

EDUCATION FOR RESPONSIBLE FUTURE LEADERS: INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Does university students' international experience lead to more positive attitudes towards civic engagement? We utilize a two-pronged approach to examine the seemingly incompatible focus of interests between global education and civic engagement in the local community. First, we evaluate students' reflection on an international service-learning project. The results suggest that students' empathy and cultural intelligence enhance their civic engagement, including community involvement and career aspirations to work for employers who demonstrate corporate social responsibilities in the local community. Second, we distribute a campus-wide survey and the significant interaction effects support that not all international experience can lead to higher civic engagement. Only when students develop more empathy and cultural intelligence, then they will have higher civic engagement. These findings suggest the need to carefully design a curriculum that translates students' international experience into desirable outcomes, including empathy and cultural intelligence, which in turn will develop students into responsible future leaders.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional educational goals of short-term study abroad programs generally are to improve students' knowledge of the subject taught in the course, enhance students' understanding of the host country culture as well as build students' confidence in international travels (Sachau, Brasher and Fee, 2010). Recently, the service learning component has been added to study abroad programs. These international service-learning programs have gained popularity as more and more higher education institutions are recognizing the importance of developing students into future leaders with a global mindset who are also civically engaged (Le and Raven, 2015). Responsible global leadership competency encompasses the cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of service learning that can increase students' ethical literacy, self-development, community building, and global mindset (Lee, 2017; Pless, Maak, and Stahl, 2011). A few pioneering studies suggest that by incorporating community-service learning activities in an international setting, the study-abroad programs may encourage students to develop a sense of global citizenship and hopefully demonstrate greater willingness to participate in community services (Drnarch, Ruby, Kluender, Palomba, and Ursick, 2016; Larsen and Searle, 2017).

The trend of globalization has shaped the strong focus in international education in recent decades. However, the recent political climate suggests a reverse trend of globalization due to the rising concerns of how rapid globalization has taken away the public interests in domestic affairs (Witt, 2016). Similarly, it is intriguing how international experience, such as one attained through a study-abroad program, enhances students' willingness to participate in community affairs. One may argue that the experience gained outside one's home country can enhance students' awareness of global issues, but does not necessarily foster their interests in the local community.

The current study examines the seemingly incompatible focus of interests between global education and civic engagement in the local community. A two-pronged approach is utilized. First, a service-learning component was incorporated in a study-abroad program to China. Prior to the trip, the students were given a cultural orientation and information on the prevalent societal problem of migration in China. The influx of migrant rural workers to China's coastal cities is a relatively recent phenomenon which resulted from the rapid economic development in the last three decades (Chen and Feng, 2012; Zheng, 2005). The presence of migrant workers satisfied the need for cheap labor, but also presented much greater social issues due to the traditional household registry (hu-kou) system which excludes these migrant workers and their children from social and educational benefits in the urbanized cities (Chen and Feng, 2012; Zheng, 2005). Learning about the needs of migrant children in a city, the study-abroad participants took the initiative and solicited donations from student organizations in addition to preparing a two-hour English lesson to be taught in an elementary school which mainly serves low-income migrant workers' children. Through the literature review and students' reflection, we develop a set of hypotheses for probing the association between students' international experience and their attitude towards responsible leadership and civic engagement in a local community.

Second, we administer a campus-wide survey on students' international experience and attitudinal measures to test the hypotheses. The regression analyses of the moderating effects of empathy and cultural intelligence support that not all international experience can lead to higher civic engagement. Only when students develop more empathy and cultural intelligence, then they will have higher civic engagement. These findings suggest the need to carefully design a curriculum that translates students' international experience into desirable outcomes, including empathy and cultural intelligence, which in turn will help develop students into responsible future leaders.

INTERNATIONAL SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Service learning or community-based learning" and "diversity/global learning" are two of the ten high-impact educational practices supported by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U, 2008). Service learning encompasses a field-based experience where students apply what they learn in the classroom into real life situations through reflective practices. The goal is to prepare citizens who are engaged with the community in which the university serves. Service learning programs increases civic engagement, fosters critical thinking, and enhances civic and social responsibility among college students (Nokes et al., 2005). Furthermore, service-learning experiences transform students, especially in civic engagement-oriented programs, and foster their understanding of inequality within communities (Enfield and Collins, 2008). Service-learning experiences help develop students' sense of empathy and nurture students' psychosocial development, which includes developing mature interpersonal relationships (Armstrong, 2005). While much has been reported about the learning outcomes of domestic service learning projects, more research is needed about the impact of international service-learning and study abroad programs (Mayhew et al., 2016).

Diversity and global learning emphasizes the investigation and exploration of differences and inequalities that challenge humanities around the globe through programs such as a study abroad trip (AAC&U, 2008). Study abroad has been found to enhance intercultural awareness and competence, tolerance, and interest in political and cross cultural issues, promote positive attitudes towards cultural pluralism and open-mindedness (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Salisbury, An, and Pascarella, 2013), as well as positively influence civic values and community participation (Lott, 2013). Students who participate in study abroad programs develop a deeper understanding of diverse cultures. This cultural intelligence becomes an essential skill sought by companies and organizations as they compete in global markets. More and more employers seek individuals who have the ability

to develop and maintain reciprocal relationships within communities, are empathetic, and can interact with others across cultural, racial, or social class boundaries (Enfield and Collins, 2008).

Although international learning experiences have been found to positively impact cultural intelligence among individuals (Pless, Maak, and Stahl, 2011), this study will address the gap in the literature on international service-learning projects. Specifically, the study explores the effects of combining international experience with service learning on students' civic engagement within the community where they reside in their home country.

A CASE IN POINT: A STUDY ABOARD PROGRAM TO CHINA

In the current study, we aim to assess the various learning outcomes attained through a 2-week study abroad program with a service-learning project in China. Other than visiting Chinese companies and attending lectures at a local Chinese university, the group of study-abroad participants was involved in an effort to help migrant workers' children in Suzhou, China. Prior to the trip, student organized and conducted fund-raising events, such as placing bins on campus to seek children books donation. Students also approached local restaurants for donation of crayons and coloring pages for the migrant children. Students collected over 400 children books.

In addition to academic activities such as attending lecture and visiting local organizations, the study abroad participants taught a two-hour block of English class at an elementary school that serves migrant workers' children in one district, and visited a non-government organization that was recently established to serve migrant children and their families in another district. As one student reflected, "The most exciting part of the day was going to the migrant school. The students were excited to see us from the second they saw us. They had no idea what we would be teaching them, but I don't think it would have mattered because they were just excited to see new and different people. We taught the students about Texas and some of the things we have in Texas, such as the space center and the Alamo. The children were so excited for us to be there, most of them stayed in the class for recess. We also taught them a song (itsy-bitsy spider). It was an amazing experience that I will never forget." Several students had similar sentiment about the transforming experience.

The empathy developed through an international service program is also evident. One student commented, "I was able to see a variety of people, such as the farmers, retirees, students, and working class. To sum it up, the East and West are similar in that everyone just wants to do what is best for them and their family." The first-hand experience in China has greatly enhanced students' ability to see through the differences and find the similarity that is relevant to his or her own circumstances, which empower students' capacity for empathy.

Further, students' career aspiration is proposed to be also impacted by their heightened sense of empathy. Students who developed greater empathy are more likely to be attracted to future employers who demonstrated CSR in the local community. As indicated in one student's reflection, "Companies that use migrant workers are taking advantage of the cheap but efficient labor that is available. These same companies can improve the educational level of the future labor pool by helping to fund education. By spending a small amount now companies can increase the future benefits for the regions they operate in and themselves... It is my hope that children with academic talents will be given chances to progress and not marginalized as a result of their place of origin."

Hypothesis 1: Greater empathy leads to higher community involvement (1a) and greater career aspirations to work for employers who have demonstrated CSR in the local community (1b).

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is the capability of individuals to interact appropriately across cultural situations with diverse individuals (Thomas, et al., 2015). Earley (2002) offered a construct of

cultural intelligence that includes the cognitive, motivational, and behavioral elements. The cognitive element can be explained using the concept of self which is formed by negotiating one's interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences (Gecas, 1982; Markus and Wurf, 1987; Markus and Kitayama, 1991, Markus, Kitayama and Heiman, 1997 as cited in Earley, 2002). Having cultural intelligence means not only being cognitively aware of oneself, but rather being flexible as one constantly reshapes and adapts the self in new cultural settings. Having high CQ also means having high inductive reasoning skills and meta-cognitive strategies to negotiate knowledge that help understand cultural nuances. In addition to this cognitive knowledge, one must also be motivated to use the new knowledge to construct culturally appropriate responses, and be capable of adapting and behaving in ways that are consistent with the new culture.

On student reflected, "By participating in the study abroad I was able to use all my sense to see, touch, smell, taste, and hear at every location we were at. You cannot get this experience from a book. I love traveling internationally. It makes you more aware of other ways to do something and ultimately makes you a better person." Individuals who have a high level of CQ, it seems, enjoy the advantage to exercise the meta-cognitive capacity to be sensitive to others' needs and expectation as well as the adaptive capacity to act on the initiatives to build a greater community in which the individuals' desire for self-realization is in sync with the best interests of the community. Hence, the students who have a high level of CQ will aspire to work for employers who value the social responsibilities in the local community.

Hypothesis 2: Greater cultural intelligence leads to higher community involvement (2a) and greater career aspirations to work for employers who have demonstrated CSR in the local community (2b).

The number of students participating in service-learning programs has increased steadily in the last two decades (Einfeld and Collins, 2008). However, there has been little focus on students' motivation for participating in these community-involvement programs. Batson (1994) described the motivations for community involvement which include egoism, altruism, collectivism, and principlism. Of these four motivations, altruism or collectivism is the most promising traits in student learning and development (Batson, Ahmad, and Tsang, 2002). Altruism builds upon empathy, which is "other-oriented feelings congruent with the perceived welfare of another person" (Batson, 1991). Developing empathy within community engagement programs may increase one's altruism, or that "other-oriented" feeling that propels one to action.

The international experience gained through a study abroad program often provides students spaces to interact with diverse cultures and environments which are very different than their own. Empathy was one skill noted by Einfeld and Collins (2008) that was needed to successfully interact in multicultural environments. Ferranto (2014) found that students who participated in a short-term international cultural experience, like study abroad, had gains in cultural empathy, self-awareness, and leadership skills. Therefore, it is plausible that international experiences enhance students' civic engagement through their enhanced empathy and cultural intelligence.

Hypothesis 3: With higher empathy, international experience leads to higher community involvement (3a) and greater career aspirations to work for employers who have demonstrated CSR in the local community (3b).

Hypothesis 4: With higher cultural intelligence, international experience leads to higher community involvement (4a) and greater career aspirations to work for employers who have demonstrated CSR in the local community (4b).

METHODOLOGY

A survey was created using Qualtrics and distributed by the student affair office in one university located in a southern state of the U.S. This regional university serves majority students who are retired from military and are seeking a degree to start a second chapter of life. The students' responses are voluntary and confidential. There are no compensations for students' participation. The emails with the link to the survey were distributed to a total of 2,658 students. After two rounds of reminders in a month, a sample of 265 usable surveys is collected. The respondents have an average age of 36.7 with 30% males and 70% females, which closely mirrors the student population at this university with an average age of 34, with 40% male and 60% female. Specific measures for all variables are available upon request.

RESULTS

The highest correlation occurs between community involvement and cultural intelligence with a coefficient of 0.49, which indicates 24% of variance is shared between two variables. The multivariate OLS regressions are utilized for hypotheses testing. In all regression models reported in Table 2, the VIF values are below 5 which indicate that multicollinearity is not a concern for us to interpret the results (O'Brien, 2007). In addition, the independent variables are centered before creating the interaction terms to test the moderation hypotheses (Aiken and West, 1991).

In Hypotheses 1 and 2, we test the main effects of empathy and cultural intelligence on two outcome variables, including community involvement and career aspirations to work for an employer who demonstrated local CSR. Hypothesis 1a and Hypothesis 2a state that the empathy and cultural intelligence enhance students' community involvement. Both main effects are supported with positive coefficients for empathy ($\beta = 0.42$, $p\text{-value} < 0.01$) and for cultural intelligence ($\beta = 0.32$, $p\text{-value} < 0.01$). As for the career aspirations for CSR employers, only cultural intelligence ($\beta = 0.21$, $p\text{-value} < 0.01$) has a positive significant main effect as shown in Model 2 in Table 3. Empathy is not significantly related to students' career aspirations for future employers' CSR. Therefore, H2 is fully supported for both outcomes, while only H1b is supported.

Further, we test the moderation effects of empathy and cultural intelligence on the relationship between international experience and two outcome variables. The moderation effects exist for the community involvement. However, we do not find the moderation effects for students' concerns for future employers' CSR.

DISCUSSION

Study abroad programs have been found to positively affect intercultural competence, tolerance, and promote positive attitudes towards cultural pluralism and open-mindedness (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005; Salisbury et al., 2013). The current study examines the relationship between the predictors, CQ and empathy, and community engagement. The results point to a stronger correlation between CQ and community engagement than the relationship between empathy and community engagement. From this finding one may be able to infer that CQ is a stronger indicator of community involvement because it encompasses the ability to interact with those who are different (Thomas, et al., 2015). So while empathy propels one to do good, these good deeds may be directed to only those who are "alike". As communities become more diverse, it follows that there is a more urgent need to cultivate students who are not only empathetic, but also culturally intelligent. The findings in this study supports that cultural intelligence and empathy indeed are associated with the heightened sense of civic engagement among college students.

Another area being examined in the current study is the relationships between empathy and CQ and students' aspiration to work in a company that has demonstrated corporate social responsibility (CSR) in a local community. The analyses indicate that empathy is not significantly related to students' career aspiration, while CQ is positively correlated to students' aspiration to work in a company with demonstrated CSR. This finding further implies that CQ seems to have a more profound impact on student actions than empathy in their career aspirations.

The study further explores the moderating effects of empathy and cultural intelligence on the relationship between international experience and community involvement, and between international experience and future career aspirations. The results indicate that there is a moderate effect between international experience and community involvement, but not aspirations to work in a company involved with CSR. We find that with higher empathy and higher cultural intelligence, international experiences lead to higher students' community involvement. On the other hand, when students do not develop empathy or CQ, international experience tends to have an opposite effect on their community involvement.

The current study suggests that empathy and cultural intelligence have a positive effect on students' community engagement. Batson et al. (2008) suggested altruism as one of the four possible motives for civic engagement. Altruism is the ability to identify and empathize with the situation of others, and this empathy propels individuals into action. While the current study provides a glimpse as to what motivates students to be civically engaged, it does not point to a cause and effect relationship. Does higher empathy lead to higher civic engagement, or does civic engagement foster empathy? If higher empathy leads to higher levels of civic engagement, then how can students who are less empathetic be motivated to be involved? A longitudinal study will be at a better position to study how empathy is developed among students in higher education. While there is ample research on study abroad experiences, and just as much on service learning projects, studies on projects that combine the two are still scant. The current study attempted to provide insights into the relationship between empathy, community engagement, and cultural intelligence, but it barely scratched the surface in the understanding of the potential benefits of infusing service learning component into study abroad experiences. Further studies may look into the benefits of international service-learning experience for students with various level of international experience. For instance, what are the justifications for creating a more costly version of service learning that is carried out overseas when we already have a body of research supporting local service learning projects that are much more economical? In other words, does international service learning project provide above and beyond what students can learn from a local service-learning project?

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICES

Several implications can be drawn from the results of the current study. One, it seems that cultural intelligence (CQ), a trait highly valued in both academia and the corporate world, is positively correlated to community engagement, a trait that higher education institutions seek to develop in their students. Hence it is clear that when institutions plan curriculum to increase community engagement, the specific components which support CQ development are also effective in nurturing further responsible leaders who are committed to civic engagement. Moreover, when institutions invest in study-abroad service projects, there should be extracurricular activities that support CQ prior to and during the program so that the emotional benefits of international experiences be capitalized and maximized. Another aspect to consider would be to set clear selection criteria and assess students on their CQ. Institutions may even consider recruiting students who can most benefit from these experiences.

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