Introduction

According to Fantini (2005) cultural competence is defined as the ability to develop and maintain relationships, the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with others, and the ability to work in cooperation with others. Existing research shows that study abroad significantly increase their cross-cultural competence and global understanding when they participate in a study abroad experience (Kitsantas, 2004; Watson, Siska, & Wolfel, 2013). Studies on the outcomes of study abroad programs also show that students strengthen creative thinking skills, problem solving skills, and have higher levels of emotional resilience, openness, flexibility, and personal autonomy due to their study abroad experience (Kitsantas, 2004; Lee, Therriault, and Lindholm, 2012).

Although much research has been done in the area of study abroad, no research has been done pertaining to the outcomes of the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay (UWGB) study abroad program. The purpose of the current study is to evaluate whether the UWGB study abroad program is meeting one of their learning outcome which is to “develop intercultural competencies that enable students to recognize one’s self in a cultural context while respecting others from different cultural backgrounds.” Our research serves the purpose of gaining more knowledge on the extent to which study abroad increases the intercultural competencies of students.

Materials & Methods

In our study we measured cross cultural competency for students before and after their study abroad trip. Using the Assessing Intercultural Competency Scale (Fantini, 2005), we surveyed 137 students from a Midwestern college intending to further our knowledge on the outcomes of UWGB’s Study Abroad Program. Participants were primarily white females which falls inline with the UWGB student population. Our participants ranged in age as 47% of our participants were ages 18-20 and 41% were ages 21-23. We had 26 participants complete the pre-survey which was taken before studying abroad, 14 participants complete the post-survey which was taken when they returned from studying abroad, and 95 participants in our control group. Control group participants were from two random 300 level Human Development courses therefore providing us with internal validity.

Materials & Methods Cont’d

The Intercultural Competency Scale (Fantini, 2005) included 5 sections of questions. The survey was prepared via internet and administered via email to various students on campus who were enrolled in the UWGB winter study abroad program or who were in the control group.

For the current data, we focused on the following scales:

- **Personal Characteristics (Own culture vs. in other cultures)**
  - Using a scale of 0 to 5 (highest) please rate yourself on:
    - Flexibility: “How flexible you perceive yourself in your own culture and how flexible your host culture may perceive you in their culture”
    - Tolerates Differences: “Your ability to tolerate difference in your own culture and how your host culture may perceive your ability to tolerate difference”
    - Self-Reliant: “How self-reliant you perceive yourself in your own culture and how self-reliant your host culture may perceive you in their culture”
    - Perceptive: “How perceptive you perceive yourself in your own culture and how flexible your host culture may perceive you in their culture”

- **Intercultural Competencies (Study Abroad students only)**
  - Using a scale of 0 to 5 (highest) please rate yourself on:
    - Attitude: “While in my host country I demonstrated the willingness to try to understand differences in behaviors, values, attitudes, and styles of my host culture”
    - Knowledge: “I can cite a definition of culture and describe its components and complexities”
    - Awareness: “While in my host culture, I realized the importance of differences and similarities across my own and the host culture”
    - Skills: “I demonstrated a capacity to interact appropriately in a variety of different social situations in my host culture”

Total scores from the attitude, knowledge, awareness and skills subsections were combined to produce an overall cultural competency score.

Results

- **Before students traveled for their study abroad programs, they indicated that in other cultures, they would be less likely to be flexible, t(26)=3.38, p<.01, tolerant to difference, t(27)=3.10, p<.01, self-reliant, t(27)=3.38, p<.01, and perceptive t(27)=3.07, p<.01, than in their own cultures.
- **After they came back, there was no significant differences between their perspectives of personal characteristics other own culture vs. in other cultures, t<1, n.s.**
- **The control group also showed no difference on the tolerance and self-reliant, t<1, n.s.**
- The mean score on the strength of their intercultural abilities increased from 3.7 to 4.03 after study abroad participation, t(38)=3.38, p<.01, while the mean score on the strength of their intercultural abilities increased from 3.7 to 4.03 after study abroad participation, t(38)=3.38, p<.01.<sup>0.01</sup>

While the difference was not statistically significant, the mean score on the strength of their intercultural abilities increased from 3.7 to 4.03 after study abroad participation, t(38)=1.72, n.s

In order to test the study abroad students’ intercultural competencies, we compared our data to the Fantini (2005) study. As shown in the graph, the UWGB program showed the similar effectiveness to other institution’s results for students to gain intercultural competencies.

Evaluation

The validity of the current data is strengthened because we used a control group to account for individual differences. The validity is weakened due to our small sample size in our post study abroad group. A draw back of these results is that they only apply to the UWGB’s Study Abroad Program, but they do provide a general understanding of outcomes other study abroad programs may be offering. A recommendation we have for future studies is to adjust the survey to create consistency, such as a Likert scale throughout the survey, to aid in making data analysis easier. Finally, we recommend making the survey a requirement of the study abroad program to gain more participants.

Conclusions

Overall, our findings are in line with findings of Fantini’s (2005) study. Both our significant results as well as our non-significant results allowed us to see trends in our data. We found that the study abroad experience strengthens one's intercultural abilities as well as gives participants more flexibility, self-reliance, perception, and better ability to tolerate difference in other cultures. We found that the UWGB study abroad program has comparable outcomes in the areas of increasing one’s knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness of other cultures. We found that UWGB study abroad program is meeting one of their learning outcome which is to “develop intercultural competencies that enable students to recognize one's self in a cultural context while respecting others from different cultural backgrounds.” These results will be useful in justifying the importance in providing funding to allow students to participate in study abroad programs to become more well-rounded individuals.

Literature Cited


Acknowledgements/Sponsorship: Dr. Sawa Senzaki