Exploring Intercultural Competence Through Internationalization-at-Home Efforts: Perspective of Domestic Graduate Students in Helping Professions

Danielle Meyer, Valerie Angulo, Anna Bui, Kamari Gouin & Shengli Dong

Background

- Intercultural competency (ICC) is a vital ability for those working in social work, education, healthcare, and counseling. Research indicates that ICC improves professionals' ability to work with individuals from different backgrounds (Deardorff, 2006; Krajewski, 2011).

- Hauerwas et al. (2021) and Leung (2003) highlight the importance of ICC in educating professionals for a variety of work environments.

- Multicultural competency (MCC), which increases cultural understanding, is the main focus of traditional techniques (Mio et al., 2019).

- By encouraging participatory cultural adaptation and communication, ICC goes beyond MCC (Fleckman et al., 2015).

- The impact of Internationalization-at-Home (IaH) initiatives on ICC development is investigated in this study.

Research Question: How do IaH programs affect the development of ICC in graduate students pursuing helping professions, and what factors aid or hinder this process?

Methods

Participants:

- 200 graduate students from a university in the Southeast of the United States (2015–2018).
- 138 international students
- 68 domestic students, the majority of which are white women working in counseling fields
- Only first-year graduate students.

Procedure:

- Every semester, one domestic student is paired with one or two international students.
- pre-program orientation on intercultural communication.
- Four to six times a semester, students gathered together for cultural, intellectual, and social events.
  - Reflection on:
    - How their transition was supported by cultural partners.
    - difficulties can arise with cross-cultural communication.
      - Analysis:
        - Research into thematic content in open-ended responses.
        - coding important statements and determining what supports or hinders the growth of ICC.

Resources

Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *10*(3), 241–266. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315306287002
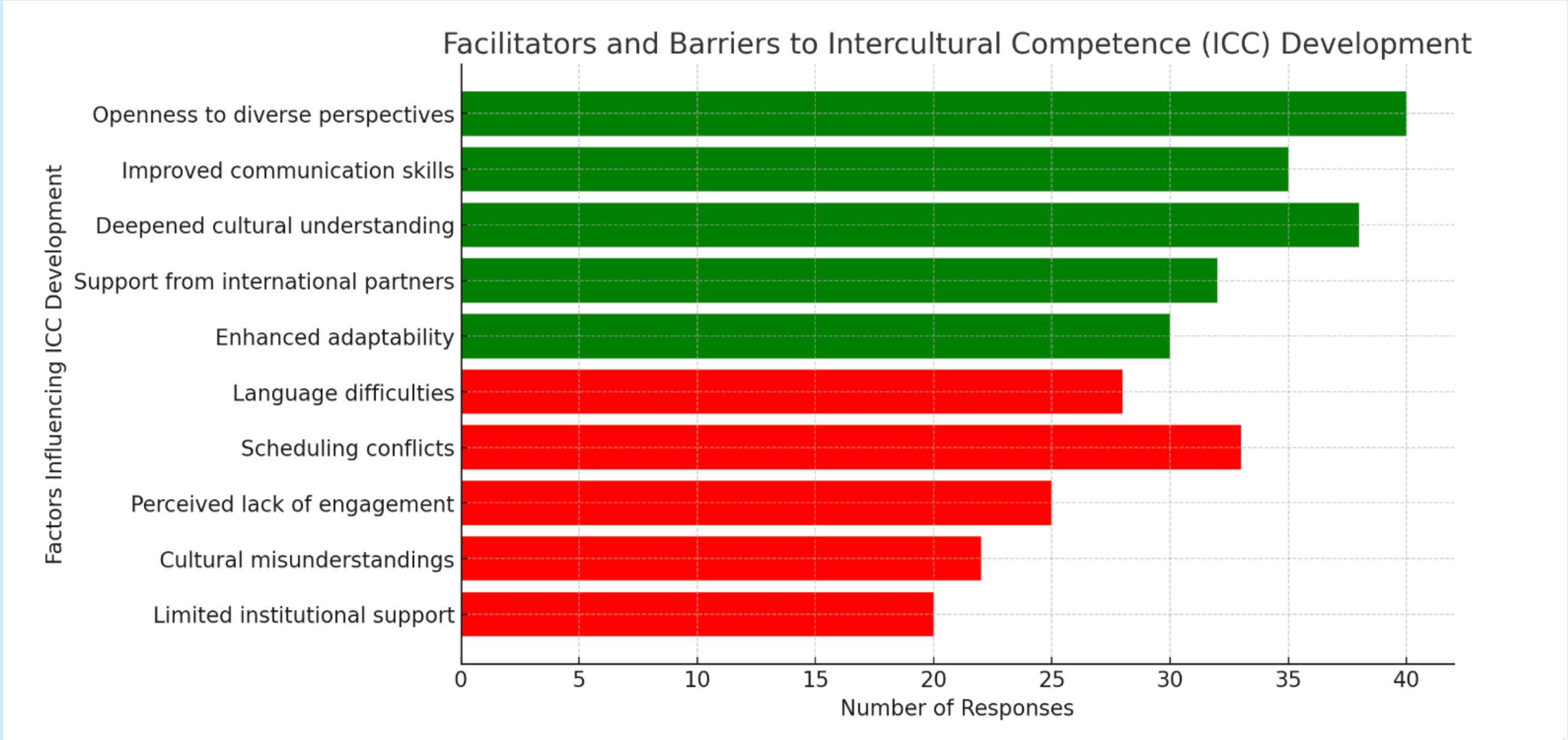
Krajewski, S. (2011). Developing intercultural competence in multilingual and multicultural student groups. *Journal of Research in International Education, 10*(2), 137–153. https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240911408563

Leung, S. A. (2003). A journey worth traveling: Globalization of counseling psychology. *The Counseling Psychologist, 31*(4), 412–419. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000003031004004

Hauerwas, L. B., Kerkhoff, S. N., & Schneider, S. B. (2021). Glocality, reflexivity, interculturality, and worldmaking: A framework for critical global teaching. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 35*(2), 185–199. https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2021.1900714

Mio J. S., Barker L., Rodríguez M. D. (2019). Multicultural psychology: Understanding our diverse communities. *Oxford University Press*.

Fleckman, J. M., Dal Corso, M., Ramirez, S., Begalieva, M., & Johnson, C. C. (2015). Intercultural competency in public health: A call for action to incorporate training into public health education. *Frontiers in Public Health, 3*, 210–210. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2015.00210

Facilitators and Barriers to Intercultural Competence (ICC) Development

Results

Facilitators of ICC Development:
- greater receptivity to different viewpoints, which promotes more in-depth intercultural interaction.
- enhanced ability to communicate, especially when interpreting nonverbal clues and overcoming language barriers.
- enhanced awareness of culture, enabling people to value variations in worldviews, traditions, and practices.
- assistance from international partners, guiding domestic students through a range of viewpoints and cultural quirks in work environments.
- Increased adaptability as a result of learning how to modify their engagement and communication methods for various cultural circumstances.

Barriers to ICC Development:
- Language barriers cause misunderstandings and lower meaningful interaction.
- Meeting chances are limited by scheduling difficulties, especially for students who have high academic responsibilities.
- Collaboration is difficult because of some cultural partners' perceived lack of engagement.
- Cultural misinterpretations can make people uncomfortable or hesitant in social situations, which can occasionally result in lost educational opportunities.
- Students have expressed a desire for more explicit program expectations and direction, and there is a lack of institutional support.

Future Implications

A number of important modifications must be taken into account in order to maximize the efficacy of IaH programs and guarantee significant cross-cultural interactions:

- Structured Pairing: Students may be more engaged and collaborative if they are paired according to common interests or career objectives.
- Clearer Participation Guidelines: Mutual commitment to the program can be ensured by clearly defining expectations for both domestic and overseas students.
- Improved Support Systems: Offering faculty participation, mentorship, or organized workshops could assist students in overcoming obstacles and encourage ongoing involvement.
- Opportunities for Flexible Meetings: Providing virtual or hybrid program forms will help students with hectic schedules, which will increase participation and accessibility.
- Encouraging Participation: Regular student participation may be promoted by incorporating ICC development activities into the curriculum, awarding awards, or giving praise.
- Increasing Program Duration: Extended collaborations could foster deeper connections and improve ICC growth beyond superficial interactions.
- Cultural Sensitivity Training: Extra instruction prior to and throughout the program may avoid cultural misinterpretations and enhance the efficacy of communication.
- Higher education institutions can better prepare graduate students for success in diverse, international professional situations by addressing these structural hurdles. By putting these changes into practice, IaH programs will have a greater impact, encourage deeper intercultural engagement, and better prepare students for employment in helping professions where cross-cultural contacts are crucial.