

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Study Abroad Participation and University Students' Intercultural Sensitivity

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American institutions of higher learning have long recognized study abroad as an educational practice which enhances and deepens the integrative educational experience of students. The purpose of this study was to identify the relationship between College of Education students' participation in a short-term, faculty led, study abroad program and their intercultural sensitivity. A total of 24 students (21% return rate) responded to an online survey (Intercultural Development Inventory v.3, IDI; Hammer and Bennett, 2010) to measure intercultural sensitivity. The IDI demographic questionnaire, scores and qualitative responses were used for both the analyses and to identify themes from students' recollections of their intercultural experiences. The research established baseline intercultural sensitivity scores, demographic characteristics, and students' perception of their intercultural sensitivity. The mean scores for students who participated in a study abroad program was higher than students who did not participate in study abroad programs.

Keywords: education students, study abroad, intercultural sensitivity

The number of students participating in higher education, short-term, faculty led, study abroad programs continues to escalate steadily (IIE, 2015). Many students cite their study abroad experience as being one of the most significant events of their university career. Students return to their home campuses with stories of new cultures, people, and challenges, which increased their awareness of a world that may be in contrast with their own. The familiar bonds of friendship and family that students experience during their time abroad, reinforce the underlying connections that unify humanity. "Students are influenced by their study abroad experience and, provided that it is successful and rewarding, they look for ways to incorporate those newly acquired knowledge, concepts, and ideas into their academic, professional and personal lives" (Medina-López-Portillo, 2004, p.59).

Promoting and developing intercultural sensitivity among the student body has become a key goal in higher education (Lewin, 2009). Demonstrating the requisite effects participation in study abroad has on student intercultural sensitivity is a complex enterprise. This task is further complicated due to the increasing variety of study abroad programs available to students through colleges, universities, and non-university sponsored opportunities such as internships, not-for-credit course work, church led mission trips, and volunteer activities. Establishing a baseline of intercultural sensitivity scores of education students who have participated in faculty led, short-term, study abroad programs may yield information for education departments, curriculum

designers, international program administrators, faculty, the student body, and the field of study abroad in general.

Several of the current intercultural competence programs available to undergraduate students at American educational institutions were developed as the result of administrative and educational campus leaders challenge to meet global competence goals rather than through a measured, well researched process (Hunter, White, & Godbey, 2006, p. 271). Hayward and ACE (2000) published *Internationalization of U.S. Higher Education* asserting “international education at U.S. colleges and universities is a poorly documented phenomena” (p. 4). Although personal growth and life changing experiences may be remembered for decades, education professionals need research-based evidence of impact to support the growth of study abroad programs. Understanding how students’ study abroad experiences effect their intercultural sensitivity is important for university administrators to consider while planning study abroad programs and determining the support students will need to make significant individual gains in global competence (Goodwin & Nacht, 1988).

THE INDERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT CONTINUUM THEORY

The research conducted in this study was based on Hammer’s theoretical framework, the *Intercultural Development Continuum* (IDC; Hammer, 2011, 2015). The IDC is a theoretical model of intercultural competence in which an individual’s orientation result, determined by the scores they receive on the *Intercultural Development Inventory* (IDI), are arrayed on the continuum from a monocultural mindset to an intercultural mindset. The IDC describes an individual’s knowledge, attitude, and skill sets in relation to cultural differences and commonalities. The six orientations on the IDC are Denial, Defense, Reversal, Minimization, Acceptance, and Adaptation (Table 1).

The IDC is grounded in and is a revised and updated version of Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS; 1986, 1993). The DMIS (Bennett, 1986, 1993) and the IDC (Hammer, 2011, 2012, 2013) were used to create the third version of the IDI. Perceived Orientation (PO) reflects which orientation (Denial, Defense, Reversal, Minimization, Acceptance, and Adaptation) an individual respondent *places themselves* on the IDC. The Developmental Orientation (DO) score indicates which orientation (Denial, Defense, Reversal, Minimization, Acceptance, and Adaptation) an individual *is located* on the IDC according the IDI assessment. The DO is the perspective an individual is most likely to use in intercultural situations. The Orientation Gap (OG) is the difference, in IDI scores, between and individual’s PO and their DO. An OG of seven points or more shows a meaningful difference between the PO and the DO (Hammer, 2017).

TABLE 1
IDC Orientation Definitions as Developed by Hammer (2009, 2011)

Orientation	Description
Denial	An orientation that likely recognizes more observable cultural differences (e.g., food), but may not notice deeper cultural differences (e.g., conflict resolution styles) and may avoid or withdraw from cultural differences.
Polarization	A judgmental orientation that views cultural differences in terms of “us” and “them”. This can take the form of Defense or Reversal.
Defense	Uncritical views toward one’s own cultural values and practices, and an overly critical view toward other cultural values and practices.
Reversal	An overly critical orientation toward one’s own cultural values and practices, and an uncritical view toward other cultural values and practices.
Minimization	An orientation that highlights cultural commonality and universal values and principles that may also mask the deeper recognition and appreciation of cultural differences.
Acceptance	An orientation that recognizes and appreciates patterns of cultural difference and commonality in one’s own and other cultures.
Adaptation	An orientation that is capable of shifting cultural perspectives and changing behavior in culturally appropriate and authentic ways.

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In a College of Education program, it is essential for leadership to consider the benefits of implementing a system that measures the intercultural development of students resulting from their participation in a short-term, faculty led, study abroad program. Although there is empirical evidence on the effects short-term, faculty led, study abroad programs have on undergraduate students’ intercultural sensitivity, to date there has not been a study focusing on the combined population of graduate and undergraduate education students who participated in short-term, faculty led, study abroad programs and their intercultural sensitivity using a similar population of students for comparison. Additionally, there has not been research examining students’ intercultural sensitivity conducted at this specific large, urban, branch, university in the Southeast.

1. Is there a difference between the students who participated in short-term, faculty led, study abroad programs and those who did not participate in study abroad programs on their Perceived Orientation scores, Developmental Orientation scores and their Orientation Gap scores?

2. Is there a difference between the students who participated in the short-term, faculty led, study abroad programs and those who did not participate in the study abroad programs in their subscale orientation; Denial, Defense, Reversal, Minimization, Acceptance, Adaptation, location on the Intercultural Development Continuum?
3. How do the intercultural experiences recollected by the participants, in their written responses, reflect their orientation on the Intercultural Development Continuum?

METHOD

Study Design

A mixed methods design was selected because it was not possible to randomly assign students to an experimental group (study abroad) or a comparison group. Furthermore, the research was conducted after the students participated in the short-term, faculty led, study abroad course. While the ability to control the assignment of students to a study abroad program was not possible, the study did allow for the identification of a sample of education students that was similar in composition to the group of study abroad students which participated in the research. This was accomplished by working with the instructors of the study abroad course to select classes they were teaching, which did not participate in a study abroad program, and were similar to the representative sample of the study abroad classes.

Sample and Participants

The study took place at a large, urban, branch campus of a university in the Southeast (the University) with an enrollment of 23,404 undergraduates and 5,317 graduate students for the 2016-2017 school year. The College of Education had a total enrollment of 1,066 undergraduate students in nine majors and 603 undergraduate students in education minors. The gender ratio of the University's total student population, undergraduate and graduate students, was 51 % male and 49 % female. This is in stark contrast to the gender ratio of the College of Education undergraduate population which was approximately 8.5 % male and 91.5 % female. The graduate student gender ratio was approximately 29 % male and 71 % female.

The study's sample was representative of the population of the College of Education. The sample ($N = 82$) in the study were College of Education graduate and undergraduate students, who took part in short-term, faculty led, study abroad programs during 2016 and students who were enrolled in College of Education courses during the Fall of 2017 and did not participate in College of Education, short-term, faculty led, study abroad programs.

The initial sample ($N = 82$) of students were contacted through University email by the researcher and invited to participate in the study. Three reminder emails were sent to the 82 students and all students were offered a \$5 gift card for their participation. The survey was voluntary, confidential, and participants were able to end their participation in the research at any time without penalty. Of the 82 students who were invited to participate in the research 24 students chose to participate by taking the online IDI. Twenty of the respondents were graduate students in the College of Education; six participated in the College of Education short-term, faculty led, study abroad program to China and South Korea during the summer of 2016 and 14 were enrolled in a

graduate level College of Education course during the fall of 2017. There were four responses from undergraduate students; two participated in the College of Education short-term, faculty led, study abroad program to Western Europe during the fall of 2016 and two were enrolled in an undergraduate College of Education course during the fall of 2017.

Instrument

This study's quantitative and qualitative findings relied on the statistically valid and reliable *Intercultural Development Inventory v.3* (IDI; Hammer, 2012) to measure intercultural sensitivity. The research participants were asked to complete the third educational version of the *Intercultural Development Inventory v.3* (IDI), a proprietary instrument developed by Hammer (2009). The IDI delivers an empirical measure of a person's orientation and response to differences in culture as defined by the IDC. The IDI is the only theory-based instrument which assesses intercultural competence, measures an individual's or group's mindset, and provides detailed insight into how the survey respondent comprehends and responds to cultural differences.

The IDI v.3 is an online, self-administered, questionnaire consisting of 50 Likert scale survey questions, a demographic questionnaire created by the developer of the IDI, and a qualitative section comprised of five open-ended, contexting questions which asks participants to recall and explain their intercultural experiences. The individual and group IDI profile reports supplied the researcher with quantifiable information. The IDI contexting questions give study participants the opportunity to relate their intercultural experiences and allow cultural grounding for the IDI scores in relation to the respondent's actual experiences. These open-ended, personal responses enable the researcher to gain insight into the student's perception of their intercultural sensitivity (Hammer, 2011). According to the literature, the contexting questions allow respondents to frame their intercultural experiences in terms of "their cross-cultural goals, the challenges they face navigating cultural differences, critical (intercultural) incidents they encounter around cultural differences during their study abroad sojourn, and ways they navigate those cultural differences" (Hammer, 2012, p. 117). These open-ended questions permit the incorporation of both quantitative and qualitative information regarding how the participants respond in their daily interactions with cultural differences and commonalities (Hammer, 2012).

Data Analysis

SPSS was used to evaluate the descriptive information, screen the data, and conduct statistical analysis. Research questions one and two utilized independent *t*-tests and Hedge's *d*. However, the alpha level .05 was not adjusted due to the small sample size and the resulting decrease in statistical power. The independent variable in question one was participation in a short-term, faculty led, study abroad program and the dependent variable was intercultural sensitivity as demonstrated by the DO, PO and the OG scores. Research question two used participation in a short-term, faculty led, study abroad program as the independent variable and sub-scale orientation on the IDC was the dependent variable.

Research question three focused on the qualitative information respondents provided recalling their intercultural experiences in relation to their perceived location on the IDC. An

inductive approach was used to determine the frequently occurring themes that emerged from the followed by open coding which was used to analyze the qualitative data.

RESULTS

The analysis conducted for question one indicated that there were statistically significant differences in PO and DO scores between College of Education students who participated in short-term, faculty led, study abroad programs and College of Education students who did not participate in short-term, faculty led, study abroad programs. The findings for question two showed that students who participated in the study abroad programs had higher subscale orientations. However, due to the small sample size and low statistical power, no differences were detected in the participants' subscale orientation on the IDC.

The findings for question three showed that although the responses to the open-ended question were quite brief, themes did emerge through open coding which were similar across the respondents who chose to answer the questions. The established themes were compared to the IDC orientations allowing the IDI scores to be compared with the major codes. Study participants who responded thoughtfully to the open-ended questions perceived themselves to be further along the IDC than their DO score indicated. The researcher was unable to detect any demographic similarities among the students who perceived themselves to be further along the continuum than their IDI score indicated.

It was determined that in future studies additional demographic data would provide the researcher with more in-depth information in determining variables which play a role in intercultural sensitivity, for example; race, year in their degree program, GPA, participation in extra-curricular activities, (especially those with an international component), specific international travel locations and durations, travel that participants may have undertaken to culturally different parts of the United States, participation in a religious organization, socio-economic standing, source of funding for students who participated in study abroad and the reasons why they had or not participated in a study abroad course.

Limitations

The predominate limitation of the study was the limited participation rate. For future research a larger and more representative sample of the College of Education is needed. The cost of study abroad does not allow all students to participate in study abroad programs which may have influenced the survey responses. Approximately 40 % of the students on the selected Southeastern college campus are low income. This may have caused the student sample not to be representative of the College of Education population. The time required for students to participate in study abroad often does not easily pair with the required course curriculum. Therefore, the percentage of students who can engage in study abroad programs may be diminished. Students who were enrolled in the study abroad programs may have been at different levels of intercultural sensitivity prior to their participation in the study abroad course. As often is the case regarding self-administered, self-reported surveys, there are respondent concerns, such as image management, honesty, and introspective ability which pose potential validity issues. A final limiting factor was the amount of time between the students' participation in the study abroad program and when they

completed the IDI. The time factor involved dictates that caution be used in applying the findings more broadly or to the other study abroad program research.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the intercultural sensitivity of education students who participated in short-term, faculty led, study abroad programs compared with a control group of graduate and undergraduate education students who did not participate in short-term, faculty led, study abroad programs. The data collected, and the resulting findings, may prove of interest to the university where the research was conducted and individuals who are engaged in College of Education study abroad programs.

The research was undertaken in the hope of positively influencing increased assessment of intercultural sensitivity of College of Education students, assisting faculty and administration in including more wide-ranging research-based efforts to incorporate intercultural experiences, both in and out of the classroom, and aiding in the development of students' intercultural sensitivity. In reviewing the findings which resulted from this study, the ground work has been laid for more research which may expand and further develop the picture of this population's intercultural development along the continuum. This research may also support the formulation of department and campus plans for enhancing all students' access to intercultural experiences. The research showed that education students tend to have a developmental orientation in the high monocultural orientations of the IDC while their perceived orientation is predominantly intercultural. The use of pre- and post-test assessment would allow the researcher to determine the relationship between the PO and DO scores. One topic of future interest would be to determine if students continue to progress on the IDC toward an intercultural orientation with on campus interventions, and whether the interventions come through course curriculum or non-curricular activities. Although this study noted a significant finding, the small sample size greatly limits the conclusions of the research. A larger sample would allow stronger, more definitive conclusions to be drawn from the research.

While individual faculty members may have course goals and requirements for the students in their study abroad classes, from the researcher's perspective, it is important for departments, international program coordinators and university administration to have a comprehensive intercultural assessment plan. Without a valid assessment plan in place, students are unable to comprehend what they can hope to gain from their international educational course. With an appropriate assessment plan in place students may have realistic expectations of the benefits studying abroad provides them in the market place, developing their intercultural competency, and enhancing their educational competencies. By incorporating international competency in the university's or department's goals, a plan could be put in place to select an assessment instrument which would ensure that the university's or department's global competency objectives and internationalization efforts are able to be reviewed, further developed, and aid in increasing students' intercultural competence.

In the poem *The English Flag*, written by Rudyard Kipling in 1891, he lyrically expressed "Winds of the World, give answer! They are whimpering to and fro -And what should they know of England who only England know" (Kipling, 2005). Kipling's prose serves to emphasize the significance of developing cultural competence and an awareness of the perspective others may have. The intent of this study was to provide informative data on the intercultural sensitivity demonstrated by College of Education students who participated in short-term, faculty led, study

abroad programs. This research was conducted to add to the body of literature on intercultural competence and assist the following: post-secondary leadership, college and university study abroad directors, university and college administration, faculty, prospective study abroad students and their families, and those who are interested in developing intercultural sensitivity.

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