

Intercultural Competence Development of Chinese Students After a Short-Term Study Abroad Experience

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This study investigated Chinese students' intercultural competence and linguistic growth during a six-week study abroad program. The students and their professor participated in pre- and post-tests covering written and oral language competency as well as intercultural competence. The Global Scale of English assessed student language development to determine linguistic growth and the Assessment of Intercultural Competence of Chinese College Students (AIC-CCS) was used to determine student growth of intercultural competence skills, specifically related to cultural knowledge, skills, attitudes, and awareness as a result of their experiences in a non-Western context. Results indicated that students experienced a change in the salience of intercultural knowledge themes over their period abroad, as well as improved their individual language abilities. This study provides suggestions for future programming focused on the development of Chinese student intercultural competencies during short-term study abroad experiences in Western university environments.

Keywords: English language development, linguistic growth, Global Scale of English, second language (L2), intercultural communicative competence (ICC), Chinese college students, Chinese context

Introduction

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Deardorff, 2006). The development of ICC is important in the current age of globalization since interactions with people from diverse cultures have become more and more common, and participants usually benefit from these intercultural experiences. Researchers have documented that U.S. students who participate in study abroad programs generally do so with the expectation that these experiences will cultivate their cross-cultural skills and knowledge, enhance their personal growth and self-confidence, and allow them to be more competitive in an increasingly diverse and globally oriented job market (Carlson, Burn, Useem, & Yachimowicz, 1990). Although intercultural experience is essential for intercultural competence, according to Peng, Wu and Fan, "in the Asian contexts, and

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especially in China, many students primarily learn the language and culture of the Western country from foreign language (FL) classrooms, but in the actual intercultural contexts, most of these students may encounter various types of intercultural communicative difficulties and barriers when communicating with foreigners in China and abroad (Peng, Wu, & Fan, 2015, p. 143-144). International students commonly suffer from culture shock during their first experience abroad (Lewthwaite, 1996; de Verthelyi, 1995). Chinese students are no exception. Lin (2006) found that Chinese students' suffering, as defined by experiencing fear and/or worry, began even prior to their trip abroad and intensified during the first few weeks or months after their arrival. They mainly experienced the following stressors: pre-arrival uncertainty, anxiety, and stress accompanying the trip to campus, post-arrival problems such as housing, transportation, and living expenses, as well as stress related to language barriers, separation from family, political bias from host culture, insufficient living facilities, and boring small town life, among other items.

The significance of exploring Chinese students' intercultural communication competence related to study abroad becomes increasingly important as the results and recommendations made could affect not only students in China, but perhaps students throughout Asia. A primary question arises: Are the intercultural experiences of Chinese students developed in ways that complement the goals of intercultural competence? This study uses the Global Scale of English to test Chinese students' improvement of English language proficiency, and the Assessment of Intercultural Competence of Chinese College Students (AIC-CCS) to measure development of intercultural competence through both quantitative and qualitative methods. The following research questions guided this work: (1) Are there any improvements (as measured by the Global Scale of English) made in students' English language proficiency following the participation of this short-term study abroad program? (2) On what aspects of intercultural competence have the students made salient progress?

Literature Review

In order to examine the impact of study abroad on ICC, researchers must first define the components of ICC. There exist numerous definitions of ICC, such as intercultural competence (Byram, 1997), intercultural awareness (Chamberlin-Quinlisk, 2005), and intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1993). However, only a few of these definitions have been extensively discussed by scholars (Deardorff, 2009). For example, Lustig and Koester (1993) defined ICC in the following components: communication and context, appropriateness and effectiveness, knowledge, motivation, and behavior. Byram (1997) states that ICC involves abilities related to intercultural knowledge, skills, attitudes, and critical intercultural awareness. Additional elements of ICC, such as knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness, were found in studies by Deardorff (2006). Among all these definitions, Byram's definition appears to be the most comprehensive one, which is summarized as follows: Knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one's self. Researchers from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives often elicited Byram's ICC assessment framework involving attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction and critical awareness in learners' development of ICC, as described in Table 1 (Byram, 1997, pp. 50-53).

Table 1

Byram's Definitions of ICC

Attitudes	Curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own.
Knowledge	Social groups and their products and practices in one's own and others' countries and of the general processes of societal and individual interactions.
Skills of interpreting and relating:	The ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own culture.
Skills of discovery and interaction	The ability to acquire new knowledge of culture and cultural practices and the ability to use one's knowledge, attitudes, and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.
Critical cultural awareness/political education	The ability to evaluate critically on the basis of explicit criteria on perspectives, practices, and products in one's own and other cultures and countries.

Notes. Refer to: Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, pp. 50-53.

In addition to Byram's interpretation, Chinese scholars have provided interesting definitions for ICC. For example, Zhao and Jiang (2003) reported that the components of ICC included language skills, pragmatic competence, and behavioral competence. Yang and Zhuang (2007) considered ICC to comprise knowledge competence, practical communication competence, acculturation competence, and global consciousness systems. Wu, Fan, and Peng (2013) suggested that ICC involves six main factors: knowledge of self, knowledge of others, attitudes, intercultural communicative skills, intercultural cognitive skills, and awareness.

Following Wu et al. (2013), this study focuses on the six factors they identified related to intercultural competency. The elements of ICC such as knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness are considered the main indispensable components of ICC, and due to this, most researchers agree that the combination of these dimensions is essential to ICC (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006; Wu et al., 2013).

Study Abroad and Development of Foreign Language Proficiency

There have been many studies exploring how short-term study abroad experiences might improve students' foreign or second language (L2) skills with mixed results. For example, Allen and Herron (2003) found that after participating in summer study abroad programs, students significantly improved their French speaking and listening skills. However, DeKeyser (2010) reported that students having taken part in a six-week program abroad did not show significant progress, inferring that the reason might be due to the lack of adequate grammar knowledge limiting language acquisition in real-world situations. Davidson and Fulcher (2007) claimed that students showed no significant improvement in their linguistic proficiency during a short-term study abroad program, but stressed that these programs can arouse students' interest in foreign language study. Cubillos, Chieffo, and Fan (2008) also found that there was no significant progress in listening comprehension skills of Spanish learners during a month-long course abroad, but at the same time revealed that the students gained a higher level of confidence regarding their linguistic skills as a result of the experience. While some studies have reported beneficial effects of study abroad on grammatical accuracy (Duperron, 2006; Yager, 1998) or lexico-grammatical competence (Juan-Garau, 2013; Juan-Garau, Salazar-Noguera, & Prieto-Arranz, 2014), other studies reported no substantial differences between study abroad and at-home language learning contexts (DeKeyser, 1991, 2010; Isabelli-Garcia, 2010), a limited impact on morphosyntactic system restructuring (Howard, 2001), and even superior gains for the formal classroom at-home settings (Collentine & Freed, 2004).

Similarly, some studies reported an association between superior gains in both lexicon size and accuracy as a function of study abroad experience (Dewey, 2008; Ife, Vives-Boix, & Meara, 2000), while others reported either no learning effects or superior development in the at-home setting (Collentine & Freed, 2004).

As there exists a controversy regarding whether short-term study abroad experiences help improve students' language proficiency, various scholars have explored the topic. Some found that whether or not study abroad benefits one's language proficiency might be linked to learner-internal individual differences that likely interact with the learning context and, subsequently, with L2 learning outcomes (DeKeyser, 1991; Sanz, 2014). However, DeKeyser (2014) and Llanes and Munoz (2009) reported that the first two factors—program duration and initial second language proficiency—have been identified as particularly important for understanding the extent to which second language immersion abroad facilitates its development, though both factors remain under-investigated. In terms of program duration, most existing studies have examined language development over the period of a semester (5-6 months), or year-long periods abroad, with a few exceptions (Cubillos, Chieffo, & Fan, 2008; Llanes & Munoz, 2009; Yager, 1998). However, the focus on longer-term programs does not correspond to the increasing popularity of shorter programs, which allow students to have experiences abroad while not falling behind in the academic programs at their home institutions.

According to the International Institute of Education (IIE, 2013), among the 283,223 U.S. college students who studied abroad during the 2011-2012 school year, 59% participated in short-term programs which lasted for eight weeks or less, 38% participated in mid-length programs lasting for one to two quarters or a full semester, and only 3% of students spent a year abroad. Thus, targeted investigations of the potential benefits of short-term programs are eagerly needed.

Short-term study abroad programs can last from weeks to months, having become very popular in recent years due to features related to flexibility and affordability. These programs are usually offered outside of regular semesters, and therefore normally do not interfere with students' required courses or their progress towards degree completion. As for learning outcomes, shorter programs might be comparable to long-term programs in terms of increasing students' knowledge of a host country and its culture (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004). Research has shown that short-term study abroad programs increase student appreciation for other cultures (Pence & Macgillivray, 2008), provide exposure to different languages, which contributes to a change in a student's perceptions of worldview (Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005), and develop intercultural awareness and sensitivity (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006; Black & Duhon, 2006; Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004).

Methodology

Two universities, one from the Yunnan Province of the People's Republic of China, and the other located in East Texas, established a community partnership in 2001 in the areas of education, business, sports, medicine and city government. The partnership continues to grow stronger each year through collaborations facilitated by the Sister Cities International program. Sister Cities International promotes activities in thematic areas that are important to both cities and benefit their local communities through municipal, business, trade, educational and cultural development (Sister Cities, 2019). Over the last 18 years, the partnership between the two universities has resulted in hundreds of community members sharing cultural experiences, including visiting delegations traveling from both cities in the areas of art, business, education, sports, as well as the medical industry (hospitals

and clinics). As a result, the citizens of these two cities have mutually benefited from the exchange of ideas, educational collaborations, and cultural growth.

Each spring semester, a small group of Chinese university students and their professor travel to East Texas for six weeks to attend English language classes as well as participate informally in other university courses related to their fields of study. Over the period of the partnership between these two cities, more than 200 students have participated in this short-term study abroad program, highlighting the need to assess the intercultural impact of this experience, and especially determine the impact of their intercultural communicative competence and gains in English language proficiency as a result of their short-term university experience abroad.

In 2018, six students and one professor were selected at the Chinese university to participate in the annual program. This study documents their experiences and perspectives, and seeks to identify the factors that lead to a successful short-term academic experience abroad.

Factors investigated include the students' and professor's intercultural competence development and their improvement of English language proficiency in order to determine how the overall program quality could be improved in the future to enhance student learning experiences, as well as provide program administrators with valuable data to justify the resources spent on the annual experience abroad.

As had been done in previous years, students were provided with a trip orientation overview and completed a language placement assessment prior to traveling. Upon arrival, students were assigned to live with host families, with two students per home, and rotated to different host families every two weeks. They attended English classes in the university's Intensive English Language Institute for the first four weeks and observed classes occurring on the university campus in their respective fields of study. As a culminating experience, the delegation participated in various excursions to local places of cultural or historic interest across the state of Texas, followed by a three-day camp focusing on leadership training with students from other universities across the United States. The camp highlighted a different theme each day and included the topics of "Dealing with Adversity and Emotional Intelligence", "Cross Cultural Leadership and Effective Listening Skills", and "Adversity Quotient (AQ) and The Way to Success (TWTS) Program Community Service Concepts". These themes aimed to promote development of all participants' intercultural communication skills as well as improve their leadership abilities. The student's schedule is depicted in Table 2.

Table 2

Program Schedule

Week	Activity	Purpose	Assessment type
Prior to arrival	Program orientation	Establish baseline data	English proficiency pre-test
Week 1	Arrival and orientation; City tours, etc.	Acquainting with new people and environment.	Cultural competence pre-test Pre-interview
Week 2	University experiences	Improve English proficiency	None
Week 3	University experiences	Improve English proficiency	None
Week 4	University experiences	Improve English proficiency	None
Week 5	University experiences	Improve English proficiency	English proficiency post-test
Week 6	Travel throughout Texas Attend Camp	Learn about local history and culture Leadership retreat	Cultural competence post-test Post-interview

The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which participation in the short-term program described above affected change in aspects of these students' intercultural competence, and whether attending English language courses during a short-term study abroad program improved their English proficiency.

Participants

Participants in the 2018 delegation from China were six female students (five students were 20 years old and one student was 21), and one female professor (34 years old). Four of the participants were university sophomores, and two were juniors. Four of the six students were majoring in English, one student was majoring in education, and the other in accounting.

None of the students reported ever participating in any type of study abroad program for any duration of time prior to this experience. Collectively, these students possessed little to no intercultural communication experience. However, the four students studying English did report that some of their foreign-born teachers, who taught them one or two English courses each semester, included some intercultural communication experiences in their classes. The two non-English majors reported no intercultural communication experiences in any of their past coursework. The professor reported a one month experience abroad to study business English in Thailand in 2017, and reported that she was formerly in charge of foreign teachers' affairs in her university, and therefore had some daily intercultural communication experiences.

Instrumentation

Two different instruments were used in this study: the Assessment of Intercultural Competence of Chinese College Students (AIC-CCS) (Wu et al., 2013) and the Global Scale of English, a standardized granular scale that measures English language proficiency. Students also completed a questionnaire to collect demographic and personal information.

Questionnaire surveys were conducted on the third day after their arrival (Survey 1) and two days prior to their return to China (Survey 2). The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part described personal information such as age, gender, grade, major, family background, and intercultural communication experience, while the second part covered the six main factors of ICC through 28 items selected from the Assessment of Intercultural Competence of Chinese College Students (AIC-CCS) (see Appendix A), using a Likert-type scale for response. The item categories included: knowledge of self (three questions), knowledge of others (seven questions), attitudes (three questions), intercultural communicative skills (nine questions), intercultural cognitive skills (three questions), and awareness (three questions) (Wu et al., 2013). All items were scored on a five-point Likert scale.

The Assessment of Intercultural Competence of Chinese College Students (AIC-CCS), created by Wu et al., was used to determine changes in students' cultural perceptions. It is one of the most recently designed ICC assessment tools in the Chinese context, and is based on theories such as the multidimensional ICC model (Byram, 1997) and the pyramid ICC model (Deardorff, 2006). The tool contains six main factors and 28 description items (see Table 3). The tool has been demonstrated to have high validity and high reliability, and can accurately be used to measure Chinese college students' ICC (Wu et al., 2013). The ICC includes six main factors of knowledge of self, knowledge of others, attitudes, intercultural communicative skills, intercultural cognitive skills, and awareness.

Table 3

Index System of Chinese College Students' ICC

Target layer	First-layer index	Second-layer index	
ICC index system (U)	Knowledge of self (u1)	u11 General knowledge of one's own history	
		u12 Understanding the native social norms	
		u13 Understanding the native sense of value	
	Knowledge of others (u2)	u21 Understanding the foreign knowledge of history	
		u22 Understanding the foreign social norms	
		u23 Understanding the foreign sense of value	
		u24 Understanding foreign cultural taboos	
		u25 Understanding foreigners' speech	
		u26 Understanding basic concepts of intercultural communication	
		u27 Understanding successful intercultural communication strategies	
		Attitudes (u3)	u31 Willingness to learn from those who differ from one's self and culture
			u32 Willingness to respect foreigners' lifestyles and customs
	u33 Willingness to learn a foreign language and cultures well		
	Intercultural communication skills (u4)	u41 The skill of consulting with foreigners if there are misunderstandings	
		u42 The skill of communicating with foreigners through body language or other nonverbal communication when it is difficult to communicate through language	
		u43 The skill of successfully communicating with foreigners	
		u44 The skill of treating foreigners politely	
		u45 The skill of avoiding offending foreigners with inappropriate words and behavior	
		u46 The skill of avoiding prejudice against foreigners	
		u47 The skill of avoiding violating foreigners' privacy	
		u48 The skill of having intercultural sensitivity	
		u49 The skill of taking different perspectives when encountering different cultures	
		Intercultural cognitive skills (u5)	u51 The skill of acquiring knowledge of other cultures from foreigners
			u52 The skill of learning different intercultural communication strategies
	u53 The skill of learning how to manage cultural conflicts		
	Awareness (u6)	u61 Realizing cultural differences and similarities when communicating with foreigners	
		u62 Realizing how to judge a cultural situation from both one's own and the other's cultural perspective	
		u63 Realizing differences in cultural identity when communicating with foreigners	

The mean and standard deviation were calculated for each individual question of the pre- and post-test. The results of the pre-test are presented in Table 4. The results of the post-test are presented in Table 5.

Table 4

Mean and Standard Deviation for Each Question of Pre-test

Question number	Mean	SD
1a	3.43	0.53
1b	3.57	0.79
1c	3.86	0.90
2a	2.14	0.69
2b	2.29	0.49
2c	2.14	0.69
2d	2.43	0.98
2e	3.29	0.76
2f	3.29	0.76
2g	3.00	0.82
3a	4.57	0.53
3b	4.71	0.49
3c	4.71	0.49
4a	3.71	0.49
4b	3.86	0.69
4c	3.57	0.79
4d	3.71	0.95
4e	3.71	0.95
4f	4.14	0.38
4g	4.00	0
4h	4.14	0.69
4i	3.86	0.69
5a	3.71	0.76
5b	3.43	0.98
5c	3.71	0.76
6a	4.43	0.53
6b	4.14	0.69
6c	3.43	0.98

Table 5

Mean and Standard Deviation for Each Question of Post-test

Question number	Mean	SD
1a	3.71	0.76
1b	3.86	0.69
1c	4	0.82
2a	3	0.58
2b	3.57	0.53
2c	3.29	0.49
2d	3.71	0.49
2e	4.00	0.58
2f	4.00	0
2g	3.86	0.38
3a	4.71	0.49
3b	5.00	0
3c	4.86	0.38

(table 5 continued)

Question number	Mean	SD
4a	4.00	0
4b	4.14	0.38
4c	4.00	0.58
4d	4.57	0.53
4e	4.43	0.79
4f	4.29	0.49
4g	4.14	0.69
4h	4.00	0.58
4i	4.00	0.58
5a	4.14	0.69
5b	4.14	0.69
5c	4.00	0.58
6a	4.43	0.79
6b	4.29	0.49
6c	4.14	0.69

Results of the Pre-Post Analysis

Pre- and post-assessments were compared by item and by domain for the Assessment of Intercultural Competence of Chinese College Students survey questionnaire. Table 6 provides the results of paired comparison tests.

Table 6

Results of the Pair Samples Test Pre-Post for Domains

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		Lower	Upper		
				Lower	Upper				
D1	Knowledge of self	-0.23810	0.65868	0.24896	-0.84727	0.37108	-0.956	6	0.376
D2	Knowledge of others	-0.90051	0.54912	0.20755	-1.40836	-0.39266	-4.339	6	0.005
D3	Attitudes	-0.19048	0.46576	0.17604	-0.62123	0.24028	-1.082	6	0.321
D4	Intercultural communication	-0.30000	0.43205	0.16330	-0.69958	0.09958	-1.837	6	0.116
D5	Intercultural cognitive skills	-0.47619	0.97861	0.36988	-1.38125	0.42887	-1.287	6	0.245
D6	Awareness	-0.28571	0.70523	0.26655	-0.93795	0.36652	-1.072	6	0.325

Of the six domains examined in the Assessment of Intercultural Competence of Chinese College Students, Domain 2, "Knowledge of Others" showed gains that were significant.

An examination of individual items in Table 7 shows a similar result, with all items in Domain 2 showing significant gains from pre- to post-assessment. This included the following items:

- (2a) understanding foreign knowledge of history
- (2b) understanding foreign social norms
- (2c) understanding the foreign sense of values
- (2d) understanding foreign cultural taboos
- (2e) understanding foreigners' speech

(2f) understanding basic concepts of intercultural communication

(2g) understanding successful intercultural communication strategies

The significant results of the Domain 2 questions provide support that short-term experiences can improve Chinese students' "Knowledge of Others" in a significant way.

Table 7

Results of the Pair Samples Test Pre-Post for Prep-Post Items

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Q1A	pre1a-post1a	-0.28571	0.75593	0.28571	-0.98483	0.41340	-1.000	6	0.356
Q1B	pre1b-post1b	-0.28571	0.75593	0.28571	-0.98483	0.41340	-1.000	6	0.356
Q1C	pre1c-post1c	-0.14286	1.06904	0.40406	-1.13156	0.84584	-0.354	6	0.736
Q2A	pre2a-post2a	-0.85714	0.69007	0.26082	-1.49535	-0.21894	-3.286	6	0.017
Q2B	pre2b-post2b	-1.28571	0.48795	0.18443	-1.73699	-0.83444	-6.971	6	0.000
Q2C	pre2c-post2c	-1.14286	0.89974	0.34007	-1.97497	-0.31074	-3.361	6	0.015
Q2D	pre2d-post2d	-1.28571	0.75593	0.28571	-1.98483	-0.58660	-4.500	6	0.004
Q2E	pre2e-post2e	-0.71429	0.48795	0.18443	-1.16556	-0.26301	-3.873	6	0.008
Q2F	pre2f-post2f	-0.71429	0.75593	0.28571	-1.41340	-0.01517	-2.500	6	0.047
Q2G	pre2g-post2g	-0.85714	0.69007	0.26082	-1.49535	-0.21894	-3.286	6	0.017
Q3A	pre3a-post3a	-0.14286	0.69007	0.26082	-0.78106	0.49535	-0.548	6	0.604
Q3B	pre3b-post3b	-0.28571	0.48795	0.18443	-0.73699	0.16556	-1.549	6	0.172
Q3C	pre3c-post3c	-0.14286	0.37796	0.14286	-0.49242	0.20670	-1.000	6	0.356
Q4A	pre4a-post4a	-0.28571	0.48795	0.18443	-0.73699	0.16556	-1.549	6	0.172
Q4B	pre4b-post4b	-0.28571	0.75593	0.28571	-0.98483	0.41340	-1.000	6	0.356
Q4C	pre4c-post4c	-0.42857	0.78680	0.29738	-1.15624	0.29909	-1.441	6	0.200
Q4D	pre4d-post4d	-0.85714	0.89974	0.34007	-1.68926	-0.02503	-2.521	6	0.045
Q4E	pre4e-post4e	-0.71429	1.25357	0.47380	-1.87364	0.44507	-1.508	6	0.182
Q4F	pre4f-post4f	-0.14286	0.69007	0.26082	-0.78106	0.49535	-0.548	6	0.604
Q4G	pre4g-post4g	-0.14286	0.69007	0.26082	-0.78106	0.49535	-0.548	6	0.604
Q4H	pre4h-post4h	0.14286	1.06904	0.40406	-0.84584	1.13156	0.354	6	0.736
Q4I	pre4i-post4i	-0.14286	1.06904	0.40406	-1.13156	0.84584	-0.354	6	0.736
Q5A	pre5a-post5a	-0.42857	0.97590	0.36886	-1.33113	0.47399	-1.162	6	0.289
Q5B	pre5b-post5b	-0.71429	0.95119	0.35952	-1.59399	0.16542	-1.987	6	0.094
Q5C	pre5c-post5c	-0.28571	1.11270	0.42056	-1.31479	0.74336	-0.679	6	0.522
Q6Q	pre6a-post6a	0.00000	0.57735	0.21822	-0.53396	0.53396	0.000	6	1.000
Q6B	pre6b-post6b	-0.14286	0.69007	0.26082	-0.78106	0.49535	-0.548	6	0.604
Q6C	pre6c-post6c	-0.71429	1.38013	0.52164	-1.99069	0.56212	-1.369	6	0.220

Although Domain 4 did not show significant gains overall, one item in Domain 4 did show gains that were significant from pre- to post-assessment. Item (4d) the skill of treating foreigners politely, was found to be significant.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted at the beginning of the program, during the first week (Interview 1), and at the end of the program prior to departure (Interview 2). The semi-structured interview consisted of pre-planned questions related to the six aspects of ICC to guide interviewers and participants (see Appendix B). Questions

about participants' intercultural knowledge and ICC development and achievements were the focus of the interviews, in order to explore participants' ICC improvement. The interview topics were selected to align with definitions of ICC in the questionnaire. All interviews were conducted in Chinese, the mother tongue of the participants, for accuracy.

All interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. For comparative purposes, the interviews at the beginning of the program collectively lasted for 263 minutes ($M = 37.57$, $SD = 5.12$) and interviews at the end of the program collectively lasted 275 minutes ($M = 39.29$, $SD = 4.89$), revealing that Interview 2 was slightly longer than Interview 1 on average, but that there was no significant difference in interview length.

The primary researcher of this study served as the interviewer. With the exception of the professor, the interviewer knew none of the participants well. The interviews were focused on the following aspects: knowledge of self, knowledge of others, attitudes, intercultural communicative skills, intercultural cognitive skills, and awareness. The interviewer used the pre-planned questions in all interviews, changing topics in a smooth, conversational manner. There was also flexibility in the interviews since the students were encouraged to talk about topics beyond the interview question if they preferred, making the interviews semi-structured (Eckert, 2000).

To analyze the data, the two interviews were transcribed, data were coded according to the six aspects (themes) and 28 items (subthemes) in the interview, and a measure of participants' subthemes mentioned was calculated. The number of certain subthemes mentioned by all the participants in a given interview indicated knowledge of each respective subtheme. As this is a frequency count, a participant might repeatedly mention the same subtheme at different points in the same interview. Therefore, for some subthemes in each interview set, the total possible mentions were over seven, the total number of the participants.

In total, the 63 comments obtained during the pre-interview and the 66 post-interview comments provided by participants were coded using six themes and 18 subthemes. In order to answer the question about the participants' ICC development, the thematic comments gathered during Interview 1 and Interview 2 were counted and analyzed. To support the quantitative results, the researcher included comments from the participants to illustrate their ICC change and development in their own words.

Interview Results

In total, two themes and six subthemes were mentioned during the pre-interview; the most common themes were 2(b) knowledge of social norms of USA (mentioned 33 times), 2(c) knowledge of collective sense of values of USA (mentioned 14 times), 1(b) knowledge of social norms of my country (mentioned seven times), 1(c) knowledge of collective sense of values of my country (mentioned six times), 2(d) knowledge of cultural taboos of USA (mentioned once), and 2(e) knowledge of English spoken in the USA (mentioned twice).

Generally, the themes of ICC mentioned in the pre-interview were mainly focused on cultural knowledge, which indicate that at the beginning of the program, the participants' ICC levels were mainly manifested through their basic cultural knowledge of their own country and the U.S. The participants talked less using their intercultural communication skills or intercultural awareness which can typically only be acquired during the process of communicative interaction with foreigners.

Comparatively, five themes and 14 subthemes of ICC were mentioned during the post-interview, which

contained not only knowledge, but also change of attitudes, improvement of intercultural communicative skills, and awareness of the cultural difference. Themes mentioned most by the participants included 6(a) realizing cultural differences and similarities when communicating with foreigners (mentioned 13 times), 6(c) judging cultural situations from both one's own and the other's cultural perspective (mentioned six times), 4(c) skill of successfully communicating with foreigners (mentioned six times), 2(a) knowledge of history of USA (mentioned six times), 3(a) willingness to learn from those who differ from one's self (mentioned five times), 3(b) willingness to respect foreigners' lifestyles and customs (mentioned five times) 2(a) knowledge of history of USA (mentioned six times). These data suggest that the post-interview discovered that after living and studying abroad for six weeks, the participants gained achievement in knowledge acquisition, and also experienced a change of their attitude towards foreign culture, the improvement of their intercultural communication skills, their awareness of cultural difference and similarity, as well as the improvement of their English language proficiency.

Table 8

Counts of Participants' Comments for the Themes and Subthemes in Interviews 1 and 2 Collectively

Pre-interview	Post-interview
Knowledge of self	
1(b) Knowledge of social norms of my country (7)	
1(c) Knowledge of collective sense of values of my country (6)	
Knowledge of others	Knowledge of others
2(b) Knowledge of social norms of USA (33)	2(a) Knowledge of history of USA (6)
2(c) Knowledge of collective sense of values of USA (14)	2(b) Knowledge of social norms of USA (4)
2(d) Knowledge of cultural taboos of USA (1)	2(c) Knowledge of collective sense of values of USA (3)
2(e) Knowledge of English spoken in the USA (2)	2(d) Knowledge of cultural taboos of USA (1)
	Attitudes
	3(a) Willingness to learn from those different from one's self (5)
	3(b) Willingness to respect foreigners' lifestyles and customs (5)
	Communicable skills
	4(c) Skill of successfully communicating with foreigners (6)
	4(d) Skill of treating foreigners politely (4)
	4(f) Skill of avoiding prejudice against foreigners (3)
	4(i) Skill of understanding different perspectives (4)
	Cognitive skills
	5(a) Skill of acquiring knowledge of other cultures (3)
	5(c) Skill of learning how to manage cultural conflicts (3)
	Awareness
	6(a) Realizing cultural differences and similarities when communicating with foreigners (13)
	6(c) Judging cultural situations from both one's own and the other's cultural perspective (6)

To further demonstrate change and development of ICC, participants' comments were selected and analyzed. Comments can be found in the Appendix C.

The results showed ICC development by participants in their interviews, summarized as six themes with 20 subthemes. Participants most often commented on their knowledge growth related to social norms, collective sense of values, lifestyles and customs, history of USA, their change of attitude to respect and learn from foreigners, their improvement of skills of communicating with foreigners politely and successfully, as well as their improvement of English language proficiency. Table 8 shows that while some themes were more salient to participants at the beginning of the program (i.e., knowledge of social norms and values), most themes were more salient to participants at the end of the program. The data gathered from both interviews support the overall ICC development that occurred during the six-week program abroad.

Tests of English Language Proficiency

The participants attended English classes in an Intensive English Language Institutes (IELI) at the local university for four weeks, from Monday to Friday, five hours each day. Classes focused on reading, writing, listening, grammar, and contemporary topics.

Students' English language proficiency levels, in the areas of reading and writing, were tested twice. The pre-test was completed in China prior to the students' departure for the USA, and the post-test was completed during the last day of their attendance in IELI (at the end of week 5 of their six week experience abroad).

Administration of both tests lasted for 90 minutes, and consisted of four parts: reading, vocabulary, skills for writing, and writing. Following the scale of the scores and levels of the Global Scale of English, the first three parts (reading, vocabulary, and skills for writing) were combined into the category of "reading", and the score of writing was calculated separately. Unlike other frameworks that measure English language proficiency in broad bands, the Global Scale of English identifies what a learner can do at each point on a scale 10-90, across each of the four skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Using the Global Scale of English, students and teachers can answer three questions accurately: (1) Exactly how good is my English? (2) What progress have I made toward my learning goal(s)? (3) What do I need to do next if I want to improve?

Table 9

Level Divisions of the Global Scale of English

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7
0-9	10-25	26-35	36-50	51-60	61-70	70+

Results of English Language Proficiency Tests

According to the scores of the pre- and post-tests (See Table 10), all participants made improvements as shown by the comparison of their post-test with pre-test scores. Regarding the area of reading, two students raised eight points, one student raised six points, one raised four points, two raised two points, and one raised one point. All students made progress in the area of reading. Regarding the area of writing, one student raised six points, three students raised four points, one raised three points, and two raised one point. Again, all students made progress as shown on the post-test area of writing.

The composite scores showed one student raised 14 points, one raised 12 points, one raised 10 points, one raised seven points, one raised five points, and two raised three points. These scores were significantly higher at post-test than during pre-test, and the improvement was comparable. Using the seven levels as outlined by the Global Scale of English (Table 5), one student advanced two levels, three students advanced one level, and the other two students remained on the same level in pre-test and post-test; however the scores of both students did show improvement.

Table 10

Scores of Pre- and Post-tests of English Language Proficiency

Student number	Reading score		Writing score		Composite		Levels	
	pre-test	post-test	pre-test	post-test	pre-test	post-test	pre-test	post-test
Student One	44	46	10	11	54	57	Level 5	Level 5
Student Two	42	48	8	12	50	60	Level 4	Level 5
Student Three	45	49	10	13	55	62	Level 5	Level 6
Student Four	43	51	5	11	48	62	Level 4	Level 6
Student Five	35	36	5	9	40	45	Level 4	Level 4
Student Six	39	47	7	11	46	58	Level 4	Level 5
Student Seven	45	47	11	12	56	59	Level 5	Level 5

Discussion

This study was undertaken to investigate whether short-term study abroad programs lead to development in intercultural competence, specifically on the aspects of knowledge of self, knowledge of others, attitudes, intercultural communicative skills, intercultural cognitive skills, and awareness. It also examined whether enrollment in foreign language courses during short-term study abroad experiences can facilitate improve in language proficiency.

The results showed that the development of ICC and English language proficiency both improved with Domain 4 of the ICC showing gains that were statistically significant, as shown in both qualitative and quantitative data collected from English language tests, as well as questionnaires and interviews, which were conducted both at the beginning and end of the short-term study abroad program. The results also demonstrated that short-term study abroad programs significantly increased all measured outcomes examined in this study. This finding is consistent with the results of previous studies (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2004; Williams, 2009), which suggested that even a short period of study abroad can have positive effect on the aspects of intercultural competence.

Positive development on the aspect of cross-cultural awareness and attitudes demonstrates that as a result of study abroad, students were able to better interpret people's behavior in the context of the host culture, tried to understand why people behave in a certain way before judging their actions, and knew how to avoid stereotypes about people from different cultures. This development is consistent with the findings of previous studies (Anderson et al., 2006; Kitsantas & Meyers, 2002), which also claimed that study abroad might lead to development in cognitive skills needed to understand different cultures.

The development in intercultural communicative skills revealed in this study suggests that students felt more confident when communicating with people from the host culture and adapting to new circumstances. This

finding supports the results of previous studies (Anderson et al., 2006; Williams, 2009) which suggested that study abroad might increase adaptability to unfamiliar contexts and people, flexibility in finding solutions, and help students to keep an open mind.

The improvement of foreign language proficiency indicated by both pre- and post-test results showed students' vocabulary, listening and reading ability have all been improved to a certain extent, which enable them to communicate with local people better, and also serve as an indication that the students became more motivated to study English. These results support the previous research that demonstrates how study abroad can benefit foreign language skills (Allen & Herron, 2003) and enhance students' motivation to continue foreign language study (Davidson & Fulcher, 2007). Even though some students did not advance to a higher level on the Global Scale of English, an increase in perceived ability and interest was nevertheless evident and expressed by the students.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study, like most, has its own limitations; thus there is a need for further investigation of the impact of short-term study abroad programs. First, and foremost, the number of participants in the study is small, with a sample size of only seven students. This sample may not be large enough to represent the larger group of Chinese students taking part in this particular short-term study abroad program. Therefore, there is a need to conduct additional studies with larger samples of participants.

Another limitation is that the participants in our study did not have enough time to reflect on which factors may have led to the social realities they observed, and therefore, they did not have the opportunity to reflect deeply about their cultural observations. This superficial understanding of culture could create or reinforce stereotypes without proper debrief activities. It is recommended that follow-up discussions and assessment occur with the same student group after they return to China and have had time to further reflect on their experiences and to evaluate the persistence and further development of their personal intercultural competence levels. Analysis of future data of this type may answer the following questions: How will the intercultural experiences impact the participants' life after re-assimilating with their own culture? And, how will their world views, values, and future employment opportunities be different after this experience?

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

Questionnaire based on the Assessment of Intercultural Competence of Chinese college students (AIC-CCS) (Wu et al., 2013)

Part I: Background information

1. Grade: first-year; second-year; third-year; fourth-year
2. Gender: male; female
3. What is your major?
4. Have you ever participated in any study abroad programs? If yes, where have you been and how long were you there?
5. Are you worried about living with your host families, if yes, please explain your worries or concerns.

Part II: Intercultural competence

This section is designed to collect your self-evaluation of your intercultural competence. According to your understanding, choose the most appropriate answer from 1 to 5 about your objective and universal intercultural competence, where: 1 = Very Low, 2 = Low, 3 = Average, 4 = High, 5 = Very High.

1. Knowledge of self

- (1a) understanding native history
- (1b) understanding native social norms
- (1c) understanding the native sense of values

2. Knowledge of others

- (2a) understanding foreign knowledge of history
- (2b) understanding foreign social norms
- (2c) understanding the foreign sense of values
- (2d) understanding foreign cultural taboos
- (2e) understanding foreigners' speech
- (2f) understanding basic concepts of intercultural communication
- (2g) understanding successful intercultural communication strategies

3. Attitudes

- (3a) willingness to learn from those who differ from one's self and culture
- (3b) willingness to respect foreigners' lifestyles and customs
- (3c) willingness to learn foreign languages and cultures well

4. Intercultural communicative skills

- (4a) the skill of consulting with foreigners when misunderstandings occur
- (4b) the skill of communicating with foreigners using body language or other nonverbal communication when it is difficult to communicate using language
- (4c) the skill of successfully communicating with foreigners
- (4d) the skill of treating foreigners politely
- (4e) the skill of avoiding offending foreigners with inappropriate words and behavior
- (4f) the skill of avoiding prejudice against foreigners
- (4g) the skill of avoiding violating foreigners' privacy
- (4h) the skill of having intercultural sensitivity

(4i) the skill of understanding different perspectives when encountering different cultural affairs

5. Intercultural cognitive skills

(5a) the skill of acquiring knowledge of other cultures from foreigners

(5b) the skill of learning intercultural communication strategies

(5c) the skill of learning how to manage cultural conflicts

6. Awareness

(6a) realizing cultural differences and similarities when communicating with foreigners

(6b) realizing the differences in cultural identity when communicating with foreigners

(6c) judging cultural situations from both one's own and the other's cultural perspective

Appendix B: Guiding Questions for Interview

1. Explain your understanding of the local social norms?
2. Explain your understanding about the sense of values of the local culture?
3. Explain your understanding about the local cultural taboos?
4. Explain your understanding of the local people's life styles and customs?
5. Explain your understanding of American history?
6. Have you learned any communication strategies from foreigners? If yes, explain.
7. Have you encountered any misunderstandings in your communications with the local people? If yes, explain.
8. Do you have any prejudice against people? If yes, explain.
9. Are there any violations of privacy you have experienced? If yes, explain.
10. Have you acquired any knowledge of the local culture? If yes, explain.
11. Have you experienced any cultural conflicts? If yes, explain.

Appendix C: Selected Interview Comments

(6a) realizing cultural difference and similarities when communicating with foreigners

Comment 1. Participant 4

People here often hug or even kiss to express their love to family members and friends when they meet. But people in our culture don't do this.

Comment 2. Participant 5

The waiters and waitresses in the restaurant are very friendly, they seem to be very responsible for their work, never played with their phone at work.

3(c) willingness to respect foreigners' lifestyles and customs

Comment 3. Participant 1

So far, none of my host families have told me I have ever done anything wrong, this is very different from my culture. From this, I learned that people from different cultures have different lifestyles and customs, when communicating with foreigners, I should respect them without judgment or prejudice.

Comment 4. Participant 2

They took shower and change clothes everyday, they have dryer to dry clothes. But I am not used to it, still washed my clothes and hung them up to dry in the rest room. But my host family never told me that I was not supposed to do so.

From this I realize that we have different lifestyles, they respect my customs.

2(c) understanding values of USA

Comment 5. Participant 1

After coming here, I found all my host families put their family's photos on their refrigerator, and they spent a lot of time talking and chatting with their family members without playing with their mobile phones. I realized that family is very important to me, I will spend more time with my family after going back.

Comment 6. Participant 5

Here people go out to eat with their family instead of their friends, I found they value their family more than their friends. This is different from people in my hometown who spend more time with friends.

4(d) skill of treating foreigners politely

Comment 7. Participant 2

At the very beginning, when strangers greeted me on the street, I was surprised and didn't respond at all. But now I feel comfortable to greet them back, just take it easy.

Comment 8. Participant 2

When I first got here, the supermarket waitress greeted me "Hi, how are you doing?" I just stared at her, didn't know how to reply. Now I know I would reply by "Good, thank you".

2(a) knowledge of history of the USA

Comment 9. Participant 4

We traveled to San Antonio, visited the ruins of Alamo battle, and learnt something about Texas history. When watching the movie, I was waiting for the ending to see who would win the battle, but finally realized that what was important is not who would lose and who would win, but the spirit of freedom for which people had been fighting.

3(a) willingness to learn from those who differ from one's self and culture

Comment 10. Participant 4

I used to dislike American food because it is too sweet, and there is cheese in almost every dish. But my host family encouraged me to try, she said "Food is one of the important aspects of culture. You go to a different country to meet different people, to see new things, and to taste new food." So now I am more open to try new things.

2(b) knowledge of social norms of USA

Comment 11. Participant 2

Traffic rules here are different, drivers stopped at crossing with stop sign to let other drivers go first even if there is no red light.

Improvement of English language proficiency

Comment 12. Participant 7

I found my spoken English has been improved a lot. I learnt a lot of daily expressions and I can understand better when I talked with local people.