

Measuring EFL Students' Intercultural Competence and Language Skill after Having an International Living

Veni Roza¹, Melyann Melani¹, Reflinda Reflinda¹, Rianto Rianto¹, Alistair Welsh², Nora Fudhla²

¹ Universitas Islam Negeri Sjech M. Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi, Indonesia

² Deakin University, Australia

Correspondence: Veni Roza, Universitas Islam Negeri Sjech M. Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi, Indonesia.

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Abstract

The study aims to measure EFL students' intercultural competence and English language skills both qualitatively and quantitatively after participating in an international living program, where English served as the primary means of communication. This research utilized surveys, interviews, and self-reflections to assess the sojourners' intercultural competence and English language proficiency. To provide a comparative perspective, data were also collected from a control group of students who did not participate in international living. The findings reveal that the international living experience had a significant impact on students' intercultural competence and English language skills compared to their non-participating peers. Knowledge and awareness showed the most improvement, followed by skills and attitudes. Additionally, students exhibited notable advancements in their English language proficiency. Qualitative data from interviews indicated that the international experience facilitated self-discovery, empathy, and cultural awareness, enriching their understanding of their original culture's complexities and contributing to their English language development. Quantitative analysis from questionnaires highlighted participants in the international program had higher levels of cultural competence and language skills compared to the control group. The informants demonstrated a better attitude toward cultural differences and showed marked progress in their English communication abilities compared to the control group. They overcame initial challenges by actively engaging with various cultural practices, interacting with locals, and embracing different viewpoints, which also fostered their language learning. The study underscores the transformative impact of international living on students' intercultural competence and English language skills, highlighting a journey of self-discovery, empathy, and enhanced communication abilities.

Keywords: Intercultural Competence, Language Skill, International Living

1. Introduction

Achieving intercultural competence is a key outcome of positive self-reflection and engagement in multicultural interactions, both in formal education and social settings with native speakers (Welsh, 2015). For EFL students in Indonesia, opportunities for international multicultural encounters are often limited, which can hinder their development of communicative competence (Roarty & Hagley, 2021). The predominant domestic cultural exposure may not fully support the enhancement of English language skills. As Basthomi et al. (2023) suggest, education serves as a crucial mechanism for cultural transformation, highlighting the importance of integrating diverse cultural experiences to foster growth in intercultural competence.

In response to these challenges, international living programs offer significant opportunities for EFL students to immerse themselves in diverse cultural contexts. These programs, conducted in both English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries, allow students to experience and adapt to different cultural environments firsthand. This exposure can lead to substantial growth in intercultural competence, as students navigate new cultural norms and perspectives. Extensive research has explored the outcomes of students' mobility experiences, highlighting benefits such as improved language proficiency, decreased ethnocentrism, enhanced awareness of both other cultures and one's own, and development in intercultural communication skills and professional competence (Cushner & Karim, 2003; Halse, 1996; Hill & Thomas, 2002; McCabe, 2001; Wilson, 1983).

Furthermore, in response to the global world education and to improve the quality that meets demand of twenty first century skills, higher education in Indonesia needs to apply mobility program and assess the learning outcomes of students studying abroad or living internationally in a host country. Studying abroad can initially present challenges such as culture shock and language barriers. However, it also offers valuable learning experiences that contribute to students' intercultural competence and personal development. According to Bennett's (2004), at the beginning, sojourner felt so ethnocentric found themselves as beginner as denial that they isolate and separate themselves from surrounding, the next level is defense their culture, they were more superior that the host culture, next step is minimization where they begin to have physical universalism. In order to be successful studying oversea, the students need move on ethno-relative stage which is students begin to accept feel empathy with the plurality.

This study aims to measure EFL students' intercultural competence and language skills by examining both participants and non-participants of international living programs. Intercultural competence is assessed through two key dimensions: the affective and the cognitive. The affective dimension, based on Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), evaluates students' perceptions of cultural diversity across stages such as denial, reversal, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, and integration. The cognitive dimension, guided by Byram et al.'s (2002) framework, explores students' attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness/political education, highlighting their adaptation to both native and host cultures. Additionally, the study measures language skills using the CEFR self-assessment grid to compare the abilities of students who have participated in international living programs with those who have not.

2. Literature Review

2.1 International Living

International living typically refers to the experience of residing in a foreign country for an extended period, often involving immersion in the local culture and society. This experience can be part of various programs or personal endeavors and may not always have a formal educational component. Programs that include international living, such as study abroad and mobility, are increasingly recognized for their role in enhancing language proficiency and intercultural competence. According to Roarty & Hagley (2021), in a globalized world, proficiency in a foreign language, especially English, is crucial for accessing global opportunities, improving career prospects, and facilitating international communication. Research shows that extended periods abroad contribute to significant improvements in linguistic fluency and confidence (Root & Ngampornchai, 2012) and the development of essential skills such as linguistic, intercultural, creative, and adaptability skills, which go beyond technical or professional skills acquired through academic training. Additionally, personal growth aspects like increased maturity, global engagement, and autonomy are evident (Figuera, 2023). By engaging directly with diverse cultural contexts, students not only improve their language skills but also enhance their intercultural competence, gaining valuable insights into global perspectives and preparing them for success in an interconnected world.

2.2 Intercultural Competence

Term of intercultural competence is usually called intercultural communicative competence or shortened ICC. Some experts assert intercultural sensitivity (IS) and intercultural competence (IC) are interchangeable. IS is considered as "active desire to motivate themselves to understand, appreciate and accept differences among cultures (Chen and Starosta, 1998). Byram & Planet (2000) insist that intercultural communication requires a complex connection system between students' point of view, ideas, values, and behaviors, which goes beyond the simple transmission of information. Regarding this statement, Malyuga et al. (2018) states that intercultural engagements generally show that communicative objects in communication patterns emerge as persons from several cultures who are representatives of particular socio-cultural societies. It means that effective intercultural communication involves more than the exchange of information. Consequently, intercultural communication is a long process requiring awareness to cultural differences and the capacity to manage such gaps in order to interact successfully with others from diverse backgrounds.

The questionnaire on intercultural competence is designed to assess various dimensions of intercultural competence, aligning with Byram et al.'s (2002) framework. It incorporates the five components of intercultural competence: attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness/political education. Here's a breakdown of each component in the new questionnaire:

The attitude dimension evaluates an individual's openness and willingness to engage with different cultures. It includes their proactive efforts to interact on an equal basis, curiosity about diverse cultural practices, and readiness to question and adapt to different cultural contexts. Attitudinal skills are crucial for fostering genuine intercultural exchanges and adapting to new environments.

The knowledge dimension assesses the individual's understanding of cultural contexts, including historical relationships, national memories, geographical perceptions, socialization processes, and social distinctions. Knowledge of these aspects is vital for grasping the complexities of both one's own and other cultures, facilitating informed and respectful intercultural interactions.

The dimension of skills of interpreting and relating focuses on the ability to analyze and explain cultural differences. It includes identifying ethnocentric perspectives, understanding misunderstandings in intercultural interactions, and mediating between conflicting cultural interpretations. These skills are essential for effective communication and resolving cultural conflicts.

The dimension of skills of discovery and interaction evaluates practical skills in intercultural contexts. It includes the ability to understand cultural concepts, recognize significant cultural references, and navigate verbal and non-verbal interactions. Effective application of these skills is necessary for successful intercultural engagement and using institutional resources to facilitate cultural contact.

Critical cultural awareness/political education dimension measures the ability to critically analyze and interpret cultural values and documents. It includes evaluating explicit and implicit cultural values and making reasoned judgments about cultural phenomena. This awareness is crucial for understanding and mediating complex intercultural exchanges based on informed analysis.

Moreover, for this research, Bennett's theory is used to measure students' intercultural competence during a semester-long study abroad experience. It is compared their response of students who study abroad and who do not. Pathak and Artika (2022) said that intercultural competence involves steps such as acknowledging hesitation and fear, bringing stereotypes to light and challenging them, keeping an eye on feelings and emotions, sorting through confusion, and tackling complexity. This is in line with Bennett's Developmental Model of

Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (1993). There are two division *ethnocentrism* and *ethnorelativism*. The first three is Denial, Reversal and Minimization, the first three stages are on the ethnocentric end of the continuum with a worldview that ‘one’s culture is central to all reality and the second three is Acceptance, Adaptation and Integration are on the ethnorelative end with a worldview that ‘cultures can only be understood relative to one another and particular behavior can only be understood within a cultural context as shown in Picture 1:

Picture 1. Milton Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity



Denial: In this stage, individuals do not recognize or acknowledge cultural differences. They may dismiss or ignore the existence and significance of these differences, viewing people from other cultures in overly simplistic and often negative terms. This lack of recognition can lead to stereotypes, dehumanization, or an indifference towards other cultures, sometimes resulting in insensitive or harmful remarks.

Defense: People in the defense stage see cultural differences in a polarized manner, often viewing their own culture as superior while perceiving other cultures as threatening or inferior. This can lead to a defensive attitude or resistance to diversity initiatives, and may manifest in opposition to policies aimed at increasing inclusivity or addressing bias.

Minimization: Minimization involves the assumption that one’s own cultural perspective is universal and that all people share the same fundamental values and beliefs. This perspective can obscure the significance of cultural differences and may lead to oversimplified views of diversity, often avoiding deeper discussions about cultural issues and biases.

Acceptance: Acceptance occurs when individuals recognize and appreciate that different cultures have distinct beliefs, values, and behaviors that are shaped by their cultural contexts. People in this stage show curiosity about other cultures and engage in learning and interactions that respect these differences, though they may not necessarily agree with or endorse every aspect of other cultures.

Adaptation: In this stage, individuals are able to understand and empathize with perspectives from other cultures, interacting effectively and authentically with people from diverse backgrounds. Adaptation involves adjusting one’s own behavior and thinking to communicate and connect meaningfully across cultural boundaries, without losing one’s own cultural identity.

Integration: Integration is the stage where individuals’ sense of self becomes enriched by incorporating and navigating multiple cultural perspectives. People who reach this stage can fluidly move between different cultural contexts and view themselves as multicultural beings, making choices about their behavior based on a broad understanding of diverse cultural norms.

According to Abduh & Rosmaladewi (2018), to promote and include intercultural values in bilingual programs, can be done through:

Intercultural and Language Engagement through in-Country Programs. This strategy recognizes several immersion activities that promote intercultural and linguistic engagement among students, such as English debate, language club, student clubs, and writing groups. These programs employ English and Indonesian as the instructional mediums, attracting both local and foreign students interested in engaging with other cultures and improving their language skills. The approach recognizes the significance of club activities in fostering English confidence and proficiency, especially in national and international debate competitions. Overall, these immersion programs encourage students to engage in their English proficiency and give them chances to interact with individuals from all over the globe.

Intercultural Engagement through Overseas Immersion. The techniques addressed short-term (1-4 weeks), mid-term (1-6 months), and long-term foreign immersion activities (over 6 months) in overseas immersion activities. Seminars, conferences, and summer courses were short-term activities, while community service, student exchange, and internships were mid-term. Long-term 6-month and double-degree programs helped students build connections and improve their English. All areas were considered vital for foreign learning and cultural exposure.

Virtual exchange. Virtual exchange which is also known as tele-collaboration enables students from around the world to meet and learn together online in virtual meetings. In accordance with the goals of the World Economic Forum and the OECD’s idea of Global Competence, VE emphasizes the development of foreign language proficiency, intercultural abilities, and digital literacy in order to enhance 21st-century competencies (Machwate et al., 2021). Hoch and Kozlowski (2014) in Lokhtina et al. (2022) argue that shared leadership may assist virtual teams in overcoming the barriers of cooperating across borders and time zones, controlling dynamics, and trust building. The following are examples of Virtual Exchange initiatives: Virtual exchange consists of the involvement of groups of learners in extensive periods of time of online intercultural interaction and collaboration with partners from other cultural contexts or

geographic locations as an integral component of their learning programs and under the supervision of educators and/or expert facilitators (Dowd, 2018). Overall, virtual exchange allows learners to socialize with classmates from across all backgrounds and build valuable skills via online collaboration.

Based on those three ways of promoting students' intercultural competence, this research goes with the second way namely through international living. However, to do this language teachers may face significant challenges in teaching intercultural understanding and formal education in foreign country, especially if students have different cultural backgrounds. According to Welsh (2011), there are some risks before focusing on how intercultural understanding might be developed.

Generalizing. Generalizing is a natural process that helps teachers fully understand the world, yet it may also result in errors and over-generalization. In language acquisition, overgeneralizing grammatical rules can lead to errors. It's simple to categorize individuals from various backgrounds based on understanding, yet this can lead to overgeneralization and stereotyping. Educators must be aware of these tendencies and encourage the students to develop critical thinking skills to reduce over-generalizing and make responsible choices using their own observations and experiences.

Stereotyping. Stereotyping and over-generalizing can influence people's views, even in intercultural circumstances. In language teaching, if generalizing is essential, word choices must be monitored in order to prevent over-generalization. Language teachers should gently analyze cultures, starting with their own, to teach students about stereotyping. It's crucial to recognize that cultures are complicated, challenging to define, and practiced differently by different people, and to avoid making broad generalizations like saying English speakers have a single "culture." Generally, language teachers should emphasize accurate representations and critical thinking and analysis of diverse cultural backgrounds.

Culture and 'Othering'. Intercultural awareness is essential for perceiving hidden meanings, assumptions, and contextual meanings in language. Defining culture can be challenging since perceptions varied and old definitions can foster societal separation. Multiculturalism emphasizes differences over commonalities, making intercultural communication in the language classroom difficult. Recognize culture's diversity, avoid stereotyping, and find good approaches to enhance intercultural understanding in the classroom.

Exploring the "Third-Place". Language is a tool for communication, culture, and meaning. A "third place" emphasizes the necessity of cross-cultural dialogue and managing an intercultural area where all parties feel comfortable. Post-structuralist philosophy sees language as a constantly evolving meaning rather than a reflection of reality. Intercultural Language Learning (ICLL) emphasizes that language learners have complex social identities and that language is both a mirror of identity and a means for transforming it. The "third place" is where components of two cultures meet and interact in unanticipated ways, creating new and dynamic cultural features. A "third place" challenges traditional ideas of culture and cultural identity and promotes an understanding of duality, cultural pluralism, and different belongings.

In this research, intercultural competence is seen from the point of view of intercultural exchange or international mobility. Students study in host country and live for a semester which is something common as international program designed by Indonesian campuses. Students' reflection on their experience while studying overseas demonstrate the transformative and enriching potential of sustained intercultural interaction. Students can develop the capability to look at the self through the eyes of the other and as a result enhanced self-reflexivity and a more critical view of their own background culture.

3. Data Collection Method

This research investigates how international living experiences impact EFL students' intercultural competence and English language skills. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques to assess these impacts.

3.1 Quantitative Approach

Surveys: Structured surveys were administered to two groups: EFL students who participated in semester-long international living programs and a control group of EFL students who did not participate in such programs. These surveys measured intercultural competence based on its dimension which are attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness/political education. The survey design was based on Byram et al.'s (2002) model of intercultural competence.

Self-Assessment: A self-assessment grid based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was used to measure the English language skills of both the participants and the control group.

Sample: The study included 20 EFL students who participated in international living programs in English-speaking countries and non-English and a control group of EFL students from similar academic programs who did not participate in international living experiences.

3.2 Qualitative Approach

Essays: Upon returning to their home institutions, participants wrote reflective essays about their international experiences. These essays explored how their time abroad influenced their understanding of their own culture, the host culture, and their intercultural awareness and English language development.

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with alumni of the international programs to gain in-depth insights into their experiences and personal growth. These interviews were analyzed using Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (1993) to assess shifts in intercultural awareness and attitudes.

3.3 Participant Selection and Data Collection Procedures

Selection: Participants included 20 EFL students who took part in international living programs and a control group of non-participants from similar academic programs.

Data Collection: Data were collected at two stages: (1) post-program surveys from both the international program participants and the control group, and (2) reflective essays and interviews with the international program participants after their return.

3.4 Analysis Techniques

Quantitative Data Analysis: Statistical methods were used to compare survey responses between international program participants and the control group, focusing on changes in intercultural competence and English language proficiency.

Qualitative Data Analysis: Thematic analysis was used to interpret interview transcripts and reflective essays from program participants, identifying key themes related to intercultural competence and language development.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Intercultural Competence Cognitive Dimension

Based on the data analysis from the questionnaire, it was found that students perceived items related to intercultural competence differently by EFL students who participated in semester-long international living programs and a control group of EFL students who did not participate in such programs. The mean scores from the 20 respondents indicated significant difference in intercultural competence across all dimensions measured, that are attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness/political education.

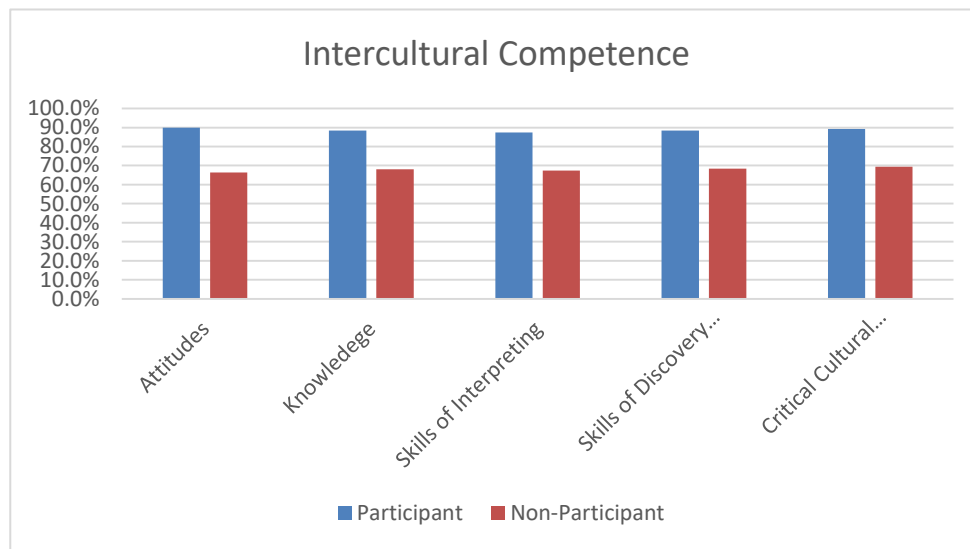
The table below showed the results of students' intercultural competence scores non-participant and participant of international living:

Table 1. Intercultural Competence Scores of Participant and Non-Participant of International living experience

Dimension	Participant	Non-Participant
Attitudes	90.0%	66.4%
Knowledge	88.4%	68.0%
Skills of Interpreting	87.3%	67.3%
Skills of Discovery and Interaction	88.4%	68.4%
Critical Cultural Awareness/Political Education	89.3%	69.3%

The intercultural competence scores can also be viewed in Graphic 1.

Graphic 1. Mean score of Intercultural Competence



As illustrated Table 1 and Graphic 1, the intercultural competence score scores for students who participated in international living programs were higher compared to those of non-participants. This comparison provides insight into the impact of the international living experience on intercultural competence.

4.1.1 Attitudes

The participants exhibited a high score of 90.0% in the attitudes dimension, indicating a strong willingness to engage with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds on an equal footing. This score reflects their open-mindedness and readiness to explore different cultural perspectives, which is crucial for effective intercultural communication. In contrast, the non-participants scored significantly lower at 66.4%, suggesting that they may hold more ethnocentric views and are less inclined to actively seek interactions with people

from different cultures. This difference highlights the impact of international living experiences in fostering a more inclusive and accepting attitude towards cultural diversity among participants.

4.1.2 Knowledge

Participants scored 88.4% in the knowledge dimension, demonstrating a robust understanding of the historical and contemporary relationships between their own country and others. This score indicates that participants have acquired essential insights into various cultural contexts, enhancing their ability to navigate intercultural interactions effectively. Conversely, non-participants scored 68.0%, reflecting a more limited understanding of other cultures and their historical backgrounds. This gap in knowledge may hinder non-participants' ability to engage in meaningful cultural exchanges, emphasizing the importance of immersive experiences in broadening cultural awareness.

4.1.3 Skills of Interpreting and Relating

With a score of 87.3%, participants showed strong capabilities in identifying ethnocentric perspectives and mediating misunderstandings during intercultural interactions. This skill set is critical for effective communication across cultures, enabling participants to engage constructively with diverse viewpoints. Non-participants, on the other hand, scored 67.3%, indicating that they may struggle to recognize and address misunderstandings, which could lead to miscommunication and cultural conflicts. The disparity in scores underscores the role of international living programs in enhancing intercultural skills essential for navigating complex interactions.

4.1.4 Skills of Discovery and Interaction

Participants achieved an impressive score of 88.4% in this dimension, indicating their effectiveness in eliciting and understanding cultural values and concepts. Their experiences abroad have equipped them with the skills to adapt to different cultural contexts and apply their knowledge in real-time interactions. In contrast, non-participants scored 68.4%, suggesting they may find it challenging to engage with other cultures meaningfully. This difference highlights the value of immersive experiences in developing essential interaction skills necessary for successful intercultural communication.

4.1.5 Critical Cultural Awareness/Political Education

Participants demonstrated a high level of critical cultural awareness with a score of 89.3%, reflecting their ability to identify and interpret values in documents and events from various cultures. This skill enables them to engage in thoughtful analyses of cultural phenomena, facilitating deeper intercultural understanding. In comparison, non-participants scored 69.3%, indicating a less developed capacity for critical cultural awareness. This gap suggests that without exposure to diverse cultural contexts, non-participants may struggle to engage in nuanced discussions about cultural differences and their implications. Overall, the scores reveal the transformative impact of international living on developing critical awareness and intercultural competence among participants.

Overall, these findings highlight the positive impact of international living programs on students' intercultural competence. By comparing participants with non-participants, the study demonstrates how the international experience contributed to enhanced intercultural competence, underscoring the value of such programs in fostering intercultural understanding and effective communication.

4.2 Intercultural Competence (Affective Domain); Perceptions of Participants' Own Culture

Moreover, the qualitative data that was gathered by using interviews and essay that was made based on Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) reveals that studying internationally has a profound impact on students, enhancing their understanding of both their own culture and others, cultivating a deeper appreciation for cultural variety and fostering English language skills. 20 informants conveyed how their self-perception transformed when they fully engaged in a foreign culture. The results are presented and discussed concerning the 6 main characteristics of their experiences reported in their essays and interview.

4.2.1 Denial

Initial perceptions of one's native culture often reflect a lack of awareness or a simplistic view of cultural differences. Informants in the denial stage initially perceived their culture as the norm, with limited recognition of how their cultural practices differed from those of the host culture. For instance, one informant noted:

"One aspect of Indonesian culture that I've come to view differently is our approach to time. Back home, it's common for events to start late and for people to adopt a more relaxed attitude towards punctuality. However, in Australia, I've noticed a greater emphasis on timeliness and efficiency. This realization has made me more mindful of deadlines and schedules, highlighting the value of being punctual."

This observation demonstrates how the informant's initial perception was influenced by their limited exposure to different cultural norms regarding time. The contrast between Indonesian and Australian attitudes towards punctuality provided the informant with a new perspective on the importance of time management, reflecting a shift from a simplistic view to a more nuanced understanding of cultural differences.

4.2.2 Defense

In the defense stage, individuals may feel that their own culture is superior to that of the host culture, or they may experience a reversal, where they view the host culture more favorably. For example, one student expressed:

"In my time living in Australia, I've been pleasantly surprised by how my Australian friends have embraced and understood Indonesian culture, even more so than myself as a native. Their knowledge of Indonesian cultures, like those of Java and Bali, surpassed my own. This realization made me feel both ashamed of my ignorance and inspired to learn more about my own culture."

This reflects a defense stage reversal, where the informant initially felt their own culture was superior but later admired the host culture's appreciation of Indonesian traditions. The informant's recognition of the host culture's knowledge and understanding prompted a re-evaluation of their own cultural perceptions and a greater appreciation for cultural diversity.

4.2.3 Minimization

The minimization stage involves recognizing superficial similarities between cultures while downplaying deeper differences. For instance:

"I found similarities between my own culture and the host culture, such as shared values and social behaviors. However, I initially assumed that the host culture's values were essentially the same as mine. Over time, I realized that while there were similarities, there were also significant differences that needed to be understood more deeply."

This response shows how the informant initially minimized cultural differences by focusing on similarities. As they engaged more with the host culture, they began to appreciate the deeper, more complex aspects of cultural differences.

4.2.4 Acceptance

At the acceptance stage, individuals start to understand and appreciate cultural differences in values and behaviors. One informant shared:

"During my stay, I developed a better understanding of the host culture's values, such as the emphasis on individualism in Western societies. For instance, I adapted to the local customs by valuing personal space and privacy more than I did before."

This reflects an acceptance of cultural differences, where the informant recognized and adapted to the host culture's values, leading to a deeper understanding and integration of new cultural practices into their own behavior.

4.2.5 Adaptation

In the adaptation stage, individuals actively adjust their behavior to fit the cultural context of the host country. One student described:

"I had to adapt my communication style to fit the more indirect mannerisms of British culture. Initially, I found it challenging, but I learned to interpret subtle cues and adjust my responses accordingly. This adaptation helped me engage more effectively with locals and navigate social situations more comfortably."

This illustrates how the informant adapted their behavior to better align with the cultural norms of the host country, demonstrating an increased capacity to manage cultural differences.

4.2.6 Integration

At the integration stage, individuals have fully embraced multiple cultural perspectives and can navigate between them with ease. For instance:

"My experience in the host culture has significantly influenced my worldview. I find it easier to navigate between different cultural perspectives and apply the insights I gained to my everyday interactions and academic work. I now approach cultural differences with a more open and flexible mindset."

This response reflects how the informant's international experience led to a more integrated understanding of cultural diversity, allowing them to blend multiple cultural perspectives into their worldview and daily practices.

4.3 Intercultural Competence (Affective Domain); Perceptions of Host Culture

4.3.1 Denial

Informants in the denial stage may have struggled to see beyond surface-level differences in the host culture. One student noted:

"I initially thought that studying abroad would be similar to what I saw in media. However, I soon realized that there were deeper cultural differences I hadn't anticipated, such as variations in communication styles and social norms."

This example demonstrates how the informant initially underestimated the complexity of cultural differences, reflecting a denial of deeper cultural variations.

4.3.2 Defense

The defense stage often involves a reversal in perceptions, where individuals may view the host culture more favourably. One informant shared:

"My experience in Australia made me appreciate the host culture's sense of community and inclusivity. Initially, I thought my own

culture was superior, but I came to admire the Australian values of fairness and openness, which made me feel welcomed and valued.”

This response highlights a shift from viewing one’s own culture as superior to recognizing the positive aspects of the host culture, reflecting a stage of defense and reversal.

4.3.3 Minimization

In the minimization stage, informants may focus on similarities while underestimating significant cultural differences. One student noted:

“I found similarities between my culture and the host culture, but I also realized there were subtle cultural nuances that I had not considered before. For instance, while the English language was familiar, the cultural context in which it was used was quite different from what I expected.”

This response reflects a minimization of cultural differences, where the informant initially focused on similarities but later acknowledged deeper cultural complexities.

4.3.4 Acceptance

At the acceptance stage, individuals begin to understand and appreciate the values and behaviours of the host culture. One informant described:

“I gradually learned to appreciate the host culture’s emphasis on individualism and personal space. My interactions with locals helped me understand these values better and adapt my behaviour accordingly.”

This example demonstrates an acceptance of the host culture’s values and norms, leading to a deeper understanding and adaptation to cultural differences.

4.3.5 Adaptation

Informants in the adaptation stage actively adjust their behaviour to fit the host culture’s norms. One student shared:

“I had to adapt my communication style to match the host culture’s more indirect approach. This required learning to read subtle cues and adjust my responses to fit the local norms.”

This response illustrates how the informant adapted their behaviour to align with the host culture’s communication style, reflecting an increased capacity for managing cultural differences.

4.3.6 Integration

At the integration stage, individuals have fully embraced multiple cultural perspectives and can navigate between them with ease. One informant noted:

“My experience abroad has broadened my worldview and made it easier for me to interact with people from diverse backgrounds. I now feel comfortable navigating between different cultural perspectives and applying what I’ve learned in my daily life.”

This response reflects how the informant’s international experience led to a more integrated understanding of cultural diversity and a greater ability to navigate between different cultural perspectives.

4.4 Language Skills

The data presented in the table on CEFR self-assessment for language skills reveals significant differences between the participants who engaged in international living programs and the non-participants.

Table 2. Language Skill Self-Assessment

Skill	CEFR Level	Participant	Non-participant
Speaking	C1	7	4
	B2	3	6
Writing	C1	8	4
	B2	2	6
Listening	C1	8	5
	B2	2	5
Reading	C1	7	5
	B2	3	5

Table 2 presents the self-assessed English language skills of participants and non-participants in the study, categorized by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) levels. The data highlights notable differences in proficiency between the two groups, aligning with the findings discussed in the abstract regarding the impact of the international living program on students’ English language skills. Although there are participants that were having international living in non-English speaking country, their English language skills also better than non-participants. One of the possible reasons is because non-native teachers were noted as offering better learning methodologies, being better at comprehending the challenges their pupils faced, and possessing more accurate knowledge of the English language (Quaidy, et.al, 2023)

4.4.1 Speaking Skills

Among participants, 70% achieved a C1 level, indicating a high proficiency in speaking, which enables them to engage in complex academic discussions and professional conversations with ease. In contrast, only 40% of non-participants reached the C1 level, with the majority (60%) at the B2 level. This discrepancy suggests that the international living experience significantly enhances participants' speaking abilities, enabling them to communicate more effectively in English.

Additionally, students exhibited notable advancements in their speaking skills during their international living experiences. Qualitative data from interviews indicated that immersion in diverse linguistic environments facilitated self-discovery and confidence in their ability to communicate effectively. One informant stated,

“Living with native speakers forced me to speak more often, which improved my fluency and pronunciation.”

This highlights how real-life interactions with locals contributed to participants' increased comfort in speaking English and navigating conversational dynamics. The exposure to different accents and speech styles further enriched their speaking proficiency, allowing them to articulate their thoughts with greater clarity and confidence.

However, some participants noted challenges in specific speaking contexts, particularly in more formal situations. One participant mentioned,

“I still feel nervous speaking in academic settings or when giving presentations.”

This suggests that while participants made considerable progress in everyday conversational skills, they may require additional support to enhance their public speaking abilities. The qualitative feedback emphasizes the need for ongoing practice in diverse speaking scenarios to further bolster their confidence and competence in articulating their ideas effectively.

4.4.2 Writing Skills

The writing proficiency of participants also stands out, with 80% classified at the C1 level, demonstrating their capacity to produce well-structured, nuanced, and sophisticated written texts suitable for academic and professional contexts. Conversely, only 40% of non-participants attained the C1 level, with the remaining 60% at B2. This highlights the international living program's role in developing participants' writing skills, fostering a higher level of competence necessary for advanced academic work.

Moreover, students demonstrated significant improvements in their writing skills as a result of their international experiences. Qualitative data from interviews revealed that the necessity to produce various written assignments and engage in reflective journaling enriched their writing proficiency. One informant shared,

“I learned to express my thoughts more clearly and organize my ideas better in writing during my time abroad.”

This indicates that the academic rigor of their programs prompted participants to refine their writing techniques, enhancing their ability to communicate complex ideas effectively.

However, some participants acknowledged that they still faced challenges with specific writing tasks, particularly in formal academic writing. One participant expressed,

“I struggled with the structure and style required for research papers.”

This suggests that while participants made considerable strides in their writing abilities, they may benefit from additional guidance on academic writing conventions. The qualitative insights underscore the importance of ongoing support in developing advanced writing skills to ensure participants can confidently engage in various writing contexts.

4.4.3 Listening Skills

Listening skills reveal a similar pattern, with 80% of participants at the C1 level, indicating their ability to comprehend diverse English accents and complex academic content. Only 50% of non-participants achieved this level, with an equal proportion at B2. This indicates that the immersive experience of living in an English-speaking environment contributes to participants' enhanced listening comprehension, essential for successful academic engagement.

Additionally, students exhibited notable advancements in their listening skills during their international living experiences. Qualitative data from interviews indicated that immersion in diverse linguistic environments allowed participants to refine their ability to understand various accents and speech patterns. One informant noted,

“Being surrounded by native speakers improved my ability to grasp different ways of speaking,”

highlighting the impact of real-life interactions on their listening comprehension. This exposure not only facilitated their understanding of everyday conversations but also enhanced their ability to engage meaningfully in discussions, contributing significantly to their overall language development.

However, some participants reported that they still faced challenges with more complex spoken interactions, reflecting a need for further growth. One participant expressed,

“While I could follow most conversations, I sometimes struggled with idiomatic expressions or fast-paced dialogues.”

This suggests that despite the advancements made, nuances in spoken English can still pose difficulties. The qualitative feedback emphasizes the importance of continued practice in diverse listening contexts to further elevate their proficiency and confidence in understanding intricate verbal communications.

4.4.4 Reading Skills

In reading proficiency, 70% of participants reached the C1 level, showcasing their capacity to analyse and critically engage with advanced academic texts. This contrasts with the non-participants, where 50% achieved C1 and the other half at B2. The higher reading proficiency among participants underscores the importance of exposure to English-language materials during their international experience, which aids in developing critical reading skills.

Moreover, students displayed significant improvements in their reading skills as a result of their international experiences. Qualitative data from interviews revealed that exposure to a variety of academic texts and materials enhanced participants' comprehension abilities. One informant shared,

"I had to read a lot of academic articles for my courses, which really improved my understanding of complex language."

This indicates that engaging with challenging reading materials not only enriched their vocabulary but also fostered critical thinking and analysis, contributing to their overall English language development.

Conversely, some participants remained at a B2 level, expressing difficulties with intricate texts. One participant mentioned,

"I found it hard to grasp deeper meanings or analyse complex arguments in some readings."

This reflects that while participants made considerable strides, certain advanced reading tasks still require additional support. The qualitative insights underscore the need for tailored strategies to help students navigate challenging academic content, ultimately enhancing their reading proficiency and ensuring they can fully engage with diverse written materials.

5. Discussion

This study investigated the impact of international living programs on EFL students' intercultural competence and English language skills, using both quantitative and qualitative measures. The results indicate a notable improvement in intercultural competence among students who participated in these programs, as evidenced by higher scores in Byram's framework dimensions, including attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. This suggests that immersion in a different cultural environment enhances students' ability to understand and interact effectively across cultures. Qualitative findings, analysed through Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), offer a deeper perspective on personal growth and development. Participants showed progression from ethnocentric stages like denial and defence to ethno-relative stages such as acceptance, adaptation, and integration. This shift reflects a significant enhancement in cultural empathy and understanding, as participants adapted more easily to new cultural norms and engaged with locals more effectively. The discrepancies between quantitative and qualitative results highlight the multifaceted nature of intercultural competence. While quantitative measures capture improvements in skills and knowledge, qualitative insights reveal the personal and developmental changes that are crucial for deeper intercultural sensitivity. This aligns with Harmer's perspective in Wolf and Borzikowsky (2018), which suggests that intercultural sensitivity may be foundational for developing broader intercultural competence. The study underscores the holistic impact of international living programs, affecting both cognitive and affective dimensions of intercultural competence.

5.1 Limitations of the Study

5.1.1 Sample Size and Generalizability

This study's findings are based on a relatively small sample of 20 respondents, which may limit the generalizability of the results. The experiences and perceptions of this limited group might not fully represent the broader population of EFL students participating in international living programs. To enhance the robustness and applicability of the findings, future research should aim to include a larger and more diverse sample. This would help ensure that the results are more representative and can be more confidently applied across different contexts.

5.1.2 Self-Reported Data and Possible Biases

The study relies on self-reported data from questionnaires and qualitative essays, which can be prone to biases such as social desirability and retrospective bias. Participants might have overestimated their improvements in intercultural competence or selectively recalled experiences that aligned with positive outcomes. To address these biases, future studies could incorporate mixed methods, including observational data or peer assessments, to provide a more comprehensive view of students' intercultural experiences.

5.1.3 Temporal Limitations

The study examines the intercultural competence of participants at a single point in time, without considering the long-term retention of these gains. Future research could explore how intercultural competence develops over time and whether participants continue to maintain or further develop their intercultural competence after returning to their home country. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into the sustainability of intercultural competence improvements.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

The results of this study contribute to existing theories of intercultural competence, particularly Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). The participants’ experiences illustrate a progression from initial stages of denial and defence to greater acceptance and appreciation of cultural differences, aligning with Bennett’s framework.

5.2.1 Support for Byram’s Framework:

The findings support Byram's framework by demonstrating how students developed key components of intercultural competence, such as knowledge, attitudes, skills, and critical cultural awareness. Participants’ increased ability to engage with and understand cultural differences reflects Byram’s emphasis on the integration of cultural knowledge with effective communication skills.

5.2.2 Support for the DMIS

The findings also support Bennett's model by showcasing how students shifted from an ethnocentric viewpoint, characterized by denial and defense, to a more ethno-relative perspective that emphasizes acceptance and appreciation of cultural diversity. Participants reported changes in their attitudes and perceptions toward both their native and host cultures, indicating a deeper understanding of cultural complexities and a willingness to engage in cultural exchange.

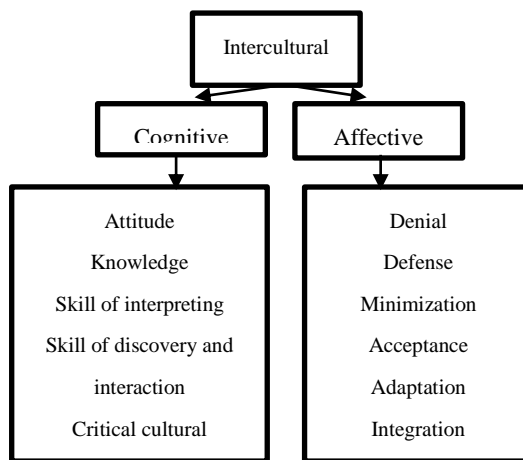
5.2.3 Challenges to Existing Theories:

While the study affirms both Byram’s and Bennett’s models, it also raises questions about the linearity and universality of their developmental stages. Some participants reported fluctuating perceptions and experiences, suggesting that the journey toward intercultural competence may not always follow a straightforward path. This complexity calls for a re-evaluation of these models, considering that individuals may oscillate between stages based on situational factors and interactions.

5.2.4 Refining the Theories

Following Harmer (2003) and Wolf & Borzikowsky (2018) that stated intercultural sensitivity may be foundational for developing broader intercultural competence. The Bennet’ DMIS acts as the affective dimension of intercultural competence because it describes the progression from ethnocentric to ethnorelative perspectives, represent the affective dimension. These stages focus on how individuals’ attitudes and feelings towards cultural differences evolve over time. Byram Framework acts as cognitive domain since the components of attitudes, knowledge, skills, and critical cultural awareness in Byram's framework can be considered as elements of the cognitive dimension of intercultural competence. These components involve the intellectual and knowledge-based aspects of understanding and engaging with other cultures. By integrating both theories, the researcher came up with new model of intercultural competence.

Picture 2. Integrated Bennet -Byram Model (IBBM)



5.2.5 Cultural Awareness and Language Acquisition

The findings highlight the interconnectedness of cultural awareness and language acquisition. As students engaged with their host cultures, they not only developed a deeper appreciation for cultural differences but also enhanced their English language skills. This relationship suggests that language learning should be integrated into intercultural competence training, emphasizing the importance of context in language use and cultural interactions.

5.2.6 Future Research Directions

The limitations identified in this study underscore the need for further research to explore the nuances of intercultural competence development. Future studies could investigate the role of specific program characteristics (e.g., duration, type of engagement) in shaping intercultural competence outcomes. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking students’ intercultural competence over time could provide valuable insights into the long-term impacts of international living experiences and their implications for educational practices.

5.3 Practical Recommendations

5.3.1 Integrate Intercultural Competence into EFL Curricula

Develop Intercultural Modules: Create dedicated modules within EFL curricula focusing on intercultural competence. These modules should cover topics such as cultural attitudes, knowledge, skill, and critical cultural awareness. Incorporate case studies and role-playing exercises to help students practice and reflect on these concepts.

Promote Experiential Learning: Include activities that simulate international experiences, such as virtual exchange programs, international guest speakers, or collaborative projects with students from different cultures. These activities can provide students with practical insights into intercultural interactions.

Enhance Cultural Awareness: Include readings, discussions, and assignments that expose students to diverse cultural perspectives and historical contexts. This can help broaden their understanding of global cultures and improve their ability to engage in meaningful intercultural exchanges.

Incorporate Feedback Mechanisms: Regularly assess students' intercultural competence through self-assessments, peer evaluations, and instructor feedback. Use this information to tailor the curriculum to address specific areas where students may need additional support.

5.3.2 Improve the Design of International Living Programs

Structured Reflection and Debriefing: Implement structured reflection sessions and debriefing activities for students returning from international living programs. These sessions should focus on evaluating their experiences, discussing challenges, and articulating personal growth in intercultural competence.

Tailor Programs to Individual Needs: Design international living programs with flexibility to accommodate diverse student needs and backgrounds. This may involve providing pre-departure training tailored to students' specific cultural contexts or offering support for students in non-English-speaking countries to improve their English language skills.

Foster Long-Term Engagement: Encourage participants to maintain connections with their host cultures through alumni networks, continued language practice, or involvement in intercultural events. This can help sustain and further develop the intercultural competence gained during their international experience.

Evaluate Program Impact: Conduct regular evaluations of international living programs to assess their effectiveness in enhancing students' intercultural competence and language skills. Use both quantitative and qualitative feedback from participants to refine and improve program design.

5.3.3 Enhance Language Skill Development

Provide Targeted Language Support: Offer additional language support tailored to students' needs, focusing on specific skills such as academic writing, formal speaking, or advanced listening comprehension. This could include workshops, tutoring, or online resources.

Encourage Immersive Experiences: Promote opportunities for students to engage in immersive language experiences, such as internships, volunteer work, or social activities with native speakers. These experiences can enhance practical language skills and build confidence in using English in various contexts.

Support Ongoing Practice: Create platforms or programs that facilitate continuous language practice beyond the international experience. This could include language exchange partnerships, discussion groups, or online forums where students can practice and refine their language skills.

6. Conclusion

The study's findings offer significant insights into how international living might affect students' perceptions of their own culture and those of the host country. The informants' experiences demonstrate a progression of self-discovery, empathy, and cultural awareness when seen through Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). The informants showed a renewed awareness for the intricacies and complexities of their original culture. Encountering various cultural environments enabled them to analyze and reevaluate their own cultural standards and principles. This self-reflective process enhanced their continuous development in cultural knowledge and sensitivity.

The informants had various experiences when examining perceptions of the host culture, which ultimately resulted in a deeper understanding and appreciation for the cultural diversity they observed. Although some individuals first had challenges due to cultural disparities, particularly in communication methods, they eventually moved towards embracing and incorporating these differences. Engaging with locals, joining cultural events, and receiving compassion from peers helped create a feeling of belonging and connection with the host culture.

Over time, the informants showed a notable change in their attitudes towards cultural differences, transitioning from denial to acceptance. They overcame initial misunderstandings by actively participating in cultural variety, interacting with locals, studying

other cultural customs, and embracing different viewpoints. International living has a transformative impact on students' multicultural sensitivity and understanding, highlighting a journey of self-discovery and empathy.

To enhance the applicability and impact of these findings in real-world educational settings, it is essential for educators and policymakers to integrate intercultural competence into foreign language curricula. One effective approach is to incorporate intercultural competence frameworks into the language curriculum itself. This can be achieved by designing courses that ensure students engage with diverse cultural perspectives and practices. Such integration not only broadens students' cultural understanding but also equips them with the necessary skills to navigate intercultural interactions effectively.

Additionally, developing partnerships with institutions abroad to facilitate cultural exchange programs can provide students with invaluable immersive experiences. These programs can allow students to engage deeply with different cultural contexts, similar to the transformative experiences highlighted by the informants in this study. By participating in cultural exchange programs, students can apply their language skills in authentic settings while gaining firsthand insights into the host culture.

Encouraging reflective practices within the curriculum is also crucial for fostering intercultural competence. Educators can promote activities such as journaling or group discussions, where students critically analyze their cultural experiences and articulate their evolving perceptions of both their own and the host cultures. This reflective engagement helps students internalize their learning and fosters a deeper understanding of cultural nuances.

Furthermore, providing professional development opportunities for educators on teaching intercultural competence can significantly enhance classroom practices. Training programs can equip teachers with effective strategies for facilitating discussions about cultural differences and promoting empathy among students. By empowering educators with the right tools and knowledge, the integration of intercultural competence into foreign language education can be more effectively realized.

Finally, implementing assessments that evaluate students' intercultural competence can help track progress and guide curriculum improvements. By measuring outcomes related to intercultural understanding and sensitivity, educators can refine their teaching practices and ensure that students are developing the skills necessary for successful interactions in diverse environments. This comprehensive approach not only fosters language acquisition but also cultivates a deeper appreciation for cultural diversity, ultimately preparing students for meaningful engagement in an increasingly interconnected world.

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Authors' contributions

Dr. Veni Roza, M.Pd was responsible for the study design and revision of the manuscript. Dr. Melyann Melani, M.Pd and Reflinda, M.Pd handled the data analysis. Rianto and Nora Fudhla helped in data and literature collections. Alistair Welsh contributed for abroad data access and validated instruments used. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. All authors contributed to the article completion.

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Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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Appendix 1 Interview Questions**Denial**

1. Can you describe your initial perceptions of the culture you encountered during your mobility program? How did these perceptions change over time?
2. Before participating in the program, how did you view cultural differences? Did you feel that other cultures were significantly different from your own?

Defense

3. Did you ever feel that your own culture was superior to the culture of the country where you studied? Can you provide an example?
4. How did you react to cultural practices that were very different from your own? Were there any specific practices that you found particularly challenging or confusing?

Minimization

5. In what ways did you find commonalities between your own culture and the culture of the country you visited? How did these commonalities affect your interactions?
6. Can you recall a time when you assumed that people from the host culture shared the same values or beliefs as you? How did this assumption impact your experience?

Acceptance

7. How did your understanding of the host culture's values and behaviors evolve during your stay? Can you provide an example of how you adapted to these differences?
8. Were there moments when you felt that you had a deeper understanding of cultural differences? How did you navigate situations that required cultural sensitivity?

Adaptation

9. Can you describe a situation where you had to adapt your behavior to fit the cultural context of the host country? What strategies did you use?
10. How did you manage to balance your own cultural identity with the new cultural norms you encountered? Did you find yourself adopting behaviors from the host culture?

Integration

11. How has your experience in the host culture influenced your overall worldview and identity? Do you feel that you can navigate between different cultural perspectives more easily now?
12. In what ways have you continued to apply the skills and insights gained from your mobility experience in your everyday life or academic work? Can you provide specific examples?

Appendix 2 Questionnaire on Intercultural Competence**Attitudes**

1. I actively seek out opportunities to engage with people from different cultures on an equal basis.
2. I am interested in understanding various perspectives on both familiar and unfamiliar cultural practices.
3. I frequently question the values and assumptions inherent in my own cultural practices.
4. I am prepared to experience and adapt to different cultural stages during a period of residence in another country.
5. I am willing to engage with the verbal and non-verbal communication conventions of other cultures.

Knowledge

1. I have a good understanding of the historical and contemporary relationships between my country and other countries.
2. I understand the national memory of other countries and how their historical events are perceived from my own perspective.
3. I am knowledgeable about the geographical definitions and perceptions of space in both my own country and other countries.
4. I am familiar with the processes and institutions of socialization in both my own country and other countries.
5. I understand social distinctions and their principal markers in both my own country and other countries.

Skills of Interpreting and Relating

1. I am skilled at identifying ethnocentric perspectives in documents or events and explaining their origins.

2. I am proficient at identifying areas of misunderstanding in interactions and explaining them in terms of the cultural systems involved.
3. I am capable of mediating between conflicting interpretations of phenomena.

Skills of Discovery and Interaction

1. I am effective at eliciting and understanding the concepts and values in documents or events from other cultures.
2. I am able to identify significant cultural references and understand their connotations.
3. I am adept at identifying and negotiating appropriate verbal and non-verbal interaction processes in different cultural contexts.
4. I effectively apply my knowledge, skills, and attitudes in real-time interactions with people from other cultures.
5. I use public and private institutions effectively to facilitate contact with other cultures.

Critical Cultural Awareness/Political Education

1. I am skilled at identifying and interpreting explicit or implicit values in documents and events from different cultures.
2. I am proficient at making evaluative analyses of documents and events based on a reasoned process of reasoning.
3. I am capable of interacting and mediating in intercultural exchanges based on reasoned analysis.

Appendix 3 CEFR Self-Assessment Grid

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages Self-assessment grid						
	A1 Basic User	A2 Basic User	B1 Independent User	B2 Independent user	C1 Proficient user	C2 Proficient user
Listening	I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment); I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
Reading	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works
Spoken Interaction	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
Spoken Production	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
Writing	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select a style appropriate to the reader in mind	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works