



Fostering Intercultural Interactions and Outcomes for Graduate Students Through Internationalization-at-Home Efforts

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Abstract

This study examines the Intercultural interactions between domestic graduate students and international graduate students through the cultural partner program. In higher education within the United States, intercultural efforts are of utmost importance to help with cultural sensitivity and intercultural competency. These efforts help combat common multicultural stigmas and biases that American students may hold. The study comprises of eighty seven participants from the southeastern region of the United States. The experimental group of this study had sixty-eight participants. All these participants were paired with an international graduate-level student to complete multicultural activities throughout the semester. The students in the study had to complete other tasks such as pre- and post-surveys which included psychosocial measures such as well-being, stress, intercultural sensitivity, mindfulness, and perceived support. The statistical analysis found a significant difference in the variable of well-being, however, none of the other variables had a significant difference. Statistical analyses of the data found that there were improved reports of stress, perceived support, and interaction attentiveness throughout the semester.

Background

Internationalization is becoming increasingly popular in education. As the number of international students has culminated to 914,095 (Open Doors, 2022). Due to this rapid expansion of international students, it is critical that higher education post-secondary educational programs facilitate intercultural discussion for both local and international students. This is especially important for the United States as it is the top host country of international students globally (Emma & Batalova, 2021). Students may lack the intercultural competency to work in diverse fields specifically in psychotherapy programs. Intercultural competency is defined as knowledge, skills, and behaviors imperative to intercultural communication, and is essential in optimizing intercultural interactions for students at higher education institutions (Meade, 2010). Internationalization-at-home efforts are one of the most popular strategies for fostering intercultural skills and social and academic success amongst domestic students. Internationalization-at-home is unique as it does not require any other expenses for students; In doing so the program is accessible to all students. Although internationalization provides a multitude of benefits American universities lag in internationalization at-home efforts. The inadequate education on intercultural competency has led students to not overcome stereotypes and biases. These biases lead to students not wanting to engage in intercultural programs due to a lack of education in intercultural practices. Domestic students' intercultural competency is most likely to increase when they engage in meaningful and well-structured intercultural interactions that challenge their cognitive and cultural worldviews (Otten, 2003). Therefore, international at-home efforts are crucial to providing opportunities for students to develop intercultural competency.

Methods

We recruited 97 participants 19.6% of the participants were male. More than half of the participants were Caucasian (52.6%), followed was multiracial participants making up (10.3%). The participants also had diversity when it came to majors as they came from 19 different majors. The largest amount came from "Mental Health Counseling" (39.1%), The second largest group came from "counseling/school psychology" (18.5%) and the third largest group was in "career counseling" (14.3%). The study was split into an experimental group containing 80.4% of the participants while 19.6% of the participants were a part of the control group. It is important to note that 71% of the participants reported having experienced prior intercultural experiences.

Group Means (SDs) and Standardized Mean Differences

	WB	MF	ISS	ISSIE	ISSRCD	ISSIC	ISSIEN	ISSIA	SE	PSS	SAI	Stress
Pre-intervention												
Control	19.21 (4.39)	49.00 (7.47)	92.00 (6.25)	27.74 (2.60)	25.32 (2.26)	15.53 (2.95)	12.26 (1.59)	11.16 (1.46)	35.79 (5.07)	32.42 (4.66)	64.63 (5.11)	37.50 (10.55)
Experimental	20.27 (3.35)	51.13 (8.15)	94.32 (10.20)	28.90 (3.53)	26.45 (2.38)	16.83 (3.14)	12.97 (1.35)	11.43 (1.80)	39.67 (5.39)	33.72 (4.88)	64.25 (7.60)	31.46 (11.23)
<i>d</i>	.30	.27	.24	.34	.48	.42	.51	.16	.73	.27	-.05	-.54
Post-intervention												
Control	19.05 (4.05)	45.68 (8.29)	93.32 (10.98)	27.42 (4.00)	25.42 (2.97)	16.95 (3.70)	12.32 (2.19)	11.21 (1.78)	38.00 (6.39)	31.21 (5.89)	61.05 (8.15)	35.33 (12.84)
Experimental	21.00 (2.74)	47.94 (9.48)	95.73 (9.25)	28.38 (3.35)	25.94 (2.73)	16.81 (3.29)	12.95 (1.40)	11.66 (1.70)	39.76 (5.79)	34.02 (5.21)	61.63 (8.58)	31.81 (12.07)
<i>d</i>	.63	.24	.25	.27	.19	-.04	.39	.26	.30	.52	.07	-.29

d: standardized mean differences

Figure 1 displays the Group means and standard mean differences from Pre- and Post-intervention surveys regarding the participants Well Being, Intercultural sensitivity, self-esteem, Perceived social support, Social and academic integration, mindfulness, and stress.

Procedure

All participants had to meet the following criteria 1) 1st-year graduate students 2) were born in the US. The participants were then assigned either a control or experimental group. Those in the experimental group were assigned a partner that was an international graduate-level student at the same university and the study was a semester-long. At the beginning of the semester, all participants attended a cross-cultural orientation that contained basic cross-cultural interaction and answered questions related to the program. The control group received a pamphlet for the rest of the semester while the experimental group met their partner for the semester as they were instructed to meet their partner four to six times per semester. While meeting with their partner they were instructed to participate in cross-cultural experiences such as social or cultural events, and sporting events, or activities around the community. All participants were required to take two surveys which included basic demographics such as race, gender, and major, and focused on five topics well-being, intercultural sensitivity, perceived social support, mindfulness, and stress.

Statistical Analysis

We computed means and standard deviations for all interested measures. The distributions of most measures were approximately symmetric or mildly skewed with skewness, less than .70. Asymmetric distributions existed for the measures of Stress and the post-test measures of Well-being as well as Interaction Enjoyment. We first examined the interaction effect between the group and the covariate, that is, we first ran a regression model that included an interaction term between the group and the covariate. The group is an indicator variable for whether the intervention was present, with 0 = control group and 1 = experimental group; represents the interaction term between the group and pre-intervention measure; b0 is the intercept; b1, b2, and b3 are the slopes; e indicates the error term. Data from Well-being, Interaction Enjoyment and Stress violated the assumptions on errors (normality and/or homoscedasticity). Therefore, we used a robust estimation method for the regression analyses of these three measures, which is robust to the assumption violation and corrects for standard errors of parameter estimates.

Limitations

This study had a few limitations. The main thing had to do with self-reliability based on the surveys, such as enjoyment and attentiveness. Second, the study size is unreliable as the population is small and the location is on one campus located in the southeast united states which is not representative of the whole population.

References

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Results

Correlations among pre-intervention measures were from -.43 to .83, and correlations among post-intervention measures were in the range of -.53 to .84. We found significant group differences in well-being between the experimental and control group in the studies. Both the main and interaction effects were significant (P>.05). This suggests a significant interaction between pre- and post-relationships being different amongst the participants. We observed three types of patterns in the change of standardized mean differences from pre-intervention measurement to post-intervention measurement. On Well-being and Perceived Social Support, standardized mean differences between groups increased after the intervention; on Respect for Cultural Differences, Interaction Confidence, Self-esteem, and Stress, mean differences decreased after the intervention; on the other variables, means differences did not change much from pre-intervention to post-intervention. All other scores were non-significant (P<.05).

$$X_{post} = b_0 + b_1 * group + b_2 * X_{pre} + b_3 * (group * X_{pre}) + e,$$

$$X_{post} = b_0 + b_1 * group + b_2 * X_{pre} + b_3 * (group * X_{pre}) + e,$$

Figure 2 displays the general form for the regression analysis between the group and covariate.

$$X_{post} = b_0 + b_1 * group + b_2 * X_{pre} + e. X_{post} = b_0 + b_1 * group + b_2 * X_{pre} + e.$$

Figure 3 displays the updated general form of the regression model without interaction terms to examine the conditional differences between experimental and control groups.

Discussion

The regression analyses discovered that all variables except well-being were found insignificant conditional differences between experimental and control groups. The standardized mean difference analyses revealed no substantial changes present between the pre-intervention and post-intervention in mindfulness, intercultural sensitivity, and social and academic integration. Furthermore, there were also measures in which the standardized mean differences in the post-intervention were lower than those in the pre-intervention, including self-esteem, stress, and intercultural sensitivity subscales like respect for cultural differences and interaction confidence. The constructs being measured are complex, so there might have not been enough time to develop enough intercultural growth within such a time frame. Furthermore, many of the participants were first-year graduate students who had many other important and ongoing activities in their transition to postsecondary education. Consequently, their busy schedules might have negatively impacted the amount of change they underwent in the program due to a lack of achieving mutually available meetups with their international partners (Campbell, 2012; Shigaki & Smith 1997). Similarly, the timing of the second survey in this research might also have influenced scores, as it was taken during the end of the semester, which is already a difficult and busy time for the participants (Campbell, 2012). Finally, insufficient training for participants in cross-cultural interactions might have led to insignificant results in the current study. Despite the insignificant results mentioned above, both the regression and the standardized mean analyses of the experimental and control groups between the pre-and post-intervention displayed considerable results of the CPP intervention in enhancing the well-being of the participants. Furthermore, the standardized mean analysis revealed