

# The Effects of Intercultural Learning on English Learning Motivation among Students Studying Abroad

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## Abstract

*Background:* While English is becoming as a tool of communication and interaction with people from different countries in the global society of the twenty-first century due to the trend toward globalization and internationalization, those who study abroad and immerse themselves in the host culture may experience intercultural learning naturally during the interaction with native speakers by using English as an international language in daily life. As students studying abroad may also have the opportunity to learn English in the process of intercultural learning, whether intercultural learning has an effect on their English learning motivation deserves researchers' attention and thus becomes the focus of this study.

*Aim:* The purpose of this study investigates whether and how intercultural learning has an effect on English learning motivation among students studying abroad.

*Sample:* A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed to Asian students speaking English as a foreign Language (EFL) and studying abroad in an English-speaking country, and 143 questionnaires were returned at a response rate of 95%.

*Method:* This study was conducted in an English-speaking country by drawing upon a questionnaire survey. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was applied in this study to analyze the data collected from questionnaires.

*Results:* While finding that English learning motivation held by students studying abroad was significantly affected by intercultural learning, the results of this study showed that integrative motivation and instrumental motivation were significantly correlated with each other in reflecting the effects of intercultural learning among students studying abroad.

*Conclusion:* Integrative motivation and instrumental motivation can be considered two types of English learning motivation which are equally important to students studying abroad for experiencing intercultural learning and benefiting from it in English acquisition.

**Keywords:** EFL, intercultural learning, English learning motivation

## 跨文化學習對留學生英語學習動機之影響

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## 摘要

**背景：**英語這個語言因國際化與全球化趨勢而成為二十一世紀全球化社會人與人溝通與互動的工具之際，跨文化學習往往是那些沈浸在另一國文化的留學生平日以英語為國際語言；與以英語為母語者互動時自然體驗到的學習經驗。由於留學生在跨文化學習過程中也有學習英語的機會，是否這種跨文化學習經驗會影響到留學生英語學習動機值得研究者注意，因此成為本研究的重點。

**目的：**本研究目的在調查跨文化學習是否影響留學生英語學習動機以及其影響情況。

**樣本：**150份問卷發給以英語為外國語；在英語系國家唸書之亞洲留學生，結果回收143份問卷，回收率達95%。

**方法：**本研究使用問卷調查法，在英語系國家做問卷調查，並以社會科學統計軟體做資料分析。

**結果：**本研究結果發現留學生英語學習動機顯著受到跨文化學習經驗的影響，也顯示融入式動機與功利式動機在反映跨文化學習對留學生的影響方面，有顯著關連性。

**結論：**融入式動機與功利式動機可視為兩種不同類型的英語學習動機，兩者皆有助於留學生體會跨文化學習經驗；以及獲得跨文化學習經驗對習得英語的影響。

**關鍵詞：**以英語為外國語、跨文化學習、英語學習動機

## Introduction

While English is emerging as a tool of communication and interaction with people worldwide due to the trend toward globalization and internationalization, people across the world face increasing opportunities to have intercultural contacts through English as an international language. Indeed, people coming from one culture may use English as an international language and act as intercultural speakers to share the social reality in another culture (Byram, 2008) and even share the new trend in a global culture (Dornyei et al., 2006). More importantly, English as an international language has enabled many people in the global society to experience intercultural learning as a consequence of communication and interaction with native speakers and the target culture. For people immersing themselves in the target culture and using English as a shared language such as students studying abroad, intercultural learning may occur naturally in daily life. Studies on study abroad programs have, on the one hand, found that studying abroad is a good way to experience intercultural learning (Weber, 2005) and to develop intercultural communicative competence intercultural competence and intercultural communicative competence (Van Deuzen, 1998; Sercu, 2002). On the other hand, research into study abroad programs also finds that students studying abroad can achieve greater success in English acquisition (Wilkinson, 2002; Churchill & Dufon, 2006). Since both intercultural learning and English acquisition may take place in a study abroad context, one question which may deserve researchers' attention is whether intercultural learning has an effect on English acquisition among students studying abroad. This study thus explores the effects of intercultural learning on English acquisition

among students speaking English as a foreign language (EFL) and studying abroad in an English-speaking country.

Psychological factors such as motivation are considered to serve as a common frame of reference for understanding an individual's intercultural development (Alred, 2003) and also identified as the main reason for achieving the success in learning the second or target language (L2) (Norris-Holt, 2007), so it is assumed that English learning motivation is the factor that would vary with intercultural learning and reflect the effects of intercultural learning on English acquisition. Since motivation can be categorized into two motivational orientations, which refer to integrative motivation and instrumental motivation, according to the reaction to both the target language and the target language group (Gardner & Smythe, 1981), it is also hypothesized that these orientations are the factors that would be affected by intercultural learning. This study targets EFL students coming from Asian countries and studying abroad in an English-speaking country, with the aim of investigating whether and how their English learning motivation, which in turn leads to English acquisition, is affected by intercultural learning. This study addresses the following three research questions:

- (1) Is the English learning motivation which is held by EFL students in three groups affected by intercultural learning in a study abroad context?
- (2) Are the two motivational orientations, which refer to integrative motivation and instrumental motivation, affected by intercultural learning in a study abroad context?
- (3) Is integrative motivation correlated with instrumental motivation due to the impact of intercultural learning in a study abroad context?

### **The Process of Intercultural Learning**

Intercultural learning in itself is the process of interaction in a particular linguistic and cultural context (Paige & Stringer, 1997). Such a learning process involves the total immersion in a host culture or the intense exposure to different cultural products and materials (Sen Gupta 2003). Studies have found that the length of residence in the second or target language (L2) learning environments may reflect the amount of comprehensive input in foreign language learning and also predict what learners can achieve (Ellis, 1990). Different from traditional learning in a foreign language classroom, intercultural learning which involves communication and interaction with native speakers may enable learners to handle different culture-bound conceptions, reconstruct their old belief systems and practices and internalize new beliefs (Lahdenpera, 2000). In addition, intercultural learning can help one to develop one's critical engagement, self-reflection and sensitivity toward communication and interaction between the "self" and "others" (Papademetre, 2003). Learners as intercultural learners have to cope with unavoidable changes in a process of cultural negotiation (Corbett, 2003) and may attempt to learn more about the target language and culture (Paige et al., 1999). Indeed, one motivation for interaction with the target language group often leads to a greater frequency of inter-group contacts and a higher level of open-mindedness on the part of language learners (Hammer, 1987). To this point, motivation is likely to reflect the impact of intercultural learning.

### **Factors that Affect Motivation**

Motivation by nature is the driving force that enables people to persist with specific task (Chambers, 2001). A truly-motivated student usually

makes efforts on language learning and enjoys learning tasks (Gardner, 2001). Indeed, motivation plays a role in determining L2 achievements (Dornyei et al. 2006). While English learning motivation is associated with the effects of intercultural learning, research finds that the second or target language (L2) motivation is often affected by other factors. For example, L2 motivation may not only be enhanced by lower anxiety and higher self-confidence (Saville-Troike, 2006), but it can also be easily influenced by attitudes (Marshall, 2001). Studies have also shown that motivation to learn a second or foreign language is closely linked to contexts (Thorne, 2000; Alison, 2001). Indeed, motivation to learn a second or foreign language can reside in one's interaction with the host environment (McGroarty, 2003). According to Ushioda (2006: 157), "motivation is never simply in the hands of the motivated individual learner, but is constructed and constrained through social relations with others". On this point, L2 motivation seems not to be easily measurable.

### **Features of Integrative Motivation and Instrumental Motivation**

L2 motivation can be categorized into two motivational orientations, which refer to integrative motivation target and instrumental motivation, according to the reactions to the language and the target language group (Gardner & Smythe, 1981) and may help to understand how and why English learning motivation can be affected by intercultural learning. Integrative motivation by nature is considered as "an openness to, and respect for, other culture groups and ways of life; in the extreme, it might involve complete identification with the community (and possibly even withdrawal from one's original group)" (Dornyei. 2003: p.5). It can also be

identified as both the goal of acquiring a second or foreign language and developing positive attitudes toward the target language group and the desire to integrate into the target language community (Crookes and Schmidt, 1991).

In contrast to integrative motivation, instrumental motivation is based on individuals' interest and reflects their values and stereotypes (Huguet, 2006). Instrumental motivation is often explained as the desire to acquire something practical or concrete from English learning (Hudson (2000) but sometimes classified to be the attitudes toward the target language which is placed outside the domain of motivation (Tremblay & Gardner, 1995). According to Gardner (1985), both integrative dimension and instrumental dimensions refer to orientation rather than to motivation itself. However, studies have showed that integrative motivation and instrumental motivation can be considered two types of motivation and may operate on L2 learners at different stages of learning (Dorynei & Otto, 1998; Brown, 2000; Lamb, 2004). According to Lamb (2004), integrative motivation and instrumental motivation exist but are not necessarily identified as separate concepts in the global society where English is used in many countries as an international language and not limited to any specific country.

### **Method**

Based on Schumann's acculturation model (1978) which asserts that acculturation involves one's social and psychological integration and is beneficial for the success in second or foreign language acquisition (SLA), this study targeted EFL students studying abroad and adopted socio-psychological factors as variables to investigate the effects of intercultural learning on English acquisition. One of the social factors in the model was associated with the

length of residence in the target language community, so it was assumed that length of residence abroad might predict the degree to which those who were immersed in the target culture would get involved in the target culture and also experience intercultural learning. Since motivation as a psychological factor in the model was considered to determine how a learner achieve the success in SLA while integrating into the target culture, it was also hypothesized that English learning motivation could be the factor which would be affected by intercultural learning and in turn increase as a function of increased length of residence. While finding that the component of motivation in the model might also consist of integrative motivation and instrumental motivation, it was further hypothesized that the two motivational orientations would be affected by intercultural learning and increase as a function of increased length of residence abroad.

### **Subjects**

Questionnaires were distributed to 150 students who came from Asian countries and studied abroad at a university in the United States according to the enrolment information provided by the university. 143 questionnaires were returned at a response rate of 95%. However, five of these questionnaires were found to be invalid. According to the nationality of subjects (Table 1), it was found that quite a few subjects recruited for this study were Chinese students, who comprised 27.5% of the sample. The proportions of Korean and Taiwanese students were, 23.2% and 21.7% respectively. Japanese students ranked the fourth-largest group, representing 18.8% of the sample. It was found that only 8.7% of the subjects came from South Asian countries such as Thailand or Indonesia. In general, the nationality of

the subjects varied within an acceptable distribution. Because length of residence abroad was hypothesized to be the factor of predicting the degree to which students would experience intercultural learning, subjects in this study were divided into three groups (Table 2) according to the length of residence (i.e. more than two years, 1-2 years, less than one year).

It was found that subjects studying abroad for more than two years accounted for a plurality of the sample (47.8%). Subjects studying abroad for 1-2 years represented 29.7% of the sample, while those who had been studying abroad for less than one year accounted for 22.5% of the sample.

Table 1

*Nationality of Subjects*

Country	Number of Subjects	Percent
China	38	27.5%
Japan	26	18.8%
Korea	32	23.2%
Taiwan	30	21.7%
Others	12	8.7%

Table 2

*Category of the Length of Residence*

Length of Residence	Number of Students	Percent
Less than 1 year	31	22.5%
1-2 years	41	29.7%
More than 2 years	66	47.8%

**Instrument & Procedure**

The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was applied to analyze the data collected from the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics was firstly performed to understand subjects' general perspectives on their English learning motivation and explore whether subjects in different groups responded differently in the dependent variable of motivation. Secondly, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to investigate how differently subjects who were divided into three different groups responded in the dependent variable of motivation. The same computation procedures of

descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA were then completed to compare whether and how subjects in the three groups responded differently in the variables of integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. The correlation test was further performed in order to examine whether or not the variables of integrative motivation and instrumental motivation were correlated with each other. In addition, although the questions of the questionnaire in this study were adopted from a standardized questionnaire, the reliability of the scales on the individual items was still empirically examined through reliability analysis.

## Limitation

There were three limitations in this study. The first was that the researcher seemed unable to distribute questionnaires to Asian students according to length of their residence abroad on the campus of the university where she was a total stranger. The lack of control in recruiting subjects according to the length of residence might cause some unexpected results. Because the researcher often made use of the lunch hour or coffee break to distribute questionnaires to students studying abroad, whether they felt comfortable to fill out the questionnaires might pose the other limitation of this study. In addition, this study was limited to being unable to find out what effects exactly looked like due to the adoption of quantitative research. It seemed necessary for the researcher to further trace such effects in more details from qualitative research in the future.

## Results and Discussions

When descriptive statistics was firstly performed to investigate what subjects thought about their English learning motivation, the results of this

study found that due to the effects of intercultural learning, most of the subjects in the three groups felt motivated to learn English actively. For example, the results of this study showed that under the influence of intercultural learning, more than half of the subjects in the three groups (Table 3) considered English important to them for interacting with native speakers and people from different countries (90%), understanding more about native speakers (82%), attending the activities of the target language group (79%), appreciating English arts and literature (72%) and being respected by people in the target culture (52%). In addition, it was found that the effects of intercultural learning led many subjects in the three groups (Table 4) to recognize the importance of English for career planning (93%), surviving in the society (91%), finding good jobs (89%), acquiring more information (86%) and becoming more knowledgeable (81%). These responses indicated that subjects were motivated to learn English either for integrating into the target culture or for practical concerns.

Table 3

### *Subjects' Perspective on Integrative Motivation*

Reason for learning English	Option (percentage)				
	*5	4	3	2	1
1. Understanding more about native speakers	39.1	42.8	13	4.3	7
2. Attending the activities of the target language group	40.6	38.4	18.8	1.4	0.7
3. Appreciating English arts and literature	32.6	39.1	19.6	6.5	2.2
4. Being respected by native speakers	20.3	31.2	35.5	9.4	3.6
5. Interacting with native speakers and people from different countries	56.6	33.3	8.7	0.7	0.7

\* 5=strongly agree; 4=agree; 3=neutral; 2=disagree; 1=strongly disagree.

Table 4

*Subjects' Perspective on Instrumental Motivation*

Reason for learning English	Option (percentage)				
	*5	4	3	2	1
1. Surviving in the society	77.5	13	6.5	2.9	0
2. Finding a good job	57.2	31.9	6.5	2.9	1.4
3. Acquiring more information	52.9	33.3	9.4	3.6	0.7
4. Career planning	62.3	30.4	5.1	1.4	0.7
5. Becoming more knowledgeable	48.6	31.9	17.4	1.4	0.7

\* 5=strongly agree; 4=agree; 3=neutral; 2=disagree; 1=strongly disagree.

Descriptive statistics was also performed to explore the trend toward subjects' responses in the three groups. While finding that subjects in the three groups responded differently in the variable of motivation, the results of this study showed that their responses did not increase as a function of increased length of residence abroad (Table 5). For instance, the mean value shown in the variable of motivation was the highest when the length of residence was less than one year. It was the lowest when the length of residence became 1-2 years. The mean value rose again when the length of residence was more than 2 years. Although the results of this study found that the responses shown in the variable of motivation

did not increase with increased length of residence abroad, one-way ANOVA (Table 6) was performed to confirm significant differences in the responses to the variable of motivation among subjects in the three groups ( $F=6.050$ ,  $p=0.003$ ). This revealed that English learning motivation held by the subjects in the three groups was significantly affected by intercultural learning but did not increase with increased length of residence abroad. In addition, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the variable of motivation via reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha coefficient=0.825) ensured the satisfactory reliability of the questions in the questionnaire.

Table 5

*Trends toward Responses in the Variable of Motivation*

Variable (Length of Residence)	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Less than 1 year	31	43.6129	4.43229	0.79606	41.9871	45.2387
1-2 years	41	40.0976	6.68508	1.04403	37.9875	42.2076
More than 2 years	66	43.3182	4.25408	0.52364	42.2724	44.3640

Table 6

*Test of Differences in the Variable of Motivation*

Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	P
318.493	2	159.246	6.050	0.003*
3553.283	135	26.321		
3871.775	137			

\*p&lt;0.05.

Descriptive statistics was further performed to find that subjects in the three groups also responded differently in the two variables of integrative motivation and instrumental motivation but that these responses did not reflect an increase as a function of increased length of residence abroad (Table 7 & 9). For instance, the mean values shown in the variables of integrative motivation and instrumental motivation were the highest among subjects studying abroad for less than one year but the lowest among those who had studied abroad for 1-2.years. The mean values rose again when the length of residence was more than two years. This indicated that there were similar trends toward the responses in the variables of integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. In addition, one-way ANOVA (Table 6 & 8) was performed to confirm significant differences in the responses to the two variables of integrative motivation (F=6.773, p=0.002) and instrumental

motivation (F=3.463, p=0.034) among subjects in the three group. More importantly, the responses to these two variables were found to follow significant trends which were similar to those shown in the variable of motivation. This implied that both integrative motivation and instrumental motivation might be part of motivation and thus did not increase as a function of increased length of residence abroad either. When the correlation test was further performed to explore the relationship between the two variables of integrative motivation and instrumental motivation (Table 11), the results of the study showed that they were significantly correlated (r=0.704, p=0.000). Additionally, the results of reliability analysis showed that the reliability of those questions as the indicators of integrative motivation (Cronbach's alpha coefficient=0.7335) and instrumental motivation (Cronbach's alpha coefficient=0.6654) were within a satisfactory level.

Table 7

*Trends toward Responses in the Variable of Integrative Motivation*

Variable (Length of Residence)	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
					Less than 1 year	31
1-2 years	41	18.8049	3.83549	0.59900	17.5942	20.0155
More than 2 years	66	20.7879	2.66323	0.32782	20.1332	21.4426

Table 8

*Test of Differences in the Variable of Integrative Motivation*

Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	P
Between groups	122.154	2	61.077	6.773	0.002*
Within groups	1217.469	135	9.018		
Total	1339.623	137			

\*p&lt;0.05

Table 9

*Trends toward Responses in the Variable of Instrumental Motivation*

Variable (Length of Residence)	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Less than 1 year	31	22.6129	2.71634	0.48787	21.6165	23.6093
1-2 years	41	21.2927	3.14041	0.49045	20.3014	22.2839
More than 2 years	66	22.5303	2.09189	0.25749	22.0161	23.0446

Table 10

*Test of Differences in the Variable of Instrumental Motivation*

Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	P
46.189	2	23.094	3.463	0.034*
900.282	135	6.669		
946.471	137			

\*p&lt;0.05

Table 11

*Correlation in Two Variables*

Variables	R	P
Integrative motivation *	0.704	0.0000*
Instrumental motivation		

\*p&lt;0.05

### Implications and Suggestions

An overview of the results of this study has found that due to the effects of intercultural learning, students studying abroad are significantly motivated to learn English for different reasons but that their

English learning motivation commonly does not increase as a function of increased length of residence abroad. For example, the mean value among subjects in three groups rose up to the highest when the length of residence was 1-2 years. However, it was the

lowest when the length of residence was less than one year. The mean value was found to be between two extremes when the length of residence was more than two years. More importantly, it was found that such a trend was significant. This indicates that students' English learning motivation is significantly affected by intercultural learning but does not increase as a function of increased length of residence abroad. It can thus be argued that the degree to which students studying abroad increase their English learning motivation may not be identified simply through one single factor such as the length of residence. Because motivation may be influenced by other factors, the researcher suggests that those influential factors should be taken into consideration in exploring those effects.

In addition, the results of this study have shown that students studying abroad respond differently to both integrative motivation and instrumental motivation and that the trends toward their responses in these orientations are similar and significant. However, the results of this study also find that neither integrative motivation nor instrumental motivation increase as a linear function of increased length of residence abroad. For instance, their mean values rose up to the highest when the length of residence was 1-2 years. However, they were the lowest when the length of residence is less than one year. Those values were found to be between these extremes when the length of residence was more than two years. Since the results of this study have shown that students' responses to both integrative motivation and instrumental motivation resemble those to their motivation, it can be argued that the component of English learning motivation may be too complex to be predictable from length of residence abroad. Especially when the results of this study also

show that integrative motivation and instrumental motivation are significantly correlated with one another, it can also be argued that both of them may interact in reflecting the effects of intercultural learning on English learning motivation which leads to English acquisition among EFL students studying abroad. The researcher emphasizes that the close relationship between integrative motivation and instrumental motivation may make it uneasy to predict the degree to which students studying abroad increase their English learning motivation. While echoing the perspectives of other researchers, the researcher maintains that both integrative motivation and instrumental motivation are equally important to students studying abroad for experiencing intercultural learning and achieving the success in English acquisition. In response to Gardner's claim that instrumental motivation is simply like attitudes and less important than integrative motivation to EFL students for achieving the success in English acquisition in the socio-educational model (Gardner, 1985), the researcher argues that integrative motivation and instrumental motivation should be considered to be two types of motivation which are included in one dimension of English learning motivation and lead to English acquisition. It is also suggested that the function of instrumental motivation in reflecting the effects of intercultural learning should not be ignored but rather strongly recognized.

### **Conclusion**

Since EFL students may experience intercultural learning everywhere in a study abroad context, they may unavoidably be affected by such learning experiences. More importantly, EFL students may also benefit from intercultural learning while studying abroad. Because it is found that intercultural learning

significantly affects English learning motivation which is beneficial for English acquisition, it can be concluded that due to the effects of intercultural learning, EFL students become more motivated to achieve the success in acquiring English as a shared language in a study abroad context. When EFL students' responses to integrative motivation and instrumental motivation are found to resemble those to their motivation, the results of this study also show that integrative motivation and instrumental motivation are significantly correlated with one another. The researcher also concludes that both integrative motivation and instrumental motivation can be considered two types of motivation which play a role in reflecting the effects of intercultural learning on English acquisition among EFL students studying abroad. While emphasizing that integrative motivation and instrumental motivation may interact in enabling EFL students studying abroad to make a choice in getting involved in the target culture and experiencing intercultural learning, the researcher further concludes that such a close relationship can even be the key to determining how intercultural learning leads to English acquisition. It is hoped that English teachers, educators and researchers across the world pay more attention to the importance of intercultural learning to EFL students in the twenty-first century of the global society for achieving greater success in English acquisition outside the foreign language classroom.

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