

Measuring Intercultural Sensitivity of Thai University Students: Impact of Their Participation in the US Summer Work Travel Program

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Article information	Abstract
<p>Article History: Received: April 6, 2020 Accepted: April 26, 2020 Available online: April 27, 2020</p> <p>Keywords: Intercultural sensitivity ISS five-factor model US Work Travel program</p>	<p><i>As we are now approaching the first quarter of the 21st century, the impact of globalisation has increased the importance of intercultural competence. This study aims to measure the degree of intercultural sensitivity of 30 English major students who have participated in the US Work Travel program. In this study, an online survey adopted from Chen and Starosta (2000)'s Five-Factor Model of Intercultural Sensitivity was used to collect the data. Although participants were English majors who had high level of English proficiency, the level of their intercultural sensitivity was not high enough to claim that it resulted from the program. In addition, they reported not to have much confidence and motivation to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the program might not actually benefit and help Thai students to develop intercultural skills, the skills needed to meet the challenges of the 21st century. It is hoped that this study could be useful for teachers, or even parents, to decide whether or not, they would support the students to participate in the program in the future.</i></p>

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Work Travel program: Its original purposes

The Work Travel program has been one of popular exchange programs among university students worldwide. Of approximately 1.5 million international participants joining the program each year; more than a thousand of them are Thais (Consular Affairs, U.S. Embassy Bangkok, as cited in Thairath Online, 2019). However, according to Foster (2017), an increase in the popularity of the Work Travel program does not fit with its true purposes. The program was initially aimed to engage international students with U.S. culture and the cultures of other international university students they live and work with,

'income that students are able to save from participating in the program is just one of the benefits and must never be mistaken as the main objective for doing the program' (Foster, 2017, para.1).

Objectives of the Work Travel program being advertised by Thai agencies were also changed from their original purposes (Wongluekiat, 2009). A demand for life experience was a major factor, with salary and compensation being ranked as important factors when choosing the types of jobs. As reported by Thaokhamlue (2012), Paveenavittayachote (2011) and Manadee (2010), factors influencing students in Chiang Mai and Bangkok to participate in the program were not much different. In their studies, they mainly involved the desire to gain different life experiences, travel abroad, experience work-related conditions such as wage rates, benefits of the job, compensation and program fees, and to develop English skills.

Popularity of the work travel program and motivation of Thai students to participate in the program

Thailand has been one of the top ten countries that the U.S. government permits J-1 visa application for the Summer Work Travel program (Kammer, 2011). The number of Thai university students in the program has increased by approximately *'20 percent'* since 2017, with more than *'five thousand'* Thai students taking part in the program in 2019, according to Sarah Duffy, Chief of American Citizen Services Section, Consular Affairs, U.S. Embassy Bangkok (Thairath Online, 2019, p. 21-24).

Although the Work Travel program has been one of frequently chosen research topics in the Thai tertiary contexts, cultural aspects of the program do not seem to be of interest of Thai researchers. Research topics in the past mostly focus on decision making of Thais to participate in the US Work Travel program, or work experiences e.g. Maeluskul (2018); Piencharoen (2018); Lertjanyakit & Bunchapattanasakda (2015); Supat & Jiratchot (2015); Tappaya & Sriboonlue (2013); Thaokhamlue (2012); Paveenavittayachote (2011); Manadee (2010) and Wongluekiat (2009).

Intercultural aspects of the Work Travel program were mentioned by Manadee (2010), who investigated the expectation and satisfaction of participants in the Work Travel program. In her study, the researcher found influencing factors such as experiences of working in an American environment, living with other people, and building friendships both with Thais and foreigners. However, even the researcher herself concludes her study by noting that the program *'is set up in order for the students to experience life and help them to grow by facing many real-life problems'* (Manadee, 2010, p. 38). There is nothing in the statement that mentions the word *'culture'*, the main essence of the program. In the study of Maeluskul (2017), cultural exchange was ranked as the least influencing factor. The participants' desire to improve their English language skills and to earn extra money were ranked as two major factors. As mentioned

earlier, many Thais seem to be misguided and consider the program as an opportunity to travel and to make money abroad.

As we are now approaching the first quarter of the 21st century, the impact of globalisation and internationalisation has increased the importance of intercultural competence. This leads to a growing need for Thai graduates who are well equipped with adequate skills of global citizenship and are potential candidates for highly competitive job markets. In addition, Inkaew (2016) suggests intercultural competence as an important skill to deal with the intercultural challenges of the global community in the 21st century. As a result, there is a need to find out whether the younger generations of Thais have these essential skills to survive in culturally diverse environments and international work settings in this century or not.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Intercultural sensitivity: A key predictor to becoming successful global citizens

The world in the 21st century is diverse and global; therefore, intercultural competence is considered as one of foundation skills for the future success of university graduates to live and work in a diverse and globalised world. As a global citizen, flexibility, adaptability and appreciation of cultural diversity are considered as essential life and career skills (Maharaja 2018; Driscoll, 2017 and Arvantis, Bertozzi, & Armaos, 2017). Flexibility, the '*ability to work and live anywhere*', was found as one of the important factors, according to the Global Shapers Annual 2017, funded by the World Economic Forum, which surveyed 31,495 worldwide respondents aged 18 to 35 who planned to work abroad (Savage, 2018, para. 1).

As defined by Chen & Starosta (2000), intercultural competence is an ability to '*communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations*' (p.12). As defined by Bennett (2017), it is '*a learned perceptual adaptation*' (p.8), a capacity of individuals to learn to adapt and change their behaviors when communicating with people from different cultures or in different cultural contexts. However, Bennett (2017) and Chen & Starosta (2000) point out that intercultural sensitivity, an ability needed for communication across culture, is a prerequisite of intercultural competence.

Intercultural sensitivity has been highly valued as a key predictor for individuals to achieve intercultural competence and to become successful global citizens (Chen & Starosta, 2000). It is one of three basic components of Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC). A lack of intercultural sensitivity can cause a failure to communicate in intercultural interactions. Moreover, as mentioned by Portillo (2004) and Hammer et. al. (2003), the higher the level of intercultural sensitivity individuals possess, the higher their intercultural competence.

Although a number of definitions of intercultural sensitivity has continually been revised to explain in globalized contexts, the key concept of intercultural sensitivity is the success in dealing with people from different cultural backgrounds (Wu, 2015). According to Chen & Starosta (2000), to be interculturally sensitive, one needs to possess six affective elements: self-esteem, self-monitoring, open-mindedness, empathy, interaction involvement, and nonjudgmental attitudes. Therefore, people with intercultural sensitivity are willing to integrate and accommodate different worldviews, and respect and deal with cultural differences, which are increasingly necessary qualities of global citizens.

1. Bhawuk and Brislin (1992)'s the Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory (ISCI)

Bhawuk and Brislin (1992)'s ISCI was developed to measure intercultural sensitivity and intercultural effectiveness of overseas workers; their individualist-collectivist orientations, open-mindedness, and flexibility. Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) defined intercultural sensitivity as the quality of an individual to respect people of other different cultures. As a result, people with intercultural sensitivity tend to be *'interested in other cultures, sensitive enough to notice cultural differences and also willing to modify their behavior'* (p. 416). However, the model was found to be unreliable, as it measures *'everyday conduct peculiarities unless the subjects had an opportunity to study a specific culture from close quarters'* (Kapoor, Blue, Kinsky & Drager, 2000, as cited in McMurry, 2007, p. 28-29). Therefore, the instrument might be only suitable for overseas people who have been staying abroad for a long period of time (Ruengthai, 2012).

2. Bennett (1993)'s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)

Bennett (1993)'s DMIS was developed to explain individuals' reactions to cultural differences emphasising the development of communicative competence. The DMIS compares two types of individual called Ethnocentrism (Denial, Defense, and Minimization) and Ethnorelativism (Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration). Ethnocentric people tend to have no interest in intercultural communication and the existence of culturally different others with their mindset as *'central to reality'*, while people who are ethnorelative perceive all cultures as *'equal in complexity but different in form'* (Bennett, 2017, p.3).

According to Bennett (2017), intercultural sensitivity depends on the need to communicate outside one's own social context. An individual who is intercultural sensitive will develop the competence to interact successfully in different cultural contexts at the same ease as in their own cultural context. Although DMIS is internationally recognized and validated, it was not possible to be used in this current study due to time constraints. The instrument was considered to be more appropriate for a longitudinal study to measure differences between the pre- and post-test (Ruengthai, 2012 and McMurry, 2007).

3. Chen and Starosta (2000)'s five-factor scale of intercultural sensitivity

In 2000, Chen and Starosta formulated 24 items to assess an individual's possession of intercultural sensitivity based on five factors: (1) Interaction Engagement; (2) Respect for Cultural Differences; (3) Interaction Confidence; (4) Interaction Enjoyment; and (5) Interaction Attentiveness. The scale had an overall Cronbach's alpha of '0.88' and '0.86' in two separate studies indicating high internal consistency (Chen & Starosta, 2000, p. 12), was reevaluated by other scholars such as Wu (2015), Rahimi & Soltani (2011) and Fritz, Mollenberg, & Chen (2002), and claimed to be ready for being replicated. The scale consists of 24 statements as follows:

1) Interaction Engagement (Seven statements)

- [1] I am open-minded to people from different cultures.
- [2] I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.
- [3] I tend to wait before forming an impression of culturally-distinct counterparts.
- [4] I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons.
- [5] I often give positive responses to my culturally-different counterpart during our interaction.
- [6] I often show my culturally-distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues.
- [7] I have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between my culturally-distinct counterpart and me.

2) Respect for Cultural Differences (Six statements)

- [1] I think my culture is better than other cultures.
- [2] I think people from other cultures are narrowminded.
- [3] I don't like to be with people from different cultures.
- [4] I respect the values of people from different cultures.
- [5] I respect the ways people from different cultures behave.
- [6] I would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures.

3) Interaction Confidence (Five statements)

- [1] I find it very hard to talk in front of people from different cultures.
- [2] I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.
- [3] I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures.
- [4] I always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures.
- [5] I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures.

4) Interaction Enjoyment (Three statements)

- [1] I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures.
- [2] I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures.
- [3] I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures.

5) Interaction Attentiveness (Three statements)

- [1] I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures.
- [2] I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures.
- [3] I am sensitive to my culturally-distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during our interaction.

For more than a decade, the ISS scale has been used and replicated by researchers in both western and non-western countries including Thailand (e.g. Arvantis, Bertozzi & Armaos, 2017; Semchuchot & Soontornnaruerangsee, 2016; Wu, 2015; Rahimi & Soltani, 2011; Hou, 2010) because the scale *'has demonstrated strong reliability and appropriate concurrent and predictive validity'* (Chen & Starosta, 2000, p. 12). However, replication studies by Tamam (2010) and Fritz, Graf, Hentze, Möllenber, and Chen (2005) found that the scale could not be validated and applied to all contexts, and they suggested further studies to improve it.

Nonetheless, as contexts of the two researches are quite different from the Thai context, there is room to believe that Chen and Starosta (2000)'s five-factor model can be used in this current study. First, the study of Fritz, Graf, Hentze, Möllenber, and Chen (2005) was conducted in Europe, where the context and participants were different from Thai's. Second, Tamam (2010)'s study was conducted in Malaysia. However, although the country is a neighbor of Thailand, the two countries have different social and cultural contexts. While Malaysian context is 'multicultural' and 'multi-religious' (Tamam, 2010, p.177), Thailand is a mono-cultural society (Chocce, 2014) with Theravada Buddhism as a national religion. As a result, suggestions of the two studies above might not be entirely applied to this study. In addition, Chen and Starosta (2000)'s ISS was designed based on the clear concept of intercultural sensitivity, can be used as a self-report measure and there is no need to train professionals to analyze participants' answers (McMurray, 2007). Therefore, the ISS scale is used to collect the data in this study.

Using Chen and Starosta (2000)'s ISS five-factor scale to measure intercultural sensitivity in the Thai tertiary context

The study of intercultural phenomena is not new; however, few studies examining intercultural sensitivity have been conducted in Thai tertiary contexts. There are two studies conducted by Bosuwon (2017) and Chocce (2014) which employed Chen and Starosta (2000)'s Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) to measure intercultural sensitivity of university students in Thai contexts.

Nevertheless, the first study collected data only from foreign international students in Thailand, while the second study collected and compared data received from foreign and Thai students at an international college in Bangkok.

In the first study, Bosuwon (2017) investigated levels of intercultural sensitivity, self-perceived communication competence and social intelligence of foreign international undergraduates from government and private universities in Thailand. The level of intercultural sensitivity of participants was found to be high. American participants had higher scores than other nationalities. Moreover, foreign students who had less than one year or more than four years of intercultural experience had higher scores than those who had 3-4 years of experience. In the second study, Chocce (2014) compared intercultural sensitivity of local Thais and foreign international students at an international college in Bangkok. The study revealed that foreign students had a significantly higher level of intercultural sensitivity than local students who were Thai.

From the two studies, experiences in a host country help develop intercultural sensitivity. As foreign students were forced to adjust themselves and learn a new set of cultures of the host country, this helped them adapt to new situations and environments in order to live their life without much difficulty. On the contrary, Thai students had lower levels of intercultural sensitivity. Although they were studying in an international college, Thais lived in their own social context. As a result, Chocce (2014) recommended intercultural courses and trainings for Thais to widen their worldview and encourage them to make friends with other culturally-different people. Findings of the two Thai studies can also be linked to Savage (2018) and Chen & Starosta (1997) that cultural differences must be experienced by individuals during their intercultural interactions in different cultural contexts. Therefore, the development of individuals' intercultural sensitivity would be achieved through those intercultural interactions.

AIM OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTION

This study aims to measure the degree of intercultural sensitivity of the third and fourth-year English majors who have participated in the US Work Travel program. The research question used to guide this study is *'what degree of intercultural sensitivity exists among the third- and fourth-year English majors who have participated in the US Work and Travel program?'*

The contribution of this research study can be justified from two important aspects. First, this study explores the level of intercultural sensitivity that participants developed during their stay in the US. This is to ascertain the real benefits they received from being in the program, and whether the program actually improved intercultural skills. Second, currently an increasing number of students continue to miss their classes or drop their study in the first academic semester in order to fully participate in the program. This study will find out whether the

university should support and allow students to be absent from classes to participate in the program or not.

Participants

Participants were 30 third and fourth-year English majors at a public university in Bangkok who had at least once participated in the US Summer Work Travel program. The participants finished the Work Travel program and returned to Thailand at the beginning of August 2019. The data was collected at the end of the first academic semester approximately six months after they returned to Thailand. The duration of the survey was one month. An invitation to participate in the survey was initially sent to 45 students; however, 30 participants completed and returned the questionnaire. Nonetheless, there were limited numbers of students who joined the Work Travel program at the moment when the study was conducted and some of them refused to reveal that they had joined the program. Consequently, the sample size of 30 participants was determined and considered sufficient to represent the total population.

Research methodology, data collection and pilot study

The design of data collection was influenced by the need to make it convenient for participants. In addition, an online questionnaire survey was used to maintain the anonymity of participants and to reduce response bias from peer pressure. In this study, Chen and Starosta (2000)'s Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) was used. This research instrument was considered appropriate with participants who were university students for two reasons. First, the language was comprehensible for their level of understanding. Second, the statements of each item of the questionnaire were not too long. Moreover, the scale, which consisted of 24 items, could be completed within a short period of time, approximately 15-20 minutes. The data was collected online via Google Form.

The questionnaire was piloted to five non-population respondents, who were third and fourth-year English majors to test their understanding of the English statements on the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS). As participants were English majors, they were considered as having intermediate and upper intermediate level of English proficiency (CEFR=B2-C1). Therefore, the original English version of the questionnaire was used and there was no need to translate the questionnaire into Thai. In this study, participation of the students was completely voluntary. They were informed of the objectives of the study. Each of them was invited to sign an informed consent form and had approximately a month to complete the questionnaire online. All data collected would also remain confidential and be kept only for the purposes of the study.

Questionnaire, reliability test, and reversed coding items

The survey was divided into three parts. The first part requested personal information such as gender, age, year of studies, how many times and when they had joined the Work Travel program. They were also asked if they had made any new foreign friends while they were in the US. In the second part, there was a list of eight statements on a 5-point Likert scale from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree adapted from Songkasiri (2015)'s social and cultural motivational factors. The second part aimed to explore participants' experiences of social and cultural opportunities while they were participating in the program. In the third part, participants were asked to respond to 24 statements adapted from Chen and Starosta's Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (2000) on the 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. Higher scores on each aspect of this scale would suggest greater sensitivity to intercultural differences (Chen & Starosta, 2000). As presented in Table 1, 24 items of the questionnaire were randomly combined as follows:

Table 1
Five Aspects of Intercultural Sensitivity Used in this Study

Five Aspects of Intercultural Sensitivity	Item Number as Listed on the Questionnaire
[1] Interaction Engagement	1, 5, 18, 19, 21, 22 and 24
[2] Respect for Cultural Differences	2, 3, 4, 6, 7 and 10
[3] Interaction Confidence	8, 14, 15, 16 and 17
[4] Interaction Enjoyment	9, 11 and 13
[5] Interaction Attentiveness	12, 20 and 23

In addition, each element of the five factors of the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale was calculated to test the reliability of the scale. As presented in Table 2, five components of the scale were ranked from highest to lowest reliability. According to Ursachi, Horodnic & Zait (2015), the reliability of the questionnaire was higher than 0.6-0.7, an acceptable level of reliability, and 0.8 or greater, a very good level, therefore, the scale was considered acceptable.

Table 2
Reliability of the Questionnaire

Five Aspects of Intercultural Sensitivity	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
[1] Interaction Attentiveness	3	0.942
[2] Interaction Engagement	7	0.926
[3] Respect for Cultural Differences	6	0.924
[4] Interaction Enjoyment	3	0.913
[5] Interaction Confidence	5	0.896

In this study, descriptive statistics, mean scores, and standard deviations were employed to analyse findings. The values of means of the rating scale were interpreted as follows: 1.00 –

1.80 = 'very low', 1.81 – 2.60 = 'low', 2.61 – 3.40 = 'moderate', 3.41 – 4.20 = 'high', 4.21 – 5.00 = 'very high'. Moreover, in order to calculate an overall score, as suggested by Chen & Starosta (2000), nine items such as item number 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13 and 22 were 'reverse-coded' before computing them (p.12). Reverse-coding was used in this study because the ISS scale has items that are considered negatively worded such as '*I don't like to be with people from different cultures*' and so on (See Table 5- Table 9). Therefore, negatively worded items were reverse-coded to make sure that the participants' agreement on all of each item on the scale was consistent.

FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Demographic data of participants

There were 19 fourth-year and 11 third-year students in this study. Nine of them were male (30%) and 21 were female (70%). Their age was around 21 – 23 years old. Participants in this study applied through different Work Travel agencies in Bangkok. The maximum amount of time allowed for their Work Travel Visa was approximately three months. All participants joined the Work Travel program in 2019, and they all returned to Thailand in August 2019. However, while 90% had join the program for the first time, three participants had participated in the program twice (10%). One had joined the program in 2017 and 2019 (3.33%), while the other two joined the program in 2018 and 2019 (6.66%).

When participants were asked whether they had made any foreign friends from participating in the Work Travel program, there were only two students who had made more than ten friends, four had around 1-5 friends, while other participants (80%) had made no foreign friends. 93% of the participants perceived that they did not have much opportunity to use English when they were in the program. There were only two students (7%) who frequently used English to communicate in everyday life.

2. Social and cultural opportunities while participating in the Work Travel program

As seen in Table 3, participants reported to have a high level of social and cultural opportunities while participating in the Work Travel program. Most participants believed that they had a chance to '*expand their perspective and increase overseas experiences*' (mean=4.63) and '*to learn the difference of other people, culture, tradition, and life of other nations*' (mean=4.55). The mean scores received for the first two items were very high. However, it seems that participants might not have much opportunity '*to be engaged in cultural exchange*' (mean=3.36), and '*to interact outside work with other participants of varying cultural backgrounds*' (mean=2.73) as the mean scores received for these two items were moderate and considered lower than other items.

Table 3
Social and Cultural Opportunities as Perceived by the Participants

Social and Cultural Opportunities	Mean (N=30)	Response interpretation
[1] to expand my perspective and increase overseas experiences	4.63	very high
[2] to learn the difference of other people, culture, tradition, and life of other nations	4.55	very high
[3] to experience cultural diversity	4.36	high
[4] to interact with other participants of varying cultural backgrounds	3.90	high
[5] to learn and live with other people peacefully	3.54	high
[6] to make new friends and make friend with foreigners	3.45	high
[7] to be engaged in cultural exchange	3.36	moderate
[8] to interact outside work with other participants of varying cultural backgrounds	2.73	moderate
Total	3.81	high

From Table 3, the score on opportunities to expand their perspective and increase overseas experience is consistent with previous studies in the Thai context such as Thaokhamlue, (2012); Paveenavittayachote, (2011); Manadee, (2010); Wongluekiat, (2009). Although these studies have been conducted for decades, the motivation of Thais to join the Work Travel Program remains the same. A demand for life experience and a desire to travel are the main motivation for Thais to participate in the Work Travel program. It can be implied that most Thai teenagers do not have much opportunity to experience the real world without their parents. As a result, joining the Work Travel program might be the only opportunity for some Thai teenagers to step their feet out of the house, go abroad and experience the world on their own. However, this requires further study in order to explore more in more detail.

Nevertheless, high scores on opportunities to learn about the differences of other people, cultures, traditions, and life of other nations reflect that participants in this study valued intercultural experiences that they gained from the program. As they were English majors, the language barrier was not an obstacle for them to communicate and engage in a conversation with foreigners. This could explain why the level of scores on items such as item [2], [3] and [4] were high (See Table 3 above). In addition, these results possibly make them unique and different from other Thai participants in the previous studies. As reported by Maeluskul (2017) and Manadee (2010), participants in their studies did not value cultural benefits from working and travelling abroad that much, and they tended to mingle with participants who shared similarities or common backgrounds, particularly the same native language. Nonetheless, to make younger generations of Thais value intercultural benefits from their experiences abroad, their language and communicative skills need to be improved to make them confident enough to be able to engage successfully in intercultural communication and recognise the value of intercultural skills. Moreover, to widen their worldview and to encourage them to make friends

with foreigners, as suggested by Chocce (2014), intercultural courses and trainings need to be provided.

3. Measuring five aspects of participants' intercultural sensitivity

In order to obtain the whole picture of the data, all elements of the five factors on the scale were combined. From Table 4, the average mean score of a participants' level of Intercultural Sensitivity was high. Respect for Cultural Differences was the highest, followed by Interaction Enjoyment, Interaction Engagement, Interaction Confidence, while Interaction Attentiveness was the lowest.

Table 4
Average Scores on Five Aspects of Intercultural Sensitivity

Five Aspects of Intercultural Sensitivity	Total Mean (N=30)	Total SD	Response Interpretation
[1] Respect for Cultural Differences	4.40	0.70	very high
[2] Interaction Enjoyment	4.30	0.84	very high
[3] Interaction Engagement	3.76	0.82	high
[4] Interaction Confidence	3.41	0.85	high
[5] Interaction Attentiveness	3.29	1.07	moderate
Total	3.70	1.04	high

Although participants had stayed in the US for only three months, their average scores on most factors were tentatively high. The results correspond with Bosuwon (2017) that the length of stay is one factor that increases the intercultural sensitivity. In his study, the participants with less than one year and more than four years of intercultural experience had higher scores than those with 3-4 years of experience. Furthermore, as pointed out by Savage (2018) and Chen & Starosta (2000) living in a foreign or different cultural context is definitely a factor for individuals to develop their intercultural sensitivity.

However, participants in this study were English majors who had more exposure to using English and to communicate with foreigners both in the host and home country than participants in other disciplines. Therefore, their English proficiency probably enabled them to enjoy intercultural experiences abroad and interact more with friends from different cultures. This is the same as in previous studies in which language and communication skills were factors promoting intercultural sensitivity (e.g. Aydogan and Akbarov, 2014; Olson and Kroeger, 2001; and Sizoo et al., 2004, as cited in Bosuwon, 2017). Consequently, as they are proficient in communicating in English, it cannot be claimed that the high level of intercultural sensitivity found in this study was simply from the Work Travel program. Based on this, there is a need to have more studies to measure the pre and post level of their intercultural sensitivity before and after their participation in the program.

3.1 Descriptive statistics of the items on each factor of the scale

3.1.1 *Respect for cultural differences*

In order to understand findings clearly, it is necessary to look at means of the items on the scale. From Table 5, the average score for Respect for Cultural Differences was very high. Participants rated the item [4] as the highest and the item [3] as the lowest (See Table 5).

Table 5
Respect for Cultural Differences

Respect for Cultural Differences	Mean (N=30)	SD	Response Interpretation
[4] I respect the values of people from different cultures.	4.72	0.47	Very high
[2] I think people from other cultures are narrowminded.*	4.55	0.69	Very high
[10] I would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures.*	4.55	0.52	Very high
[6] I respect the ways people from different cultures behave.	4.36	0.67	Very high
[7] I think my culture is better than other cultures.*	4.18	0.75	High
[3] I don't like to be with people from different cultures.*	4.09	0.94	High
Total	4.34	0.67	Very high

Note: Items 2, 3, 7 and 10 were reverse-coded.*

From Table 5, results seem to correspond well with the amount of social and cultural opportunities that participants reported to receive from the Work Travel program (See Table 3 above). According to Chen & Starosta (2000), the component, Respect for Cultural Differences, was designed to evaluate individuals' level of self-acceptance, which enables them to have positive attitudes and emotions to manage stress from a feeling of alienation during intercultural communication. Therefore, experiences that participants gained from the program possibly broadened their worldview, increased their willingness to accept and respect others' different practices and opinions and, thus, developed the level of their skills on this component.

3.1.2 *Interaction enjoyment*

From Table 6, the average score for Interaction Enjoyment was very high. Participants rated the item [11] as the highest and the item [13] as the lowest (See Table 6).

Table 6
Interaction Enjoyment

Interaction Enjoyment	Mean (N=30)	SD	Response Interpretation
[11] I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures.*	4.45	0.69	Very high
[9] I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures.*	4.36	0.81	Very high
[13] I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures.*	4.09	1.04	High
Total	4.23	0.85	Very high

Note: Items 9, 11 and 13 were reverse-coded.*

According to Chen & Starosta (2000), the component, Interaction Enjoyment, was designed to evaluate an individual's positive or negative reaction to engage in intercultural communication. Even though the duration of three months was considered a short period of time, participants were in daily contact with people from different cultural backgrounds, and that experience made them score very high on this component.

3.1.3 Interaction engagement

From Table 7, the average score for Interaction Engagement was high. Participants rated the item [5] as the highest and the item [19] as the lowest (See Table 7).

Table 7
Interaction Engagement

Interaction Engagement	Mean (N=30)	SD	Response Interpretation
[5] I am open-minded to people from different cultures.	4.63	0.50	Very high
[21] I often give positive responses to my culturally different counterpart during our interaction.	4.09	0.83	High
[1] I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.	4.00	0.77	High
[24] I have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between my culturally-distinct counterpart and me.	4.00	0.77	High
[22] I avoid those situations where I will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons.*	3.36	0.67	High
[18] I often show my culturally-distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues.	3.18	0.60	Moderate
[19] I tend to wait before forming an impression of culturally-distinct counterparts.	3.09	0.30	Moderate
Total	3.53	0.63	High

Note: Item 22 was reverse-coded.*

According to Chen & Starosta (2000), the component, Interaction Engagement, aims to evaluate an individual’s feeling and willingness to communicate and participate in intercultural communication. However, the explanation for this is similar to other factors on the scale that received high scores. To make it simply, their willingness to engage in intercultural communication was resulted from the intercultural experience they received daily with people from different cultural backgrounds.

3.1.4 Interaction confidence

From Table 8, the average score for Interaction Confidence was moderate. Participants rated the item [16] as the highest and the item [8] as the lowest (See Table 8).

Table 8
Interaction Confidence

Interaction Confidence	Mean (N=30)	SD	Response Interpretation
[16] I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures.	3.90	0.70	High
[15] I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures.	3.54	0.52	High
[17] I always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures.	3.54	0.93	High
[14] I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.	3.36	0.81	Moderate
[8] I find it very hard to talk in front of people from different cultures.*	2.73	0.90	Moderate
Total	3.29	0.77	Moderate

Note: Item 8 was reverse-coded.

According to Chen & Starosta (2000), the component, Interaction Confidence, evaluates how confident individuals feel when they engage in intercultural interactions. However, it was surprising that participants’ scores on this component were moderate. Although the participants were expected to be competent in communicating in English, a moderate level of scores show that they did not have much confidence in interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Nevertheless, their lack of confidence can be linked to social and cultural opportunities the participants received while participating in the program. Based on Table 3 above, the scores on some items such as opportunities to engage in cultural exchange activities and socialise outside the working hours were moderate. This is similar to findings of Reardon (2015) who found unsatisfactory experiences with cultural exchange were observed by the majority of participants in his study. Even though opportunities for cultural exchange while participating in

the Work Travel Program were the sponsors’ first priorities, the obstacles reported in his study were business operation policies that grouped participants based on their work schedule, responsibilities, and language or ethnicity for the effectiveness of the operations, and that did not allow for socialisation among participants in different work groups, or outside working hours. In addition, the participants’ ability to meet with other foreign participants, learn about US culture and socialise with American people were also limited by financial constraints and geographical locations (Reardon, 2015).

3.1.5 Interaction attentiveness

From Table 9, the component, Interaction Attentiveness, was the factor which received the lowest scores on the scale. Participants rated the item [23] as the highest and the item [20] as the lowest (See Table 9).

Table 9
Interaction Attentiveness

Interaction Attentiveness	Mean (N=30)	SD	Response Interpretation
[23] I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures.	3.81	0.75	High
[12] I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures.	3.45	0.93	High
[20] I am sensitive to my culturally-distinct counterpart’s subtle meanings during our interaction.	2.63	1.21	Moderate
Total	3.04	0.96	Moderate

According to Chen & Starosta (2000), the component, Interaction Attentiveness, relates to an individual’s effort to understand and respond to what is going on in intercultural contexts. As participants’ scores for this component were moderate, this was probably linked to factors mentioned earlier such as time and financial constraints that decreased the degree of their attentiveness. In addition, even though they were staying in a foreign context, some aspects of cultural differences such as beliefs or practices might be too complicated to understand or to cope with within three months. As a result, these possibly obstructed them from investing more effort in improving their skills in this component. (Chen & Starosta, 2000).

4. Intercultural sensitivity skills need to be developed over a sufficient period of time

As all factors on the scale are linked, the lack or low level of one factor can possibly decrease the level of other factors on the scale. Results of this study suggest that the level of participants’ intercultural sensitivity was not high enough in all factors to claim that it resulted from the Work Travel program. Some participants did not gain much from the cultural exchange experience, the main essence of the program, at least not enough to increase the level of

intercultural sensitivity. During the three months, some participants also did not have sufficient opportunities to make new friends and socialise outside their working hours to develop their intercultural sensitivity. As a result, intercultural experiences gained from the program were not as much as they had expected and sufficient to make them feel confident, thus, participants were not motivated to enjoy interacting and engaging in intercultural activities with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Although previous studies in Thai contexts found positive outcomes and satisfaction received from the Work Travel program, this current study is slightly on the contrary. In the study of Manadee (2010), for example, the researcher considers the US Work Travel program as successful as her respondents achieved all the main purposes of the program. Most participants reported satisfaction with the real-life experience of working, earning a living, travelling by themselves, and having cultural exchange opportunities by joining the program. They also had opportunities to gain different social life and job experiences, improve self-reliability and self-responsibility, and learn how to work in an American environment. However, for most of them, the program was set up to help teenagers learn and grow from a real-life experience abroad.

5. Language competence cannot be used as a sole predictor for intercultural sensitivity

The results of this study seem to show that language competence cannot be used as a sole predictor for indicating an individual's level of intercultural sensitivity. Although the participants were English majors whose English communicative skills were highly competent, they did not have much confidence and motivation to engage in intercultural interactions. This shows that language competence alone is not sufficient to survive in today's international contexts. This is similar to the Global Shapers Annual 2017, which surveyed more than 30,000 respondents in 186 countries (Savage, 2018, para. 1). Moreover, according to Savage (2018), learning a language is necessary for anyone planning to live and work abroad, however, it is not enough because

'...in an increasingly globalised world, having an adaptability to different communication styles or socialisation norms are perhaps as much or more important' (para. 3).

In summary, as flexibility is one of the keys to survive in the world in the 21st century, this leads to concerns that, as a teacher, we might need to find ways to develop students' readiness to be well-equipped with the essential qualities to meet the challenges of the 21st century and prepare them to become future global citizens.



CONCLUSION

The results gained from this study might not yield many positive outcomes from the US Work Travel program. The participants in this study were English majors who were fluent in communicating in English, the native language used as a medium of communication in the context where they were joining the program. However, the levels of all components of their intercultural sensitivity were not high enough to claim that they resulted from their participation in the program. Therefore, as a teacher, there are many university activities and exchange programs that we can encourage students to join in order to improve their intercultural competence, instead of the Work Travel program. In addition, parents might even need to reconsider whether they will invest both the time and finance to support their children to go abroad under this program.

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