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Undergraduate Student Engagement of Intercultural Competence

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UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT OF INTERCULTURAL
COMPETENCE

A thesis

Presented to

The School of Social Sciences, Education & Business

Department of Higher Education and Student Development

Taylor University

Upland, Indiana

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

by

Amanda Joy Steinbeck

March 2014

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**Higher Education and Student Development
Taylor University
Upland, Indiana**

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Thesis of

Amanda Joy Steinbeck

entitled

Undergraduate Student Engagement of Intercultural Competence

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the

Master of Arts degree
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Abstract

A growing focus addresses the value of cross-cultural experiences within higher education, especially in how these opportunities develop students' intercultural competence. However, the literature on intercultural competence focuses primarily on study abroad experiences, leaving gaps as to how to cultivate this competency in students on their home campuses. The present study seeks to connect student engagement with intercultural competence in understanding what increases engagement levels. The current study analyzed quantitative data using two new scales—the Individual Intercultural Competence Engagement Scale and the Institutional Facilitation of Intercultural Competence Engagement Scale—created from the National Survey of Student Engagement with student participants from a small liberal arts university in the Midwest. Results demonstrated that study abroad itself actually does not serve as a significant predictor of growth in student engagement with intercultural competence, pointing to a need to facilitate opportunities for engagement on campus.

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“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” – Maya Angelou

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“The way we interact with the world in knowing it becomes the way we interact with the world as we live in it.” (Palmer, 1993, p. 21)

American higher education institutions originally functioned as places to cultivate students that would serve the young colonies as political and religious leaders, recognizing the importance of educated citizens engaging with society (Rudolph, 1990). Though universities and their roles have evolved and may look different in contemporary society, the objective remains of developing students who can effectively interact and benefit their communities. In a world with societies increasingly impacted by a variety of cultural and ethnic influences, equipping students who have the ability to engage at both societal and global levels becomes progressively more imperative. Educational institutions provide opportunities to challenge and encourage students to begin discerning how they perceive the world and the part they can play as global citizens. Garber (2007) states, “. . . education, always and everywhere, is about the deepest questions of life and the world” (p. 96). If that holds true, universities should comprehend this responsibility and recognize that experiences and knowledge of cultures impact understanding and perception of the world.

The establishment of the study abroad program offers an important response to the need of developing students capable of engaging on a global level. The quantity of these programs has significantly grown since the first regular occurrence in 1923 (Goode,

2008). More importantly, though, the quality of these experiences has developed as practitioners continue to learn and seek assessment measures to increase potential learning outcomes for students (Goode, 2008). Studying abroad challenges and encourages growth in student participants in a variety of areas, especially intercultural competence. Cross-cultural knowledge, experience, and communication create an increasingly valuable and marketable skill set for students to possess and cultivate. As research continues to evaluate the long-term impact of cross-cultural experiences on students, higher education institutions must design programs that maximize student learning and development in this area.

Friedman (2007) discusses the increasing impact globalization has upon society and daily life, which exhibits the need for a skill set to effectively play a role in a global world. He says that “every person now must, and can, ask: Where do I as an individual fit into the global competition and opportunities of the day, and how can I, on my own, collaborate with others globally?” (p. 11). Intercultural competence can provide the ability to engage well in a global context, and higher education institutions serve as places to develop students’ abilities. Intercultural competence can be defined as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Deardorff, 2006, p. 247–248). This definition evolved as a general consensus from responses of international and national intercultural scholars and American institutional administrators of internationalization strategies (Deardorff, 2006).

Notably, though knowledge, skills, and attitudes all function as important parts of intercultural competence as defined above, they must manifest in clear and respectful

interpersonal interactions. Bennett (2004) established the interrelated nature between intercultural communication and sensitivity in developing intercultural competence, which directly reflects Deardorff's (2006) definition. This skill set appears and develops only through thoughtful interactions that allow room for multiple perspectives representing different cultures or worldviews; one can also cultivate the skills anywhere, especially because today's students live in more diverse environments regardless of geographic location due to widespread globalization (Johnson, 2009). However, engagement with and intentional development of cross-cultural competence most frequently occurs through immersion experiences.

As measurement tools gain prevalence, the results prove encouraging as they demonstrate that study abroad programs have become increasingly effective and achieved legitimate intercultural competence development in the students' lives in ways they can perceive and articulate. Not only does this important aspect of holistic development equip students for engaging with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, it also trains them to think critically from multiple perspectives that might not necessarily come naturally. This trait proves vital in a global marketplace because companies seek employees capable of handling themselves and representing their corporations well in cross-cultural situations (Braskamp, Braskamp, & Merrill, 2009). Study abroad programs also offer another way to facilitate experiential learning for students, as suggested in Kolb's theory on learning styles (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Immersion in another culture and different program designs can help students to learn in a different way than they may be used to on their college campuses or strictly within their majors. This experience provides the chance for a potentially different form of specialization to impact

the students' learning style development (Evans et al., 2010).

Purpose of Study

Yet despite the increasing quantity of positive data, there seems to exist a lack of literature analyzing student engagement in activities that utilize intercultural competence. There also exists a gap as to the impact a study abroad experience may have on that engagement level. Studies on the difference in engagement levels of students who choose to study abroad compared with those who do not also appear deficient. These analyses could prove integral to raising the quality and impact of study abroad programming, as well as developing equivalent opportunities to develop intercultural competency in students who do not choose to travel. Thus, the current study sought to fill this gap by answering the following question: How do study abroad, gender, and pretest scores act as predictors of growth in student engagement with intercultural competence?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The personal application and subjectivity of intercultural competence makes it difficult to quantify or measure. Most existing studies involve some component of the students' own perceptions of themselves through either quantitative or qualitative methods, and a few incorporate external reviews to ensure validity (Deardorff, 2006). Pretests and posttests often show direct change, though the main objection remains the reliance on self-report data; often without external verification, self-perception does not always hold a reputation for high validity. However, due to ease of distribution, administrators of study abroad programs prefer these tools significantly more than do intercultural scholars (Deardorff, 2006).

There exist a variety of specific assessment tools, including the Cross Cultural Adaptability Inventory, the Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale, the International Education Survey, the Global Awareness Profile, and the Intercultural Development Inventory (Rexeisen, Anderson, Lawton, & Hubbard, 2008). Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) appears one of the most often used, based on Bennett's Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity and utilized in numerous studies (Emert & Pearson, 2007; Engle & Engle, 2004; Franklin, 2010; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004; Rexeisen et al., 2008). The International Education Survey (IES) also experiences frequent use (Dwyer, 2004; Norris & Dwyer, 2005; Norris & Steinberg, 2008).

This literature review seeks to address the different factors of cross-cultural experiences that seem most effective in developing intercultural competence, as well as understanding the overall effectiveness of study abroad experiences in developing students' intercultural competence. The review also discusses student engagement with intercultural competence to begin bridging the gap the present study sought to fill.

Factors of Study Abroad Effectiveness in Developing Intercultural Competence

Program duration.

With increasingly effective measurement tools, study abroad programs continue to demonstrate positive results in their development of students' growth in intercultural competence. Program length offers one significant factor in developing cross-cultural skills. Over 90 percent of students who took pre- and post- IES surveys after year-long and semester programs stated that their program "helped [them to] better understand [their] own cultural values and biases" as well as "influencing [their] interactions with people from different cultures" (Dwyer, 2004, p. 158); a good portion of those same students also agreed that their program "contributed to developing a more sophisticated way of looking at the world" (p. 158). The high self-ratings on these three survey questions proved key in analyzing the development of intercultural competence because all demonstrated that, at least from the students' own perspectives, their knowledge and awareness had grown and impacted their personal interactions. In addition, the length of the term positively correlates with developing intercultural competence. The 2004 study conducted by Dwyer did demonstrate that, despite slight differences, student gains appear relatively comparable for all of the programs, whether they lasted a semester or year.

However, shorter length programs can also offer positive results, especially when

compared with students who do not study abroad, even if the impact does not appear as significant as that of a longer immersion. One study compared students' perceptions of themselves after a course abroad for three weeks and contrasted that data with data received from students taking a comparable course on campus. The results clearly indicated that the students abroad exhibited a significantly higher mean in four key areas of intercultural competence: "thought about differences between myself and people in other countries," "thought about similarities between myself and people in other countries," "thought about a current issue important to people in a developing country," and "thought about why other countries have different perspectives than U.S." (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004, p. 170). This study demonstrated the impact even a shorter program can have when compared with a lack of travel.

Program design.

A second factor that has received attention in the literature comes with the actual design of the student experience in relation to its influence on the impact of study abroad programs and the development of intercultural competence skills. Traditionally there exist three basic program designs: direct enrollment, island, and hybrid. In direct enrollment programs, students engage directly in a host university and have little to no support from their home institution. Island style programs stand on the opposite end of the spectrum and facilitate student experience within the foreign country, offering significant support but possibly less direct cultural engagement because of the ex-patriot nature. Finally, hybrid programs exist somewhere in between the first two models and strike balance by exhibiting different aspects of both (Norris & Dwyer, 2005).

Norris and Dwyer (2005) performed a longitudinal study comparing direct

enrollment programs with hybrid programs. Both programs resulted in several statistically significant findings that showed a positive change in students in a variety of areas within cultural development. Specific survey items significant for participants in both programs included the fact that students acknowledged the continuing influence of their program in regards to “[their] interaction with people from different cultures, [their] political and social awareness, [their] perspective on how [they] view the world, [their] develop[ment of] a more sophisticated way of looking at the world” (p. 133). Not only did all of these findings prove statistically significant, but they received all extremely high positive responses. Over 90 percent of the students confirmed that their program experiences influenced all the items stating their “interaction with people from different cultures” and their “perspective[s] on how [they] view the world” (p. 133). This study demonstrated the overall impact of study abroad experiences on developing students’ intercultural competence. It also showed the effectiveness of different program models and that student preference may indicate best which style proves a better choice.

A longitudinal study utilizing the IDI on students who participated in an island study abroad program also demonstrated positive results (Rexeisen et al., 2008). The data exhibited a positive average increase in overall development, with the only decline seen in the Defense/Denial scale that the researchers quickly note could have resulted from the relatively high value that the students achieved on their pretests (Rexeisen et al., 2008). Though not compared with the other two program models, this study further demonstrated that, regardless of design type, intercultural competence develops in students who participate in study abroad programs.

Use of language in program structure.

A third aspect often discussed in study abroad programs is the use of foreign language and if or how that acquisition may impact the development of intercultural communication skills. One study on students participating in a semester-long program of advanced language looked for correlations in relationship between language fluency and cultural development resulting from the experience (Engle & Engle, 2004). While group results reflected the possibility of a relationship between increased language use and cultural skills, individual data indicated less coherence in the correlation (Engle & Engle, 2004).

Another study compared three different program models—one conducted in the students' native language, one in the foreign language, and one in a mixture of both languages—and how or if the differences in language impacted other aspects of the student experience. In regards to cultural development, there appeared some statistically significant results. Not surprisingly, students engaged in a foreign language program more often become more interested in the other culture and language (Norris & Steinberg, 2008). Students in a mixed language program more likely remain connected with the peers they travel with because their lack of fluency in the foreign language limits their communication with host nationals. However, as an important and unanticipated result, the students studying completely in their own language most likely maintain ties with nationals. However, when taken into consideration with housing of these students, this finding becomes more explicable, as often those students most likely to live with nationals and thus form the closest relationships.

Though language may not have a direct correlation with a deeper level of

intercultural competency, the program structure and the incorporation of language can still impact the student experience and the development of some of their cross-cultural relationships or interests. The overall effectiveness of cross-cultural experiences in cultivating intercultural competence can be evaluated in light of understanding the different factors of study abroad.

Overall Effectiveness of Study Abroad in Developing Intercultural Competence

The results of these studies prove encouraging as they demonstrate that study abroad programs have become increasingly effective and achieved legitimate intercultural competence development in the students' lives in ways they can perceive and articulate. Not only does this important aspect of holistic development equip students for engaging with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, it also trains them to think critically from multiple perspectives that might not necessarily come naturally. This trait proves vital in a global marketplace because companies seek employees capable of handling themselves and representing their corporations well in cross-cultural situations (Braskamp et al., 2009). Study abroad programs also offer another way to facilitate experiential learning for students, as suggested in Kolb's theory on learning styles (Evans et al., 2010). Immersion in another culture and different program designs can help students to learn in a different way than they may be used to on their college campuses or strictly within their majors. This experience provides the chance for a potentially different form of specialization to impact the students' learning style development (Evans et al., 2010).

Though much discussion has addressed the positive impact of these experiences, much still requires in-depth assessment, in particular, some results that indicate the need

for continued development in program execution. Some research has shown that “the instruction still may be focused on what [the students] learned rather than on how they think” (Braskamp et al., 2009, p. 112). Moving forward, this statement proves an integral result to note because, for students to continue to grow in their intercultural competence, they will need to communicate effectively out of their attitudes and skills, as well as their knowledge base (Deardorff, 2006). Study abroad programs must provide more than new experiences and new knowledge, though such a starting point has its merits. These opportunities must also cultivate critical thinking skills in students so that they can weigh multiple perspectives and thoughtfully communicate their opinions.

Student Engagement with Intercultural Competence

Despite the increased amount of literature on the effectiveness of study abroad programs, there remains a gap as to how these programs impact differences in student engagement with intercultural competence between students who have studied abroad and those who have not. Pike, Kuh, and McCormick (2011) stated that “engagement is positively related to learning outcomes, academic achievement, and student success broadly defined” (p. 301). Thus, student engagement serves as a critical factor in undergraduate student learning. This concept appears frequently in literature, articulated even beyond explicit learning outcomes. Student engagement has also demonstrably related to levels of student personal development (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006) and the overall “desired outcomes of undergraduate education” (Kuh, 2009, p. 683). Thus, studying the relationship between student engagement and intercultural competence proves an important endeavor, as the relationship could indicate the level that the skill set integrates into a student’s attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors.

Student engagement serves as a critical component in any campus environment, but specific areas allow for higher levels of engagement than most college opportunities. One specific “high-impact activity” according to the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) appears in study abroad (Kuh, 2009, p. 688). This category is defined as practices that utilize more significant amounts of students’ time and energy, resulting in deeper learning (Kuh, 2009). This definition seemingly expects differences in student engagement levels between participants in “high-impact activities” and students who choose not to participate; however, studies show that these activities, while not singularly effective, prove productive in conjunction with campus activities (Chickering & Braskamp, 2009). Regardless of how students choose to engage, institutions must intentionally offer a variety of opportunities in this area—both on and off campus—because knowledge of human cultures comes as one indicator of a high quality education according to the AAC&U (Colby & Sullivan, 2009). Though this understanding of cultures and development of intercultural competence can happen in the classroom alone, a richer experience will broaden a student’s engagement level and should exist as an aspect of an undergraduate education in today’s society.

Conclusion

Analyzing student engagement with intercultural competence proves critical because the literature shows that this skill set most evidently develops through experiential and interpersonal engagement (Lee, Poch, Shaw, & Williams, 2012). By the nature of the definition of intercultural competence as an ability to communicate and relate based on knowledge, skills, and attitudes, students must practice competence, not simply learn about the skill (Deardorff, 2006; Lee et al., 2012). If engagement most

effectively develops intercultural competence in students, measuring engagement with activities that cultivate this competence offers another avenue of measurement beyond student self-perception, as often seen in most intercultural competence instruments. As one of the most prominent opportunities for experiential learning and practice of intercultural competence, study abroad provides an chance for measurement of student engagement in this area, as well as a comparison with students who choose not to participate.

Chapter 3

Methodology

To determine the differences in student engagement with intercultural competence, the study utilized a quantitative approach with a correlational design. A survey provided multiple items providing comparison opportunities of engagement between students who have studied abroad and those who have not. The researcher administered a pretest and posttest of this survey at the beginning and end of students' undergraduate careers to provide increased reliability in measuring the impact study abroad had on engagement levels, also taking gender into account.

Participants

One hundred graduates of a small liberal arts university in the Midwest participated in this study. The student body numbers approximately 2,000, with females representing 56 percent of the population. Ethnic minority students make up 12 percent of the population, and international students constitute 5 percent of the student body. The institution requires all senior students to take a survey as a part of larger institutional requirements before graduation to evaluate overall student engagement on campus. A group of these students also took the same survey as they entered the institution. This participant pool encompassed both students who did and did not study abroad during their undergraduate years. The participants in this study completed the survey twice so that the instrument served as both the pretest and posttest.

Instrument

The present study utilized the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). To answer the specific question studied, the researcher analyzed only data from ten specific items on the survey in the form of two individual scales. In line with the methodological goals of the current study, the items included only those specific to engagement of intercultural competence and those measuring institutional facilitation of engagement, so as to determine how study abroad experiences impacts engagement. Study abroad serves as the primary independent variable of analysis, yet the pretest scores and gender also allow for additional independent variables in comparing engagement with intercultural competence.

The NSSE measures student engagement levels within higher education (Kuh, 2009). Widely used, this tool allows for ease of comparison between institutions, with its reliability and validity clearly established. In both student engagement behaviors and educational and personal growth items, the NSSE has had reliability coefficients of .85 and .90, respectively. The reliability coefficients stand high, and these scores have also remained demonstrably stable across institutions and over time. Not only has the instrument proven reliable statistically, but validity of results also has evidenced itself through relationships between achievement of learning goals and students' engagement measurements.

Data Collection and Analysis

In conjunction with the preexisting graduation requirement, this instrument already served as a part of greater institutional objectives as an established data set. The researcher analyzed the data upon two new scales that the researcher created specifically

for this study from the NSSE. Before analyzing the data, the researcher tested the scales for validity and reliability by conducting a factor analysis and a reliability test. The researcher then utilized regression analysis to effectively compare the engagement scores of the students. This regression analyzed student engagement of intercultural competence posttest scores as the dependent variable based upon the independent variables of pretest scores, gender, and study abroad. The researcher chose regression analysis to analyze this data because this method allows for the prediction of outcomes based on multiple variables (Creswell, 2008). The researcher hypothesized that study abroad would prove a significant predictor of growth in student engagement of intercultural competence.

Chapter 4

Results

The current study's data analysis involved two components: scale development and a regression analysis. The researcher developed two new scales utilizing NSSE survey items. Before analyzing the data for results, the researcher tested the scales for validity. Having proven the reliability, the researcher then analyzed the data through a regression analysis.

Scale Development

The two scales developed for this project allowed the researcher to utilize NSSE data to measure student engagement and intercultural competence. The researcher built these scales—the Individual Intercultural Competence Engagement Scale and the Institutional Facilitation of Intercultural Competence Engagement Scale—by combining items that previously had not been studied together. The Individual Intercultural Competence Engagement Scale consisted of six survey questions:

1. Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments
2. Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own
3. Had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values

4. Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue
5. Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective
6. Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept
(National Survey of Student Engagement)

The Institutional Facilitation of Intercultural Competence Engagement Scale consisted of four survey questions:

1. Institutional contribution: Thinking critically and analytically
2. Institutional contribution: Working effectively with others
3. Institutional contribution: Understanding yourself
4. Institutional contribution: Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds (National Survey of Student Engagement)

Before analyzing data based on these new scales, the researcher conducted a factor analysis, as well as reliability testing, to determine validity of both scales.

Factor analysis.

The researcher measured and separated the items into two distinct scales after the factor analysis. This analysis determined the Eigenvalues, numbers that demonstrate the strength of relationship between survey items to ensure measurement of the same component. The initial Eigenvalue for the Individual Intercultural Competence Engagement Scale was 51.498 % of variance. The initial Eigenvalue for the Institutional Facilitation of Intercultural Competence Engagement Scale was 57.054 % of variance. These values demonstrate two distinct components measured by the questions. Table 1 exhibits the component matrix for the Individual Intercultural Competence Engagement

Scale, demonstrating how each survey item loaded on the component that scale measure.

Table 2 offers the component matrix for the Institutional Facilitation of Intercultural Competence Engagement Scale. Important to note in both of these tables is the high loading values. These values reveal that each particular survey item in fact measured an aspect of the component the scale sought to address. The higher the value, the more accurately that specific question measured the scale's component.

Table 1

Individual Intercultural Competence Engagement Scale Component Matrix.

Survey Item	Loading on Component
Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments	.606
Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own	.731
Had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values	.746
Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue	.784
Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective	.782
Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept	.636

Table 2

Institutional Facilitation of Intercultural Competence Engagement Scale Component Matrix.

Survey Item	Loading on Component
Institutional contribution: Thinking critically and analytically	.737
Institutional contribution: Working effectively with others	.724
Institutional contribution: Understanding yourself	.820
Institutional contribution: Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds	.737

Reliability.

After creating two distinct scales based upon the factor analysis, the researcher conducted a reliability test to further establish the validity of each scale. The researcher used a Cronbach's alpha, similarly to the factor analysis, to determine how closely all items in the scale relate as "a measure of internal consistency" (*What Does Cronbach's Alpha Mean?*). A higher number, typically around .8, denotes a close and reliable relation. The Cronbach's alpha for the Individual Intercultural Competence Engagement Scale was .804 and .745 for the Institutional Facilitation of Intercultural Competence Engagement Scale. Due to those values, in conjunction with the factor analysis, these scales demonstrated measurement of legitimate components and thereby evidenced reliability.

Regression Analysis

The researcher utilized a regression analysis to understand the data based on the scales. The researcher analyzed each data set with pretest scores, study abroad participation, and gender as the independent variables and the posttest score as the

dependent variable. To ensure no statistical significance between genders, the researcher ran an independent t test on the pretest scores and posttest scores. These results demonstrated that, while students came in without significant differences based on gender on their pretest scores, gender became a differentiating factor in their posttest scores.

Table 3 shows the t test values for the pre and posttest scores for both males and females.

Table 4 exhibits the beta weights from the regression analysis for the Individual Intercultural Competence Engagement Scale. Table 5 displays the analysis for the Institutional Facilitation of Intercultural Competence Engagement Scale.

Table 3

Gender t Test Scores

Scale	Male		Female		df	t	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD				
Pre-Individual	16.90	3.63	17.25	3.41	102	-0.493	0.623	-0.099
Post-Individual	16.29	3.07	17.48	3.32	99	-1.790	0.077	-0.372
Pre-Institutional	11.95	2.58	12.38	2.17	105	-0.922	0.359	-.180
Post-Institutional	12.41	2.49	13.63	1.95	102	-2.782	0.006*	-0.546

Note. * Statistical significance

Table 4

Regression analysis on the individual intercultural competence engagement scale

Variable	B	$SE B$	β	t	p
Pretest	0.400	0.088	0.425	4.53	.000*
Gender	0.819	0.637	0.125	1.284	0.202
Study Abroad	0.264	0.663	0.039	0.398	0.692

Note. * Statistical significance

Table 5

Regression analysis on the institutional facilitation of intercultural competence engagement scale

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Pretest	0.195	0.094	0.199	2.069	0.041*
Gender	1.113	0.459	0.245	2.425	0.017*
Study Abroad	0.317	0.469	0.068	0.674	0.502

Note. * Statistical significance

Noteable in Table 3 more closely, while the only statistical significance appeared in the *p* score for the posttest Institutional scale, the *p* score for the posttest Individual scale also achieved close near statistical significance. These values also had Cohen's *d* values signifying a medium to large effect size. Together, these results indicated gender as an impactful independent variable on the posttest scores but not on the pretest scores.

The regression analysis results displayed in Tables 4 and 5 demonstrated that the pretest scores had the biggest effect on the posttest scores out of the three independent variables. Those scores, along with gender for the Institutional scale, emerged as the only variables of statistical significance. This statistical significance indicated that the β weights accurately predicted the strength of relationship between the pretest scores and gender and their impact on the posttest scores. Thus, in looking more closely at the Individual Intercultural Competence Engagement Scale, the most significant factor in determining a student's posttest score proved the pretest with a β weight of .425, a fairly high β weight score. The regression analysis of the Institutional Intercultural Competence Engagement Scale revealed two significant factors in determining a student's posttest score: the pretest and gender. However, these β weights proved much lower at .199 and .245, respectively, though notably gender proved more influential than the pretest variable on this scale.

Conclusion

Although these results could determine no direct conclusions or predictors, the following discussion seeks to address the value of understanding the impact that these independent variables have on a student's individual and institutional intercultural competence engagement posttest scores. The following observations perhaps prove most worthy of consideration: the weight of the pretest scores upon posttest scores, the implications of gender as a predictor, and the implications of study abroad not acting as a significant predictor upon student engagement of intercultural competence.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The discussion in this section first considers the analysis of the results presented in Chapter 4 in light of the research question and hypothesis. Subsequently, the discussion addresses each of the predictors of the posttest score more thoroughly, to not only examine the impact but also to further understand how and why they significant indicate student posttest scores. Next, the discussion offers implications of the current study's results for practitioners. The discussion also addresses the present study's limitations, which provides opportunities for further research in this area.

Research Question and Hypothesis

The researcher posited the following question for the study: How do study abroad, gender, and pretest scores act as predictors of growth in student engagement with intercultural competence? The results do not support the hypothesis that study abroad would serve as a significant indicator of growth in student engagement of intercultural competence. Rather, the pretest scores on both scales in fact emerged as the most significant indicators, along with gender on the Institutional Facilitation of Intercultural Competence Engagement Scale. Since the literature does not explicitly address student engagement of intercultural competence, this finding does not contradict preexisting research; however, this result necessitates further understanding in light of that context, especially understanding the significations the variables that emerged as indicators.

Pretest Scores as Indicators

In his 2012 work on assessment, Astin asserted pretests as common indicators among college students. He even went so far as to state, “With few exceptions, pretests are more highly correlated with outcome posttests than any other input or environmental variable” (p. 70). Self-predictions function as powerful inputs, primarily because people often do not change at rapid rates. Thus, even at such a formative age, how students come into college influences the impact the experiences and opportunities have on them.

In looking at these specific results, as well as the scales on which the researcher analyzed the data, the question arises of self-selection bias among the students. The students who chose to participate in cross-cultural experiences may in fact more naturally tend towards activities and relationships that would engage them with developing their intercultural competence, especially in regards to the items on the Individual Intercultural Competence Engagement Scale. All six items on that scale addressed differences in perspective, whether through interpersonal interactions or simply trying to challenge one’s own understanding with opposing viewpoints.

Gender as an Indicator

As another interesting facet to the study’s results, gender significantly impacted the posttest scores for both scales but appeared statistically significant only upon the Institutional Facilitation of Intercultural Competence Engagement Scale. Critical to note, gender did not provide an influencing factor on the pretest scores. This result could demonstrate that, during a student’s time in undergraduate education, gender can begin to play a more influential role in intercultural competence engagement. In looking at the difference in the mean scores, the females’ score increased more than the males’ on both

scales, while the males' mean decreased on the Individual Intercultural Competence Engagement Scale.

Higher education literature has begun to address this trend, as the finding does not appear unique to student engagement of intercultural competence. As one researcher comments:

Women tend to study abroad, volunteer in the community, and spend longer hours preparing for class, some experts have noted. Men spend more time playing video games, relaxing, and watching television. But men have more substantive engagements with their professors, are more likely to do undergraduate research, and tend to major in fields that steer them into better-paying jobs. (Sander, 2012, para. 3)

These areas of engagement reflect how gender could directly impact student engagement levels of intercultural competence. Rather than a discouragement, this finding simply demonstrates a need to provide alternative opportunities to engage male students in other manners. Additional literature has begun calling for engaging men where they have already become involved, rather than only seeing the need to push them towards increased involvement in the same manner as their female counterparts (Barone, 2006). This implication does not negate the potential for them to engage in more traditional space but does demonstrate a need to create other opportunities in which male students would likely engage in order to close the growing gender gap.

Study Abroad Not as an Indicator

After the significant literature review understanding how study abroad develops intercultural competence in student participants, the study abroad experience surprising

does not show up as an indicator in the present study. However, in spending time understanding the data and college student development, a hypothetical understanding of this anomaly may suggest that students slowly change behaviors. Therefore, while formative in and of itself, the study abroad experience may take more to change behavior patterns in significant ways that would register it as an indicator of engagement levels. The limitations of the current study and further research could prove informative in exploring this area more effectively.

Implications for Practitioners

The findings of this study prove beneficial in filling the gap in the intercultural competency literature base despite the unanticipated nature of those results. Rather, though not affirmative of the positive impact of study abroad, the findings point to the need to increase the opportunity to encourage intercultural competence engagement on home campuses. While study abroad does not provide a significant indicator of intercultural competence engagement, this finding does not mean that studying abroad did not contribute to the competency development in the student while overseas. Rather, this result simply means that the study abroad experience did not increase engagement levels in a student's life upon return to campus.

As such, practitioners should consider how to impact students in ways to engage them into activities on campus to develop intercultural competence. These results emphasize the importance of assessing students' intercultural dispositions when they come to college rather than whether they go abroad or not, giving increased opportunities to engage all students in cultivating involvement in thinking and interacting with ideas and others from different backgrounds or perspectives. The implications of the current

study also provide a greater challenge of how to increase student engagement and involvement in areas that they may naturally not tend to participate.

Of particular importance to note, both of the scales developed and utilized in this study leave room for engagement of intercultural competence to happen in the classroom and even ask questions that lend themselves naturally to that. In a liberal arts undergraduate education, the classroom provides a legitimate and potentially beneficial context for that engagement to take place as students' critical thinking and interpersonal skills develop. Especially if study abroad does not provide a predictor of increased engagement of intercultural competence once students return to their home campuses, institutions should cultivate and increase this engagement for all students in order for them to develop these competencies through both the curricular and the co-curricular.

Thus, the implications from the present study leads most specifically to ways to cultivate opportunities for student engagement of intercultural competence on their home campuses. The first, though obvious, comes as the facilitation of student interactions with diverse populations. Intercultural competence develops and improves through communication as an interpersonal competency (Deardorff, 2006). Therefore, one of the most effective ways to cultivate engagement and development remains interpersonal interactions.

As the second suggestion, practitioners should facilitate occasions for reflection and awareness of personal perspectives. In order for students to recognize the biases and cultural lenses with which they view and interact with the world, practitioners and institutions must encourage students to create space to understand themselves and their own backgrounds. This space could exist formally and informally but must allow

students to acknowledge their own attitudes, skills, and knowledge that they draw from during all intercultural interactions and scenarios.

A third and final suggestion, practitioners should integrate an intercultural pedagogy into programming as well as the formal classroom (Lee, Poch, Shaw, & Williams, 2012). The classroom provides an important place in which students can engage intercultural competency specifically through developing their knowledge and critical thinking skills. Both scales had items that addressed opportunities to engage intercultural competency in the classroom because of the value derived. Thus, in developing curriculum for programming and courses, practitioners intentionally should incorporate a pedagogy incorporating intercultural competence development.

These specific implications, though not directly derived from the data results themselves, remain important to consider because the results do point to a need for increased opportunities for student engagement in intercultural competence on their campuses and in their classrooms. Practitioners can integrate these recommendations formally and informally into both the curricular and co-curricular to facilitate opportunities that students may not naturally choose to engage with on their own. However, by practitioners providing them, students have the chance to cultivate their intercultural competence in meaningful ways.

Limitations

As a significant limitation, the present study only examined the students' engagement levels of intercultural competence and did not capture the actual level of their intercultural competency development. The study operated on the assumptions (based in student engagement and involvement theory) that the levels of engagement

should indicate development and growth. However, the value of the results would have increased if the researcher had measured the data in conjunction with the students' actual intercultural competency pretest and posttest scores to assess their actual development in this area during their undergraduate experience and not just their engagement levels. This step would have allowed the researcher to further examine the relationship between engagement and development of intercultural competence. Doing so also may have shown the greater benefits of study abroad as the literature base has developed.

The small sample size, particularly for a quantitative analysis, brought another important limitation to the study. Having a larger sample size of students who took both the pretest and posttest would have proven much more beneficial. However, the researcher decided that the value offer to the results by the pretest merited the decrease in sample size. Simply utilizing a posttest would have changed the methodology and, based on the results, may not have offered as meaningful data to analyze.

The quantitative design of the present study appears valuable in understanding the numbers as they explain the predictors of student engagement with intercultural competence. However, the data does not allow the depth that a qualitative design would offer into students' personal narratives and ability to articulate experiences they perceived as essential in their engagement and growth of intercultural competencies.

Future research.

The limitations clearly lay the foundation for the opportunities for further research. The current study developed two valid scales implementable by any institution that already facilitates the NSSE for assessment purposes. The researcher recommends the continued study of data on these scales with larger sample sizes to increase the

potential for statistical significance, as well as the testing of more factors to see how they predict and impact student engagement levels of intercultural competence. Additional research could pair more studies utilizing these scales along with a scale or measurement of intercultural competence itself. Doing so could offer practitioners more insight into best practices of increasing student engagement of and better developing intercultural competence.

Beyond these suggestions of further research, some of the value of these scales exists in the ease of using them to analyze numerous data sets because of the widespread NSSE usage. The current study not only had a small participant set but from one specific institution; therefore, future studies would add to the literature by using the present study's foundation as a model for further research at a variety of institution types and sizes. In addition to quantitative research, qualitative studies might more fully illuminate students' experiences in engaging with intercultural competence.

Conclusion

Although the results did not confirm this study's hypothesis, some valuable takeaways still exist for higher education practitioners. The development of both the Individual Intercultural Competence Engagement Scale and the Institutional Facilitation of Intercultural Competence Engagement Scale and the established reliability and validity offered an important mark of progress for research in this area. The present study not only further examined what impacts student engagement levels but also provided opportunities for more research and insight in this gap. These results and implications will continue to improve the development of best practices of how to involve students in develop intercultural competencies.

The importance of this goal does not stem from seeing intercultural competency as an end in and of itself, but rather as means and one way in which practitioners can better holistically develop students who become equipped through their education and experiences to perceive the world and recognize the part they can play in their communities and the world through their work and lives. Higher education has the unique opportunity to provide a specific time and place to engage the learning process mindfully and intentionally in this development through the environment, relationships, and experiences, as well as in the formal classroom. Palmer (1997) said,

We all know that what will transform education is not another theory or another book or another formula but a transformed way of being in the world. In the midst of the familiar trappings of education—competition, intellectual combat, obsession with a narrow range of facts, credentials—we seek a life illumined by spirit and infused with soul. (para. 1)

Higher education must provide more than facts, content, and skills as well as open up the mind and soul to view the world with a broader perspective and deeper meaning.

Practitioners and institutions alike can accomplish this endeavor in many ways, including through facilitated opportunities for student engagement of intercultural competence.

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