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Long term effects of intercultural competence development training for study- abroad adjustment and global communication

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Abstract

This study investigates the long term contribution of intercultural competence development training for global communication and adjustment given to Turkish study-abroad students prior to their sojourns to English L1 countries, indicating their views on how they benefited from the instruction after their arrival in the host country, to what extent the instruction contributed to their adjustment process, and what suggestions they would make for the improvement of the program they had undertaken. Being the last of the three consecutive studies, it is based on e-mail interview responses of eight graduate sojourners whose opinions on the program prior to their departure were reported earlier. The study focuses on the participants' views on the significance of intercultural competence training and awareness of the nature of English as a means of global communication, and demonstrates the long-terms gains that could be attributed to study-abroad students through an intercultural development course that could best serve for their communication and adjustment needs in the host country.

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Keywords: intercultural competence; English as a lingua franca (ELF); intercultural sensitivity; global citizenship

1. Introduction

Much of the study abroad literature is based on those who either seek to have education in English speaking countries or those who travel to or from these countries to others to study. Obviously, there is a good reason for that and that is basically because the role that intercultural competence plays in global communication where English functions as a lingua franca. Advancements in communication technology fostered by the globalisation process, reciprocally, have brought people from different nations into day to day contact for a variety of economic, social and political reasons where English is primarily used as a means of exchange, which has made the language most sought after commodity. Fostered by this new trend, there has been an increased inflow of international students into English L1

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countries in their pursuit of undergraduate and graduate programs in the language of globalism (Crystal, 2003, p. 86-122)

Like almost all of the nations worldwide, in Turkey a lot of institutional, as well as individual, efforts have been made for sufficient linguistic preparation of students who would like to pursue their studies abroad. Such efforts generally limit their purposes with preparing to succeed in internationally recognised English exams such as Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and International English Language Testing (IELTS), the criteria of which remain unchallenged and recognised as primary linguistic achievement objectives by almost all of the educational institutions worldwide. On the other hand, there has not been any academic attempt that would address the views of the participants of these programs as to whether or not these programs serve sufficiently for their intercultural communication needs during their sojourn where intercultural communication is inseparable from their day to day living.

In order to provide insights on the significance of intercultural competence (IC) for study-abroad preparation three consecutive studies have been conducted. The former two of these studies were based on the syllabus design and implementation of IC training which were reported by Kural & Bayyurt (2017) and Kural & Bayyurt (2016) respectively. Being the third and the last of these three consecutive studies, the present study intends to demonstrate the long-term contribution of the IC development instruction for global communication as well as focusing on the necessity of the development of awareness of the role that English plays for global communication. The instruction on which the study is based was an eight-week long program integrated to the participants' English preparatory program prior to their sojourn to English L1 countries.

The program was designed according to the European Council criteria accepted for IC development for education suggested by Barrett, Byram, Lázár, Mompoin-Gaillard and Philippou (2014) and based on the social-constructivist view of learning development of Vygotsky (1978), which is consistent with the Council's outlook. The instruction scope intended to develop awareness in the nature and function of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) as well as competencies, skills and knowledge needed to perform effectively in intercultural encounters to be developed through the involvement of the participants in in-class activities at, both, individual and interactional levels.

1.1. Literature review

As English becomes the overwhelmingly dominant language in a large number of cross-cultural encounters throughout the world, the number of its non-native speakers of different L1 backgrounds who use it as a lingua franca in education and academic settings, also, increasingly outnumbers its native speakers who take part in such settings; and, in most cases its native speakers are absent from these settings. Participants of speech events in these settings belong to different primary lingua-cultural communities, and ELF users do not, themselves, constitute a speech community with an established distinct legitimate "variety" (Seidlehofer, 2008, p. 28) that would characterise regular local networks of interaction, and thus, as indicated by Nunn (2005) it is not possible to talk about a definable global speech community in terms of a single speech community.

The use of English in cross-cultural communication domains where native speakers are absent the linguistic and sociocultural norms of native speakers as well as their cultures are also absent Gnutzmann (2000, p. 358). According to Widdowson (1994, p. 385) it is not possible for learners to maintain learner autonomy in a learning context where another language and culture are imposed upon them as it requires to "shift the emphasis away from context of use to context of learning, and consider how language is to be specially designed to engage the student's reality and activate the learning process" (p. 387), which

highlights the point that study-abroad preparation should emphasize the student's study-abroad reality in its approaches to instruction method and material choices.

Indicating that the concept of communication competence emerged as a reaction to earlier approaches to language that focused exclusively on grammatical competence, Canale (1983) and Canale & Swain (1980) suggest that the notion of communicative competence should be reconsidered for teaching English and define communicative competence as “a global competence that subsumed four separate but related competencies: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic.” Claiming that English as an international language could not be reduced to a single, limited, monolingual or mono-cultural concept, Nunn (2005) states that when used in cross-cultural communication its competence consists of a combination of ‘interlocking and interdependent competences that sometimes compensate for each other, sometimes counteract each other and sometimes reinforce each other’, and thus, in international English there is unity in diversity and there can be no agreed body of standard English available to be taught or learnt. He suggests that it is essential to reconceptualise communicative competence in relation to English as an international language as a holistic, global and international concept encompassing various linking components of usable knowledge and skills and abilities needed to put these into practice within a variety of communities and types of community that would encompass various competence.

Since ELF is a means of cross-cultural exchange, any study falls within the scope of its competencies requires considering IC as one of its indispensable factors. Although the definition of IC varies in the literature depending on the purpose, approach and interpretation of the researcher (Hoskins & Crick, 2010) a lot of recent IC research commonly defines it as a fundamental dimension of global culture and global citizenship, and thus as an inseparable element of ELF and the development of ELF skills. In a broad sense IC can be defined as “a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are culturally and linguistically different from oneself” (Fantini, 2006).

The developmental and co-orientational models of IC provide deeper insights into the development of these abilities, with the former focusing on how communication takes place within cross-cultural domains and how views, meanings and intercultural understanding are constructed during the interactions in these encounters (Bennet, 1993; Bennet, 1986), and the latter describing the stages of development through which intercultural competence is acquired (Barrett, 2012).

The components of these abilities defined by Barrett, Byram, Lázár, Mompoin-Gaillard and Philippou (2014) and accepted by the European Council include attitudes, knowledge and understanding, skills, and actions. The attitudes defined by the authors include valuing cultural diversity; respecting people who have different cultural backgrounds; being open to, curious about and willing to learn from and about people who have different perspectives; willingness to empathise with people who have different cultural affiliations; willingness to question what is usually taken for granted as ‘normal’ according to one's previously acquired knowledge and experience; willingness to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty; and willingness to seek out opportunities to engage and cooperate with individuals who have different cultural orientations. The knowledge and understanding component of IC development are identified by the authors as understanding the internal diversity and heterogeneity of all cultural groups; understanding and awareness of one's own and other people's assumptions, preconceptions and stereotypes; awareness of the influence of one's own language and cultural affiliations on one's experience of the world and of other people; communicative awareness, including awareness of the fact that other peoples' languages may express shared ideas in a unique way; knowledge of the beliefs, values, practices, discourses and products that may be used by people who have particular cultural orientations; and understanding and awareness of the socially constructed nature of knowledge.

The IC skills defined to be developed in the learners by the authors include multiperspectivity; skills in discovering information about other cultural affiliations; skills in interpreting other cultural practices, beliefs and values and relating them to one's own; empathy; cognitive flexibility – the ability to change and adapt one's way of thinking according to the situation or context; skills in critically evaluating and making judgements about cultural beliefs, values and practices; skills of adapting one's behaviour to new cultural environments; linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse skills, including skills in managing breakdowns in communication; multilingual skills to meet the communicative demands of an intercultural encounter; and the ability to act as a 'mediator' in intercultural exchanges, including skills in translating, interpreting and explaining. The ability of IC actions defined as the ultimate performance criteria to be performed in intercultural encounters are identified by the authors include seeking opportunities to engage with people who have different cultural orientations; interacting and cooperating appropriately, effectively and respectfully with people who have different cultural affiliations; and challenging attitudes and behaviours which contravene human rights; and taking action to defend and protect the dignity and human rights.

Because IC involves not only attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills but also action, equipping learners with IC through education empowers learners to take action in the world. As identified by the authors also, literature on IC stresses the close link between IC and intercultural sensitivity (Barnlund & Namura, 1985; Bennett, 1993; Zhao, 2002; Chen & Starosta, 2000) suggesting that intercultural sensitivity could be observed as an important measure of IC, and attending culturally related programs would make a significant contribution to learners' intercultural sensitivity (Klak & Martin, 2003). Chen & Starosta (2000) claim that "the process of achieving awareness of cultural similarities and differences is enhanced and buffered by the ability of intercultural sensitivity" (p. 6). The authors identified five intercultural sensitivity areas – 'interaction engagement', 'respect for cultural differences', 'interaction confidence', 'interaction enjoyment', and 'interaction attentiveness' – which could be focussed and observed as a means of intercultural competence development and assessment.

Indicating that ELF studies show us general aspects of IC, Hülmbauer, Böhringer, & Seidlhofer (2008) state that training that would intend to develop intercultural sensitivity and cognitive flexibility for ELF users require the activation of process that would involve cooperation, accommodation and simplification strategies, the ability to signal non-understanding in a face saving way, lingua-cultural awareness, and open-mindedness.

While IC is considered a fundamental aspect of study abroad preparation (Vande Berg & Paige, 2009), it is also emphasized as a fundamental means of cooperation and peace within the education policy of the European Commission which addresses intercultural education as "a pedagogy which aims content, learning processes, teaching methods, syllabus and materials, and assessment, one purpose of which is to develop intercultural competence in learners of all ages in all types of education as a foundation for dialogue and living together" (Barrett, Byram, Lázár, Mompoin-Gaillard and Philippou, 2014). Considering IC training as also a means of global contemporary culture, the Commission also emphasizes the implementation of intercultural education as part of general responsibility of educational authorities within all the scopes of informal, non-formal, and formal education.

Parallel to this trend, IC training has become an important dimension of many study-abroad preparation programs with a strong emphasis on how sojourners benefit from it (Vande Berg & Paige, 2009). A Georgetown Consortium program designed to promote intercultural learning demonstrated a strong association between intercultural training and student learning (Vande Berg, 2009). An intercultural competence training program provided by the European University Viadrina located on the German–Polish border demonstrated how a course programme could boost IC in their learners. The main aims of the program were to give students the possibility of experiencing, discovering and discussing the diversity of values and worldviews in special workshops. Although at first it had not been

considered necessary by many university employees, the program turned into a success story which could be transferred to other international academic institutions (Hiller & Wozniak 2009).

1.2. The IC development instruction

As reported earlier (Kural & Bayyurt 2016) the instruction was designed according to the process oriented model of IC suggested by Deardorff (2006) which was developed by encapsulating the many perspectives on IC in the current literature into a single consensus. The instruction was given to the participants as four hours a week program for eight weeks during their final half-semester integrated to their two-semester long English preparatory course prior to their sojourns to pursue their graduate studies in English L1 countries. The content of the instruction consisted of video-clips, films, and reading material compiled and simplified from academic sources containing information on intercultural topics, competencies needed for intercultural communication, the role and function of English for global communication, and people using different varieties of English for global communication.

In order to develop sufficient intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes defined and accepted as the ultimate goal by the European Council (Barrett, Byram, Lázár, Mompoin-Gaillard and Philippou, 2014) the topics included in the material were introduced in the classes through the participants' involvement as part of their in-class activities during which their views, ideas and opinions emerged by using their own skills to listen, observe, analyze, reflect, and relate.

Along with focusing on the development and improvement of the intercultural sensitivity skills identified as interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness in Chen & Starosta (2000), the participants' in-class activities were also guided and directed towards the improvement of their attitude of valuing cultural differences, respecting people of different cultural backgrounds, being open to and curious to learn from others who have different perspectives, willingness to empathise with people who have different cultural affiliations, willingness to question what is usually taken for granted as 'normal', willingness to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty, and willingness to seek out opportunities to engage and cooperate with people of different cultural orientations.

2. Method

2.1. The purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to demonstrate the long-term effect of the IC development training on the participants during their sojourn in English L1 countries which they had undertaken prior to their departure.

2.2. Research question

In order to demonstrate the long-term effect of the IC development instructions on the participants the present study intended to answer the following research question:

What are the opinions of the participants, who currently pursue their graduate programs in English L1 countries, on the ELF-aware IC development instruction which they had undertaken as part of their English preparatory program prior to their departure?

2.3. Instruments and participants

The Turkish versions of the following research instruments were used to answer the above research question:

Demographic Questionnaire: This questionnaire included items to obtain data on all of the participants' demographic information such as name, gender and age, as well as their educational background, the country of sojourn, and the level and scope of their graduate studies abroad.

E-mail interviews: The e-mail interviews were conducted during the participants' sojourn which was 10 months after their arrival in English L1 countries upon completion of their preparatory program in Turkey prior to their departure. Eight students (seven males and one female) volunteered to participate in the interviews. Their ages ranged from 23-27. Six of them were undertaking their studies in the U.S. and two of them in the U.K. The e-mail interviews contained the same questions used in the first study (Kural & Bayyurt, 2017) which were used as part of the needs analysis for the IC syllabus design in that study and in which the participants were asked to state where they lived and studied, whether their friends, colleagues, associates and lecturers were native speakers of English and where they came from; whether the participants' had had any knowledge about their culture; whether they had any adjustment problems such as language barriers, cultural shocks, differences in body language, religion, nationality, ethnicity, gender, outfit, etc.; what issues they felt significant for intercultural communication according to their experience during their sojourn such as open-mindedness, social initiative, emotional stability, flexibility, patience, humour, curiosity, ability to deal with stress; whether they changed their perceptions of what the ideal English language was and who its speakers were; what they would advice to those who would like to pursue their studies abroad when they would face problems caused by cultural, national, ethnicity and language differences; and what their opinions were about the English preparatory program they undertook prior to their sojourn in terms of their preparedness and readiness to cope with these problems during their sojourn, and what they would suggest for the to facilitate convenience for living abroad and ease up communication with people during sojourn.

2.4. Data collection and analysis procedures

The answers obtained from the participants were analyzed as follows: First, all the responses were translated into English, which were then back translated into Turkish by two professional translators to ensure certainty that the English versions of the responses represented accurately the participants' responses in Turkish. Then, the responses were grouped up according to ELF-awareness and IC development focus areas through thematic or content analysis according in order to identify the participants' orientation to the English language, awareness of ELF and intercultural sensitivity. In order to ensure internal validity and to establish certainty that the thematic analysis represented the participants' responses, an emerging thematic analysis method was used in the grouping up of the participants' responses. In order to avoid confusion the responses of the participants were presented as "Participant 1-8". The five overarching themes emerged from their responses, which were presented for discussion in topic sequences, were their:

- perceptions of the "ideal English" and native speakerism (i.e. their attitudes towards English used by its native speakers compared to its use by its non-native speakers);
- perceptions of their own English;
- views on their English learning experiences;
- intercultural awareness and views on intercultural development needs; and
- ELF awareness.

then, the responses of the participants

3. Results

The responses of the participants firmly revealed that they had already been conscious of the existence of variations in native speaker norms and there was not anything like ideal English:

Observing three native instructors to make corrections individually on the corrected versions by each of the other two consecutively on separate occasions proved my idea that there could be more than just one correct version even for native speakers. This also showed that there is nothing like ideal English, just like we were taught in the preparatory course. I think everyone should feel comfortable about this. (Participant 4)

My opinion did not change as I knew before I came here that there is no ideal English. Everyone speaks differently. (Participant 7)

The participants indicated that they were not surprised that their English was different from the native speakers'. They stressed that it did not worry them, and they knew what to do when they communicated with the native speakers:

Like we saw in the videos in our course at Marmara University, English is used differently by different people in daily communication. Although I have had some minor difficulties with some Americans, I already know what to do like, when I have problems I ask them to speak slowly or repeat again. (Participant 1)

I knew that people spoke differently here, and my speech would be different from theirs. But, my vocabulary level increases day by day. I do not have that much difficulty now. I feel more comfortable than before. I think I will always have some problems, because English is not my mother tongue. (Participant 6)

As one of the enrolment prerequisites of the participants' graduate programs in the host country was to obtain a sufficient achievement result in the internationally recognized normative exams such as TOEFL and IELTS and their English preparatory program is based on achieving this objective, the participants did not dispute the programs' contents and activities directly related to the preparation for these exams. Along with their appreciation for their preparation for the exams, the participants stressed their appreciation of having been exposed to different varieties of English used in oral communication and ELF-awareness developed prior to their sojourn:

Becoming aware of the existence of different accents and seeing how the meanings of words can vary from time to time before I came here was very useful, necessary and very informative for me. (Participant 3)

It was very important for us to visualise and see what we would face here, and to concentrate on these issues before our departure. In the preparatory school, our instructor had the same experience and shared it with us. This helped us to see things from different angles, which was very useful for us when we first came here. (Participant 4)

The participants clearly indicated that they were satisfied with having being exposed to ELF and other cultures in English L1 countries and the way they were guided during the instruction period through the implementation of the syllabus, indicating the significance of more training in this area as stated below:

During the classes we used a lot of materials about different people and cultures that exist here. We used a lot of audiovisual materials. I think they were very helpful for our preparation. I strongly suggest that there should be more instruction in this area. Our teacher was just like a coach directing his team before the match began. (Participant 2)

The participants also expressed their appreciation for the written material adapted for the enhancement of their sociolinguistic knowledge as part of their IC development needs, which resulted in changes in their attitudes to other cultures and the significance of IC for global communication:

I think the written materials used in the course were very helpful. They showed us that the cultures of people from different backgrounds could vary a lot. They gave us the idea that we should accept these cultures in the way they exist and we should look at them in a positive way. This was very important in terms of our early adjustments here. They gave us very useful and supportive outlook. I believe that the awareness and consciousness about the existence of other cultures here was very useful especially by easing up the earlier stage of our adjustment process. (Participant 5)

The participants stated that they had firmly established sufficient ELF awareness prior to their sojourn:

I think they should provide more culture classes to everybody who would study abroad. For example, all the materials studied in some of our classes and their contents demonstrated were very helpful for me especially when I first arrived here. I already knew that when we got here we would not confront only one kind of English. I knew that that we would meet many different people from every part of the world. The material used in the classes made a lot contribution to my adjustment to the situation here in psychological and aural ways. I would advise the newcomers to read a lot of material about different cultures and watch videos which present different kinds of English and accents used here. (Participant 7)

Everyone who wants to study abroad should learn about different English styles and accents people use here. They should have good knowledge in this area. They should also become familiar with the cultures of different people live abroad. They all use English differently. The preparatory courses should use more of the materials we used in the last few weeks. They were very useful to show us that there were many different kinds of English used here. They should use these material right from the very beginning through to the end of the program.” (Participant 8)

4. Discussions

The responses of the participants clearly indicate that their study-abroad experience posited their views on all the points addressed above and they had already developed sufficient confidence to cope with their communication needs in the host country. This was contrary to the opinions of those which were addressed previously (Kural & Bayyurt, 2017) who had indicated that they were not ready to cope with the new cultural and communication environment when they arrived in the host country, and the shift and changes in their perceptions of the “ideal English”, native speakerism and their own English, their views on their English learning experiences, the significance of intercultural awareness, intercultural development and ELF awareness occurred only after their arrival, indicating serious linguistic and adjustment problems.

The participants indicated that IC development training prior to sojourn would contribute to their awareness about the kind of linguistic environment they would confront when they arrive in the host county, developing consciousness about the existence of variations in native speaker norms and about

the fact that there is no ideal English, which is one of the most influential factor shaping up their attitude not only towards their own performance in English but also towards others'. Stressing the point that they were not surprised that their English was different from the native speakers' and they knew what to do when they communicated with native speakers in the host country show that attending IC development programs prior to sojourn could offer significant contribution to international students' adjustment process in the host country as indicated in the literature (Vande Berg, 2009; Hiller & Wozniak, 2009).

The participants' responses indicate that the written material used during the preparatory program and the guidance provided for their adjustment to the new multicultural context of the host country contributed to their outlook concerning their attitudes towards other cultures, which indicates that IC development can enhance sojourners prior to their departure and offer readiness to live and adjust in the new cultural environment.

5. Conclusions

The participants' responses demonstrate the significance of the IC development instruction and ELF-awareness during the linguistic preparatory stage prior to sojourn for all the study-abroad candidates, indicating the long-term effects and positive contribution to their readiness for the new communication environment and global communication domains in the host country. As indicated in the current ELF literature, exposure to different varieties of English is an essential dimension of IC instruction contributing the participants' linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse skills. This goes hand in hand with the development/improvement of intercultural awareness and sensitivity, and equipping learners with the ability to adapt in new cultural environments and participate effectively in intercultural exchanges.

It is also clear that the instructor's IC competence and ELF awareness would contribute to the study-abroad candidates' preparedness during the preparatory program undertaken prior to their sojourn. The instructor's knowledge and experience gained in ELF intercultural settings could provide significant input during the preparatory stage, indicating the long-term positive impact of the program. Thus, current English preparatory program developers and administrators should consider the global function of ELF and its indispensable IC development dimension as part of their macro and micro level language policies, especially in the areas of syllabus design, material development, and teacher training and development.

6. Ethics Committee Approval

The author(s) confirm(s) that the study does not need ethics committee approval according to the research integrity rules in their country (Date of Confirmation: June 11, 2020).

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Kültürlerarası yeterlilik becerileri geliştirmeye yönelik programın yurt dışına giden öğrenciler üzerindeki uyum sağlama ve global iletişim açısından uzun vadedeki etkileri

Öz

Bu çalışma, İngilizcenin birinci dil olarak kullanılan ülkelere öğrenim görmek üzere giden öğrencilerin, yurt dışına çıkmadan önce katılmış oldukları ve kültürlerarası yeterlilik becerilerinin geliştirilmesine yönelik olarak düzenlenen eğitim programının, bu öğrencilere, gittikleri ülkeye uyum sağlama ve global iletişim kurma açılarından sağladığı uzun vadeli katkıyı araştırmaktadır. Çalışma, öğrencilerin program hakkındaki yurt dışına gittikten sonraki görüşlerini, yurt dışı ortamına uyum sağlamaları ve global düzeyde iletişim kurmaları açılarından ele almaktadır. Konuya ilişkin yürütülen ve üç aşamadan oluşan uzun vadeli çalışmaların sonucusu olan bu çalışma, yurt dışına çıkmadan önce söz konusu eğitim programına katılan ve yurt dışına çıkmadan önceki görüşleri önceki çalışmalarda değerlendirilen sekiz öğrencinin, yurt dışına çıktıktan sonra, e-posta ile yapılan görüşmeler ile elde edilen görüşlerini temel almaktadır. Çalışma, öğrencilerin, katılmış oldukları kültürlerarası yeterlilik becerilerinin geliştirilmesi programının önemi ve İngilizcenin global iletişim aracı olarak işlevi konusundaki edindikleri farkındalık hakkındaki görüşlerini araştırmakta; kültürlerarası yeterlilik becerilerinin geliştirilmesine yönelik programın yurt dışında öğrenim görmeye gidecek olan öğrencilerin yurt dışındaki iletişim ve uyum sağlama gereksinimlerini karşılamada ne denli etkili olabileceğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: kültürlerarası yeterlilik; dünya dili olarak İngilizce; kültürlerarası duyarlılık; global vatandaşlık

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