Intercultural Competency Development in Conjunction With a Short Term Study Away Experience: Changes in Undergraduate Students

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The purpose of this research was to examine whether undergraduate business students who participated in a short term study abroad course and intercultural competence building coursework demonstrated a significant increase in intercultural competence over those who only enrolled in the study abroad course. The 20 participants attended a small liberal arts College in Midwestern United States. The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) was administered to the participating students before and after their study away experience. The IDI (v.3) is based on the theoretical framework of the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) introduced by Milton Bennett. The DMIS is based on the assumption that intercultural competence can be strengthen through the development of intercultural knowledge and experience with people from other cultures. The IDI has been used in numerous scholarly studies and has demonstrated valid and reliable results. It is a self-administered 50-item series of statements in which participants are asked to rate the level of their agreement with statements that address their relationship to and evaluation of cultural difference. In the model, people progress in a linear developmental fashion through six stages: defense, denial, polarization, minimization, acceptance, and adaptation. This study was designed to determine if students who studied away and completed intercultural coursework (prior intercultural knowledge and an intercultural experience) would increase their level of intercultural competency more than those students who just studied away (intercultural experience only) as measured by the change in their IDI scores. The results of this small sample show that intercultural coursework in conjunction with a short term study away experience can have a positive impact on individual intercultural development.

Keywords: management, management education, study abroad, intercultural competence, cultural development

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to examine whether undergraduate business students who participated a short term study abroad course and intercultural competence building coursework demonstrated a significant increase in intercultural competence over those who only enrolled in the study abroad course. While there have

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been numerous studies that have looked at the effectiveness of one-to-two course interventions designed specifically for students who are preparing to study abroad, very few (if any) studies have looked at the impact a series of courses that students have chosen to complete has on cultural competence.

This study considers intercultural competence from a developmental perspective that emphasizes the importance of recognizing that competence increases as one is exposed to numerous competency building experiences. This process has been described in Bennett's (1986) model of intercultural sensitivity, "… as one's experience of cultural difference becomes more complex and sophisticated, one's potential competence in intercultural relations increases" (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003, as cited in Deardorff, 2009). As one continues to experience cultural differences, a greater potential to develop intercultural competence exists.

One of the integral ways that students can experience these cultural differences is through participation in a study-abroad program. Designed to immerse students in another culture, some of the potential benefits include increased knowledge and understanding of a culture outside of one's own. There have been a number of studies reporting on the benefits of study-abroad programs and their ability to increase intercultural competence (L. Engle & J. Engle, 2004) assessed language acquisition and intercultural sensitivity development in relation to a study-abroad experience. Presenting some preliminary evidences from the American University Center of Provence (AUCP)'s study abroad program, differences in development were observed based upon the length of the program. The initial results indicate that students who study for a full year make significantly more progress in their intercultural competence than those who only study abroad for one semester. Attempting to expand upon the research conducted by L. Engle and J. Engle (2004), and Medina-López-Portillo (2004) examined two different language-based programs of differing lengths: a seven-week summer program in Taxco, Mexico, and a 16-week semester program in Mexico City. The results confirm (L. Engle & J. Engle, 2004)—more development was observed in students who participated in the 16-week program in Mexico City.

Nevertheless, short-term programs can still make an impact on development. Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, and Hubbard (2006) examined the effects of a short-term study abroad program on intercultural sensitivity. Results indicate that the study abroad program had a positive impact on the overall development of cross-cultural sensitivity. Jackson (2009) examined advanced second language students from Hong Kong who took part in a short-term sojourn in England after 14 weeks' preparation. While abroad, they lived with a host family, took literary/cultural studies courses, visited cultural sites, participated in debriefing sessions, and conducted ethnographic projects. As a group, the students experienced a significant average gain in intercultural competence. Thus, even those who have a short-term experience can still improve competence.

While the duration of the program has demonstrated effects on developing intercultural competence, curricular interventions also play an important role. In examining this role, Paige, Cohen, and Shively (2004) researched the impact of a curriculum intervention on students' intercultural development, second language acquisition, and culture and language learning strategies while studying abroad. Specifically, those who were assigned to the curriculum intervention used a guidebook that was designed to prepare students take advantage of the opportunities that they would likely encounter abroad. Significant differences in individual language culture strategies were found, which may reflect the effects of the guidebook on how students understood and conceptualized their experiences.

Pederson (2009) examined the impact of curriculum and instruction on intercultural competency. Detailing a year-long study abroad program, three different conditions existed: (1) students who received an intercultural

pedagogy intervention; (2) students who did not receive the intervention; and (3) control students who studied at home. Results indicate that those students who received an intercultural pedagogy intervention experienced significant changes in intercultural competence. Similarly, Sample (2009) assessed the development of intercultural competence among a group of students who underwent an interdisciplinary approach to intercultural development to prepare for a semester-long study abroad experience. Designed to help students adapt to cultural changes before studying abroad and after they arrive back home, the results indicate students who were taking part in this approach significantly increased their intercultural competence.

Vande Berg (2009) summarized the major conclusions of a four-year study designed to measure the intercultural and second language learning of over 1,300 U.S. undergraduates enrolled in over 60 programs abroad. Specifically, this article attempts to answer the question of whether students learn more effectively when "left to their own devices" (p. 15) or whether students learn more when educators intervene. Results indicate the latter—when students are a part of a curricular intervention, they experience more gains in intercultural development.

The purpose of the present research is to examine whether students who studied abroad and participated in intercultural coursework experienced a significant increase in intercultural competence over those who only studied abroad. Given this purpose, two hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis I: Overall, there will be a significant increase in students' change scores in their individual profile as measured by the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) after a short term study abroad experience.

Hypothesis II: Students who study abroad and who enrolled in Intercultural Studies courses will demonstrate a larger change score in their individual profile as measured by the IDI than those who study abroad only.

Background and Methods

All 20 students who participated in this study completed an IDI before and after their study abroad experience. The IDI was selected because it has theoretical grounding in the Milton Bennett's development model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS) (Bennett, 1993) and demonstrated validity and reliability (Paige et al., 2004; Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003; Hammer, 2011).

Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

The DMIS (Bennett, 1993; Paige et al., 2004; Hammer, 2009, 2011) divides the experience of cultural difference into more monocultural (denial, polarization), transitional (minimization), and global/intercultural (acceptance, adaptation) mindsets. Students with a monocultural or ethnocentric mindset assume that their own culture is central to reality. It does not occur to them that other people may have different cultural frameworks. If those frameworks are recognized, they will typically judge them in light of their own limited understanding of appropriate human interaction. The transitional worldview of minimization is neither fully monocultural nor fully intercultural or ethnorelative in orientation. Students who subscribe to a minimization orientation are generally able to focus on common cultural artifacts (e.g., love of family) but are less effective at understanding important cultural differences (e.g., how love of family manifests) (Sample, 2009).

People with an intercultural/global worldview recognize that others have different cultural frameworks and accept that those cultural frameworks are equally complex and real in comparison to their own culture. An

intercultural or global mindset allows a person to develop the ability to empathize with people who have different cultural frameworks, and to act in ways appropriate to that framework, seeing distinct cultural patterns as equally plausible choices for human behavioral patterns (Bennett, 1993; Sample, 2009). In denial, people are simply unaware of cultural differences. This may be the result of isolation, occurring naturally or through deliberate avoidance of difference (Bennett, 1993). People in polarization have recognized that there are cultural differences, but other cultures are seen in fairly simple ways and not as complex as their own culture.

Students in this stage of development typically rely on stereotypical interpretations of members of other cultures. People in this stage often sense the need to uphold a hierarchy of cultures as a way of making sense of the perceived cultural difference.

In defense recognition of difference is accompanied by fear and a sense that one's own culture is threatened. From this hierarchical perspective, one's own culture is defined as right, good, and proper, and others are viewed as wrong, bad, and inappropriate. The flip side of defense is reversal, however, people in reversal have reversed the hierarchy by defining their own culture as wrong, bad, and inappropriate, and some other culture with which they are familiar as more desirable. Reversal is often believed by the people experiencing it to be quite sophisticated because of its critical gaze on the home culture, but in truth fails to move beyond the simplistic, polarized understanding of cultures and cultural differences (Sample, 2009).

The third orientation of intercultural development is minimization. Cultural differences are recognized, but deemed as simply surface' differences that do not interfere with a real understanding of human relations. Instead, those who minimize cultural differences argue that to really understand people, it is necessary to focus almost exclusively on similarities across cultures. People with a minimization orientation may consider surface cultural differences interesting, or even fun (particularly objective culture—visible aspects like food, art, music, etc.), but not truly relevant to understand other people. They may well view too much consideration of culture difference to be dangerous. They are likely to think that deeply down, everyone is pretty much like them, thus still seeing their own cultural framework as real and natural, and not recognizing the complexity and legitimacy of other cultures (Bennett, 1993; Sample, 2009).

Students, who move beyond the minimization stage of cultural differences to an acceptance of cultural difference, have moved to an intercultural, or a global mindset. This represents a fundamental shift in worldview. The DMIS model divides the position of interculturalism into three stages as well. In the first, Acceptance of difference, people understand that their own culture is one of many equally complex ways of organizing human behavior. They may prefer some sets of behavior to others, but all are seen as the legitimate. After acceptance is adaptation to cultural difference. Cognitive adaptation is the ability to see the world through the cultural framework of another or other cultures with which the person is familiar. Behavioral adaptation is the ability to (increasingly unconsciously) change one's behavior so that it is seen as normal within the resident culture (Bennett, 1993). The final stage of the DMIS is integration, in which a person has to develop a conscious identity as a person on the margins of multiple cultures, developing one's own identity through integration of aspects and values of the various cultures that they have experience. An example of an IDI profile is shown in Figure 1.
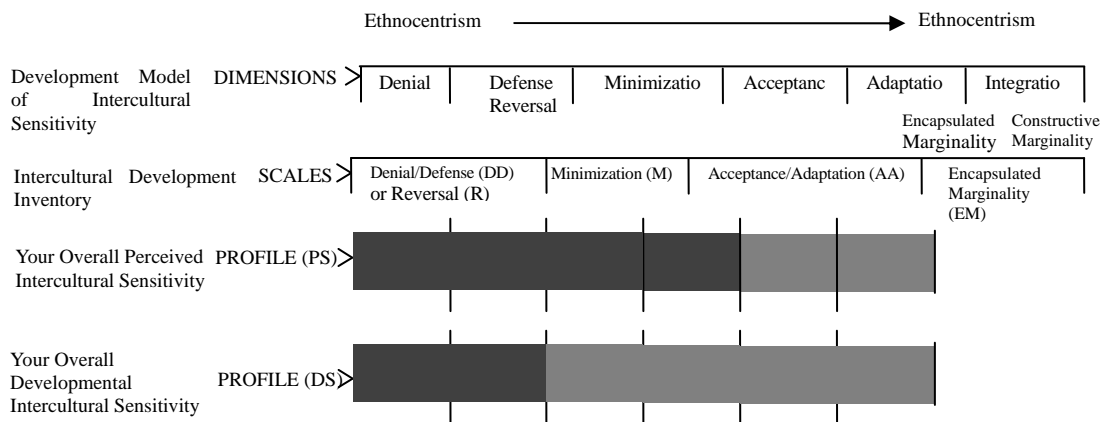
IDI PROFILE for 9385

INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Figure 1. Example IDI profile.

One of the goals of studying abroad is to increase students' intercultural competence, or the ability to adapt to cultural differences while abroad and be able to generalize those skills after they have returned home. Within a developmental model like the DMIS, this means seeing forward movement through the stages of the model toward an intercultural/global mindset. Study abroad programs can take many forms, some leading to more immersion in a host culture and some to less. Students may spend a few weeks abroad or a year. They may be in fairly contained programs in which they and other students from a home institution stay together and have faculty from their home institutions with them, or they may directly enroll in a host institution and live with a family of that culture for the duration of their time abroad. A number of studies, using a range of different measures, have attempted to discern what the impact of study abroad is on the ability of students to sense and adapt to cultural difference. Many have found changes in students' overall sensitivity to cultural difference, though the results have not been entirely consistent.

The Intercultural Development Inventory

The instrument used to measure students' levels of intercultural sensitivity in this study is the IDI. The IDI (v.3) is based on the theoretical framework of the DMIS described above, and is a self-administered 50-item inventory in which participants are asked to rate the level of their agreement with a series of statements about their relationship to and evaluation of cultural difference on a five-point Likert scale. Different sets of statements assess participants' orientation toward denial, polarization (defense and reversal measured as separate scales), minimization, acceptance, and adaptation.

The overall IDI scores range from 55-145 and follow a normal distribution with a mean of 100 centered in minimization, and a standard deviation of 15. A score below 85 indicates that a person is primarily operating in the realm of polarization; 85-114.99 represents a primary orientation in minimization, and scores of 115 and above indicate acceptance and adaptation. In this study, changes in the students overall intercultural sensitivity development score were considered.

Intercultural Coursework

A major in Intercultural Studies must complete 9.5 courses (38 semester hours) while students pursuing a minor in Intercultural Studies are required to complete five courses (20 semester hours). Two half credit courses are required, Introduction to Intercultural Studies and Intermediate Intercultural Studies, while the others are selected by the student in consultation with the Director of the Program. Some courses they may select include: Intercultural Communication, Cultural Anthropology, Race, Class and Gender, and Cultural Diversity in Organizations. Students may also apply their study away experience to their ICS Program. A course titled Intercultural Experiential must be completed by students majoring in Intercultural Studies. A short term study away course fulfills this requirement. The short term study away courses are from 10 days to four weeks in length. The IDI was administered to students in the Introduction to Intercultural studies. Students who study away complete the instrument prior to departure and again in the days following their completed study away experience.

Results

All the participants were undergraduate students who attended a small mid-western college who participated in a short term study abroad experience and completed an IDI before their experience and another one upon their return. There were three men and 17 women, 15 of whom reported that they had completed some Intercultural Coursework toward a major or minor in Intercultural Studies. The mean IDI score pre-travel was 97.52 and the mean post-travel score was 113.32. This suggests the mean score moved from the mid-stage of minimization to a very late stage, indicating development in one's intercultural sensitivity occurred. The change score of 15.80 is slightly larger than the standard deviation of 15. Table 1 shows the various categories of students.

Table 1

Comparison of Pre-post Matched IDI Developmental Scale Scores

Group	*N*	Pre-abroad (avg.)	Post-abroad (avg.)	Change	Change (%)
All	20	97.52	113.32	15.80	16.20
Study abroad only (short term)	5	86.60	91.40	4.81	5.54
ICS minor and study abroad (short term)	13	97.26	120.49	23.23	23.88
ICS major and study abroad (short term)	2	126.50	121.50	-5	-3.95
Study abroad only (short term)	5	86.60	91.40	4.81	5.54

It is interesting to note that two students who majored in ICS scored lower on the IDI upon their return from their study away experience while the students who earned a minor in ICS scored a significant increase in intercultural sensitivity as measured by the IDI.

Conclusions and Limitations

Overall, on average, the 20 students who participated in this study demonstrated an increase in their intercultural sensitivity scores. The movement within the minimization stage suggests the students' exposure to people from another culture, even for a short period of time, helped them recognize and appreciate cultural differences in behavior and values. To resolve issues holding people in the minimization stage, one needs to have obtained a deeper understanding of one's own culture and have an increased understanding of cultural

frameworks for making sense of cultural differences (Hammer, 2009).

The two required Intercultural Courses—Introduction to Intercultural Studies and Intermediate Intercultural Studies, concentrate on developing students' cultural self-awareness and understanding various theories such as Critical Race Theory (Harris, 1995) and Hall and Hofstede's value dimensions (Hall, 2001; Hofstede, 2001). This knowledge provides a foundation for a richer cultural emersion experience as students' are better prepared for intercultural interactions. As noted, students who took ICS courses started off with higher intercultural development scores (97.26 versus 86.60). This difference can be attributed to knowledge obtained prior to departure and their natural greater interest in cultural difference. In addition, these students measured higher change scores (23.23 versus 4.81) suggesting they also obtained a greater appreciation for cultural difference as compared to students with no intercultural coursework.

An unexpected exception is noted in the scores of the two students who majored in Intercultural Studies and a short term study away experience. Their intercultural sensitivity scores declined by 5 (-3.95%) though their scores were the highest pre-scores of the 20 student participants.

Clearly, the small sample size limits the ability to extrapolate these findings to a larger group; however, this study does offer additional evidence of the importance of intercultural competence building knowledge in conjunction with an intercultural study away experience in order to maximize learning. According to McTighe-Musil (2006), "The Association of American Colleges and Universities Greater Expectations Project reported that global knowledge and engagement, along with intercultural knowledge and competence, has been identified as essential learning outcomes for all fields of concentration and for all majors" (p. 1). In addition, Cassiday (2005) found that effective leaders in his/her study were ones who demonstrated intercultural competence. It seems that business students will be at a disadvantage in today's global marketplace if they fail to develop intercultural cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills (Deardorff, 2009).

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