Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria

Ministry of High Education and Scientific Research

University of Tlemcen

Faculty of Arts and Languages

Department of Foreign Languages

Section of English

The Impact of Exchange Programmes on Intercultural Competence: A Life Experience of Algerian MEPI Programme Students

Thesis submitted to the Department of Foreign Languages as a partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Language Sciences

Presented By: **Supervised By:**

Ms. Amina GUERRICHE   Dr. Noureddine MOUHADJER

Board of Examiners

Dr. Noureddine MOUHADJER   Supervisor   University of Tlemcen

Dr. Mohammed Nassim NGADI   Internal Examiner   University of Tlemcen

Dr. Nawel BENMOSTEFA   Internal Examiner   University of Tlemcen

Academic Year : 2014/2015

Statement of Originality

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution. I also certify that the present work contains no plagiarism and is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Mis. Guerriche Amina

04/29/2015

Acknowledgements

Upon beginning the process of writing this master's thesis, the eventual day of completing the project seemed a far off notion. However, after much hard work and considerable assistance from several individuals, a finished product is a reality.

It is a pleasure to thank those who made this thesis possible. I owe my deepest gratitude to my supervisor , Dr. MOUHADJER Noureddine , whose guidance, and expertise from the initial proposal to the final thesis encouraged me to continue working and to develop an understanding of the subject. . I would also love to thank all my professors and the board or examiners; Dr, NEGADI and Dr, BENMOSTEFA for their endless support all along my academic path.

Also, without the knowledge and dedicated contributions of my Algerian MEPI student leaders friends who provided all necessary assistance requested, a successful research culmination would not have been possible.

I would like to thank Algeria MEPI chapter and the director of the CIED at Georgetown University Mr. Christopher Shirley for they never ceased an effort to provide the necessary support and assistance for the completion of this work.

To my amazing parents, family, friends, and professors whose words of encouragement and push for tenacity ring in my ears.

I place on record, my sense of gratitude to one and all, who directly or indirectly, have lent helping hand in this venture.

Abstract

This qualitative study examines how studying abroad, through exchange programs, provides cultural emersion that would help participants develop their intercultural competence .It takes for case study the Middle East Partnership Initiative program which offers a chance to Algerian students to participate in a 6 weeks long cultural emersion program experience in the United States of America.

Data were collected by means of a pre-program and a post-program participation multiple choices questionnaires of twenty Algerian students. Findings and conclusions drawn from the comparison between the pre and post participation questionnaires will show that studying abroad programs expose students to people and cultures from different religious, geographic, cultural, and social backgrounds, and in doing so have the potential to grant them the opportunity to develop their understanding of cultural diversity and hence nurture them with an intercultural competence that would help them accommodate to differences.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

MEPI : Middle East Partnership Initiative

MENA: Middle East and North Africa

USA : United States of America

IC : Intercultural Competence

General introduction

As the world of the 21st century emerges more clearly, it becomes increasingly apparent that people around the world have become and continue to become more interconnected than any other time in history. Such interconnectedness results in a wide variety of contacts between people belonging to different cultures and backgrounds.

Intercultural contact is increasing at a rapid pace. This is in part due to developments in transportations, communication technologies, emergence of international corporations, and movements of manufacturing. Another area of increased intercultural exposure is the ever growing number of educational exchange and study abroad programs. Hence, to be as effective as possible in this century, it is important that individuals are able to successfully communicate and interact with the culturally diverse individuals they will encounter within and outside their home countries, no matter the purpose of the interaction. Possessing the culturally appropriate skills, behaviours, and attitudes, i.e., intercultural competence, necessary to effectively fulfil the interactional role is imperative in today's world

In this continuously globalizing world, education is stepping forward and serving the people living in the cultural world of today and tomorrow through becoming increasingly international with universities welcoming more students from around the globe. The universities' educational exchange programs give birth to a cultural diversity that provides many benefits as well as potential challenges (pragmatic failures, cultural misunderstandings…).The differences in values, norms, and behaviours became apparent in various ways through communication styles, learning beliefs, and the way of working and collaborating. The differences and similarities arising from diversity could be managed through developing a cultural competence involving sensitivity and awareness about cultures different than ours.

Student study abroad programs and exchange programs are designed to expand knowledge and increase student excellence through intercultural learning experiences.

These programs provide opportunities for developing intercultural competence and a unique exchange of ideas.

The tradition of students travelling abroad has a long history. After the Second World War, a dramatic increase in the number of overseas-study programs took place. A large number of American universities now offer study abroad programs. Baker (1983) found that such programs result in significant effects on interest in international affairs, increase of cultural sensitivity and awareness, communication skills, and interest in various subjects.

Cultural exchange programs expose students to people from different cultural, religious, geographic, and socioeconomic backgrounds as well as different places, traditions, and ways of living. In so doing, they provide students with the opportunity to develop a cultural understanding of diversity outside their cultural comfort zone. Study abroad programs assist students to develop positive skills and attitudes, i.e., intercultural competence needed for active participation in our multicultural society. "Intercultural competence" has been defined as "*a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself*" Fantini (2006 :12). The major parts of intercultural competence are awareness and sensitivity to other cultures that could be enhanced through an intercultural emersion provided by study abroad programs. In this study, the intercultural program is the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI).

MEPI grants Algerian students, among others from over the Middle East and North Africa, a cultural emersion opportunity of six weeks in the United States where students learn about topics ranging from leadership, cultural diversity, interfaith dialogue and get to take part in voluntary works, debates, and different workshops.

In this respect, this qualitative study aims at exploring whether studying abroad, through exchange programs, provides cultural emersion that would help participants develop their intercultural sensitivity and awareness as major parts of intercultural competence.

In an attempt to answer this question, this work is framed into two distinctive chapters. The first chapter is going to be a review of literature that will define the concepts of

intercultural competence as well as intercultural sensitivity and awareness. It will further highlight the importance of cultural diversity, define the study abroad programs and illustrate their importance in promoting intercultural competence. The second chapter is a case study which starts by a situation analysis in which an Algerian and American cultural profile analysis is provided following the cultural dimensions of Geert Hofstede and a detailed description of the Middle East Partnership Initiative study abroad program. Data, then, will be displayed and interpreted followed by a discussion and recommendations for further research.

Chapter One

The Review of Literature

Introduction :

This chapter is a review of literature which defines the concept of « intercultural competence » and analyse it in terms of two observable behaviours; cultural sensitivity, and cultural awareness. This chapter also displays the importance of cultural diversity and the development of students' intercultural competence, as well as the role that study abroad programs plays in this vain.

1. Intercultural Competence:

1.1. Culture

While talking about "intercultural competence", we cannot deny the concept of "culture" at least as an abstract concept or as an abstract unit.

As a unit, one can analyze and try to understand a culture, which may have a vague or undefined borderlines separating one culture from another. These borderlines –which might move from time to time and from situation to situation- can, however, be crossed for various reasons, such as in connection with all kinds of intercultural co-operation, international tourism, cross cultural management and intercultural communication of course is the most important in all these situations.

'Culture is considered as an amorphous concept even in the most rigorous of theoretical discussions of intercultural competence. It is a symbolic system which includes issues of perception cognition and understanding. Various scholars have attempted to define culture. A more succinct definition is provided by Down (1971:73) "……*a culture is a system of symbols shared by a group of humans and transmitted to upcoming generations"*. Barnow suggests that culture is inheritance and is expressed through behaviour *"a culture is a way of life of a group of people, the configuration of all of the more or less stereotyped patterns of learned behaviour which are handed down from one generation to the next through means of language and imitation"*.(1973:6)

It is very important that one makes the distinction between culture with the capital C and cultural with the small c. A major component of a culture is its systems of values,

beliefs, and material products. First, culture includes belief systems that involve stories, or myths, the interpretation which enables people to have a sight on how they should think and behave. Second, culture includes value systems. Values are formed based on how we learn to believe things or how people ought to behave, especially in terms of qualities such as honesty, integrity, empathy and openness. Third, culture is also defined by material products as food, clothing and music.

Culture has tremendous influences on the way people think, perceive, communicate, learn, teach and use technology. Most people are not aware of how cultures affect their social behaviour and attitudes. The best way to learn about a culture is to take part in its context and try to develop one's understanding while interacting with people belonging to it, that is the reason behind the great importance of study abroad programs highlighted in this work.

There is a wide variation in the literature concerning the definition of intercultural competence as well as multiple perspectives on how one becomes interculturally competent.

1.2. Intercultural Competence:

Across a wide variety of disciplines, the terms cross-cultural and intercultural are often used interchangeably despite the definitional differences. Asante & Gudykunst (as cited in Wiseman & Koester, 1993) make the distinction between the two saying that : "*cross-cultural research involves the comparative study in multiple cultures, whereas intercultural research involves the study of people from differing cultures who are interacting together*" (p.5). Based on this clarification, "intercultural" is now the term used when describing the totality of intercultural skills, behaviours, and attitudes that combine to make an individual successful and effective in intercultural interactions. As intercultural more accurately reflects the interactive process in which MEPI student leaders exchange program participants engage during the time spent in the United States, the term "intercultural competence" is used in this study rather than cross-cultural competence.

Intercultural competence has been defined by Fantini (2006:12) as "*a complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself*". These complex abilities include affective, behavioural, and cognitive capacities such as openness, awareness, adaptive motivation, behavioural flexibility, respect and self-confidence. Intercultural competence is one's knowledge and ability to successfully deal with intercultural encounters. Bryan, Nichols and Stevens (2001:5) define intercultural competence as "*the ability to interact with others, to accept other perspectives, to be conscious of their evaluation of difference*". Thus, one should observe dispassionately, analyze critically, interpret and discuss cultural differences so as to achieve a mutual understanding and respect, and become more tolerant to cultural differences. Another definition was put forward by Taylor (1994) who defines intercultural competence as a transformative process whereby the stranger develops adaptive capacity, altering his perspective to effectively understand and accommodate the demands of the other cultures. Mainly, intercultural competence involves engaging in behaviours that "*foster cooperative relationships in all types of social and cultural contexts in which culturally or ethnically dissimilar others interface*"(Kim,2009 :62).

Stoof et al. (2002) suggest that any demonstration of competence is fundamentally influenced by three variables – people, goals, and context. Furthermore, they argue that competence is most effectively defined when conceived within a constructivist paradigm that recognizes its iterative formation process and contextualized manifestation. Intercultural competence applies the notion of competence to describe the successful engagement or collaboration toward a single or shared set of goals between individuals or groups who do not share the same cultural origins or background. These cultural differences can arise from any combination of factors including racial, ethnic, socio-economic, religious, and national differences. Individuals or groups demonstrating intercultural competence are able in a given situation to find "common purpose through mutually coordinated communication across cultures and languages" (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p. 2).

Individuals, who develop sensitivity and awareness towards cultures other than their own, gain necessary knowledge, attitudes, and skills to function effectively in various

intercultural encounters overtimes. Hence, cultural sensitivity and awareness are greatly associated with intercultural competence. The latter is a process that continues throughout one's lifetime (Deardoff, 2006). In this sense, individuals develop a change over time to become/remain interculturally competent.

Martin & Vaugh (2007) assert that intercultural competence comprises awareness, attitudes towards differences, sensitivity, cultural knowledge, and skills. On the other hand, Chen & Starosta's (1996) model of intercultural competence gathers three dimensions including intercultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity, and intercultural adroitness.

This research will analyse the role of the MEPI short term study abroad program in the development of students' intercultural competence with a focus on intercultural sensitivity and awareness as key components.

2. Intercultural Sensitivity:

Intercultural sensitivity is a key element of intercultural competence (IC). It is the individual's ability to respond to, recognize, and acknowledge cultural differences in intercultural encounters. Hammer, Bennett, and Wiseman (2003) view intercultural sensitivity as a precursor to greater intercultural competence. Moritsugu (1999) maintains that cultural sensitivity is *"the knowledge and understanding of a specific culture that enables an individual to effectively communicate and function within that culture"* (p.62). Importantly, greater cultural sensitivity is associated with greater potential for exerting IC (Hammer et al., 2003).

Intercultural sensitivity determines the person's ability to successfully modify his or her behaviour in a culturally appropriate manner while moving from one culture to another. Intercultural sensitivity relies on knowing that both cultural differences and similarities exist, and act in a flexible manner that would ensure the effective intercultural function of the individual. Therefore, the more culturally sensitive a person is, the more likely he is able to modify his behaviour in a foreign culture outside of his comfort zone. People *"who can perform such alternations demonstrate greater intercultural sensitivity*

and are believed to have greater potential for successful overseas assignments" (Bhawk & Sakuda, 2009, p.261).

Bhawk & Sakuda (2009) point out that intercultural sensitivity is a process of cultural learning and involves cognitive, affective, and behavioural learning processes. Hence, a person goes through the process of cultural learning during which his level of intercultural sensitivity and competence change.

The increasing importance of intercultural sensitivity in the global and multicultural society has led many scholars and experts to examine the concept from different perspectives. Practically, the concept has been integrated into different intercultural exchange programs as the MEPI program where students are offered the chance to learn and develop their intercultural sensitivity through being in a multicultural environment where intercultural encounters are faced every day.

As intercultural sensitivity focuses on personal emotions caused by specific situations, people, and environment (Triandis, 1977), it carries the notion that an interculturally sensitive person is able to display and receive positive responses before, during, and after the interaction. It refers mainly to empathy and flexibility which are key components of intercultural sensitivity.

2.1.Empathy:

Empathy has been long recognized as a central element for intercultural sensitivity. Empathy is mostly illustrated through the metaphors "standing in someone else's shoes" or "seeing through someone else's eye".

Cultural empathy is the understanding of the cultural attributes of a given society, tolerate and respect differences and appreciate similarities. Empathy refers to the process of projecting oneself "*into another person's point of view so as to think the same thoughts and feel the same emotions as the other person*" (Adler & Towne, 1987, p.95).

According to Barnlund (1988), interculturally sensitive persons tend to look for symbols that may enable them to live the other's experiences. Hence, a person in possession of an intercultural empathy will not take the same role regardless the situation he is put into (Hart, Carlson & Eadie, 1980). Moreover, empathic persons are judged to

be more selfless and having more concern for the others' feelings and responses. They are therefore able to accurately judge the behaviours and internal states of their counterparts in the interaction process (Parks, 1994).

Thus, empathy allows individuals to construct firm connections with different cultures. It helps in the development of a mutual understanding and decreases from the rise of possible cultural misunderstanding due to the differences prevailing between cultures and societies. This is the reason Coke, Bateson, and McDavis (1978) contend that empathy allows a person to possess a higher degree of feeling of sympathy and concern toward others. Hence, the display of identification, understanding and consideration to others are characteristics of empathy which forms the essence of intercultural sensitivity and leads a person to be interculturally competent (Bennet, 1979; Gudykunst, 1993; Yum, 1989).

2.2. Flexibility

With the recent heightened volume of student mobility, intercultural flexibility of students has become a topic of much interest. Flexibility is an integral component of intercultural competence and several researchers have developed measures for being flexible in different social situations.

Empirically, the concept of intercultural flexibility has occupied the attention of a lot of researchers specialized in studying specific economic sectors and immigration and who focus on the inclusion and adaption of new residents and workers in a host society (e.g., Kyong Dong, 2005).

Flexibility is considered to be a characteristic acquired by an individual who possesses intercultural competence (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Bochner & Kelly, 1974). Endicott, Bock, and Narvaez (2003) defined intercultural flexibility as "the ability to understand, consider, and weigh multiple frameworks, or schemas" (p. 415). To assess the flexibility a person possesses, Martin and Anderson (1998) developed the Flexibility Scale. Results from several studies testing the validity of the scale indicates that flexibility enables a person to be more confident in communicating with strangers; it was also suggested that interculturally flexible individuals "have more confidence in their ability to communicate

effectively, especially in new situations" (p. 6). Hence, a flexible individual tends to acknowledge possible adjustments based on situational factors.

Flexibility is a major component of intercultural competence which has often been discussed in the light of stereotypes and prejudices that may rise and harm intercultural understanding. Intercultural flexibility goes beyond the individual's ability to cross different social and symbolic boundaries. Social boundaries emerge from the grouping of individuals into social categories and may be national, ethnic, cultural, or religious, to name a few. On the other hand, symbolic boundaries comprise conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorise objects, people, practices, and even time and space.

Intercultural flexibility focuses on international experiences in terms of cross cultural participation.

3. Intercultural Awareness:

According to Chen and Starosta (1996), technology development over the last decades is the main reason the world faces intercultural encounters and communication on a daily basis. To be aware of the relevant multiple identities of another is the first step towards becoming an enlightened interculturally competent individual who tolerates cultural differences and shows mutual respect among cultures (Boulding, 1988). Intercultural awareness functions as a minimum condition to achieve intercultural competence.

According to Winkelman (2005), awareness of cultural differences and their impact on behavior is the beginning of intercultural effectiveness. He states that "*cultural self-awareness includes recognition of one's own cultural influences upon values, beliefs, and judgments*" (p.09).

The changing cultural characteristics of the surrounding environments make from cultural diversity the norm rather than the exception of life of most countries of the world. According to Belay (1993), this trend tends to nourish multiple cultural identities. To be aware of this relevant multitude of diverse cultural identities is the first step towards developing tolerance and respect of differences and achieve a multicultural coexistence.

Intercultural awareness may be seen as an attribute of personal outlook and behaviour which can be developed in an individual, rather than as an objective field of study in its own right. It emphasizes the changing of personal thinking about the environment through the understanding of distinct characteristics of our own and others' cultures (Triandis, 1977).

The importance of intercultural awareness is reflected nowadays in the increasing number of intercultural training or exchange programs. Intercultural awareness requires individuals to understand from their own cultural perspective, that they are cultural beings and to use this understanding as a foundation to further figure out the distinct characteristics of other cultures in order to effectively interpret the behaviour of others in various intercultural interactions. Intercultural awareness grants us the chance to develop an understanding of cultural dynamics through reducing the level of situational ambiguity and uncertainty in intercultural interactions. Such awareness of differences can develop adaptability with ambiguities and diversity as well as tolerance to differences and diversity. This assertiveness and adaptability are considered main elements that contribute in the development of intercultural awareness and hence competence.

3 .1. Adaptability:

Intercultural adaptability is defined as the process through which persons in cross-cultural interactions and different cultural settings change their behaviour to facilitate understanding. Put another way, intercultural adaptation refers to the behavioural adjustment aiming at decreasing the probability of being misunderstood when interacting with someone from a different culture.

The process of intercultural adaptability starts when one individual perceives his current setting as unfamiliar and potential speakers as different. By bringing his existing thoughts, feelings, behaviours and beliefs with him, he will integrate that into his new society while adjusting and accepting to the new standards, thereby creating a multicultural person. As a whole, adaptability is the process of overcoming the barriers separating foreigners from their new surrounding environments. According to Kim (2001), the necessary process of cross-cultural adaptability is defined as *"the entirety of the phenomenon of individuals who, upon relocating to an unfamiliar sociocultural*

environment, strive to establish and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with the environment" (p. 380). Adaptability is therefore an interplay between the individual and the surrounding environment.

"In this increasingly integrated world, cross-cultural adaptation is a central and defining theme: The multicultural world is enhanced by the experiences of sojourners, immigrants, and others who successfully make the transition from one culture to another" (Kim, 2002: xi).

Kim dedicated much of her research to the study of immigrant populations. In investigating the adaptive processes of short-term and long-term sojourners, including immigrants, Kim composed an integrative piece of literature that explains and highlights major components of the adaptive process.

It was hypothesized that students enrolled in a study abroad program including taking a class with students from the host country would score higher on the intercultural adaptability. The assumption made was that the study abroad program objectives would serve as a default training period that would have a positive impact on students' ability to adapt in another culture.

3.2. Self-assertiveness

Cultural diversity has for a long time been a matter of lived reality in the world societies and their educational systems. Dealing with this diversity implies developing an effective cultural competence which implies, among other skills and attitudes, assertiveness.

"To assert is to state an opinion, claim a right, or establish authority. If someone asserts himself, he behaves in a way that expresses his confidence, importance of his power and earns him respect from others" Oxford English dictionary.

Self-assertiveness allows the person to express his feelings and opinions openly and honestly, as well as listening respectfully to the opinions of others. Assertive behaviour demonstrates respect for self and others, promotes self-disclosure, self-control and awareness.

In recent years scholars have become increasingly interested in intercultural competence which represents the notion of effective interpersonal interaction across cultures with diverse individuals (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984) and that represents in its major part assertiveness in interacting across cultures. Lozarus (1973) identifies assertiveness as *"the ability to initiate, continue and finish a general conversation".* Lange and Jacubowski (1976:86) claimed that *"assertiveness involves personal rights and expressing thoughts, feelings and beliefs directly, honestly and appropriately, without violating the rights of others."*

Self-assertiveness is reflected in much behaviour; assertive students tend to say what they want firmly, spontaneously, honestly and directly but without crossing the borders and violating the rights of others. They show tolerance and acceptance of the differences in cultures, beliefs and characters. Learners are open-minded and are ready to compromise when necessary. Also, they tend to show empathy and facility in coping with different situations. This assertiveness will be assessed further in this research.

4. Importance of Cultural Diversity:

From the arena of international business to the intimacy of family life, there is an increasing urge on the ability to deal effectively and appropriately with diversity, whether ethnic, religious, or cultural.

"Cultural diversity" is the joint of human societies or cultures in a specific region, or in the world as a whole (The term is also sometimes used to refer to multiculturalism within an organization). It has for a long time been a matter of lived reality. Dealing with it implies shaping and developing attitudes of understanding, empathy, sensitivity and awareness to assure the cohesion between societies and nations.

Greater exposure to cultural diversity means that students will be better prepared to excel as researchers in a world in which collaborative innovation on an international scale is becoming a norm. Recent research in social psychology demonstrates that having diverse cultural experiences can enhance one's thinking toolkit (creativity, problem solving, cultural understanding…etc) enabling him to approach problems from different perspectives and think outside of the box. Those with an enriched cultural environment

become more psychologically ready to accept and recruit ideas from unfamiliar sources and places.

The UNESCO (2001) Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity affirms in its first article that

"Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature".

In our multicultural world, creation flourishes in contact with other cultures, such contact also fosters creativity and inspires a genuine dialogue among cultures. Learning about other cultures helps us understand different perspectives within the world in which we live, and helps dispel negative stereotypes and personal biases about different groups.

Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up mankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognised and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generation.

As citizens of the 21st century, our students must be informed about diverse cultures of the world, their traditions and beliefs, social and political systems, their geographies, economies, and psychologies. As Lester (1950) anticipated, we are living in an age where different civilizations have to learn to live side by side in peaceful interchange, learning from each other, studying each other's history, ideals, art, and culture, mutually enriching each other's lives.

5 -Study Abroad Programs:

Study abroad programs are programs that take place outside the geographical boundaries of the country of origin. They have increasingly gained popularity in the last few years for their major role is bridging the cultural distance between the world's

societies and building a strong students' intercultural competence that would enable collaboration and effective interaction across cultural boundaries.

The Liaison Group for International Educational Exchange (1990), noted that the best resource the nation can have in facing its international challenges is a very large number of highly trained people with first hands knowledge of another culture and hands on experience working and learning in it. In the same vein , Gurin et al (1999), in evaluating a program to facilitate cross cultural relations in a university setting, found that students who participated in programs in a culturally diverse setting are more likely to engage later in cross cultural events, take courses on cultural diversity, develop a sensitivity to differences and maintain intergroup dialogue and discussions.

Study abroad opportunities continue to be a popular choice for college students looking to expand their undergraduate education. During the last decade higher education organizations and educational policy makers have substantially increased efforts to incentivize study abroad participation. These efforts are grounded in the longstanding belief that study abroad participation improves intercultural competence.

Study abroad advocates and international education scholars have repeatedly sought to demonstrate the positive effect of studying abroad on intercultural competence under the presumption that the conditions for intergroup contact during a study abroad experience are ideal for reducing prejudice, developing intercultural competency skills, and improving relations across cultural, ethnic, and/or national differences (Sell, 1983; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Hence, study abroad programs are assumed to play a major role in promoting intercultural competence.

6. The role of exchange programs in promoting intercultural competence:

It is in the intercultural space that unity and diversity can be reconciled. The natural attraction most people have to the exotic and foreign is a call for reaching beyond known environments in order to expand. The essence of intercultural competence lies in the ability to recognize when and where culture is manifested in intercultural encounters and the ability to manage an intercultural space where all parties are comfortable participants.

Study abroad advocates have long argued that the experience of living and learning abroad has a unique effect on many of the broad educational outcomes. Study abroad participation has been linked with aspects of psychosocial – often called personal – development (Gmelch, 1997; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1966), identity development (Dolby, 2004), moral or values development (Ryan & Twibell, 2000), intellectual development (McKeown, 2009), and holistic development (Du, 2007). The most prominent among the educational benefits claimed of an international educational experience, study abroad has long been considered a powerful mechanism for developing intercultural competence (Fulbright, 1989; Hoffa & DePaul, 2010; Lincoln Commission, 2005).

Byram (1995) asserts that an interculturally competent individual is the one who manage to interact across cultural boundaries, anticipates misunderstandings caused by differences in values, meanings and beliefs, and thirdly cope with the effective and cognitive demands of engagement with the others different from self. Intercultural competence is of a crucial importance and a necessary precondition for an adequate, successful and mutually satisfactory communication, encounter and cooperation between people from different cultures (Alexander 1996). Researchers characterise intercultural competence in the merging of the ability to develop and maintain relationships, communicate effectively, and attain compliance and obtain cooperation with others.

Establishing an intercultural competence through studying abroad, helps students to understand, adopt and interact with different cultures and develop their critical thinking by training them on developing the ability to interrogate and interpret intercultural interaction. It helps also to develop an international collaboration and commitment as it brings together students from different parts of the world and create intercultural and international working groups. In addition, it enables participants to achieve an effective global communication through learning about other cultures and implementing communication strategies such as reflective listening and open-mindedness, awareness, and sensitivity.

Cultural emersion experience is a versatile tool which shapes one's cultural understanding and makes him see how cultures shape one's view. Intercultural

competence, without the experience of knowing how living in at least one foreign culture, can affect us in providing an impoverished form of intercultural competence. Hence, a multicultural education doesn't necessarily imply the study of foreign languages, but the former without the latter is incomplete and tends to face hardships in generating the needed results, i.e. tolerance, sensitivity, awareness, and cross cultural understanding. Higher education institutions have increasingly emphasized internationalization as a core element of their strategic goals for the next century (Green, Luu, & Burris, 2008; Siaya & Hayward, 2003). When institutional strategic plans and mission statements articulate the intended educational outcomes of internationalization, they often claim that the institution will instil in its students the intercultural competency skills necessary to successfully engage, compete, and thrive in an increasingly diverse and globally interconnected world (Deardorff, 2004; Knight, 2004).

Cultural exchange programs expose students to people from different cultural, religious, geographic, and socio-economic backgrounds and in doing so provide the opportunity for students to develop a greater understanding of diversity and enhance their intercultural competence. They allow students to interact with and learn from people who are different from themselves and participate in unique experiences. Cultural exchange assists students in developing positive relationships with others, understand the broader range of perspectives, and develop the knowledge and skills needed for an efficient participation in today's globalized multicultural world.

The cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal capacities necessary to exhibit intercultural competence – sensitivity to cultural differences, awareness of socio-historical cultural contexts, adaptability and flexibility to view cultural differences and contextual circumstances, and the empathy to seek deeper understanding while withholding judgment – are all attributes that could increase the likelihood of a positive cross-cultural outcome.

Though, educational institutions would contribute in changing the world of the 21st century through making students intellectually and interculturally viable. The formation of those interculturally competent students is one of best illustrations of the importance of

establishing an intercultural understanding and social harmony especially in educational settings.

Conclusion:

In this chapter, the concepts of culture, intercultural competence, and program exchanges have been defined taking into account works of previous scholars in the field of this research. Further in this chapter, discussions on the importance of cultural diversity and the role of cultural emersion provided through the study abroad programs in increasing intercultural competence skills have been discussed in an attempt to shed the light on the vital role these programs play in nurturing interculturally competent student well prepared to effectively function in today's multicultural world.

Chapter Two

The Research Method

Introduction

This chapter deals with the practical part of this research work. In the beginning, it starts with a situation analysis in which it analyses the cultural differences between the American and Algerian context based on the culture dimensions established by Hofstede in the cultural theoretical framework. An Algerian and American profile were later presented following Hofstede's dimensions. Later in this investigation, a detailed presentation of the study abroad program was done. Then, it will move to data analysis, results, and interpretations. The chapter will end with a discussion and recommendations for further research about the benefits of study abroad programs in nurturing interculturally competent students.

I. Situation Analysis

A situation analysis defines and interprets the state of the environment of a person or organization. It is a process of identifying and analysing the context or the environment, including external and internal factors, in which the research project takes place. Situation analysis is designed to take a snapshot of where things stand at the time the research is conducted.

I.1 Intercultural Differences:

In recent years, opportunities for higher education students to go abroad during their studies have arisen enormously. Some of the reasons behind such development are the growing intercultural and educational collaborations between nations, and the fact that institutions started to be highly aware of the importance of cultural emersion and intercultural experience is nurturing interculturally competent students prepared for the job market, and able to effectively function as global citizens.

Intercultural competence has been shown to impact on major business activities, education, and collaboration and group performance. Cultural awareness and sensitivity can lead to greater success of international business ventures, educational outcomes and lack of it can just as well lead to their failure (Dowling et al, 2008: 57). Geert Hofstede is a renowned author who developed a model to describe various cultural 'dimensions', and

has researched issues relating to cultural differences. Hofstede (1991) describes cultures as a special collective programming which differentiates a category or group of individuals from others. He also asserts that the acceptance and understanding of other cultures different from ours, is thought to contribute to cooperation among different cultures. Hofstede (1984) developed a four dimensional model of cultural differences, which can be used to characterize cultural behaviours that originate from different societies. Dimensions are described in the table below, followed by other tables aiming at clarifying the most important differences between the cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede.

Dimension	Descriptions
Large Vs Small **Power Distance** **PD**	It is the degree to which people accept the unequal distribution of power and wealth in a society (Gunawardena et all. , 2001) -People in Large Power Distance societies tend to accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a "place." -People in Small Power Distance societies tend to strive for power equalization and demand justification for inequalities.
Individualism **Vs** **Collectivism**	- Individualism stands for a preference of a loosely knit social framework in society where individuals are only supposed to take care of themselves and their immediate families. - Collectivism stands for a preference for a tightly knit social framework in which individuals may expect their relatives to look after them in exchange for loyalty.
Strong Vs Weak **Uncertainty** **Avoidance (UA)**	It is the degree to which the individuals of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations (Hofstede, 1986). -Strong Uncertainty Avoidance countries tend to maintain rigid codes of belief and behavior and are generally intolerant toward deviant persons and ideas. -Weak Uncertainty Avoidance societies maintain a more relaxed atmosphere in which practice counts more than principles, and deviance is more easily tolerated.
Masculinity **Vs** **Femininity**	It is the degree to which the society prefers distinct gender roles (Hofstede, 1986; Mercado, Parboteeah, and Zhao, 2004). -People in masculine societies tend to place more value on achievement and success. Males generally dominate a significant portion of the society and power structure. In general, the female population is likely to be more assertive and competitive, with women shifting toward the male role model and away from their female role. - In feminine societies, caring for others and quality of life are considered more important.

Table 1.1.1.Hofstede' 4 Dimensions Cultural Model

Small Power Distance	Large Power Distance
- Use of power should be legitimate and is subject to criteria of good and evil.	-Power is a basic fact of society antedating good or evil
-Parents treat children as equal	- Parents teach children obedience.
-older people are neither respected nor feared	- Older people are both respected and feared.
- Hierarchy means inequality of roles, established for convenience	- Hierarchy means the existential inequality
-Subordinates expect to be consulted on what to do.	- Subordinates expect to be told what to do.
- Pluralist governments based on majority vote and changed peacefully.	- Autocratic governments based on co-optation and changed by revolution.
- Corruption rare; scandals end political careers.	-Corruption frequent; scandals are covered up
-Student-centred education	-Teacher-centred education.

Table 1.1.2: Differences Between Small- and Large- Power Distance Societies

Weak Uncertainty Avoidance	Strong Uncertainty Avoidance
- The uncertainty inherent in life is accepted and each day is taken as it comes	- The uncertainty inherent in life is felt as a continuous threat that must be fought.
- Ease, lower stress, self-control, low anxiety	-Higher stress, emotionality, anxiety, neuroticism.
- Tolerance of deviant persons and ideas: what is different is curious.	- Intolerance of deviant persons and ideas: what is different is dangerous.
- Comfortable with ambiguity and chaos.	- Need for clarity and structure.
- In politics, citizens feel and are seen as competent towards authorities.	- In politics, citizens feel and are seen as incompetent towards authorities.
- In religion, philosophy and science: relativism and empiricism	- In religion, philosophy and science: belief in ultimate truths
-Teacher may say "I don't know"	-Teacher is supposed to have all the answers

Table 1.1.3: Differences Between Weak and Strong Uncertainty Avoidance Societies

Individualism	Collectivism
- Everyone is supposed to take care of him- or herself and his or her immediate family only	- People are born into extended families or clans which protect them in exchange for loyalty
- "I" – consciousness	- "We" –consciousness
- Right of privacy	- Stress on belonging.
- Transgression of norms leads to guilt feelings	- Transgression of norms leads to shame feelings.
- Languages in which the word "I" is indispensable.	- Languages in which the word "I" is avoided.
- Purpose of education is learning how to learn	- Purpose of education is learning how to do.
- Task prevails over relationship.	- Relationship prevails over task

Table 1.1.4: Differences between Collectivist and Individualist Societies

Femininity	Masculinity
- Minimum emotional and social role differentiation between the genders.	- Maximum emotional and social role differentiation between the genders
- Men and women should be modest and caring.	- Men should be and women may be assertive and ambitious
- Both fathers and mothers deal with facts and feelings	- Fathers deal with facts, while mothers deal with feelings.
- Both boys and girls may cry but neither should fight.	- Girls cry, boys don't; boys should fight back, girls shouldn't fight
- Matter-of-fact attitudes about sexuality; sex is a way of relating	- Moralistic attitudes about sexuality; sex is a way of performing
- Many women in elected political positions	-Few women in elected political positions.
- Religion focuses on fellow human beings.	- Religion focuses on God.

Table 1.1.5 : Differences between Feminine and Masculine Societies

I. 2. Cultural Profiles:

All social behaviour is embedded in a particular context and is connected to other deeply held values and beliefs. This means that the stakes are high for mismanaging cultural differences. Ignoring or mishandling differences can lead to the rise of intercultural misunderstandings, failure in communication and effective collaboration, misreading the potential of cross-border alliances, and frustration while working with culturally different groups or individuals. When successfully managed, however, intercultural differences can lead to innovative practices, faster and better learning, and effective work and collaboration.

I. 2.1. American Cultural Profile:

The United States of America (USA) exhibits a small power distance in society. This dimension does not measure the level of power distribution in a given culture, but rather analyses the way people feel about it. The USA has a culture characterized by relatively equal power sharing and discourages attention to status difference and raking. It is a culture that expects and accepts that power relations are democratic and people grasp the fact that they have the right to be treated equally no matter the differences. In the educational context, students are expected to be treated as equal as their teachers. In class, the teacher is active in setting up the learning situation while students do much of the talking and interacting. Education is considered student-oriented.

Americans are seen as culturally individualistic, they stress on personal achievement and individual rights and goals rather than those of the group. Individualism correlates with effective and intellectual autonomy, commitment, responsibility and independence. There is a preference of people to belong to a loosely knit society where importance is placed on the self and autonomy. In the educational context, students are encouraged to speak up and express their opinions. They see diplomas as means to increase economic and self-respect.

The dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance refers to the degree to which the member of a society feels uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. In this vein, Americans are confronted to weak uncertainty avoidance, which makes them tolerant with culture

differences and open to new ideas and perspectives. Hence, the USA educational institutions offer a wide range of study abroad opportunities (as MEPI), and are engaged globally in partnerships with different academic institutions and universities where American students can have the chance to be immersed in another cultural and social experience and eventually develop as interculturally competent individuals. The Open Doors report by the Institute of International Education (2014) shows that the number of U.S. students who studied abroad is 289,408 students in 2012/13. The UK had the largest increase in the number of U.S. study abroad students. In addition, there was double digit growth in the number of American students studying in South Africa, Denmark, Italy, Spain, France, South Korea, China, Peru, and Thailand, as well as strong growth to Costa Rica, Middle East, Turkey, Australia, Argentina, India, Mexico, Ecuador, Israel, Chile, New Zealand, and Ireland and a continued rebound in those going to Japan as programs recovered after the earthquake and tsunami of March 2011.

In terms of femininity vs. masculinity, United States of America is considered as a masculine society. This dimension focuses on the importance a culture places on stereotypically masculine values and stereotypically feminine values. Masculine traits include assertiveness, material success, self-centeredness, power, strength, individual achievements, ambition, and differentiated gender roles.

"Masculinity stands for a society in which social gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success ; women are supposed to be more modest, tender , and concerned with the quality of life" (Hofstede, 2001:58).

I. 2.2. Algerian Cultural Profile:

Algeria is believed to be a large power distance society where individuals accept and legitimise the fact that wealth and power are unequally distributed in the society. The hierarchical order in which everyone has its place is established and agreed upon. In the social life, older people are respected and feared, and youth often have an already traced life path. Education is teacher dominated and centrally organized pedagogical culture. In class, all communications are initiated by the teachers who are considered as a source of knowledge and wisdom.

Collectivism reflects the degree to which the society reinforces collective achievements and interpersonal relationships. Collectivist societies, as Algeria, have a great emphasis on groups and think more in terms of "we", they have close ties between individuals and reinforced extended families where everyone takes responsibility for fellow members. In collectivist societies, the goals of the group and its well being are valued over those of the individual. Education in Algeria is group-based; students are believed to be collectivist. However, active individual initiatives are not encouraged, and students view diplomas as means for having access to higher status groups.

Algerians belong to a society of uncertainty avoidance. Hofstede (1991:115) distinguishes between low and high uncertainty avoidance as he says:

"Members *of cultures with high uncertainty avoidance, have lower tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity, which expresses itself in higher levels of anxiety and energy release, greater need for formal rules and absolute truth, and less tolerance for people or groups with deviant ideas or behaviour"*.

This dimension indicates to what extent the culture programs its members to feel either comfortable or uncomfortable in unstructured situations. As a country which belongs to high uncertainty avoidance, Algeria has little tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. It is a rule-oriented society that institutes laws, rules, regulations, and controls in order to reduce the amount of uncertainty. People in uncertainty avoidance countries tend to be emotional and motivated by inner nervous energy.

Likewise the USA, Algeria is considered as a masculine society. This dimension focuses on the degree the society reinforces, or does not reinforce, the traditional masculine work role model of male achievement, control, and power. A High Masculinity ranking indicates the country experiences a high degree of gender differentiation. In these cultures, males dominate a significant portion of the society and power structure. Masculinity represents a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material reward for success.

Algerian students link success and failure with luck and occult forces. They lack innovation as they are very conservative and stick to old fashioned ways of accomplishing tasks.

1.3. The Middle East Partnership Initiative Program:

Short term study abroad programs claim to generate an increased intercultural awareness and sensitivity to other cultures, to enhance enthusiasm for international issues and willingness to participate in international activities (Gray et al. 2002).

During the last decade higher education organizations and educational policy makers have substantially increased efforts to incentivize study abroad participation. These efforts are grounded in the longstanding belief that study abroad participation improves intercultural competence – an educational outcome critical in a globalized 21st century .

As student populations have diversified and both policy makers and employers have recognized the importance of intercultural competent among college graduates, college impact scholars have focused on identifying the educational experiences that enhance student attitudes toward diversity and develop intercultural competence skills (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

As study abroad participation rates have increased and diversified across academic disciplines, researchers from a wide range of academic fields have increasingly endeavoured to demonstrate the educational benefits of studying abroad (Lewin, 2009; McKeown, 2009; Savicki, 2008).

The Middle East Partnership Initiative program for student leaders is an example of the study abroad program which does not only help students widen their knowledge, scope of learning in the subject matter, and leadership skills, but also provides participants with opportunities to immerse in an in-depth international exposure.

MEPI student leaders program is an intensive six weeks exchange program to the U.S.A gathering nearly 120 student annually from the MENA region. The project is funded by the U.S Department of State, Bureau of Middle Eastern Affairs, and Office of MEPI. The program is designed to engage with people from the MENA and works to create vibrant partnerships with citizens to foster the development of pluralistic, participatory, and prosperous societies. MEPI partners with local, regional, and international non-governmental organizations, private sector, academic institutions, and governments.

Students are selected through a competitive and merit-based process which starts by submitting an online application form in English. Participants are then recruited by and apply through the U.S embassy in their home countries and are selected by the

Department of State. Recruitment is typically managed by the Public Affairs Office in conjunction with the MEPI local coordinator/administrator. Embassies conduct interviews for candidates who travel to the U.S on a J-1 visa.

Legible participants should be undergraduates between the ages of 19 and 25, demonstrating a high level of English language and good leadership skills. Students come from the countries of Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen and are divided across six U.S universities and campuses including Georgetown University, Delaware University, Benedictine University, Portland State University, Roger Williams University, and Montana University.

In each of the participant countries there is a MEPI local chapter. In Algeria, the MEPI alumni chapter was launched in 2004 serving as a network of the program's alumni and helping in developing volunteer and civic engagement activities. The number of Algerian MEPI alumni is 79 (2003/2014) from all over the national territory, who have been engaged in civil society and projects promoting the empowerment and aggregate good of the societies.

1.4. Research Instruments:

The only research instrument used in this investigation is the multiple choices questionnaire. This latter is a form of scientific inquiry to which respondents are asked to choose the answer that position them the best among the set of suggestions provided. This qualitative means of data collection is used to explore whether students behaviour reflecting intercultural competence has changed after taking part in the Middle East Partnership Initiative program is the United States of America.

Students were given the questionnaire prior and post their MEPI experience. This former is framed into thirteen different questions related to the behaviours of assertiveness and adaptability as components of intercultural awareness , and empathy and flexibility as part of the intercultural sensitivity. The aim is to explore what has been previously said in the review of literature concerning the development of intercultural sensitivity and awareness as major components of intercultural competence developed through the short term study abroad programs.

II. Data Analysis:

II.1-intercultural Awareness:

II.1.1. Assertiveness:

<u>Questions:</u>

which is mostly like me :

- o   I feel free to politely voice my disagreement with someone
- o   I don't act in a comfortable way with others different from me
- o   I agree on everything the others say to avoid debate even if I disagree with them

which is mostly like me

- o   I don't persuade others to follow a course of action
- o   I often seek personal relationship with people no matter their differences
- o   I often regret not expressing certain ideas after the end of a conversation

If my ideas contradict with someone else's culturally different from me :

- o   I respect his point of view
- o   convince him with the correctness of yours
- o   ignore him and avoid any kind of debate

<u>Rationale:</u>

Assertiveness is not being aggressive or forceful, or about taking things from others. It is about being able to effectively interact with other people no matter what the existing differences are. That means to be heard calmly, to be able to express your disagreement, voice out your opinions and perspectives and not be trampled upon by the stronger individuals and intimidated by authority.

Assertiveness is part of intercultural competence and has strong implications on our interpersonal relations and relationships. The questions aim at discovering the degree of change students achieved in assertiveness through being in a give and take communicative and collaborative exchange process outside their cultural comfort zone.

II.1.2. Adaptability:

When travelling to the USA, facing a wide range of diversities :

- o I fit in easily
- o I laughed at my own discomfort
- o I negatively stereotype the environment

Am I willing to work or live in a country other than yours

- o yes
- o no
- o leaving my choices open

While in another different cultural setting :

- o I adjust my behaviour so that it meets the social norms off the other culture
- o I behave regardless the cultural context or norms
- o I accept the new standards and act accordingly

Rationale:

   Adaptability is about the capacity to change so as to fit or to work better in different situations. It is about thriving on change and the unexpected and enjoying alteration over the routine. The questions aim at identifying whether students are able to overcome cultural barriers in the way of their social and cultural integration in different setting with different people. Also, if they are able to adjust methods to deal with a changing situation or emergency in a new cultural setting.

II.2.Intercultural Sensitivity:

II.2.1. Flexibility:

<u>Questions</u>:

If I pertain to a group of students where I know nobody:

- o   I change the group for I prefer not to work with people I don't know
- o   I work with them as an individual
- o   I converse, get to know them and try to effectively collaborate and team up

When meeting new people:
- o   I interact with them and try to know more about their culture regardless differences
- o   I prefer interacting with people from similar cultures to mine
- o   I avoid communication unless I am approached

My friends are:
- o   very much like me
- o   very different with diverse backgrounds
- o   mostly like me with small differences

I think that cultural diversity can affect an individual's interaction process :
- o   positively
- o   negatively
- o   it doesn't affect it

<u>Rationale:</u>

Flexibility is the ability to understand and consider multiple frameworks and to move beyond the cultural restrictions that may hinder the intercultural understanding. The questions asked in this section aim at identifying whether students are able to keep up to differences and culturally challenging situations, how they respond to new challenges,

unfamiliar, and unexpected, and whether they are able to anticipate and respond positively to changing environments. It also tends to see if they are open to diversity and changes or are willing to stick to old similar, unchanging situations.

II.2.2. Empathy:

My behavior with people from different cultural backgrounds

- o It never changes. I behave the same way with everyone
- o I take the context, people, and cultures into consideration while interacting
- o I behave randomly

Which statement do I mostly agree with:

- o actions are made to be judged
- o stereotyping is based on misconceptions and the real motive behind any act is never fully known
- o indifferent

I judge my reaction to cultural differences as:

- o negative (fear, ridicule, superiority…)
- o positive (adaptability, curiosity, appreciation…)
- o other

Rationale:

Empathy is the ability to step into someone else's shoes and then step out of them. This grants us the possibility of understanding their experiences, feelings, and points of view. The questions related to empathy aim at discovering if students are able to understand the cultural attributes of others, tolerate, and respect the differences, and how they allow the construction of connections with other cultures.

3. Data Interpretation:

The questionnaire was sent through Google forms to twenty Algerian MEPI participant students. Collected data was then gathered and reflected in the form of pie charts displaying the percentage of each answer and drawing a comparison between the pre and the post participation answers

Part #1:

3.1. Intercultural Awareness

Assertiveness

Pre-participation answers:

which is mostly like me

- I feel free to politely voice my disagreement with someone (7/20) - 35% -
- I don't act in a comfortable way with others different from me (10/20) - 50% -
- I agree on everything the others say to avoid debate even if you disagree with them (3/20) - 15% -
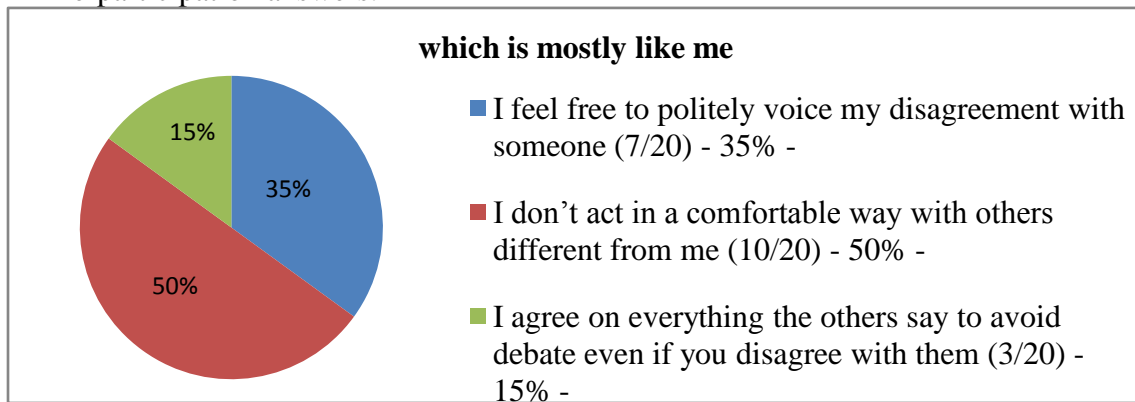
Figure 3.1.1: Students' Assertiveness reflected in voicing opinion
-prior participation in the program-

which is mostly like me

- I don't persuade others to follow a course of action (4/20) -20%-
- I often seek personal relationship with people no matter their differences (7/20) -35%-
- I often regret not expressing certain ideas after the end of a conversation (9/20) -45%-
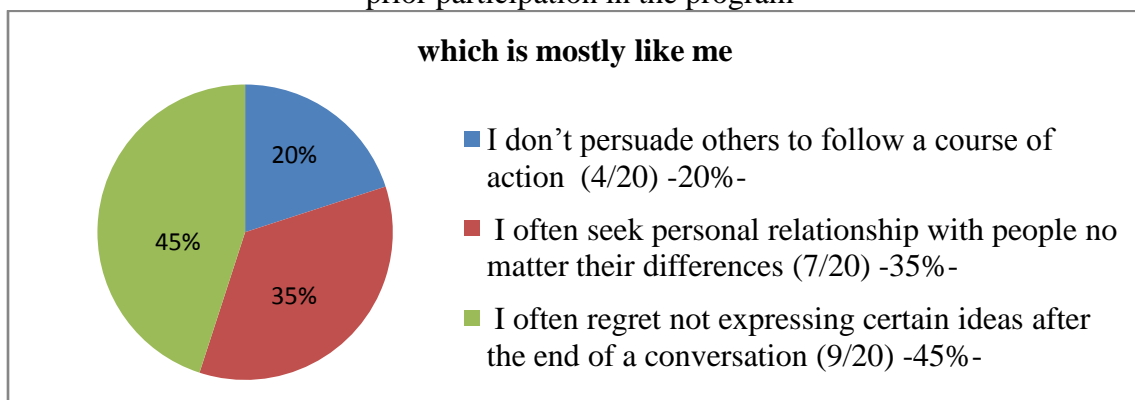
Figure 3.1.2: Students' assertive behaviour reflected in self expressing and relationship building- prior participation in the program-

If my ideas contradict with someone else's culturally different from me

- I respect his point of view (4/20) -20%-
- convince him with the correctness of yours (4/20) - 20%-
- ignore him and avoid any kind of debate (12/20) -60%-
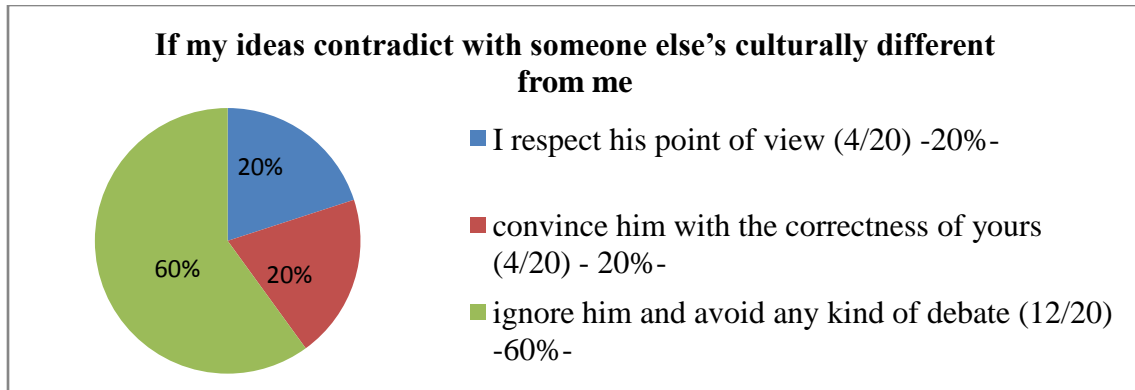
Figure 3.1.3: Students' reaction to disagreement with culturally different individuals

-prior participation in the program-

-Assertiveness

Post participation answers

which is mostly like me

- I feel free to politely voice my disagreement with someone (16/20) -80%-
- I don't act in a comfortable way with others different from me (2/20) -10%-
- I agree on everything the others say to avoid debate even if you disagree with them (2/20)v- 10%-
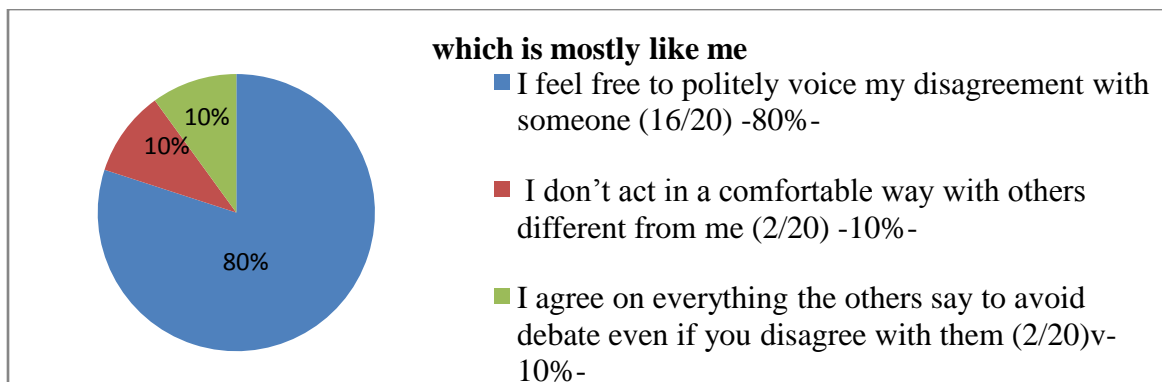
Figure 3.1.4 : Students' assertive behaviour reflected in voicing opinion

– post participation in the program-

which is mostly like me

- I don't persuade others to follow a course of action (6/20) -30%-
- I often seek personal relationship with people no matter their differences (12/20) - 60%-
- I often regret not expressing certain ideas after the end of a conversation (2/20) -10%-
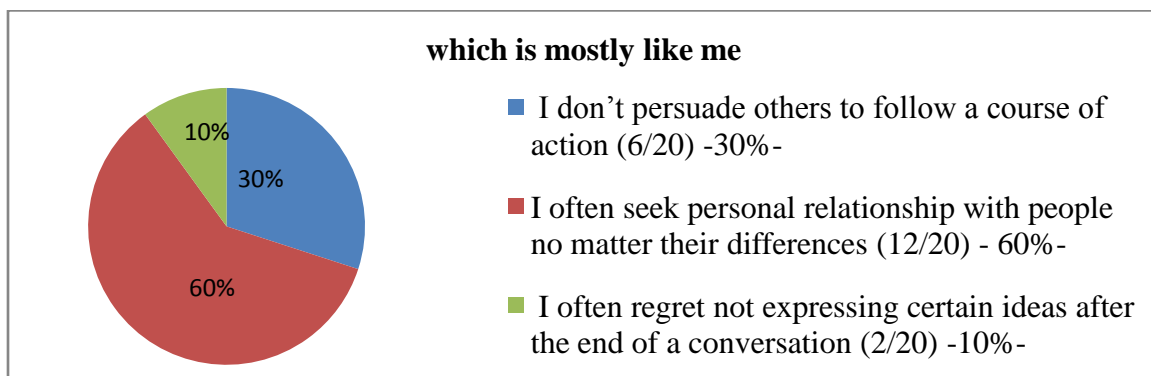
Figure 3.1.5 : Students' assertiveness reflected in self expression and relationship building – post program participation-

If my ideas contradict with someone else's culturally different from me

- I respect his point of view (18/20) -90%-
- convince him with the correctness of yours (0/20) -0%-
- ignore him and avoid any kind of debate (2/20) -10%-

0%
10%
90%
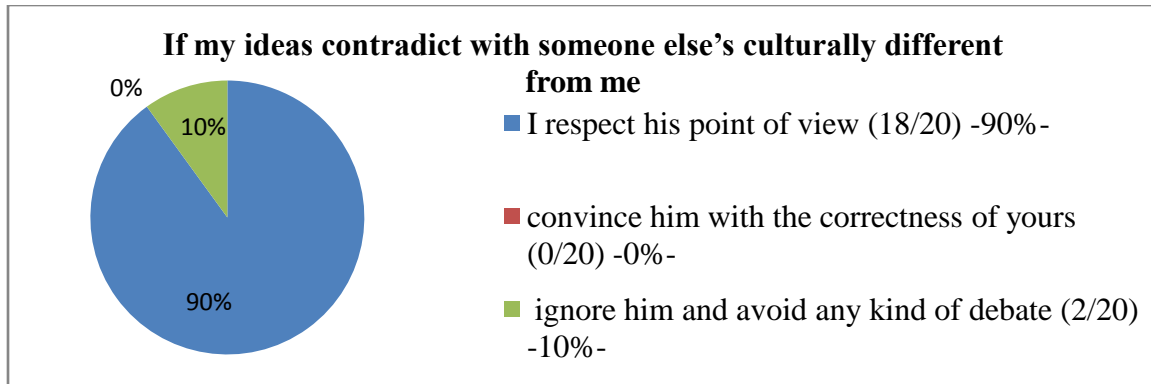
Figure 3.1.6 : Students' reaction to disagreement with culturally different individuals
– post program participation -

Interpretation:

Assertiveness is illustrated in this study as an observable behaviour pertaining to intercultural awareness which is a major characteristic of an interculturally competent individual.

Statistics above show that the degree of change in the students' assertiveness has tremendously changed. Students became more assertive and tend to openly say what they want firmly and directly and expressing their point of view without violating the rights of others and respecting their views. These have been shown in their answers to the questions related to assertiveness, where their willingness to voice disagreement went from 35% before the program to 80% after its completion, their avoidance to get into debates dropped from 60% before to 10% after. They also tend to show respect to others' opinions despite differences as the rate for this answer went from 20% to 90%. Students' answers also reflect their willingness to seek personal relationships with others (from 35% before the program to 60% after the program) which reflects that they overcame cultural differences barriers and are becoming more interpersonally effective individuals able to communicate across cultural differences (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984).

Adaptability:

Pre-participation answers:

When travelling to the USA, facing a wide range of diversities

- I fit in easily (6/20) -30%-
- I laugh at my own discomfort (2/20) -10%-
- I negatively stereotype the environment (12/20) - 60%-

Figure 3.1.7: Students' adjustment to the USA diverse cultural environment
-Prior program participation-

Am I willing to work or live in a country other than mine

- Yes (7/20) -35%-
- No (7/20) -35%-
- Leaving my choices open (6/20) - 30%-

Figure 3.1.8 : Students' willingness to live in culturally different environments
-Prior program participation -

While in another different cultural setting :

- I adjust my behavior so that it meets the social norms off the other culture (1/20) - 5%-
- I behave regardless the cultural context or norms (18/20) -90%-
- I accept the new standards and act accordingly (1/20) -5%-

Figure 3.1.9: students' behavioural adjustment in different cultural setting
-Prior program participation-

Adaptability:

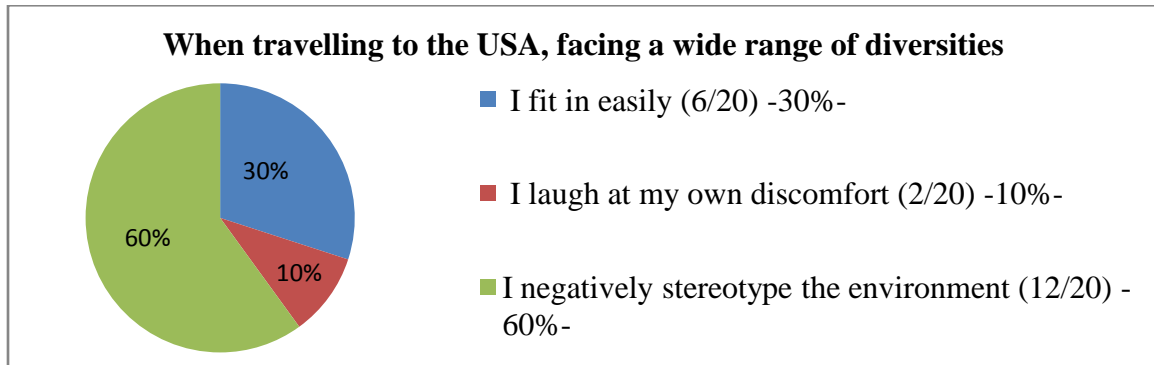Post participation answers:

Figure 3.1.10: Students' adjustment to the USA diverse cultural environment
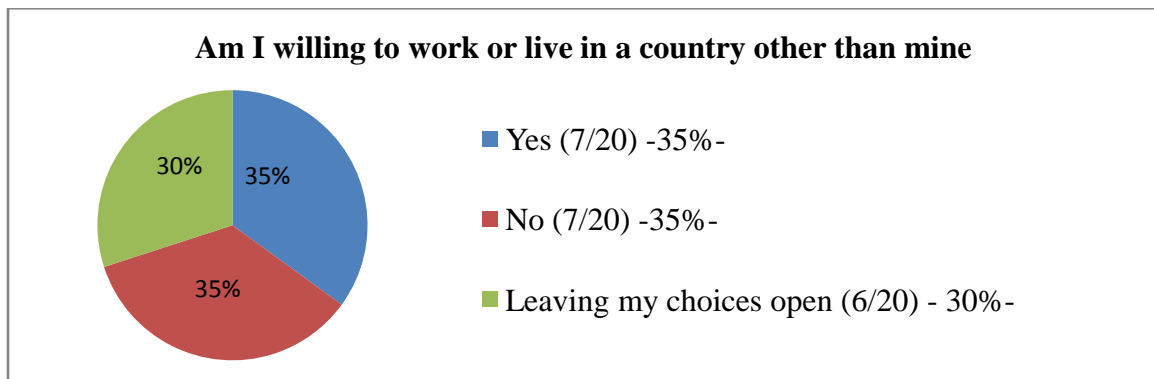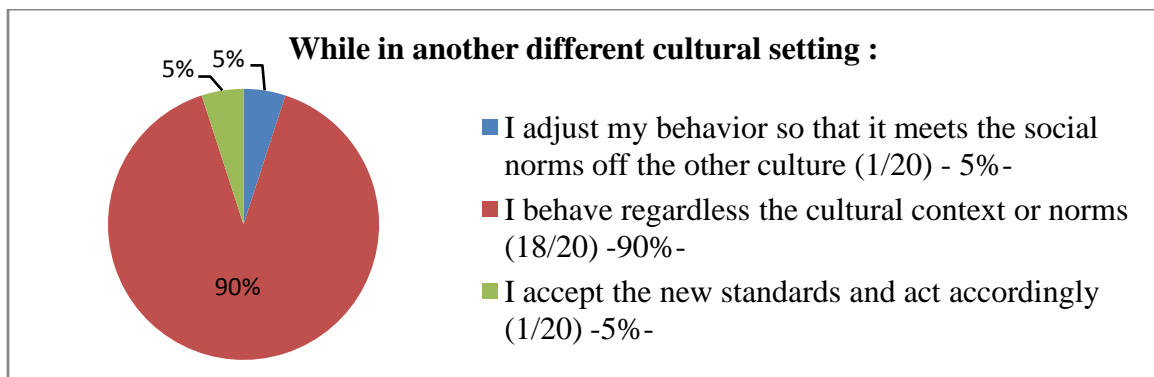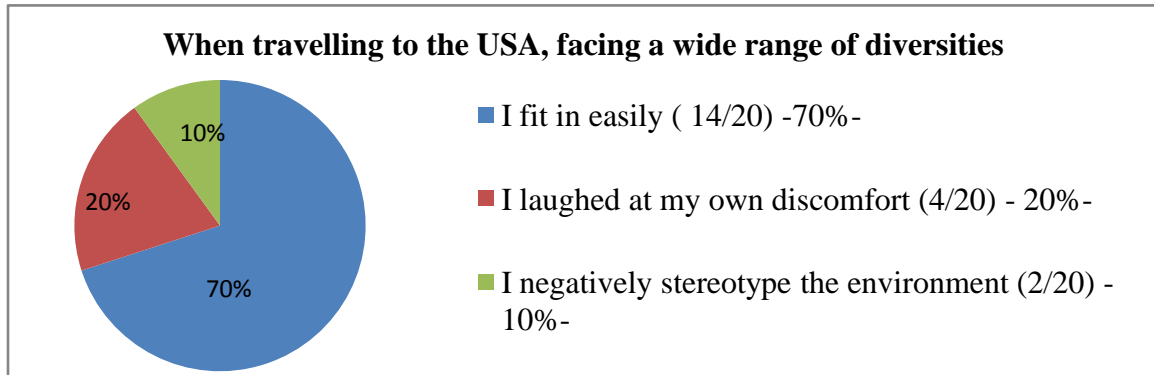
-Post program participation-
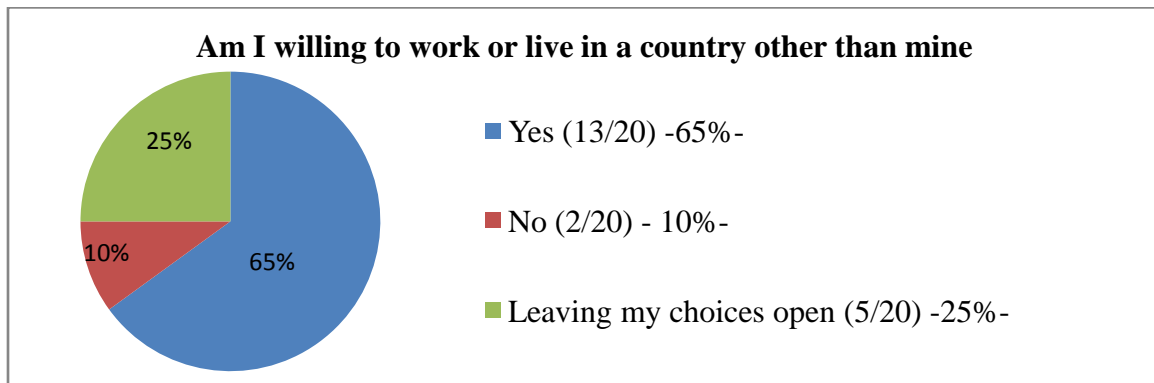
Figure 3.1.11: Students' willingness to live in culturally different environments

-Post program participation-

while in another different cultural setting

0%

10%

90%

- I adjust my behavior so that it meets the social norms off the other culture (18/20) -90%-
- I behave regardless the cultural context or norms (0/20) -0%-
- I accept the new standards and act accordingly (2/20) -10%-
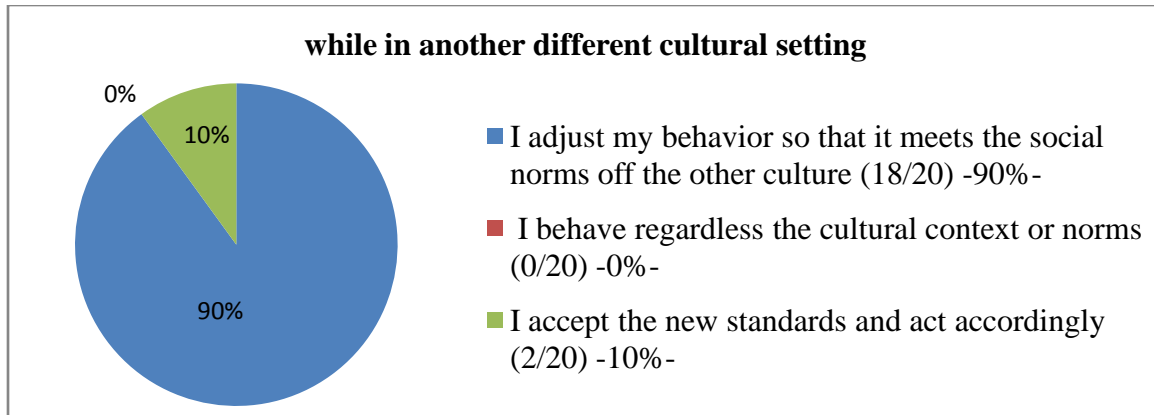
Figure 3.1.12: students' behavioural adjustment in different cultural setting

-Post program participation-

Interpretation :

Regarding adaptability, results show that students have made a great progress concerning their ability to adapt to different cultural settings and adjust their behaviour in order to facilitate the understanding, this has been demonstrated in the in the rise of their willingness to adjust their behaviour from 5% before the program to 90% after it. Students' negative stereotyping has been reduced after the program by 50% which reflects the development in their acceptance of defferences and openmindedness. Through the study abroad experience students have increased their ability to fit in different contexts from their own (30% prior the program to 70% after it) and are more open to live, study, or work in other settings and environments.

The data gathered reveals the correctness of the previously suggested hypothesis claiming that students enrolled in study abroad programs score higher in the intercultural adaptability (Kim, 2001). The assumption that the study abroad objectives would serve as a default training period that would have a positive impact on students' ability to adapt in another culture has been successfully affirmed and explored.

Part #2:

3.2. Intercultural Sensitivity

Flexibility

Pre-participation answers

If I pertain to a group of students where you know nobody

- I change the group for you prefer not to work with people I don't know (10/20) -50%-
- I work with them as an individual (8/20) -40%-
- I converse, get to know them and try to effectively collaborate and team up (2/20) -10%-

50%
40%
10%
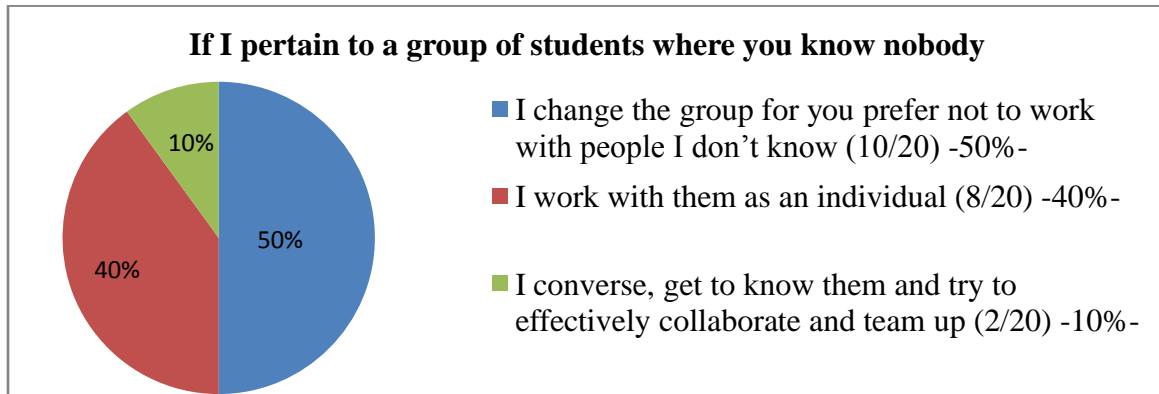
Figure 3.2.1 : Students' willingness to partner with different working groups

-Prior program participation-

When meeting new people

- I interact with them and try to know more about their culture regardless differences (4/20) -20%-
- I prefer interacting with people from similar cultures to mine (15/20) -75%-
- I avoid communication unless I am approached (1/20) -5%-

20%
5%
75%
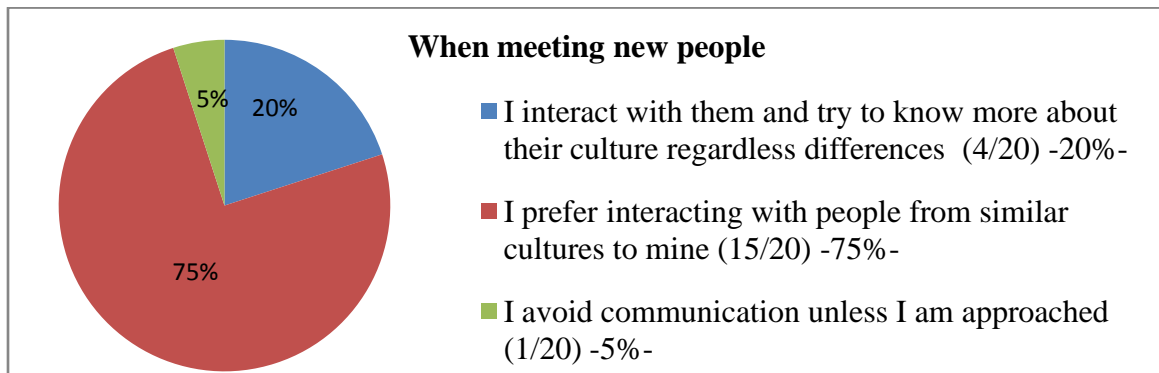
Figure 3.2.2: Students' flexibility reflected in their intercultural curiosity

-Prior program participation-

My friends are
- ■ Very much like me (6/20) -80%-
- ■ Very different with diverse backgrounds (2/20) -10%-
- ■ Mostly like me with small differences (2/20) -10%-
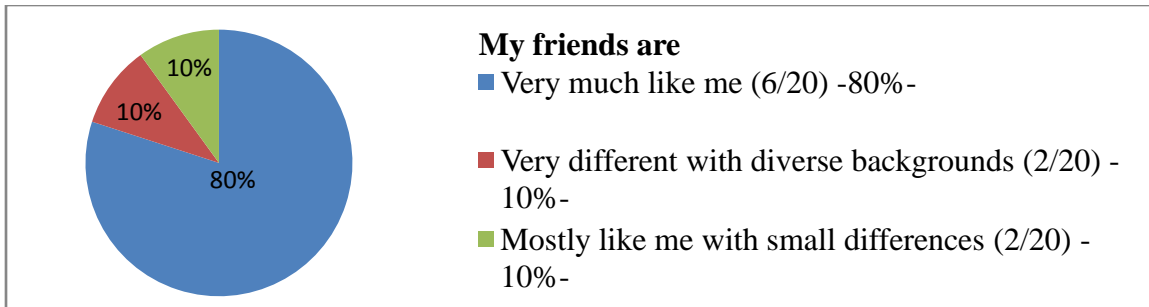
Figure 3.2.3 : Diversity of the students' social network

-Prior program participation-

I think that cultural diversity can affect an individual's interaction process
- ■ Positively (8/20) -40%-
- ■ Negatively (12/20) -60%-
- ■ It doens't effect it (0/20) -0%-

Figure 3.2.4 : Students' opinion regarding the influence of cultural diversity on interaction -Prior program participation-

Flexibility

Post participation answers:

If I pertain to a group of students where you know nobody
- ■ I change the group for you prefer not to work with people you don't know (0/20) -0%-
- ■ I work with them as an individual (2/20) -10%-

Figure 3.1.5 : : Students' willingness to partner with different working groups

-Post program participation-

When meeting new people

- I interact with them and try to know more about their culture regardless differences (20/20) 100%
- I prefer interacting with people from similar cultures to yours (0/20) -0%-
- I avoid communication unless I am approached (0/20) -0%-
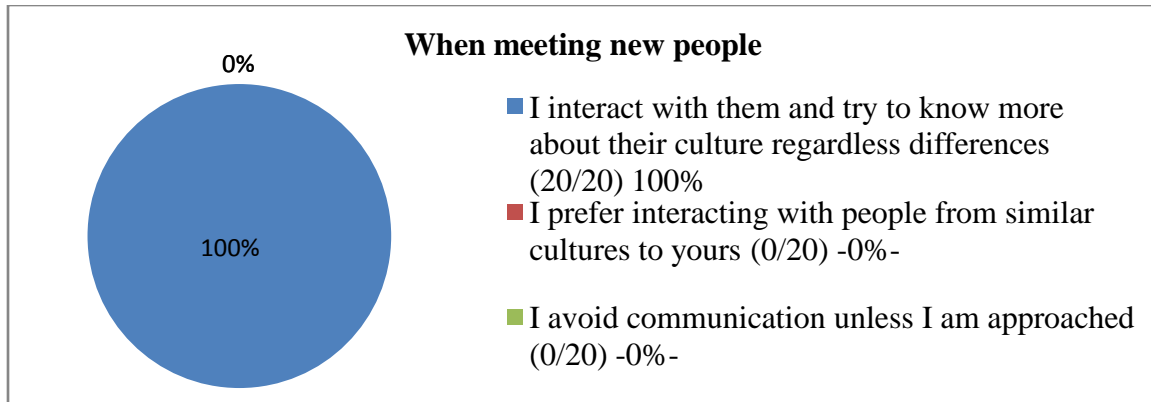
Figure 3.2.6 : Students' flexibility reflected in their intercultural curiosity

-Post program participation-

My friends are

- very much like me (0/20) -0%-
- very different with diverse backgrounds (18/20) -90%-
- mostly like me with small differences (2/20) -10%-
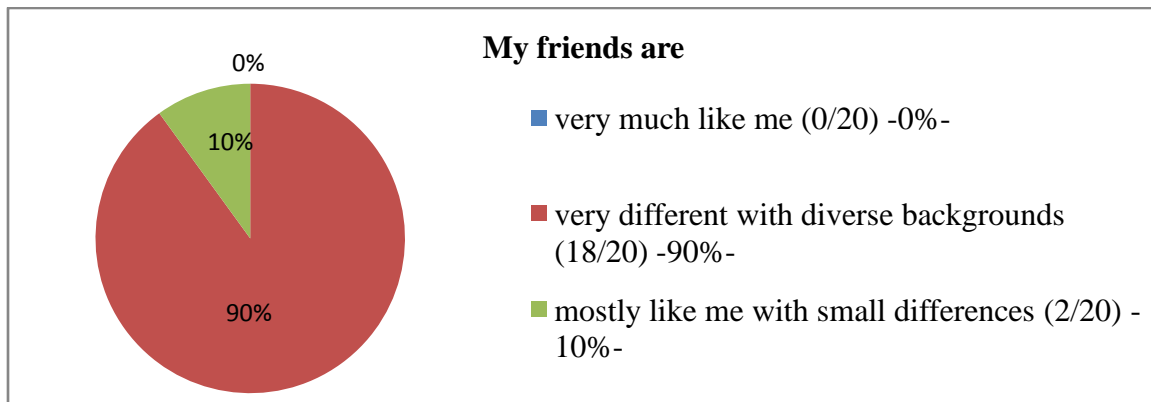
Figure 3.2.7 : Diversity of the students' social network

-Prior program participation-

I think that cultural diversity can affect an individual's interaction process

- Positively (19/20) -95%-
- Negatively (1/20) -5%-
- It doesn't effect it (0/20) -0%-
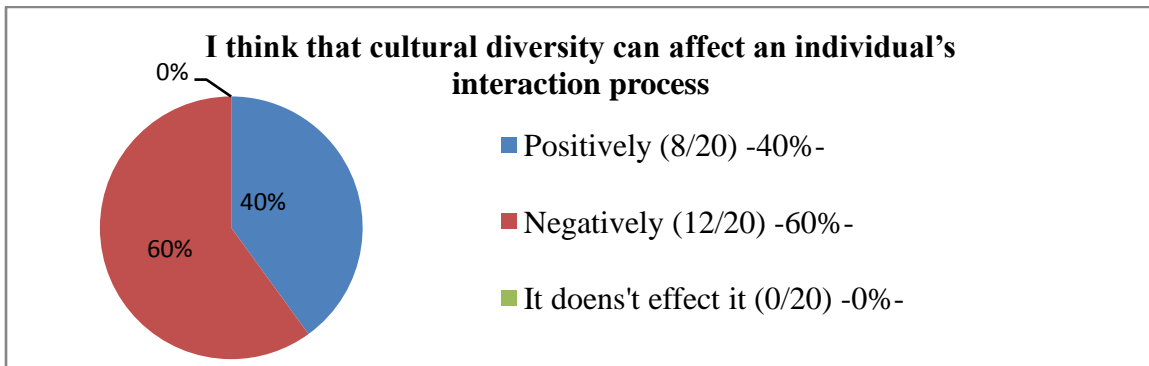
Figure 3.2.8 : Students' opinion regarding the influence of cultural diversity on interaction -Post program participation-
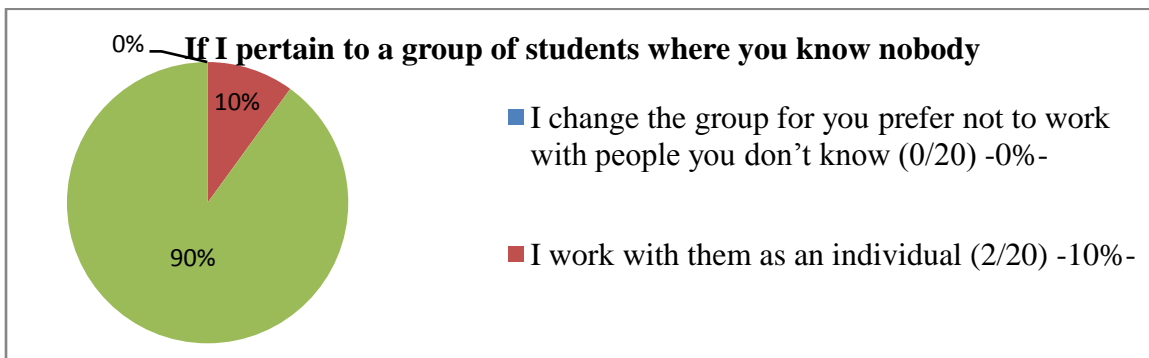
Interpretation:

Flexibility is an integral component of intercultural competence and has been the centre of interest of researchers investigating flexibility in different social and cultural contexts. Theories assert that flexibility enables the person to be more confident in interacting with people from diverse backgrounds. In fact, this has been proved through the respondents' answers showing that the degree of their avoidance of working with different people dropped from 50% before the program to 0% after it. Students are also m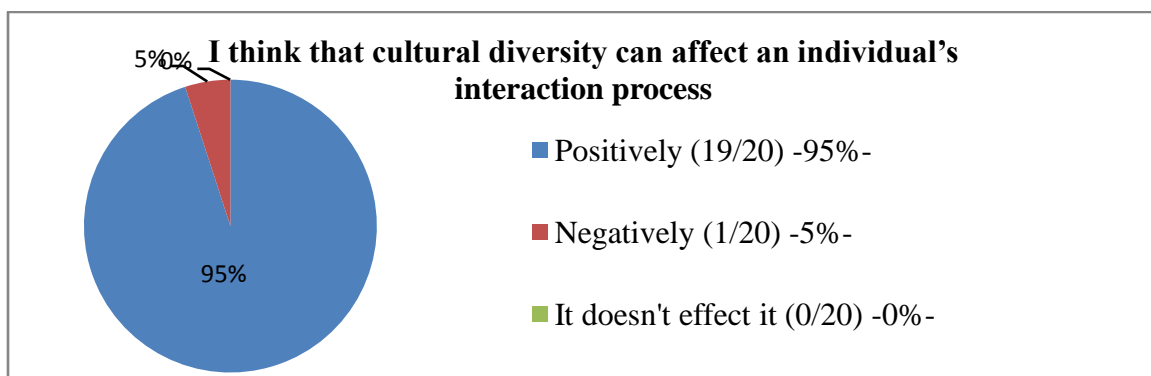ore open to differences and are willing to get to know different people and cultures; this has been shown in their eagerness to get to know more about different peers (20% before the program to 100% after it). Students' social network became more diversified (10% of different friends before to 90% different after), reflecting their flexibility and diversity appreciation. Therefore, this reflects the fact that flexibility is a characteristic of an interculturally competent individual, and could be raised through international experience in terms of cross cultural participation (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Bochner & Kelly, 1974).

Empathy:

Pre-participation answers:

My behavior with people from different cultural backgrounds

- It never changes. You behave the same way with everyone (13/20) -65%-
- I take the context, people, and cultures into consideration while interacting (2/20) -10%-
- I behave randomly (5/20) -5%-
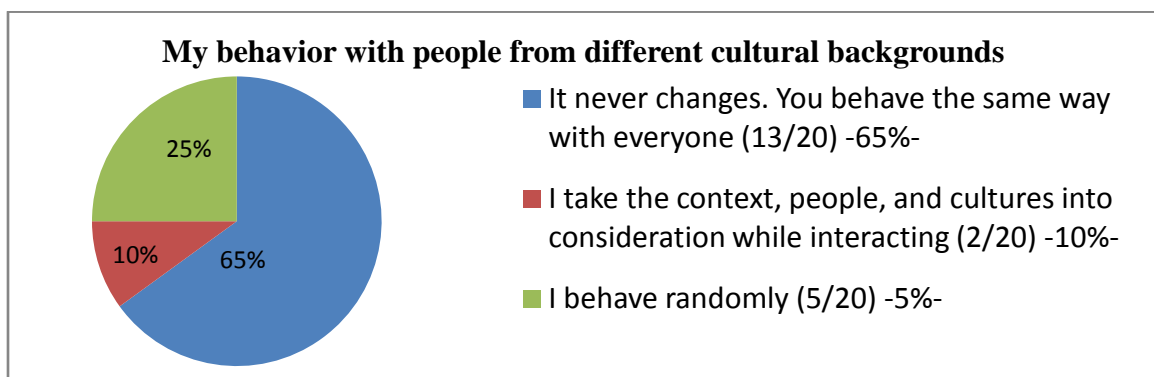
Figure 3.2.9: Students' behavioural adjustment

-Prior program participation-

Which statement do I mostly agree with

- Actions are made to be judged (12/20) -60%-
- Stereotyping is based on misconceptions and the real motive behind any act is never fully known (5/20) -25%-
- indifferent (3/20) -5%-

5%
25%
60%
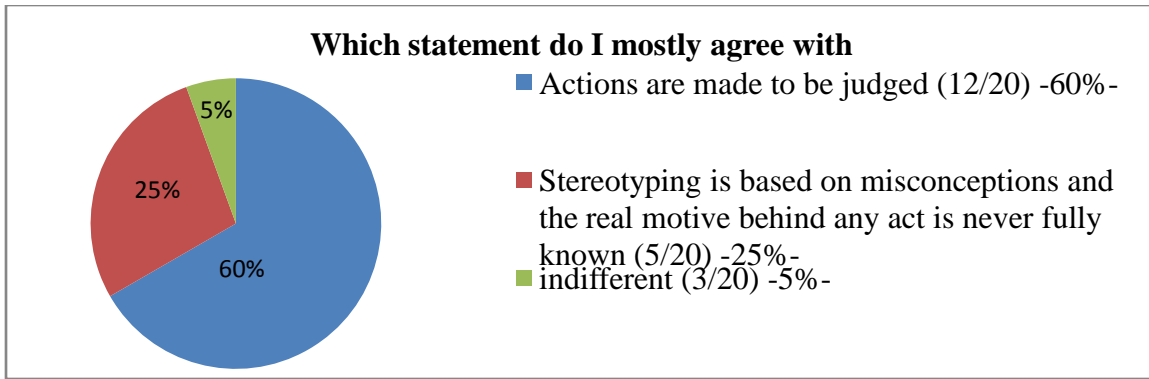
Figure 3.2.10: Students' position regarding stereotyping

-Prior program participation-

I judge my reaction to cultural differences as

- Negative (fear, ridicule, superiority…) (8/20)-40%-
- Positive (adaptability, curiosity, appreciation…) (12/20) -60%-
- Other (0/20) -0%-

0%
40%
60%

Figure 3.2.11 : Students' self- judgement regarding the reaction to cultural differences

-Prior program participation-

Empathy:

Post participation answers:

My behavior with people from different cultural backgrounds

- It never changes. You behave the same way with everyone (3/20) -80%-
- I take the context, people, and cultures into consideration while interacting (16/20) -80%-
- I behave randomly (1/20) -5%-

5% 15%
80%

Figure 3.2.12: Students' behavioural adjustment

-Post program participation-

Which statement do I mostly agree with

- Actions are made to be judged (1/20) -5%-
- Stereotyping is based on misconceptions and the real motive behind any act is never fully known (18/20) -90%-
- Indifferent (1/20) -5%-

5% 5%
90%
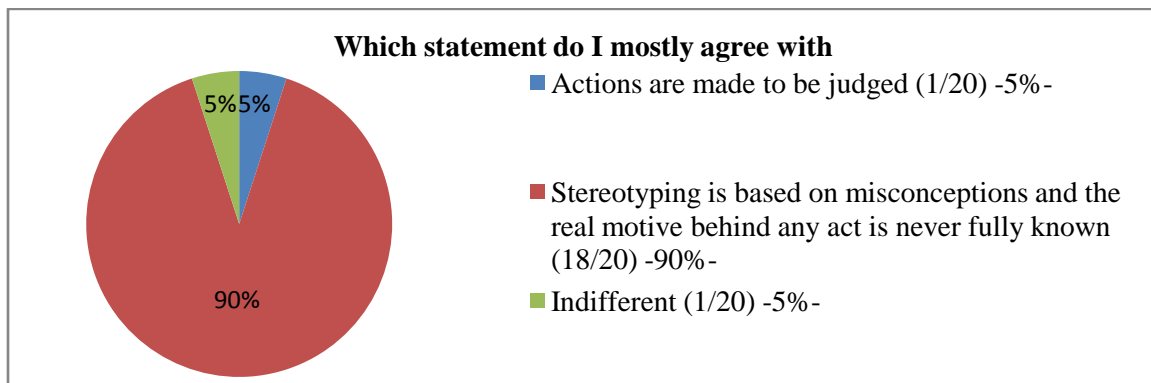
Figure 3.2.12: Students' position regarding stereotyping

-Post program participation-

I judge my reaction to cultural differences as

- Negative (fear, ridicule, superiority…) (0/20) -0%-
- Positive (adaptability, curiosity, appreciation…) (20/20) -100%-
- Other (0/20) -0%-

0%
100%

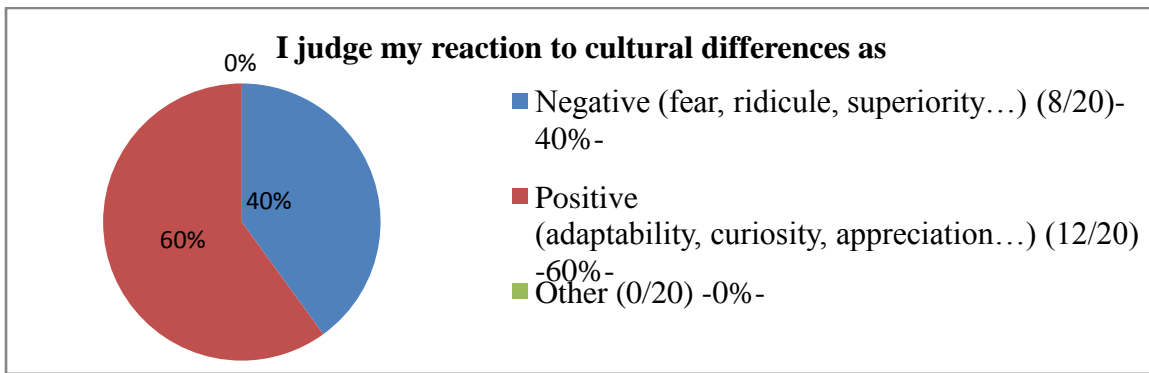Figure 3.2.13: Students' self- judgement regarding the reaction to cultural differences

-Prior program participation-

Interpretation:

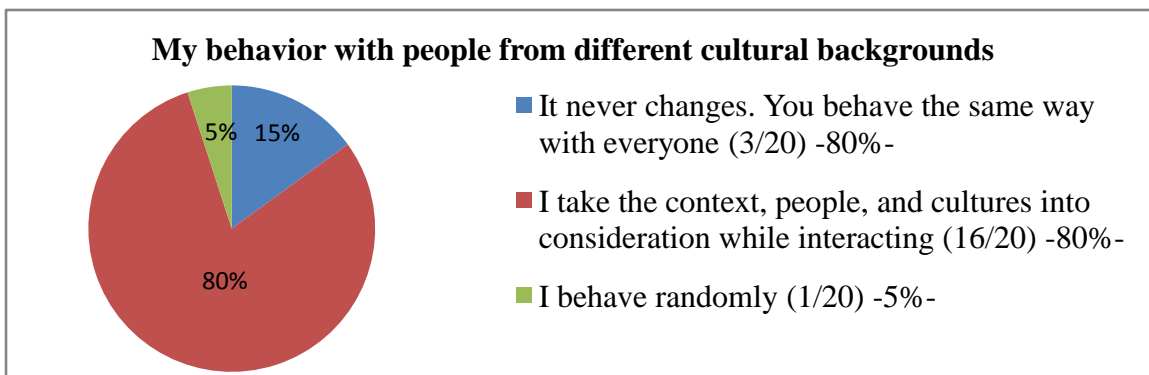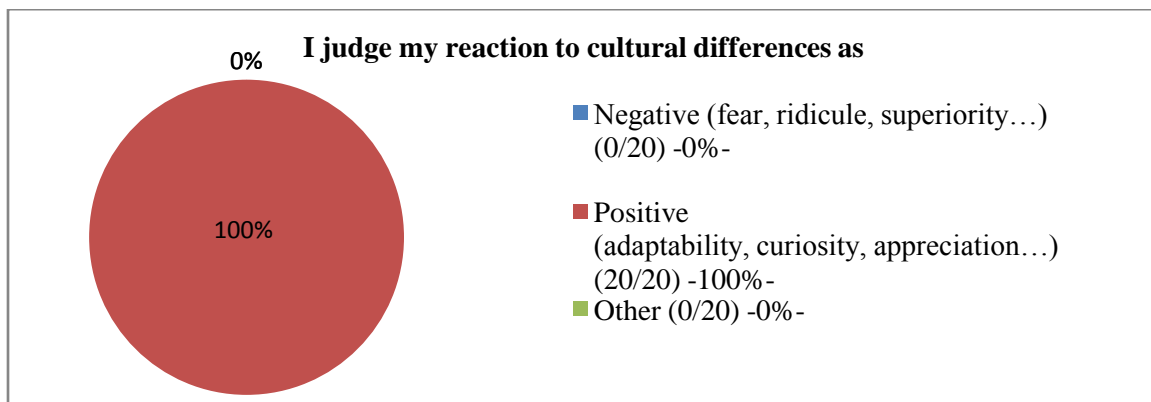Empathy is a very essential element to intercultural sensitivity and competence. During the MEPI study abroad program students developed an understanding of the social attributes of the American society and their negative reaction to the context dropped from being 40% to 0%. Hence, students developed a high tolerance to differences and appreciation of similarities which was displayed in the results got from the extent to which they avoid stereotyping different surroundings, the rate went from 25% to 90%. Negative reactions to cultural differences have also dropped from 40% to 0%. Therefore

student display of identification, understanding and consideration of the other are characteristics of empathy which form the essence of intercultural sensitivity.

4. Implications:

Study abroad advocates have long argued that the experience of living and learning broad has a unique effect on many of the broad educational outcomes. Study abroad international experience has long been considered as a powerful mechanism for developing intercultural competence (Fullbright 1989, Hoffa, 2007). The number of undergraduate students participating in study abroad programs has increased significantly in the past decade (Carlson, Bum, Useem, & Yachimowicz, 1991).

Educational justifications for study abroad programs include increases in students' level of intercultural awareness and sensitivity, value of diversity, development of global perspective and the importance of international understanding. Study abroad programs are associated with the development of cultural empathy and adjustment, and traits of flexibility and adaptability (Cui and Van Den Berg, 1991).

The interest of this research is primarily focused on the possibility and importance of establishing an intercultural interaction through engaging students in a social and cultural immersion outside their comfort zone by means of study abroad programs. Such programs help students to develop a multicultural identity which tolerates differences, appreciate similarities, and adjust attitudes to cope with different environments and people.

As a matter of fact, few studies have attempted to empirically investigate the impact of the study abroad programs on students' intercultural competence. Most studies have focused on adjustment and attitudes of international students (Ward at al. Flack, 1976)

It was reported that students enrolled in overseas program exhibited higher autonomy and expansion and differentiation of self than a comparable control group. No differences were shown however, in either increased tolerance and flexibility, or Awareness and sensitivity.

The findings of the present study demonstrate that study abroad programs significantly contribute to the preparation of students to function in a multicultural world and promote intercultural competence. These findings are consistent with those of McCabe (1994) and Carlson and Widaman (1988) who found that significant differences in global perspectives, and cultural competence respectively emerged in the study abroad students. Moreover, the differences in the students' behaviour demonstrated through this investigation suggest that the study abroad students increased their ability to deal with differences and diversity of the cross-cultural experience, and developed more flexible role behaviour, cultural awareness and respect for the host culture. According to Searle & Ward (1990) this would translate into a positive attitude, increased psycho-social well-being and the ability to "fit in" or negotiate interactive aspects of the new cultural environment.

Some recommendations for study abroad directors and faculty may be that courses being offered abroad to both Algerian or international students may be a more effective way to enhance the students' cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, and although not tested in this study, learning. In agreement with Morgan (1975) educators should develop specific objectives that will increase the students' intercultural awareness intercultural sensitivity and provide appropriate opportunities to meet these objectives. Policy makers in international education should be aware of the fact that the intercultural composition or structure of the learning environment further enhances intercultural competence.

Conclusion:

The second chapter was about the research methodology. It started with situation analysis which illustrates the cultural differences according to Hofstede, followed by an analysis and description of American and Algerian profile according to his culture dimensions. Also, a description of the MEPI program has been provided. Another part of this chapter was the data analysis. Responses of the students before and after taking part in the program were analysed and interpreted. Research conclusion and interpretation highlighted the importance of study abroad programs in building students' intercultural competence which was observed in terms of sensitivity and awareness. It ended with suggestions for further research about establishing study abroad programs as a means of enhancing students' intercultural competence that prepares them to efficiently function in today's multicultural societies.

General Conclusion

The trend of globalization with the increasingly popular internationalized activities signifies the need of nurturing students with effective intercultural competence. Most researchers noted the fall of Berlin wall as a start of the age of globalization, while some added the birth of the World Wide Web as the avenue for globalization, which in both cases have fostered the development of a more diverse culture and multilingual global society.

Intercultural preparedness is an ever growing concern for the world's colleges and universities. In an attempt to create an intercultural exposure for students, study abroad programs are initiated. This allows students to take part in an intercultural experience that would stimulate their cultural sensitivity and awareness.

The number of students enrolled in a program outside their country of citizenship increased more than threefold, from 1.3 million in 1990 to nearly 4.3 million in 2011, representing an average annual growth rate of almost 6%. Among the benefits of studying abroad perceived by an increasing number of students are the cultural enrichment and improved language skills. Studying abroad helps students to expand their knowledge of other societies, languages, and cultures.

McCabe (1994) investigated change along five dimensions of a global perspective prior and after a semester at sea program amongst: "fear versus openness", "people as the same or different versus people as the same and different", and "naivety versus intercultural knowledge and understanding". The results revealed that the program positively influenced the students' development of the global perspective. Students were more open towards other cultures, recognized that differences between cultures and qualities across cultures, showed greater cultural understanding. Students became interculturally competent.

Begley (2000) noted that : " *distance and seas no longer keep people at home; more of the world's population is now on the move seeking trade, work, knowledge, and adventure*" (p.404). We are living in a world characterised by a side by side coexistence of different cultures. This multiculturalism makes the dynamics of interpersonal relations more challenging requiring that we learn how to relate effectively to people who may behave, think, and feel differently from our own personal and cultural expectations. The need to develop an intercultural competence is

becoming increasingly apparent within our society and around the world, for often cultural differences may create insurmountable barriers to effective relations on all scales.

This study emphasizes that providing students with experiential opportunities to develop an intercultural competence should be one of the major objectives of any academic institution. The research has investigated the effect of study abroad programs on the students' intercultural competence. It attempted to address this limitation through using a valid instrument to explore the change in the students' intercultural sensitivity and awareness. The work has been respectfully framed into two chapters. The first chapter defined the concepts of intercultural competence, sensitivity and awareness. It has highlighted the importance of cultural diversity, defined the study abroad programs and illustrated their importance in promoting intercultural competence. The second chapter is a case study which started by a situation analysis in which an Algerian and American cultural profile analysis were provided as well as a detailed description of the Middle East Partnership Initiative study abroad program. Data have been displayed and interpreted followed by a discussion and recommendations for further research.

This research shows that one of the most fundamental factors to develop intercultural competence is the cultural immersion provided by study abroad programs. Hence, educational institutions should focus on implementing short term study abroad time for students and establish collaboration with worldwide institutions to nurture culturally competent individuals willing to adjust to the multicultural identity of the society and function efficiently in and outside their cultural zones.

Bibliography

-Adler, P. (1977). Beyond cultural identity: Reflections on cultural and multicultural man. In R.W. Brislin (Ed.), Culture learning: Concepts, applications, and research (pp. 24-41). Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.

-Alexandar, T. (1996). *Development of Intercultural Competence* – Contributions of Psychology.

- Barnow, V. (1973). *Culture and Personality*. Homewood. Dorsey press.

-Bennett,M.J. (1986). A developmental approach to training for intercultural sensitivity. *International Form of Intercultural Relations, 10.* 179-196.

-Berry, J.W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. Applied Psychology: An International Review, 46 (1), 5-34. doi:10.1080/026999497378467.

- Bryam, M., Nichols. A. & Stevens.D. (Eds). (2001). *Developing Intercultural Competence in Practice*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters

-Chen, G.M & Starosta, W.J. (1998). *Foundations of intercultural communication.* Boston, MA : Allyn & Bacon.

-Clement, R., Noels, K.A. & Deneault, B. (2001). Interethnic contact, identity, and psychological and adjustment*: The mediating and moderating roles of communication.* Journal of Social Issues, 5, 559-577

- Hofstede, G. H. (2001). Culture's consequences: *Comparing values, behaviors institutions and organizations across nations.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Hofstede, G.H. (1991) *Cultures and Organizations*. Berkshire: McGraw-Hill Book Company Europe.

-Kim, Y.Y. & Gudykunst, W.B. (1988). Cross-cultural adaptation: Current approaches. Newberry Park, CA: Sage.

-Kim, Y. Y (2005). Adapting to a new culture. In W.B. Gudykunst (Ed.). Theorizing about intercultural communication. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

-Oberg, K. (1960). Culture shock : Adjustment to new cultural environments. Practical Anthropology, 7, 177-182.

-Spitzberg, B.H. (2000). A model of intercultural communication competence. In L. Samovar & R. Porter (Eds.), Intercultural communication: A reader (9th ed., pp. 375-387). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

-Pheng, L. S. & Yuquan, S (2002) "An exploratory study of Hofstede's cross-cultural dimensions in construction projects", Management Decision, Vol. 40 Iss: 1, pp.7 – 16.

- Taylor, E.W. (1994). Intercultural Competency: *A Transformative Learning Process, Adult Education Quarterly.*

WEB-BIBLIOGRAPHY

-O'Dowd (2006) .The Routledge Handbook of Language and Intercultural Communication.

http://books.google.dz/books?id=9H6pAgAAQBAJ&pg=PA356&lpg=PA356&dq=O%27Dowd+%282006%29+:+developing+intercultural+understanding+through+telecollaboration&source=bl&ots=UZuBG-Wd9_&sig=Wgy3G5DwoUYLFyZNtbZKTRjbtRY&hl=fr&sa=X&ei=ghZKVMX-KY34aovBgugB&ved=0CDEQ6AEwATgK#v=onepage&q&f=false (permalink)

- Kitsantas, A. (2004). Studying abroad: *the role of college students' goals on the development of cross-cultural skills and global understanding*.

http://www.freepatentsonline.com/article/College-Student-Journal/123321904.html (permalink)

-Centre for Building a Culture of Empathy.

http://cultureofempathy.com/references/definitions.htm#   (date of access 03/24/2015)

-Hofstede, G. (2011). Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context.

http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1014&context=orpc (permalink)

-The Middle East Partnership Initiative Program

http://mepi.state.gov/opportunities/mepi-exchange-programs/student-leaders.html (permalink)

Appendices

Questionnaire:

This questionnaire is a methodological means of collecting quantitative data for a master research thesis concerned with studying and analyzing the development of students' intercultural competence through short study abroad programs taking the MEPI program as a case study and Algerian MEPI participants as a sample population.

Name

which is mostly like you :
- ⦿ I feel free to politely voice my disagreement with someone
- ○ I don't act in a comfortable way with others different from me
- ○ I agree on everything the others say to avoid debate even if I disagree with them

which is mostly like you
- ⦿ I don't persuade others to follow a course of action
- ○ I often seek personal relationship with people no matter their differences
- ○ I often regret not expressing certain ideas after the end of a conversation

If my ideas contradict with someone else's culturally different from me :
- ○ I respect his point of view
- ○ convince him with the correctness of yours
- ○ ignore him and avoid any kind of debate

When travelling to the USA, facing a wide range of diversities :
- ○ I fit in easily
- ○ I laugh at my own discomfort
- ○ I negatively stereotype the environment

Am I willing to work or live in a country other than mine
- ○ yes
- ○ no
- ○ leaving my choices open

while in another different cultural setting :

- ○ I adjust my behaviour so that it meets the social norms off the other culture
- ○ I behave regardless the cultural context or norms
- ○ I accept the new standards and act accordingly

If I pertain to a group of students where I know nobody:

- ○ I change the group for I prefer not to work with people I don't know
- ○ I work with them as an individual
- ○ I converse, get to know them and try to effectively collaborate and team up

When meeting new people :

- ○ I interact with them and try to know more about their culture regardless differences
- ○ I prefer interacting with people from similar cultures to mine
- ○ I avoid communication unless I am approached

My friends are :

- ○ very much like me
- ○ very different with diverse backgrounds
- ○ mostly like me with small differences

I think that cultural diversity can affect an individual's interaction process :

- ○ positively
- ○ negatively
- ○ it doesn't affect it

My behaviour with people from different cultural backgrounds

- ○ It never changes. I behave the same way with everyone
- ○ I take the context, people, and cultures into consideration while interacting
- ○ I behave randomly

Which statement do I mostly agree with :

- ○ actions are made to be judged
- ○ stereotyping is based on misconceptions and the real motive behind any act is never fully known
- ○ indifferent

I judge my reaction to cultural differences as :

- ○   ○   negative (fear, ridicule, superiority…)
- ○   ○   positive (adaptability, curiosity, appreciation…)
- ○   ○   other

Summary:

Study abroad programs provide students with opportunities to venture beyond their own particular culture through immersing them in an intercultural learning experience. The research investigates the impact of study abroad programmes on the students' intercultural competence reflected mainly in intercultural sensitivity and awareness. The research takes Algerian students participants in the Middle East Partnership Initiative programme in the United States of America as a case study.

Key words: Intercultural competence, Intercultural sensitivity, Intercultural Awareness, Study abroad programmes, Middle East Partnership Initiative programme.

Résumé:

Programmes d'études à l'étranger permettent aux étudiants de s'aventurer au-delà de leur propre culture en les immergeant dans une expérience d'apprentissage interculturel. Cette recherche étudie l'impact des programmes d'études à l'étranger sur la compétence interculturelle des étudiants reflété principalement dans la sensibilité et la conscience interculturelle. La recherche prend les étudiants Algériens participants dans le programme de l'Initiative de partenariat au Moyen-Orient aux Etats-Unis d'Amérique comme une étude de cas.

Mots clés: la compétence interculturelle, la sensibilité interculturelle, la conscience interculturelle, programmes à l'étranger étude, programme de l'Initiative de partenariat Moyen-Oriental.

الملخص:

توفر برامج الدراسة في الخارج فرصا ثقافية للطلبة تسنح لهم بتعدِّي ثقافتهم الخاصُّة من خلال غمرهم في تجربة تعليمية ما بين الثقافات. يدرس هذا البحث تأثير برامج الدراسة في الخارج على الكفاءة ما بين الثقافات للطلاُّب الُّتي تنعكس بشكل رئيس على الحساسية والوعي ما بين الثقافات. أخذ هذا البحث الطلبة الجزائريين المشاركين في برنامج مبادرة الشراكة الشرق أوسطية في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية كعينة.

الكلمات الرئيسية: الكفاءة بين الثقافات، الحساسية بين الثقافات، الوعي بين الثقافات، برامج الدراسة في الخارج، برنامج مبادرة الشراكة الشرق أوسطية.