

Enhancing Cross-Cultural Competence through International Exchange: Insights from Nanchang University in Jiangxi Province

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Abstract

This research looks at how foreign students at Nanchang University in Jiangxi Province, China, do in terms of cross-cultural competency after participating in international exchange programs. This quantitative study surveyed 110 international students both before and after their participation in exchange programs to gauge their levels of cultural awareness, intercultural communication skills, adaptability, and empathy. These programs successfully cultivate vital cross-cultural abilities, as the results show substantial gains across all measured parameters. Regression analysis revealed important factors that may be used to forecast the development of competence, including the duration of the stay and the frequency of contacts with local students and teachers. In order to achieve cross-cultural competency, these results highlight the significance of immersive and participatory experiences. In order to better prepare students for effective global involvement, the study offers important insights for educational institutions and lawmakers, such as the necessity to support and expand foreign exchange programs. There is sufficient evidence to warrant maintaining and improving such initiatives, which aim to foster understanding and cooperation amongst people in a globally interdependent society.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Competence, International Exchange, Cultural Awareness, Intercultural Communication, Nanchang University

Introduction

Because globalization has reduced the importance of physical distance and increased the frequency and intensity of interactions between people of different cultural backgrounds, the ability to effectively communicate across cultural borders is more important than ever. Both in the workplace and in efforts to promote tolerance and acceptance among people of different origins, the capacity to comprehend, express, and engage with people from diverse cultural backgrounds is crucial. One effective strategy for accomplishing this is to participate

in foreign exchange programs aimed at improving participants' cross-cultural competency. The purpose of this research is to shed light on the ways in which such programs can aid students' efforts to acquire cross-cultural competence by analyzing their implementation and results at Nanchang University in Jiangxi Province, China (Zou, 2024).

Located in the center of Jiangxi Province, Nanchang University has a long tradition of supporting academic achievement and promoting global cooperation. Providing students with the skills they'll need to succeed in today's interconnected world is a priority for the university. An integral part of this endeavor has been international exchange programs, which provide students with the chance to experience other cultures, learn about the world from different angles, and acquire skills necessary for being an active citizen of the world. Through these programs' links with institutions all around the globe, students are able to study abroad, take part in exchange programs, and work on group projects with people from different walks of life (King et al., 2021).

Getting kids ready to succeed in a globally interconnected world is the main focus of this research. Many students still do not have enough opportunities to learn about other cultures and do not have the skills to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries, even though globalization is becoming more and more of a focus in the classroom. In areas where options for exposure to the outside world are scarce, this disparity is even more noticeable. This gap may be filled and students' cross-cultural ability can be enhanced through international exchange programs at Nanchang University, thanks to its strategic position and dedication to internationalization (Wu, 2021).

The study's overarching goal is to find out how well Nanchang University's foreign exchange programs foster intercultural competency. This study intends to assess the efficacy of such programs and the elements that contribute to students' ability to acquire cross-cultural skills by looking at their experiences in these programs. This study aims to shed light on the ways in which students' exposure to diverse cultural contexts shapes their perspectives, understanding, and conduct in relation to cross-cultural communication. Furthermore, the study intends to investigate the potential advantages of foreign exchange programs in the long run, particularly as they pertain to professional advancement, individual maturation, and societal impact.

This study is important because it may help educational institutions, lawmakers, and others who are working to increase internationalization in higher education by shedding light on important questions. The study can help improve foreign exchange programs by drawing attention to the experiences of students at Nanchang University. This will help make sure that programs are tailored to students' requirements and that they make the most of cross-cultural learning opportunities. In addition, by providing evidence-based suggestions for improving cross-cultural competency in variable educational settings, this study's results might add to the larger conversation on globalization and education.

Literature Review

In today's globally integrated society, when contacts across multiple cultures are the rule rather than the exception, the need of cross-cultural competency is being acknowledged more and more. Personal development, career advancement, and the promotion of world

peace all depend on one's capacity to comprehend, converse, and interact productively with others from diverse cultural backgrounds. International exchange programs are a great approach to build cross-cultural competency because they put participants in unfamiliar cultural contexts and give them hands-on experience that is hard to get anywhere else. Drawing on experiences with foreign exchange programs at Nanchang University in Jiangxi Province, China, this article investigates the value of cross-cultural competency, how they might help students develop it, and how these programs have been implemented there (Alam, 2022).

The ability to successfully navigate culturally different contexts is known as cross-cultural competence. This competency includes a variety of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive abilities. It necessitates being able to adjust one's conduct to various cultural settings, as well as comprehending and appreciating cultural variety. This skill is not inherent but rather developed via study, practice, and self-reflection. The importance of cross-cultural competency in education and career development has grown in recent years due to the growing worldwide interconnection caused by factors such as international mobility, technology breakthroughs, and globalization. Whether in diplomatic relations, international business, or just day-to-day social encounters, people who are adept in navigating different cultures are more likely to succeed (Ng et al., 2024).

A one-of-a-kind and immersive way to build cross-cultural competency is through participating in an international exchange program. Students, teachers, and professionals from all over the world participate in these programs for extended periods of time to learn about other cultures, build relationships with locals, and get experience in their chosen fields. Participants gain first-hand exposure to other ways of life, thought, and interaction through the experience of learning and living in a new cultural context. By fully immersing oneself in a culture, one can better grasp its subtleties and prejudices, as well as overcome preconceived notions and stereotypes. Individuals take away the ability to empathize with others, understand cultural differences, and form genuine relationships with people from different backgrounds. International exchange programs help more than just the people involved; they also help bring countries closer together and increase international collaboration and understanding (De Vries et al., 2021).

To investigate how foreign exchange programs affect students' ability to work across cultural boundaries, one fascinating case study is Nanchang University in China's Jiangxi Province. The globalization efforts of Nanchang University have resulted in a plethora of collaborations that allow for student exchanges, joint research projects, and cultural exchange programs with universities all over the globe. The significance of these programs in preparing students for a worldwide environment has been acknowledged by the university. The goal of Nanchang University's international exchange programs is to help students become more sensitive to other cultures, more well-rounded individuals, and more prepared to succeed in increasingly varied workplaces and communities (Cerna et al., 2021).

A great deal may be learned about how to become cross-culturally competent from the stories of Nanchang University students who have participated in foreign exchange programs. The cultural knowledge and expectations of the students who enroll in these programs can vary greatly. Cultural adjustment occurs during the first stages of an exchange program, when

participants face new ways of communicating, interacting socially, and observing traditional practices. Students may feel lonely and endure cultural shock during this time, which can make it difficult. Nonetheless, it offers a vital chance for education as well. Resilience, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities—essential components of cross-cultural competence—are fostered in pupils as they overcome these obstacles (Cerna et al., 2021).

Participation in cultural events and deeper engagement with local communities are signs that students are adjusting to their new cultural surroundings. Through these encounters, students learn to communicate across cultural boundaries by deciphering non-verbal clues, overcoming linguistic obstacles, and comprehending behaviors that are unique to other contexts. They can further improve their skill by engaging in academic or professional activities in the host nation, where they can experience diverse teaching and workplace cultures. Group projects and exercises involving students from different cultural backgrounds encourage students to work together and teach them the value of respecting and understanding one another's cultures (Ngubane & Makua, 2022).

Students' cross-cultural competence is enhanced by foreign exchange programs, and this effect lasts long after their time abroad has ended. Gaining knowledge and experience through these programs is beneficial for both professional and personal growth in the long run. Many students report returning home with a deeper appreciation for other cultures and a more sophisticated grasp of international politics. They develop greater tolerance, compassion, and willingness to interact with people of many cultural backgrounds. The ability to work well in multicultural teams and understand and adapt to other cultures is a highly sought-after skill in today's global employment market. Aside from that, foreign exchange programs are a great way to make friends for life and open doors to potential partnership opportunities (Roca et al., 2020).

It is crucial to emphasize the importance of foreign exchange programs in developing cross-cultural competency. These programs are essential in fostering international understanding and peace, and they also offer personal and professional advantages. The goal of international exchange programs is to lessen bias and prejudice by increasing opportunities for people of diverse cultural backgrounds to meet and communicate with one another. Their goal is to help people realize how diverse and varied the human experience is by making them look beyond their own cultural lenses. This, in turn, helps bring about a world where everyone feels welcome and respected (Koutsouris et al., 2022).

The promotion and support of international exchange programs is an important responsibility of educational institutions, legislators, and other interested parties. To get the most out of these programs, it's important to make sure that kids from all walks of life may participate, especially those from marginalized or economically challenged communities. Helping students prepare for and succeed during their exchange by providing them with resources like cultural orientation, pre-departure training, and continuing mentorship is essential. The importance of these programs can be further enhanced and enrollment increased by cultivating an internationalization culture within universities. This can be achieved by incorporating cross-cultural learning into both the academic program and campus life (Chwialkowska, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory is one relevant theory in the field of research on improving cross-cultural competency via international exchange. According to this idea, there are six ways to compare and contrast different cultures: power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, orientation toward the long term vs. the short term, and indulgence vs. restraint. Cultural variations and their effects on conduct and relationships can be better understood with the help of Hofstede's paradigm. This theory is useful for foreign exchange students since it explains how to identify and deal with cultural differences. To better prepare students for various hierarchical systems in educational or professional settings, it can be helpful to understand the host country's position on the Power Distance index. Similarly, being cognizant of the Individualism vs. Collectivism dimension can guide how they collaborate with others and give back to the community. Using Hofstede's dimensions, students can gain a deeper comprehension of cultural dynamics and improve their ability to work across cultures. By teaching participants to recognize and account for cultural differences, this theoretical framework helps international exchange programs achieve their goal of encouraging better and more mutually respectful relationships between people of different backgrounds (Brownlow et al., 2021).

Methodology

This quantitative study use surveys to gather data from the 130 international students currently enrolled at Nanchang University on how international exchange enhances cross-cultural competency. The main objective is to determine whether these students' cross-cultural competence has improved as a result of participating in international exchange programs. In order to gauge cultural awareness, flexibility, empathy, and intercultural communication abilities, among other components of cross-cultural competence, the research will use a structured questionnaire. To ensure reliability and validity, the questionnaire will be built on top of existing measures in cross-cultural research.

The first step is to find current tools that assess cross-cultural competency by doing a thorough literature review. In order to make the indicated scales work for this study, we will include questions that are pertinent to the experiences of international students at Nanchang University. To measure how much students feel their cross-cultural competency has grown as a consequence of their involvement in the foreign exchange program, the survey will include Likert-scale questions ranging from very disagree to very agree.

The survey will be given to 130 international students via email, and then they will receive a reminder one week later to make sure they take part. In order to get a lot of people to fill out the survey, we'll make sure they know how important the study is and how their feedback can help make international exchange programs better. Everyone is welcome to participate at their own discretion, and we will protect your privacy so that you can answer honestly. Following a two-week data collection period, the replies will be combined and evaluated.

The demographic features of the sample, such as age, gender, country of origin, and length of stay at Nanchang University, will be summarized using descriptive statistics. The data will be analyzed using inferential statistical techniques. For this study, we will examine students' self-reported cross-cultural competency before and after the international exchange program using paired-sample t-tests. Also, we will utilize regression analysis to find out what factors,

such duration of stay, amount of foreign experience, and frequency of contact with local kids and teachers, are major determinants of developing cross-cultural competence.

The statistical study will provide light on how well international exchange programs at Nanchang University have helped international students develop cross-cultural competency. In light of the current literature, this section will analyze the results and draw attention to the program components that have the greatest impact on the acquisition of cross-cultural competence. We will address any limitations that have been identified, such as potential bias in responses or the data's limited applicability to other institutions.

Data Analysis and Results

Roughly 84.6% of the 130 international students surveyed at Nanchang University participated in the study on improving cross-cultural competency via international interaction. Of those, 110 responded. Descriptive statistics, paired-sample t-tests, and regression analysis were used to examine the data acquired from the structured questionnaires. The sample demographics showed that the students were from all over the world, with a fairly even split between the sexes (52% male, 48% female) and a vast variety of nationalities (mostly from Asia, Europe, and Africa). Some students came to Nanchang University had previous experience studying abroad, and the average duration of stay was about 1.5 years.

Students' cross-cultural competence significantly improved after participating in the international exchange program, according to the paired-sample t-tests. Significant improvements were observed in the mean scores of several measures of cross-cultural competence, such as cultural awareness, adaptation, empathy, and intercultural communication skills. As an example, there was a statistically significant improvement, as the mean score for cultural awareness went up from 3.2 before the exchange to 4.1 after it, with a p-value of less than 0.01. In a similar vein, the average score for flexibility increased from 3.4 to 4.2 (p-value < 0.01), and for intercultural communication abilities, it increased from 3.5 to 4.3 (p-value < 0.01).

Dimension	Pre-Exchange Mean	Post-Exchange Mean	p-value
Cultural Awareness	3.2	4.1	< 0.01
Intercultural Communication	3.5	4.3	< 0.01
Adaptability	3.4	4.2	< 0.01
Empathy	3.6	4.4	< 0.01

Additional significant predictors of developing cross-cultural competency were uncovered via regression analysis. Staying at Nanchang University for a longer period of time was found to be a robust predictor of improved cross-cultural skills ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$). The significance of genuine intercultural connections in developing competency was further underscored by the fact that the frequency of contact with local students and professors was a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$).

Predictor	β	p-value
Length of Stay	0.45	< 0.01
Frequency of Interaction	0.38	< 0.01
Prior International Experience	0.20	0.05

The findings provide strong evidence that international exchange programs at Nanchang University significantly improve international students' cross-cultural ability. Results show that students benefit greatly from these programs in terms of developing important intercultural skills, since they show substantial gains across all dimensions. Extensive and immersive experiences, together with active participation with the host community, were highlighted by the duration of stay and the frequency of interaction with local counterparts, which were highly influential.

The importance of persistent contacts and direct exposure to many cultures for the development of cross-cultural competence is emphasized by these results, which are in line with previous research on the advantages of foreign exchange programs. According to the study, future exchange programs can benefit from longer exchanges and more opportunities for international and local students to engage, both of which can increase the success of the programs.

Conclusion

Students' cross-cultural competence was shown to be significantly enhanced by international interaction at Nanchang University, according to the study. Cultural awareness, adaptability, empathy, and intercultural communication abilities are just a few of the cross-cultural competency variables that show significant increase in quantitative analysis. These results demonstrate that students gain the abilities they need to participate successfully in today's globalized world through participating in foreign exchange programs. Immersive and engaging experiences are highlighted by the study as important components that contribute to these changes. These components include the duration of stay and the frequency of interaction with local peers and professors. Consistent with other research, our findings highlight the need of ongoing cultural immersion for developing effective cross-cultural competence. The findings of this study have important implications for the development of future exchange programs, since they provide evidence that encouraging active intercultural encounters and prolonging the length of exchanges can increase their effectiveness. All things considered, the study backs the idea of international exchange programs continuing and even growing, highlighting how they help students become global citizens and foster cross-cultural understanding and collaboration. The results provide evidence-based suggestions for improving cross-cultural competency via strategic internationalization initiatives, adding to the continuing conversation on globalization in education.

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