accommodating visiting student groups outside of semester-long exchanges. The experience of navigating on-campus resources to support this short-term, inbound student cohort revealed how the rhetorical goal of increasing mutuality and reciprocity in international education often precedes the infrastructural changes required to actually make it happen.

For example, like at many U.S. universities, for liability reasons only Cornell students, faculty, and staff are allowed to ride in Cornell fleet vehicles. Yet, this was the most economical way to transport visiting USFQ students to/from community site visits. Had they been semester-long exchange students,

that affiliation and official student status would have negated this issue. Obtaining access to the dining hall or other campus facilities required negotiating systems that are not designed for short-term visitors. On the contrary, USFQ's administrative infrastructure is built for in-bound students and had to navigate the new terrain of managing an outbound group. This highlighted an institutional asymmetry that goes far beyond one program, it reflects the broader architecture of international education in both the U.S. and Latin America, which privileges the U.S. as a sender rather than host of short-term study abroad programs. Our CHIL experience made these structures visible and, importantly, enabled us to advocate for change within our own institutions.

7. Implications for practice

7.1. Moving from rhetoric to infrastructure

Replicating CHIL requires not only shared values but a commitment to shared governance, consistent communication, and an institutional infrastructure capable of sustaining reciprocal mobility. These types of equitable partnerships hinge on collective responsibility among all stakeholders: faculty, international programs leadership, students, and community partners.

Faculty should remain flexible and open and should anticipate both what it means to teach in a different way - stepping back from the design and leadership of your students' international experience and stepping up to the task of designing a local experience for visiting students. They should not underestimate the time and attention required to make this kind of exchange work logistically and should be prepared to liaise between their study abroad office and their partner institutions in a way that may not be typical of faculty in a regular faculty-led study abroad program.

International programs leadership should recognize that oftentimes the administration infrastructure - both within their unit and across campus - is not built for CHIL programs. Changes or at least flexibility is required when attempting to operationalize the goals of reciprocity and mutuality in international education partnership. In Latin America, and indeed across the Global South, this means building capacity to send students abroad on short-term programs; and in the U.S. it means doing the same to support incoming programs. Institutional policies, risk management, and compliance for international collaborations must evolve in order to ease the process of developing and implementing more reciprocal programs like CHIL.

Students should ideally be vetted carefully for admission to a CHIL program as it requires a commitment not only to the academic requirements of the course and the logistical preparations for travel, but to the responsibility of *hosting*. This seemed to come quite naturally for our USFQ students but felt foreign to the Cornell students - as it may for many U.S. based students in our largely individualist culture. If the working language of CHIL is English, as it was in our CHIL, meaning that one group is working in a second language - the English-speaking students should ideally be required to enroll in an accompanying language course. The Spanish jumpstart course offered by Cornell's Language Resource Center was useful in exposing students to Spanish but also in orienting them to the challenge of working outside your first language.

Community partners should be engaged early as co-designers of the site-visit experience, ensuring that program objectives align with community priorities and yield mutual benefit. More importantly, they should not be viewed as one-time collaborators of rotating visiting international groups but as *long-term partners* of the host university. These sustained relationships between universities and community organizations create continuity that allows visiting student groups to connect with existing initiatives rather than launching short-term projects that can duplicate efforts or be disruptive. When host universities maintain multi-year partnerships with community organizations, each incoming student cohort contributes to an ongoing body of work, deepening trust and expanding collective impact.

Ultimately, sustainable reciprocity requires not just enthusiasm and goodwill but policies, funding models, and administrative systems that recognize hybrid mobility as a legitimate form of international engagement.

7.2. Policy frameworks for south–north mobility

To create truly inclusive short-term exchanges, both North–South and South–North travel must operate within transparent and equitable policy frameworks. At the institutional level, CHIL partnerships should be embedded into existing academic agreements to ensure parity in student selection, funding, and credit recognition. Integration at this level helps normalize reciprocity, which would make it part of an institution's standard practice rather than an exception that requires special negotiation each time.

Achieving this, however, requires universities to address the structural barriers that limit equitable participation, particularly for students from Latin America, and the Global South. Passport hierarchies, visa restrictions, and the high cost of international travel continue to exclude many students, particularly indigenous students from Latin America. Addressing these

inequities requires institutional mechanisms like dedicated travel funds, simplified administrative processes, and flexible course structures that allow both cohorts to participate fully regardless of citizenship or financial capacity. In the U.S. context embedded CHIL into a regular semester course cuts down on the additional tuition required of students who participate in international programs during off-terms (like summer).

Equally critical is ensuring that collaboration itself remains balanced. As Chasi and Hagenmeier (2023) reminds us, preventing the dominance of Northern institutions in decision-making and funding requires intentional design. Partnership agreements should include explicit reciprocity clauses and mechanisms for shared accountability, making responsibility for both success and risk collective rather than unevenly distributed. This helps to ensure that equity is not just aspirational rhetoric but an operational reality embedded within the infrastructure of institutional cooperation.

7.3. CHIL as an inclusive pedagogical practice

With thoughtful design, CHIL represents a highly inclusive, high-impact educational practice that deepens the learning outcomes traditionally associated with both COIL and study abroad. Like COIL, students engage in sustained virtual collaboration that builds intercultural understanding and shared problem-solving. Like study abroad, it offers the immersive and relational learning that only physical presence can provide. By combining the two, we argue that CHIL enables a depth of connection and reflection that neither model achieves on its own.

A defining feature of CHIL is the intentional use of the guest–host dynamic as a pedagogical tool. Instead of encouraging students to “immerse” themselves in a local context or to “be like a local” CHIL focuses on what it means to be welcomed into another community, as an outsider, and, in turn, to host visitors in your own community. In this way the act of hosting can become an equally valuable form of learning as traveling, as students imagine how to create inclusive spaces for their peers within their on-campus networks as well as in the community.

We think that the faculty-hosted structure amplifies these effects. When local faculty lead the engagement with community partners, visiting students gain a more contextually grounded understanding of place. Host-side continuity ensures that community relationships are maintained across cohorts, transforming short-term visits into contributions to long-term partnerships. In this way, CHIL not only broadens access to international learning but also models a more equitable and sustainable approach to global education.

7.4. Ongoing and future research on comparative global learning outcomes

The qualitative case study presented here forms part of a broader research agenda that seeks to empirically assess the educational impact of the CHIL model. In parallel with the development and implementation of our pilot, we have undertaken a comparative study examining differences in global learning outcomes between our two CHIL courses - explored in this case study and two of our Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) courses that have not included any short-term mobility components. We use the Global Engagement Survey to investigate how hybrid international experiences influence global learning vis-a-vis intercultural competence, critical reflection, and civic engagement.

Because this complementary study is currently under peer review, specific findings are not reported here. Nevertheless, we note this work to highlight that CHIL is not only a pedagogical innovation but also an emerging site of evidence-based inquiry. Together, we hope to provide a definitional and descriptive account of the CHIL model as well as empirical mixed-method evaluation research aimed at measuring the value that is added through the additional efforts, and funding, that CHIL requires.

8. Conclusion

CHIL demonstrates that equitable, reciprocal international education is possible when institutions commit to shared leadership, intentional design, and community-centered collaboration. Originating in Ecuador, CHIL represents a Latin American contribution to global education by challenging extractive mobility patterns and redefines what internationalization can mean. Through its hybrid structure, CHIL combines the accessibility of virtual exchange with the transformative power of short-term, reciprocal mobility. It creates space for students from both the Global North and South to act as hosts and guests, learners and teachers, in a continuous process of mutual learning.

Ethical approval

All data collection was conducted under Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval at both Cornell and USFQ, with informed consent obtained from all participants.

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