

IMPACT OF STUDY ABROAD ON STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS: ADAPTABILITY AND SENSITIVITY

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Identification of the Problem

More and more colleges and universities are looking at study abroad in new ways.

1. Positive aspects of international education. Hopkins says that today, “in their goals and mission statements, most colleges and universities include some version of ‘knowledge of other cultures’ as a component of a liberal education” (Liberal Education, 1999, p. 36).
2. Other hand -- many are still critical of such programs and see them on the periphery of the educational experience. “Today's students and their parents are more inclined than ever to hold colleges and universities to account for the quality of the educational opportunities they provide--educational consumers want assurances that institutions will provide the knowledge, skills and awareness that will contribute directly to success after graduation” (Vande Berg, International Educator, 2001, p. 31).

I felt it was important to conduct a study of outcomes assessment

1. Reinforce the anecdotal evidence many of us have about the value of international education
2. Offer concrete evidence of the values and outcome of study abroad experiences to give it the credence afforded to other educational programs.

To do this, I felt that measuring outcomes of study abroad should be conducted in light of the skills that are needed for success in today's world.

So, what are the skills need for success in today's world? They differ from those needed even fifteen years ago.

1. An increasing internationalization of campuses, companies, and communities.
2. Young people today are also a part of an increasingly educated population.

“Overall, immediate college enrollment rates of high school completers increased from 49 to 66 percent between 1972 and 1998 (NCES, 2000).

3. Capricious job market. College graduates today can be expected to change careers—not jobs—six times in their life, and will retire from jobs for which do not even presently exist. In fact, rather than looking for specific training in a single field, many employers today are looking for communication skills as their top priority in employees (Job Outlook, 2000, p.6).

Consequently, college students today need an education that provides them with skills—such as communication skills—that will allow them to compete in a global market with an increasingly educated population.

My question is whether a study abroad experience helps students acquire such skills. Do study abroad experiences help students develop communication skills needed to work in a global community? Do study abroad experiences distinguish graduates from the general educated population regarding intercultural communication skills?

Typically, the skills one recognizes as a result of study abroad are:

- increased foreign language skills
- knowledge of a (single) new culture

- perhaps knowledge of a specific topic better learned in a different environment.

I believed, though, that in addition to developing skills which are directly related to one specific other culture, that participants develop certain personal skills such as sensitivity, perseverance, and adaptability that transcend success in a single culture to success in a variety of intercultural situations. These skill sets can be identified as intercultural communication skills, or the ability to effectively interact with people of different cultures.

I felt that conducting research on students' development or improvement of intercultural communication skills due to studying abroad can advance the international experience from being one of value only for individuals interacting with one specific foreign culture to being of value to all individuals of today's multicultural world.

Research Focus

Defining this study:

Study abroad experience -- a semester-long (four month) stay in a foreign country within the context of a university or academic setting.

No qualifications were made as to the housing situation, host-country language, course instruction language, or degree of integration with host-country nationals. As Hopkins stated, "study-abroad programs take many forms, but all share the characteristic that, by their very nature, they provide students with a healthy dose of experiential learning. Immersing oneself in another culture provides new opportunities for learning-by-doing, virtually twenty-four hours a day" (1999, p. 36). While the study abroad

programs may differ in varying degrees of immersion, it is presumed that spending four months abroad will provide ample opportunity for participants to interact with people of the local culture.

Identifying Intercultural Communication Skills

In reviewing the research on intercultural communication skills and competency, several key elements recur. Flexibility and open-mindedness is one notable trait that many theorists include in their lists. It was called cognitive flexibility, open-mindedness to new ideas, openness to change, high tolerance of ambiguity, and the multicultural man in constant personal transition by different researchers, but the theme of flexibility and open-mindedness remained.

A second characteristic often noted is cultural empathy. Again, different names by different theorists were non-judgmental perceptiveness, the mediating man believing in the community of mankind, believing in the value of all men, having intuition and sensitivity toward the other, intercultural empathy, the ability to respectfully observe and react to the other's communication process through verbal and non-verbal sensitivity. This can be summed up as perceptual acuity, or ability to perceive and interpret the other's actions through a broad cultural lens.

Personal strength and stability is mentioned in different forms as another important trait for successful intercultural communicators. It was described as personal stability, the multicultural person who is grounded in his or her own cultural reality, a high degree of integration, personality strength, positive self-esteem, an internal locus of control, or inner-directed drives and motivations, but the ideas can be expressed as personal autonomy.

Finally, resourcefulness and ability to deal with stress recur throughout intercultural communication competency research. Described as the ability to create a new set of social rewards to sustain one's behavior, problem-solving abilities, or the ability to manage psychological stress, this trait can be called emotional resilience, and means the ability to face failures, confusions, and misunderstandings and to continue working towards positive interactions.

Summary: I came to two definitions which I felt summarized much of the findings of previous researchers.

Kim (1991) submits the hypothesis that intercultural communication competency results from adaptability, or "the individual's capacity to suspend or modify some of the old cultural ways, to learn and accommodate some of the new cultural ways, and to creatively find ways to manage the dynamics of cultural difference/unfamiliarity, intergroup posture, and the accompanying stress" (1991, p. 268).

Similarly, Ting-Toomey's definition of transcultural competence (TCC) is an effective summary including two essentials to effective intercultural interactions —adaptability and sensitivity. Ting-Toomey explains that TCC is a process whereby communicators learn to "mutually adapt to each other's behaviors appropriately and flexibly" by respectful observing and reacting to other's communication process (1999, p. 261).

So,

Adaptability and Sensitivity = the basis of intercultural communication skills.

To measure: looked for instruments measuring adaptability and sensitivity.

The Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI) and

The Global Competency and Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI)

The Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI) is a “training instrument designed to provide information to an individual about his or her potential for cross-cultural effectiveness” (Kelley & Meyers, 1995, p. 1). The CCAI is intended to be used as a part of cross-cultural training sessions to help individuals identify their strengths and weaknesses for cross-cultural effectiveness and adaptability. Kelley and Meyers presume that there are four skill areas that predict success in cross-cultural adaptability—and, following Kim’s research, intercultural communication—and further, that these are skills which can be identified and improved through training or cross-cultural interaction.

The CCAI takes a culture-general approach, addressing the universal aspects of culture shock and cultural adjustment. The CCAI covers four dimensions: emotional resilience, flexibility and openness, perceptual acuity, and personal autonomy – the same four elements which were identified earlier by a multitude of researchers.

To restate, the emotionally resilient person is resourceful and able to deal with stressful feelings in a constructive way, can cope with ambiguity and bounce back from emotional setbacks. Flexibility and openness “are characterized by accepting other ways of doing things, a lack of rigidity, and an ethnorelative perspective” (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994, p. 90). People with these skills enjoy interacting with people who think differently from themselves and spending time in new and unfamiliar surroundings. Perceptual

acuity “refers to the degree of sensitivity individuals have in terms of verbal and nonverbal messages, as well as to interpersonal relations in general” (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994, p. 90). People with perceptual acuity are sensitive to others, and “are attentive to verbal and non-verbal behavior, to the context of communication, and to interpersonal relations” (Kelley & Meyers, 1995, p. 15). Personal autonomy refers to individuals’ abilities to maintain their personal beliefs and values when challenged in a new culture. People with personal autonomy have a strong sense of self, and do not need to rely on cues from their surroundings to make decisions or form their identity.

The second instrument, the Global Competency and Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI), was designed by Olson and Kroeger to measure the global competencies and intercultural sensitivity of individuals and see how that related to individuals’ effectiveness and experience abroad. The components they sought to measure regarding global competency included substantive knowledge (knowledge of cultures, languages, world issues, etc.), perceptual understanding (open-mindedness, flexibility, resistance to stereotyping), and intercultural communication (skills such as adaptability, empathy, and cultural mediation) (Olson & Kroeger, 2001, p. 117).

The questions they developed regarding substantive knowledge and perceptual understanding were similar to questions which were already being asked in the CCAI; however, the questions regarding intercultural communication had some unique aspects and I thought they would be important to this study. These questions draw upon the skills needed to engage effectively with others – including adaptability, empathy, cross-cultural awareness, intercultural relations, and cultural mediation, all topics previously

mentioned throughout intercultural communication research. These questions – intercultural awareness or ICA – go to the heart of intercultural communication, asking individuals to rate themselves on such things as, “I can act as a cultural mediator and serve as a bridge between people of different cultures,” and “I feel self-confident and comfortable socializing with people from other cultures” (2001, p. 131).

The ISI, developed by Olson and Kroeger’s, stemmed from Milton Bennett’s work called the Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). DMIS delineates the successive stages of cultural sensitivity and understanding through which an individual progresses, each associated with particular attitudes and behaviors. The first three are ethnocentric stages – denial, defense, and minimization, states in which the individual sees his own culture as central and measures all other cultures against his own, usually finding them to be lacking substance or significance. In the next three, ethnorelative stages of acceptance, adaptation, and integration, individuals acknowledge cultural differences and realize that one’s own culture is one of many equally valid worldviews (Greenholtz, 2000, p. 413).

DMIS can be used to identify at which stage an individual is in terms of cultural sensitivity, thereby predicting attitudes and behaviors common to people of that cognitive stage. Olson and Kroeger designed some 30 questions based on the statements describing each of the six DMIS stages, as well as ten questions related to intercultural communication awareness in particular. Their Intercultural Sensitivity Index, or ISI, can be used to identify at what DMIS stage an individual is, thereby predicting attitudes and behaviors common to people of that cognitive stage.

Research Questions

Question 1: whether students who study abroad will exhibit a greater change or development in intercultural communication skills than students who stay on campus. Intercultural communication skills will be viewed in terms of the seven aspects of the two indices: Emotional Resilience (ER), Flexibility and Openness (FO), Perceptual Acuity (PAC), and Personal Autonomy (PA) for the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI), and Ethnocentrism, Ethnorelativism, and Intercultural Communication Awareness (ICA) for the Intercultural Sensitivity Index (ISI).

Question 2: This study will also consider other factors which may have an impact on intercultural communication skills: gender, age, academic level, major, religion, hometown, and previous intercultural exposure through foreign language study, international travel, friendship with individuals of different cultures, and coursework in cultural or international studies. Thus, the second research question will explore other possible predictors of a change in intercultural communication skills.

Question 3: The question of whether students who study abroad will exhibit greater changes in intercultural communication skills than students who do not study abroad must next be explored in the context of these other possible predictors for change in skills. Thus, the third research question, then, will consider all independent variables – location (abroad or on campus), gender, age, major, academic level, hometown, and previous intercultural exposure – and determine which had the greatest impact on change in intercultural communication skills.

Question 4: Because studying abroad is an activity for which students themselves select to participate, one might anticipate that they have demonstrated an interest in learning about other cultures and will already have a high degree of adaptability, sensitivity, and intercultural communication awareness in comparison to their peers who do not choose to study abroad. In fact, previous research seems to indicate that they will. If the study abroad students do in fact have higher scores on the pretest of intercultural communication skills, then they may have less room to show increase or development, which could affect the preliminary research questions. Therefore, a final research question is posed, asking whether students who choose to study abroad have a higher level of intercultural communication skills, even before their semester abroad, than students who do not choose to study abroad.

The Design

Change or development means pretest and posttest

The change or development in this study is assessed by asking students to complete a pretest at the beginning of the semester, before going abroad, and a posttest at the end of their semester abroad, and then measuring the change, if any, between the two tests.

Test group / control group

In order to determine if the measured change was indeed due to the study abroad experience and not to the natural maturation and the exposure to new people and ideas that occur during a typical college semester, a control group of students who

stayed on campus also needed to be measured at the beginning and end of the semester. As such, two groups of students were compiled: an “abroad” group and a “campus” group.

Time frame: Fall 2001 semester, pretest and posttest, same survey

The survey: CCAI, ISI, demographic questions

Demographic questions addressed students’ background (age, gender, ethnicity, major, and class level) as well as the students’ previous exposure to other cultures (size of hometown and other places where resided, previous travel, number of friends of different ethnic groups, attendance at different religious services, attendance at diversity events such as ethnic celebrations, culturally different museum exhibitions, foreign language films, etc., and previous language / cultural studies).

The pretest survey = fifteen multiple-choice questions (some requiring explanation) and eighty questions on a six-point Likert scale.

The posttest survey was exactly the same as the pretest survey, except that the demographic questions were omitted, and the additional questions were limited to inquire about exposure to different cultures during the previous semester only.

The eighty questions measure seven basic skills and mental states related to intercultural communication skills: The four aspects of the CCAI—Emotional Resilience (ER), Flexibility and Openness (FO), Perceptual Acuity (PAC), and Personal Autonomy (PA), as well as the three aspects of the ISI—Ethnocentrism, Ethnorelativism, and Intercultural

Communication Awareness (ICA). Seven to fifteen questions were asked on each of the dimensions, such as:

ER: When I am working with people of a different cultural background, it is important for me to receive their approval.

FO: If I had to adapt to a slower pace of life, I would become impatient.

PAC: I pay attention to how people's cultural differences affect their perceptions of me.

PA: I feel free to maintain my personal values, even among those who do not share them.

Ethnocentrism: I do not really notice cultural differences.

Ethnorelativism: I am able to analyze and interpret events from one or more chosen cultural perspectives.

IC Awareness: I can act as a cultural mediator and serve as a bridge between people of different cultures.

Sample Population and Data Collection

Sample groups:

The abroad group = the fall 2001 study abroad students at Texas Christian University.

This group included students studying in Australia, Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, Russia, Spain, and the U.K. (44 students)

The campus group = two classes visited, a general studies business course and an English course, both of which contained a majority of sophomores and juniors (similar to the study abroad group) with a range of majors and backgrounds. (48)

Distribution:

Pretest, Abroad: during the on-site orientation the first or second day in country (by the TCU on-site director), or via mail with the pre-departure packet from the International Education Office at TCU, and, whenever possible.

Pretest surveys, campus students -- two class visits at the beginning of the semester.

Format:

Consent form and survey

Numbering

Redistributed in same fashion

I initially had pretest groups of 36 each, and of those I had 27 posttests returned from the abroad, and 25 posttests returned from the campus group.

For comparative purposes, the demographic information was reviewed for the two sample groups. The demographic data was reduced to the two to three predominant answers for each question.

Sample population was not truly random, but

Do represent a wide range of backgrounds, with two exceptions.

- Majority of the communication majors in the research group were abroad (25 abroad compared to 9 on campus); majority of the business majors were on campus (16 on campus compared to 2 abroad).
- More females in the study abroad group (23 abroad compared to 14 on campus) and many more males in the on campus group (11 on campus compared to 4 abroad).

The students' intercultural exposure was quantified by totaling:

- number of close friends of another culture
- romantic relationships with someone of another culture
- different languages studied
- cultural classes taken
- religious services other than their own attended
- frequency of attendance at cultural and diversity events
- number and length of trips outside the U.S.

The range of international exposure is shown in table 1.

Results show that prior to the fall semester, the two groups had a very similar range of intercultural experiences, but that during the fall semester, the students abroad had many more intercultural experiences.

Next, data from the pre and posttests of all fifty-two students were input by the aspect measured (ER, FO, PAC, PA, Ethnocentrism – called NEG, Ethnorelativism – called POS, and ICA) and totaled by test (CCAI and ISI).

Figured change by individual from the pretest to the posttest.

Thus, for each individual, there was an ER difference, FO difference, PAC difference, PA difference, CCAI difference, Ethnocentrism difference, Ethnorelativism difference, ICA difference, ISI difference, and Total Intercultural Communication Skills difference.

Total Adaptability (CCAI) = sum of totals of ER, FO, PAC, and PA.

Total Sensitivity (ISI) = sum of totals of Ethnocentrism, Ethnorelativism, and ICA.

Total Score = sum of Total Adaptability and Total Sensitivity. Results in table 2.

Test 1: MANOVA to investigate how each of the independent variables – location (abroad or on campus), gender, age, academic level, major, religion, hometown, and previous intercultural exposure through foreign language study, international travel, friendship with individuals of different cultures, and coursework in cultural or international studies – affected a change in intercultural communication skills over students who study on campus.

Among the four CCAI dimensions, the only significant results were in ER and PAC. In terms of changes in Emotional Resilience, it is not unexpected that students who study abroad encounter many more situations where they are tested, disappointed, and discouraged, and learn to develop abilities to bounce back from emotional setbacks. In terms of Perceptual Acuity, it seems possible that students who spend a significant amount of time living in another culture will develop an ability to be more understanding, sensitive, and willing and able to see situations through another's cultural viewpoint.

Among the three ISI dimensions, two showed significant differences – Ethnorelativism and ICA). In terms of Ethnorelativism, the study abroad students reported a much higher average increase than the students on campus (who, in fact, showed an average decrease in these skills). With an r-squared of 0.27, a significance of 0.01, this is one of the strongest aspects of the change in intercultural communication skills of study abroad students. Other predictors of ethnorelativism were major and gender. Communication majors were found to have greater increases in ethnorelativism than business majors, and females reported greater increases than males.

Findings for Intercultural Communication Awareness revealed that the study abroad students averaged a greater increase than the campus students. With an r-squared of 0.38 and a significance of 0.01, this is the most significant finding of this study. It was anticipated that students living abroad would experience intercultural communication situations which would increase awareness of the impact that culture has on communication. It may be that the students who studied abroad had more exposure to the type of situations which would bring about an increase in intercultural communication awareness. Additionally, communication majors reported higher changes in ICA than the business majors. It seems likely that communication majors, either through their own interests or through coursework, have also learned about the impact of culture on communication. Perhaps the traits that draw them to be communication majors also draw them to continually improve their own communication skills.

Testing both instruments together, change in CCAI by location and change in ISI by location had significant findings, with the students who studied abroad reporting greater increases in both CCAI and ISI scores than those on campus. Major was also found to be a predictor of change in ISI, with communication majors reporting larger increases in ISI scores than the business majors.

Question three explored whether students who study abroad will exhibit greater changes in intercultural communication skills than students who do not study abroad in the context of these other possible predictors for change in skills. A stepwise multiple regression was run on each of the ten dependent variables (difference in pre and posttest scores of ER, FO, PAC, PA, Total CCAI, Ethnocentrism, Ethnorelatism, ICA, Total ISI, and Total IC) in relation to the independent demographic variables (location, academic

level, major, age, gender, ethnicity, size of hometown, exposure to cultures during lifetime, exposure to cultures during the fall 2001 semester). Results in table 3 show significant effects of location on change in ER, PAC, Ethnorelativism, ICA, ISI, and total scores, with students who studied abroad reporting higher increases than students who stayed on campus.

For Flexibility and Openness (FO), location had no effect on a change in score but students' major was a predictor, with communication majors reporting higher levels of flexibility and openness than business majors. Multiple regression also showed exposure to other cultures during fall semester to have a significant impact on change in ISI. Change in PA, CCAI, and Ethnocentrism were not found to have predictors.

The results of the multiple regression reinforce the findings of the MANOVA testing, and confirm that the location of the semester is the primary factor for reported changes in scores. Clearly, students who studied abroad had an opportunity, by living in a different culture for four months, to develop and or improve their intercultural adaptability and sensitivity; in essence, their intercultural communication skills. While a number of students who stayed on campus also had experiences that increased or developed their intercultural communication skills, they did not report the increase in skills that the study abroad students did.

The final research question posed is whether students who choose to study abroad, even before actually going abroad, have a higher degree of intercultural communication skills than students who do not choose to study abroad, and, if after studying abroad, have a higher level of intercultural communication skills than their peers who do not. This question was tested with multiple regression of the total intercultural

communication skills in the pretest and posttest as the dependent variables and location, level, major, age, gender, ethnicity, size of hometown, and exposure to other cultures as the independent variables.

In the pretest, there were twenty-five students intending to study abroad, who averaged 353 in total intercultural communication skills, and twenty-five students intending to stay on campus, who averaged 340. While these figures show that the students intending to study abroad did indeed have higher pretest scores of intercultural communication skills than the students not planning to study abroad, plans for the coming semester was not found to have any significant impact on pretest scores with multiple regression. Instead, findings revealed that the primary predictor was in fact **intercultural exposure** (such as having had close friends or romantic relationships with people of other cultures, traveled or lived abroad, attended religious services other than their own, taken foreign language or cultural courses, or attended cultural exhibits such as foreign language films, museum shows, or ethnic celebrations). Intercultural exposure ranged from 2 – 35 points for both groups of students, with an average of 15.88 (15.52 for abroad students, 16.24 for campus students).

The CCAI pretest scores were not found to have any predictors, but the ISI pretest scores found intercultural exposure prior to fall semester to be a predictor, and the total pretest scores reported intercultural exposure prior to the fall semester to be a predictor.

Out of curiosity, I decided to look at the posttest scores now too. The posttest scores reported intercultural exposure during the fall semester as the **only** predictor. Intercultural exposure during the fall semester only ranged from 0 to 35, with a mean of 10.62 (study abroad students averaged 16.63 and on campus students averaged 4.12).

Multiple regression using all independent variables (location, intercultural exposure, age, gender, major, level, ethnicity, and hometown) revealed significant results only for intercultural exposure. **These results indicate that intercultural exposure prior to the fall semester was predictive of ISI scores and total scores in the pretest, and intercultural exposure during the fall semester was predictive of CCAI scores, ISI scores, and total scores in the posttest.**

It is interesting to note that exposure to various cultures is the only predictor of total intercultural communication skills in both tests. Regardless of whether students studied abroad or not, if they have made friends or had romantic relationships with individuals of a different culture, taken foreign language or cultural courses, attended ethnic celebrations, foreign language films, or new religious services, or in other ways learned about or interacted with people of another culture, their intercultural communication skills seemed to proportionally reflect that exposure. While the students who studied abroad may have had greater opportunity for such experiences, the study abroad experience alone was not the major predictor of total intercultural communication skills.

Results

The results showed that, as predicted, the students who studied abroad generally showed a greater increase in intercultural communication skills than the students who did not study abroad, and students who chose to study abroad had a higher level of intercultural communication skills at the beginning and at the end of the semester than students who did not choose to study abroad. The results also showed that exposure to

various cultures was actually a better predictor of intercultural communication skills than location in both pre and posttest scores.

Problems and Concerns with Results

The results did not show as dramatic a difference between the abroad group and the campus group as was anticipated. A number of explanations can be explored which may explain the results and the variations.

Let's look at Table 2 again. At the end of the semester, the students who studied abroad averaged a 4.15 increase on CCAI and an 11.28 increase on ISI, as opposed to those who stayed on campus, averaging a 2.27 decrease on CCAI and 1.26 decrease on ISI. Although MANOVA testing found significant changes for ER, PAC, Ethnocentrism, ICA, and ISI scores based on students' location, the actual changes in score were not very large. Both groups of students started the semester with somewhat high scores, perhaps leaving less room for improvement or change.

The major factor influencing students' change in intercultural communication scores was, as hypothesized, the location of their previous semester, not their academic level, major, gender, age, ethnicity, hometown, or exposure to various cultures, although some of these aspects did have an influence on certain scales. Unfortunately, the sample was not truly distributed according to gender, major, ethnicity, academic level, and hometown, which may have diminished the possibility of accurately detecting their influence on change in scores.

First, Texas Christian University has declared as part of its mission the goal of international awareness of its students. The very fact that the university is interested in international awareness prompted this study in an effort to determine if study abroad experiences were strong learning tools in the development of that awareness. TCU emphasis on study abroad experiences is also evident in its national ranking as 6th among doctoral institutions for percentage of students who study abroad. As such, a small number of students in the campus group had in fact studied abroad or were thinking about studying abroad, or in some other manner had been exposed to the values of international awareness. The campus group was not, then, a pure control group of students who had no previous intercultural exposure. The campus group was, however, representative of the student population at TCU, and many of those who has studied abroad only did so for a few weeks, so validity of the hypothesis, students who study abroad for a semester increase or improve their intercultural communication skills to a greater degree than those who stay on campus, could still be studied under these conditions and a larger or more selective control group was not polled.

Second, as is always a concern with self-surveys, the students may have felt an expectation to select more “correct” answers than what they truly felt. In this time of political correctness, and especially on a campus where international awareness is being pushed, there may be a tendency for students to want to fit that mold and respond with what they believe they are expected to respond. With a median score of 347 out of 480 on the pretest, the scores were already quite high (72 percentile), and perhaps overstated. Such a high initial score leaves little room for increase.

Additionally, a major concern in intercultural communication is that in order for it to be successful, both parties must feel that it is successful. Quite often, one individual may feel that an intercultural conversation was successful and that he completely articulated himself and completely understood the other, while the other is left completely baffled and unsatisfied with the exchange. It is entirely possible that the respondents may have overestimated their own skills. However, this problem too was originally addressed and it was determined that the constraints of this study would naturally limit the results to merely be a reflection of the subject's own perception of his own skills, and it would measure whether his perception was that his skills had increased or developed.

Third, the only criterion for the study abroad group was that they were intending to study abroad for a full semester (four months). There were no constraints as to the type of program and the level of integration they had. As mentioned previously, it was assumed that during four months students would have ample time to learn communicative abilities in a foreign language and ample opportunity to interact with natives of country. Based on the results indicating the predictive value of cultural exposure, it may have been better to narrow the study abroad group to students who would all have the same level of cultural exposure (i.e. living accommodations, with local people or only U.S. students, classes, with local people or only U.S. students) to see if studying abroad would be a predictor of intercultural communication skills.

Fourth, the reliability of the ISI test was only moderate, with a 0.56 reliability on the pretest and a 0.67 reliability on the posttest. While MANOVA and multiple regression revealed significant r-squared for ISI aspects (0.27 for Ethnocentrism, 0.38 for

ICA, and 0.37 for ISI total scores), these results should not be overstated given the moderate reliability of the test. Future testing of intercultural communication skills should continue to refine the instruments used to measure these skills.

Finally, one major event during the fall of 2001 was completely unforeseen but may have had a dramatic effect on the results of this survey. The terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, brought to light a dichotomy of reactions. Many individuals regressed to a state of isolationism, projecting stereotypes onto entire groups of people based on their religion, race, style of dress, or even their accent. For many others, this event brought to light a huge cultural awakening, an awareness of many groups of people who lead completely different lives with completely different values.

It is difficult to anticipate how these events affected the intercultural communication skills of the respondents to this survey. They may have brought a renewed sense of determination to be flexible, open-minded, and mindful of cultural differences and perceptions, or they may have invigorated a sense of superiority and defensiveness towards people of different cultures. For students living abroad, these events may have cemented an identification with the United States and U.S. American culture, or they may have sharpened a desire to fully integrate with the local culture and further develop their intercultural communication skills. Regardless of the individual's reaction, it is hoped that the two groups will have a combination of all reactions, and the comparison between the two groups will still provide reliable information.

Questions for Future Study

This study could not cover everything related to the topic of students increasing intercultural communication skills because of a study abroad experience. In fact, it is hoped that this study is merely the beginning of much research into this topic.

As mentioned earlier, the control group was not screened but was simply a random group of students on campus, some of whom had studied abroad previously. This study could be repeated using a more controlled campus group of students who had not studied abroad previously to see if that changes the results. The groups could also be increased in order to have a more equal distribution of other independent factors such as gender, academic level, major, and ethnicity, and these factors could be more deeply explored as to their influence on development in intercultural communication skills.

This study was limited to students studying abroad for a semester, but future studies should look at other lengths of stay for similar kinds of comparisons. For example, TCU has programs as short as 3 to 5 weeks in length, as well as full year abroad programs. One wonders if there is a proportional increase in intercultural communication skills based on time abroad, or if simply spending any amount of time in another culture will lead to better intercultural communication skills.

One potential problem of this study is that it was open to all students participating on a study abroad program for a semester. Future testing, however, could be more selective, such as testing students on only one type of program, or testing students who have completed pre-departure training programs which would prepare them for intercultural communication learning and development.

Only current students and their intercultural communication skills immediately before and after going abroad were explored in this study. It did not look at the long term

effects of a study abroad experience, but it would be interesting to discover if individuals still have better intercultural communication skills 1, 5 or 20 years after their study abroad experience than those who did not study abroad.

Finally, one problem previously mentioned is that students may have overestimated their intercultural communication skills. Perhaps using an interview or observing intercultural conversations might reflect the students' skills more accurately than their own self-interpretation. Such a study would require setting up a situation with enough consistency to make the study accurate and enough flexibility to make the setting natural, which would not be a simple task. The study would also require that both parties of the conversation be questioned afterward for interpretation of the event and that the same researcher observe all conversations. Using different measures could help evaluate intercultural communication skills in more depth or with more precision.

This study was initiated in an effort to better understand and quantify the benefits of study abroad in the context of a multicultural world. While anecdotal evidence abounds, there has been little quantifiable research on the skills and traits that students develop as a result of studying abroad and how these apply to life today. This study is a first step in identifying and measuring intercultural communication skills of students who study abroad, and correlating the development and improvement of these skills to the international experience. In a country still reeling from the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in September, it seems more clear than ever that we learn how to communicate with our neighbors, and it is valuable to know that studying abroad is one opportunity that can help in that endeavor.

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