

EFFECTS AND OUTCOMES OF A STUDY ABROAD SEMESTER

—

**INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT
IN AN AUSTRALIAN CASE STUDY**

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Statement of Candidate

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled “Effects and Outcomes of a Study Abroad Semester – Intercultural Competence Development in an Australian Case Study” has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that this thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received is my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

Global citizenship and intercultural competence are highly sought-after skills in today's globalised world. Desired graduate capabilities, as developed through higher education, include the attitudes, skills and knowledge that one needs to competently and successfully live, work and interact in a world where peoples' cultural identities are developed beyond national borders. Through the internationalisation of the tertiary education system, institutions can assist students in developing these capabilities to effectively and appropriately communicate with people of different cultural backgrounds. Outbound mobility and study abroad is one side of these internationalisation efforts, which helps students to become interculturally competent global citizens.

In this thesis, after an introduction of the importance of study abroad on a global and national level, an overview of current theories in the field of intercultural and language learning is given. The attitudes, skills and knowledge that an intercultural speaker has to exhibit are explored next and research outcomes on their enhancement through study abroad are discussed. This leads into the field of the development of intercultural competence during overseas studies and the adaptation process that is connected to it. Following a qualitative research methodology, the concept of intercultural competence and its development during a study abroad semester are examined from the students' perspective.

On a conceptual level, students' opinions on intercultural competence components slightly differed from those listed in the research literature; however their development, especially on a behavioural and cognitive level could be confirmed to correspond to previous research results. The role of the target language was separately focused on and of special interest for this study. No direct connection between the level of comfort in intercultural encounters and the competence level in the target language could be found; however, the importance of culture contact for language learning could be confirmed.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Overview and Significance

“If Australia is to develop graduates who exhibit the awareness, knowledge and skills of a global citizen, then evidence-based research is needed to inform policy makers in government and the university sector.” (Daly & Barker 2010, 340)

Creating global citizens or graduates is a declared goal of the internationalisation aims of higher education institutions and is supported by the Australian Government, as it:

... produces global citizens who form networks and collaborations to foster wider international business engagement, achieve diplomatic solutions to world pressure points, develop innovations in science and technology to improve quality of life and environmental sustainability, tackle global challenges like climate change and embrace cultural differences that enrich our social experiences. (Gillard in SPRE 2009, 12)

The internationalisation of education has been a worldwide phenomenon with increasing value to governments and institutions in the last 25 years (Crichton & Scarino 2007, Pasfield et al. 2008). It comprises educational efforts that already start in primary and secondary education, but mainly tertiary and vocational institutions in higher education. In this context, internationalisation is defined as: “[T]he process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension in the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight 2003, 1) or what some researchers call global or intercultural citizenship education (Knight & Altbach 2007, Tarrant & Sessions 2008, Byram 2008). As Bryant (2006, 1) states, a global citizen is a person “... with the ability to work, play and live somewhere other than the land of their birth. [T]his person exhibits agency (is proactive and engages in civic life) and primacy (has the capacity to make change happen).” In contrast to this definition, that solely defines them as people who could live anywhere in the world, Byram (2008b) more specifically describes an intercultural citizen as being:

... one, who, first, has the competences of active citizenship needed in a community – whether local, regional or national – where there is a shared language and shared meanings, and who, second, also has the attitude, knowledge and skills of intercultural competence which enable them to participate in multilingual and multicultural communities. Such

communities exist within states, and increasingly so due to mobility and migration. They also exist when citizens of different states participate together in any form of joint activity. (p. 7)

He emphasises not just active participation in their own society as a citizen, but also individual traits and knowledge that are needed in a global society, whether inside or outside their own country. By mentioning multilingual and multicultural communities, this definition suits not only the European circumstances, but also the Australian ones, since it is a country of migration, where in major cities about one-third of the population speaks a language other than English at home (Clyne 2005, Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011). Moreover, more international and connected work places and societies mean that people inevitably have more direct contact with people of different cultural backgrounds.

The difficult and salient task of transforming students into global or intercultural citizens engages policy makers and educators alike (Daly & Barker 2010). As Alred, Byram and Fleming said (2003, 6), one of the goals of education is to promote "... a sense of interculturality, an intercultural competence, which is fundamental to education". It is believed that it will assist students when meeting people of other cultural backgrounds in their home country or other countries, when working in international teams, while studying abroad or simply during overseas travels. The ability to communicate appropriately and efficiently with people of different cultural backgrounds is essential for all of these activities (Deardorff 2006, Fantini 2005). One of the many ways to develop these intercultural capabilities is by study abroad (SA), as promised by universities, the government and scholars (see Chapter 2). Hence, education has to offer students the ability to develop and enhance intercultural skills/capabilities, or their intercultural competence (IC), because of first-hand experience in other countries, which is undeniably one of the big supporting factors in their development (Mohajeri Norris & Gillespie 2008). However, the skills, attitudes and knowledge that define an intercultural person, the importance of being able to speak another language, and how a study abroad sojourn can help to develop them, are all widely discussed topics that constitute the research field of study abroad outcomes and intercultural competence.

Although students are the essential receivers as well as the ones that pay for these efforts, educational objectives and curricula are usually established in top-down processes, often initiated by new governmental policies and then implemented by the institutions (e.g. the New Colombo Plan; see 2.3.1). Usually outcomes are measured against standards that policy makers and educational officers set as thresholds. Apart from certain credit point requirements, there is often no fixed study abroad agenda. A study abroad semester (SAS) is in many cases seen as a bonus and enhancement of one's résumé, but its wide range of possible benefits and outcomes are often not fully taken into account, because one simply does not know what results can be achieved and moreover it is difficult to measure them.

Nevertheless, students undergoing a study abroad experience are often recruited by promising them generic personal, academic and career outcomes, and study abroad is seen as a shortcut to enhance them (Mohajeri Norris & Gillespie 2008). Study abroad programs further promise to be an effective way to improve one's intercultural competence as well as to learn a language in a short period of time. However, study abroad research shows that positive outcomes are not necessarily mainly taken from this experience: some students report no language gains at all, difficulties adjusting, a negative view on the host culture, or, more severely, psychological distress while living abroad (Ecke 2013, Jackson 2011).

About 6% of Australian undergraduate students currently participate in some kind of study abroad experience, which could reach from a short field trip to a year-long exchange (Olsen 2008). As numbers are rising, so are demands for more study abroad assessment, especially by educators, because they, as well as students, parents and officials, want to know the benefits of the sojourn that is often costly and not necessarily seen as an essential part of the degree. Knowledge about realistic outcomes of a study abroad semester as well as an approach that incorporates the students' perspective is therefore desirable. Numerous studies have tried to explore what effect a study abroad sojourn can potentially have on students' intercultural as well as language competencies; however, very ambiguous results have been published so far. It is important for

institutions to know that the SAS is really delivering what they promise or rather what is expected, as justification of their efforts and support. To understand the influencing factors that might interfere with the experience will further help to improve programs and support networks, to offer a satisfying experience for both sides. This includes research on intercultural (communicative) competence as a concept, and intercultural learning as a process, both of which are still being discussed for their components, interrelations and how exactly their development can be enhanced.

Two major theoretical models are introduced in this thesis to explain the concept of intercultural competence (IC): the pyramid model of intercultural competence by Darla Deardorff (2004, 2006) and the well-established intercultural communicative competence (ICC) theory by Michael Byram (1997) that constitute the basis of the Council of Europe's endeavours for plurilingualism and European citizenship through language education. Both models agree on similar IC components, but their number is limited in both cases and the question on how they are developed in the learning process is only marginally addressed. Further, the models derive from either consent findings among different IC scholars or classroom findings and are rather theoretical, not clearly indicating their application for experiential learning situations such as studying abroad. What the students' perspective on IC is and how they experience intercultural development during a study abroad semester are two of the big questions this study attempts to answer.

1.2 Research Scope

In order to broaden the research on study abroad and intercultural competence development, this thesis examines a group of students that had chosen to study a Bachelor of International Studies degree, which includes an obligatory study abroad semester.

The process of intercultural learning is a very individual one and can therefore not be generalised. This is because, firstly, students have different cultural backgrounds and their experience with languages, cultures and living abroad situations are very

diverse. Secondly, their semesters overseas are highly individual since they take place in a rather uncontrolled learning environment in different countries and much about their language gain and participation in the target culture depends on the students' attitudes and efforts, but also on external factors. This case study attempts to give a better insight into students' perception of their semester abroad sojourn and to provide a greater overview about effects, outcomes and impacting factors on students' intercultural and language learning as well as their adaptation process.

Therefore, this study on the one hand focuses on the interdependence and development of language and attitudinal, behavioural and cognitive factors within a study abroad setting. On the other hand, the general experience and what interfered/enhanced students' intercultural learning is the wider and second focus of this thesis. Deriving from open questions that resulted from the research literature as well as directly from the data that students provided, this study's scope follows these three major interests:

- (1) To build a common basis on the understanding of IC, the students' perspective on what components they think IC consists of and which ones they believe have been enhanced by the SAS is explored. It is further of interest what role students assign to the target language as part of IC and of successfully living abroad.
- (2) The development of students' self-perceived comfort in intercultural situations was of further interest and was assessed over time. Intercultural encounters in their own country, in other countries and at university reflect on students' intercultural competence and readiness to face these situations. Further, specific attitudinal, behavioural and cognitive features that are related to IC are also assessed for their changes over time. These provide a general overview on students' development of their IC and the influence of the SAS on it.
- (3) Since intercultural development and language learning are subject to many different influencing factors, their impact are taken into account and are

examined for their effect on these SA outcomes. What factors help to predict intercultural and language learning outcomes and which ones obstruct them, as well as the connection between intercultural competence and language gain are looked at closer as part of students' adjustment process.

The study's research design is guided by the rationales of case study research, qualitative content analysis, a dynamic and open view on culture and language learning processes, longitudinal assessment, and design flexibility to accommodate the emerging results of previous research steps. It was aimed to achieve a triangulation of the data and sources by using three different, mainly qualitative research instruments in a longitudinal research methodology: surveys, a self-reflection essay and the *Reflection of Intercultural Encounters* (RIE), a questionnaire that investigates students' comfort in intercultural encounters.

1.3 Chapter Outline

As an extension of this introductory chapter and in order to further emphasise the significance of the research topic and the importance of study abroad in general, Chapter 2 broaches the issue of internationalisation of higher education worldwide and in the Australian case. This gives insights into data and information on general internationalisation activities and more specifically on study abroad as one of them. The aims and the involvement of the Australian Government and of higher education institutions in encouraging students to study abroad are then explored. Further, academic and career related outcomes that can be enhanced by studying abroad are presented and the employers' perspective on IC employability skills are presented, to further show the significance of study abroad outcomes.

Chapter 3 leads into the field of intercultural competence, by first discussing important terms like culture and language and by explaining their interrelation and mutual influence, in particular against the Australian social and education background. Intercultural competence as a general concept is then discussed and the previously

mentioned two significant models, by Deardorff and Byram, are introduced in some detail. Since a strong emphasis is put on IC components, a research overview on attitudinal, behavioural and cognitive components of IC, and if and how they are developed during a study abroad semester, is given. This constitutes essentially the core of the first research question. Following this, models of intercultural competence development that include the previous notions and findings are presented to lead the way into the procedural level of intercultural development. The second research question is concerned with IC development in general and changes in attitudes, skills and knowledge in particular. Therefore the topic of IC assessment is addressed and current trends are discussed. Then, adaptation and the adjustment processes during a sojourn are introduced in more detail. After a theoretical overview of the adjustment process, predictors and stressors that might influence students' IC before and adaptation during the SAS are addressed in more detail, which is essentially what the third research question explores. All three research questions are then elaborated on at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 4 provides a comprehensive overview and discussion of the methodology and its applications in this study. Starting with the theoretical implications of case study research and a mixed method approach, the assessment tools are further introduced. An extensive explanation of how the three research questions are going to be assessed and analysed follows this. The setting and educational background of this case study and the way intercultural outcomes are pursued in this study's context, shows one example of how universities try to achieve their internationalisation goals. Following this, a broad introduction of the research subjects, their demographics and their cultural, language, and experiential backgrounds are given.

The next three chapters are dedicated to one of the research questions each. Chapter 5 presents and discusses the findings of the first research question about the components of IC, the role of the target language and what IC components the SAS had especially impacted on. Results of some of the survey answers as well as the self-reflection essay are used to find answers about the students' perspective on IC.

The findings of the analysis of the *Reflection of Intercultural Encounters (RIE)* questionnaire and of the survey questions on attitudinal, behavioural and knowledge changes over time are shown in Chapter 6. This helps to answer the second research question and with the help of the previous results it enables a deeper insight into students' IC development and further explores reasons to why this might have changed.

Chapter 7 explores answers to the third research question and delves deeply into the process of adjustment during a study abroad sojourn. It examines what stressors influence students' intercultural competence development negatively, as well as what predictors might help to foresee certain changes. Of special interest here is the connection between intercultural and language learning and different survey answers are cross-matched in order to find answers to this very salient point.

All results are summarised in Chapter 8 and conclusions based on the previous research findings are drawn, as well as suggestions for applications and future research are made.

2. STUDY ABROAD – STATE OF THE ART AND RATIONALE

Study abroad, as one of the components of internationalisation of the tertiary education sector, is an extensively researched field with its different types and variations, economic effects, outcomes and influencing factors. Since its inbound-side is of major economic value for many universities in English-speaking countries including Australia, research is increasingly focusing on international students' experiences and is supported by governments, private associations and educational institutions. Outbound activity, or study abroad, is the other, often smaller side of internationalisation endeavours, at least when it comes to actual student participation numbers as well as research output in the Australian case. However, domestic students, as well as their parents, educators and future employers deserve to receive well-researched information about its effects and outcomes – which is what this study is examining. Efforts to raise awareness for study abroad are made on governmental as well as institutional levels, both supporting study abroad by following their own goals.

In this chapter a general overview of the significance of study abroad on different levels is given: starting with an introduction to the field of internationalisation in general and an overview of worldwide and national trends, including quantitative data of Australia's internationalisation of tertiary institutions, followed by government and universities' efforts and a presentation on current research of academic and career outcomes of studying abroad.

2.1 Study Abroad as Internationalisation Concept

Internationalisation combines all efforts of an institution to provide an international in-country (or on-campus) as well as out-of-country (or off-campus) learning experience with the help of institutional activities such as international co-operations and involvement, degrees, curricula, programs, research, staffing and student participation. A large number of these efforts in English speaking countries goes into

improving the domestic or on-campus learning experience mainly catering for international students, but also promoting international degrees and internationally enriched and globally focused curricula and units for domestic students (Nesdale & Todd 1997). One of the attempts of enhancing this is to improve students' outbound mobility by various study abroad programs.

Darla Deardorff (2004) visualises internationalisation in higher education in the following figure (Figure 1) which presents the standpoint of mainly American higher education institutions, but it generally applies to the situation of Australian higher education institutions, too. It shows the inputs and outputs which can be measured in numbers and statistics and the activities it takes to receive these numbers, as well as educational outcomes of these endeavours, highlighting interculturally competent graduates.

Figure 1: General program logic model applied to internationalisation, (Deardorff 2004)



Deardorff's model lists study abroad as one of the various activities of internationalisation between inputs and outputs. While it seems logical that governments and administrators are mainly interested in the numerical outputs;

graduates, their parents, employers, educators and scholars might be more interested in the actual outcomes of internationalisation.

2.2 Internationalisation – worldwide and in Australia

2.2.1 Worldwide

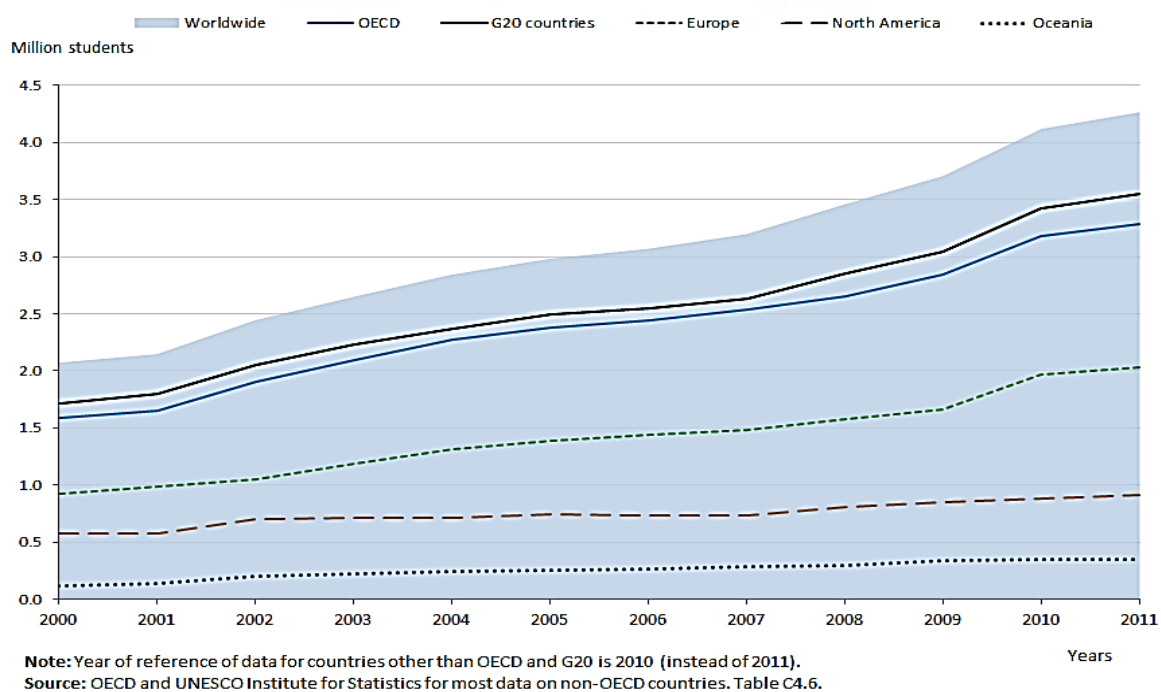
History shows that international education and study abroad are nothing new and are a worldwide occurrence. Scholars and researchers in Europe and Asia have always travelled abroad to explore new theories, gather information and to teach at foreign universities (Cluett 2001). Similarly, students moved to other countries to pursue education they could not get in their own country or to improve their skills. Although there is no consensus about the beginnings and creation of study abroad, there are numerous records of students being taught and scholars teaching at foreign educational institutions, dating as far back as ancient times (Cluett 2001). Numerous articles and books present overviews about the history of study abroad, and especially its development in the United States and Europe¹, which will not be repeated here (e.g. Coleman 1998a, Ireland 1999, Ward et al. 2001, Cushner & Karim 2004, Hulstrand 2006a).

These days, study abroad is expected to become even more popular, since the internationalisation of the education sector has generally been accepted and accelerated (Altbach & Teichler 2001). Current trends of study abroad numbers show, that especially South East Asian, Eastern Asian, Middle Eastern and Eastern European countries are increasingly popular as study abroad destinations. The United States has seen decreasing numbers of international students, as countries in Asia invest heavily in their education. Also, since there is a growth of countries providing coursework in English, such as Scandinavian, Middle European and South East Asian countries, English-speaking countries do not have this monopoly anymore (see Figure 2).

¹ As large receivers of international students, but also, in the European case, as large senders (Erasmus, Sokrates programs).

Also, new forms of SA programs emerged, for example transnational programs, like a Semester at Sea (McCabe 1994), and the construction of overseas campuses (Coleman 2003, Strategy Policy and Research in Education Limited – SPRE 2009). While in 2000 more than 1 million students studied outside their home country, this increased to 2.7 million in 2007 and there is an expected growth to about 7.2 million by 2025 (SPRE 2009, Daly & Barker 2010).

Figure 2: Evolution in the numbers of students enrolled outside their country of citizenship, by region of destination (2000–2011), (OECD 2013)



2.2.2 Australia

Over the last 60 years the Australian Government has become more involved in the internationalisation of the on-shore (home sector) educational sector through the internationalisation of policies, research and research links, curriculum and teaching, staff and student services, and community outreach. Starting with the Colombo Plan in 1951, the Australian government gave scholarships to thousands of talented Asian students so they could benefit from the Australian tertiary education system as part of an 'education as aid'-program to help educate students from countries with a less developed higher education system. This soon made Australia one of the largest

providers of higher education in the Asia-Pacific region (Cuthbert et al. 2008, SPRE 2009). From then on, more and more universities engaged in the internationalisation of their institution. In 1984 the Committee to Review the Australian Overseas Aid Program ('The Jackson Report') suggested to view education as an export industry, since foreign money flows from it into the domestic economy. "The shift from a philosophy of educational aid to educational trade had commenced" (SPRE, 2009, 10). This phase is often referred to as "the trade phase" (ibid.), because all international students who met the institutions' requirements could study in Australia and consequently they came in large numbers. In 2008 the third wave in Australia's international education history started and it now aims for a richer and deeper educational experience rather than just mass commercialisation.² Australia is now (2013), with 6.1% of all students being international students, the fifth largest provider of international tertiary education among all OECD-countries (AEI 2013c).

The benefits of large international student enrolment numbers for the Australian economy and universities are obvious. With over \$9.8 billion in export income international students contributed enormously to the Australian economy in 2012–13 (AEI 2013a). It is seen as Australia's biggest services export industry and third biggest general export industry (Cuthbert et al. 2008, Department of Education, Science & Training (DEST) 2009b, Daly & Barker 2010). At the same time it constitutes a large amount of universities' revenues every year³ and many tertiary education institutions have become dependent on the income received from international students (Ward et al. 2001). The internationalisation of research helps Australian universities to progress in specialist areas and innovations and to improve their international ranking and reputation. Increasing internationalisation also helps students and staff to have a more diverse and greater international on-campus experience and to incorporate this into the curriculum and teaching activities. All these advantages explain the government's and institutions' efforts and policies (SPRE 2009).

² According to Universities Australia: <http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/page/policy-advocacy/international/>.

³ 15% of the yearly revenue in 2007 (SPRE 2009).

Since this aspect of the Australian higher education system is a major economic and political factor, we are well informed about numbers, reasons, experiences and other factors influencing international students' decisions to study in Australia (or not). According to Australian Education International (AEI 2013b) 504,544 international students⁴ received some sort of education in Australia in October 2013; 228,263 of which were enrolled in higher education institutions. Although recent enrolment numbers of international students are declining, the institutions' efforts will continue, especially since their income relies so heavily on study fees from international students. Consequently, there has also been a lot of research (see ISANA website⁵) about the internationalisation of Australian campuses and the study experiences of international students at Australian universities.

The above mentioned numbers prove that Australia indeed constitutes a perfect research ground in the field of internationalisation with the 'on campus' international side of Australian higher education being well appreciated, analysed and researched. However, internationalisation goes both ways and the 'off-campus' side has long been neglected and respective research has only recently increased and studies been published (Daly & Barker 2005, 2010; Malicki 2006, Olsen 2008, ISANA website⁶).

Although the experience of international students on Australian campuses is a form of study abroad too, on-shore internationalisation is not the scope of this study, so the focus is directed to the off-campus side of internationalisation efforts. This thesis aims to enlighten the other side of internationalisation, namely Australian students spending a certain amount of time overseas as part of their university degree. This aspect of the Australian education system has not been that well elaborated and international benchmarking of outbound mobility is still not satisfactory according to government reports:

Australia as a destination for international students is well researched. Less is known about the numbers of students in Australian universities who undertake international study experiences during their courses, the characteristics of those students, their types of experiences, their fields of education, and their destinations. (SPRE, 2009, 37)

⁴ They are full-degree and full-fee paying students.

⁵ <http://www.isana.org.au/articles-mainmenu-30>.

⁶ <http://www.isana.org.au/articles-mainmenu-30/study-abroad-mainmenu-60>.

Therefore, a closer look into the study abroad phenomena will reveal what is known and what still remains unclear, and aims to widen the research base from the students' perspective.

2.3 Study Abroad in the Australian Education System

2.3.1 The Government's Off-Campus Engagement

After decades of mainly promoting Australian education to international students (in-country), because of diplomatic and financial reasons, educators and politicians have recognised the advantages of international education for their domestic students, because they were facing a huge number of international Australian degree holding students applying for residency and decreasing numbers of skilled domestic employees. The terms 'student or outbound mobility' are used for government policies and their implementation by the institutions to create study abroad programs and to promote them among students. 'Study abroad' or 'exchange' is the actual sojourn during which students stay at a partner institution overseas to undertake some kind of formal education or professional development during the course of their studies. The Australia 2020 Summit's final report⁷ argues engagement in outbound student mobility would create 'international good citizens' with increased diplomacy skills and the ability to promote a culture of peace locally, nationally and internationally, and offers support for "incentive-based language training and cultural familiarisation (e.g. supported international study)" (Australia 2020 Summit Final Report 2008, 372).

Naturally, different countries have different reasons for engaging in outbound mobility, but generally the long-term economic advantage through a well-skilled work force is a desired goal for most countries, as well as a universal educational objective. The Australian Government supports outbound mobility mainly by emphasizing its economic advantages and rising security issues for the domestic and international market (Liddicoat 2009): (1) to address skill shortages through improved global skills and knowledge; (2) to ensure that Australia keeps pace with global industry trends

⁷ Held by the former Labor government summoning views of the wider Australian community.

and competitiveness and (3) to help to build human capital and capacity to contribute to productivity gains as organisations become increasingly global in their outlook (DEST 2009b).

In 2008, Australia's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education at the time, the Hon. Julia Gillard, highlighted in her opening speech at the Australian Education International Industry Forum in 2008 the importance and aims of international education for Australian students:

Many benefits flow our way, as our own students study overseas in greater numbers and are exposed to other cultures and education systems. Such exchanges deepen and improve our own education system and I look forward to seeing a real growth in numbers of Australian students taking the opportunity to study overseas. (SPRE 2009, 8)

She further agrees with Bryant's previously mentioned definition of a global citizen facing the outside world by stressing its importance for the economy and diplomacy, rather than declaring it necessary for intra-cultural (inner-country) and individual matters. Promoting study abroad for Australian students at a government website⁸, however, assures students of improved personal, academic and advanced career outcomes and emphasises employers' positive attitudes towards students with international experience. Stressing new urgent global and national issues and the need for more internationally educated Australian students, Australia is now heading towards comparable strategies with North America and Europe, employing a combination of programs.

According to the Australian Government report *The Nature of International Education in Australian Universities and its Benefits* (SPRE, 2009, 14), combined internationalisation efforts would involve mainly on the institutions' side:

- *International Student Programs*, where international students study on campuses in Australia, in higher education and in pathways to higher education;
- *Transnational Education Programs*, including delivery of courses outside Australia, partnerships offshore and pathways offshore to universities in Australia;

⁸ AEI: <http://www.studyoverseas.gov.au/whystudyoverseas/whystudy.html> (retrieved June 23, 2011) has been replaced by <http://www.studyoverseas.gov.au/studentstories/Pages/default.aspx>.

- *International Student Mobility*, where students undertake outgoing international study experiences, of a range of types, away from home campuses; and
- *International Projects*, where staff carries out project work or customised training, outside Australia or for clients outside Australia, for development assistance or commercial purposes.

Countless *International Students* and *Transnational Education Programs* were developed in the last 60 years, whereas *International Student Mobility Programs* have only supported student mobility over the last 20 years. Since Australia's main economic focus lies on Asia, major government programs to enhance the last two points – *International Student Mobility* and *International Projects* – between Australian and Asian universities have been established to create study abroad opportunities for national students and staff visits with the help of bilateral exchange programs: The University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific Program (UMAP), founded in 1993 and the University Mobility in the Indian Ocean Region Program (UMIOR) in 2000 (Daly & Barker 2010)⁹ are two examples of past governmental endeavours. Further, the International Student Exchange Program such as the Endeavour Cheung Kong Student Exchange Program, the Study Overseas Short-term Mobility Program, the VET Outbound Mobility Program as well as the Asia Bound Grants Program provide financial aid for students who want to study overseas. Since so many different funding bodies, schemes and programs existed, the National Forum on Outbound Mobility was created in 2004 to “unify existing strategies, highlight areas of best practice and identify areas that require further work and policy” (Malicki 2006, 2).

Recently the New Colombo Plan has been launched by the new government, focusing more than ever on the enhancement of educational exchange with Asia. “Over time, the Australian Government hopes to see study in the Indo-Pacific region become a “rite of passage” for Australian undergraduate students, and as an endeavour that is highly valued across the Australian community” (Department of

⁹ See more about the history of international co-operations in Daly & Barker 2010.

Foreign Affairs and Trade, DFAT 2013). The government provided \$100 million for scholarships and mobility grants, and an internship or work component as a compulsory part of the overseas experience is suggested to provide students with essential professional experience. The learning of the host country's language is further seen as an essential part and is required from all participants. Although there has been a strong focus on Asia, the need to expand co-operation with the so called 'innovator countries' was expressed too (Malicki 2006).

From 2008 onwards, new numbers show that more Australian students study abroad and the gap with the US (in 2005 11.9% of undergraduates) and Europe (2.2 million by mid-2010, European Commission 2009) is closing (Daly & Barker 2010). The increase has been about 10% per year in the years after 2004 (DEST 2009b). This growth can be explained by the previously mentioned government programs, other financial aids like the Commonwealth OS-HELP loan scheme¹⁰, the facilitation of credit transfers from study abroad courses and the increase of transnational courses in English.

The government's strong engagement in study mobility calls for and justifies research on the outcomes of such encounters (Malicki 2006). In order to promote SA to students, the government's website (www.studyoverseas.gov.au) emphasises its advantages in learning a language and a culture first-hand, and further stresses that "[m]any employers recognise that people who have spent time overseas for study have international skills that are in increasing demand"¹¹. Therefore, study abroad perfectly serves as a "resume booster" and one is able to widen ones professional networks while studying overseas. Further, the personal development, while overcoming problems and adjusting to a new culture, language learning and the ability to make international friendships are stressed.

¹⁰ From UMAP the universities receive \$5,000 for each student and OS-HELP supports students with a loan up to \$10,000 (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008).

¹¹ <http://www.studyoverseas.gov.au/studentstories/Pages/default.aspx>.

2.3.2 Australian Study Abroad in Numbers

At the beginning of the 21st century, the numbers of Australian students studying abroad is still much smaller than in many other countries and does not compare to the number of students Australia received: about one-fifth of, at some universities one-third, of students on Australian campuses and in transnational education programs are international students (or non-English speaking students) in some undergraduate degree programs almost up to 50% (Olsen 2008, www.gooduniguide.com.au)¹².

To appreciate the value of international education, broad research about outcomes and influencing factors is needed, but only limited and little detailed data are available so far (Daly & Barker 2010). The Australian Universities International Directors' Forum with the assistance of the International Education Association of Australia conducted a study of 39 universities to quantify and "enhance the quality and standing of Australian international education" (International Education Association of Australia, 2007). In contrast to the international students' numbers that are updated and published every year, study abroad statistics are not followed up yearly and this is the most recent study. It shows that in 2010, of a total of 242,647 completing students, 18,340¹³ underwent an international study experience. The majority were undergraduate students which makes study abroad a typical undergraduate occurrence (Olsen 2008, 2011).

Table 1 shows the program type students participated in, with exchanges usually lasting one semester or longer. The majority underwent a program for academic credit, which seems to be a decisive factor. According to Australia Education International, 9,968 Australian students completed their entire degree overseas (in 2009), but detailed research and numbers in this field are still missing (AEI 2011).

¹² As one example: number of non-English speaking background students in undergraduate degrees at Macquarie University Sydney = 49% ; postgraduate students = 49%, from <http://www.gooduniguide.com.au>.

¹³ 2009: 15,058; 2007: 10,718; 2005: 7282.

Table 1: International experiences 2010 by type, (Olsen 2011)

International Study Experiences 2010 by Type	Number of Experiences
Exchange	6,696
Other Semester or Year Programs	228
Short Term Programs	5,889
Placements or Practical Training	2,650
Research	2,309
Other	568
Total	18,340

In 2011 about 18% of the total number of study abroad students studied a degree in the field of Culture and Society, and about 17% in Management and Commerce (Olsen 2011). The largest number of students studying overseas are from these two areas of studies, but these data also clearly show that more students of other fields like Engineering, International Studies, Law and Health and students enrolled in double degrees took the opportunity to undertake some sort of study abroad experience.

In 2011, Europe (37.4%; most popular UK, Sweden and Germany) was the most favourable destination followed by Asia (31.8%; most popular Japan, China, Korea, Hong Kong) and the Americas (24.3%) (SPRE 2009, Olsen 2011). Other less frequently chosen destinations became “trendier” and student numbers leaving for Africa and Middle Eastern countries are rising (Olsen 2008). Due to the increased support by the government study abroad programs numbers have clearly changed in favour of Asian countries and North America has fallen out of favour¹⁴.

2.3.3 Universities’ Efforts

The ‘Outbound Mobility Practices at Australian Universities’- survey by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations in 2008 showed that 90% of the Australian universities agree that a study abroad experience can benefit students in gaining:

¹⁴ Retrieved February 21, 2011 from

<http://www.spre.com.hk/download/AUIDFMobility2007AIECPaper.pdf> offers all underlying numbers published by the Australian Government, written by Olsen.

- an international perspective on their field of study;
- greater independence and self-confidence;
- international understanding;
- international networks;
- increased employability skills;
- expanded career options (DEST 2009a).

Except for the first two points that emphasise students' academic and personal development, these outcomes resemble the arguments the government lists on their current website and stress students' employability and capability development. These will eventually benefit the economy; however, concrete skills are not mentioned here and not backed up by recent research literature.

According to this survey, almost all universities promoted study abroad in 2008 and about 74% of the Australian universities believe that study abroad is a desired graduate outcome and collect data about its outcomes and benefits. The overwhelming majority of universities generally agreed that a well-organised range of study abroad programs is a powerful marketing strategy, since "there is increasing evidence that students are selecting our institution because of the locations where they can go on exchange" (Daly & Parker 2010, DEST 2009a).

Looking at how some universities promote study abroad on their websites, however, reveals a large discrepancy in the perception of the outcomes and benefits of study abroad. These differences in promoting study abroad range from rather short outlooks¹⁵ (i.e. more confidence and independence, added value to the degree, favourable employability, and adventure and travel experience) to websites¹⁶ that promise students a whole set of generic personal, global, professional and academic outcomes, which sound rather unrealistic and imposed on the students. As these examples show there is quite a difference in the perception of study abroad outcomes, therefore research in the outcome area is necessary and this study will contribute to it. Despite these differences all of the surveyed universities offer

¹⁵ i.e. http://students.mq.edu.au/opportunities/student_exchange/how_does_exchange_work.

¹⁶ i.e. <http://www.international.unsw.edu.au/outbound-opportunities/outbound-exchanges>.

semester or year-long exchanges, which shows the importance they ascribe to it as opposed to shorter stays or other options.¹⁷

Despite improvements in offering different programs and helping with credit transferability, there are still challenges. Most universities in the above mentioned survey agreed on existing problems like the lack of awareness about mobility options for students; educators' and parents' lack of understanding of the benefits of outbound mobility; language and culture barriers; insufficient data, research and costs. This study can help to provide more research on some of these issues, especially in the area of outcomes and in informing about the influence of language and culture barriers.

In the following sub-chapter, general academic and career outcomes related to study abroad are looked at as two very convincing aspects for the significance of study abroad. This shows how realistic the government's and institutions' evaluations of SAS outcomes are and leads deeper into the field of research this study is concerned with.

2.4 Study Abroad Outcomes and Effects

"International educators have during the past decade become increasingly aware of the need to identify and measure the learning outcomes of students participating in study abroad programs"
(Vande Berg, 2001, 31).

Clearly, classroom learning is just one way of gaining new knowledge and skills. As internationalisation endeavours of curricula, staff and research progress become more effective, studying on campus already provides an invaluable international experience. However, the positive impact and additional output of studying abroad is generally accepted, as previously seen. If one considers the numerous benefits of study abroad beyond life experience, it can effectively impact on a student's personal, academic and career development. "The great potential of study abroad learning experiences is that they offer a rich variety and depth of learning spaces" (Passarelli & Kolb 2012, 143). Especially the psychological and social dimensions of

¹⁷ See Olsen (2008) or DEST (2009) for an overview of different study abroad options at Australian universities.

study abroad can affect students learning lastingly (ibid.) Subject specific knowledge and skills as well as language and culture learning are just some of the many learning effects that can be enhanced. However, since outcomes are multifaceted, interdisciplinary, varied and individual it is difficult to assess them holistically. Nevertheless, Vande Berg (2001) emphasises:

Today's students and their parents are more inclined than ever to hold colleges and universities to account for the quality of the educational opportunities they provide – educational consumers want assurances that institutions will provide the knowledge, skills and awareness that will contribute directly to success after graduation. (p. 31)

Therefore, large numbers of different studies assessing study abroad outcomes can help to contribute to the knowledge basis of study abroad outcomes. Considering the immense political and financial support from the government and institutions, its justification beyond 'travel and life experience' is necessary. The reasons why governments and educational institutions support study abroad have been outlined previously: long-term economic, political and diplomatic goals as well as employability and the gain of internationally-sought-after skills seem to be the main reasons for the state and institutions.

In the following section, study abroad (SA) outcomes that are of interest for institutions (academic outcomes) and employers (career outcomes) will be presented in a general overview and will lead into this study's focus on intercultural, language and personal outcomes. It should be remarked that many of these outcomes are interrelated (Hadis 2005b) and influence each other's development.

2.4.1 Academic Outcomes

Often, the academic gains of a study abroad sojourn are doubted, especially by employers (Mohajeri Norris & Gillespie 2009). However, universities' views on the academic quality of studying overseas are generally positive (Steinberg 2002) and there are mostly no concerns about the academic coursework completed abroad. The establishment of 'Best Practice Guides' (i.e. by Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education, DIISRTE) and a standardisation of higher education, i.e. through the Bologna Process in Europe, helped to improve academic contexts and unify standards.

While study tours or short-term programs often serve a certain academic purpose like language immersion, longer programs leave the teaching of knowledge to the host institution and are therefore less controlled. However, the curricular integration of study abroad is an important goal for the home institution during longer programs, since students often feel they 'waste' too much time otherwise. Flash (1999) could show that this is usually not the case as there are no significant degree delays among study abroad students. Still, academic achievements are often not the main purpose for studying abroad (Thompson 2004). Typically students in their first or second year at university "set a low priority on studying for the sake of expanding their knowledge" (Hadis 2005b, 60) and often refer to their study abroad sojourn as 'the trip', implying that they see it more as a social or touristic experience (Ingraham & Peterson 2004, Hadis 2005b). Thus, academic achievements and foci become rather secondary. Hadis (2005b) revealed that less than 50% of the students, as they returned from their overseas studies, were more focused on their studies. As a probable answer to this phenomenon, he found that students are less concerned about marks and credits after their return and nevertheless showed a general increase in their academic focus and sophistication (Hadis 2005a/b).

Another study by Mohajeri Norris and Gillespie (2009) revealed an increase among students who later chose an international career, because of their study abroad sojourn. Dwyer (IES)¹⁸ also found a long-term change in the following academic areas in her students: Reinforced commitment to foreign language study (Dwyer: 86%, Chieffo & Griffiths 2003: 70%), influenced decision to expand/change academic majors, influenced decision to go to graduate school (Dwyer: 52%, SAGE¹⁹: 58.7% in contrast to US average of 33.4%), studied abroad again after IES program and use a language other than English regularly. Lathrop (1999), and Mohajeri Norris and Dwyer (2005) showed that SA students exhibit more significant changes in academic autonomy and a general enhancement in educational involvement (87%)

¹⁸ <https://www.iesabroad.org/IES/Students/alumniSurveyResultsStudents.html>.

¹⁹ <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/projects/SAGE/GlobalEngagementSurvey.pdf>.

and the appreciation of the arts. Also studies by Melchiori (1987), Oppen et al. (1990) and Carlson et al. (1990) dealt with academic gains.

The *Study Abroad for Global Engagement* study (SAGE 2005) matched long-term outcomes with demographic factors and found that only higher socioeconomic status and older age had a positive relationship with the pursuing of higher academic degrees. Further, they correlated outcomes with the depths of immersion into the host culture and the cultural distance between host and home culture and found that the more intensive the immersion and the more different the host culture from the American one the more likely students were to continue with an international degree. However, there was no proof that students' academic outcomes improved because of their study abroad.

The effects of SA on students' academic aspirations are of minor interest for this study, but are assessed more generally to see if they have an impact on students' motivation and interests. It is assumed that the general impact of studying in a different country and in a different language will benefit students. However, it is expected that a different education system might also influence the student adaptation and learning process negatively, which has to be assessed as part of their general satisfaction.

2.4.2 Career Outcomes

2.4.2.1 Employability Skills

One of the major goals of tertiary education is the preparation of students for the job market, which today is increasingly globalised as Douglas and Jones-Rikkens (2001) acknowledge:

Today's ... student must be prepared to deal with international issues as escalating globalization brings cultures and societies closer together. Most importantly, future business managers must be prepared to interact with people and cultural situations that differ significantly from their ... life experiences. (p. 56)

Surely not every student is an aspiring manager, but it is generally assumed that many job profiles require some sort of international engagement or intercultural competence, especially in a multi-cultural society like the Australian one. The Australian Department of Education, Science & Training (DEST 2009b) refers to the

following shared competencies for students majoring in Business, Engineering, the Humanities and Sciences as being acquired, developed or enhanced by studying abroad:

- The ability to function in multicultural teams;
- An understanding of ethical and professional responsibility;
- An understanding of the impact of disciplinary solutions in a global and societal context;
- An ability to apply disciplinary knowledge.

When it comes to study abroad career outcomes, the students' as well as the employers' perspective, have to be taken into account equally. The students' perspective will be examined first.

Employability is not necessarily one of the main reasons why students chose to study abroad (Thompson 2004, Daly 2007). However, during or soon after the completion of their experience abroad, many students feel that it has effected or will affect their career goals and paths (Armstrong 1984, Hannigan 2001, Mohajeri Norris & Gillespie 2009), and career planning clarity is gained by most study abroad participants, regardless of age (Hadis 2005a). For example, the majority of former Erasmus-students stated in an longitudinal Erasmus mobility study (Bracht et al. 2006) that the study abroad experience had a positive effect on their future career development and it helped them to obtain their first job.

Various longitudinal studies (Lathrop 1999, Wallace 1999, SAGE 2005) have been undertaken to measure study abroad's long-term influence on students' careers. One of these was carried out by the previously mentioned SAGE-study, surveying study abroad students over the last 50 years. General outcomes were, for example, that men, after studying abroad, were more likely to pursue an international career than women (although more female students participate in study abroad programs according to Chieffo and Griffiths 2003) and the same was true for students who stayed in countries being culturally very different from the United States.

Participants in student exchange programs feel that the knowledge they gained abroad is relevant to their future jobs (Van Hoof and Verbeeten 2005) and

cited the experience as being responsible for their career choices (Carlson et al. 1990, Christie & Ragans 1999) and knowledge of another language is further perceived to add value to a student's economic and symbolic capital (Heller and Duchêne 2012 in Kramsch 2014). Lathrop (1999) and Mohajeri Norris & Gillespie (2009) observed how study abroad influenced the decision for an international job. According to them, factors like study abroad for a full year or in a direct enrolment program, host university course enrolment, internship participation, and host family living arrangements might correlate with future international work.

The Institute for International Education of Students (IES) advertises important job skills among study abroad students on their homepage²⁰. They found that 76% of their students retrospectively reported that they acquired skill sets that influenced their career path, 62% said that studying abroad initiated an interest in the career direction pursued after the experience, and 48% claimed that they have worked internationally or participated in volunteer activities since having studied abroad.

2.4.2.2 Employer Perspective

Looking at the employers' perspective, two aspects become important. On the one hand, it seems to be a salient point to see how study abroad is generally perceived to justify its benefits for the preparation of students for an ever changing and internationally growing job market. On the other hand, there are opinions on what specific skills employers think can be improved due to SA. Only a few studies explored employers' attitudes toward study abroad (Adelman 1988, Job Outlook 2000, Bikson et al. 2003, Thompson 2004, Mohajeri Norris & Gillespie 2009) and results are highly controversial. The main criticisms on the employers' side is that they are unfamiliar with the foreign university's program quality and reputation, believing that credits are not transferable and students are not able to network nationally during this time abroad (Thompson 2004).

²⁰ <https://www.iesabroad.org/IES/Students/alumniSurveyResultsStudents.html>.

Nevertheless, there are studies that demonstrated that employers do see study abroad as favourable for professional skills and knowledge development. One was undertaken by Trooboff, Vande Berg and Rayman (2008) measuring how senior managers of large companies and in contrast Human Resources staff value study abroad among entry level applicants and found interesting discrepancies between the two groups. In their study, they showed that managers believed that a student's major is the main hiring factor and that HR staff generally regarded study abroad related outcomes as more important than managers did. CEOs and HR staff both valued study abroad experience in a non-English-speaking country equally – but generally not very high – instead, CEOs appreciated study experience in an English-speaking country higher, whereas HR staff responded better to the importance of language skills. All employers valued a study abroad experience followed by an internship as best; but again HR staff showing more interest in it. Further, employers who had previously undergone a study abroad experience themselves believed stronger in its benefits.

Another important question for their study was 'Do employers value certain personal and intercultural qualities and skills that are related to study abroad and international experiences more than traditional workplace qualities and skills, as educators claim they are important to employers?' The results showed that the three most important personal traits for employers (honesty and integrity, shows strong work ethic and self-motivation/shows initiative) are not among the intercultural traits research has found, as can be seen in Chapter 3. However, six out of the twelve most valued traits, were found to be related to intercultural competence (listens and observes well, flexible, adapts well, curious, non-judgemental, willing to take risks, recognises own world view is not universal). Trooboff and colleagues' (2008) survey further investigated professional skills (Table 2) and among the four most wanted capabilities in prospective employees are three that directly relate to study abroad outcomes (works well under pressure; analyses, evaluates, interprets well; works effectively outside comfort zone). The first-ranked answer does not refer to an intercultural skill. As a result of their findings, they conclude that study abroad programs need to be designed more according to required workplace skills, e.g. team work, analytical skills etc., and employers need to be informed about positive impacts

on study abroad. Also, students need to learn ways to show employers what they have learned during their study abroad experience.

In short, studying abroad is not, in and of itself, a way to get a job. Picking the major is probably the single most important decision a student will make, where his or her employment possibilities are concerned. However, students who opt to study abroad are making a decision that can have a very positive impact on their employability. Employers clearly value many of the qualities, and especially the skills, that international educators associate with study abroad. (Trooboff et al. 2008, 31)

Table 2: Personal skills of prospective employees: ranking for all employers, (Trooboff et. al. 2008)

Skills	Importance in Hiring	Enhanced by Study Abroad
1. Effective working in teams	4.73	2.93
2. Works well under pressure	4.69	2.94
3. Analyzes, evaluates, interprets well	4.60	2.92
4. Works effectively outside comfort zone	4.54	4.03
5. Expresses self effectively in writing	4.22	2.60
6. Knowledgeable about firm's core activities	4.22	2.31
7. Communicates effectively in intercultural situations	3.41	4.06
8. Knowledgeable doing business elsewhere	2.92	3.20
9. Understand global econ., political trends	2.74	3.58
10. Well-informed re: world events/history	2.68	3.71
11. Effective socializing/doing business elsewhere	2.14	3.96
12. Knowledgeable re: other history/culture	1.93	4.12

Note: 5-point Likert scale, with 5 = highest, 1 = the lowest importance

Thompson's (2004) survey supports many of these findings²¹, i.e. that employers do not highly appreciate the personality or language gains resulting from study abroad. However, the ability to work in international teams, the knowledge gain and the global perspective are valued by employers. These are also mainly the outcomes that universities promote and that the Australian government proclaims.

Similar finding were also shown in Diamond, Walkey and Scott-Davis (2011) study, who compiled a list of global competencies ranked according to how important

²¹ His study was undertaken to test "employer acceptability and market value of an international degree" (Thompson 2004, 1) among US students and employers as a joint survey interest of the German Academic Exchange Service, the British Council, the Australian Education Abroad Office, and the Institute of International Education, the US Department of Education and the US State Department.

employers think they are. Their ranking shows that working in culturally diverse teams and communication skills are indeed very highly valued (as opposed to the previous findings of Trooboff et al. 2008) and so is drive and resilience and the ability to change perspectives and one's thinking.

Taking these and similar findings, Jones (2013) collected two sets of skills (self-efficacy and people skills) that are seen as requirements of employers and compared them with the outcomes of student mobility programs (study abroad, international work placement, volunteering and service learning) as presented in the general research literature (Table 3). She could show that the enhancement of these skills through study abroad, as well as an increase in maturity and intercultural competence could be proven in numerous studies. This demonstrates the positive influence of these kinds of endeavours and again proves institutions right to promote raised employability skills as study abroad outcomes.

Table 3: Key transferable employability skills and international experience, (Jones 2013)

	<i>Key skills requirements of employers*</i>	<i>Key skills developed through international work placement, study, volunteering or service learning (with relevant reference shown in parentheses)</i>
<i>Self-sufficiency/ self-efficacy skills</i>	Self-awareness Initiative and enterprise Willingness to learn Planning and organizing Integrity Commitment/motivation Problem-solving Flexibility Self-management	Self-awareness, self-confidence, sense of identity, and personal independence (Black and Duhon, 2006; Hadis, 2005; NUS, 2012; British Academy, 2012) Being informed, greater interest in global affairs and cross-cultural perspectives (Crossman and Clarke, 2010; Jones, 2010; Rowan-Kenyon and Niehaus, 2011) Organizational skills, project management, decision-making, creativity and taking on responsibility (Crossman and Clarke, 2010; Jones, 2010 and 2012; NUS, 2012) Vision, independence, experience, broader outlook and attitude (NUS 2012) Problem-solving, coping strategies and risk-taking (Jones, 2010 and 2012) Patience, flexibility, adaptability, open-mindedness and humanity (Williams, 2005; Black and Duhon, 2006; Crossman and Clarke, 2010; Jones, 2012)
<i>People skills</i>	Team working Communication skills Foreign language Networking Leadership Customer service Interpersonal skills Intercultural skills	Team work and team leadership skills (Jones, 2010 and 2012; NUS, 2012) Fluency, accuracy and appropriateness of language competence (British Academy 2012) Mediation skills, conflict resolution, sensitivity, humility and respect (Jones, 2012) Forging of relationships and networks (Crossman and Clarke, 2010) Challenge to personal stereotypes, cultural relativism (Sutton and Rubin, 2004; Jones, 2010) Enhanced intercultural communication, conducting business intercultural (Hadis, 2005; Crossman and Clarke, 2010; Jones, 2010 and 2012; Gu, 2012) Cultural empathy (Williams, 2005; Black and Duhon, 2006; Crossman and Clarke 2010; Jones, 2010) Non-judgmental observation, respect for local values without abandoning one's own (British Academy, 2012) Cultural understandings, ways of thinking and adaptation to complex cultural milieux (Crossman and Clarke, 2010; British Academy, 2012)

As a restriction to the previous studies' findings, Jones however reminds us that students who decide to undergo such an experience might already possess these qualities or have certain advantages in developing them (i.e. previous language knowledge, international experience etc.).

For future research it will be necessary to show target groups and all stakeholders the connection between study abroad and the gain of valuable international skills for the current job market. The importance of intercultural competence and skills in this context are to be explored further.

What this study is concerned with are intercultural, language and personal skills and attitudes that employers indeed see as favourable and that are enhanced by a study abroad sojourn (Jones 2013). As study abroad outcomes are highly inter-related, the links and influence of intercultural, language and personality changes should be researched in more depth. The field of intercultural competence has extensively been researched for the formal education system, but it still needs exploring if and how intercultural competence develops during a study abroad sojourn and what influences its progress.

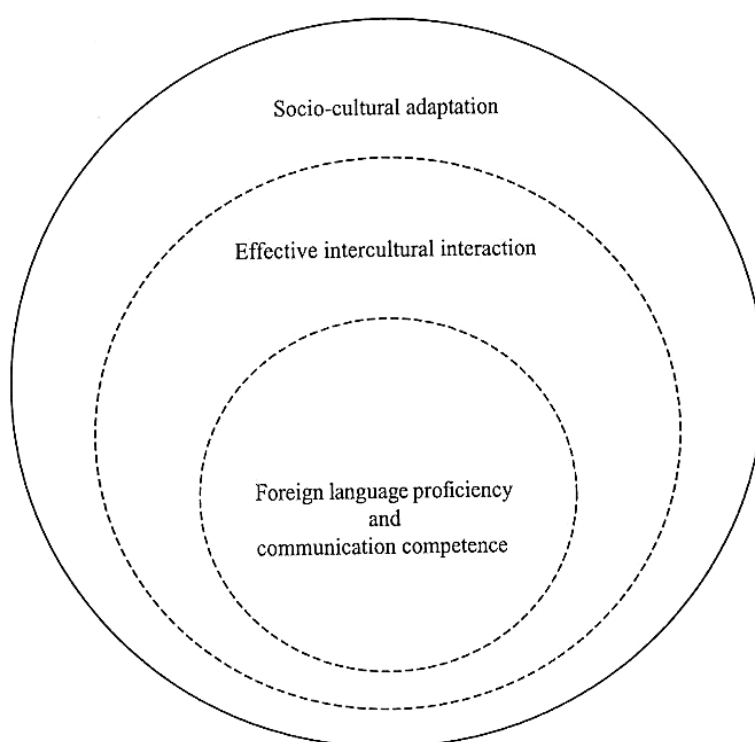
In the following chapter current theories, models and results of outcome measurements are presented. This will lead into the exploration of the central question 'What effect can a study abroad semester realistically have on students?' This study is especially concerned with the outcomes of a study abroad semester from the students' perspective, as it is believed that objectives of a learning experience should not be projected on the students, but rather derive from their perspective and evaluation.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW – THE ‘INTERCULTURAL’

The theoretical setting of this study is within the field of intercultural (communicative) competence and (inter-)cultural learning. There are various theories that try to explain the concept of intercultural competence and the role of languages for its development. Many of these theories were developed against the context of formal education and language learning and teaching (i.e. Kramsch 1993, Byram 1997, Byram & Zarate 1997, Seelye 1997, Roche 2001, Liddicoat et al. 2003). Study abroad is a very specific case of culture and language learning, since formal classroom factors (i.e. teacher, material, instruction, feedback) often do not apply. Moreover, adaptation processes students are undergoing to adjust to the new environment have to be taken into account.

Masgoret and Ward (2006) introduced a model (Figure 3) of language proficiency & communication competence, effective intercultural interaction and sociocultural adaptation, to summarise the processes students are involved in when living overseas and to show how they are related. It consists of three circles that condense the necessary steps students studying abroad are undergoing in order to successfully communicate with people of different cultural backgrounds and to adjust to the new living and learning environment.

Figure 3: Interactive model of foreign-language proficiency, communication competence, effective intercultural interaction and sociocultural adaptation, (Masgoret & Ward 2006)



As the inner circle, language proficiency and communication competence are seen as the core of interaction and adaptation (Searle & Ward 1990, Ward & Kennedy 1993b): "Indeed, if individuals making cross-cultural transitions are to communicate successfully across cultures, they will be required, at least to some extent, to speak the language of the receiving community" (Masgoret & Ward 2006, 61). This competence, together with effectiveness in intercultural interactions (middle circle) forms the basis of the notion of intercultural (communicative) competence (ICC). ICC, in turn, is one of the major prerequisites for a successful socio-cultural adaptation (outer circle) and scope of this thesis.

This chapter's outline roughly follows the layout of this model, starting from the inside. Recent approaches to the concept of 'culture' and the connection to languages are introduced as the theoretical foundation of the first circle's content and essentially of this entire study. As a second step and link to the second circle, two frequently referred to models of intercultural competence (IC) and intercultural communicative competence (ICC) are introduced, so there is a clear understanding

on what 'effective intercultural interaction' is and what attitudes, skills and knowledge an intercultural person has to exhibit. Following this, an extensive overview of these three major components or prerequisites of intercultural competence and what the research literature reveals about their development by studying abroad is given. Further, theories on intercultural development and learning that are of significance for this study, are presented, so the learning processes in the inner and the middle circles and how they influence each other become clearer. The area of research of the outer circle, 'socio-cultural adaptation', concludes this chapter, by looking at this process and some influencing stressors and predictors that seem to be of importance for this study's setting and subjects. These three circles generally represent the research scope of this study, and the three research questions will follow their exploration in the same order (see 3.5).

3.1 Culture and Language

3.1.1 A 'Dynamic' Approach to Culture

In order to eventually examine the development of intercultural competence in a study abroad setting, the notion of 'culture' should be explored for operational reasons and its role in language learning. Many scholars have engaged in the discussion if culture can and should be defined at all and whether the term culture is still applicable today. Kramsch (2008), for instance, argues that the notion of 'culture' itself might not be suitable anymore, as cultures have become increasingly denationalised, deterritorialised, dehistorised, more fragmented and a discourse in itself. Especially in formal education, these problems make it difficult to grasp the concept of culture and to teach about it in language classrooms.

Nevertheless, it is assumed that 'culture' in its broadest sense can be described, shaped, taught, assessed as well as be made responsible for misunderstandings, linked to language and seen as the basis for someone's identity and learning. Hence, it is assumed that there is an underlying concept for all these activities that can be captured and described somehow. The advantages of operationally defining culture and its practices are that it makes misunderstandings

predictable by creating certain expectations and stereotypes, and cultural dimensions become more easily accessible for training and education purposes, however, it makes it difficult to understand and define multicultural societies (Roth 2006) and transcultural phenomena.

Rather than finding a general definition that serves all purposes, a commonly agreed on rationale that can be applied to language and culture learning in Australian (tertiary) education as well as to the study abroad experience is more applicable (Kramsch 1994, Liddicoat et al. 2003, Schulz 2007). "If cultural learning is to constitute a formal objective of foreign language education, we cannot avoid developing an operational definition of culture" (Schulz, 2007, 12).

In a 'static' definition of culture, it used to be a closed term applied by industrialised countries to define obvious characteristics and differences of countries or groups of people (Liddicoat 2002).²² The 'static' view on cultures might have been suitable for a time of less mobility, migration and information exchange (see Kramsch above), and for the pure purpose of learning facts about another country. However, 'old-fashioned' definitions can hardly be supported any more (Welsch 1999, Roche 2001, Liddicoat 2002, Kramsch 2008). Most industrialised countries exhibit a large number of migrants, sometimes not fully assimilating to the majority culture ('multiculturalism') or bringing in new aspects of different cultures that are taken over by other cultural groups, even outside the nation states ('transculturalism', see Roche 2001, Welsch 2009). Cultural exchange and 'blending' beyond borders is a common phenomenon and it is shaped by contact and communication with other people rather than the actual state one lives in (Liddicoat et al. 2003, Welsch 2009). Hence, commonly referred to phrases like 'culture A' and 'culture B' or a nation having 'a culture' are not applicable anymore.

A 'dynamic' view on culture therefore seems to be more accurate and is used for this study's purposes, since it reflects not only on the openness and flexibility of culture, but also the role of communication and language. Rather than finding one definition that combines all classical mainstream aspects of cultures, as well as new characteristics of a multicultural/-lingual and pluralist society in a globalised world,

²² For historic overviews of the changed notion of 'culture' see Roche 2001, Welsch 2009, Piller 2011.

one might just accept that there are many different ways of understanding a group's/person's cultural background and that there is no unified definition anymore that suits them all. Liddicoat (2002) explains this new approach:

The dynamic approach to culture involves seeing culture as a set of practices in which people engage in order to live their lives. The practices are variable. Not everyone within a culture does everything in exactly the same way. Instead, the practices represent a framework which people use to structure and understand their social world and communicate with other people. As such, culture is not about information and things, it is about actions and understanding. In order to learn about culture, it is necessary to engage with the linguistic and non-linguistic practices of the culture and to gain insights about the way of living in a particular cultural context. (p. 7).

In the Australian context, this dynamic approach to culture applies well, because a person's 'culture' is shaped through contact and interaction with people of many different cultural backgrounds, as these interactions are a vital part of the daily life. Without suggesting a general definition, Liddicoat, Scarino, Papademetre and Kohler (2003) mention at least three basic features of culture that suit Australian learners and teachers of languages. According to them, a modern approach to culture and language teaching takes three major aspects into consideration: (1) culture is multifaceted, variable and dynamic; (2) culture is created through interaction rather than being a pre-existing construct, and (3) culture is fundamentally related to our understanding of who we are (identity).

As the view on what 'culture(s)' is, has changed significantly over the last centuries, so has the approach on teaching culture and integrating it into language learning. Taking the basic characteristics of culture into account, intercultural learning has been specified as educational goal in Australian secondary education and is currently being implemented in a new language curriculum (Liddicoat et al. 2003, Asian Languages Professional Learning Project, ACARA 2013). Cultural knowledge is thereby not defined as factual knowledge about a culture, but rather as behavioural knowledge, knowing how to engage with an individual's cultural background (ibid). Moving on to the application of this view, the connection of culture and language learning will be outlined.

3.1.2 The Role of the Language

Although cultures become more transcendent and the existence of transnational phenomena is more and more common (Welsch 2009), experiencing other cultural and social practices first-hand (i.e. during study abroad) can offer a deeper understanding of them. There are “concepts, attitudes, values, beliefs, conventions, behaviours, practices, rituals, and lifestyle of the people who make up a cultural group, as well as the artefacts they produce and the institutions they create” (Liddicoat et al. 2003, 45) that can be perceived as different in various communities, hence they can also be made explicit and therefore be learnt (Bolten 1993, Byram 1997, Welsch 2009).

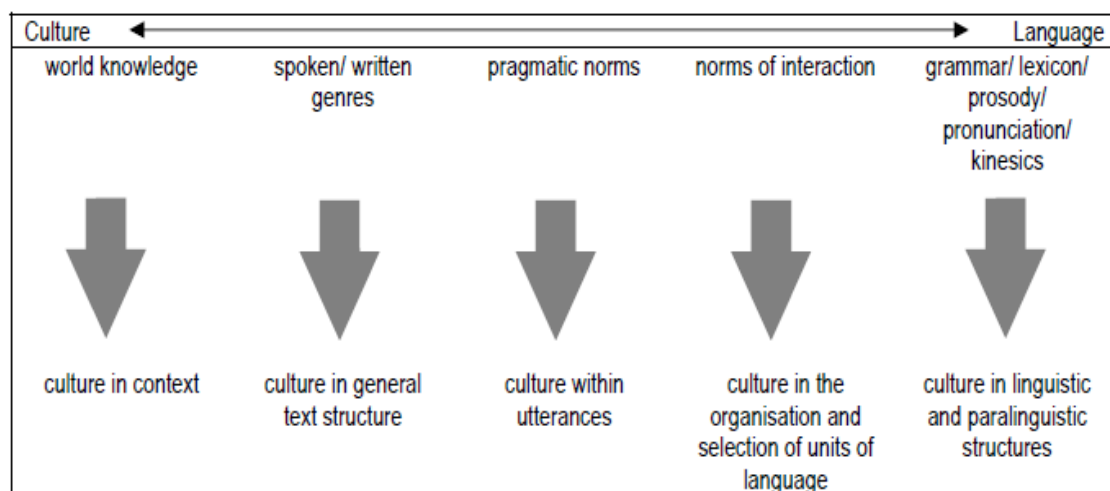
Although many values, beliefs and behaviours are also highly individual and influenced by many personal factors, people with a common experiential background often share their meanings “to open a link to language, in which they are embodied and to a view of language learning as learning the meanings of a specific social group” (Byram 1997, 39). These shared meanings are usually unknown to people of other experiential or cultural backgrounds, but necessary for successful communication. For their communicative purpose, languages cannot be taken out of their socio-linguistic contexts, because speakers (or writers) and listeners (or readers) express and receive utterances in a certain context with a certain function (Scarino 2010). Since language is “a medium for as well as a shaper for culture²³” (Paige et al. 2003, 4) any linguistic expression is linked to a cultural context and is also formed by it (Saunders 2006, Piller 2011). “Culture shapes what we say, when we say it, and how we say it from the simplest language we use to the most complex. It is fundamental to the way we speak, write, listen and read” (Liddicoat, 2002, 5). Therefore, it is impossible to separate language and culture in a communicative context (Saunders 2006, Scarino 2007). Liddicoat and his colleagues (2003) summarize:

Language is always used to communicate something beyond itself and is at the same time affected by the context in which it is found. The cultural context therefore affects the ways in which language is shaped by participants in a particular interaction, at a particular time and in a particular setting (p., 8).

²³ Although linguists like E. Sapir (1921), B. L. Whorf (1956) and L. Vygotsky (1986) early on recognized the influence of language on thought and perception, the link and influence of language on culture learning and vice versa is still being discussed today.

A connection between language and culture exists on many verbal, non-verbal, para-verbal and trans-verbal levels, in written and spoken genres, pragmatic and interactional norms and conventions of speaking, i.e. paying respect, role taking etc. (i.e. Byram 1997, Crozet & Liddicoat 1999, Liddicoat et al. 2003). Crozet and Liddicoat (1999) further demonstrate the link between language and culture in the form of a continuum (Figure 4) according to how attached culture is to language. In its extremes, world knowledge is almost detached from a specific language whereas grammar, vocabulary, structures etc. are closely linked to socio-cultural conventions.

Figure 4: Points of articulation between culture and language, (Crozet & Liddicoat 1999)



Languages can therefore not be learnt without knowing the cultural background of its speakers and the interactional circumstances it is used in (Byram, 1989a; Kramsch, 1993a, Scarino 2010). Important here is socio-cultural as well as socio-linguistic knowledge, because knowledge about social concepts and their linguistic representations helps us to appropriately communicate with people.

In the primary socialisation context, learning about these connections in one's mother tongue(s) usually happens unconsciously, comes naturally, indicates the speaker's ethnic, regional, social and educational background and is sometimes restricted to an even smaller group of people (i.e. a sports team or an occupational group) (Saville-Troike 1999, Liddicoat et al. 2003).

Learning a language can help to convey cultural knowledge and it is believed that this can be learned through formal and informal instructions as well as in different learning settings. In interactions with other language speakers, differences become obvious, because a non-native speaker needs to acquire this knowledge first, in order to become a proficient speaker of the language, as opposed to a fluent speaker who knows the linguistic principles of the language but not their socio-cultural conventions. Bennett calls this phenomenon being a ‘fluent fool’, referring to a language learner who knows the grammar, words and semantic rules of a language and uses them effectively, however does not know the underlying appropriate “social and philosophical content of that language” (Bennett 1993, 16). Jackson (2011) agrees with this view:

Foreign language learners may have a reasonably good grasp of grammar and academic vocabulary but have little understanding of (or need for) the socio-pragmatic dimension of the target languages until they engage in sustained intercultural interaction either at home or abroad. (p. 182)

Another connection that has to be kept in mind in a language learning environment is that language, like culture (as previously mentioned), is part of a person’s identity too, and that speaking another language means one has to develop and constantly negotiate a new identity using the other language (Ting-Toomey 1999). One has to deal with the recognition of others and oneself and with power differentials, which are also often influenced by the perception and acceptance of others (e.g. native speakers, teachers). When a student’s identity using their first language collides with a changed self-image when using another language, this can become a major obstacle (Byram 1997, Ting-Toomey 1999, Lo Bianco et al. 1999, Liddicoat et al. 2003, Council of Europe 2008).²⁴

To sum this up, for this study and its research purpose, language is seen as shaped by culture, but also as one of the representations of it. In this sense, they are both intertwined dimensions of each other (Fantini 1995, Scarino 2010). Every speech

²⁴ At this point it shall be mentioned that second language (learning) is a special case as opposed to learning “foreign” languages. A second language is mainly acquired while living in the country where the language is spoken. Together with the language, socio-cultural and socio-linguistic elements are learnt at the same time and sometimes rather subconsciously (like in the first language setting). This and the fact that one is often surrounded by the majority language, distinguishes second language learning from learning other languages which usually happens in rather formal learning setting.

act is a cultural act at the same time (Kramsch 1993a). Hence, language and (inter-)cultural learning go together not just in the primary socialisation and first language(s) context, but also when acquiring an additional language. In the study abroad context, socio-cultural and socio-linguistic circumstances of intercultural encounters are of special importance, as one is surrounded by native speakers and their cultural practises. As one of the aims of this study, it will be explored what role the language plays in the (inter-)cultural learning process and vice versa.

3.2 Intercultural (Communicative) Competence

3.2.1 Approaching Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence (IC) can be seen as part of the research field of intercultural communication and as a specific approach to it. It is an interdisciplinary social science approach that draws its knowledge from psychology, sociology, anthropology, ethnology, communication studies, language teaching and learning, education policies, and diverse linguistic fields (Kramsch 2002, Bennett & Bennett 2004, Jackson 2010). The notion of IC gained more consent in recent years; in the perception of what it actually means, what components it consists of and how to enhance it (Deardorff 2004, 2006). It is primarily concerned with people's behaviour, but not being disconnected from thoughts, attitudes and emotions (Bennett & Bennett 2004). Other terms like cross-cultural, pluricultural, transcultural and global have emerged to contest or widen the notion of the intercultural.

For this present study the term *intercultural* is used for the contact between at least two individuals with different cultural and socialisation backgrounds and speaking different languages. Consequently, any interaction between two people of different cultural backgrounds creates a new 'interculture' or 'third place' (Kramsch 1993a) that has to be negotiated by both. Since mono-cultural and mono-lingual upbringings and personal backgrounds are not the norm anymore²⁵, it is assumed that many different cultural elements are brought into contact during such

²⁵ Although there seems to be a "loss" of languages in favour of the world languages (40% of the world's population speaks one of the eight major languages) (Spitzberg & Changnon 2009).

encounters. This 'third place' is created through the interlocutors' interactions and may consist of elements that both individuals bring into that situation as well as new ones. Being able to 'negotiate' these elements is part of the person's intercultural (communicative) competence and it is assumed that it can be learnt and taught (Liddicoat 2002). So being intercultural, interculturally competent or interculturally literate (Shirato & Yell 2000, Heyward 2002) is an important goal of one's skills and mindset, and communication is the key to any new intercultural/interpersonal situations.

Appropriate and effective communication and behaviour as well as the ability to maintain relationships are the goals of any communicative situation, and communicative skills and knowledge about mannerisms and norms have to be learned and applied in the first/second/third language learning environment alike (Wiseman 2002, Erll & Gymnich 2007). Intercultural communication in general "brings a particularly useful emphasis on the development of IC", state Bennett and Bennett (2004, 149). What is often called intracultural communication (Gudykunst & Kim 2003, Saville-Troike 1999) or cultural competence (Fantini et al. 2001) is what Fantini, Arias-Galicia and Guay (2001) describe as "acceptable and intelligible performance within one's society", whereas intercultural competence refers to the "multiple abilities that allow one to interact effectively and appropriately across cultures" (Fantini et al. 2001, 8).

What differentiates these two concepts is the role of the language. Byram (1997) states, that for him an encounter becomes truly intercultural, if it includes communicative aspects involving the use of another language. That is why he refined the term intercultural competence by adding 'communicative' to it (intercultural communicative competence). In order to truly gain intercultural communicative competence, one has to learn another language and use it as an 'intercultural speaker' (Byram 1997). However, when it comes to the role of language competency, there are still different theories and opinions on whether it is an outcome or prerequisite of intercultural learning and how individual and external factors contribute to its enhancement.

Before looking at specific theories and models of intercultural competence, several factors have to be taken into consideration. As a pre-requisite to the theoretical basis, it shall be noted that different terms are often used for a similar concept. They might refer to cross-cultural competence, intercultural sensitivity, cultural fluency, intercultural competence or intercultural capability (Scarino 2010, Deardorff & Jones 2012), among others, but for the course of this study the already introduced term ‘intercultural competence’ will be used.

Further, there is a large amount of theoretical models defining and determining intercultural (communicative) competence²⁶ with some of them focusing more on the links between components, others more on the process of IC development or purely on the composition of IC (Spitzberg & Changnon 2009). It is further distinguished between models that describe how to manage culture contact and conflict as part of intercultural communication, and models dealing with issues arising from actual cultural immersion. Since in this case study IC development is embedded in the action of adjustment to a new culture(s), it has to be looked at from different angles, and models of the latter kind are of more interest. Especially for the study abroad case, that can only partially be considered as formal education where instructions and guidance is often missing, many different factors influence the whole experience, and comparisons to the “protected world” of classroom instructions are hard to draw. The learning processes consist of different components and stages and are influenced by many different factors, so they are dealt with in this theoretical part as well as in the data presentation. Internal as well as external problems are experienced individually and cannot be generalised. Outcome measurements are hard to achieve and describing the complex process of learning during a sojourn abroad holistically for a group of students would be desirable, but is nearly impossible. It will not be assumed that experiences are the same or are perceived equally, yet the attempt to capture students’ perspectives can give invaluable insights and possibly reveal some shared outcomes or influencing factors.

Moreover, many of these models picture outcomes that are seen against the European or American educational contexts and policy making (Bertelsmann Stiftung

²⁶ See a comprehensive overview in Spitzberg & Changnon (2009).

2006). They are different mainly by the designated role of the language(s) to learn²⁷. Currently, there are national guidelines and recommendations for intercultural language learning in Australia that are surely inspired by previous research findings, but try to focus on the particular social and cultural learning context in Australia (Liddicoat et al. 2003). A new curriculum for learning languages in the Australian secondary education system is currently being introduced, which:

...recognises Australia's distinctive and dynamic migration history. Language learning builds upon students' intercultural understanding and sense of identity as they are encouraged to explore and recognise their own linguistic, social, and cultural practices and identities as well as those associated with speakers of the language being learnt. (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority ACARA 2013, 1)

Once implemented, it might also influence the study of languages in higher education and therefore what study abroad destinations will be on demand.

Finally, another often discussed point shall be made. According to Allport (1979), personal (direct) intercultural contact automatically leads to more understanding and reduces prejudice and negative images, if certain key conditions like equal group status, common communicative goals, cooperation and external support are met. It is consequently generally assumed that an SAS leads to language as well as intercultural learning, but, as will be shown later, many studies have found quite the opposite to be true. As already mentioned, many factors influence the study abroad experience and as a result, unwillingness to communicate or to adapt as well as even negative attitudes and higher ethnocentrism²⁸ may occur. So the degree and quality of the contact is essential (Smith et al. 2006) and enhancement of certain outcomes cannot automatically be assumed. Cultural knowledge alone does not predict culture learning, and culture contact does not necessarily lead to IC (Bennett 2010). However, for this study it will be assumed that there will be some kind of assessable changes of IC and language learning caused by the semester abroad, and that there is a way of capturing them, so they can be observed and described.

²⁷ There are also models that claim to be truly international (Arasaratnam 2005, 2006) and Japanese and Chinese scholars are examining the differences between the East and the West in specific studies which mostly deal with differences in cultural aspect (i.e. Wiseman & Abe 1984, Nishida 1985, Tsai & Houghton 2010).

²⁸ One of the earlier stages of intercultural sensitivity (see 3.2.4 – Attitudes).

In the following two sub-chapters, two theories and models of intercultural competence (Deardorff) and intercultural communicative competence (Byram) will be introduced, to conceptualise the notion of IC (ICC). They conform to the previously established dynamic view on culture and are applicable for different educational settings. These two models achieved wide recognition and agreement among researchers and education associations (even governmental bodies) over the last years (Spitzberg & Changnon 2009), so they represent a common ground in the examination of IC. Both models derive from educational backgrounds, Deardorff's more to highlight the outcomes and prerequisites of internationalisation, and Byram's model to conceptualise intercultural communicative competence for language learning and teaching, including a strong emphasis on the language. Therefore, these two models were found to serve the context of this study well.

3.2.2 Deardorff's Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence

Rather than introducing a large number of models that were created over decades, a study that helped finding a common ground on the definition and components of IC is presented here²⁹ and its results are used as theoretical basis for this thesis. For her PhD thesis, Darla Deardorff (2004, 2006) conducted a large research project in the beginning of the 2000s, to achieve consensus on several aspects of IC as an internationalisation outcome. Mainly U.S. American higher education administrators and a panel of 23 distinguished IC scholars (as identified by the administrators) participated in a three-round Delphi study. Deardorff first asked open-ended questions on the definition of IC. In the second round these definitions were ranked according to their importance and these results were rejected or accepted in the third round. Amongst the scholars the definition of IC as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Deardorff, 2004, 194) was favoured. This definition relates to earlier findings in intercultural communication theories (Hammer, Gudykunst & Wiseman 1978, Hymes 1986) and interpersonal theories (Spitzberg &

²⁹ See Spitzberg & Changnon (2009) for an extensive overview of IC models.

Cupach 1984, Spitzberg 1989). Fantini (2005) explains that 'effective' is concerned with the way people perceive their own performance and 'appropriately' is how others perceive one's behaviour³⁰. So it is on the one hand the action of bringing one's point across, to achieve one's communicative goals and on the other hand to do so without harming the other person's beliefs and values. Most definitions the IC scholars in Deardorff's study agreed with "focus primarily on communication and behaviour in intercultural situations" (Deardorff 2006, 246) and are therefore essentially intercultural communicative competence definitions.

The administrators in Deardorff's study mainly voted for Byram's '*savoirs*' (see next sub-chapter on intercultural communicative competence) as components that summarise IC best: "Knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others' values, beliefs, and behaviours; and relativising one's self" (Byram, 1997, 34). Hence, Byram's model became part of this new conjoint of commonly agreed on components. Other jointly agreed on intercultural communicative and behavioural abilities comprise further: the shift of one's frame of reference, the achievement of one's goals, making and maintaining meaningful relationships, and appropriate and effective behaviour in intercultural situations.

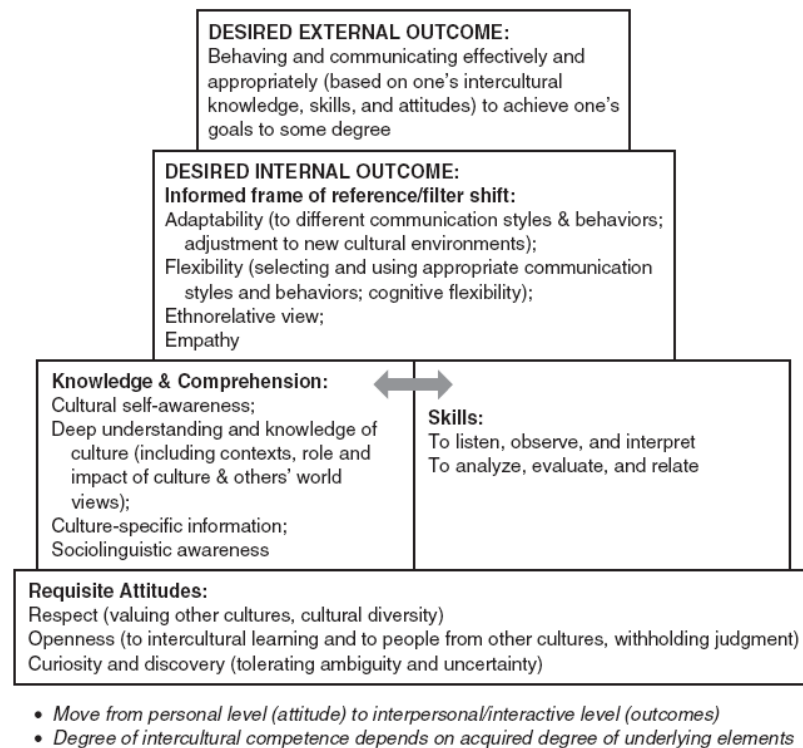
In her pyramid model of intercultural competence (Figure 5), Deardorff summarises her results of the Delphi-study, featuring three basic categories: as prerequisites different attitudinal features such as respect, openness, curiosity and discovery; as second category knowledge and understanding of one's own and the other cultures, as well as socio-linguistic awareness; and as third category skills such as: listening, observing, interpreting, analysing, evaluating and relating. The first goal (internal outcomes) is a shift of one's reference to achieve: adaptability to different communication styles, behaviours and adjustment to new cultural environments, cognitive and communicative flexibility, ethnorelative view³¹ and empathy in order to behave and communicate effectively and appropriately with others. The more

³⁰ See Wiseman (2002) for a more detailed description of this.

³¹ A stage of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett 1986/1993) in which the individual has shifted their world view away from the preconceived cultural view of their own background (see 3.2.4)

components of the model are acquired, the higher the chances of the greater external outcome of communicating effectively and appropriately (Deardorff 2006). The model implies different outcome levels (internal and external) and at the same time reflects the four developmental stages of IC recommended by the *American Council on International Intercultural Education* (1996)³² (in Deardorff 2006).

Figure 5: Pyramid model of intercultural competence, (Deardorff 2006)



In order to reach agreement on the individual components of each category, Deardorff further asked the participants to rank IC components. Table 4 shows the 22 IC components the scholars agreed on the most, in descending order. Components of all three categories (attitudes, behaviours, knowledge) were ranked equally high so there is no preference towards one of the three categories. Understanding of others, as well as of oneself and adaptability, were seen as very important and so were the skills of listening and observing and the traits of openness and flexibility.

³² 1) recognition of global systems and their interconnectedness (including openness to other cultures, values, and attitudes), 2) intercultural skills and experiences, 3) general knowledge of history and world events, and 4) detailed areas studies specialization (e.g. language).

Table 4: Specific components of intercultural competence, (Deardorff 2006)

Understanding others' worldviews
Cultural self-awareness and capacity for self-assessment
Adaptability and adjustment to new cultural environment
Skills to listen and observe
General openness toward intercultural learning and to people from other cultures
Ability to adapt to varying intercultural communication and learning styles
Flexibility
Skills to analyse, interpret, and relate
Tolerating and engaging ambiguity
Deep knowledge and understanding of culture (one's own and others')
Respect for other cultures
Cross-cultural empathy
Understanding the value of cultural diversity
Understanding of role and impact of culture and the impact of situational, social, and historical contexts involved
Cognitive flexibility—ability to switch frames from etic to emic and back again
Sociolinguistic competence (awareness of relation between language and meaning in societal context)
Mindfulness
Withholding judgment
Curiosity and discovery
Learning through interaction
Ethnorelative view
Culture-specific knowledge and understanding host culture's traditions

Although the desired external goal is communication and Deardorff herself stated that “language is a window into how people see the world”³³, her model does not include any other linguistic factors but sociolinguistic awareness. It is solely based on personal and individual traits and skills and how they enhance the internal and external outcomes of IC learning as a summary about what the surveyed scholars and administrators agreed on. Consequences of direct contact with cultures or the role of cultural immersion for the acquisition of the different components have not been specified in her study. It is a rather compositional, hierarchical model that shows only what components IC consists of, but its intention is not to demonstrate how knowledge, skills and attitudes are acquired and how they are linked to each other as well as to language and culture learning. However, Deardorff mentions that it is a

³³ Presentation given by her on October 12th, 2010 at Dunmore Lang College, Macquarie University, Sydney.

model that can serve as a basis for assessment of the different categories and components and as such it is used in the present study. She also created a process model, based on the same components, that illustrates the IC learning process (see 3.5.1).

Deardorff's pyramid model reflects mainly a U.S. view on IC (Deardorff 2006)³⁴, where learning/speaking another language is primarily concerned with major domestic migrant languages, though Deardorff mentions the model is context dependent and not limited. So the intracultural reality of the American educational system is more in the centre of attention: "Intercultural education focuses on race, ethnicity, and culture within the context of our domestic experience" (American Council on International Intercultural Education 2002, 6). In this context, language knowledge becomes an additional skill, or rather an outcome, of IC.

3.2.3 Byrams' Theory on Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

Compared to the domestic reality of the U.S., the European understanding of IC derives from its cultural and linguistic diversity on different national levels as well as across its member states. The Council of Europe promotes learning of a foreign language in the context of 'opening the doors' for getting to know the culture of the neighbour in order to enhance a united Europe and promote peace and individual responsibility. Because of the exposure to so many different cultures and the ease to travel intercontinentally, the aim is that everyone growing up in Europe should have knowledge about other neighbouring countries and their languages, and employ active European citizenship and tolerance (Byram 1997, Kramsch 2008, Council of Europe 2009). The European perspective, as put forward by the Council of Europe, is that language learning is essential to every European citizen and through learning one

³⁴ The American perspective on IC originates from its geographical distance and hybrid domestic culture (Kramsch 2008). Language learning, in an official classroom setting, is valued less than in many countries in Europe and is not one of the major educational goals (Byram 1997). Therefore languages are simply less taught in secondary education and foreign language departments at universities "... are faced with dwindling enrolments and the large-scale instrumentalization of education" (Kramsch 2008, 8). Students do not necessarily expect to use the foreign language in interactions outside the United States (Byram 1997) and often language choices are made because of heritage backgrounds.

or more other languages³⁵, one achieves cultural understanding. The term intercultural communicative competence is therefore introduced with a focus on language learning and teaching. As the *White Paper of the European Commission* (Council of Europe 2008) demands, its aim is that every European citizen speaks at least three European languages and common European language curricula should incorporate contents of subject matters such as literature, political science and history into language learning (Byram 1997).

In this sub-chapter, Michael Byram's theory of intercultural communicative competence is introduced, as one of the well-established and elaborated models that is also used as basis of the Council of Europe's publications on language and IC learning and teaching (Byram & Zarate 1997, Byram et al. 2002, Byram 2009).

As opposed to the previous model that features IC as an internationalisation outcome, the following model was originally designed for the language classroom as well as for teacher education purposes. Therefore, Byram (1997) puts a strong emphasis on the importance of language learning, because "[l]inguistic competence plays a key role" (Byram, 1997, 34).³⁶ According to Byram (1997), the outcome of ICC:

is a learner with the ability to see and manage the relationships between themselves and their own cultural beliefs, behaviours and meanings, as expressed in a foreign language, and those of their interlocutors, expressed in the same language or even a combination of languages. (p. 13).

Later he expands his definition with the notion of the 'intercultural mediator', a person who is able to interpret internal and external differences

either for themselves or for other people. It is also someone who has a critical or analytical understanding of (parts of) their own and other cultures – someone who is conscious of their own perspective, of the way in which their thinking is culturally determined, rather than believing that their understanding and perspective is natural. (Byram 2000, 10)

By drawing on van Ek's (1986) linguistic and socio-linguistic competences, Byram further develops his cultural and socio-cultural aspects, taking into account newer research about non-verbal communication (Argyle 1983), inter-group (Allport 1979)

³⁵ Often referred to as 'plurilingualism' (Zarate et al. 2008, Goullier 2009). Plurilingualism is "... about the transcultural circulation of values across borders, the negotiation of identities, the inversion, even invention of meaning, often concealed by a common illusion of effective communication" (Kramsch 2008, 9)

³⁶ See also Roche 2009 (p.425), 'intercultural competence is not possible without a profound understanding of the other and the own language' (translated from German).

and cross-cultural competences (Ruben 1989, Gudykunst 2004), identities, and language teaching approaches.

The communicative aspects of ICC consist of linguistic, socio-linguistic and discourse competences. Byram (1997) further stresses the importance of non-verbal aspects. He defines the three linguistic competences as follows:

Linguistic competence: the ability to apply knowledge of the rules of a standard version of the language to produce and interpret spoken and written language.

Sociolinguistic competence: the ability to give to the language produced by an interlocutor – whether native speaker or not – meanings which are taken for granted by the interlocutor or which are negotiated and made explicit with the interlocutor.

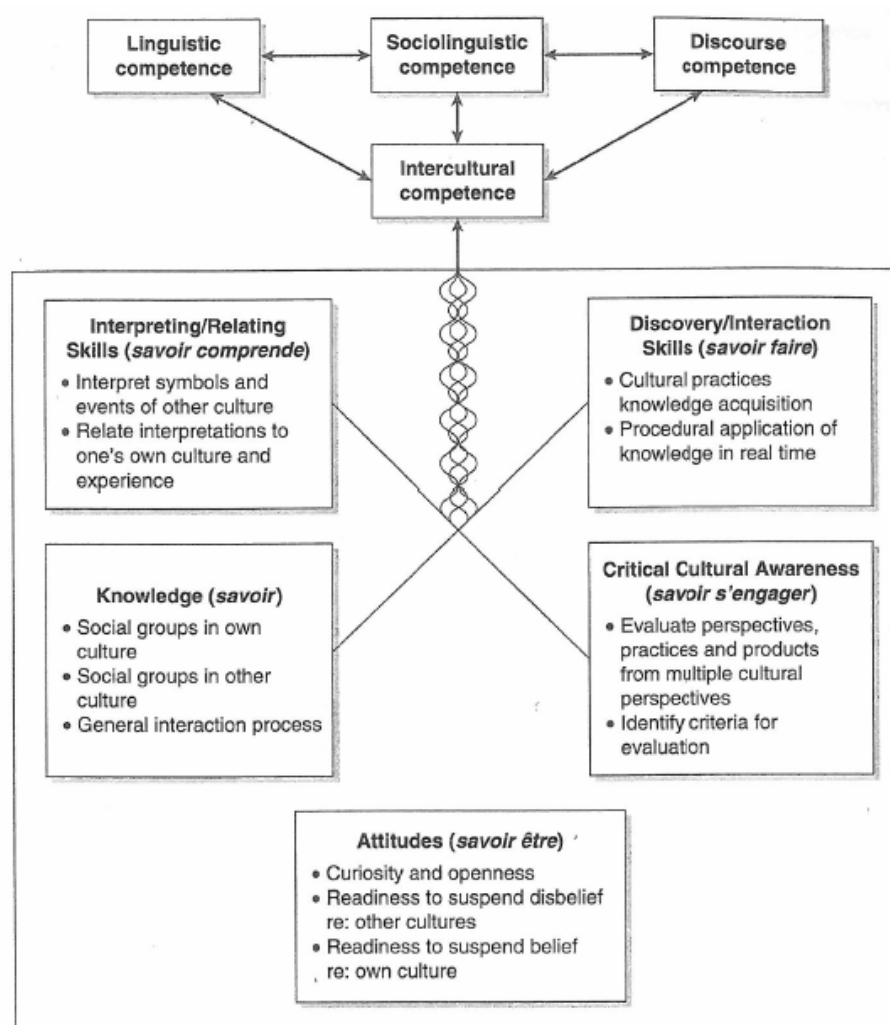
Discourse competence: the ability to use, discover and negotiate strategies for the production and interpretation of monologue or dialogue texts which follow the conventions of the culture of an interlocutor or are negotiated as intercultural texts for particular purposes. (p. 48)

Byram does not compare linguistic competence to that of native speakers, but rather assembles a list of competences a truly intercultural speaker should have. Successful communication is defined by him as: “effective exchange of information and the establishment and maintenance of human relationships” (ibid. 32f.). It therefore does not necessarily mean to avoid misunderstandings or to come to agreements, but “that each understands what the other wishes to say as fully as possible” (Council of Europe 2009, 23). Competences to do so require a set of preconditions which start his description of an ‘intercultural speaker’. These preconditions are basically the same as in many other definitions and models of IC and include: knowledge, attitudes and skills; however, Byram calls these components ‘*savoirs*’, referring to things you know (knowledge) as well as things you know how to do (skills).

‘*Savoir*’ as *knowledge* comprises first of all knowledge of oneself and the other, and secondly of individual as well as societal interaction processes in general (also referred to as culture-specific and culture-general knowledge). Primary and secondary socialisation, especially formal education, provide more or less conscious knowledge about the own cultural background. It also helps to develop a ‘national identity’, depending on how many aspects of it are actually agreed on and represented in a person’s life style, behaviour, beliefs etc. by a larger group of individuals. Knowledge of the target country is often restricted to history, events, their emblems, symbols or institutional knowledge and is ‘tainted’ by the stereotypical and prejudiced perception of the national media or episodes of

experiences of friends and relatives. This knowledge is linked to the second category (*savoir être*) and the awareness about how identities are acquired, as well as how they reflect the perception of others and oneself by others. Procedural knowledge is further necessary to help engage in interaction with other interlocutors to know how to behave in certain situations.

Figure 6: Byram's intercultural communicative competence model, (Spitzberg & Changnon 2009)



'*Savoir être*' or 'existential competence' refers to attitudes to relativise oneself and to value others that are perceived as having different cultural beliefs, behaviours and meanings. According to Allport (1979) these differences are of a stereotypical and prejudiced nature and are often perceived negatively. The attitudes Byram is referring to are curiosity and openness to suspend disbelief and judgement. The

readiness to analyse one's own beliefs and behaviours from the perspective of the interlocutors is another essential ability, that is also called 'to decentre', and in the process of language learning Byram calls it 'tertiary socialisation' (Byram 1989b). Skills of interpreting and relativising are interdependent with attitudinal preconditions not to judge and control value-laden analysis. Discovery and interaction are seen to be easier with an open-minded and curious attitude and an augmented knowledge increases positive attitudes.

Intercultural skills are referred to as '*savoir comprendre*' (interpreting and relating) and '*savoir apprendre/faire*' (discovering and interacting).

The major opportunity offered by [...] exchange is the development of the skills involved in the 'discovery' of a new environment, *savoir apprendre*. Learners can be trained in simple or complex skills, depending on their maturity and language skills, with which they can investigate the environment, look for what is unfamiliar and for explanations which help them to understand. (Byram et al. 2002, 19).

Savoir comprendre is linked to knowledge by using it more or less consciously to interpret and translate behaviours, events or documents and to relate it to similar occurrences in one's own culture. It is further concerned with the ability to find and convey new information using whatever technology possible (Byram et al. 2002). Moreover, handling 'dysfunctions' and contradictions are essential skills in understanding documents, since *savoir comprendre* does not necessarily involve direct interaction with others. In contrast, skills of discovery and interaction might incorporate a social encounter and help to increase and refine knowledge and an understanding of the interlocutor's behaviour, beliefs and meanings. "The skill of discovery is the ability to recognise significant phenomena in a foreign environment and to elicit their meanings and connotations, and their relationship to other phenomena" (Byram 1997, 38). Activities that enhance this skill can be carried out without actually being present in the target country (i.e. by reading texts), whereas the skill of interaction involves at least the presence of an interlocutor from another culture. In such a situation the interlocutors need their knowledge about each other, need to suspend judgement and be sensitive to one another and use their skills of discovery and interpretation to establish a relationship or to mediate between people of different origins. If all these preconditions are successfully applied, one is truly an 'intercultural speaker'.

The fifth *savoir* is '*savoir s'engager*' and Byram calls it (socio)-political education or critical cultural awareness. "It fundamentally re-characterizes language teaching and learning as education for citizenship and democracy" (Houghton 2011). It refers to the ability to critically engage with other cultures' values, beliefs and practices on the basis of human rights and dignity, but was initially relatively unexplored in Byram's explanations. A rational and explicit approach to the evaluation of different cultural encounters is the emphasis of critical cultural awareness that is essential to an intercultural speaker (Byram 2008b).

Byram established a very elaborate model and framework of ICC (Figure 6), but it also comes with restrictions. Similar to Deardorff's model, Byram describes a situational model that refers to objectives or outcomes of language instructions at a certain time in a learning process, but it does not describe the process and interplay of skills and language acquisition during this process. Since it is a conceptual model, it is criticised for not operationalising the mutual relationship of language and cultural components and leaving the level of influence and integration of culture to the linguistic components open (Liddicoat et al. 2003, Scarino 2007). There is also not much said about how the different *savoirs* influence each other or are enhanced in the learning process. Insofar, it describes desirable outcomes and preconditions, but to a lesser degree the effects of a new socio-cultural setting on them, as in an immersion setting. As the development of these attitudes, skills and knowledge (ABCs) during a semester abroad is this thesis' scope, adaptation problems and cultural development theories of the ABC components have to be taken into account, as well as external factors specific to the study abroad situation.

Moreover, Sercu (2004) expands Byram's model with a *metacognitive* dimension, which is partially included in '*savoir apprendre*', but not explicitly mentioned as she relates her assessment model to the *savoirs* with the current educational use of 'competence' as *domain-specific knowledge*. "*Metacognitive strategies* include knowledge, conceptions and convictions regarding one's own cognitive functioning as well as self-regulating mechanisms which help one to plan, direct and evaluate one's own learning processes" (Sercu 2004, 77). Metacognitive knowledge and learning strategies are absent from most conceptual models of IC and ICC, however often find acknowledgement in process models (i.e. Paige et al. 2003).

For this study, a general indication of students' metacognitive skill development will be looked at, but is rather secondary.

On a practical level, it is challenging to match Byram's theory with the reality the students in this study are faced with, since the process of learning and its influencing factors are not taken into account by the model. However, the application of the model and its objectives for the assessment of ICC makes it possible to explore and evaluate IC components as well as language skills at different points in time, which will help to illustrate the process of intercultural learning and its outcomes.

Although this model has a number of restrictions, it comprises major generally agreed on competences and prerequisites and allows room to extend the list of competences mentioned here as well as to assess them separately with different qualitative and quantitative methods. It fits into the design of a university language degree, as its prerequisites might have been acquired through classes and experiences prior to students' SAS. Byram however states that the necessary skills and attributes "can in principle be acquired through experience and reflection, without the intervention of teachers and educational institutions" (Byram 1997, 33) and describes ICC "in such a way that the discussion is of value in any situation" (Byram 2008b, 87) so it can also fit the study abroad context.

Byram's model and expertise assisted the Council of Europe for language teaching recommendations and the creation of the European Language Portfolio (ELP – Council of Europe 2000) and the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters (AoIE – Council of Europe 2009). A part of the ELP (the Reflection of Intercultural Encounters) as well as the descriptors of the Common European Framework of References (which include socio-cultural components based on ICC) were used for this study. Furthermore, the individual components and prerequisites Byram lists in his *savoirs* were used in the self-assessment of students' traits, interests, skills and knowledge. These will be presented in depth in the following section, since part of this study's aim is to enrich the research basis further with the students' perspective.

3.2.4 The ABC Components of Intercultural Competence

When it comes to the dimensions or categories of IC and IC learning, different theories differ on their numbers and terminology. For instance, Deardorff groups IC components in three categories according to 'Requisite Attitudes', 'Knowledge & Comprehension', and 'Skills'. Byram, in contrast, found five (originally four) categories, two of which describe skills (and more or less correspond with Deardorff's skills category), one knowledge, one attitudes and one being critical cultural awareness, which is included in Deardorff's 'Knowledge & Comprehension' group as well. However, essentially most models are built around the three key dimensions (or categories) many scholars agree with: attitudes/affections, behaviour, and knowledge, also called 'the ABC components' (Bloom 1964, Kim 1992, Chen & Starosta 1996, Ward et al. 2001, Paige et al. 2003, Deardorff 2004, Fantini 2005, Passarelli & Kolb 2012). They derive from the attitudinal, behavioural and cognitive dimension of learning (see different theories in 3.3) and intercultural competence.

The attitudinal category might also be referred to as motivation, cultural awareness, empathy or intercultural sensitivity (Spitzberg 1989, Wiseman 2001, Lambert 1999, Chen & Starosta 1996, Bennett 1986). The behavioural dimension might simply be called 'skills' (Byram 1997, Deardorff 2004) or 'operational dimension' (Kim 1992). Sometimes skills and knowledge are one entity when it comes to their development, but they will be treated separately for this study's purposes to gain more detailed information on them (Deardorff 2006, Council of Europe 2009). Each of these categories consists of a number of components that differ considerably in various models.

As this study is interested in the students' perspective on IC components for study abroad, not just the previously introduced ones are of interest, but the wide range of attitudinal, behavioural and cognitive features across the research literature. Therefore, a closer look at what components these categories consist of will follow here. This directly leads to the first research question, trying to shed light onto the students' perspective on IC components and their development during a study abroad semester.

3.2.4.1 Attitudes

Under 'A components' personal traits, affections and attitudes are combined. They often depend on a person's previous experience and personal predispositions and can change during the process of learning and engaging with others. A person's attitudes are powerful tools in the way of how they communicate and relate with others. Positive and open attitudes impact on how effectively a person can develop and use their skills of discovery and interaction when communicating with others, and this person is consequently less likely to experience distress when interacting with others (Byram 1997, Lambert 1999, Fantini 2006). This alone is not enough and Byram (1997) adds that curiosity and discovery, openness, the willingness to suspend disbelief and judgement, and the ability to 'decentre'³⁷ are part of this positive attitude. Further, respect, flexibility and tolerance are often listed (Council of Europe 2001), and tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty (Gudykunst 1998) are also seen as necessary in adaptation situations. Byram (1997) also mentions that attitudes are often interdependent, so if one of the intercultural attitudes and traits is value-laden it will probably affect the others too.

Among the attitudes, that have been found to be especially influenced by study abroad are certain personality changes, a changed view on the own and the other culture, global- and world-mindedness and intercultural sensitivity. They will be elaborated on below.

Personality traits that were often found to be influenced by a study abroad sojourn were maturity, self-awareness, independence, empathy, self-esteem, confidence, flexibility, self-efficacy, values and open-mindedness (Nash 1976, Willis et al. 1977, Frisch 1990, Thomlison 1991, Carlson et al. 1990, Kauffman et al. 1992, King & Young 1994, Laubscher 1994, Herman 1996, Gmelch 1997, Stimpfl & Engberg 1997, Lathrop 1999, Hutchins 1996, Waldbaum 1996, Bates 1997, Ting-Toomey 1999, Zhai 2000, Hadis 2005a, Lindsey 2005, Milstein 2005). For instance, in Hadis' (2005a) study, the majority of the students surveyed agreed that studying abroad made them more independent, teaching them how to make their own decisions and they came

³⁷ The ability to analyse other viewpoints independently from one's own values and behaviours (Byram 1997).

back more self-confident, flexible, cosmopolitan, reflective and independent-minded. Also, open-mindedness was generally found to be one of the most influencing factors for IC and adaptation during a sojourn. It refers to a person's "open and unprejudiced attitude towards outgroup members and towards different cultural norms and values" (Van Oudenhoven and Van der Zee (2002, 680). Having an open mind makes a person more accepting and therefore more adaptable and available for new relationships and learning progress. Also, an open mind often makes it easier to deal with culture shock (Hadis 2005b). Dwyer's³⁸ IES students agreed that study abroad enabled them to better tolerate ambiguity as it serves as a "catalyst for increased maturity". Furthermore, a heightened appreciation of the arts (Chieffo & Griffiths 2003), greater maturity (Frisch 1990), independence and self-awareness (Cash 1993), patience and understanding (Chieffo & Griffiths 2003) and a more salubrious lifestyle (Mohajeri Norris & Dwyer 2005) were to be enhanced by study abroad. An increased confidence and self-reliance were observed in a number of students in different studies and many also reported a changed self-perception (Ingraham & Peterson 2004, McLeod & Wainwright 2009, Dwyer see ¹⁹).

These perceptions of oneself and others often change being faced with otherness and while engaging in intercultural communicative processes. This leads to contrasting one's personal cultural dispositions with the ones of the interlocutor, which often results in a changed understanding of one's own and the other culture (Roche 2001). Ideally the differences are used to broaden one's views, as kind of a 'catalyst'³⁹ to gain a deeper understanding or a 'fusion of horizons'⁴⁰ (Roche 2001).

Among her many findings about study abroad outcomes, Dwyer⁴⁹ claims that 98% of her students reported that the study abroad experience helped them to better understand their own cultural values and biases. Ecke (2013) could confirm this finding in his study of American students who came back after their sojourn in Germany appreciating the positive attributes of their country even more. During that short-term exchange students were found to have a higher sensitivity towards the peculiarities of their own culture, they learnt more about themselves and tend to

³⁸ <https://www.iesabroad.org/IES/Students/alumniSurveyResultsStudents.html>.

³⁹ Translated from German 'Katalysator'.

⁴⁰ Translated from German 'Horizontverschmelzung'.

accept and even idealise their own culture more. Coleman (1998b) in contrast, found that his students did not change their attitude about their own country at all. Furthermore, Allen, Dristas and Mills (2006) found a lower level of identification with the culture of their home country in the homestay group after they stayed with host families, while the non-homestay group identified more strongly with their home culture after studying abroad.

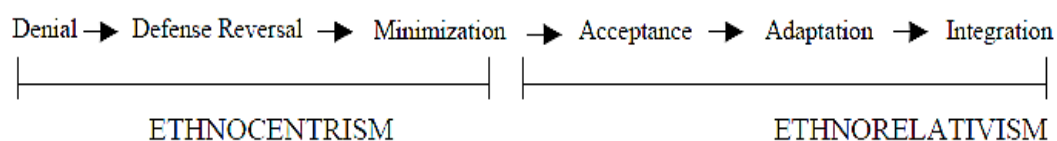
It is a common belief that students return from their study abroad sojourn appreciating or even admiring the newly discovered culture and being able to understand and interpret the peculiarities of the new culture. Stephenson (1999) noticed a number of value and attitude challenges that students with increased self-awareness had to adjust to while being abroad. For instance, many students found it more difficult than anticipated to respect the host country's value system regarding class, gender roles and expected behaviour, race and ethnicity; and to understand a new way of humour. Many students struggled with keeping an open mind about the new culture and being seen as a foreigner, and they were surprised that in some regards they could not stay open-minded to accept some of the host country's peculiarities. Another group only reflected on themselves, noticing that for outsiders, parts of their shared culture could just be as confronting and they agreed that probably every culture has its positive and less acceptable sides. "[They] tend to be just as diverse, complicated, simple, loving, selfish, brilliant, ignorant, shy, loud, and fascinating as any other group of people", one of Stephenson's students noted (Stephenson, 1999, 16). As all of the above mentioned studies relied on self-assessments and self-reports, measurable changes of students' self-awareness and perception of one-self and others could not be proven quantitatively. However, reaching the point of not judging anymore, many of them had successfully reached an important step in their intercultural sensitivity development.

According to Medina-López-Portillo (2004) intercultural sensitivity (IS) is an important predictor in one's intercultural learning process and, as opposed to intercultural competence, it does not comment on one's external behaviour or communicative abilities, but one's worldview and the mental development of the ability to deal with cultural differences. Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) define it as the "sensitivity to the importance of cultural differences and to the points of view of

people in other cultures” (p. 414). Landis and Bhagat (1996) describe intercultural sensitivity as a salient personal trait when living and working with people of different and diverse cultural backgrounds.

Milton Bennett’s developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS 1986/1993) (Figure 11) “... was created as a framework to explain the observed and reported experiences of people in intercultural situations” (Bennett and Bennett 2004). This six-stage model demonstrates in which stage an individual or sojourner is in their “worldview configuration” (Bennett et al. 2001, 13). The “underlying assumption of the model is that as one’s experience of cultural difference becomes more sophisticated, one’s competence in intercultural relations increases” (Hammer et al. 2003, 423). In the first three stages⁴¹ a person’s intercultural mindset is said to be ‘ethnocentric’⁴², meaning one’s own cultural background is the centre of one’s perspective as a way of avoiding cultural differences. In the next three stages⁴³ a person develops ‘ethnorelativism’, meaning that the own culture is relativised in contrast to others, and cultural differences are perceived in a more differentiated way.

Figure 7: Developmental model of intercultural sensitivity, (Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman 2003)



⁴¹ Denial, Defense and Minimalization.

⁴² Ting-Toomey (1999), researching about identity changes and intergroup behaviour, summarises ethnocentricity: “While all human beings carry a certain degree of ethnocentric tendency in them because of their needs for identity security, in-group inclusion, and predictability, a rigidly held ethnocentric mindset creates a superior-inferior gap in intergroup relations. The degree of ethnocentric tendency in an individual can range all the way from the basic need for valued social identity to the identity defensive need for power or dominance. Additionally people can be ethnocentric about different aspects of their culture (e.g. language, food, architecture)” (p. 158).

⁴³ Acceptance, Adaptation and Integration.

Students in a study abroad situation need to develop their IS before, during and after their sojourn and it develops further even after years (Medina-Lopéz-Portillo, 2004).

Intercultural sensitivity is one of the most frequently examined intercultural outcomes and a growing number of studies (Chen & Starosta, 1996, Paige et al. 2004, Medina-Lopez-Portillo 2004, Jackson 2011) deal with the impact of study abroad on it and its development. Paige, Cohen and Shively (2004) found an expected increase in the overall sensitivity and ethnorelativism and a decrease in ethnocentrism among their study abroad students. Medina-Lopez-Portillo (2004) examined the correlation between program length and intercultural sensitivity development and found that students in longer SA programs increased their intercultural sensitivity more than students in short-term programs. Rundstrom Williams (2005) came to similar results using a control group that stayed on campus and Engle and Engle (2005) showed an increase in students' intercultural sensitivity in a longitudinal study with a larger sample size. Another larger study from Spain (Osma et al. 2011) found statistical relevance of the influence of certain personality traits such as acceptance, tolerance, respect and interest on international activities to predict a students' IS and therefore higher success rates in personal and work matters.

Nevertheless, doubts have been expressed that through travel, work and study abroad a greater intercultural sensitivity is achieved. Andersons, Lawton, Rexeisen and Hubbard (2006) express this general uncertainty by quoting Kelly (1963, 73): "... a student could participate in a study abroad program without experiencing the culture in which the student resided", because one can observe an event without experiencing or reflecting on it. They therefore demand more research about the enhancement of IS in certain programs and training methods.

As a last point in the elaboration of IC attitudes, global-mindedness/world-mindedness should be mentioned, as many studies examined its change during an SAS (Carlson & Widaman 1988, Hett 1993, Drews & Meyer 1996, Bates 1997, Kehl & Morris 2008). "Global mindedness entails a concern for issues and processes that affect the world, as well as awareness that local issues are connected to global ones" (Hadis 2005b, 61). Students who study abroad gain global-mindedness when they successfully rise beyond culture shock through open-mindedness (Hadis 2005b) by

changing their perception of the world and of oneself (Ingraham & Peterson 2004, McLeod & Wainwright 2009). Hutchins (1996) conducted a qualitative study about the impact of a study tour on American graduate students and found that it had a positive effect on their international perspective. Moreover, she found changes in personal development in relation to international, global, and intercultural perspectives. Drews and Meyer (1996) contrasted the conceptualization of national groups of study abroad students with students who stayed at home and found that the SA students perceived others in a more 'personalised way' in terms of their individual characters than in a generalised nation-stereotypical way. Among Hadis's (2005a) findings were that students who went abroad already had a high score in concerns about international affairs, appreciation of different cultures and friendliness toward people of other countries. With the help of his post-tests he found an enhancement in: frequency of newspaper readership, interest in international news, interest in issues debated in the UN and enhanced global mobility including journeys to non-English speaking countries. He further found that about half of his surveyed students would consider living or staying abroad for a longer period of time after their study abroad encounter. Also Chieffo and Griffiths (2003) reported more engagement and interest in global concerns. Their study abroad students were more likely to engage with global topics, by using media or talking more to others than other students and they were more interested in how others see them from the outside. Moreover, they explored students' self-perceived impact on their global-mindedness in a short term program and clearly showed that those students believed they acquired internationally related knowledge even in such a short time. World-mindedness is not only connected to a student's intercultural abilities, but is also seen as strongly related to career and personality outcomes as some studies showed:

World-minded individuals are those whose primary reference group is humankind, rather than a specific ethnic group (according to Sampson & Smith 1957). World-mindedness is the extent to which individuals value the global perspective on various issues. World-minded individuals are more likely to see viewpoints that differ from their own ethnic, national, or religious perspectives as valuable. A world-minded individual both recognises and appreciates cultural differences. (Douglas & Jones-Rikkers 2001, 59)

Douglas and Jones-Rikkers therefore expected world-mindedness to have a positive influence on students' managerial and organizational outcomes and proved that the

increased world-mindedness not only prepares students for the changing corporate environment, but also provides additional managerial skills. They could fully support their hypothesis that students who study abroad have a higher level of world-mindedness than non-participating students. The already mentioned longitudinal SAGE study⁴⁴ (2005) of former study abroad participants, examined links between study abroad and future outcomes related to former SA students' lives in general. Among the many outcomes that were assessed and found to be salient for the former SA students, were: (1) global engagement (wanting to make a difference, actively engaged in working for the common good, seeking a more balanced life, changing lifestyles, taking action to influence purchasing decisions to enhance social justice and environmental preservation) and (2) global values (tolerance and seeing multiple perspectives, becoming international and comparative, realization and negotiation of identity and values, critical consciousness related to media). Though this very large study (n>6,000) managed to trace back study abroad impacts of decades, it still lacks a control group and is rather retrospective than longitudinal (SAGE 2005). World-mindedness or global-mindedness is mainly of importance for this study, as students were asked to rank their interest in global, cultural and language matters as part of their IC development. The results are presented in chapter 6.

To complete the itemisation of attitudinal components of IC, J. Bennett further lists (2010): inquisitiveness, initiative, confidence to take risks, cognitive and role flexibility, patience, perseverance, realistic expectations, inner strength, stability and resourcefulness, attention to harmony and motivation. Also, communicative drive and willingness, as human needs to communicate are seen as an important prerequisite for ICC (Council of Europe 2001).

3.2.4.2 Behaviour/Skills

Behaviour in its narrow intercultural sense is mainly the ability to communicate with people of a different cultural background and is often used to describe skills that are employed in adjustment and communication situations. There are many other

⁴⁴ <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/projects/SAGE/GlobalEngagementSurvey.pdf>.

behavioural factors that are connected to intercultural communication. Apart from the four skills of interpretation, relating, discovering and interacting that Byram (1997) lists as core skills, other skills that can be enhanced through learning another language and that are needed for successful intercultural communication are: to listen, to observe, to interpret, to analyse and compare and the general ability to adapt well to unknown and uncertain situations (Deardorff 2006, Bennett 2010).

In Deardorff's (2004) study, the ability to adapt to varying intercultural communication situations and learning styles was agreed on by many of the IC scholars. Wiseman (2001) accumulated a list of even more IC skills from the research literature: being mindful, interaction involvement, recognition of nonverbal messages, appropriate self-disclosure, behavioural flexibility, interaction management, identity maintenance, uncertainty reduction strategies, appropriate display of respect, immediacy skills, ability to establish relationships and expressing clarity and face support. All these skills refer to behavioural strategies, especially when living abroad, or linguistic abilities when communicating with people of other cultures. The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR – Council of Europe 2001.) lists as other IC skills:

the ability to bring the culture of origin and the foreign culture into relation with each other; – [...] the ability to identify and use a variety of strategies for contact with those from other cultures; – the capacity to fulfil the role of cultural intermediary between one's own culture and the foreign culture and to deal effectively with intercultural misunderstanding and conflict situations;- the ability to overcome stereotyped relationships. (p. 104f.)

Hammer, Gudykunst and Wiseman (1978) reduced what they call IC effectiveness to three major skills: the ability to deal with psychological stress, the ability to communicate effectively and the ability to establish interpersonal relationships⁴⁵. The latter should be mentioned, as it is seen as more and more important for ICC and is included in several models of ICC (Bochner et al. 1977, Byram 1997, Bennett 2010, Krajewski 2011, Hotta & Ting-Toomey 2013). It is referred to as the ability to form friendships or at least deeper relationships with locals (or other sojourners). This enhances a person's culture and language contact and can contribute to one's

⁴⁵ For American students, later revised for Japanese ones by Abe & Wiseman (1983): (1) the ability to communicate interpersonally, (2) the ability to adjust to different cultures, (3) the ability to deal with different societal systems, (4) the ability to establish interpersonal relationships, and (5) the ability to understand another.

intercultural learning as well as general wellbeing in the adaptation process (see 3.4). The ability to communicate appropriately and effectively would be seen as a tool in succeeding in it. In Dwyer's previously mentioned survey, for instance, 94% of all study abroad participants stated that the "experience continues to influence their interactions with people from different cultures" and 90% stated that studying abroad influenced them in seeking a greater diversity of international friends (see also Mohajeri Norris & Dwyer 2005). To complete the list of an intercultural person's skillset J. Bennett (2010) further lists: the ability to gather appropriate information, interaction management skills, anxiety management skills, ability to accurately perceive others and problem definition and resolution skills.

Further, the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 107f.) lists as specific study skills under *savoir-apprendre*:

- the ability to make effective use of the learning opportunities created by teaching situations;
- to make rapid and frequent active use of the language learnt;
- ability to use available materials for independent learning;
- ability to organise and use materials for self-directed learning;
- ability to learn effectively (both linguistically and socio-culturally) from direct observation of and participation in communication events by the cultivation of perceptual, analytical and heuristic skills;
- ability to organise one's own strategies and procedures to pursue these goals, in accordance with one's own characteristics and resources.

3.2.4.3 Knowledge

Byram classifies knowledge in ICC situations according to two broad categories: (1) knowledge about social groups and their cultures in the own country and about the target language culture and (2) knowledge about concepts and processes of interpersonal and societal interaction. This is what is generally referred to as culture-specific and culture-general knowledge.

Culture-specific knowledge about one's own country is also referred to as cultural self-awareness (Bennett 2010) or is often paraphrased as 'understanding of oneself and one's own culture'. Zull (2012) also emphasises that the IC learning process starts with uncovering and identifying subconscious behavioural patterns to raise the awareness of one's own cultural links. As metacognition is a very salient aspect of learning, knowledge about one self is an essential part of it. At the same time self-knowledge is "arguably the most remarkable brain function yet identified" (ibid. 186). He further concludes: "Study abroad offers many opportunities for personal growth and understanding of ourselves" (ibid. 186).

As opposed to Byram's communication-based model, Paige and colleagues' (2003) culture learning model contains even more cognitive components. Especially in living/studying abroad situations, one needs general knowledge of IC phenomena such as about adjustment stages, culture shock, intercultural development, culture learning, cultural identity and cultural marginality, and as culture-specific cognitive components they further mention pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence.

In Deardorff's study, 'understanding of others' worldviews' was the only component that received agreement of all IC scholars. Badstübner and Ecke (2009) could find 'cultural understanding' as being the only component that changed the way students expected it during a short-term sojourn. Additionally to the previously mentioned components, Deardorff's study also found 'understanding the value of cultural diversity', 'understanding of role and impact of culture and the impact of situational, social, and historical contexts involved' and 'cognitive flexibility' (which is probably rather an attitude, but connected to knowledge) as important.

3.2.5 Summary

The previous overview of the research literature on components of IC, as outcomes of study abroad endeavours, demonstrated that there are many different findings on what can be enhanced by this kind of sojourn. They show that study abroad can indeed have a strong influence on many different IC aspects. The following table (Table 5) summarizes the ABCs that were found to be influenced by a study abroad sojourn.

Table 5: Summary of ABC components

Attitudes	Open-mindedness/openness, respect, flexibility, tolerance, empathy, global-mindedness/world-mindedness, curiosity, discovery, willingness to suspend judgement, ability to 'decentre', tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty, maturity, self-awareness, independence, self-reliance, self-esteem, confidence, self-efficacy, patience, intercultural sensitivity, inquisitiveness, initiative, confidence to take risks, cognitive and role flexibility, perseverance, realistic expectations, inner strength, stability and resourcefulness, attention to harmony and motivation, communicative drive and willingness
Behaviours/skills	Skills of interpretation, listening, observing, analysing and comparing, ability to adapt well to unknown and uncertain situations, withholding and suspending judgement, relating, discovering, interacting, being mindful, interaction involvement, recognition of nonverbal messages, appropriate self-disclosure, behavioural flexibility, interaction management, identity maintenance, uncertainty reduction strategies, appropriate display of respect, immediacy skills, ability to establish relationships, expressing clarity, face support, the ability to gather appropriate information, interaction management skills, ability to accurately perceive others, problem definition and resolution skills Study skills: effective use of learning opportunities, rapid and frequent use of language, use material for independent learning, learning from direct observation, participation in communication events
Knowledge	knowledge about social groups and their cultures in the own country and about the target language culture ones; knowledge about concepts and processes of interpersonal and societal interaction; understanding how others see the world, understanding of what one is expected to behave like in the target country, understanding of others' worldviews, understanding the value of cultural diversity, understanding of role and impact of culture and the impact of situational, social, and historical contexts involved, cognitive flexibility

Note: The ABCs in bold were used for the survey assessment part of the second research question.

This summary does not claim to be complete, but indicates what ABC components are necessary for effective and appropriate communication and that can generally be expected to be enhanced by the study abroad semester. As this study examines the students' perspective, it is of special interest what components students believe to be necessary for IC. Their perspective on the role of the language for successful communication is another research interest of this study. Moreover, their perception on what specific components the SAS had an influence on is explored, as part of the first research question (see. 3.5). As the previous models merely conceptualize intercultural competence, but not sufficiently explain its development and how language learning is incorporated in this process, the following sub-chapter focuses on these aspects.

3.3 Intercultural Competence Development and Assessment

The following section focuses on the process of intercultural competence development and intercultural learning. This process refers to the way attitudes, behaviours and knowledge are developed together, how they are related to each other in this process, and how they influence language learning, and vice versa, and how they are developed through language learning. The process of IC development can be described as “complex and multidimensional and, depending on the intercultural situation, can take on a variety of forms. The acquisition of intercultural competence is a continual, dynamic process, one that moves through diverse dimensions while developing and enriching itself” (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2006, 6).

In the past, many learning theories were separated into two streams of either cognitive or behavioural learning theories; Argyle (1969), for instance, focused his early work on social skills and interpersonal behaviour. Both streams have been brought together and integrated by the Social Learning Theory, which combines both practices to an (inter-/intra-) active process which “seems to be a reasonable theory to use in examining the cross-cultural learning process” (Black & Mendenhall 1991, 232). More specifically though, the Sociocultural Theory (SCT), based on Vygotsky’s (1978, 1986) work, acknowledges behavioural learning as a mediated process of one’s social and cultural surroundings. Interaction between humans is the basis for cognitive activities and language use is one way of participating in a society or culture. “Language is the most pervasive and powerful cultural artifact that humans possess to mediate their connection to the world, to each other, and to themselves (Lantolf & Thorne 2007, 201). This theory was found to be especially useful for second language acquisition as processes like internalisation, mediation and imitations are part of the language learning experience (ibid.). Therefore, the concepts of culture contact and language use are of special interest for this study and will be linked to study abroad outcomes as well as effects. They are introduced and discussed further in chapter 3.4.

Another learning theory that is of importance for the particular setting of study abroad learning is Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), as it provides clearer understanding of how "knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb 1984, 41). Learning is here described as a continuous process in which individuals base and examine new knowledge against already existing experiences and vice versa through concrete experience, abstract conceptualisation, reflection observation and active experimentation. Essentially this constructivist theory gives the learner the power over their learning experience and their knowledge development through active engagement and experimentation, and reflective observations and conceptualisation (Vande Berg et al. 2012). These behavioural skills are also part of intercultural competence theories, as could be show before. Based on ELT, self-reflections and narratives were found to enhance learning experiences and this study's assessment methodology therefore uses them as assessment as well as learning tool (Passarelli & Kolb 2012).

3.3.1 The Process of Intercultural Learning

The way intercultural competence is developed is often illustrated in a circle or spiral form⁴⁶, based on the ELT, to emphasise the learning process and dynamics behind it (Liddicoat 2002, Deardorff 2006, Erll & Gymnich 2007). Each individual starts the learning process at a different point, depending on their level of intercultural competence, but often positive attitudes such as openness, flexibility, curiosity etc. open up opportunities and the willingness to interact with others. With the help of the experience of these encounters, but also through observation, active experimentation, 'experiential learning' (Kolb 1984, Kolb in Paige et al. 2003, Zull 2012) and concerted reflection, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour change (Byram 1997, Okayama, Furuto & Edmondson 2001, Deardorff 2006, Alred & Byram 2006). The gain of new knowledge activates affective processes, in return, which helps reflecting on them. "Learning and memory are greatest when cognition and emotion work together" (Zull 2012, 184). This often leads to an adaptation of behaviour, one

⁴⁶ Or as gear-wheels model (Krajewski 2011).

of the desired goals of intercultural competence. Erll & Gymnich (2007) further stress that intercultural learning is a lifelong learning process that needs to be refined and revised constantly, so there might not even be a point where a person is ever fully interculturally competent (also see Council of Europe 2008).

Deardorff's (2004, 2006) 'Process Model of Intercultural Competence' (Figure 8) demonstrates this process in a circular model: starting at the individual's level with attitudes, knowledge and skills, a shift in one's frame of reference and interaction with others can then help to reach the external outcomes of successful communication and intercultural competence. The same process can also be illustrated in a helix model (Figure 9), which implies that throughout an ongoing learning process, a person can reach higher levels of IC.

Figure 8: Process Model of Intercultural Competence, (Deardorff 2006)

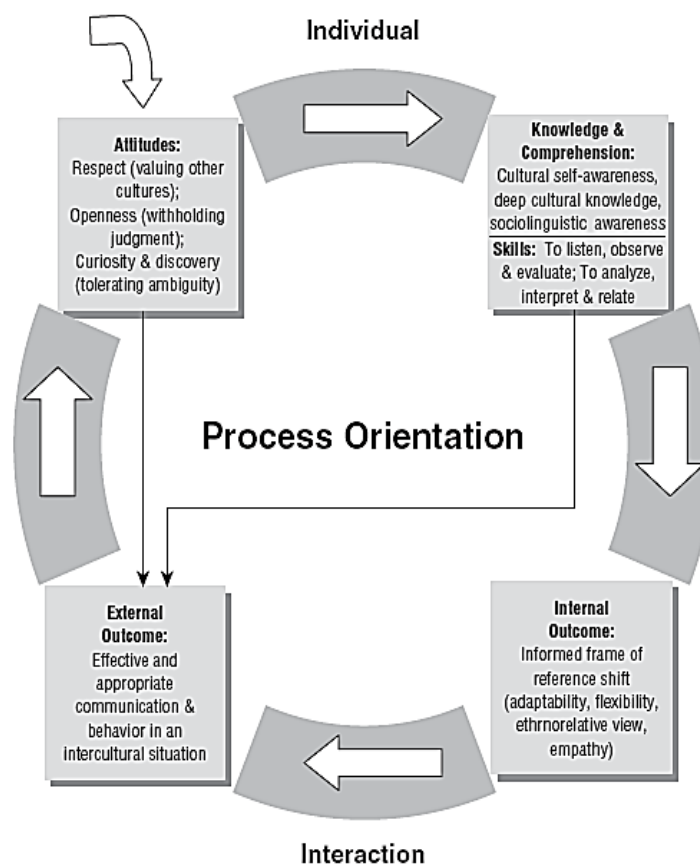
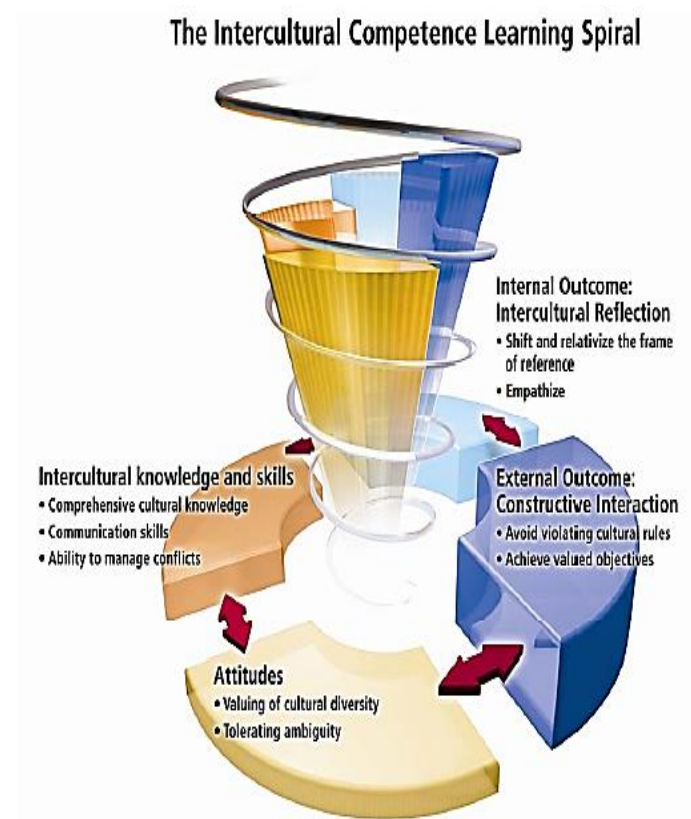


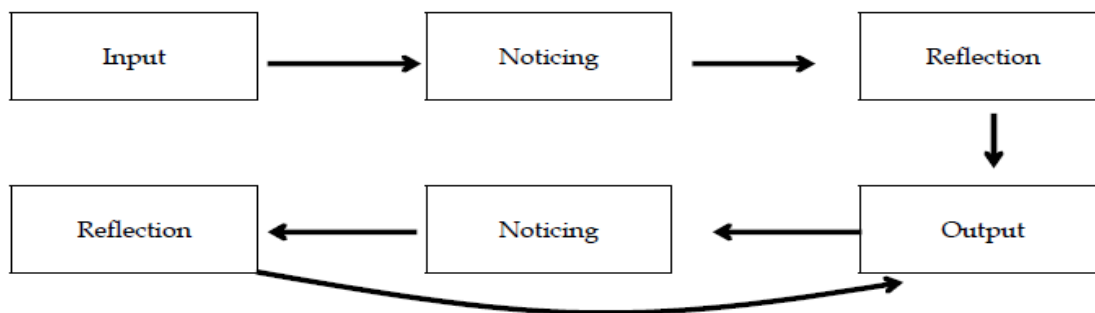
Figure 9: Intercultural Competence Learning Spiral, (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2006, adapted from Deardorff)



As both of these models only specify language and communication as an external outcome, the connection between language and culture learning has to be further explored. Liddicoat's Pathway Model for Developing Intercultural Competence (Figure 10) focuses on the specific connection of culture through language learning (intercultural language learning) and the skills involved. He illustrates IC development as a process of input, noticing, reflection – output, noticing, and reflection, specifically referring to the language input, and output in form of communicative acts in the other language and its active reflection and experimentation by the learner (Passarelli & Kolb 2012). This is in line with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory. However, it has to be kept in mind that "intercultural learning comes through interaction, not simply through exposure and analysis" (Bolten, 1993 in Liddicoat et al. 2003, 24) as most other social learning processes. Through awareness raising, experimentation, production and feedback, students learn about the target culture while experimenting with the target language and creating an interlanguage/-culture.

While this certainly applies to classroom settings (as intended by the model), experiential learning often lacks structured input and feedback and learners have to go through this process independently, using their skills and knowledge (e.g. self-awareness, reflection, ability to decentre etc.) to constantly re-evaluate their own and the other's viewpoints.

Figure 10: Pathway for developing intercultural competence, (Liddicoat 2002)



Essentially agreeing with the skills that are involved in the process that was here described by Liddicoat, Alred and Byram (2006, 1) further explain the process of becoming intercultural with the following activities:

- Experiencing the ‘Otherness of Others’ of different social groups, moving from one of the many in-groups to which we belong to one of the many out-groups that contrast with them;
- Questioning the conventions and values we have unquestioningly acquired as if they were natural;
- Reflecting on the relationships among groups and the experience of those relationships;
- Analysing our intercultural experience and acting upon the analysis.

This description of being intercultural (with a slight change in the order) fits the study abroad setting well, as it generally explains the process of intercultural learning during an immersion setting. The first point represents what students experience during their study abroad semester, which brings them to the second point during which they (hopefully) start reflecting on their own culture and their values, and as stated in the last two points, they analyse and reflect on their experience during and after it and hopefully learn to become more intercultural.

As already mentioned in the description of the SCT, the acquisition of new knowledge usually happens by connecting it to already existing information (Vygotsky 1978, 1986; Scarino 2007), language learning draws on the experience of former languages learnt and relates to the first (native) language(s) background (First Place), also taking into account personal traits and learning styles. Consequently it can be assumed, the more culture-related knowledge and experience with learning languages a sojourner has, the easier and the faster they will develop their intercultural competence. Language learners have to be able to interpret and evaluate new aspects of a language and culture (Second Place) against their First Place knowledge and later establish ways of negotiating new communicative aspects of both languages (Third Place):

In terms of learning, students engage in developing cultural competence from the beginning of their language learning. Learners develop an intercultural perspective where the culture and language contexts in which the students live (the First Place) are made apparent alongside the target culture and language contexts (the Second Place). Using this knowledge, learners move to a position (the Third Place) in which their developing intercultural competence informs their language choices in communication. (Saunders 2006, 11)

It should further be taken into account that learning is “socially and culturally mediated” (Scarino, 2007, 4) and students construct new knowledge in a certain cultural and social context, that shapes this process. Knowledge about social and communication processes helps to evaluate a situation appropriately.

In many IC models (Deardorff 2006, Erll & Gymnich 2007) language is only seen as an outcome but not as a component or ‘carrier’ of culture. By adding language to the process, it becomes truly intercultural, since learning about a culture is also learning about its language (Kramsch 1993a). Yet, there are voices saying that living in another country without speaking its language still enhances intercultural learning (Cholakian 1992, Citron 1996, Wilkinson 1998a/b) and vice versa, so the really important component seems to be the interaction with people of other cultural backgrounds – or ‘culture contact’ – because only these encounters force people to re-evaluate their viewpoints and adapt their behaviour and attitudes while creating and maintaining these social relationships. Consequently it requires different skills and competencies to communicate with people of different cultural backgrounds while living abroad, as opposed to with people of the same cultural background.

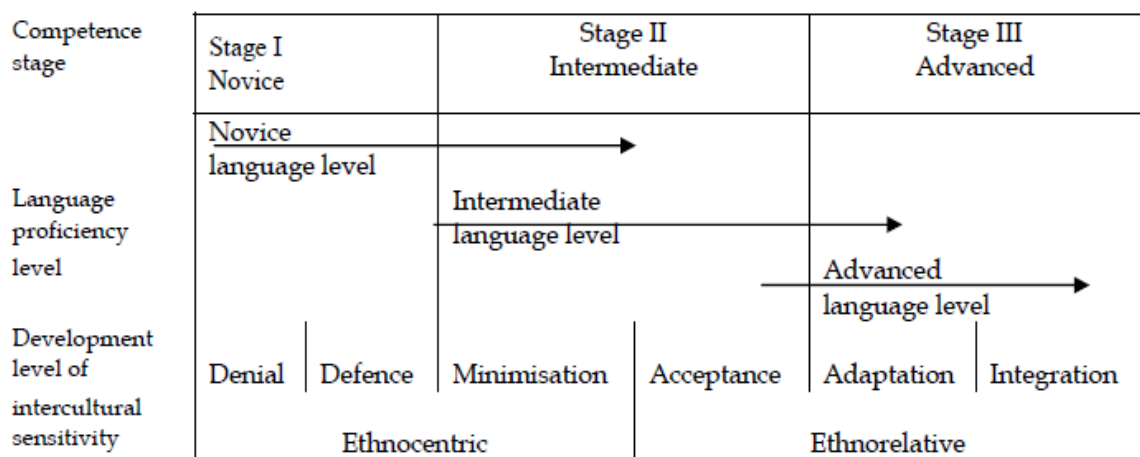
Culture-based communicative strategies have to be explicitly recognised, made aware of and learned, in the language classroom or through experiential learning. Their recognition as well as their practice are skills that are unique to intercultural communicative situations. If they are completely different from what seems natural in one's own native language, they have to be practiced intensively, sometimes even through trial and error.

As language and (inter-)cultural learning can be acquired simultaneously, the question arises if language and intercultural learning also develop together at the same speed. Previously introduced models by Byram, Deardorff and Liddicoat et al. do not explicitly specify this point; hence other models have to be looked at to elaborate this point. J. Bennett, M. Bennett and Allen (1999) created a language-based model (Figure 11) that allocates certain language levels to intercultural sensitivity developmental levels trying to show the interrelation of the two. They assume a "typical fit between language proficiency levels and developmental levels of intercultural sensitivity" (Bennet et al. 2003, 255). In that, the 'novice' stage (*Denial* and *Defence*) is the beginner's language level, intermediate language levels refer to the stages of *Minimalization* and *Acceptance* and on an advanced language level learners are either at the stage of *Adaptation* or *Integration*. This illustrates the coherence between language and intercultural sensitivity; however, this model may only apply to IS in general and has a number of limitations. It originates from a non-linguistic background and solely states on a person's intercultural sensitivity as part of their mindset, but does not take into account that learners might have prior intercultural knowledge or experience, i.e. due to their ethnical and cultural background and through personal experiences such as friendships and travel. It sees intercultural learning as a rather linear process and not in its circular, even possibly backwards motions as previously discussed models do. Also, a person's IS stage might be higher than the actual language level due to the fact that they might have learnt other languages before. On the other hand, a learner's language level could also be much higher than their IS level, if they did not have a lot of contact with people of other cultural backgrounds (Jackson 2011). Jackson (2011) testing this assumption,

could not find a correlation between her Chinese students' IS and language level, neither before nor after their short-term sojourn.

Nevertheless, it is an attempt to include language and intercultural levels in one model, which could help teachers of students that learn their first language, other than their mother tongue, at an early stage in their life without having been exposed to many people of different cultural backgrounds yet. Other studies by Gudykunst (1985), Ward and Kennedy (1993a), Park (2006) and Edstrom (2005) as well as Deardorff and Hunter (2006) also show that language learning alone, does not necessarily lead to becoming an 'intercultural speaker'. Comprehensiveness and cultural awareness rising are approaches that have to be integrated into language learning (Jackson 2010) just as the teaching of IC skills and knowledge.

Figure 11: Language development and the development of intercultural sensitivity, (adapted from Bennett et al. 1999 in Liddicoat et al. 2003)



This special interrelation of language and intercultural learning, how they influence each other and if there are common contact points, are of special interest for this study and basically form the foundation for the second and third research question.

3.3.2 Assessment of Intercultural Competence

It is widely discussed if IC can be separately assessed from language competence, if it should be assessed at all, and if so, in what form (Byram and Morgan 1994, Paige et al. 2003). For the purpose of this study, this topic will be narrowed down, and only aspects will be discussed that are directly linked it to the methodology chosen.

Assessment in education abroad underlies two implications: on the one hand, that outcomes such as intercultural competence can indeed be measured or somehow assessed, and on the other hand, it is presumed that it can be enhanced by an international experience like a study abroad semester. The latter has been proven extensively due to the fact that so many researchers and scholars have engaged in the exploration of the impact of an SAS and their results are presented in this literature review. The first implication is a widely discussed one and there is little common ground amongst researchers and scholars whether and how IC can or should be assessed.

That is why, whether IC can and should be assessed was one of the questions of the already mentioned Deardorff-study and the administrators and scholars she surveyed agreed to both. However, they confined it to the assessment of individual IC components rather than the whole complex phenomenon (Deardorff, 2006). Being able to assess certain IC traits would not only imply that it is possible to teach them in the first place, but also for learners to acquire and enhance them actively. For this reason it is assumed that there is a way of assessing IC and Krajewski (2011) summarizes it:

Assuming that intercultural competence is a skill, it should be possible to assess it and to document its existence and progress. If intercultural competence is an ongoing process, measurement can only reflect a moment in time; it can reflect the ability to communicate effectively in a particular circumstance and situation only. (p.13)

Among the many ways of assessing IC, testing is one way and can result in quantitative data that is easily comparable at different points in time. Especially for many policy makers, educators, students and their parents, some kind of assessment or reassurance is required and wished for, because they would like to know if investing in a study abroad endeavour really holds what it promises. Hence, many different instruments of assessing students' SA outcomes and experiences overseas

or someone's general IC were developed. Fantini (2006) lists 87 assessment tools for intercultural competence ranging from universities' self-assessment questionnaires to validate and internationally used quantitative IC-tests used in professional or personal contexts. Also, Paige (2004) lists a large number of assessment instruments for IC training purposes.⁴⁷

One example of these tests is the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) which is used by numerous researchers worldwide (Medina-López Portillo 2004, Engle and Engle 2005, Jackson 2011) to statistically measure a person's IC changes. Consisting of 50 questions, the IDI creates a cross-cultural profile with a placement in, and analysis of, the corresponding stage of the earlier mentioned DMIS (Bennett 1986). It can also be used to measure one's self-perceived intercultural sensitivity development before and after a sojourn or to measure the effectiveness of cross-cultural intervention strategies. Insofar, it is used as a tool in education for study abroad programs (Medina-López-Portillo 2004, Anderson et al. 2006), experimental learning as well as classroom-based instructions.⁴⁸

For the purpose of this study, testing IC in this way was not found to be feasible for several reasons. Travel, work and study abroad do not necessarily affect people's IS. Andersons et al. express this general uncertainty by quoting Kelly (1963, 73) "a student could participate in a study abroad program without experiencing the culture in which the student resided", because one could observe an event without experiencing it personally or without reflecting on it. As this study's focus is not on how much students' intercultural sensitivity developed, but rather on what caused the change or stagnation, students' IS is not assessed in the way Hammer and Bennett suggest through the IDI, but in a rather deeper insightful way. Yet, certain elements of the IDI and other intercultural learning models are taken into account, since their perception of change through study abroad is the starting point of intercultural learning and in that of this study.

⁴⁷ On the general topic of outcome assessment especially from the American perspective and as an overview of this research field, please see Bolen (2007). A more recent overview on the assessment of language learning, especially against the Australian education background, provide Liddicoat and Scarino (2013).

⁴⁸ Or an extensive overview of studies using the IDI and their results see Paige & Vande Berg (2012)

Besides these limitations for the study presented, other restrictions of assessing IC have to be taken into account as well. Assessing single IC components through e.g. 'what if' situations is rather difficult and might be unreliable. Giving a teacher the power or duty to decide if a learner exhibits the necessary traits and attitudes to communicate appropriately and effectively in a certain situation is not only subjective, but also illusory. Further, the question remains on how can traits like tolerance, openness and respect be developed in a classroom setting. For the behavioural side, role plays or flash cards were often used to 're-enact' intercultural situations, but the assessment value of those hypothetical situations can be doubtful. The same is true for assessing the cognitive side of culture as 'content', which often makes it easier to objectively teach and test it. However, this ignores the interactional setting and circumstances an encounter usually is situated in and does not see the learner as an 'interactant' (Crichton & Scarino 2007).

Having established the necessity or rather the ability to assess IC, the question is now, what and how to assess it. Study abroad assessment is still a fairly young research field (Sutton et al. 2007). Different ways of effectively assessing outcomes and effects are still being discussed for their feasibility and insightfulness, as there are so many factors influencing students' experiences. Deardorff (2007) distinguishes between direct and indirect assessment methods. The former directly reflects students' application of skills or knowledge (i.e. in portfolios, course assessment and performance) and are often incorporated into the program design and assessment. Indirect methods (i.e. surveys, interviews, self-assessment) ask about students' learning and provide a more holistic picture of the process. As it was a primary aim to gain an insight into students' study abroad experience, the latter method was preferred. However, the research subjects also completed portfolios as part of their return unit's assessment and therefore not only reflected on their learning, but also had to practically demonstrate their skills and metacognitive knowledge.

Previous research methods were often not able to really grasp the students' experiences, because they might have been unable to express these in the methods chosen or they were unaware of what had really concerned them. Therefore, Pellegrino (1998) claims that introspective assessments are better and consequently research on students' perception has changed since the mid-1990s in favour of more

qualitative and broader research methodologies. Qualitative studies in this field comprise the following according to Pellegrino (1998):

analyses of individual language learning journals, written by the researchers themselves;
analyses of third party diaries and interviews written by members of single or multiple study abroad groups; questionnaire-driven case studies of single or multiple study abroad groups; and case-studies that include a mixture of qualitative and quantitative techniques (p. 94)

Further, she states that students' perceptions are formed according to their individual perception, because "whether the learners' descriptions of the events happening around them or in their language learning are accurate is not the salient point, but rather how learners perceive those events" (Pellegrino 1998, 93).

Byram also favours self-accounts and narratives (Byram 2000). However, his original model of the five *savoirs* does not primarily serve assessment purposes, which he also did not intent to. Though he describes classroom objectives, there are no thresholds or levels like in Bennett's intercultural sensitivity model (De Florio-Hansen 2009). Hence, there is no elaboration on how to assess ICC in general. Byram's (1997) fifth chapter theoretically proposes ways of assessing the objectives, primarily stating that classroom assessment should focus on them, and secondly to make sure to take the context of the purpose of the assessment into account. This context is given by the educational institution and societal and geo-political factors. Henceforth, Byram strongly recommends assessment of IC in the form of portfolios and later on co-develop (self-) assessment strategies based on his model of the intercultural speaker for publications of the Council of Europe. The European Language Portfolio⁴⁹ (ELP) takes intercultural and socio-pragmatic components of language learning into account. One of the parts of the ELP is a self-assessment questionnaire that focuses on students comfort in intercultural situations (*The Reflection of Intercultural Encounters – RIE*) and is used for this study's IC assessment purposes (see 4.3.1). Further, other assessment strategies were used for the greater

⁴⁹ For instance, the *European Language Portfolio* (ELP, Council of Europe 2000) is a widely appreciated and used, free tool to promote learners' reflection and use of languages, not just European ones. It is even used by American and Asian language educators and cultural institutions as seen on the CoE's website (<http://www.celelc.org>). It draws on the experiences gained during a lifetime of using other languages and dealing with intercultural situations and does not restrict its use to where those experiences were made (inside or outside the EU) or in which educational context the other language(s) was learnt.

purpose of finding out what is the role of studying abroad in the development of graduates' intercultural awareness and skills. These methods are introduced and discussed in chapter 4.

3.4. Adaptation and Influencing Factors

3.4.1 Adaptation Overview and Process

To bring the previously introduced mainly classroom- or formal-education-based models into a study abroad context, one has to broaden the setting with acculturative elements that influence learning while one is living in the host culture, which is essentially what the Culture Learning Theory is concerned with as it explains the behavioural changes and adaptation process of intercultural contact, (Argyle 1969, Bochner 1982). The following part therefore focuses more on the experience of students studying abroad as opposed to the previous exploration of single factors of IC development.

Adaptation is also often referred to as adjustment or enculturation and is at least to some extent, the goal of a sojourn, which includes communication with others and the creation of meaningful relationships, but also to study successfully in a new academic environment; to live on one's own, to be able to partake in social activities; to deal with everyday problems and bureaucracy as well as to handle loneliness, homesickness, prejudice and other problems that arise from day-to-day situations (Ward et al. 2001). Hence, intercultural competence is a precondition that can help to lead to and to facilitate adaptation. At the same time, the ability to adapt is one of the components of IC, so both processes are part of one another and can stimulate or impede each other.

Essentially, adaptation is the ability to change (Gudykunst & Kim 2003). Kim (1992) defines it as:

the individual's capacity to suspend or modify some of the old cultural ways, and learn and accommodate some of the new cultural ways, and creatively find ways to manage the dynamics of cultural difference/unfamiliarity, intergroup posture, and the accompanying stress (p. 377).

Distress during a sojourn is evoked due to a lack of appropriate social, communicative and behavioural skills in regards to what is seen as appropriate in the other culture. It causes less effective communication or miscommunication, a negative attitude towards the host culture, frustration and even in some cases hostility and consequently a general dissatisfaction with the entire sojourn (Leong & Ward 2000, Ward et al. 2001, Ecke 2013).

As a matter of course, adaptability skills are mostly of importance for sojourners or people who plan to spend a longer period of time in another country and are less applicable for formal classroom situations in the own country; however, it is assumed that training can facilitate it (Bhawuk & Triandis 1996, Brislin & Yoshida 1996, Cushner & Brislin 1997, Bennett 2010). As previously stated, direct contact with the host culture, or host country nationals, is a precondition of IC learning and adaptation (Gudykunst & Kim 2003), but does not necessarily lead to it (Bennett 2010). Theories that are concerned with interpersonal and intergroup contact of student sojourners include research on intra- and intercultural interactions (Sandhu and Asrabadi 1994), Bochner, McLeod and Lin's (1977) friendship network model, stress and coping theories (Gudykunst 1998) and social identification theories (Ward et al. 2001).

Different factors that predict a better adjustment are of interest for this study, especially those that directly or indirectly influence IC and language learning. The impact of these problems and stressors is another research field in the area of student adaptation and is of significance here. Questions about how and why students adapted/did not adapt, and if this was shown in their IC comfort and language skills development, are hoped to be answered.

The Adaptation Process

According to Kim (2001), the adaptation process begins with acculturation, while an individual slowly starts learning about the new culture's mannerisms and at the same time to renegotiate their own cultural perceptions and values (*deculturation*) (Berry 1997, Gudykunst & Kim 2003). This essentially agrees with the steps of IC

development (Alred and Byram 2006) earlier presented. As a next step, one assimilates to the host culture as a higher degree of acculturation and deculturation, which often appears in migrants, since they spend a long time in the host culture (Gudykunst & Kim 2003). To what degree a person adapts is very individual and often depends on a person's motivation and reasons for being in the host culture, but also on the length of the stay, and culture distance and contact, among other personal factors (Chirkov et al. 2007). For the course of this study, it is assumed that at least some degree of adaptation will occur.

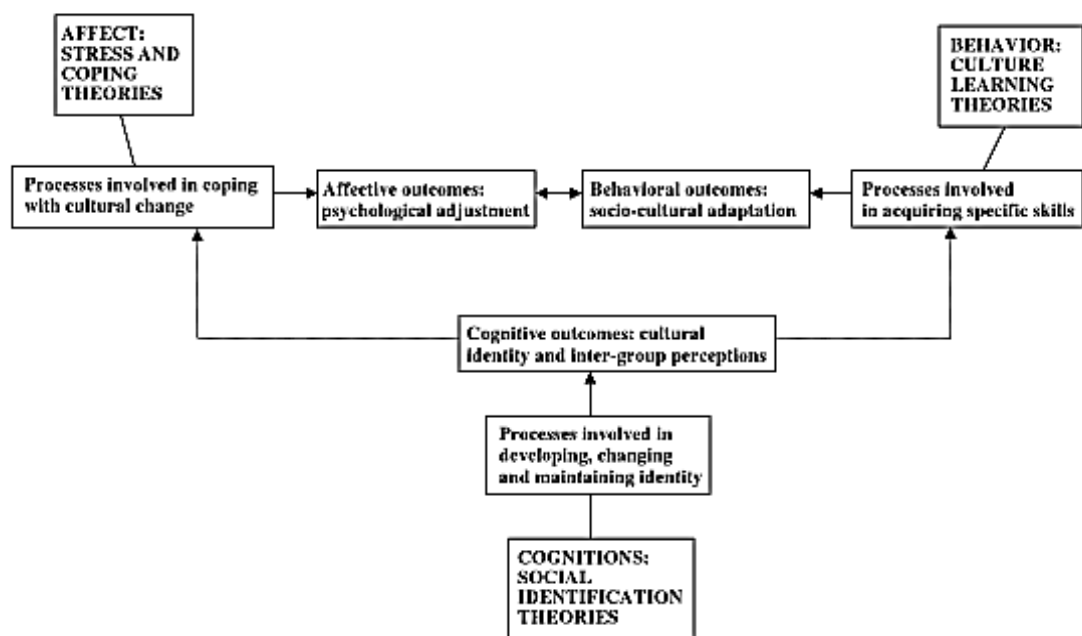
Personal prerequisites and components of adaptation are believed to be similar to the IC general ABC components, as previously shown in Deardorff's, Byram's and other IC models. The process follows similar patterns as the intercultural learning processes previously introduced show, and is further illustrated in Figure 12. "The affective cultural patterns are embodied in the common emotional orientations, aesthetic sensibilities, motivational drives, attitudes, and values held by the native members of the host society" (Gudykunst & Kim 2003, 362). Attitudes that are associated with better adjustment during a sojourn, are i.e. conscientiousness, self-efficacy, emotional stability, extraversion, agreeableness, traits like tolerance of ambiguity, risk taking, locus of control, resilience, extroversion, self-control and cultural empathy for adaptation as well as interpersonal behaviour in intercultural situations (Berry 2006, Wilson et al. 2013).⁵⁰ They are partially the attitudes associated with IC development, but include even more traits that are necessary for living and studying abroad as opposed to short intercultural encounters, i.e. emotional stability and resilience. Behavioural components can be distinguished as *technical* (i.e. language skills, job skills, academic skills etc.) and *social* skills (i.e. interpersonal and communicative strategies) which are essentially the same as IC skills (Taft 1977). Cognitive processes include a change in the way one processes information and to understand the host culture members' mindsets. Over time, a sojourner acquires new cognitive structures and an increased knowledge about their host culture and more immediate domains (Gudykunst & Kim 2003). Kim (2001) also strongly argues that preparedness is an important factor in someone's adaptation

⁵⁰ There are various studies and findings on it, see Gudykunst & Kim (2003).

and preparatory training, to lower the impact of culture shock, is suggested (see also Brislin & Yoshida 1994 & 1996, Ward et al. 2001, Cushner & Karim 2004). This closes the adaptation circle and brings it back to a more formal learning setting that can help students to prepare for the challenges ahead.

The outcomes include effective and appropriate communicative interaction, but to further this adaptation includes psychological and general health, a complete socio-cultural adaptation as well as the creation of a new cultural identity and a changed intergroup perception. While the former result is important for the general mood and psychological wellbeing of a sojourner, this study is especially concerned with the latter, as it involves the acquisition of specific skills linked to IC development.

Figure 12: The ABC model of culture contact, (Ward et al. 2001)



Socio-cultural Adaptation

Socio-cultural adaptation describes the behavioural side of adaptation and is expressed in the level of difficulty of daily life tasks (Searle & Ward 1990). The actual process and its influencing factors have to be explored further to understand what has an impact on a student's adaptation process.

As with all social processes, it is influenced by a number of internal and external factors. Language proficiency and communication competence are but two of them, believed to have a positive influence on someone's socio-cultural adaptation (Masgoret & Ward 2006). In an SAS context, a longer stay, more extensive contact with locals and a low cultural distance are further believed to be beneficial for socio-cultural adjustment. At the same time, predictors before someone's sojourn, like initial language proficiency, motivation, previous experience, culture-specific and general knowledge and skills, and certain attitudinal traits play a role too. These and other factors can influence the stay positively and are discussed in more detail in the next subchapters. It shall be mentioned that successful adaptation also depends on the receptivity, openness and conformity pressure of the host culture towards strangers, but less research has been conducted on it (Kim 2001, Roche 2001).

Different kinds of sojourns require and lead to different levels of adaptation⁵¹ and cause different kinds of stressors – i.e. a short study tour vs. a complete degree in another country (Spitzberg & Cupach 1984, Ward et al. 2001). Referring to Oberg's (1960) culture shock theory (U-curve model⁵²), sojourns of at least four months seem to provoke the most distress, since the sojourner is not given enough time to adjust to the new environment, whereas over a year's time, adjustment and adaptation can more realistically happen. Psychological adjustment problems, however, can occur at any time of the sojourn (Ward and Kennedy, 1999, Ward et al. 2001). This also suggests opting for longitudinal studies, as was done in this thesis, in order to observe students' adjustment over time. It would not only show their adaptation during the SAS, but also the impact of the re-entry, which can be quite powerful too (Christofi & Thompson 2007, Thomas 2009).

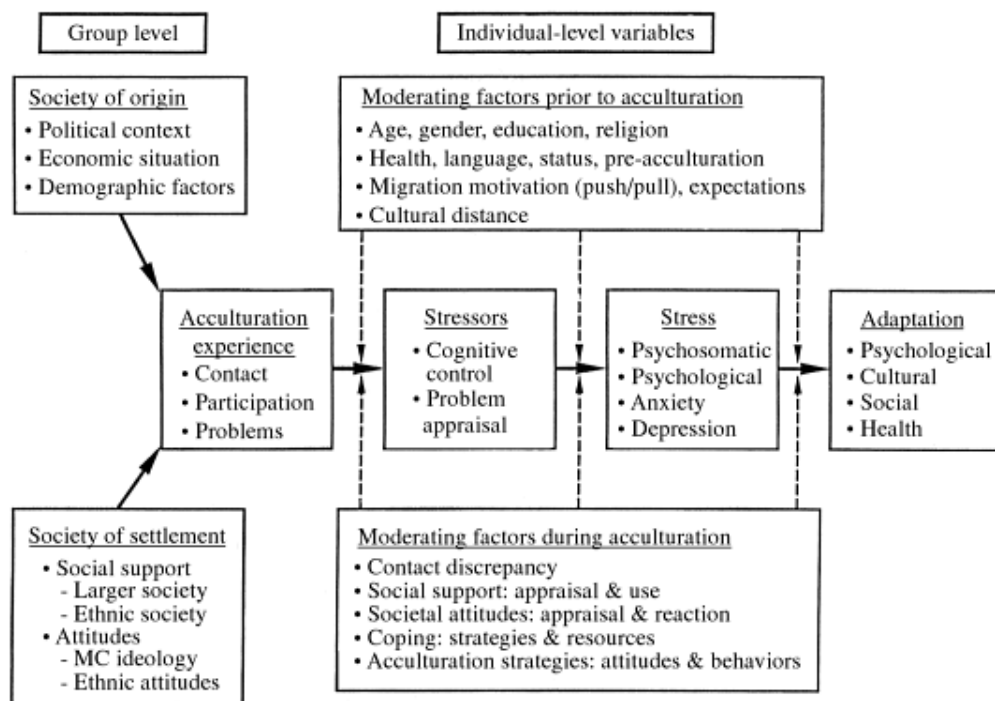
The following figure (Figure 13) presents a comprehensive overview of influencing factors on a group and individual level and the process of adaptation during a sojourn. On a group level, political, economic and culture contact of the

⁵¹ Similar to the stages of intercultural sensitivity, Berry (1997) distinguishes between four modes: integration, separation, assimilation, and marginalization.

⁵² Sojourners usually start off positively; their psychological well-being decreases in the first months and then rises again with continuous learning and adjustment. Later a double U-curve was suggested for longer sojourns since re-entry problems can cause similar stress levels and adaptation issues (Martin 1984). (see also Black & Mendenhall 1991 and Ward et al. 2001).

society of origin and the target culture, have to be taken into account. Among the preconditions, or moderating factors as Berry calls them, are of interest for this study: language, pre-acculturation, motivation, perceived culture distance before the sojourn; and support, acculturation strategies, culture contact and coping mechanisms as stressors during the sojourn.

Figure 13: Factors affecting acculturative stress and adaptation, (Berry 2006)



This model essentially summarises the previously mentioned processes and outcomes and leads into a closer analysis of these influencing factors on an individual level, which will follow in the next section.

An extensive overview of factors, that influence students' language and IC development as well as adaptation during an SAS, is given below. Research literature about such predictors and stressors is plentiful in the field of language acquisition, whereas there are still gaps in what accelerates or hinders IC development for students during a sojourn abroad. Medina-López-Portillo (2004) summarises these influencing factors in three groups: external program factors, external student factors

and internal student factors. Some of the internal student factors have already been discussed as preconditions and components of IC development (ABCs), and some more study abroad related ones are here discussed as predictors before the sojourn. Further, program factors, to a lesser extent, and especially external student as well as cultural and intergroup factors, here referred to as stressors, are focused on later.

3.4.2 Predictors before the Sojourn

Prior to a student undergoing an SAS, they bring a number of factors into the situation, that may influence how successfully they adapt and deal with unknown situations. They not only depend a lot on each individual's personality and characteristics, but also on their skills and knowledge that are either learnt through formal education or through experiences.

The extent to which a student takes advantage of a study abroad experience linguistically and culturally is believed to be partially influenced by individual or internal variables, which are here referred to as predictors. These comprise certain demographic factors like age and gender, motivation, realistic expectations and preparedness, previous experience, initial language proficiency of the target language, other language(s), and education and coursework about culture-specific or -general topics. Previous experience might have improved students' behaviour in intercultural situations and language or culture classes might have helped with knowledge and skills gains.

Certain demographic features could be linked to different adaptation and learning outcomes, like gender (Polanyi 1995, Brecht & Robinson's 1995, Institute for International Education 1996, Herman 1996, Desoff 2006, Pellegrino 1997), age (Beiser et al. 1988, Hadis 2005a), ethnicity, education (Beiser et al. 1988), social background (SAGE 2005) and income (Jones & Bond 2000). However, different studies come to controversial results about what demographic factors seem to influence students' SA outcomes and it often becomes clear that no single factor, but a combination of them as well as other prerequisites, attitudes, program specific factors and stressors during the sojourn, have an impact (Medina-López-Portillo

2004). The predictors that seemed most salient for this study were: reasons for studying abroad (motivation), expectations, previous experience and initial language proficiency.

Motivation and Expectation

When it comes to motivation, several studies have observed students' level of self-determination as well as their reasons for studying abroad in relation to their adaptation (Gardner and Lampert 1972, Deci & Ryan 1985, 2002, Chircov et al. 2007). Gardner and Lampert (1972) found that students who were determined to become like the people of the target country, were found to be more successful language learners. Also a high motivation can lead to more than just language gains (Byram & Morgan 1994, Isabelli-García 2006), especially in an adaption setting where the level of determination plays a role, too.

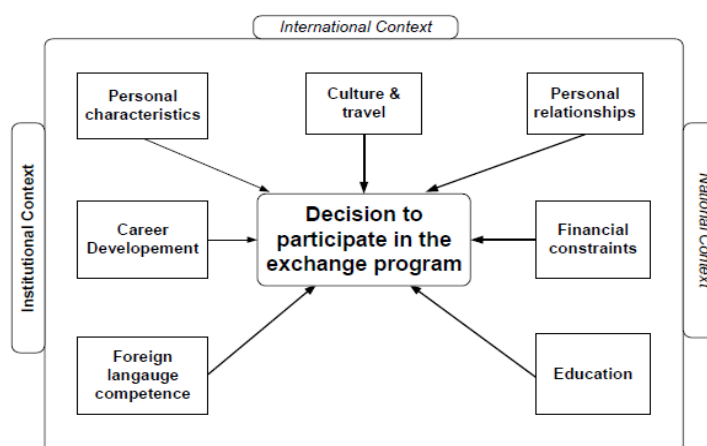
Self-determination can be distinguished on four levels and Chircov, Vansteenkiste, Tao and Lynch (2007) described them for the study abroad situation: *intrinsic* motivation (doing something for its own sake and because they enjoy it., i.e. a student enjoying learning another language) and internalised extrinsic *identified* motivation (the outcome of a situation is thought to be important or satisfying, i.e. a student wanting to improve their language skills) are believed to result in high determination.; *external* (to avoid punishment or to receive rewards, i.e. to please parents) and *introjected* motivation (social pressure or avoiding feeling guilt, i.e. student wanting to improve their esteem or social standing) on the other hand, are believed to result in a lower self-determination⁵³. Students who are more self-determined are more autonomous in their learning and therefore are often more resourceful and resilient in their behaviour. Chircov and his colleagues found a link between motivation and adaptation in their study of Chinese students in Belgium and Canada. They showed that those students who had a higher self-determination had a higher academic motivation, higher general wellbeing and adapted better during study abroad. They further found that a person's autonomy is more responsible for their wellbeing and personal satisfaction than the concrete goals they are trying to

⁵³ The CEFR distinguishes intrinsic/extrinsic and instrumental/integrative motivation

achieve. Isabelli-García (2006) found in her study that the reasons students had for learning the target language was connected to their attitude towards their host country and the depth of their social networks. Depending on students' changing views on the host culture, their motivation to interact with host country nationals changed accordingly. She explains these changes with the learners' acculturation progress and cultural awareness.

Exploring the drivers of Australian students studying abroad, as opposed to those who decide against an exchange, Amanda Daly (2007) undertook a major study of Australian and New Zealand students' decision-making to participate in an exchange program and listed a number of factors that influenced their reasons. Figure 14 summarises these reasons that range from intrinsic motivation (personal characteristics) to extrinsic ones, such as career development. Students that went on exchange were found to have a higher intercultural competence than the non-study abroad students and their reasons for participating in an exchange were mainly for future employment and academic reasons, as well as the desire to travel and experience a new culture⁵⁴.

Figure 14: The decision to participate in an exchange program, (Daly 2005)



⁵⁴ These reasons are slightly different from the findings on European and American students.

Europe (Erasmus students): improvement of foreign language abilities (86%), self-development (81%), academic learning in another country (77%), enhance understanding of the target country (72%), travel (62%), wanting a break (56%), experience of new teaching methods (49%) and the desire to get another perspective on the own country (49%) (Teichler 1997, Coleman 1998b).

America: see another part of the world/experience another culture (59%), gain international perspective (13%), study in a country where another language is spoken (11%), compulsory (11%), because it is cheaper (4%), future employment (3%), linked to high school program (3%), wanting a challenge (3%), visiting relatives (3%) (Thompson 2004).

The problem with motivation is, that it is hard to determine what reasons lead to a specific outcome, and if motivation is a precondition or rather an effect of certain learning outcomes. Thus, more research in this field has to be conducted (Paige et al. 2003).

Concerning this study and its students, external factors like, career and academic choices might have had an important impact on the decision to study this degree and to study a certain language in the first place. Maybe the obligatory study abroad semester was one of these external motivational drivers, because with the decision to undertake this degree, students were also obliged to study abroad.

When it comes to expectations, one has to consider a student's desired or required outcomes. Knowledge of possible internal and external outcomes, but also of problems like culture shock and intergroup perceptions, shape a person's expectation of the experience which in turn helps them to predict certain outcomes and problems, already before their departure. This can be enhanced by training seminars, helping not only to raise the awareness about these stressors, but also to educate about how to deal with them when they occur. Preparedness or perceived preparedness can help to reduce certain anxiety factors and support adaptation (Kim 2001). Lillie's (1994) findings about unrealistic expectations about cultural integration led to more research and the whole new field of preparatory intercultural trainings appeared (see also Cushner & Karim 2004). They are seen as essential parts of the preparation for an SAS and institutions try to integrate them into the study abroad curriculum to 'equip' students with more realistic expectations (Badstübner & Ecke 2009). Having realistic expectations might further save students from disappointments when they do not reach their goals, which can significantly impact on their psychological adaptation as well as on their general satisfaction. Further, the anticipation of certain problems might help students to handle them better, which is also assessed in the course of this study.

Previous Experience

Previous experience is believed to play an important role in students' IC development and consequently their ability to adapt to the new culture. Prior contact with other, and especially the study abroad culture(s), might have enhanced students' IC and languages skills and might give them more realistic expectations, as opposed to students who did not have any or only little contact with people of other cultural backgrounds in their past. Previous experience, in this case, includes any kind of sojourn that students did mainly without parents, and in their adolescent or later years. These sojourns might be extended travels, high-school exchanges, visiting family overseas or other study abroad trips of some kind (e.g. short-term language programs). It is assumed, that any kind of cross-cultural contact improves one's culture-general skills and knowledge, and the more experience and the better its quality, the better one's adaptation skills are developed (Parker & McEvoy 1993, Kennedy 1999, Bennett 2010).

It was also found, that experience with the target culture enhances its language learning (Burstall 1975, Martinsen 2010), but not necessarily one's confidence (Miller & Brewer 1984). Culture-specific previous experience might help to lower the impact of culture shock and its negative effects on someone's mental as well as general wellbeing. This was, for instance, demonstrated in Masgoret's (2002) doctoral study about English teachers in Spain and she includes language knowledge for improved socio-cultural adaptation. Furnham (2004, 17) further found a link to expectations and claims that "frequent extended sojourns abroad do not substantially reduce risk of culture shock, though people may learn better to expect and recognise typical reactions to living in a foreign culture and learn how to cope with it."

Moreover, previous experience also means any kind of previous culture contact with host nationals, especially in communicative situations, even in the home country. This includes friendships with people of other cultural backgrounds, as it is believed that they can also enhance a person's understanding of other cultures, especially when they are positive (Klineberg & Hull 1979, Furnham 2004). Daly (2007) tried to determine whether previous experience had influenced the decision-making

process, but found that students in her study, that decided to participate in an exchange program, had not necessarily been overseas before, which could in return be a major driving factors for doing so.

Initial Language Proficiency

Language proficiency in this case is referred to as the ability to converse successfully in everyday as well as academic situations, so that the student uses their communicative abilities effectively and the interlocutor perceives them as appropriate. Although non-verbal and para-verbal communication is the core of such encounters (Byram 1997, Ward et al. 2001, Masgoret & Ward 2006), this study is mainly concerned with communication that includes the production and understanding of the target language, since “negotiation work that triggers *interactional* adjustments by the NS (native speaker) or more competent interlocutor facilitates acquisition” (Long 1996, 451f.). Nevertheless, this study is open to what the subjects believe and experience in the field of language acquisition and especially the exploration of what role the language plays for intercultural development and adaptation is one of the main focus points. It is understood that the study abroad experience will result in some kind of language outcome⁵⁵, but to what extend and as how important students actually see their language proficiency, is among this study’s interest of research.

Since language and IC development are intertwined, it is expected that previous language knowledge, just like previous culture experience, enhances, at least partially a student’s adaptation, so it can be seen as a critical predictor. The level of language proficiency, for instance, was found to be one of the greatest stressors and influential factors for students’ adjustment during the SAS (Ward and Kennedy 1993b, Furukawa and Shibayama 1994, Kang 2006) and for their psychological wellbeing and academic performance (Kennedy 1999). More proficient

⁵⁵ The notion of culture distance not only plays a role for the acquisition of target culture knowledge and skills, but also for language similarities, that can enhance students’ SA outcomes and essentially their adjustment. It can be assumed that it is generally easier for students to get along with their level of the target language if it is of the same language family, and also has the same script, and a similar grammar and phonetic system (Whyte & Holmberg, 1956, Masgoret & Ward 2006).

students tend to perceive their behaviour as more adequate and consequently feel more secure, so they often adapt better. When language skills are insufficient or perceived as such, it often leaves the learner feeling inadequate and insecure for not being able to participate appropriately in interactions. This often happens due to comparisons with fellow students. Consequently, these students tend to withdraw from social interactions and thereby lose the opportunity to improve one's sociolinguistic skills (Pellegrino 1998). Therefore, a minimal language proficiency level is suggested and this study will follow up on this further (Lapkin, Hart and Swain 1995). This was also confirmed by Magnan and Back's (2007) study on linguistic factors as they found that the only distinguishing factor correlating with language gain during a SAS was prior language instruction. Brecht & Robinsons (1995) also confirmed that more advanced learners interacted more in the SA country than beginners and Rivers (1998) says that this is because more proficient learners adapt better to the constant flow of the target language surrounding them.

All this is of relevance for this study and is further explored as part of the third research question. The subjects in this study all had prior language instructions, but it is still assumed that they have different degrees of language proficiency and it is explored, if the initial language level and previous experience with the target language makes a difference in students learning and adaptation process.

3.4.3 Stressors and Factors during the Sojourn

Students, no matter if domestic or international, experience a number of stressors related to interpersonal contact, personal development, academic problems and the transition to a new university/course (Ward et al. 2001). Some problems (stressors) are exclusively related to the status of an exchange (international) student, i.e. culture and language contact, the role as a 'foreign ambassador', homesickness, prejudice and discrimination (Furnham and Bochner 1986, Furnham 2004). "Students have to prove that they can adjust emotionally and attitudinally, "learn" (unconsciously) certain strategies of integration, acculturation in a very short period of time and still be able to undergo their required academic coursework" (Cushner & Karim, 2004, 293). Problems depend on what kind of study sojourn students are

undergoing (i.e. high school exchange or study abroad year, Searle and Ward 1990) as it might determine the depth of actual contact and problems arising from external sources such as program organisation, host family problems and so on. Also, the extent of cultural and linguistic differences between their home and host culture is crucial.

As for the differentiation of several influencing factors, different terms and categories are suggested. Sandhu and Asrabadi (1994) differentiate between *intra-personal* and *interpersonal factors*; Medina-López-Portillo (2004) names them *external student*⁵⁶ and *internal student*⁵⁷ variables and Paige (1993) calls them the eight *psychological stressors*. Essentially they all refer to a number of similar problems: degree of cultural difference (larger cultural difference causes more adjustment problems – Redmond 2000), prior intercultural experience (sets more realistic expectations and prior cultural learning might have occurred as seen above), degree of ethnocentrism (see intercultural sensitivity), language similarity or difference, cultural immersion vs. isolation, expectations, visibility-invisibility, status, power and control. Overcoming these stress factors successfully can result in a sense of wellbeing, increased self-esteem, openness and flexibility, heightened tolerance for ambiguity, confidence in oneself and others and competence in social interaction (Ting-Toomey 1999).

“The psychological challenge posed by the unfamiliar is particularly acute when abroad and, while sometimes the anguish it can cause ... can diminish the benefit, there is no doubt that the predominant effect on personal growth is positive and profound” (Ingraham & Peterson, 2004, 94).

Also, the program’s design and organisation by itself can be an important influencing factor and impacts on how much exposure students have to the language and culture of the study abroad country. John and Lilli Engle (2005) summarise eight program key elements and their distinctive features. They believe these factors determine the study abroad experience widely and, by the right combination of elements, can

⁵⁶ *External student* decisions include housing arrangements, independent travel, and amount of contact with hosts and target language friends.

⁵⁷ *Internal student variables* include students’ personal backgrounds, their traits and attitudes, experiences and personal circumstances. Students’ internal variables are highly individual, but it can generally be assumed that they influence students’ external decisions

optimise the sojourn's outcomes. Their list includes the following features: length of sojourn;; entry target language competence; language used in course work; on-site administrator, context of academic work; types of student housing, provisions for guided cultural interaction and experiential learning; and guided reflection on cultural experience. This list might not be complete, but extensive short-term and long-term studies try to gain important insights into the extent to which each of the eight independent key variables and their combination enhances students learning. Engle and Engle believe that they mainly influence students' academic and intercultural learning and Vande Berg, Balkum, Scheid, and Whalen (2004) add language learning as a third study abroad outcome to it.

The first feature (length of sojourn) is probably one of the best researched program components. As previously mentioned, Ward and Kennedy (1999) discovered that socio-cultural adjustment mainly happens within the first six months and after that only improves slightly. This suggests that a six month sojourn, as in this study, is a good time frame for students to actively employ their adaptation skills and learn about a new culture and its language. DeKeyser's (2007) and Dwyer's (2004) extensive studies show that students of longer sojourns benefit more from the experience and their outcome gain and the SAS's long-term effect were found to be quite significant.

Apart from these program factors, it is understood that every student is still individually responsible for their own learning progress and while one student could spend a fulfilling and adventuresome semester overseas, another one could easily be enrolled in the same program, but experience a much deeper immersion in the culture and therefore adapt and learn better (Engle & Engle 2003). The degree of immersion can remain only on "a surface level, maintaining distance from the physical, social, or intellectual tensions of the learning endeavour" (Passarelli & Kolb 2012). Why students' experiences and consequently outcomes differ so much will be part of this study's scope and the analysis of certain key elements is necessary to understand how they can individually influence the study abroad experience. Secondly, but of the same importance, the assessment of students' different study abroad experiences and influencing factors is essential to understand what makes intercultural learning processes different for individual students.

Overview of External Factors

Internal and external factors are often interrelated and subconsciously influence one's motivation, decisions and attitudes. Since they influence each other, they are hard to distinguish for the researcher and many unpredictable external factors during an SAS can have a major influence on internal factors and consequently on how students experience the SAS and develop their skills further (Medina-López-Portillo 2004). Student external factors (Medina-López-Portillo, 2004) or stressors have been considered as having a strong influence on students' personal factors like motivation and attitudes. Besides the previously mentioned factors that are already of influence before the sojourn, like prior contact with the host culture, previous cultural course work, and initial language level, there seems to be an open number of influencing factors during the sojourn. They comprise factors that influence the student's decisions and motivation outside their direct influence and the previously mentioned program-related factors.

The following stressors have been gathered from the research literature: financial aspects, credit transferability, perceived language skills and language used in course work, the social environment, friendships, adjustment to new culture, academic problems, travel opportunities, discrimination, contact with native speakers, perception of enhanced academic or career chances, culture shock and perceived cultural differences between groups and among individuals (Paige 1993, Schreier & Abramovitch 1996, Ward et al. 2001, Medina-López-Portillo 2004, Wilson et al. 2013). All of these aspects influence choices concerning the participation in a specific program in the first place and decisions about certain program features (i.e. housing arrangements) as well as impact on a student's motivation to take advantage of everything a sojourn overseas has to offer. The sum of these stressors, but even an overwhelming single one, can influence a student's ability to adapt, to learn efficiently or even just to maintain physical and mental health.

Many studies have explored the influence of one or several of these factors on students' SA experience. Schreier and Abramovitch (1996) found that their research subjects mainly struggled with financial problems, but also with the adaptation to a new life, accommodation, study problems and homesickness. Oppen,

Teichler and Carlson (1990) conducted a large international study about the most common problems international students encountered; they included: too much contact with people from the other culture, academic differences, administration, readiness of teaching staff to help foreign students, guidance and support, not enough time for travel, accommodation, financial matters, finding a place to study, and interaction with host country students. Crano and Crano's (1993) found that problems related to language and culture shock were dominant.

For the purpose of this study, similar stressors that derived from the research literature on psychological and socio-cultural adaptation (Ward et al. 2001) were gathered and used to explore what stressors students encountered during their SAS. These stressors are: language, cultural, academic and interpersonal problems, discrimination/prejudice, loneliness, homesickness, housing and financial problems. They are further elaborated, along with the notions of culture distance and culture contact that they are often embedded in. These two concepts are often used to explain adjustment problems and are also further introduced and a special emphasis on the assessment of the students' experience in this study is put on them.

Culture Distance

Culture distance is a notion that describes perceived or actual differences between someone's home and the host culture (Furnham & Tresize 1981). These include all areas of daily living and cultural aspects like language, non-verbal communication, conventions, norms and values, but also more subtle factors like role behaviour, time and space relations, pace of life, climate, population numbers etc. (Masgoret & Ward 2006). "The larger the disparity between the two, the more difficulty strangers are likely to face" (Gudykunst & Kim 2003, 368), since a sojourner will only have to adjust to the elements that are different. Zull (2012, 181) explains coping problems this way: "The richer and more diverse the new environment is, the longer and more powerful are the distractions". Hence, a larger culture distance means more adaptation stress and difficulties acquiring culture-specific skills (Searle & Ward 1990, Ward & Kennedy 1993b, Ward et al. 2001, Berry 2006, Demes & Geeraert 2013). However, Barth

(1967) warns that this parameter alone does not explain cultural differences or misunderstandings sufficiently.

Usually comparative studies between at least two different cultural groups of students were used to examine this concept. Furnham and Bochner (1982), for instance, demonstrated this in their large multi-national study of students sojourning in the UK. The group that was culturally the farthest (Asia) from the UK experienced more adaptation difficulties than the 'intermediate' (South America, Southern Europe) and 'near group' (Middle and Northern Europe). Similar results were reported in Ward and Kennedy's (1999) study of British, Malaysian and Chinese students in Singapore.

Further, Gudykunst (1983) could show that people are more confident predicting someone's behaviour if they had a similar culture, as opposed to someone whose cultural background was very different. However, he could not find a link between cultural similarity and attitudinal similarity. Nevertheless, in communicative situations, people were found to ask more questions when their cultures were perceived as more different, which could enhance linguistic improvements and cultural understanding (Gudykunst 1983).

The problem about this concept is that it, again, reduces culture to 'nation' and students from one country are automatically grouped as having one culture. Their individual backgrounds and previous experiences are not taken into account. However, if studies showed that whole groups of students had similar problems with adaptation, then it seems like there is an underlying difference between two groups that does have certain relevance here.

As previously mentioned, cultures are dynamic and a person's cultural background is very individual. It is acknowledged that the subjects of this study have their individual cultural backgrounds and experiences, although most of them have been socialised and educated in Australia. As the students of this study go to different countries, only perceived culture distance by the students is therefore assessed and a comparison between study abroad destinations is refrained from.

Culture Contact

Based on Vygotsky's (1978) research on support and influence of instructors and peers, language and culture learners were found to be influenced by more than just classroom instructions and their motivation to learn the language. Especially for learners of additional languages, there are a number of well-researched factors that can be linked to culture and socio-pragmatic learning in general.

Every language learner already has a native linguistic and cultural background which determines their communicative perceptions and learning strategies. As new speakers in an SA setting, they join a language community which is not their native one and might perceive it, and are perceived, differently. The contact with host nationals might therefore vary extremely and is a very salient factor in students' learning and adaptation. Culture contact in this case describes any communicative interaction with host nationals, i.e. "professors, staff, peers, homestay families, roommates, [...] tour guides, local citizens and even tourists" (Passarelli & Kolb 2012). Engle and Engle (2003) found authentic culture contact to be one of the two most salient factors in students' intercultural sensitivity development during SA. While the general assumption often is, that any kind of contact provides learning opportunities (Wilson et al. 2013), the quality, however, is thought to be of greater importance and culture contact does not automatically lead to language and IC learning as well as to adjustment (Allport 1979, Bennett 2010). Paige and Vande Berg (2012) strongly emphasise that immersion into a new culture alone does not guarantee results, however "when educators take steps not only to immerse them, but to actively facilitate their learning, helping to reflect on how they are making meaning from the experiences that their "immersion" is providing" (ibid. 38) students learn more effectively and appropriately.

For the course of this study, friendship networks, language contact with native speakers, and perceived discrimination and prejudice are of special interest. On the one hand, they define the degree of culture contact students had, but on the other hand, also the quality and factors that might have influenced it and therefore students IC learning.

Friendship networks

As previously shown, the ability to create meaningful relationships/friendships with host nationals is seen as a decisive factor in the learning and adaptation process (Bochner et al. 1977, Byram 1997, Krajewski 2011). Bochner and colleagues (1977) differentiate three major social networks during a sojourn: one with host nationals, one with other internationals and one with people of a similar cultural background. Contact with host nationals has been found to increase general wellbeing, social difficulties and adaptations problems (Searle & Ward 1990, Ward & Kennedy 1993a, 1993b). However, the quality and depth of this contact is of importance. It has been shown that the more and the closer the contact with host nationals, the better the adaptation and learning process. Host nationals often provide information and learning opportunities about appropriate social skills (Bochner, McLeod & Lin 1977, Furnham & Bochner 1982) as well as materialistic support, but can also lead to a feeling of isolation.⁵⁸ The quality and quantity of these relationships largely depends on the culture distance again (Bochner et al. 1977) and also certain character traits and someone's proficiency in the language of the host culture (Ward & Kennedy 1993b). Hence, it is not an isolated notion, but depends on a network of other variables (as with all of the adaptation components).

However, friendships that assist with adaptation are not restricted to host nationals and Bochner and colleagues (1977) found that often co-national are the primary network of international students their function being to: "rehearse, express, and affirm culture-of-origin values" (Ward et al. 2001, 148). Ward and Kennedy (1993b) also found that friends from the same cultural background are an important supporting factor and help with psychological adjustment, especially when they are more experienced in the cultural norms and behaviours of the host country (Ong 2000). Passarelli and Kolb (2012, 156) define these learning relationships as "connections between one or more individuals that promote growth and movement through the learning spiral, ultimately inspiring future learning and relationship building." However, if contact is only limited to people of the same cultural

⁵⁸ See a full overview on friendship networks in Ward et al. (2001, 147ff.).

background, it can lead to a decreased willingness to engage with locals and hence adaptation to the new host culture (Kang 1972, Zlobina et al. 2006).

The function of the friendship network with other international students (other than co-nationals) is mainly for recreational reasons as well as to give each other social support. Kennedy (1999) further found that the amount of interactions with other international students was also related to the perceived quality of social support⁵⁹. In order to explore what had an influence on students' intercultural and language learning, their friendship networks, but also contact with other native speakers like teachers, other students and housemates, is explored for this study.

Language contact

As previously shown, language competence is the core of culture learning and it was discussed how they influence each other. Especially well researched is the connection of culture contact and its enhancement of language learning. Since culture and language learning are intertwined, it is assumed that there are similar parallels between the amount of language contact and intercultural learning as a consequence of it. Moreover, it has to be emphasised that language by itself can also be a stressor for intercultural learning, which will be further explained below.

It can generally be assumed that intensive contact with native speakers and a successful adaptation process enhances one's linguistic gains (Alred and Byram 2002). Apart from obvious reasons, i.e. a student's attitude or motivation, the SA literature also exposes rather unexpected explanations to why students do not successfully improve their target language proficiency during a study sojourn. These reasons include the 'language myth', the perception and difficulties of language learning outside the classroom, and the role of feedback.

First, active as well as passive language contact was found to be influential for the language acquisition process. This means direct and interactive contact (i.e. speaking to a native speaker) as well as just being surrounded by the target language

⁵⁹ Support can derive from the students' immediate environment, i.e. family and friends, but in the study abroad case also from teachers, other students and locals, new friends and acquaintances as well as from the university with its diverse support services (Ward et al. 2001, Furnham 2004).

and passively perceiving it (i.e. through media, by “just” reading or listening) can help to acquire new linguistic structures and vocabulary. This was confirmed by Magnan and Back (2007) as they could not find differences in language gains between passive media users or students who were more interactive with native speakers. They also found that communication in the target language with other international students improved their students’ language gains, as opposed to exclusive contact with native speakers.

In some cases, students do not improve their language skills at all, which Wilkinson (1998a) refers to as the ‘*language myth*’. She discovered in her study (ibid. 1998b) of two Anglophone women learning French that language contact did not automatically lead to a use and improvement of their target language skills and they often retreated to their mother tongue. Many other scholars confirmed that their students did not automatically improve their language skills; often by not having sufficient interaction with native speakers. It was found that many students do not use all opportunities to socialise with target language speakers that present themselves during an SA, and they often struggle to immerse into the new culture (Gudykunst 1985, Kline 1993, Keating 1994, Pellegrino 1997, Byram & Feng 2006, DeKeyser 2007). Wilkinson further points out that Cholakian’s (1992) ‘lazy student’ is also a myth, because there are many impacting factors (as seen above and below) and some are beyond the influence of the student and their motivation to learn the target language.

Pellegrino (1997) noticed four aspects of social and psychological security students want to be sure of while interacting with native speakers:

- a) Learners need to feel that their status as a mature, intelligent adult is preserved;
- b) They need to feel a sense of physical and affective safety;
- c) They need to feel supported that their concerns, thoughts, questions, and efforts to speak are valid and worthy of others’ attention and interest, and
- d) They need to feel they have a reasonable amount of control over their L2 use environment (p. 71).

If learners don’t feel these securities, they tend to avoid interactions and consequently miss out on an important way of improving one’s language and culture knowledge. Interlocutor behaviour is another decisive factor students reported to have had an influence on their social interactions (Pellegrino 1998).

Apart from psychological stressors, students might struggle with the language acquisition, because they chose not to engage with the target culture. Bacon (2002) suggests that with rising immersion into the target culture, students might reject more target culture features that initially seemed fascinating, feeling like they are losing control over their environment, and therefore seek less contact with native speakers. DeKeyser (2007) drew the same conclusion for his American students in Argentina: the more unpleasant differences between the host and their home culture they found, the more they rejected them. This automatically led to less contact with native speakers and therefore their language improvement stagnated. Only if they were given enough time to overcome this stage did they find a link to the culture and its people and sought for explanations. Wilkinson (1997) explains this 'culture myth', by stating that contact with a new culture does not necessarily result in appreciation and understanding, because of certain external and internal stressors, as explained here. Hence, often students avoid immersion and interaction and can thereby not proceed in their language and intercultural learning. Brecht and Robinson (1995) assume:

It may be that to be an effective language learner, one needs 'down times' from learning and venting off culture shock with compatriots and to spend some time speaking English. While that would not meet the optimal conditions for language exposure, it might be a necessary part of the human adjustment process (p. 201-202).

Dwyer (2004b) confirms this in her large quantitative study of more than 3,400 students, refuting the common belief that it is the best to take all of the courses in the language of the country and that it would enhance language learning the most to live with a host family. She found out that a mix of English and target language classes is more favourable, because some classes are better to be undertaken in English. Another finding was, not only staying with a host family, but living with any host national, i.e. students etc., would make a difference (Dwyer in Hulstrand 2006a).

Another factor that was found to be influential in many studies is the *informal learning setting* a student is supposed to take advantage of. Though learning a language outside a classroom can have positive sides, it can also have disadvantages. Students often still tend to measure their success in classroom-like terms. For instance, a grammar mistake is instantly seen as failure, whereas socio-linguistic and -pragmatic achievements are often not appreciated as a success (Pellegrino 1998). If

this leads to a fear of failure, students may be intimidated to use certain expressions they are not sure about outside the classroom (ibid). They often still rely on constructive feedback and on instructions, as in a formal language classroom. Brecht and Robinson (1995), however, showed with the help of diaries and interviews that their students had mixed feelings about formal classroom instructions. They trace this back to differences in immersion, contact with native speakers and involvement in the speech community in general and students' needs of the moment. Further, they suggested four ways of how formal classroom learning supports language learning abroad: 1) classes help to set out-of-class goals and to achieve those goals, 2) interactions with other learners in class help to (re-) activate knowledge that has before only existed passively, 3) teachers might explain nuances between words that would have otherwise stayed unobserved, and 4) the classroom offers a troubleshooting opportunity. Miller and Ginsberg (1995) found that many students wished they could have had some kind of formal classroom-like interaction and learning opportunities while using the language in its native milieu. Their view of the language was still classroom and textbook-driven and they thought of correct language use as grammatically correct utterances and that there was only one way of expressing things. It seems that the way the language was taught before the sojourn is always part of a learner's language learning perception and is often compared to subsequent language learning encounters.

In contrast, Pellegrino's (1997) students found that informal language learning outside the classroom was more valuable and helpful than classroom instructions. This may be one of the reasons that lead students to drop language classes (Schmidt & Frota 1986), develop negative attitudes towards instructions (Brecht & Robinson 1995) or 'tune out' during classroom instructions (Pellegrino 1997). Also Cheng and Mojica-Diaz (2006) found no statistical evidence that formal language instruction in the target language environment showed better results than instructions in a foreign language environment. However, Paige and colleagues (2004) found that often students do not make the most of their experiences when it comes to language and cultural learning outcomes. They claim that this is because language learning outside the classroom is not perceived as that important. Students often view language

learning as too academic, with a certain set of rules, but they don't see the variations and the translatability of knowledge and skill (see also Miller & Ginsberg 1995s).

The way *feedback* is given and formulated was further found to be of importance. Laubscher (1994) believes that not necessarily only the classroom corrections, but any form of intervention by native speakers, can be a salient factor of improvement. DeKeyser (2007) mentions this as well, stating that even any kind of negative feedback is still an important step to enhancing proficiency. However, another finding of the previously mentioned Miller and Ginsberg (1995) study was that students found different in-class and out-of-class learning results and feedbacks confusing and frustrating. Wilkinson (2002) as well as Miller and Ginsberg (1995) also found in their students' introspective reports that they somehow expected formal explanations by native speakers according to classroom norms which, when not met, led to negative attitudes and inappropriate behaviour on both sides.

This last point further illustrates how language contact and intercultural experience are linked. If students build up self-consciousness, fear or negative attitudes towards the target language or its use, it will negatively influence their language contact and therefore their ability to make meaningful relationships, which could help them to acquire new skills and knowledge about life in the host country and its values, norms and culture-specific behaviours. In a worst case scenario, students experience prejudice or even discrimination, which can lead to a full rejection of all target culture related contact.

Discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes

Of the many factors that are also neutrally referred to as intergroup perceptions, discrimination and perceived prejudice show that culture contact does not necessarily lead to understanding and harmony (Allport 1979). It is often witnessed that there is a greater discrimination towards people whose cultural background shows more disparities from someone's culture (culture distance), but not necessarily, as it is often also the case of neighbouring countries, or even towards minorities in the own country. "It is not uncommon for international students to perceive prejudice and discrimination, and these perceptions are often stronger in

students who are more culturally dissimilar from members of the host population” (Ward et al. 2001, 153). Perceived discrimination and prejudice are reasons for poor adaptation, because those sojourners often have less contact with host nationals and therefore less learning opportunities (Leong & Ward 2000). This reduced contact can either be voluntary by the sojourner (as their willingness to adapt is greatly constrained), or as response to a low language proficiency, coming from the host nationals. Either way, it is one of the stressors that might result in lower sociocultural adaptation and is worth considering in the examination of students’ SAS.

These concepts are also often expressed and researched as stereotypes, but in this context not necessarily seen as something negative (Roche 2001). Bond (1986) for instance describes how stereotypes serve to harmonise cultural contact between American and Chinese students in Hong Kong, especially, since students’ contacts are often voluntary and serve learning reasons (as previously shown in the friendship networks).

As it is a delicate, but serious issue, perceived discrimination will be of consideration for this study and cultural prejudice will be followed up on as one of the stressors.

3.4.4 Summary

This sub-chapter introduced the process of socio-cultural adaptation and its influencing factors. Apart from certain program factors that could mainly be excluded for this study, students’ internal mindset and experience as well as external stressors are of interest for this study.

An internal or intrinsic motivation is believed to be a good predictor for learning and engaging with others; however, external goals can be very powerful too. Having clear expectations can help students approaching the SAS and its outcomes more realistically. These expectations can be shaped in training or by experience. They both assist in reducing the negative impact of culture shock so students better understand what to expect and how to approach problems. Previous language instructions can do the same, as they ideally convey culture-general and culture-specific skills and knowledge through the language learning process. Attitudes that

are primarily innate can be developed by contact with people of other cultural backgrounds as well as formal instructions, as a person learns to re-evaluate their viewpoints and to shift their frame of reference. Hence, language learning prior to a sojourn can not only result in a higher proficiency of the target language that helps to interact with native speakers, but also creates salient skills and knowledge that learners can apply during a sojourn.

As stressors during a sojourn a number of external factors could be identified as being of interest for this study. They include: academic, language, cultural, interpersonal, housing and financial problems; discrimination; homesickness, and loneliness. In order to further explore what might have enhanced or impeded students' IC and language development, certain factors of culture contact theories are assessed in this study. These include friendships and general networks with locals; language contact and learning during the SAS, and problems like discrimination and prejudice that might have resulted from contact with native speakers.

Deriving from this rather extensive overview of IC theories and its development, and the adaptation process that students are undergoing, three research questions emerged, that will be explained in the following section.

3.5 Research Questions

First Research Question

Sub-chapter 3.2 summarized general finding of IC components and an overview of those that were found to be enhanced by study abroad, was given. As a consequence of these findings, this study's first question arose: 'What are the components of intercultural competence according to the students' perspective, and how can a study abroad semester influence them?'

Students' perspective on what IC consists of, and what specific components changed during the SAS are identified for this study first and these findings are presented in Chapter 5. This helps to explore the students' perspective on IC and to

compare it with the findings of the previously introduced studies and IC models, as well as the outcomes that were stated by the government and educational institutions in Chapter 2. In order to receive meaningful and well-reflected answers to this question, several minor research steps should enlighten this topic in more detail:

- (1) Intercultural competence was previously defined as “the ability to communicate appropriately and effectively with members of another culture”, and components that scholars and researchers think are influential were introduced. Therefore, this definition is used to explore the question ‘What does it take to communicate effectively and appropriately with members of other cultures?’ in a very open and wide manner and most importantly from the students’ perspective. Naturally, it was expected to receive many answers that refer to language and linguistic skills, but also other prerequisites that students found important.
- (2) Additionally, with the help of students’ answers to this question, the link between language and intercultural development during a SA sojourn is explored further, by seeing if students include language in their answers. However, the role of the language is additionally explored, asking students directly: ‘Is knowing the other language the most important factor for successfully living and studying abroad?’
- (3) As was further explained in 3.4, students are undergoing adaptation processes during their semester abroad. Therefore, they might see other skills or traits as necessary for living and studying abroad, as an extension of the previously mentioned IC components. Hence it was further assessed: ‘Which other key components are important for successfully living and studying abroad?’ and compared to already known IC components (see 3.2.5).
- (4) In order to not only theoretically ask students about their opinion on IC and language skills, a more direct, but also elaborate way of seeing how the SAS influenced these is desirable. Therefore, students were directly asked what IC components they think have been changed during the SAS, and how they are able to tell.

Those four questions were therefore incorporated into this study's initial assessment of IC components. The first three questions could be included in a survey and were assessed at three different points in time to further explore if students' opinions had change over time. The fourth question was assessed in a more reflective way, in the form of a short essay that was also part of their return unit's assessments.

Second research question

Having identified the different components of IC and specified the role of the language for it in the first research questions, the second research question extends this by asking: 'How does the study abroad semester contribute to students becoming more interculturally competent?' Therefore, their IC has to be assessed in a way that reflects changes in specific areas as well as looking at IC holistically.

Most of the introduced models do not address the question about how to assess IC in its entirety. Language skills as outcome of study abroad have been extensively researched (see e.g. Freed 1995, 1998, Kinginger 2009) and also various IC-related skills, attitudes and knowledge tests have been created⁶⁰. As all of the theories presented in sub-chapter 3.3 agree, IC development is a process and if assessed it has to be treated as such. That means, although most testing methods will only reflect on a student's momentary IC, if assessed at, at least, two different points in time (i.e. before and after the sojourn), it will show whether they have changed. Ideally, this assessment method reflects on specific components and allows an insight into students' experiences in between the two testing points. This is essentially what the second research question is aiming for. In order to do so, students' comfort in specific intercultural encounters and changes in students' attitudinal, behavioural and cognitive development are looked at separately before and after the sojourn as well as half a year later. For this purpose, a questionnaire (*Reflection of Intercultural Encounters*) developed and published by the Council of Europe is used to assess students' IC development in specific intercultural encounters at three points in time.

⁶⁰ See Fantini (2006) for a comprehensive overview.

As a next step, the change of students' self-perceived interests, attitudes, skills, knowledge and language level is observed before and after the sojourn, as well as half a year later. Only ABC components that were commonly identified by different theories in the literature review (in bold in Table 5) were used in the surveys. This will show how closely different IC components and the language develop simultaneously and how they generally changed.

Third Research Question

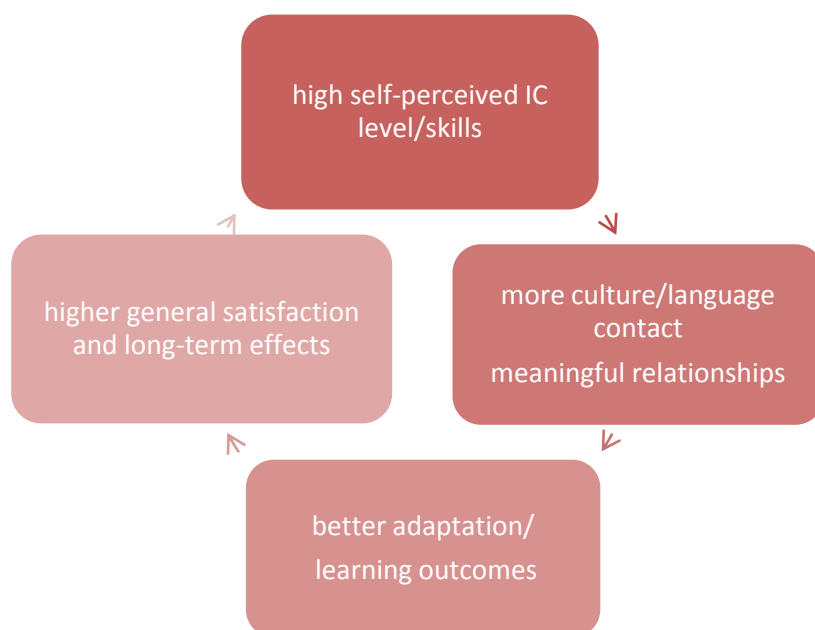
As opposed to the previous, rather smaller research step, assessing adaptation is a large field and the main focus of this study is on socio-cultural adaptation. (Searle & Ward 1990, Ward & Rana-Deuba 1999, Wilson et al. 2013). The third research question therefore aims to explore: 'What factors influenced students' intercultural as well as language learning and how did they help/hinder students in the adaptation and learning process?' Therefore, looking at students' individual experiences and what they found especially beneficial or impeding should be a main focus point in the assessment of students' experiences.

This third research question is linked to the second one as it draws from its assessment outcomes in order to further look at the adjustment process. As the previously introduced IC development models show, all components including language outcomes, develop interdependently; so only if someone's attitudes and knowledge are at a certain level, will their behavioural and consequently communicative skills develop in a similar form too. It is assumed that high intercultural competence, as a prerequisite of successful adaptation, assists students best to adjust to the study abroad environment and to generally make the most of the learning opportunities to achieve the best outcomes. This is further assumed, because students with a high IC level exhibit the traits, skills and knowledge (i.e. the confidence and willingness) to have more culture contact and hence more meaningful relationships (i.e. with local friends, housemates, fellow students and teachers) and to get less stressed by negative influences (i.e. language, cultural or academic problems). This suggests that language learning can only successfully happen in this IC development circle and consequently if someone's IC is high, their

communicative skills will follow on a similarly high level, which in turn will enhance someone's IC components further. What factors influence students positively and negatively, and to what extent and with whom culture contact is beneficial, will be part of this research question. If students with higher intercultural competence are really able to adapt and to learn better, and if they are actually more satisfied with their study abroad semester and reached better long-term effects, will be the second part of this examination. Vice versa, it is believed that students with low intercultural competence have trouble making the most of their study abroad semester and therefore adapt less or at a slower pace and improve their outcomes to a lesser extend.

Since all of the above factors are assumed to influence each other, an adaptation-cycle serves as illustration of the underlying hypotheses (Figure 15). One factor leads to another and since intercultural development is an ongoing process, this is an infinite cycle that is mainly limited by the duration of the SAS.

Figure 15: The intercultural-adaptation-cycle



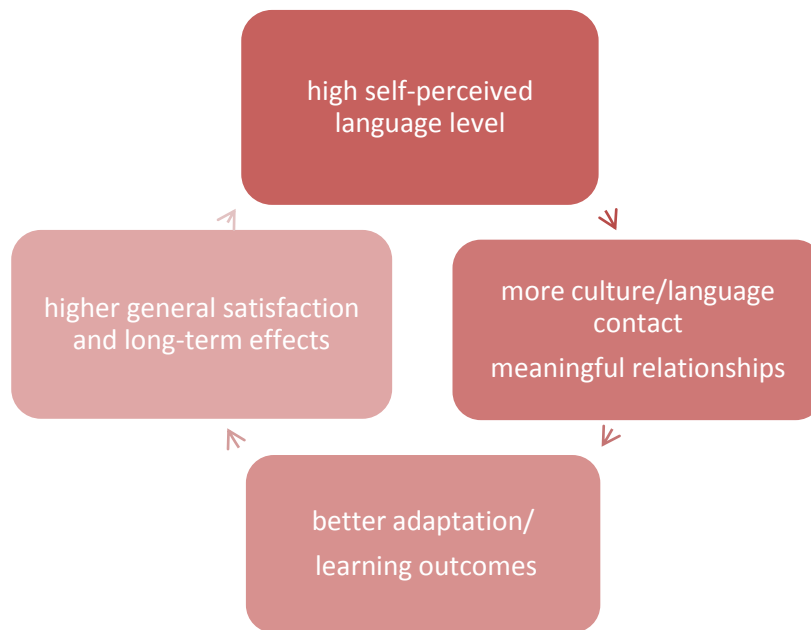
Every step in one of the four boxes has different influencing factors that impact on students to a different extent. It will be the third aim of this study to identify these

with the help of a number of survey questions. The previously introduced stressors and predictors are just a few among many factors that are believed to have an influence on how students adjust during the SAS. Of the predictors that will be explored in this study, previous experience with the host culture and a higher language level are believed to be important for the prediction of students' comfort in intercultural encounters before the sojourn, as well as their adaptation during the SAS. The role of motivation, at this point, is not sure and the data will show how influential intrinsic reasons to study a degree or to study abroad can be. Since the program features are quite similar for most students, more emphasis is put on the exploration of other external factors, such as academic, cultural and interpersonal issues; accommodation and finances; and personal factors such as feelings of loneliness or homesickness. Of special interest for this study is the concept of culture contact and its many implications and effects on students' learning and adjustment. It is believed that extensive contact with locals or native speakers, especially in friendship networks, at university and in students' living environment will not only enhance language learning, but also culture learning and consequently students' adjustment – a hypothesis that will have to be proven in this third research step.

Further, it is assumed that the connection between language and adjustment is the same as the previously assumed connection between intercultural competence and adjustment (Figure 16): the better the language skills, the better the adjustment and learning outcomes and therefore general satisfaction. A higher proficiency in the target language might influence students' affective traits and self-esteem, especially leaving them feeling more confident, already before the SAS. Hence, students with a lower self-perceived language level might feel less confident, shy or even intimidated. Consequently, it not only influences students' behaviour in everyday social encounters, but also who they choose to have contact and use the language with, i.e. locals, internationals, fellow students etc., and how meaningful these relationships are. Better language knowledge might facilitate this, which leads to a better integration, which in return results in more language contact improving their language skills and other learning outcomes further – a two-way advantage. Having local friends and getting along with the language well might further improve

adjustment and facilitate studying in the host country, resulting in a more satisfying overall study abroad experience.

Figure 16: Language use – adjustment - cycle



The same correlations are assumed for the opposite case. An initial low self-perceived language level results in lower confidence to use the language, which leads to less language contact, therefore in a lower level of adjustment and intercultural learning and consequently in a less satisfactory overall study abroad experience. These two hypothesises are assessed and tested in Chapter 8.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

As a result of the literature review, three research questions arose that were further explained in the previous chapter. Their purpose is to answer IC components and their development during a study abroad semester, as well as to explore how language and intercultural learning influence each other, and what other factors play a role during the adjustment process. The research questions are explored in a case study that focuses on a group of students whose degree combines language and culture studies with an obligatory study abroad semester. Many students are similar in their socialisation background and level of higher degree education in Australia, but differ in their personal backgrounds, experiences and exhibition of personality features, interests and skills. Since the Bachelor of International Studies degree described here, with its compulsory SA component, is relatively new in this form in Australia, this study is part of basic research to enhance the understanding and knowledge of study abroad and intercultural competence development. This also provides a deeper insight into many different areas that are part of this experience, especially in the Australian context and with students of a language degree. The research questions cover a lot of different interests to gain an insight into outcomes and influencing factors with the help of personal accounts and individual reflections. The perspectives on IC components in particular and experiences during an SAS for Australian undergraduate language students in general are relatively unknown and therefore significant for the research in this field.

The main questions that inspired this study's scope is: 'What impact and effect does a study abroad semester have on students' intercultural competence development? And what is the role of the target language in this scenario?' Since intercultural competence is of special interest here, it is taken into consideration that this is influenced by and a consequence of many different internal and external factors (as discussed in 3.4).

A combination of qualitative research methods was employed to gain individual and meaningful accounts of students' perspectives and reflections on their

experiences. It is not an aim to find quantitative results that can be used to represent Australian students in SA situations in general. The numerical findings presented reflect perspectives of these students as a result of their personal background, capabilities, language abilities and their individual experiences during their SAS. Respecting that each student and their study abroad experience is individual and dependent on a lot of internal and external factors, research (see literature review), however, leads to the assumption that certain outcomes or changes might be commonly expected since they have been reported in numerous studies. These areas might be language and culture learning, as well as personal and skill development as a result of the adaptation process. Changes do not necessarily occur in all of these areas at once and do not have to be positive, but certain developments can be expected, that is, if the student actually tried to adapt to the new culture and study environment, to overcome stressors and problems, made an active effort to learn the local language and attempted to form meaningful relationships with native speakers. This is essentially what this study is concerned with – more specifically the students' perspectives and their outcomes, views, experience, and retrospection and the influencing factors that shaped them. The results might eventually help educators and policy makers to develop realistic expectations and provide a deeper understanding of what the study abroad experience is like from a students' perspective.

This chapter offers an overview and explanation of the research methodology and design: starting with a general note on mixed method research, followed by a short summary of case study research and its implications, next a description of the three methodological instruments and last, an overview of how the three research questions (and corresponding hypotheses) are assessed and analysed.

4.2 Research Methodology

4.2.1 Case Study Research

According to 90% of the intercultural experts and 100% of higher education administrators in Deardorff's study, a case study design is the appropriate method to

assess intercultural competence. Referring to David Nunan (1992, 75), if one does a case study “one selects an instance from the class of objects or phenomena one is investigating and investigates the way this instance functions in context.” It is a bounded system, with a fixed problem of a specific research group at a specific time and the aim is to explore the connection between certain factors. The instance selected for this study is a group of Bachelor of International Studies students in Australia and the context is their semester abroad experience. It is investigated as a case of study abroad experiences and IC learning of students. The correlation between influencing factors and outcomes is central to this study. “The purpose of such observation is to probe deeply and to analyse the intensity of the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with a view to establishing generalisations about the wider population to which the unit belongs” (Cohen & Manion, 1985, 77 in Nunan 1992). Typical features of this particular study and of case studies in general are:

- Subjects are real people with their behaviour, thoughts and feelings.
- It is based in reality and set in the here and now.
- The researcher has little or no control over the context.
- Generalisations about an instance or a class are possible.
- It shows a wide range of viewpoints and therefore is open for various interpretations.
- The data can later be re-interpreted by other researchers.
- The results can be used immediately i.e. for teaching purposes.

(Adelman et al. 1976, Gillham 2000, Yin 2009)

Not only do these features influence the type of research, but also what characteristics one is looking for in the research group. Hence, "case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of what is to be studied. By whatever methods, we choose to study the case" (Stake, 2000, 435). Yin (2003a, 10) emphasises that case study refers to a strategy that is being used to generalise ‘theoretical propositions’. He distinguishes between exploratory or causal and descriptive case studies, whereas the research method defines what kind of case study one is establishing and vice

versa. Using surveys usually leads to descriptive research outcomes, whereas interviews or diaries explore causal connections further. The mix of methods used in this case study tries to describe students' outcomes, but also to explore these causal links of SA outcomes and factors, although surveys are an essential part of this research. However, the way this study's survey questions are designed, aims to explore the 'why' and 'how' of the situation (Yin 2009) and is therefore congruent with case study theories.

As for the results of a case study Yin (2003a) summarises they:

are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes. In this sense, the case study [...] does not represent a 'sample', and in doing a case study, your goal will be to generalize theories (analytical generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization) (p. 10).

He stresses the importance of theory development prior to the data collection and the developing or testing of that theory as a result of their analysis.

That is why, in the previous chapter, the theories this study is based on were presented and discussed. The importance of the language as well as the components IC is based on, were explained and their use for the interpretation of the data is discussed in the next chapter together with the presentation of the data. The methods used to explore previously mentioned theories and hypotheses about study abroad are introduced and outlined in the next sub-chapter, explaining their mode of employment.

4.2.2 Mixed Method Research

One of the advantages of case study research is that it allows for the use of multiple methods for quantitative as well as qualitative data collections as long as the methods comply with the above mentioned general features of case study research. Nunan (1992, 74) explains this further: "A case study is a 'hybrid' in that it generally utilises a range of methods for collecting and analysing data, rather being restricted to a single procedure." Gillham (2000, 2) agrees with his viewpoint: "No one kind of source of evidence is likely to be sufficient (or sufficiently valid) on its own. This use of multiple sources of evidence, each with its strengths and weaknesses, is a key characteristic of case study research." Therefore, it is suggested to use a mixed

method research methodology to employ different methods of collecting meaningful and reliable data. Case study research can be conducted relying only on quantitative methods (Nunan 1992, Yin 2009), but generally a mix of methods is recommended to gain deeper insights into the context and to better validate data. Therefore, quantitative and qualitative methods can be employed together or even just different qualitative strategies. Merriam (1988, 16) further states:

the qualitative case study can be defined as an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit. Case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic and rely heavily on inductive reasoning in handling multiple data sources. (in Nunan 1992, 77)

Usually the topic that is being researched as well as the nature of the subjects lead to a mix of methods that is elaborate as well as practical. Furthermore, while using different methods for the data collection (each single one will be further explained in the next sub-chapter) the validity and reliability of the data have to be kept in mind (Kohlbacher 2006). Stake (1988) explains this further:

A case study is valid to the reader to whom it gives an accurate and useful representation of the bounded system. Accuracy of observing and reporting is not a matter of everyone seeing and reporting the same thing. Observers have different vantage points ... Readers have different uses for research reports. The validity of the report is different for each, according to the meaning the reader gives to it. (p. 263)

The majority of the intercultural experts in Deardorff's Delphi-study agreed that a mix of qualitative and quantitative, or solely qualitative research in this field should be conducted to assess IC. Krajewski (2011) also suggests a mix of different methods including self-observations, interviews and case studies. Especially in the area of study abroad, more qualitative research is demanded to understand outcomes and adjustment problems (Usinier 1998, Hashimoto 2003). As each SA sojourn and student is individual, qualitative or mixed research methods provide a better insight into the experience so it becomes easier for the researcher to understand the context and influencing factors (ibid.).

The use of narratives and self-reports in particular enhance an understanding of the students' perspective which has already been discussed in 3.3.2. Pavlenko (2007) lists three major contributions of narratives on second language learning research: they offer an insight into the learners' personal world; they help finding new directions and links between phenomena; and thirdly, they deliver a diachronic

source of data which other research methods cannot provide. For the purpose of this study, quantitative, quantified as well as several qualitative methods were employed whereas the main focus is on the latter ones. The research mix and rationale of these methods is further explained in the following chapter.

4.2.3 Overview of Research Design

For this study it seemed logical to use a mix of different methods to, first, triangulate data and second of all, find out more than what only one single method can provide. Hence, three different methods were used for the data collection: the *Reflection of Intercultural Encounters (RIE)* questionnaire, three surveys and a self-reflection essay. They were employed to not only validate and strengthen each other's results by answering the question of 'what changes', but also to explore new dimensions of 'how and why does it change'. The *RIE* and some of the survey questions provide numerical data, but more importantly contain narrative elements and therefore might provide new insights into students' perspectives and causal explanations of different factors. The self-reflection essay, parts of the *RIE* and the surveys were created to deliver meaningful quantified data to provide trends and to strengthen the findings of the *RIE*. These three methods will be explained and discussed further in the following sub-chapter.

Table 6: Methodological overview of the study's research design

Stage 1 Pre-Departure (Dec 2010-Mar 2011)	Stage 2 Post-Return (May-Jul 2011)	Stage 3 Post-Semester (six months after re-entry)
Survey (S1): Demographics, previous experiences, expectations, reasons, ICC-self-evaluation, language and ICC-questions	Survey (S2): expectations, reasons, ICC-self-evaluation, language and ICC-questions, problems, adaptation	Survey (S3): reflection of reasons, language and ICC-questions, ICC-self-evaluation, adaptation
<i>Reflection of Intercultural Encounters (RIE1)</i>	<i>Reflection of Intercultural Encounters (RIE2)</i>	<i>Reflection of Intercultural Encounters (RIE3)</i>
		Self-reflection essays

4.3 Research and Assessment tools

This study employs three different assessment tools at different stages to triangulate data and to gain meaningful insights into the students' study abroad experience. The *RIE* is used to collect numerical and narrative data about students' comfort in certain intercultural encounters and asks for comments that essentially reflect students' attitudes, behaviour, skills and knowledge in/of these situations. It therefore mainly serves the assessment of the three major ABC components of IC. The numerical results gained from the self-ranking will later help to compare students and their IC development against each other and, with the help of the survey, to explain any possible changes (or inconsistencies). The surveys add to that by focusing especially on students' opinion on IC matters and the description of their experiences overseas. Further, students were asked to rank their language level, which helps to observe their language gains and compare them to their *RIE* rankings. As a third tool, the self-reflection essay makes use of students' strengthened IC metacognitive skills after attending the return unit and tries to explore particular behaviours and traits students might have developed during the SAS.

4.3.1 The Reflection of Intercultural Encounters (RIE)

To learn about students' initial and ongoing experience and their comfort in certain intercultural situations, the *Reflection of Intercultural Encounters (RIE)*⁶¹ as part of the *European Language Portfolio* was employed at three points in time: before the sojourn, once returned and half a year after students' return. It was essential for the purpose of this research project to study students' reflections on experiences with the help of the assessment tools over time, "so that they capture the cumulative effect of intercultural experiences and personal growth that they bring" (Little & Simpson 2003, 5).

⁶¹ This is a self-coined term and not officially used in the ELP. *The Reflection on Intercultural Encounters (RIE)* as part of *The European Language Portfolio (ELP) of the Higher Education Sector* was developed and published by the European Language Council in 2001 after an intensive piloting phase. Only section 2 of the *Language Biography* "How I see myself in intercultural contexts" is used for the present study.

The Reflection on Intercultural Encounters is especially suitable for this study's purposes since it focuses on intercultural encounters inside and outside the classroom and involves students in the reflection on previous encounters and experiences in their own country and outside of it, as well as in hypothetical situations in the future. Since even recognising cultural patterns in one's previous experiences can be challenging, the IC learning process is believed to begin with reflections on one's own culture (Zull 2012).

The *RIE* is a questionnaire consisting of 16 questions grouped in three question-sets (see Appendix A): A: *Encounters with different cultures in my own country* (6 questions); B: *Encounters with people of different cultures in their own countries or communities* (4 questions), C: *Encounters with different cultures in the workplace* (6 questions). The wording of the questions in the last question set was slightly changed to become relevant for study abroad situations. Consequently, words like 'workplace' were replaced with 'university', 'work' with 'study' and 'colleagues' with 'fellow students'. This was done to adjust it to students' immediate environment and the study abroad circumstances, to gain a deeper understanding in how prepared students feel for their exchange semester and to see how the reflection on these situations changed after the SAS.

Self-assessing these 16 encounters involved two steps – a self-rating scale and a comment box for qualitative research purposes. In the quantitative part of the *RIE*, students rated their comfort in the 16 intercultural situations on a 5-point Likert-scale reaching from 1 (This makes me feel very uncomfortable) to 5 (This feels very good – I often seek out such a situation). The intercultural situations mainly ask for students' comfort and behaviour such as how they coped, communicated, adapted, clarified and generally encountered certain previous (or possibly upcoming) intercultural situations. The questions in the third question-set (Encounters at university) are specifically about students' comfort in intercultural situations at either their home university or the host university. Most students, however, decided to comment on the latter, even if it was still to happen when the first survey was taken. Therefore, it was of special interest for this study if these hypothetical behaviours eventually took place and how comfortable students actually felt when they happened.

This questionnaire also gave students the opportunity to comment on each encounter, by giving an example or clarifying their answers. This allowed insights into where and when this situation happened, which allowed making conclusions on whether a certain skill or knowledge was learned during the SAS or somewhere else. Due to the combination of this quantitative as well as qualitative tool, a broad perspective on students' comfort in certain intercultural situations could be received to gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences.

It was found that this questionnaire offered certain advantages that were beneficial for this study's design and assessment. First of all, the assessment of IC is a very difficult task and many researchers have been engaged with it (see 3.3.2). As there are so many self-assessment instruments readily available it was decided to employ a widely used tool (as part of the European Language Portfolio), by a reliable source (Council of Europe), that is based on essential research in the research field (e.g. Byram). The questionnaire itself featured universal encounters that can be experienced by anyone and anywhere. As there is no commonly accepted assessment tool of IC a rather broad questionnaire that triggered students to reflect on their behaviour or attitudes in certain situations was favoured over extensive and expensive tests. According to Zull (2012, 184) "learning will be best when the experience naturally engages the student. It may not be important whether the experience is positive or negative, as long as it is interesting". Moreover, he stresses that reflecting past experiences will help to identify novel ones, which are the starting point for cognitive development. This is another advantage of this questionnaire as it is also a learning instrument. While students' comments help to investigate IC and study abroad further, students are able to reflect on their experiences at the same time and so it helps raise awareness of their comfort in intercultural situations and what might have caused certain attitudes ("student as analyser" Scarino, 2007, 5, also Zull 2012). Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002, 26) explain this: "The role of assessment is ... to encourage learners' awareness of their own abilities in intercultural competence, and to help them realise that these abilities are acquired in many different circumstances inside and outside the classroom." Due to the 'I feel comfortable' descriptors, students could reflect on their own feelings in a non-judgmental way and the comment fields could further stimulate them to engage even

more with these encounters. Since it could be assumed that certain changes were solely due to the study abroad experience, the comments further helped to identify the source of certain changes.

4.3.2 The Surveys

In order to receive longitudinal results, three extensive surveys were created and administered⁶² before (S1) and after the SAS (S2), and half a year after the students' return (S3) to explore the general impact of a study abroad semester as widely as possible. Surveys offer the general advantage of customising them according to the research purposes and to flexibly create questions based on the subjects' reality. It was hoped to gain rich quantitative as well as qualitative data to further validate findings from the *RIE* and essay, but most importantly to allow a deeper insight into students' experiences. The surveys should deliver more answers to the questions why students developed/did not develop their IC and what happened during the semester abroad in terms of adjustment and its predictors and stressors.

The decision to use surveys was made for three main reasons. First, to find out as much as possible about students' IC development in addition to the *RIEs*, which mostly investigated students' general comfort in intercultural situations. Hence, they were asked to rank IC related attitudes, skills and knowledge that were extracted from the relevant research literature in all three surveys. Further, students were asked more concrete questions about IC components and their development over the course of a year, which could easily be analysed for their development. Also questions that led deeper into the field of adaptation and influencing factors could be followed up on, including a number of demographic questions in the first survey.

Second, the surveys were used for practicality reasons: since more than 40 students were asked to participate right before they went overseas, this seemed to be the most feasible method, not just for analysing reasons. Doing the survey in their own time and being able to access the survey as many times as they wanted, gave

⁶² The online survey platform SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com) was used to create the surveys, to collect the answers via email distribution and analyse and summarise data with the help of their internal software.

students the opportunity to properly reflect on their answers and if necessary to change them again. Another feasibility point was that many influential factors and components were examined and online surveys offered a quick way of answering questions in different forms, for instance by just ticking boxes and ranking items.

Third, since a longitudinal approach was aimed for, surveys at three different points in time seemed logical. Although post-return surveys are the most common form of study abroad surveys, their results on outcomes and changes are not always reliable (Carlson et al. 1990) and students' enthusiasm or bad experiences during the sojourn can change their perception of the entire experience (Ward et al. 2001). According to Van Hoof and Verbeeten (2005) before *and* after surveys are therefore more reliable. Because of that, a third survey was administered half a year later, to see if students still agreed with what they said right after their return.

Creating the surveys, these steps were followed: first, the areas of interest were formulated into research questions. Then, their specific criteria and variables were extracted from the research literature and put into survey questions. These areas of interest included students' assessment of IC components, language use, motivation and expectation, adaptation, stressors, predictors and other outcomes. A link to the online survey was then sent out to the students.

Different question types were used in the three surveys to compile a diverse set of answers. First, students' demographic information with regards to factors that might have influenced their intercultural experience and exposure before the SAS, were assessed. They are introduced and summarised in the sub-chapter 4.5. General demographic questions about age, gender, SA country and languages spoken, were asked to describe and understand the cohort better. Further, questions about family background, previous intercultural exposure, language experience etc. were used to see if they are essential predictors for students' IC and language learning as well as their adaptation. It is assumed that previous experience with and exposure to other cultures, as well as a mixed-cultural family background, might have a positive influence on students' IC self-assessment. This shall be further explored in chapter 7.

Survey validation

In order to make the survey more valid, several measurements were undertaken. First, all categories from the survey rely on already existing research, and as shown in the literature review, have an impact on or are associated with intercultural competence and study abroad effects and outcomes. Before administering each survey, a pilot study with three to five participants was conducted to see if answers fit the research objectives. Question types, answer options and wording were then altered if necessary. Furthermore, several question types were used in different stages and for different research objectives, including yes/no-questions, specific answer questions, open-ended questions and ranking and self-ranking questions. Some questions referring to the main research questions were repeated in a different form to gain more reliable data.

Simple yes/no questions were asked to see a general tendency of certain changes in students' thinking. These include mainly outcome-related questions, i.e. about their career and academic plans. In most of these cases, students were given the opportunity to comment on this further in case they wanted to add something or a simple yes-no was not sufficient. Also, in questions with a set list of possible answers, a limited number of answer choices was given, i.e. time frames or education settings.

A broad and deeper exploration of students' experiences and perspectives was achieved by employing a mix of quantitative as well as qualitative question types. The open-ended questions helped to gain an insight beyond yes-/no-/don't know-tendencies and were therefore of special interest. These were generally questions that aimed to enrich the research basis of study abroad outcomes and intercultural competence components in general and it was hoped to find new answers to already existing research topics (as introduced in Chapter 3). Often students were asked 'What do you think...', 'What are the reasons, problems ...', 'What does it take ...' – question types to receive more and possibly new answers to certain study abroad topics. In some of these questions, students were also asked to define a phenomenon relating to SA, IC and language learning and the change of their answers before and after their SAS was then analysed insofar as they were available. Students were asked the same questions in all three stages to see a general tendency of changes as well as

to explore possible reasons for it. In some questions students were asked to simply list their answers in the first and second survey, and for the last survey these answers were compiled in a list, so students just had to tick the one(s) that they thought were most suitable. That way, a verification as well as quantification of the previous survey answers could be achieved. Especially in the area of intercultural competence this was of great interest.

In questions aiming for a before–after comparison, generally a list of possible answers was given and students were asked to rank their skills or opinions on that topic on Likert-scale. These topics include ranking skills, traits, interests, knowledge, problems and enhancing or impairing factors.

For the self-ranking of their language skills, the descriptors of the Common European Framework of References (CEFR, Council of Europe 2001) were used (Table 7). These descriptors are internationally recognised and used as a common basis for self-assessment and the development of learning materials.⁶³ Due to a lack of commonly agreed on descriptors for Australian language learners in higher education at the time when the surveys were created⁶⁴, and since most students were familiar with the CEFR as they were studying European languages, it was decided to use them. Currently, a project group at Monash University is trying to explore application of the CEFR descriptors for the Australian higher education context⁶⁵. At the present, there are descriptors for 36 languages, including Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Indonesian and three Middle Eastern languages (Ross 2011).

⁶³ See <http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/language-framework>.

⁶⁴ There are descriptors for Asian languages in secondary education (The Student Achievement in Asian Languages Education – SAALE) (Scarino et al. 2011).

⁶⁵ Although there has been criticism on their applicability for language learning in the Australian context (i.e. McNamara & Elder 2010, Scarino 2012), a new Languages Curriculum with its own descriptors and references, taking into account background speakers of other languages and Australian Aboriginal languages, is currently being introduced for the secondary education sector (ACARA 2013).

Table 7: Common European Framework of Reference, (Council of Europe 2001)

Proficient User	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent User	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic User	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Survey analysis

The analysis of the survey data was guided by the research design and principles of case study research. A theory-based research design and the incorporation of differing explanations in the interpretation of the data are central for case study research, according to Yin (2003a). Yet, this study's data collection and analysis exhibits some special features that are explained below.

The first intention was to develop a data collection method through ongoing data analysis in a progressive step-by-step process (Hartley 2004). Since this longitudinal study consisted of three survey stages, a gradual development was possible and intended. Hence, the creation of the first survey was mainly influenced by the research literature and theory, but the subsequent ones were also influenced by the data and categories the previous ones had provided. That way, more detailed and deeper information could be gathered by altering and adding survey questions accordingly. In doing so, the students' perspective could directly be added to the research design. Also, previous answers could be collected and incorporated in the questions to test their reliability. Another advantage was that the data could be reviewed straight away and first results were visible right after the first assessment stage. Thus, a prolonged waiting period of a year, until the end of the final data collection, could be avoided. This is also how the decision to conduct an essay instead of interviews was made; mainly since participation rates and quality of the answers did not seem satisfying at that point in time.

Further, qualitative as well as quantitative/quantified evidence was combined and tested to find evidence for the research hypotheses (Yin 2003a) and to achieve reliability and validity of the results. Multiple data sources created a way of triangulation and therefore a more holistic and reliable explanation and interpretation (Jick 1979). "One can be confident of the finding if it can be independently derived from several different concurrent data sources" (Sutton et al. 2007, 330). In combining methods they give a balance to each other's strengths and weaknesses and that way one receives a more effective way of receiving insights into a complex social phenomenon (ibid). Consequently, if the results in all three methods were similar, one could assume that not only the right method was chosen, but also that these results could be generalised for a wider group, one of the aims of case study research (Jick 1979, Gillham 2000).

Another special feature of this research design involves the data analysis itself. Although the theoretical background of study abroad and IC development was explored beforehand and themes were extracted, the actual way the data was analysed was guided by the data itself, since "data analysis means a search for patterns in data" (Neuman 1997, 426). It was of major interest to contribute to the

theory of IC development by possibly finding new categories and codes. More precisely, this meant that there was no concrete data analysis method or coding agenda decided on before the actual data were analysed more closely. This method fits into common strategies of describing the data, then developing categories and allocating the data accordingly, further developing key topics and central themes or questions from these categories and examining how they fit in the categories (Hartley 2004). This method was used for all three assessment methods. While this made it possible to alter survey questions accordingly, the questions of the *RIEs* were not changed during the course of the study.

Each of the three methods was analysed separately to closely explore the reasons they were developed for. While the analysis of the survey questions was relatively straight forward and led by the question type, the *RIE* and the essay required a different approach (as seen below). After this separate step, results were put together, matched and compared to see if they complemented or contradicted each other. That way a higher chance of reliability and generalisation was aimed to be achieved.

4.3.3 The Essay

The decision in favour of an essay and against interviews was made during the course of the data analysis for several reasons.

In the last survey, students were asked if they were willing to participate in a focus group or interview and only very few students agreed to that. Since only a small number of students had participated in the entire study at this point anyway, it would have further reduced the amount of data. There were also other reasons that made the decision for an essay more feasible.

After having analysed the first two surveys, there remained only two specific questions in order to compliment the findings on students' perspectives on IC components and their development. These two questions were phrased for the essay as follows: *'Reflect on intercultural competencies you have developed during your study abroad semester: Which competencies do you think you have developed? How can you tell that you have developed these?'* The purpose of the essay was to only

reflect on these two questions a few months after their return. The first part of the question aimed to explore IC components further and to see what students think changed the most, to explore the influence of the SAS. The essay prompt was purposely given the direction of IC and its components so students had to reflect on these and no other competencies such as career or academic ones. However this question was also quite broad and no examples were given, so students would not be led too much into one direction and their responses could help to discover new categories or components. In the second part of the question, greater outcomes of the SAS were aimed to be explored to see what other changes students had observed and how it had impacted on their lives. Students could answer this in various ways, whether they had noticed these changes themselves, or others did; whether it was already during the exchange or after their return, and whether it actually had a longer lasting impact on various domains of their lives. Again, the question was rather general in order to not prompt any responses and also the analysis was not led by a specific agenda.

Third, it was a priority to receive many answers to this question to gather as much data as possible to quantify them for the analysis. So, time management and practicability were salient points for this choice. Conducting interviews would have taken too long, since students were about to finish their degree and in most cases to leave university for good. The low participation rate of the third survey proves this point (see 4.5.2). Since the essay could be incorporated as one of the assessment tasks of the students' return unit, data from most students could be received and it can be assumed that students took it relatively seriously as it was one of the requirements of the unit.

Fourth, writing a short essay gave students the opportunity to gather their thoughts first and to thoroughly think about their answers. That way they had the chance to reflect on their experience in their own time and speed, and the researcher could hopefully receive well-reflected and complete answers. Writing in general is seen as an especially effective way of stimulating reflection, an essential part of the learning process (Paige & Vande Berg 2012). Essays can be used in addition to quantitative data to make "them less reductionist" (Sutton et al. 2007, 34) as they show a higher reflectiveness and therefore support other findings quite well. Since

the return unit had addressed intercultural theories and competencies, students could bring in their knowledge about them too. Meanwhile, this process might have helped them to gain a different, more retrospect perspective on the entire SA sojourn as well, or at least to summarise and reflect on the whole study abroad experience.

Similar to the make-up of the *RIE*, it was not specified what kind of answers students would give, but a wide range of skills and competencies that students had acquired was expected. These might include intercultural and language skills, but also social, personal, academic and professional ones. In reflecting on them at this particular point in time, changes could not be assessed like in the survey questions, but students' individual reflections were sufficient as records to explore this further.

4.4 Research Questions and Methodology

Finding answers to the research questions requires looking at multiple factors and outcomes and therefore several smaller research steps had to be undertaken and numerous minor questions had to be asked. As previously introduced, the three major research questions are:

Q1. What are the components of intercultural competence according to these students' opinion and how can a study abroad semester influence them?

Q2. How does the study abroad semester contribute to students becoming more interculturally competent?

Q3. What factors influenced students' intercultural as well as language learning and how did they help/hinder students in the adaptation and learning process?

In the following section, the research questions as well as hypotheses that derive from them are explained and how they are assessed with the help of the three surveys, the *RIE* as well as the self-reflection essay (Table 8).

Table 8: Research questions and methods of assessment

Research question	Method of assessment
1: IC components	IC-related survey questions (4x of S1,S2,S3), self-reflection essay
2: IC development	Self-assessment of IC components (4 survey questions of S1, S2, S3), <i>RIE</i> 1,2,3
3: IC and language link, adaptation stressors and predictors	Survey questions of S1, S2, S3 plus scores of <i>RIEs</i>

4.4.1 Assessment and Analysis of the First Research Question:

The first research question aims to explore students' opinion on what components intercultural competence consists of and which ones a study abroad semester can actually enhance. The previous exploration of IC components (3.2) laid the theoretical foundation resulting from research findings in the areas of IC and ICC. For triangulation and validation purposes, students were asked to answer three salient questions regarding intercultural competence and the role of the language in the surveys and one question on this topic in the essay. Open-ended questions were used in order to explore the students' perspective as well as to possibly find new components. The four questions that resulted from the research overview were:

1. What does it take to communicate effectively and appropriately with members of other cultures?
2. Is knowing the other language the most important factor for successfully living and studying abroad?
3. Which other key components are important for successfully living and studying abroad?
4. Which intercultural competencies have students developed and how can they tell? (Essay)

How these four questions were assessed for this study, their underlying hypotheses and their analysis will be further explained below.

1. *Question: What does it take to communicate effectively and appropriately with members of other cultures?*

Students were asked to comment on this question in their surveys in an open-answered form, with no restrictions or examples given. Answers were collected in the first and second survey to gain a rich knowledge base. Changes between the two surveys are addressed in the data presentation, but mainly the second survey's answers are of interest, because they incorporate students' SA experience. Since components that were agreed on by scholars were already known (i.e. Deardorff) it was expected to find many of them in the students' answers too. The previously mentioned ABC components were expected to be found. However, an open approach with no pre-arranged analysing scheme or 'open coding' (Grbich 2007) was preferred to leave space for new answers, which was the purpose of this question. In the analysis of the data, categories were extracted from the answers, which helped to quantify the data. Specific components were then discussed in more detail. Further, a qualitative before-after analysis helped to see how students changed their opinion on this question.

2. *Question: Is knowing the other language the most important factor for successfully living and studying abroad?*

This question was asked to see if the target language actually plays a vital role for students during the SAS. A large amount of the research literature on study abroad outcomes deals with language acquisition (e.g. Freed 1995, Kinginger 2009). It is therefore thought that it is considered as one of the most important prerequisites as well as outcomes of the sojourn (Masgoret & Ward 2006), but this is open for the findings of the data. A first insight into this very important matter will have been gained through the previous question. This question therefore validates and emphasises previous results.

Students could answer this question with 'yes' and 'no' and then comment on their decision. The findings are expected to show, first, how important students think knowledge of the target language is and secondly how their perspectives changed over time. Students' comments give an insight into what they think language is

important for and possibly what aspects of language knowledge (i.e. speaking, pronunciation, vocabulary etc.) they found especially helpful. Especially interesting is the comparison of their opinions before and right after their sojourn as it shows if students' expectations on this matter were proven right. Since there is no correct answer to this question, any comment and change of perspectives will give a new insight into this matter.

As most students decided not to participate in all three surveys, mainly the results of the group of ten students who did all three surveys ('matches' group) were examined. More important than the distributions of 'yes' and 'no' are the additional comments and therefore all of the students' comments are studied in terms of whether they support or negate the question and whether their quality changed over time. These results were analysed in depth, since it is believed to give an important insight into students' opinions on the importance of the target language for an SAS. There was no pre-determined analysing scheme and an open and answer-led approach was used. Having established if language is even seen as necessary or important for living and studying abroad by the students, other key factors were explored further.

3. Question: Which other key components are important for successfully living and studying abroad?

This question is the extension to the previous one, as it not only asks about communicative/intercultural features, but generally what else is necessary to successfully live and study in another country, to further open the subject to adaptation features. It gives a better insight into what students think is necessary for a semester abroad and helps to discover if the SAS actually does help to enhance it. The aim is to receive a list of features that students think are necessary for this experience. Students answered this question in all three surveys. In S1 and S2 this question was open-ended, so students could give any possible answer and as many as they wanted to. For the third survey, previous answers were accumulated and students were asked to rank which ones they think are most important. This was done to compare and validate the previous answers. In the third survey, students

were also specifically asked what was necessary to study successfully overseas, to see if they had any suggestions or opinions on what attitudes or skills were especially study-related and to compare them with the general key components they listed earlier. Similar to the previous questions, answers from the first and the second survey are categorised and compared with the ranking students made in the third survey and are then compared.

4. *Question: Which intercultural competencies have students developed and how can they tell? – The self-reflection essay*

In the previous questions, students' opinions on IC and study abroad components and their perspective changes over time are explored. However, it does not prove that these components are influenced by the SAS and can be held responsible for certain changes, as a general maturation process can also be adduced. In order to provide this proof and ultimately to receive a richer collection of IC components that students think they have actually developed due to their SAS, they were asked to write a 500-word self-reflection essay answering the two questions:

Reflect on the intercultural competencies you have developed during your study abroad semester: Which competencies do you think you have developed? How can you tell that you have developed these?

Although the essay questions address the first two research questions, it was decided to use them mainly for exploring the first one, since students were able to list anything they thought might have changed during the SAS. It was hoped to come up with new categories of IC components, although students knew about certain theories from their return unit and the use of the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters* and the *Portfolio* by the Council of Europe (2000, 2009). Further, with the help of the essay, only the overall impact of the SAS on students' IC could be explored, but not in how far it changed (i.e. with the help of rankings), so the extent could not be measured, as intended in the second research question.

Since this essay was part of students' assessment for their return unit, all students submitted it; however, only those essays are analysed for this study's purposes where the particular student had previously participated in at least one of the surveys, so their consent to participate in this study could be obtained. A total

number of 24 essays could be included in this study. Analysing the essays is partially guided by the information the students provide, but also influenced by the previously extracted categories and codes from the research literature and the surveys. Standard qualitative content analysis is used to analyse the essays and to source old and new categories (Krippendorff 2004).

To analyse the subject reality of such a narrative Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest coding them according to emerging themes, patterns and conceptual categories. This can efficiently show recurrent motifs of the subjects' experiences and be compared with previous research findings (Pavlenko 2007). Hence, as a first step, the essays were individually looked at, and the competences students mentioned were extracted and listed in a matrix according to the previously extracted categories of attitude, behaviour or skill, or knowledge. This process was then repeated three times to ensure the highest possible precision with the extraction of the items and the matching of the categories. Since it was not further specified what competencies students were asked to reflect on, a wide range of different answers was expected. Language-related comments were listed separately and are looked at separately in sub-chapter 5.4.4. A fifth category, 'new components' was included in the matrix for items that could not be matched with the four previous ones or that seemed to be completely new answers. Close attention was paid to what students described as the most important change, too.

As a next step, all components of one category (A, B or C) were grouped together, if they referred to the same skill, attitude or knowledge item. As a result, a quantification of the different items could be achieved to see how often they were mentioned by the students. Consequently, they could be compared more easily to previous findings of the first and the third survey questions ('What does it take to communicate effectively and appropriately with members of other cultures?' and 'What other key components are important for successfully living abroad?').

While reading the essays and extracting the categories, close attention was also paid to the second part of the essay question in which students were asked to comment on how they knew that they developed these IC skills. Most students did not answer this question separately or explicitly and therefore, certain clues and implications had to be searched for and in some essays an answer to this question

could not be found altogether. After extracting all of these comments, the most logical way they could then be grouped was according to: 'noticed during (1) or after (2) SAS'. Hence, students' comments were assigned to one of these two categories – either if they had noticed what a difference the SAS had made already during the exchange or upon their return.

In order to research not just the immediate impact of the SAS on students' IC development, but also possible long-term effects, students were further asked in the survey whether they thought they had learnt or adapted to something new overseas, that they would want to keep or integrate in their life after their return. They were also asked to rank a number of items that were accumulated from the first two surveys, according to how important they think they would be for their future.

Having explored what students think are necessary IC and study abroad skills, and how important they think the language is, forms the basis of the next research question. Following, it is explored how students assess their IC and some of their components and if they actually changed throughout the SAS according to their self-assessments.

4.4.2 Assessment and Analysis of the Second Research Question

This second research question (How do students evaluate their intercultural competence and its development before and after their SA?) deals more with quantified or perceived changes of students' intercultural competence. In order to research this aspect, students' IC had to be assessed over time. Therefore, the *Reflection of Intercultural Encounters (RIE)* questionnaire was used as a tool to help students reflect on their comfort in intercultural situations and their experience in these specific encounters. The reasons and advantages of the use of the *RIE* were already discussed in 4.3.1. Further to the analysis of these data, the surveys were used to assess students' interests, traits, skills and knowledge that are associated with intercultural competence. They were extracted from the research literature and the Council of Europe's publication. The chosen features do not claim completeness, but should rather give an indication on how they changed throughout the year. Additionally, students self-perceived languages levels were looked at in all three

surveys to see if there is a correlation between them and the way the ABC components changed.

Data analysis of the Reflection of Intercultural Encounters

In order to extract quantitative data of the *RIE*, several numerical results of students' comfort scores of the 16 intercultural encounters were sourced. First, the average rankings of all three surveys and of the three question sets were determined, to see how students' general comfort changed over time. As a next step, the score results of each of the 16 encounters were looked at separately to see what situations students were especially comfortable or uncomfortable in. Further, the distribution of the 5-point Likert-scale answers for each question were looked at.

The quantitative data were then used to decide what specific encounters should be focused on in the qualitative analysis. Those encounters that had been ranked as either quite comfortable or uncomfortable before the sojourn or those that had changed significantly over time (positively or negatively) were examined more closely. Relevant comments were chosen to explain these changes. For some encounters the changes could be explained through the comments, but for some these remained unknown, because not even students' comments could reveal why their comfort in a specific intercultural encounter had changed. In order to further explore the changes in students' comfort in the last encounter, a question of the surveys aiming to explain students' mediation ability further was used.

After having established what situations made students feel especially comfortable or uncomfortable and therefore reflecting on their competence in that specific intercultural encounters, students' self-perceived changes in their interests, their IC traits, skills and knowledge as well as their languages gains were examined to receive an overview about general and specific changes and to validate the previous findings about ABC changes over time.

Interests, Traits, Skills and Knowledge

Part of the examination of intercultural competence is to explore certain interests, attitudes, skills and knowledge that are believed to be linked to IC, as previously

identified in the literature review. Hence, a self-ranking component was created in the surveys so that students could estimate to which extent they exhibit these abilities.

Questions about students' interests include their general interest in language learning, cultures and global issues. This shows students' curiosity, openness and willingness to engage with the subject matter and international issues in general and is believed to be part of their IC (Council of Europe 2008). Students were asked to what extent they agree with the following six statements:

- (1) I am generally very interested in learning languages.
- (2) I am generally very interested in different cultures and countries.
- (3) I am generally interested in world affairs.
- (4) I generally enjoy meeting people from different cultural backgrounds and communicating with them.
- (5) I enjoy travelling.
- (6) I want to become a competent speaker of my target language and be able to communicate appropriately and effectively with members of the target culture.

The last one, as the definition of intercultural communication (Deardorff 2006), was added to see if it even was the students' goal to become an intercultural speaker and if that changed during and after the SAS. Through those six statements as well as the traits, skills and knowledge ranking, a form of triangulation (together with the essay and *RIEs*) was created to see how students' IC had changed. A 5-point Likert scale was used to receive a numerical overview about students' interest level. Indicators ranged from (1) being 'I don't agree at all' and (5) being 'I strongly agree'. As a second step it was of interest to see if it changed through and after the SAS, so the same question was asked in all three surveys.

Besides students' interests in intercultural and international matters, it was also shown that certain character traits (attitudes - as introduced in 3.2.4) reflecting on an intercultural personality are considered to be essential for one's development

of intercultural competence and furthermore one's ability to adapt to a different culture. Those frequently agreed-on traits are 'being':

- respectful;
- open-minded;
- flexible;
- tolerant;
- world-minded; and
- empathetic towards people with different cultural backgrounds.

Consequently, students were asked three times over the course of the study to rank themselves in how far they believe they had these traits. A comparison analysis will show if these findings will correlate with the finding of the *RIE* and the self-reflection essay. As previously, a 5-point Likert scale from 1 being 'not at all' to 5 being 'completely' was used.

Not just certain character traits and interests, but also a number of skills are associated with intercultural competence. Skills that were accumulated from the research literature were:

- listen well;
- observe well;
- interpret well;
- adapt well to unknown or uncertain situations;
- analyse and compare; and
- withholding and suspending judgment.

Because these skills were assumed to be partially learned through prior education and experiences, they are different from personality factors and were therefore separately listed in the three surveys to have students evaluate them with the help of the same 5-point Likert-scale. Again, how they ranked these skills initially and how they changed over time, was analysed.

Additionally, students were asked to rank their amount of general knowledge about their target and home country:

- understand how others see the world;
- a clear understanding of my own cultural values and biases;
- a good knowledge about my study abroad country;
- have a clear understanding of what one expects me to behave like in my study abroad country.

As previously indicated, is it difficult to assess culture-specific knowledge, since this is a very large field. However, this study is about students' self-evaluations and reflections and further about their self-perceived learning process, therefore true/false knowledge or acquired facts are not of interest and students' personal views on their knowledge level is sufficient.

In order to sum up this part about students' IC changes, they were asked after their return which of these traits, skills and knowledge components they think had changed the most. Their answers to this were compared with the actual longitudinal findings. This is to summarise and verify previous findings.

4.4.3 Assessment and Analysis of the Third Research Question

4.4.3.1 Intercultural Development

As can be seen in the wording of the third research question ('What factors influenced students' intercultural as well as language development and how did they help/hinder students from adapting and learning?'), it consists of two major parts – intercultural and language development – which are both be looked at separately. For the exploration of students' intercultural development (as outlined in the intercultural-adjustment-cycle in 3.5) and its influencing factors, the following research steps were undertaken:

1. Identify the students with a high and low intercultural competence as self-rated in the *RIE-1* and assess predictors (demographics, previous experience etc.) as well as their traits, skills and knowledge of each group before the SAS.
2. Identify the students with a high and low intercultural competence after the SAS (*RIE 2*) and compare their traits, skills and knowledge with the initial high/low *RIE* score group.

3. Identify stressors that occurred during the SAS and how they impacted on the two groups' adaptation and learning.
4. Assess the general satisfaction and long-term effects of the two groups.

Intercultural predictors

The main reasons for identifying possible predictors before and after the sojourn was to compare if the experiences that had an impact on students' IC earlier in their life, are the same ones that might have influenced students' IC development during the SAS. After having assessed how students' self-perceived ICs and its components have changed during the course of a year, it is of interest to explore why these changes happened or did not happen. Consequently, the students with the lowest and the highest *R/E* scores before and after the SAS were grouped together to explore what differentiates the two groups. It is believed that those students who experienced fewer problems and consequently adapted better are generally more content with their overseas experience and are therefore those who benefited the most from it, i.e. by higher self-perceived IC rates and higher self-perceived language skills. In order to discover the factors that are responsible (or not) for students' adaptation and intercultural learning as well as satisfaction, a lot of different questions were asked and partially repeated in the surveys. Their analysis will show which ones are of influence and which ones can be excluded for this group. The results were then matched with the groups of students whose *RIEs* had changed the most during the SAS as well as those who had very low or high *R/E* scores before and after the sojourn to examine its influence on students' IC scores.

Of special interest was why students' *R/E* scores were high or low, so the 10 students with the initially highest or lowest *R/E* scores were extracted as group 1 and 2 respectively, and then the ten students with the highest and lowest score after the SAS were combined in group 3 and 4. Then their answers to certain survey questions were looked at to see if they could predict the *R/E* results of either of the two groups.

Firstly, predictors before students' SAS were looked at, so only group 1 and 2 were of importance here. These factors included previous experience, friends, language knowledge and exposure, IC-related interests, traits, skills and knowledge, personal and family background and reasons for studying abroad. Predictors during

the SAS were students' housing arrangement, the friends they made, their IC-related interest, traits, skills and knowledge level, their self-perceived language level as well as language contact, amount of travel and support by the host university. All these items describe things/people that might have helped students to get a greater exposure to the target culture. Also, they were given a list of ten predictors (studying, teachers and fellow students, living away from my parents, travelling, working, being surrounded by/speaking a different language, friends from the host culture, international friends, friends of the same mother tongue, living in a different city/country), which they were supposed to rank according to how they influenced their IC learning during their study abroad experience, with '1' being the most influential and '10' the least.

Certain predictors, i.e. local friends or being surrounded by the target language, were therefore thought to have a more positive influence on students' intercultural learning than friends of the same mother tongue. The influence of traveling and studying was of special interest too, since it could not be predicted how far students thought they would be helpful. The results will show if this hypothesis is true for the complete group and they are compared to the low and high *RIE-2* group (3 and 4) as well for additional validation of their influence on students' IC.

Intercultural stressors

Similar to the predictors, problems students faced during the SAS were believed to have an influence on their comfort scores as well as intercultural learning. These stressors are frequently arising problems that often occur during a semester abroad: language problems, cultural (adaptation) problems (i.e. food, transportation, culture shock, health system etc.), discrimination/prejudice (racial or ethnic), loneliness, homesickness, academic performance/difficulty (educational system and support, attended classes, teaching methods, requirements etc.), interpersonal problems (i.e. making friends, maintaining relationships, contact with others, gender behaviour etc.), housing and financial problems (see 3.4). Students were asked to rank these problems on a scale from 1 (occurred very often) to 9 (never occurred) to gain a general overview of what problems occurred the most. Language, cultural adaptation

and academic problems were believed to be common, whereas i.e. financial problems were assumed to be of minor importance, because students received a university grant to cover travel expenses and other costs.

In addition to the ranking, students were asked if they expected these problems and if they felt well prepared for the SAS, which are assumed to be important factors in the adaptation and learning process. Unexpected issues might influence students' confidence negatively or even cause major interruptions (Lillie 1994). Students' comments on this question helped to relativise the impact of certain stressors. After an overview of the entire group's ranking, students' results were again looked at separately according to their *RIE* 2 score (group 3 and 4).

Further, the results of the previous problem-ranking were compared to what students found especially hard to adjust to. Especially interesting were also the questions how they managed to adapt to these problems and what they did if they faced a situation that they did not understand. Students' behaviour in unknown or uncertain situations might help to explain why some students struggled to adapt and others did fine.

As a last step, students' general satisfaction with their study abroad semester and their long-term effects were examined across the two *RIE* score groups. They were asked if the SAS was generally what they expected in the second survey and in the third survey what they wished they had done differently. Also, all students were asked if they would recommend studying abroad to other students.

4.4.3.2 Language Development

Different theories about where the language 'fits in' for cultural learning and adjustment processes were discussed in Chapter 3. As previously stated, target language knowledge is not always seen as necessary and not all students improve their language skills whilst studying abroad. Even less is known about the influence of the language on (inter-)cultural learning and if language knowledge is essential at all. Since this study's cohort is from an English-speaking country and many subjects at the host universities are taught in English, a common belief is that English skills are 'enough to survive'. Since this study is about the students' perspective, it is of vital

importance to explore what role students assign to the language and how or if it developed. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that students improved their target language skills and it is not this study's aim to measure actual language gains. Nevertheless, the importance of the language for the adaptation and learning process can be explored and so can the influence of the self-perceived language level.

Language, in the study abroad context, can be seen as both – an influencing contributor (stressor) as well as an outcome with its influencing predictors. Both sides were analysed here. Not knowing the language well or not getting along with it might influence how and to what extent students adapt and actually develop their intercultural competence. Not just students' self-perceived level of language proficiency is assumed to be a decisive factor, but also their experience with the target language, language contact, problems using it in the SA country and ways of dealing with them. It is hoped that the data reveal, first, what role students assign the target language in the study abroad setting in general; second, how students dealt with the language and what influenced their language gain; and third, how their self-perceived language level influenced their intercultural competence development.

At this point, it should be emphasised that the reason why so many different questions were asked in the survey was because it was not certain which factors would be influential, and further to see what the connection between these different factors are in order to determine causal links. The data was consequently skimmed, first to see what specific questions actually delivered useful student comments related to language, adjustment and intercultural learning; and then the final decision what questions will help to gain clear insights into the role of the language was made accordingly.

In order to prove the influence of the language on the adjustment and learning process, certain predictors and stressors are looked at for students with different language levels.

Language predictors

As a consequence of the above hypothesis, the following questions arose: Who are the students with high or low self-perceived language skills, and what might have influenced their learning process positively and negatively? The first part of the language chapter consequently identifies the students with high, medium and low self-perceived language levels and explores the influence of already known predictors as well as new ones like language contact and learning outcomes. Further, the role of the language as a predictor for intercultural learning and adaptation results was examined. The last part deals with language as a single decisive stressor. It is recognised that “with globalisation, we seem to have entered an era where different degrees of purity and authenticity are expected in different venues of learning and use” (Kramsch 2014, 300), therefore self-perceived language level are sufficient for this study as opposed to actual language tests.

Similar to the previous predictor- and stressor-analysis of students with high and low *R/E* scores, students with high, medium⁶⁶ and low language self-rankings were looked at individually to explore what might have influenced their language learning process and further their adaptation and IC development, during the SAS. Since the above research questions do not so much aim for a before-after analysis, but merely to explore if there are certain language thresholds for adaptation and learning, a medium group was included in the analysis and the main focus was put on the second survey⁶⁷. Since many students’ self-ratings generally improved after the SAS, the corresponding level for each group changed, too. It is assumed that numbers will fluctuate across the three surveys, since first of all, not all students participated in all three surveys, and secondly, their self-perceived language level varied over time – some students felt like they improved their language level, some remained on the same level and some felt their language skills deteriorated. The second survey was

⁶⁶ To justify the results of the lower and higher group and to possibly see certain thresholds, which was not aimed for in the *R/E*-score analysis.

⁶⁷ Trying to analyse the results of the group of students with the highest and lowest language changes was not possible, since students’ language level mostly only improved/deteriorated to the next higher/lower CEFR level, so no greater or lesser changes could be observed for a whole group of students.

chosen, because of the relatively high participation rate and because its questions mainly reflect on students' learning and adaptation during the SAS. However, recurring answers of the three surveys were compared accordingly.

In order to group students according to their language level, they were asked to rate their target language skills in all three surveys⁶⁸. The descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference were used for this survey question and students assigned themselves to one of the six language levels: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2. Since this entire study is not based on validated measurable results, but on retrospective accounts and self-reflections, it was refrained from assessing actual language gains with language tests. Moreover, it is not the scope of this research to measure actual language results, but to investigate the influence of this self-perceived language level on the adaptation and learning process. The perception of someone's language skills can have just as important an influence on their willingness and ability to create meaningful relationships as actual language skills. Therefore, students' opinions and self-evaluation were sufficient to see what exactly they were concerned about and dealt with during their sojourn and how they perceived the role of the language.

Language contact and language outcomes according to self-perceived language level

After having established who the three language level groups consist of, the predictors that might have been responsible for students' language level were explored further. These were students' initial language level, language contact and use, and their language learning progress. In order to determine the influence of the initial language level, students' self-perceived language level over time was looked at in terms of improvement/deterioration and significant changes. Further, students were asked about what percentage the target language had in their everyday communication compared to English/their mother tongue, in which situations/with whom they mainly used the target language, where the friends they made during the

⁶⁸ In the second and third survey the actual language level (A1, A2...) was not stated, but students were only presented with the descriptors in order to not influence their self-evaluation and receive a more realistic result of their skills.

semester abroad were from, with whom they lived, in which area(-s) they thought they had improved their language skills the most, and what helped them most to improve the host language while they were overseas. These questions aimed to explore the link between students' self-perceived language level and their language contact and progress. It is assumed that the more contact with locals and speakers of the target language, the better the language skills, especially the productive ones. Students were given several answer possibilities to be able to analyse and compare results easier. However, they were also given the opportunity to comment on the questions when they thought the answers were not suitable.

The question 'What was the most important outcome of your semester abroad for you personally' was asked in order to define the role of the language as an outcome of studying abroad for each language level group. As this question was open-ended, students were given the opportunity to state whatever they believed was important to mention, without implying any outcome type. It was also believed that students' language contact after their return had further enhanced their language development and is an important long-term outcome. Thus, students were also asked how they will continue using the target language in the future

Language as a predictor for adaptation

A mix of open-ended as well as closed questions was asked to receive new insights into the role of the language for the adaptation process and to gain further confirmation for the research hypothesis to strengthen the argument. To further explore the influence of students' language skills on their ability to adapt quickly to the SA country's culture, students were asked at what point in time they felt really comfortable for the first time in their study abroad country. Answer choices were: right from the beginning, within the 1st month, within the 2nd month, within the 3rd month, within the 4th month, and never. This question's aim was to find out if students' language skills had an impact on the speed of their adjustment. Looking at single students and their previous experience helped to explore this in depth or to exclude language as an influencing factor for adaptation.

Language as a predictor for intercultural learning

The connection between language and intercultural learning is of special interest, as this study's subjects are language degree students and the SAS is a compulsory part of their degree. However, many studies about study abroad outcomes solely focus on the acquisition of the target language on its own or even single skills without taking (inter-)cultural learning and the role of the target language into account. Since the development of intercultural competence and the target language are seen as important outcomes of an SAS, the connection between the two has to be studied further. In order to see this link first-hand, students' *RIE* scores are looked at for the three language groups before and after the SAS. Further, several influential factors for their intercultural learning as well as three outcomes like students' ability to mediate, their view on their own culture and how they see people of a different cultural background in their own country in the future are looked at according to students' self-perceived language skills.

The ability to mediate is central for the intercultural speaker (Byram 1997) and involves highly evolved communicative skills as well as knowledge about the other person's cultural and communicative backgrounds and the skills to resolve problems. It is assumed that the higher students' language skills the more confident they are to do so. Students' view on their own culture is likely to change during the SAS, too. It shows students' ability to 'decentre' as part of ICC (Byram 1997), and as a result relativises their view on themselves as well as on the world. In this case it was of interest if students of different self-perceived language levels showed differences in this ability after their return. In order to verify this, results of the third survey were looked at as well. As a third intercultural outcome and of interest for a wider community, students' changes in terms of how they communicate with and see foreigners in their own country were analysed further. The results will show if students now feel more empathetic with people in the same situation and if they can apply their own experience to the situation of others. All three outcomes will show if the SAS had a long-term effect on students' IC skills and attitudes and if they will be able to apply these in the future. If the self-perceived language level also had an impact on it, will be explored too.

Further it was of special interest to see how students of the different language levels evaluate the importance of the language for appropriate and efficient communication and for living and studying abroad in general. To add to the general analysis of this question, students' before-after comments are looked at to see if they changed their opinion much on what is important for successful communication. For this purpose, the different kinds of comments are looked at in the first and second survey, mainly according to language- and culture-related, but also other categories that will become apparent. This will show if students changed their opinion about what they initially found to be important for effective and appropriate communication.

Language as a stressor

To further assess how far the target language was a stressor by itself, questions about students' adaptation and the influence of the language on it were looked at for the different language level groups again. These questions involved what was the most difficult thing to adapt to, how students managed to cope, if they got along with the target language and if language was a single decisive factor for making the SAS especially distressing. The list of common problems students faced during the SAS (as already introduced in the previous chapter) was further looked at in terms of their language level and how often they occurred to see if students with a lower language level actually perceived the language as that distressing. As a last point, language-related results were analysed for students' general satisfaction and if their expectations were met, to close the language-adjustment-cycle (see 3.5).

4.5 This Case Study

4.5.1 Internationalisation and Outbound Mobility at Macquarie University

In order to explore the outcomes and effects of a study abroad semester, a particular group of students from an Australian university was chosen and a case study design was employed to illuminate these relations. Since this research project is about the study abroad experience of Bachelor of International Studies students at Macquarie

University (MQ), the institution's perspectives and implementations on internationalisation are further examined to reflect on the experience students are exposed to, while they are studying on campus, and to understand the university's engagement and goals in study abroad.

According to the university's self-reports (Internationalisation website⁶⁹), there are about 30% non-English speaking students studying on campus, which makes Macquarie University one of the biggest international education providers in Australia⁷⁰. It is claimed that: "This international focus enriches the educational, social and cultural experiences of all of our students and enhances their intercultural competence" (ibid). The current university's internationalisation website further stresses the importance of a gain of a global perspective and its excellent preparation for the life of a global citizen. Exchange with Asian countries is an important part of the university's internationalisation endeavours, corresponding to the launch of the New Colombo Plan (Macquarie University 2013). Therefore, they strongly encourage and support outbound mobility and have one of the most extensive SA programs in Australia. It offers one of the largest outbound mobility programs with the most generous outbound mobility scholarships among Australian universities⁷¹. According to the MQ website, more than 500 Macquarie students study abroad every year.⁷² Study abroad programs at MQ include: student exchange, short-term programs, study tours, internships, participation in the Global Leadership and Professional and Community Engagement Program and other department-specific exchange programs. By promoting and offering a wide range of study abroad programs, they realise the invaluable importance of international study and living experience and its benefits for Australian graduates. Therefore, it constitutes an ideal environment for this study.

⁶⁹ <http://mq.edu.au/about/strategy/international.html>.

⁷⁰ Also according to a recent UK *Times Higher Education* ranking:
<http://www.mq.edu.au/newsroom/2014/01/30/macquarie-among-worlds-most-international-universities/>.

⁷¹ In concordance with the New Colombo Plan for exchange to an Asian country up to \$7500 and other countries up to \$6250 from
http://students.mq.edu.au/opportunities/student_exchange/costs_and_funding/

⁷² It is not specified whether undergraduate or postgraduate.

Promoting student outbound mobility, the International Office's website⁷³ lists a number of benefits that they would expect to be enhanced through study abroad: personal outcomes like the gain of confidence and independence, academic benefits like increased value of the degree (all programs are credit-gaining), career aspects like the employers' favourable attitudes towards graduates with international experience, learning about increased global interdependence and inter-cultural and social aspects, as well as the fun of making new friends and travelling abroad. The benefits of study abroad are rather reduced to its academic and career aspects that will eventually benefit the Australian economy and its global citizens; other aspects like learning a language or gaining a deeper understanding of intercultural communication and international matters are not promoted at a university level. Clearly language aspects are excluded, or not seen as that relevant, and many departments offer study abroad course work that is completely undertaken in English (i.e. the Faculty of Business and Economics' short-term programs).

In 2010, Krajewski (2011) undertook a large Delphi study amongst MQ scholars and students to explore, on the one hand, what they think intercultural competence means, and on the other hand how important it is being seen as a general undergraduate outcome. She came up with a working definition of IC at Macquarie University (Krajewski 2011, 85): "Intercultural competence means to be open-minded and respectful and to accept ambiguity in all discourse with people, to consider other people's perspectives, and to constantly work towards effective and appropriate communication in order to build and maintain meaningful relationships." This seems like a definition for IC on campus to facilitate intercultural understanding between domestic and international students. Krajewski based much of her research design and theory on Deardorff's (2004) Delphi study's outcomes and her pyramid model of intercultural competence (see 3.2.2) which reflects the reality on American campuses and basically neglects the influence of languages. However, Krajewski agrees later on with Byram that:

language proficiency is undeniably a prerequisite to get in touch with other people and to be able to communicate, and ideally foreign language competence is paired with elements of cultural competence. In fact, without language proficiency, it may not be possible to fully

⁷³ http://students.mq.edu.au/opportunities/student_exchange/how_does_exchange_work/.

understand a culture and therefore to develop cultural competence. (Byram 1997 in Krajewski 2011, 86).

By including her view on the importance of languages, Krajewski creates a definition that includes intercultural traits and behaviour as well as skills like language knowledge, to emphasise the necessity of intercultural competence for students. It shows that IC and language skills are indeed seen as important graduate capabilities among MQ scholars and students.

The Bachelor of International Studies degree, in which the subjects of this study are enrolled, requires students to study a European or Asian language and its culture over a period of three years as well as additional classes on culture, history, politics and communication. It further integrates a compulsory semester abroad offering complete immersion into the host country's culture and language in the last year of the students' degree. In their first year of studies, all students are required to attend the unit Cross-Cultural Communication (INTS 100), in their second year a lecture called Citizenship, Past, Present and Global (INTS 202) and after their return from the SAS, the capstone unit Global Issues (INTS 304). The latter focuses on students' reflections on their experiences overseas, and further introduces intercultural competence theories based on the materials of the Council of Europe. As part of this course's assessments students fill in the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters (Council of Europe 2009) and the European Language Portfolio (Council of Europe 2000) to reflect on their language learning in general, but also on specific intercultural encounters. Their underlying theoretical frameworks are discussed during the course and might therefore have an impact on the way students reflect on their intercultural learning after their return; however, these theories are not explicit before their SA and students are invited to critically examine them as well as to add to them from their own experience. In the return unit, students also learn about future job opportunities in their fields of interest and are encouraged to create resumes that especially highlight the IC skills they acquired during their studies and their overseas semester. In addition to their compulsory classes, students have the opportunity to attend short term in-country language courses prior to their SAS and the department strongly encourages them to undertake an internship with an international organisation or business.

For this thesis it is important to stress that all students have attended culture and language classes prior to their SAS, consequently their previous knowledge on culture and communication theories can be seen as relatively homogenous. As they were exposed to the ICC theory in their return unit, it might have influenced their essay answers as well as survey reflections, which is further discussed in the discussion of the findings.

4.5.2 The Research Subjects – Overview of Participation Rate and General Demographics

As this case study aims to explore the SA experience of language degree students, the group of students of interest was relatively set right from the beginning. A purposive sampling method was used to find a suitable cohort: all students of the Bachelor of International Studies degree at Macquarie University who underwent a study abroad semester in the first half of 2011 were invited to participate in this study. The cohort was chosen for several reasons: first, the aim was to find a relatively homogenous group of students that all studied the same degree and had similar previous instructions in language and culture courses at university. Second, the external program factors were relatively similar since they all underwent the same program, which makes results more comparable by excluding (or including) some influencing factors: the SAS was organised by the department and all students received the same pre-departure information and briefings. Moreover, the amount of organisational tasks taken over by each individual student was relatively similar, leaving them with equal challenges at the beginning of the semester.⁷⁴ They also received a travel grant which helped to reduce the impact of financial strains. Thirdly, it was convenient to approach a group of students at Macquarie University. That way, class observation and assessments in their return unit were easily accessible and a personal impression of the individual research subjects could be gained as well, because “how people behave, feel, think, can only be understood if you get to know their world and what

⁷⁴ I.e. the university organised the exchange university placement, insurance and information on housing, enrolment procedures and host university support. The students had to enrol themselves, find accommodation if not pre-arranged, open bank accounts, sign up for courses etc. after their arrival in the host country.

they are trying to do in it. ‘Objectivity’ can ignore data important for an adequate understanding” (Gillham, 2000, 11f.).

After having received ethics clearance from Macquarie University⁷⁵, the students’ email addresses and departure dates were retrieved and the online surveys⁷⁶ were administered via an email link, depending on the student’s departure date⁷⁷. Several reminders were sent out, but no incentive was offered. Through the comprehensive first survey, a lot of demographic features were collected to mainly gather information on students’ backgrounds and experiences. An overview is presented in the following section, allowing a more detailed insight into aspects that might be of importance for comparing individuals with different backgrounds and experiences. Since only the first survey contained demographic questions, certain details about the students who did not do the first survey unfortunately remained unknown. All three surveys were administered to 43 students (16 male, 27 female) who studied a Bachelor of International Studies degree in their third year at Macquarie University. The submissions from male and female students were proportional to the general gender distribution of the entire group (two-thirds female, one-third male). The average age of the students that returned the first survey was 21.2 years with most students being 20 or 21⁷⁸.

As a consequence and peculiarity of this study, the data of the different research questions stem from the same group of students, but differently grouped for each research step. For the first research questions all survey answers of all students were analysed and presented, since a compilation of all answers was aimed for and a before-after analysis was merely for the sake of completeness. The self-reflection essay had a different participation rate so all of the students’ essays were included.⁷⁹ In the second research question, a before-after analysis was aimed for and consequently mainly the results of the ‘matches’ group⁸⁰ were significant. Since the

⁷⁵ Ethics Reference Number 5201001316 (D).

⁷⁶ Which included the three surveys and the three *Reflections of Intercultural Encounters*.

⁷⁷ The first survey was filled in 1–2 weeks before the individual departure date; the second one as soon as possible after their return; and the third one right after their last semester at MQ had finished half a year later.

⁷⁸ 2x19; 7x20; 8x21; 1x22; 3x23; 1x30.

⁷⁹ If the student had agreed to participate in the study at some point in time.

⁸⁰ The ten students that did all three surveys; see further below.

third research question required a completely different approach, only the few students that fit in either the high or low *R/E* score group or the low, medium and high language level group were of importance for the analysis.

Response rate

Altogether 31 students took the first survey, which equals a participation rate of 70%. Of those students, nine had to be filtered out as their semester abroad would have led them to Japan. Unfortunately the tsunami at the beginning of 2011 had too big an impact on their study destinations and in the interest of their safety the university shortened their program to a six-week summer program. Since the effects of a study abroad *semester* are the scope of this study, those students were taken out of the cohort, in order to not falsify the results. The eventual number in the first survey was therefore 22, which equals a 50% response rate. The total number of students taking the second survey was 28; reduced by the Japan students, the response rate was 45%. The response rate of the last survey was only 30%, with 13 students. All numbers and answers in the following overview of the cohort, as well as the data analysis, do not include the Japan students.

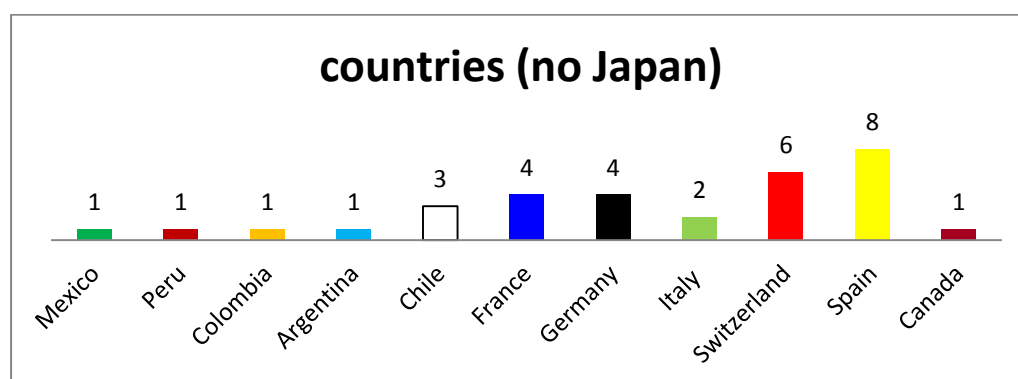
Generally the response rate in the first two surveys was quite normal for a survey distributed online; the third one was relatively low though. Students received several email reminders, and were also asked to fill in the last survey during their cap stone unit. This low response could mean that students were not that interested in reflecting on their study abroad semester half a year after their return after discussing it at length in their return unit. Also, the repetition of most questions and length of the entire questionnaire could have been less appealing or even boring to students. Finally, at that point in time most students were about to finish their degree so they were probably busy applying for jobs and planning their future steps, so they might have checked their student email accounts less frequently or were just too preoccupied with other tasks. Consequently, the initial expectation of receiving a large number of responses from students that attended all three surveys could not be met and altogether only 10 students participated in all three surveys.

Those 10 students are referred to as the ‘matches’ group since their answers could be matched before, after and half a year later. Since this is quite a small number, no statistically relevant results could be retrieved from their questionnaires, however their answers could generally be used to discover certain trends that were then followed up on. These ten students went to different study abroad destinations, had different motivations, skills and traits and prior experiences and their answers varied throughout the three surveys. Nevertheless, they seemed to be generally very motivated and willing to share their experiences and their resilience and willingness to follow through with this study is a common feature of them all (Sutton et al. 2007)

Study Abroad Country

Students went to eleven different countries in Europe and the Americas (Figure 20). Larger groups went to the European countries of Spain, Switzerland (French-speaking part), Germany, and France, as well as to Chile, and single students to the Latin-American countries of Mexico, Peru, Colombia and Argentina.

Figure 17: Student-distribution across countries



Four different majority-languages are spoken in these countries and were previously learnt by the students: the majority of the students studied Spanish and French, but also German and Italian.⁸¹ What was common to all students was that they had at

⁸¹ One student went to Canada and studied at Carleton University in Ottawa, which is in the English speaking part, however the student also attended classes in French.

least two years of formal language and cultural instruction: culture-specific in their language courses and culture-general in other seminars and lectures.

Two general factors were of special interest in order to explore what other predictors might have had an influence on students' intercultural competence even before they left to their study abroad sojourn: this was, on the one hand, their previous intercultural experience in other countries through travelling or other study abroad programs, and on the other hand, their exposure to other cultures at home through their family backgrounds, friends, previous coursework and other experiences. Therefore, students were asked in more detail about these factors, which might have influenced their initial IC self-reflection and those that were found to have an impact are presented in chapter 6 and 7. In the following section, the information is presented for the entire group, so a better overview of the research subjects can be gained and so these data do not have to be mixed up with the ones of particular groups in later chapters.

4.5.3 Previous Experience and Language Level

Under previous experience abroad any kind of intercultural encounters outside of the students' home country (in most cases Australia) was meant. This included travel experience, previous study abroad experience or even having lived abroad for a significantly long period of time. Basically any kind of experiences made outside of one's country are significant for one's IC development, especially those that were made while travelling or being on their own, without the help of parents or other guardians and longer stays with a deeper chance of immersion into the target country. They were of interest for this study, since they might have influenced students' initial comfort in intercultural encounters and that's what was asked for in the first survey. Knowing certain facts about students' initial intercultural experience might also help to predict outcomes of their *RIE* ranking, especially of the second question set 'encounters in other countries'.

Of the 22 students who filled out the first survey, ten had previously visited their SA country or another country where the same language is spoken before, mainly for a shorter period of time between 1–6 months or less and on average about two to

four years before their SAS. This shows that for almost half of these students their SA country was not entirely new and the previous trip to their SA country was either shortly before they started their studies or while they were enrolled in the degree already. For those who had been in their target country before they started the degree, this sojourn might have influenced their decision to study this country's language further. So this experience might be linked to students' reasons for studying International Studies. If they had been to the target country while they were already enrolled in the degree, this might have helped them to enhance their target language and to feel more secure about studying there for an entire semester. However, most students had mainly just travelled there within the last two years, as opposed to some kind of longer or more intense stay during high school, so the level of immersion was probably not too high. Six students stated that they attended some kind of organised program, i.e. a language course or a high school exchange.

As a last question about their international experience, students were asked how many countries they have travelled to without their parents, to see where they have been except for family holidays and with the implication of having to get along on their own. The majority (46%) had been to one or two other countries, which seems normal considering the students' age and Australia's isolated geographic position. Eight out of the 22 students, however stated, that they have been to five or more countries, which indicates that their previous intercultural experience was probably significant.

Apart from the five students who were not born in Australia and those two who spent a high school semester/year abroad, only two other students had lived in another country for a significantly longer period of time⁸².

Students' cultural background

Having migrated themselves or having a mixed cultural family background exposes students to more cultural variety and therefore might have an influence on their intercultural competence that they gained before studying and travelling abroad. Therefore, students were asked about where they were born and grew up, where

⁸² Meaning for at least a year.

their parents were from and what languages they speak at home. Further, having international friends and friends with different cultural backgrounds broadens one's horizon and makes people more open and tolerant towards cultural variety. So, students were surveyed about their friendships, too. Also, previous instructions in intercultural topics could have influenced their IC, either in language classes at school or other subjects with cultural and international matters. Hence, students were asked about their educational background on these topics.

Five of the 22 students who did the first survey were not born in Australia, although only one officially qualified as an international student. The other four moved to Australia between the age of five and nine and one student at the age of 18. Their backgrounds are diverse, ranging from being born in the US and UK to Iraq, Congo and South America.⁸³ When looking at the answers of the one student that moved to Australia when they were 18, this fact will be taken into consideration and will be addressed individually, if necessary.

Family background

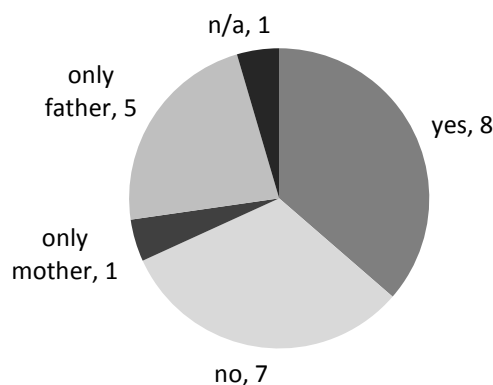
Although most students were born and grew up in Australia, many have parents with different cultural backgrounds and so they grew up under the influence of either one or two different cultures at home, which, depending on the kind and amount of contact with the parents' cultures, might have influenced students' contact with other cultures in their own country significantly. This might range from growing up with two parents of the same cultural background and their language and traditions that are different from the Australian majority ones, to having one parents of a different cultural background that one might have not grown up with and therefore not had much contact with.

Asking students whether their parents were born in Australia (Figure 21), results of those who answered with 'no' show a great variety of different cultural backgrounds. About one-third had parents who were both born in Australia, one-third where both parents were not born in Australia and about one-third with one

⁸³ One student did not answer this question; it was assumed due to their first language, father's ethnic background and choice of SA country.

Australian parent. Of the two-thirds that said that at least one of their parents was not born in Australia, one-third stated that both of their parents were not born in Australia, one-quarter said that their mother was not born in Australia and one student said that their father was not born here. When asked where the parents were from, 12 different countries were given: four parents are from other English speaking countries (England, Scotland, and New Zealand), three from South America (Chile, Peru, and Uruguay), four from South-East Asia (Cambodia, Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam), two from Europe (Spain, Italy) and two from Kurdistan/Iraq. Comparing students' families' backgrounds and their study abroad countries, it becomes apparent that those students studied one of their parent's first languages and went to their home countries as their study abroad country, especially to South America and Europe (Spanish and Italian), but those with Asian or other English-speaking backgrounds chose a completely different country as their study abroad destination.

Figure 18: Distribution of answers to: 'Where your parents born in Australia?'



Friends and other factors

The same number of students that had previously travelled to their SA country (ten out of 22) said that they have many friends of a different cultural background. Those friendships were mainly formed in Australia, but also partially abroad.

When asked what other factors influenced students' intercultural experience their answers included: "Everyday life and problems of the people"; "Merely the kind

of opportunities that were offered to me was what stipulated where I went”; “I did Japanese at high school and so went to Japan for exchange”; “Working in a Jewish summer camp in the US made me very open-minded”; “Education and travel experiences”. Apart from the compulsory culture and language classes during their two years at university, none of the students had any other significant previous course work or training in intercultural matters.

Languages

Despite a great variety of different cultural contacts at home, all students who were born in Australia stated that English was their first language. In this regard, this group of students seems quite homogeneous. Although having parents with so many different cultural backgrounds, not many students actually speak two languages at home. Only a few students mentioned that they spoke another language as well, but mainly referred to their language of study or another language they had learnt at high school.

The majority of the students perceived their target language as being on an intermediate level (B1 or B2) before the sojourn. A few students thought their initial language level was either slightly lower (A2) or higher (C1). How students’ language levels changed over the sojourn and after, is shown in the findings of Chapter 6. Most students (60%) had started studying their target language two years before (at university), six students had already studied them for three to five years, and three students had more than six years of formal language instruction. More than 70% of the students said that they learnt their target language at university, one-third at high-school and the same number through friends and social contacts.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Other possible answer choices included: movies/TV/radio, newspapers/magazines/books, using it with members of their family, evening classes/language schools, travel, social networks, using it in the community, work, student exchanges and meet-up groups.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF THE FIRST RESEARCH QUESTION

In this chapter, students' perspectives on what are essential IC components, which ones they have developed during the course of the SAS and what role they assign to the target language in this process, are explored. Initially, students' answers to the key question: 'What does it take to communicate effectively and appropriately with members of other cultures?' are presented. Second, their opinion on 'Is knowing the other language the most important component of successfully living and studying abroad?' is studied in terms of how it changed during the course of the study. Further, the answers to the question 'What other key components (besides language knowledge) are necessary to successfully live abroad?' are examined to find more outcomes/prerequisites of a study abroad semester. The answers of the self-reflection essays are analysed next, exploring what IC components students think they have developed during their exchange. Finally, results will be compared with each other and with current research findings to see if the student perspective generally agrees with what IC researchers think.

5.1. 'What does it take to communicate effectively and appropriately with members of other cultures?'

This salient core-question aims to receive a comprehensive list of components that students believe to be important for intercultural competence and is then compared to what researchers listed (see 3.2). Seventeen students answered this question in the first survey and 19 in the second one. Usually the answer of one single student consisted of more than one IC component, often listing two or three different factors. Therefore, 19 different components could be extracted from the first survey and 18 from the second one.

Looking at these answers, it became apparent that they all fit into one of the three categories: attitude/affection, behaviour/skill or knowledge of some kind, as they matched the theoretical framework of intercultural competence with its ABC

components that were previously introduced. Most answers in both surveys represented attitudes, followed by knowledge and behaviour.⁸⁵

Generally, the second survey was of most interest, since students' answers now incorporate their experiences abroad, though also the first surveys shows many different features. The following two tables (Table 9, 10) give an overview of all answers of the first and second survey, grouped according to attitudinal, behavioural and cognitive components.

Table 9: List of answers to 'What does it take to communicate effectively and appropriately with members of other cultures?'

attitude	behaviour/skill	knowledge
respect (2x)	have a go at speaking	knowledge of the other language (4x)
openness (2x)	practice	understanding (2x)
confidence (2x)	listening	knowledge of cultural differences 2x
patience (2x)		knowledge of non-verbal differences
friendliness (2x)		knowledge of key words
tolerance		knowledge of difference in symbols
acceptance		
interest		
open-mindedness		

Note: of S1 according to attitude, behaviour/skill and knowledge

⁸⁵ attitudes (S1 :59%/S2: 56%)⁸⁵, knowledge (S1: 31%/S2: 15%) and behaviour (S1: 31%/S2: 29%).

Table 10: List of answers to ‘What does it take to communicate effectively and appropriately with members of other cultures?’

attitude	behaviour/skill	knowledge
patience (6x)	adapt to new culture	knowledge of language (6x) (incl. different skills and fluency in general)
willingness (2x)	fight stereotypes	knowledge of culture
be positive	have a go at speaking	understanding
tolerance (2x)	listening (2x)	understanding of culture (2x)
confidence (2x)		
open to making new friends		
friendliness		
open-mindedness		
enthusiasm		
interest in language		

Note: of S2, according to attitude, behaviour/skill and knowledge

Based on these tables, of special interest seemed mainly attitudinal features in general, as well as the most frequently mentioned components ‘patience’ and ‘knowledge of language’. They are studied in more detail below and are compared to common research findings in the end. The number of behavioural answers ranked last in both surveys and is therefore not further discussed here. Generally ‘language use’, ‘have a go at speaking’ and ‘listening’ occurred in both surveys and moreover ‘practice’ was one of the three items that was also mentioned in the first survey. To these the second survey added ‘conquering stereotypes’ and ‘adapting to the new culture’.

5.1.1 Attitudinal components

As already stated, mainly attitudinal/affective components were listed in both surveys. The result is relatively unexpected considering that traits and attitudes alone do not create a form of linguistic exchange, but are rather a pre-requisite. However, the listed items are necessary for interpersonal and intercultural exchange and prove

students' awareness and possibly existence of these components already before their exchange.

In the following table (Table 11) all attitudinal features students listed in Survey 1 and 2 are listed. The first five components were mentioned on in both surveys. Since not all of the same students answered this question, directly comparing numbers before and after the sojourn is refrained from. However, it is worth noticing that 'patience' was the only component that was listed by more than two students after the SAS and it was also mentioned twice in the first survey. Therefore, it will be examined closer how students describe patience and why they think it is an important IC trait.

Table 11: Attitudinal components for successful communication in S1 and S2

Survey 1	Survey 2
patience (2x)	patience (6x)
open-mindedness	open-mindedness
friendliness (2x)	friendliness
tolerance	tolerance (2x)
confidence (2x)	confidence (2x)
openness (2x)	open to making new friends
interest	interest in language
respect (2x)	be positive
acceptance	enthusiasm
being assertive	willingness (2x)

Patience

The fact that 'patience' was mentioned by almost half of the students after their return (and also twice in S1) presents strong evidence that many students developed or missed this trait, in either themselves or their communication partners. Therefore, their comments to this question should reveal more insights. In fact, in several parts of the survey, students mentioned that they wish to have had more time to phrase a sentences and that their communication partners would have been more patient.

This feature was often paired with 'willingness to communicate' in the survey answers, suggesting that both communication partners have to have these traits:

- Patience and a willingness to work with the other person and adapt.
- A willingness and patience of each person to communicate.
- Patience and a good local friend with the same!

Also, their own patience when it comes to learning and adapting was referred to in combination with other attitudinal features:

- Confidence and patience.
- Tolerance, patience, an interest and a proficiency in the language of that culture.
- Enthusiasm and patience.

These answers show that patience is strongly connected to communicative behaviour, but also to learning and adapting, and students refer to their own patience as well as their interlocutor's one. Through these comments it can already be shown that language knowledge in general seems to be an important part of students' reflections on their IC. Hence, in the following section this component is analysed in more depth.

Language knowledge

Different kinds of knowledge were listed in both surveys, mainly referring to knowledge of the target language and cultural knowledge. General answers like 'understanding of ...' were included into this category too. Since the role of the language and the link to culture learning is of special interest to this study, it is examined more in the following section. Students listed different kinds of knowledge that were necessary for successful communication in both surveys, however mainly referring to knowledge of the foreign language. In the first survey, 'language' (4x), 'key words', and knowledge of 'cultural' (2x), 'non-verbal' and 'symbolic' differences were mentioned. In the second survey, knowledge of 'language', its different 'skills' and 'fluency' in general were listed by half of the students. Furthermore,

knowledge/understanding of culture (3x) and general understanding were mentioned as well.

In order to connect language and culture learning further, students' comments to the above question were also looked at in terms of language and/or culture remarks. In the first survey, four students mentioned language or a linguistic skill as being important for successful communication (amongst other things).

- Knowledge of the language and perhaps knowledge of symbols which may carry significantly different meaning in your culture
- Knowing their language well
- Knowledge in all aspects of the language (listening, speaking, reading, writing...)
- Facial expressions key words and generally a smile

In the first comment it is referred to language in general and in the second one to the proficiency level, stating that a rather higher level would be necessary. In the third one it is reflected on the skills that are needed, explaining that actually all language skills are of importance. The last comment lists facial expressions, as part of non-verbal communication as well as key words, which, in contrast to the second comment, reduces the proficiency level to a minimum.

Out of the whole group only two students said that language as well as culture are of importance.

- You have to understand their slang and cultural differences but people are people, the differences are not as concrete as an anthropologist would surmise.
- It will take constant use and practise of the language as well as understanding of their culture to communicate appropriately and effectively with members of another culture.

In the first comment cultural differences are reduced to general human behaviours. This is according to the intercultural sensitivity theory (chapter 3) part of the *Minimisation* stage, which reflects on the ethnocentric view of the student. The

second comment is the only one that includes language and culture for successful communication without restricting it, but also without explaining it further.

Also, one of the students stated their opinion on appropriateness, but limits it to common sense behaviour as something that cannot be learnt, whereas the effective side of communication can be learnt by asking for how to do it, according to their opinion.

- Just talk - give it a go. I think most people know what is appropriate and what isn't. If you don't know how to say something, just ask them.

Most of the students' answers consisted of two or more components and only some of them included some kind of language remark. This probably means that before their sojourn students did not think that knowledge of the language was that important, or did not think that it was that necessary for effective and appropriate communication. Also, the comments that included language in their reflections were rather ambiguous in what language level or which skills are of importance. 'Knowledge' or 'an understanding of the culture' were very rarely mentioned and as shown above only two students thought that language as well as cultural understanding are important for successful communication.

In the second survey, nine out of 19 students made some kind of language-related comment which indicates that it is an important component of effective and appropriate communication.

Amongst the language related comments, a differentiation between comments that referred to different language skills/elements as well as to different levels of proficiency could be observed. However, there were different perspectives on what language skills and what proficiency levels are especially needed for appropriate and effective communication. The comments are quite contradictory and reflect the differences in students' experiences. On the one hand, some students were the opinion that one needs higher proficiency and rather good language skills:

- Tolerance, patience, an interest and a proficiency in the language of that culture
- A good vocabulary, this is often where I struggle.
- First of all – having a more than basic knowledge of the language.
- Fluency

On the other hand, some students thought that basic skills in the foreign language are sufficient as long as you give it a go:

- Knowledge of basic language skills
- To actually try, even if you can't produce a grammatically correct sentence.
- The confidence to speak and converse despite the fear of saying something incorrectly

Also, there was no agreement in what skill(s) are the most important one(s):

- Ability to listen
- Listening as well as talking
- Fluency
- An open mind and listening as well as talking

One student named 'culture' as the most important components for effective communication:

- You need to have a good understanding of their culture in order to communicate effectively.

Another student believed that language elements as well as a good understanding of the culture are important:

- Knowledge of main elements, grammar, vocabulary, context and culture

The two other comments that solely referred to culture were:

- understanding all aspects of the culture
- Dive into the culture head first. Conquer your stereotypes and BE POSITIVE!!!!!!!!!!

Knowledge of language was mentioned by half of the students in the second survey, so language-related comments were the majority of all comments. This shows that knowing the other language is according to their experience the most important component for communicating appropriately and effectively, whereas statements mentioning culture knowledge or containing cultural hints were not that frequent.

Since the survey question asked about successful communication, it is not surprising that many students mentioned language and its necessary elements and skills. Many students see language as the basis of effective communication probably because they were often faced with situations where they thought that their communication was not sufficient enough and they were disappointed, i.e. they complain that it took them too long to phrase sentences, or that the communication partner did not give them enough time to phrase the sentence, but would start speaking in English. Less is reported about the appropriateness, because this is something one perceives less directly and it is less apparent, unless the person one talks to gives some sort of feedback or judgement on whether they felt the student behaved and talked appropriately.

5.1.2. Language knowledge – before – after analysis

The analysis of students' before and after comments brought some more interesting insights into students' perspective changes on intercultural competence. Although only 12 students answered this question in S1 as well as S2, the results are nevertheless worthwhile looking at and representative for the entire group of participating students⁸⁶.

First of all, it was of interest if the kind of the components students had referred to had changed after the SAS. Therefore, students' comments were categorised according to language, culture and other comments, in this case mostly attitudinal components. The comments are listed in Table 12. Red comments represent language comments, green culture and blue attitudinal feature.⁸⁷ Only three out of the 12 students completely changed their perspective on what it takes to communicate effectively and appropriately, listing a comment of a completely different category in their second survey (S2). All other students' comments at least

⁸⁶ The numbers represent 55% of student answers in S1 and 60% of S2

⁸⁷ The comment 'understanding' could not be colour-coded since it does not become apparent if it referred to language or knowledge.

stuck to their initial answer. Secondly, it was looked at how the categories changed. Initially, they all stated an attitudinal feature, with two students changing it to a language comment and one to a culture-related comment in the second survey. Another three students added or removed a category in their S2 comment, with all of them ending up with a language comment in the second survey, and one adding culture as well. Half of the students stayed in their initial category not changing the kind of comment. Three of them retained their initial perspective of attitudinal features, with one changing 'respect' to 'confidence and patience'. One student repeated their initial language comment, one added the 'talking' skill to the initial 'listening' skill and the third one changed their opinion from initially saying that 'one needs to know the language well' to 'basic language skills', therefore downgrading the importance of the target language.

Nevertheless, most students ended up mentioning or adding the language in their second survey answers, emphasizing the initial result that language is one of the most important components of effective and appropriate communication, and hence intercultural competence, in a study abroad setting. This assumption is further tested in the next questions, by asking students directly what role they assign to the target language for living and studying abroad.

Table 12: Before-after comments according to content

student	S1	S2
ST 7	open mind to a different way of thinking and approaching life	understanding all aspects of the culture
ST 5	interest	Ability to listen
ST 27	confidence	a good vocabulary, this is often where I struggle
ST 11	It will take constant use and practise of the language as well as understanding of their culture to communicate appropriately and effectively with members of another culture.	fluency
ST 9	facial expressions key words and generally a smile	Knowledge of main elements, grammar, vocabulary, context and culture
ST 1	Acceptance and tolerance of another culture, openness and friendliness	Tolerance, patience, an interest and a proficiency in the language of that culture.
ST 3	Being confident enough to have a go	The confidence to speak and converse despite the fear of saying something incorrectly

ST 6	Just talk- give it a go. I think most people know what is appropriate and what isn't. If you don't know how to say something, just ask them	To actually try, even if you can't produce a grammatically correct sentence
ST 10	it depends, but mutual respect is a start	Confidence and patience
ST 14	knowing their language well	knowledge of basic language skills
ST 25	Understanding	Understanding
ST 26	Listening and an open and friendly attitude	An open mind and listening as well as talking

Note: (blue-attitude, red-language, green-culture)

5.2 'Is knowing the other language the most important component of successfully living and studying abroad?'

While about 60% of students in each of the three surveys generally agreed that knowledge of the foreign language is indeed the most important component for a successful SAS, still 40% did not. Comparing the results of the entire group with the 'matches' group it becomes apparent that this is true for both groups. However, individual opinions and answers varied during the course of a year and students quite often changed their mind on it. In order to find out more about these changes, students' comments on these questions were studied separately and so an interesting development looking at the quantification of the answers became obvious (see Table 13). Comments in the first survey were exclusively neutral (yes, but ...) or against language being the most important factor, i.e.:

- I think you have to learn it eventually, especially when you're alone, but the most important part to be successful is to try.
- While I believe that perfecting my language skills will be of vital importance, in my opinion, being immersed in a different culture and growing as a person will be the bigger gain from the experience.

This changed in the second and third survey. In the second survey some students already said that it was beneficial for communication and therefore adaptation:

- It's very beneficial, because this is what allows you to communicate your feelings and also communicate with others. It is very important to have an understanding of their language and make the effort to speak to them in their native tongue.

- I answered 'yes', because I feel that communication is one of the most important aspects of living in a foreign country. And even if the locals speak English, it is always better to be able to communicate in any situation.

In the last survey, only neutral and positive comments about the benefits of language knowledge were made. So, although quantitative numbers for this question did not seem to have changed, the quality of their additional comments had significantly after the SAS. Half a year after their return, many students did not only see its benefits for communicative purposes, but also that it helps understanding and immersing oneself into the culture. This is demonstrated by comments such as:

- Without knowing the language whilst living abroad, it would be very difficult to get around and communicate with others.
- It contributes tenfold to your experience, ability to communicate and allows more insight in the culture of the country.

In the following table the colour-coding of the students' comments can be tracked and it becomes apparent that results for both groups ('complete' group and 'matches' group) are similar and can therefore be generalised.

Table 13: Distribution of negative (blue), neutral (yellow) and positive (red) comments in survey 1 (S1), survey 2 (S2), and survey 3 (S3) - 'matches' group

S1	While I believe that perfecting my language skills will be of vital importance, in my opinion, being immersed in a different culture and growing as a person (in both knowledge and skills) will be the biggest gain from this experience
	I think you have to learn it eventually, especially if you're alone, but the most important part to be successful is to try.
	Most other students speak english, so another language is not necessary but merely beneficial to a successful study abroad.
	in my degree i am learning about many cultures, exchange gives me an opportunity to eperience one i think approachability is the most important and my course is taught in english
S2	It helps but there are other important factors being able to communicate is more that words but manerisms.
	As well as cultural awareness, understanding and tolerance of differences that exist within other cultures.
	It's very beneficial because this is what allows you to communicate your feelings and also communicate with others. It is very important to have an understanding of their language and make the effort to speak to them in their native tongue.
	need to understand culture mannerisms and social etiquette
	Language is but one piece to the jig saw
S3	I certainly creates huge insight into culture and the way of the country. It makes your more approachable and independent and allows you to gain more from your experience.
	I answered 'yes' because I feel that communication is one of the most important aspects of living in a foreign country. And even if the locals speak English, it is always better to be able to communicate in any situation.
	People can live abroad and not know the language as long as they try to interact with local people and they will eventually pick up the language. I do think it's necessary to know the basics however
	It contributes tenfold to your experience, ability to communicate and allows more insight in the culture of the country.
	It's the key to unlocking the peoples culture
	I suppose for French in particular it is the case because of their patriotism.
	In general yes but not always and certainly not in Geneva
	It is essential because you need to interact with this language.
	It plays a prominent part in understanding but I think the most important aspect is getting out and meeting people and trying to interact in their lifestyle- language will eventually come to you
	Maybe it isn't the most important component from a very broad point of view, but in my opinion, you would have a lot to lose and you would not be able to enjoy the experience in full if you didn't speak the language.
	understanding social norms and behaviors through the language learning process is most important
	Without knowing the language whilst living abroad, it would be very difficult to get around and communicate with others.

As seen on the colour scheme above, in the first survey only blue and yellow (negative and neutral) comments were provided. In the second survey, negative, neutral and positive comments were equally distributed. Only positive and neutral ones appeared in the last one. This clearly shows that the quality of the comments changed during and after the SAS. Where initially students did not completely agree that language is the most important component of successfully living and studying abroad, it is later believed, that it indeed is or at least that it is one of the most important factors, and that it is beneficial for cultural learning, too.

Moreover, amongst the positive answers given in the last survey, a differentiation between an instrumental use of the language for everyday purposes and a culture-related use becomes apparent, which is seen as a very important finding. Some students mentioned language as the most important component purely for communicative and “survival” reasons:

- It is essential because you need to interact with this language
- Without knowing the language whilst living abroad, it would be very difficult to get around and communicate with others.
- I suppose for French in particular it is the case, because of their patriotism.

Other students commented on the “secondary benefits” of knowing the other language, like i.e. it helps to understand the culture better, making friends, etc.:

- It's the key to unlocking the peoples culture [sic].
- Understanding social norms and behaviours through the language learning process is important

As could be shown in the analysis of this question, students “discovered” the importance of the target language over the course of a year, although their quick answer (yes/no) did not necessarily reflect this. Even if they did not think that language knowledge is the most important component, they all agreed half a year after their return that language knowledge is essential and beneficial in the culture learning and adaptation process.

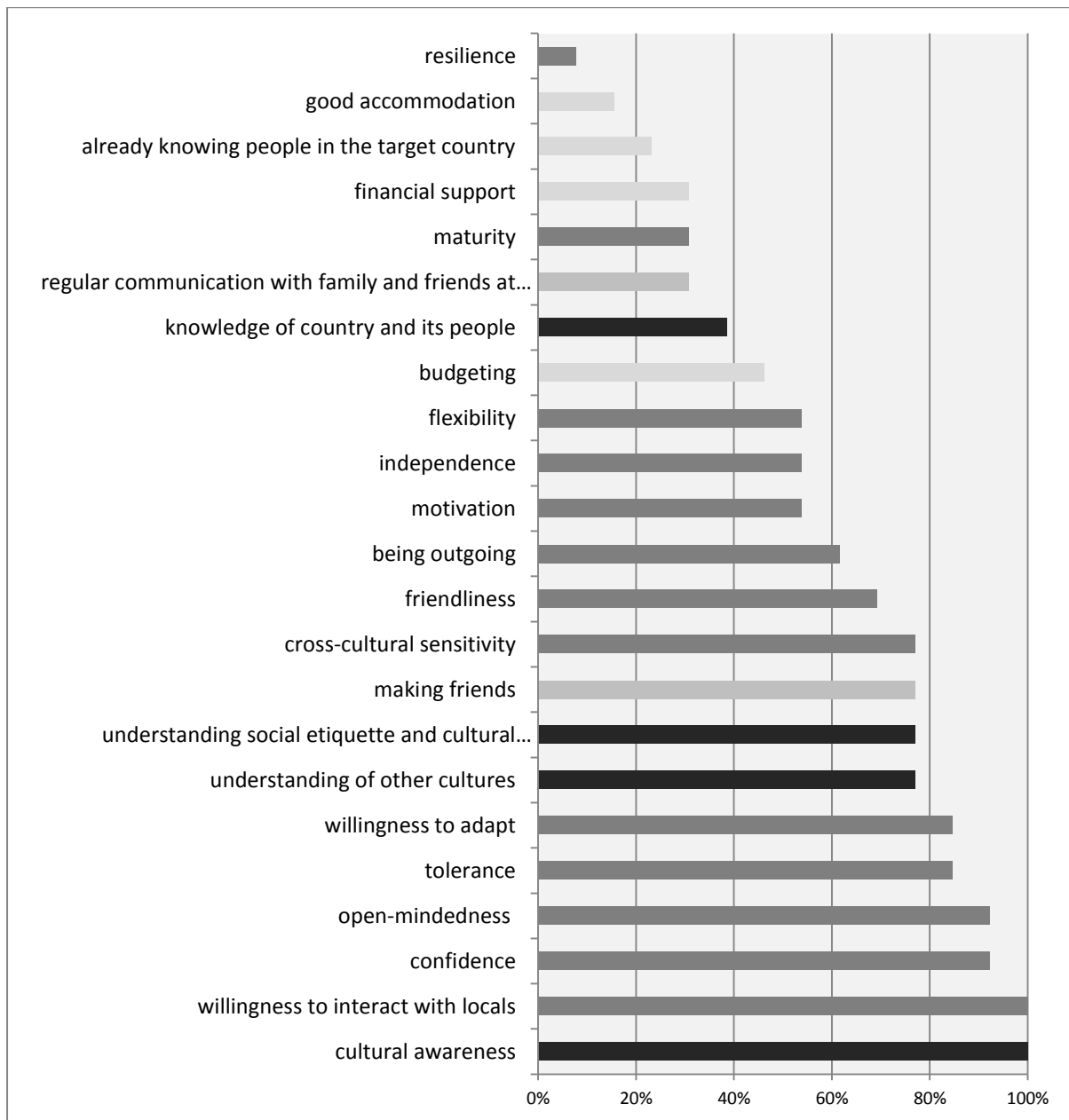
5.3 ‘Which other key components are necessary for successfully living and studying abroad?’

As it is assumed that living and studying in another country takes more than just IC and language skills, students were asked what other components were necessary during an SAS and for the last survey their previous answers were gathered and students asked to rank them. The following table (Figure 19) presents what students ranked as most important for successfully living abroad (in descending order). Four different categories were extracted, of which attitudinal features were ranked more often before behavioural, (inter-)cultural (incl. knowledge) and program-specific. The (inter-)cultural category was introduced here, to highlight the features that refer to specific intercultural abilities (as introduced in chapter 3) that are especially useful when living in another country, although it should be noted that most of the other features are also intercultural-related. These four specifically intercultural components are ‘cultural awareness’, ‘understanding of other cultures’, ‘understanding of social etiquette and cultural mannerisms’, and ‘knowledge of the country and its people’.

As can be seen, ‘cultural awareness’ and ‘willingness to interact with locals’ were seen as the two single most important components by all students who participated in S3. Further, other attitudinal features like confidence, open-mindedness, tolerance and willingness to adapt were considered as very important, too. New student-internal-/external features included ‘being outgoing’, ‘motivation’, ‘regular communication with family and friends at home’, ‘maturity’, and ‘resilience’. ‘Budgeting’, ‘financial support’, ‘already knowing people in the target country’⁸⁸ and ‘good accommodation’ were program-related factors that were somehow of importance to some students.

⁸⁸ This feature is technically not program- related, but externally influences how students might perceive the study abroad experience and is therefore put in this category.

Figure 19: Other key components necessary for successfully living and studying abroad (S3)



Note: intercultural, attitudinal, behavioural, program related

Apart from this question, students were specifically asked what it takes to study successfully in another country, to see which items were life-related and which ones study-related. Not surprisingly most students thought that knowing the target language is the most important study prerequisite, but also being 'organised', 'determined', 'independent', 'open-minded' and 'willing to adapt' was mentioned by several students, which shows that these attitudes and skills are not only necessary for "survival" in another country and IC, but also especially helpful to successfully

participate in and pass classes. The only new 'study-specific' factor 'being organised' was mentioned twice. Consequently, all remaining factors, as listed in the table above, are more concerned with the ability to live in another country, especially the (inter-) cultural factors, which were not mentioned in the list of study-related items. This list not only shows that students again think that a number of attitudinal features are most important for successfully living and studying abroad, it also shows that contact with locals and being aware of cultural matters is seen as essential.

5.4 Analysis of the Self-Reflection Essay

The essay was used for the first and second research question to find out what components students in general think are part of the IC and more specifically which ones were influenced by the SAS. Therefore, the essay results are looked at closer in this chapter, but the general findings are used in the next one as well to achieve a form of triangulation for the second research question.

In order to answer the two essay questions, students' self-reflection essays were analysed and answers quantified for easier comparison to the previous findings. Five categories could be extracted from their answers: attitudes, behaviour, knowledge, language and 'other components' which did not fit in any specific category.

5.4.1 Attitudes

Not surprisingly, attitudinal gains were mentioned by most students after their sojourn. Altogether, 78 times an attitudinal component was mentioned. Out of that, 25 different components could be extracted. About one-third of the students said that their 'openness'/'open-mindedness', their confidence' (also trust/faith in oneself) and their 'empathy' had changed greatly through their SAS. A change in students' 'flexibility', 'view on their own culture', 'independence' and 'tolerance' was

perceived by about one-quarter of all students. Also, 'cultural awareness' and 'to think critically about cultures' was mentioned by that many students. However, single students mentioned a few components that could be categorised as A components, but were not as such typically listed in the research literature, these include 'humour', 'bravery' and 'rationality'. Most of the items in Table 14 reflect the importance of the own mindset and its ability to change, but also people's attitude changes towards others, becoming more empathetic, respectful, tolerant and sensitive.

Table 14: List of attitudinal components of essay analysis

openness/open-mindedness (8x)
confidence/faith/trust in oneself (7x)
empathy (7x)
(critical) cultural awareness (6x)
flexibility (6x)
different view on own culture (6x)
Independence/self-reliance (6x)
tolerance (5x)
respect for otherness/for other people (4x)
sensitive (3x)
appreciation (3x)
broader perspective/change of outlook on the world
willingness to adapt (behaviour) (2x)
enthusiastic (2x)
tolerance of ambiguity (2x)
humour
not imposing own view on others
bravery
rationality
maturity
interest in the diversity of cultures
self-motivation
more relaxed and calm
non-judgemental/ suspension of beliefs
responsibility

5.4.2 Behaviour

Behavioural traits were generally mentioned less often; only 26 times which created 15 different components. As opposed to several frequently mentioned attitudinal traits, the one outstanding behavioural component that students thought was changed the most by the SAS was adaptability/adjustment, which was mentioned by more than one third of all students. This is not surprising and was frequently mentioned before. However, it confirms the general assumption that adaptation is a very salient part of students' SAS. The only other two components that were mentioned more than once were 'making new friends/relationships' and 'taking risks'. As previously mentioned, it should be repeated that some of these skills (i.e. strong work ethic, being organised, seeking new challenges) are rather general behavioural skills, or, in other words, they are not specifically intercultural.

Table 15: List of behavioural components of essay analysis

adaptability/adjustment (9x)
make new friendships/relationships (3x)
take risks (2x)
being organised (2x)
deal with ambiguity
functions better out of comfort zone/confront unfamiliar situations
strong work ethic
taking initiative
interact with people from different background
handle differences
act diplomatically
handle stress and complex situations/clearer thinking in new situations
introspection
seeking new challenges

Besides general behavioural patterns, students mentioned specific skills in their essays they thought had changed through the study abroad experience. Students 'knowledge about them can be traced back to the return unit's content, as

intercultural skills and traits were made explicit there. Some students stated their new ability to change perspective and not seeing their own values and attitudes as central anymore, an ability that Byram calls 'to decentre' (1997). Further, the skills of observation, analysing, and interpreting and relating were mentioned several times.

Table 16: List of skills components of essay analysis

decentre (5x)
observation (4x)
analysis (3x)
interpret and relate (2x)
problem solving
comparing
change perspective
reflect and think critically
identify new problems and find alternatives

5.4.3 Knowledge

Under the C-category all items referring to knowledge of some kind were collected. Only 17 times a reference to knowledge was given in students' essays, which is the smallest group out of the three ABCs. Culture specific knowledge was mentioned as the most frequent item, with students mentioning the SA country's specific politics, history, culture, pitfalls and traditions. Also, a general understanding for cultural diversity and otherness was mentioned as was culture general knowledge by four students. Other items that were listed under 'knowledge' refer more to students' ability or ways to gain knowledge and how to deal with it. In that sense, they are rather behaviour-/skills-related, but were listed here since they refer to students' knowledge gain during the SAS. Knowledge of the target language or about communication in general was mentioned by some students, too, but language specific comments are looked at closer in the next chapter.

Table 17: List of knowledge components of essay analysis

<u>Culture General</u>
understanding of otherness, cultural diversity (4x)
people are diverse and behaviour and attitudes can change depending on context
<u>Culture Specific</u>
acquire knowledge about study abroad country's history, politics, culture, pitfalls, laws, traditions etc. (5x)
<u>Knowledge</u>
ability to learn independently
acquire knowledge by doing research
acquire knowledge through language learning process/contact with locals
being critical with knowledge
knowledge of language/communication (3x)

5.4.4 Language Gains

Language gain was analysed separately, since it was mentioned by nearly every student. First of all, even in this area of learning newly gained attitudes, behaviours and knowledge were mentioned. Most frequently stated was a new awareness of communication in general which can be seen as general linguistic awareness, as opposed to target language specific knowledge (see Table 18). The ability to speak and an enhanced confidence to speak were further mentioned by many students. Also, other linguistic skills (listening, writing, and reading) were improved as well as a gain in general fluency/proficiency and socio-linguistic knowledge. Specific grammatical aspects were only mentioned to prove their language gain. These linguistic findings will further be used for the exploration of the connection between language and intercultural competence gain (Chapter 7) to match them with the survey results on students' language gain.

Table 18: Language-related gains during an SAS

attitudes/affections
communication skills /communicative awareness (6x)
confidence to speak (2x)
motivation to continue studying the target language
knowledge
knowledge of language (3x)
socio-cultural side of communication (3x)
cross-cultural communication
language and culture learning
skills
speaking (4x)
improving language skills (4x)
reading, writing, listening (3x)
non-verbal communication (3x)
language proficiency and fluency (3x)
colloquial language
grammar
formal vs. informal (2x)
behaviour
establish rapport with others (2x)
contact with locals

5.4.5 The Most Important Component

Since students were able to list as many IC components in their essays as they wanted, the result was quite contorted, not reflecting what the actual main impact was on. Hence, the essays were looked at in terms of what students found to be the most important component the SAS had an influence on (Table 19). Without having been specifically asked about it, the essays were skimmed through again, looking for the one (or sometimes two) IC components that students thought had changed the most. Again, the majority of students mentioned the SAS's impact on an attitudinal/affective feature. Respect and tolerance of ambiguity were mentioned

most frequently. The same amount of students mentioned the influence on their communication or language specific skills. New behaviours were only mentioned four times and a new understanding/knowledge only once. This again, proves students' preference for attitudinal and language related components – their opinion on what the SAS had the biggest impact on.

Table 19: Most important components that were changed because of the SAS

language
communication (3x)
language skills and proficiency (3x)
affections, attitudes
respect for otherness (3x)
tolerance of ambiguity (3x)
empathy (2x)
open-minded (2x)
more receptive to cultural differences
confidence (to speak), faith in self
rationality
bravery
appreciation for diversity
broader perspective
tolerance
critical cultural awareness
behaviour
adapt to new cultural environments
establishing relationships with strangers
adjusting and being sensitive to behaviour
analysis, perspective
knowledge
understanding of otherness

The aims of the essay questions were to explore the general influence of the SAS and to see what outcomes students had perceived. Since the extent of the impact of the SAS cannot be measured with the essay, this overview of what students listed as the most important outcome is a good indicator for it and concrete numbers are

presented in the new chapter. Before, however, new components that do not fit in any of the above categories should be mentioned as well.

5.4.6 New Components

Under 'new' components unspecific or unexpected students answers were gathered and also the ones that did not fit in any of the previous categories. A skill that four students mentioned is 'researching' and more specifically the ability to find and gather information, for academic purposes, but also to gain information about the SA country prior to the SAS. It is a skill which employs and broadens knowledge and is especially important for students' future academic and professional career. Connected to this skill are 'resourcefulness' and 'initiative' which were mentioned by another student. They are both linked to behaviour, but are also constituted of basic attitudes, especially 'initiative' that can be seen as the behavioural equivalent to 'willingness', which was mentioned several times. Other important outcomes that were mentioned more than once were 'time management' and 'gaining a new perspective for future employability'. Other concrete skills students learnt during the SAS were 'budgeting', 'networking' and 'being self-sufficient' which apply to many other situations in students' lives and therefore rather refer to general life skills than to specific intercultural ones. In the next section, the second part of the essay question is analysed and long-term outcomes are explored.

5.4.7 How Do Students Know They Have Developed these Components?

The second part of the essay was not made as explicit by the students as the part about the IC components; hence its analysis was quite challenging and did not deliver clear and quantifiable results. In many instances one had to read 'between the lines' and interpret certain phrases to receive any results. The table below (Table 20) shows that students had either noticed their changing IC skills during the SAS or after their return. The numbers behind the section title indicate how many students had noticed

their change during that time. The numbers do not add up to the total of 24 essays, because some students mentioned more than one instant of how they noticed the changes.

The results show that two-thirds of all comments referred to something that students had noticed already during their SAS. The most frequently mentioned one was students feeling more comfortable or confident after a while during the exchange. They had also noticed that after a certain time the following things had changed: the number of new meaningful relationships, a shift in their own behaviour, a more active participation in classes and better results, and comments by locals saying how they could not believe they were not locals but exchange students. After students returned, they noticed the differences between their host and home country more clearly, their family and friends had mentioned they had changed and as already stated above, they felt more empathetic and the view on their own culture had changed.

Table 20: List of answers to 'How do students know that they have changed during the SAS – according to during and after the sojourn.'

During exchange (21x)
feel more comfortable/confident/conscious (4x)
new friendships/relationships (3x)
noticed shift in behaviour (3x)
more active participation/use of language on class (3x)
enhanced uni results at the end of the year (2x)
locals comments (2x)
put themselves in locals' position and understood their opinions rather than the tourists' ones
found cultural peculiarities pleasant and relaxing after a while
noticed other's pitfalls during exchange
it got easier after a while

After return (10x)
be aware of differences (3x)
family and friends have noticed (2x)
be more sensitive towards people of other cultural background in Australia
comparing friends from other cultural backgrounds' behaviour in Australia
view on own culture changed
using these competencies after exchange
presentation in return-unit showed heightened awareness, analysing skills and knowledge

These results might not be as obvious or clear as one would hope, i.e. by stating that students' uni results got better or that they learnt something specific for their future professional career, but they clearly show that students did notice a difference, and potentially could have a long-term effect on their personalities and lives. Students' essays also more or less confirm the previous findings about IC components in this chapter. Attitudinal features were mentioned about three times more often as behavioural and cognitive ones, suggesting that this is what the study abroad semester mostly shaped.⁸⁹ It was also shown that attitudes and language gain were seen as the IC components that had changed the most.

What students thought the study abroad experience mostly had an impact on was: their openness, confidence, empathy, cultural awareness, ability to adjust and decentre, and culture-specific knowledge. Most students had already noticed the changes during their semester abroad, but were also willing to take over certain newly achieved behavioural skills into their lives upon their return.

The discrepancy between what students think is necessary to successfully live and study abroad and what the SAS really had enhanced shows the limits of a semester abroad semester and the gap in students' skills, knowledge and attitudes. However, certain long-term effects were expected and of special interest for this

⁸⁹ See next sub-chapter in comparison.

study, since it was initially shown that these outcomes are especially important for professional and academic development. They are further explored below.

5.4.8 Long-term Effects

In order to emphasise this point of long-term effects, students were asked after their SAS whether they think they had learnt or adapted something overseas, that they would want to keep or integrate in their life after their return. Interestingly, this time students' answers did not (except one) include many attitudinal or knowledge components, but mainly concrete behavioural ones that apply to their personal, academic, and professional lives. Some of them (e.g. being more open to new people, the host country's way of eating and communicating, siesta) can be directly linked to having lived in a different country, whereas others are general results of living alone (i.e. independence, self-sufficiency, manage finances better) or travelling in general (i.e. being more adventurous, getting out of my comfort zone, to try new things). Nevertheless, they express the students' desire to change something in their behavioural repertoire that they did not have before and some can even be linked to intercultural competence (i.e. being more open minded, being open to meet new people, getting out of my comfort zone).

Table 21: Outcomes to the question “‘s there anything that you learned/adapted to overseas that you want keep/integrate into your life after your return?’

attitudes
being more open minded
behaviour
drive for achieving the best result possible and studying hard
to try new things
being more adventurous
be friendly, helpful and always say hello
taking care of myself
being more social
manage finances better
being more open to meeting new people
make sure to enjoy every moment

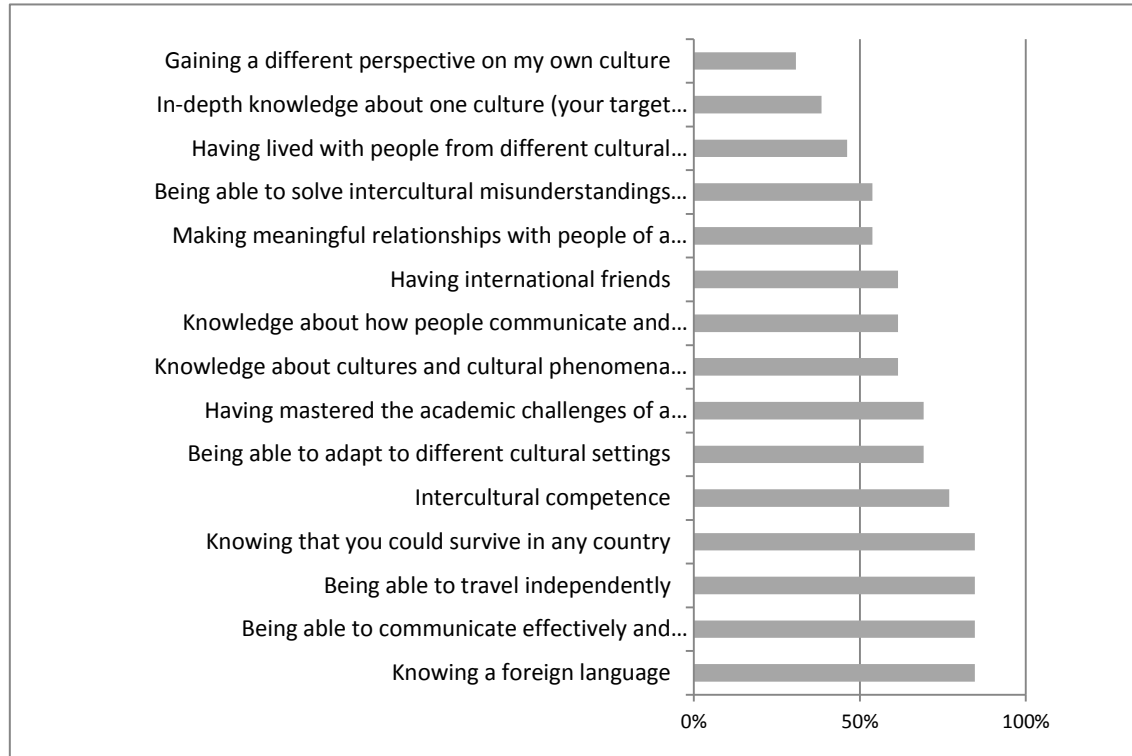
getting out of my comfort zone
the host country's way of eating and communicating
siesta
independence
self-sufficiency
knowing to be able to live and survive in another culture on my own with another language.

To further receive an overview of what outcomes of the SAS students think might be important for their future, they were asked to rank a number of items according to how important they think they will be (Figure 20). These items were taken from the interest ranking (see next research question), but also from general outcomes of an SAS as already discussed in the previous chapters. Although, as previously seen, students had listed very different outcomes, many of the students did agree on the importance of certain ones for their future. The overwhelming majority thinks that knowing the target language, being able to communicate effectively and appropriately, being able to travel independently and knowing that one could survive in another country will be very important. This are newly gained findings of students' results, saying that language but also travel-related outcomes will be of use and they are even linked with another.⁹⁰ The ability to communicate effectively and appropriately was given the same future importance, confirming that intercultural competence in general will be very important. Interestingly, 'intercultural competence' as a separate item was ranked lower, but directly followed these top four outcomes. Behavioural factors (being able to adapt to a different cultural setting, having mastered the academic challenges of a different educational setting) ranked next, followed by culture-general knowledge items, which confirms the findings of the previous question. The ability to make meaningful relationships was not seen as that important and the two factors referring to students' own culture (gaining a different perspective and in-depth knowledge) were ranked last, even though students previously agreed that these three were important outcomes of their SAS, which will apparently not be of much use in the future. This shows the

⁹⁰ Being asked what they will use the language in the future for, the majority said for travel purposes.

discrepancy between study abroad related outcomes and what students think is actually important for their future.

Figure 20: Future relevance of SAS outcomes



This not only gives a valuable insight into what students think will be important for their future, but more importantly, into what they think the study abroad semester has taught them. Language knowledge and intercultural competence are seen as two of the most salient capabilities for students' future and their acquisition seems to be very important. Certain IC behavioural skills were especially seen as essential for the future and students expressed their wish to try to maintain these after their sojourn.

5.5 Summary and Discussion

5.5.1 Discussion of the Findings of Question One

(What does it take to communicate effectively and appropriately with members of other cultures?)

When it comes to discussing the previous findings, two major premises are being followed: one is concerned with comparing the data against each other to validate them and the other one being a comparison of them against current research findings.

Starting with the latter one, especially Deardorff (2004) study's IC components were linked with this study's outcomes to see if students generally have the same idea about IC and its components as IC scholars. Both survey answers (S1 and S2) to this first question were used and compared with the 23 mostly agreed on components of the scholars. Only seven of the components the students listed were the same as the ones from Deardorff's study. Surprisingly, as the list of attitudes is the longest of the three components, only one attitudinal feature, namely 'openness', was the same, whereas three behavioural and cognitive components were similar⁹¹. Among the common B-components were: 'listening', 'learning through interaction' ('practice') and 'adjustability' ('adaptation'). The three similar cognitive features were: 'cultural knowledge', 'understanding of host culture's tradition' and 'sociolinguistic competence' (knowledge of target language). With less than one-third of matching IC components it seems that students have a different idea on what it takes to communicate effectively and appropriately with others, particularly when it comes to attitudinal prerequisites. Especially in the survey answers after students' SAS, where they had found themselves having to use their intercultural skills on a daily basis, it seems like the reality of what is needed in such intercultural encounters is quite different, at least when left to open answered questions. Nevertheless, certain limitations in comparing these two studies have to be kept in mind. Students were asked open-ended questions and were not given a list of items to agree on, as the scholars in the Delphi study, which naturally creates different results. However, the IC scholars' answers were mostly not what first came into students' minds.

When looking at the entire range of research literature on IC components, the disparity of the subject's answers and what other scholars discovered is not too big. Most of the attitudinal features the student cohort mentioned were the ones that

⁹¹ Similar as sometimes the wording was different, but the notion the same (i.e. skill to listen vs. listening).

could be found in the research literature, as listed in section 3.2. Although 'patience' as an IC trait can be found in Kealey (1996) and Fantini (2001) and among the students' accounts of Davidson and Goodrich Lehmann's (2001) study, it is very rarely mentioned in major IC models. It is apparently necessary for successful communication; however, it is not a language-related skill or trait that is difficult to be taught, especially in a classroom. Although this does not sound encouraging for language teachers, students can be helped by getting them to a conversational level of fluency, where they are able to communicate what they want (effectively) and in a manner that is culturally and linguistically appropriate, suggesting that a certain language skill level should be reached before students go off and study abroad (also see 7.2). Considering that students had just come back from their SAS, potential misunderstandings or negative experiences might have influenced their answers. Similarly, 'confidence' is often mentioned by the students, but only rarely appears in the research literature as a pre-requisite. 'Confidence' or 'self-confidence' is more commonly mentioned as an outcome, especially in connection with language learning or as necessary for an SAS in general (Davidson & Goodrich Lehmann 2001, Kitsantas 2004, Dwyer and Peters 2004b). Similar restrictions as to patience apply to confidence, and higher linguistic skills at the beginning of the sojourn might help with students' conversational confidence. 'Respect', 'tolerance', 'interest' and 'willingness' of some kind are more frequently mentioned in the research literature. It was decided that 'openness' and 'open-mindedness' were two different notions, since 'openness' was in the second survey restricted to 'openness to making new friends'. It is as such one of the very frequently mentioned attitudinal components in the IC literature. Rather rare features include 'friendliness' and 'acceptance' that were recorded in Spitzberg and Changnon's (2009) extensive overview of IC components, but no references to concrete studies on them were listed. 'Enthusiasm' and 'being assertive' were rather surprising attitudes and could not be matched with any previous findings or studies. Although they are not usually listed amongst the components of IC, according to these students' experiences they are necessary for appropriate and effective communication. Also 'having a go' or 'willingness to speak and interact' were mentioned several times, which are not part of all IC theories, but if so, often referred to as 'action' orientation (i.e. by the Council of Europe 2009).

Categorising these two answers was rather challenging since they basically refer to the same thing, but it was decided that 'willingness' is an attitudinal and 'having a go' a behavioural feature.⁹² 'Knowledge of the target language' and other cognitive linguistic components were mentioned by most of the students, which clearly indicates that they find language knowledge very important for intercultural communication.

5.5.2 Discussion of the Findings of Question Two

(Is knowing the other language the most important component of successfully living and studying abroad?)

The fact that 'knowledge of language', or a component of it, was mentioned by most of the students surveyed, confirms the finding of the second question: language is seen as very important component, but not by all students. Their comments to this question, however, show that students assign the language a key role not only for intercultural competence, just as Byram (1997) does, but also for living and studying abroad in general. Over time the quality of their answers changed, and reflect the growing change in the importance of the language. This is not too surprising considering that the subjects had spent a considerable amount of time studying their target languages and due to the fact that most of their courses overseas were taught in the target language as well. Students do not only see its importance for their study success, but also for interactions with locals, making meaningful relationships and understanding and learning about the culture and consequently adapting better. This further shows that students see language as embedded in a large web of prerequisites and outcomes that all influence each other (in what way is shown in the next two chapters). It has to be kept in mind, however, that most students mention language skills among other skills and attitudes and realise that language is but one piece of a larger puzzle, just as many researchers agree.

⁹² The categorisation problem occurred several times and it was decided to use what seems most logical from the students' perspective.

5.5.3 Discussion of the Findings of Question Three

(Which other key components are necessary for successfully living and studying abroad?)

The fact that cultural awareness was ranked first in the third research question is surprising, as it was not mentioned by the students in the first question at all. However, all of them agreed on its importance for living and studying abroad and so do IC scholars in Deardorff's study. As cultural awareness is clearly a part of intercultural competence, it can only be assumed that students thought of it as an essential attitude for living abroad, but not necessarily as a component of intercultural competence. It was mentioned by two students in the second survey as open answer to the third question and therefore taken into the ranking for the third survey. Other students did apparently not think of it when they were asked the open-ended questions, but, when they were requested to rank its importance, they all thought it was very essential. This shows that cultural awareness is not one of the predominant features that students were especially aware of when they returned (as opposed to i.e. openness); however, they do think that it is very salient in a study abroad setting retrospectively.

The same is true for 'willingness to interact with locals' which was the other top ranked feature. It was only indirectly mentioned in the second survey, however all students agreed that the willingness to have contact with locals is a very important feature for studying abroad and again shows the necessity of at least socio-cultural target language knowledge. As it was ranked so high, this might also be a reflection of students' unsatisfied attempts to communicate with locals due to their lack of confidence and their realisation that contact with host country nationals is a very salient factor for language and culture learning and general satisfaction (see also results of Chapter 7). The fact, that only 60% of the students in question two ('Is language most important?') agreed to it shows that language proficiency is not seen as the most important component by everyone, however, the willingness to interact is seen as very fundamental. Hence, the actual attempt, even if not linguistically appropriate or effective, is seen as a more basic feature of living abroad. This stands in contrast to Pellegrino's (1998) earlier stated findings, that students often don't appreciate socio-linguistic and –pragmatic improvements. Factors like patience,

confidence and language skills interfere with students' willingness to interact and the results of research question three (Chapter 7) will explain what other stressors had an influence on students' SA outcomes.

The impact of their return unit could be of importance for explaining these unexpected changes, too. Since IC and its components were extensively discussed during the return unit and materials of the Council of Europe were used to further describe them, students might have come across the terms such as 'cultural awareness' and the different IC components quite often in them.

Differences between the components that students listed in question one and three show the differences students see between communicating successfully and generally living and studying abroad, which apparently includes an even larger number of different skills and attitudes.

5.5.4 Discussion of the Essay Findings

The purpose of this self-reflection essay was to triangulate the findings on students' perspectives on IC components and on how they perceived their change, which is further compared and discussed with the findings of the next research question.

Most of the attitudinal results are not especially surprising and confirm previous findings. 'Openness'/'open-mindedness' and 'confidence' were mentioned most frequently, similar to the results of question one and three, which confirms their importance. In accord with the results of question three, 'cultural awareness' was mentioned very often too. Considering that the last survey was passed on to the students after the essay, it is not surprising that students mentioned cultural awareness that often, as opposed to the previous two surveys. This could again possibly be explained with the content of the return unit and student heightened awareness of IC components, which might have caused circularity. As the purpose of this study is to explore students' perspectives on IC components, one could argue that external information like from the return unit might have interfered with the research design. Students might have stated a different perspective on several IC components that had changed in the last survey, and also their opinion on how

important they are for effective and appropriate communication might have varied. This could have been clarified by repeating question one in the third survey.

So far, previous findings could be confirmed, and many IC components were repeatedly mentioned in the essay to emphasize their importance to the students, i.e. tolerance, respect, willingness to adapt, tolerance of ambiguity, interest and motivation.

(Cultural) empathy was not mentioned before, but seems to be important as it is often mentioned as one of the prerequisites of IC (Bugakova⁹³, Fantini 2001, Bertelmann Stiftung 2006, Spitzberg & Changnon 2009, Deardorff 2009). Even the IC scholars in Deardorff's (2004) study agreed that cross-cultural empathy is a salient component of IC. Again, the fact that students had not mentioned it before probably shows the influence of the return unit's readings, but it also proves that in retrospect they do think it has changed due to having studied overseas.

The one item that is missing from this list is the previously often mentioned 'patience'. It can be speculated that students believe that it is necessary for intercultural communication, but it was not enhanced by their SAS or they stated that they had missed it in their communicative partners during the SAS, but not necessarily as one of their personal traits. Also, a 'changed view on the own culture' and 'on other cultures' was often mentioned by the students which is also reported in other studies (Ecke 2013). It is more formally assessed in the next research question. The general skill to not see the world from one's original viewpoint or 'to decentre' was the most frequently mentioned skill being influenced by the SAS, thus it seems that its impact mainly helped students to see the world from a different perspective.

The majority of the students believed their 'willingness'/'ability to adapt/adjust' was influenced by the SAS. This not only confirms the findings of question three, but is also mirrored in the general research literature (Deardorff 2004, Paige et al. 2004, Spitzberg & Changnon 2006, Bertelsmann Stiftung 2009). It is almost not surprising that this was only mentioned by one student in the first

⁹³ No publication year stated: www.eltarea.ru/pic/fck/file/Shmidt/st_Bugakovoi_O_.doc

question, since successful communication does not necessarily involve adaptation skills. 'Organisation skills', 'the ability to find information and use resources' and 'taking risks' have been newly mentioned in the essays (as opposed to the findings of the survey answers) and can be found in several theories about successful sojourners (Byram 1997, Byram et al. 2002, Gudykunst & Kim 2003, Kealey et al. 2004). Newly developed or enhanced behavioural components also included a number of skills, as the previously mentioned one 'to decentre', but also 'to observe' and 'to analyse'. This again shows that students might have used the Council of Europe's readings and it further confirms the skills the IC scholars in Deardorff's study found to be necessary. These findings will help to compare the results of the second research question later.

At this point, it seems logical to emphasize again that even though students mentioned certain components, they might not be genuinely intercultural as they may refer to general personality traits or skills that are needed to successfully study abroad. However, this could also mean that many intercultural skills are in fact skills that have to be applied in everyday life, no matter where and in what situation. The wealth of IC components that is presented in the research literature leaves the impression that nearly every character trait or skill is an IC component or necessary to successfully study abroad. This would also confirm Ward et al.'s (2001) opinion that the adaptation process sojourners are going through is the same as any other life changing event; consequently the attitudinal and behavioural features one needs to adapt are not only specific to exchange students or sojourners. This means that a study abroad sojourn would definitely have a strong influence on students' skills, since it alters one's life completely, even if just for a short period of time.

The cognitive element that was developed the most during the SAS was culture specific knowledge, according to the subjects. This is not a surprising outcome, but also students found a new general understanding of cultural diversity as having developed a lot. It was additionally shown that most students mentioned language gains of various kinds, which again proves that language indeed is seen as a very important part of IC that is enhanced by an SAS. Students' improvements in this area were further found to be often referred to as the most important outcome of their SAS which further stresses the importance of the language for some students.

The fact that students already noticed changes of these skills, attitudes and behaviours during their exchange is a realistic indicator for the impact of studying abroad on them. However, comparing their experiences to their home culture after their return and realising the differences shows that they indeed changed their perspective and learnt to decentre. The changed view on the own culture was mentioned previously and will be further analysed in the following chapter.

Unfortunately, this second part of the essay question was not answered explicitly by many students, so only the two main categories of 'during' and 'after the exchange' could be extracted to assign most of the students' answers to them. Changes that had been perceived after their return are believed to more likely result in long-term effects, as opposed to temporary adjustments during the SA and were partially confirmed in the findings of the survey questions on long-term effects.

The results of this chapter not only show what IC components students think are important for successfully studying abroad and if they think they have acquired them, but also confirm the important role of the target language. In order to describe students' IC development further, the next research question only focuses on this, whereas the third research question tries to explore the reciprocal influence of language and IC during an SAS.

6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF THE SECOND RESEARCH QUESTION

6.1 Data Analysis of the *Reflection of Intercultural Encounters (RIE)*

Previously, it was shown what components students think are necessary for IC and studying abroad and the importance of the language in this scenario. The effect the SAS had on these components and that students believed that many different features had been influenced by it was further shown. In the following chapter, the same points are examined in a more structured way. To answer this second research question about whether and how the study abroad semester contributed to students' intercultural learning, a mix of three methods was employed at different points in time and only the students who completed all three of them (the 'matches' group) are focused on in the data presentation. In this chapter, the results of these students' *Reflection on Intercultural Encounters (RIE)* and corresponding questions of the surveys are reported to show quantitative as well as qualitative results. They reflect on students' comfort in intercultural situations and their change during and after their SAS. Students' comments on these situations will specify how and why this has happened.

Before the comments are analysed in more detail, the quantitative results of how comfortable students feel in certain situations are presented as a reference point for the subsequent analysis of the comments. Together with a number of questions in the surveys on character traits as well as interests, skills and knowledge, IC changes can be observed more closely. A summary of the findings, also with regard to previous findings on the first research question, is given in the end. Due to the nature of the results and to avoid confusion with the other research questions, a discussion of these data is included in their presentation

6.1.1 What the Quantitative Data Show

In the following section, the quantitative as well as quantified data of the *RIE* are presented in regards to students' initial self-rating and the changes of time. The ten students ('matches' group) that completed all three *RIE*'s are not a high enough number to receive statistically relevant quantitative data; hence these data are only used as an indication to see a general trend in students' self-ranking and to follow this up on by their comments and reflections on individual encounters. At the same time, this helps to triangulate the previous results, presenting a much broader perspective on the influence of a study abroad semester.

The examination of the general average score of this 'matches' group shows that scores were medium high in all three assessment stages and generally slightly rose over time. The difference between the first (average: 58.1⁹⁴) and the second *RIE* (60.7) is slightly greater than the gap to the third *RIE* (61.87). More relevant than the general examination of results, is the examination of the three question sets and of single questions which later leads to a more qualitative analysis of these findings.

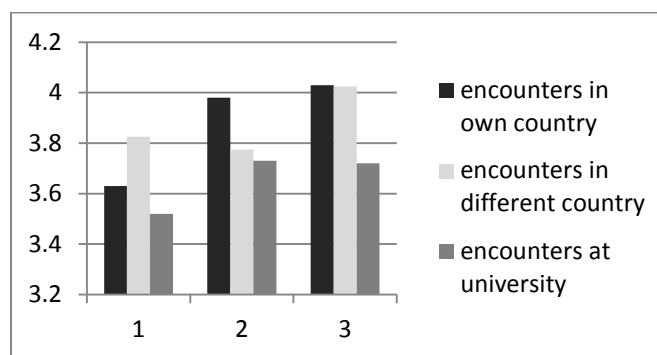
Having a closer look at the individual scores, students' comfort levels for those 16 encounters varied, sometimes considerably, showing that there is a rather heterogeneous feeling towards specific intercultural situations. The lowest general score in the first *RIE* was 51 points and the highest 70 which is quite a significant gap. In the second *RIE* the lowest score was 49 (by a different student) and the highest the maximum of 80 (again by a different student). In the third one, 51 was again the lowest score and 72 again the highest. Accordingly the gap in students' comfort rankings in all three surveys is quite big, suggesting further investigation through the surveys' comments.

Out of the three question sets (A: 'encounters in own country', B: 'encounters in other countries', C: 'encounters at university') the four questions about 'encounters in other countries' scored the highest before students' departure, but

⁹⁴ Out of a possible 80

decreased after their return and then increased again. The comfort with encounters in in the own country increased steadily, whereas students' comfort with other cultures at university, which was initially seen as very problematic, only rose a little. This shows that students feel the most at ease with coping, encountering, adapting and integrating in other countries, but the most worried about encounters in an academic context, especially at the host university. Although the mean score of the last question set rose, 'encounters at university' were generally ranked lower than the other two question sets.

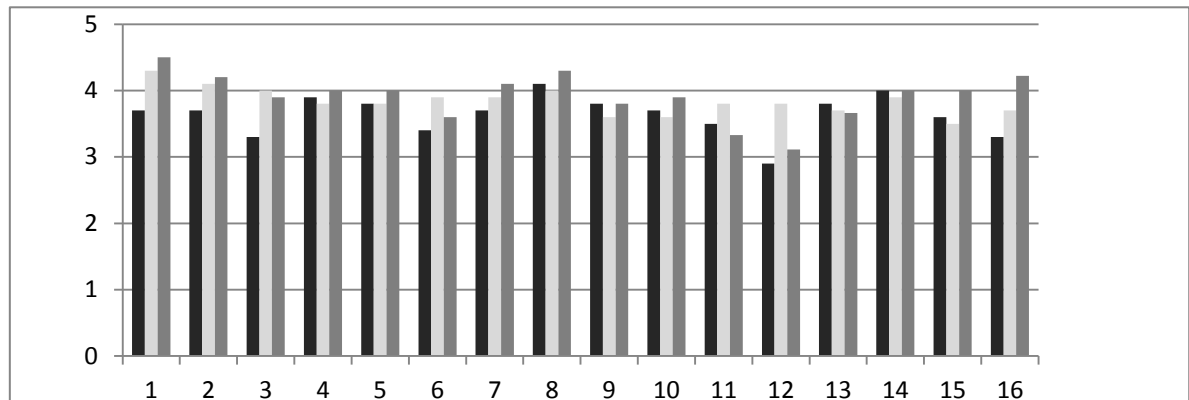
Figure 21: Question sets means over time



A closer look at the score results of the 16 individual situations reveals clearer insights into what specific encounters students felt comfortable with and which ones they are more wary of. In the first *RIE*, encounter 8 ('Encountering the different customs of people from other countries, e.g. dress, special occasions etc.') scored the highest, showing the most comfort in this situation followed by encounter 14 ('Relating to students from other cultures, e.g. learning what they like to talk about, to learn about their background etc.'). In the second *RIE* encounter 1 ('Eating and drinking in other cultural contexts, e.g. mealtime procedures, menus etc.') receives the highest comfort ranking, followed by encounter 2 ('Encountering the different customs of people from other cultures, e.g. dress, special occasions etc.'), encounter 3 ('Encountering the different values of people from other cultures, e.g. rules, beliefs etc.'), and encounter 8.

Encounter 12 ('Adapting to other study practices, e.g. using unfamiliar procedures to complete an assignment, test etc. '), 3, and 6 ('Communicating with people of different cultures, e.g. coping with misunderstandings, a different sense of humour etc. ') are seen as the least comfortable ones, leaving to the assumption that unrelated encounters from each question set are considered as less comfortable.

Figure 22: Individual encounters means over time

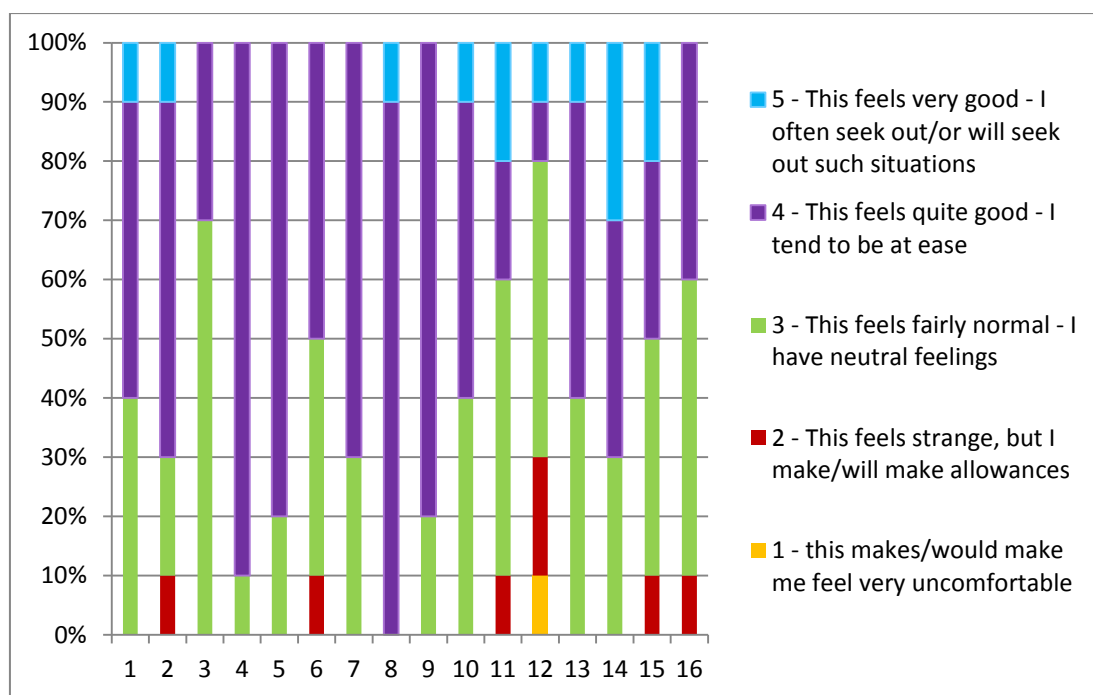


These figures also show that the biggest gain in comfort over time was perceived for the last encounter 16 ('Building bridges between fellow students of my own country and those of the different culture, e.g. sensing that someone of my culture has said the wrong thing and explaining the misunderstanding to both sides etc. '). Numbers show initial low comfort in this situation, but students rated this encounter as one of the most comfortable ones half a year after their return. While many of the comfort scores of the encounters shows an increase half a year after their return (only encounter 8 is lower), six out of the 16 encounters scored lower right after the SAS and one remained the same. This suggests either that students overestimated themselves in these encounters or that something during their SAS made them rethink their initial reaction to it. The examination of their comments (see next sub-chapter) aims to help answering these questions.

At last, a general overview of the distribution of scores across the 16 encounters shall be given. As Figure 23 shows, in *RIE-1* most questions received medium comfort scores. Encounter 8 ('Encountering the different customs of people from other countries, e.g. dress, special occasions etc. ') received scores ranked 4 and

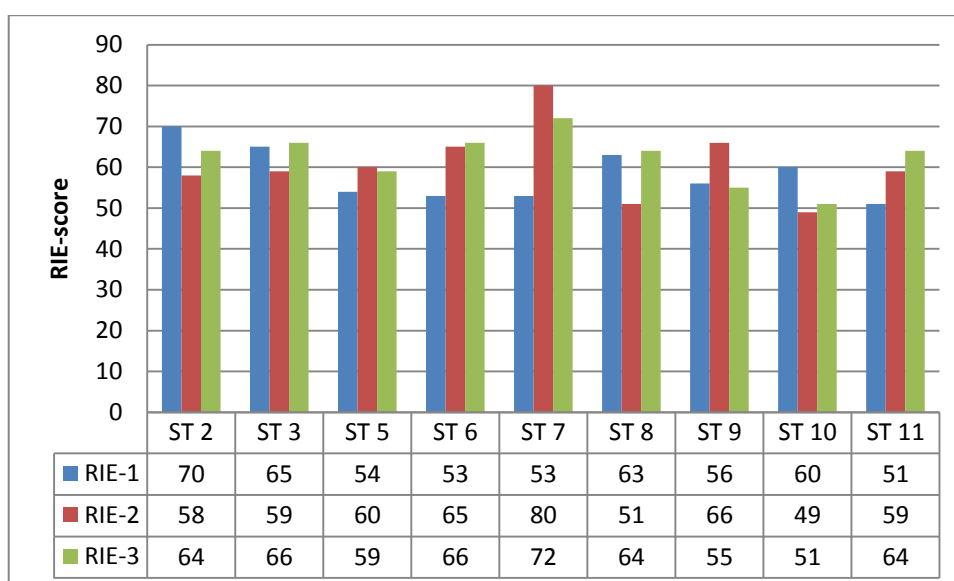
5 and consequently scored the highest on average. The score distribution in encounters 4, 5, 7, and 9 were similar and so were 1 and 10. Encounter 12 seemed to have the largest distribution of different comfort levels. According to this result, encounters with different customs and behaviours are only sought out or very comfortable when they are encountered in a different country and not in the own country. The score distribution in RIE 2 and 3 were quite similar, featuring positive attitudes towards all encounters, with no students assessing any encounter as very uncomfortable and at least one student for each encounter stating that they are frequently seeking out such situation.

Figure 23: Distribution of scores for all encounters_RIE 1



As a last item, changes of students' individual *RIE*-score over time are presented, to complete the data presentation. This further helps to answer the second research questions about how students' intercultural competence changed during a semester abroad. As can be seen, students' scores varied greatly, so it is refrained from making generalisations on developments and comfort levels. However, the effects and reasons for these scores are further discussed in the next chapter, examining details and survey answers for a better understanding of the data.

Figure 24: Students' individual RIE-score over time



All of these quantitative results suggest that most students exhibit a medium to high comfort level in intercultural situations according to the *Reflection of Intercultural Encounters* questionnaire before leaving for their study abroad semester and slightly improved this in a general manner over time. Students' comfort scores in the individual questions further confirm that they became generally more comfortable in these 16 intercultural encounters; however, the scores of individual students show that not all of them necessarily improved their comfort levels.

Having established a general overview of the numerical changes in students' comfort rankings made it possible to extract those encounters that changed significantly and to examine students' comments of them to see what made their comfort level change.

6.1.2 Specific Encounters and their Changes over Time

In this sub-chapter, students' comments for specific encounters are examined in order to answer the questions why and how their comfort levels changed. Those encounters, that students ranked as either quite comfortable or uncomfortable (in

comparison) and that changed significantly over time, meaning that students' comfort in this situation was either lower or higher after their return, were focused on especially. Looking at the comments might give an idea on how the SAS influenced students' particular attitudes, behaviour or knowledge of this situation and what specific experiences during the SAS or at home caused it. Comments are also examined according to how positive, neutral or negative students estimate their ABCs for the particular situation.

6.1.2.1 *'Encounters with different cultures in my own country'*

The first and the third encounter experienced a significant rise in students' comfort self-assessment before and directly after students returned from their SAS. Why the former was seen as the most positive one half a year after the students' return and the latter as one of the least comfortable ones before the sojourn, is examined through students' comments in the following section.

➤ **Encounter 1** (*'Eating and drinking in other cultural contexts, e.g. mealtime procedures, menus etc.'*)

This encounter received medium comfort levels before students' SAS. Students' comments reveal a general positive and neutral attitude and general interest in this matter. Further, mainly positive and neutral behavioural examples were given. Only one student had reservations which are shown by the last comment.

- I enjoy different cuisines and foods but I have grown up with it so it is normal for me.
- In my opinion a country's cuisine is quite an important facet of its culture, therefore always enjoy trying new things.
- Interaction is always so much easier over food
- Similar eating and drinking habits and cultural contexts
- I do often eat at restaurants with different cuisines but there can be many things on the menu such as sushi or duck that I would not feel comfortable eating.

After their return and half a year later, some students' linked this situation with their experience during the SA showing how this is an important daily occurrence they had to and indeed got used to. The one student that previously had reservations reported another situation where they would not embrace the situation. As this was the only negative example mentioned, it can be assumed that this was one of the encounters that students experienced openly and as positively during their SAS or they had underestimated their comfort level prior to departure. This would explain their steadily increasing comfort level over time and mostly positive attitudes towards it.

- I have gotten used to eating meals at late times, especially dinner + with drinking sangria at meal times
- It was a lot of carbohydrates and the glass of wine with a meal - I loved it!
- love it yummy and interesting
- I ate food from other cultures at least 3 times a week
- Not matter the country/region's food specialty; I am always keen to try everything at least once!
- No problems, though I did occasionally get 'looks' for forgetting to say "Bon appetite" or "Guten appetite" before eating
- I enjoy eating and drinking in other cultural contexts but once when I was abroad I could not try a popular cuisine (cheese fondue) because I didn't like the taste it made me feel sick.

➤ **Encounter 3** (*'Encountering the different values of people from other cultures, e.g. rules, beliefs etc.'*)

Although some students voiced their open-mindedness for encounter 3, others made restrictions and expressed more caution in these situations. Comfort in this encounter was ranked the second lowest before students' SAS. Students generally stated less enthusiasm about this encounter compared to encounter 1, although a general tolerance and knowledge about it is demonstrated, as the first two comments show. However, especially the notion of others imposing or holding very different values, seemed to have made some of the students feel less at ease which can be seen in the last two comments.

- I'm accepting that not everyone believes in the same thing.

- I am exposed to different values of people from just being around my friends who practise a different culture from my own.
- I am fine so long as they are not unduly imposed on me.
- I am Christian and so while generally I don't waver in my beliefs I am quite at ease to compare.

Students' comments on this situation after their return and half a year later were mainly positive, which explains the increase in their self-assessment of their comfort level. Some of the experiences they had during the SAS seem to be responsible for their heightened awareness and willingness to learn about other people's values which confirms an obvious effect of the SAS. However, the last three comments also show that some students were still wary of this situation, as it refers to experiences in their own home country, which seems to relativize their tolerance, especially in the field of religion.

- The Turkish girl I lived with was Muslim so she follows Islam faith – I have no problem, I am quite interested by the different religions.
- I love having an understanding of different cultures, beliefs and rules it allows me to expand my knowledge and help me form opinions.
- I believe that people have the right to their own opinions and values so long as they don't encroach upon mine I'm cool, I do tend to be fascinated though about learning about other people's beliefs and opinions I find it interesting
- I'm a very tolerant and accepting person of rules, beliefs, ideals that are distinct to my own.
- I like to learn, as long as the other party is not out to convert me
- If I have a moral clash I will want to defend my views but I will also want to understand and to learn where they are coming from, in saying that I could become defensive if they ridicule my own ideas but I will hold my tongue if the social situation I find myself in is inappropriate.
- Religion is sometimes a bit sticky.

➤ **Encounter 6** (*'Communicating with people of different cultures, e.g. coping with misunderstandings, a different sense of humor etc.'*)

Comfort with encounter 6 was initially ranked the second lowest in the first question set, which increased right after students' return and slightly declined again half a year later. Students' comments in the first *RIE* were mainly neutral, reflecting on their

acceptance of other people's opinions and sense of humour on the one hand, but also clearly expressing where they set their personal limits. Situations where misunderstandings and miscommunication happen are naturally seen as more uncomfortable and less easily dealt with, since it involves direct confrontation with another person and not just having a positive attitude. Generally, fewer comments about students' interest in this situation or open-mindedness were made, which could explain the relatively low comfort level before students' SAS. Similar to the comments of the previous encounter, students stress that they are generally fine in this situation as long as they are not negatively involved in it. The last comment reflects the student's heightened awareness of this issues and the possible impact their studies could have on it.

- I can try to understand that people have a different sense of humour to my own but do not feel comfortable around those who mock other cultures particularly my own.
- It happens so long as no one gets upset or annoyed I have no problem.
- If I'm in the situation where a different sense of humour has occurred, I just smile to show my indifference.
- This is what to my understanding international studies is all about, understand other cultures to avoid possible misunderstanding.

After students' SAS and half a year later, students did not, as they did initially, describe their reaction as uncomfortable and only one negative comment was made. The other comments reflect their positive experiences and behaviours during their exchange as well as comparisons to their home country, and a more open mind towards this situation. Students now exhibit a much more relaxed attitude and their higher comfort levels show that this situation was not experienced as harshly as they may have imagined it before their sojourn.

- I do cope well with misunderstandings so long as I see the person's reaction and facial expressions and they see mine so when one seems unclear then other explains the misunderstanding.
- The Australian sense of humour is very different – the Italians didn't really understand sarcasm, but it wasn't a major issue.
- Generally as long as an effort is made to resolve the misunderstanding it works out ok

- Misunderstandings will always arise among cultures, thus I feel the best way to cope is to smile and laugh.

After their return, students did not seem to be so uneasy with this encounter anymore, partially because they did not experience these situations as severely in their study abroad country or because they developed a more positive attitude and behaviour towards it. Generally, students' comfort in those situations in their own country steadily rose, showing students' open-mindedness and positive behaviour towards people of another cultural background in their own country.

6.1.2.2 *'Encounters with people of different cultures in their own countries or communities'*

The four encounters in this second question set were initially ranked as the most comfortable, which declined after the SAS and increased again half a year later. Especially significant were the comfort rankings of encounter 8.

- **Encounter 8** (*'Encountering the different customs of people from other countries, e.g. dress, special occasions etc.'*)

Encounter 8 was rated the most comfortable one in the first *RIE*, slightly decreasing after students' return, but increasing again half a year later. As being one of the encounters with the highest comfort level in general, it seemed important to see how students approached it and why this situation could be different from others. However, apart from the comment below none of the other comments made really gave away students attitudes or knowledge about it, which could be because students had not experienced them so far.

- Encountering different customs is interesting to see and be a part of. Personally I enjoy learning about different customs.

Even after the students' return, their comments did not indicate their experience in this area. Only one student mentioned a concrete example for this encounter.

- It was so interesting and exciting to participate in Carnevale and to see how this tradition is celebrated.

Two students' comments reveal why their comfort level might not have changed in this encounter. This is, on the one hand, because they perceived it to be similar to Australia and on the other hand because they simply had not experienced any traditional customs in their SA country.

- All these aspects were similar to those in my own culture in Australia.
- I would love to experience these events myself.

6.1.1.3 'Encounters with different cultures at university'

From the quantitative perspective, the third question set 'Encounters with different cultures at university' was found to be the least comfortable one for students; however this eased a little after the exchange semester. The numerical data show a rising comfort level in these situations after the return, but still, their comfort level remained much lower compared to general encounters in their own country and in other countries. Looking at students' comments on those six encounters at university may give an insight into what students were wary of and how this changed after their exchange.

Where these encounters could occur was not specified by the questionnaire. Most students, therefore, automatically applied these situations to their SAS, as opposed to exchanges with students of different cultural backgrounds at their home university in Australia. Before the sojourn, these encounters received a lot of comments reflecting on students' positive attitudes and behaviours, but also neutral and negative ones, expressing students' worries and discomfort.

- **Encounter 11** (*'Clarifying areas of uncertainty about study arrangements, e.g. describing what I am used to and asking what happens in the other culture'*)

The first of these six encounters already provides a good insight into why students ranked them so low. It received mainly neutral and negative comments before students left, but one student also expressed their positive attitude towards it.

- I find asking questions really enjoyable and way of life in other countries is really interesting
- This aspect would make me feel uncomfortable especially if I cannot communicate these things in the spoken language. But I have yet to experience this aspect.

The concern about not being able to express themselves in the target languages was shared by many students in the entire group. However, students also admitted that their answers were hypothetical as they had not experienced this before. After their semester abroad and half a year later, none of the students specifically listed a lack of language skills as one of the problems in this encounter. This shows that the initial fear of not being able to make themselves understood was not justified.

Comments generally shifted to a rather neutral tone, mainly reflecting on students' behaviour. Some students gave specific examples of situations they found themselves in when having trouble clarifying problems and explained how they dealt with it. Their comments show that they often found themselves helpless or not knowing what to do at some point during their SAS, but most of them still managed to get along.

- When I was provided with directions as to whom I should talk to about a problem I was able to deal with certain difficult situations I found myself in.
- I had great difficulty in attaining my student card (I didn't get it until uni classes had finished).

➤ **Encounter 12** (*'Adapting to other study practices, e.g. using unfamiliar procedures to complete an assignment, test etc.'*)

Students felt especially uneasy with this encounter. This situation had the lowest ranking of comfort in all three *RIEs*, which improved slightly in the second one, only to drop again in the third one. Before they left, students stated the following hypothetical behaviours:

- If I can't get an understanding of what is needed of me then I would feel very uncomfortable but would hope to adapt to their study practises and familiarise myself with their procedures.
- I haven't done that I would be nervous but I'm sure not impossible [sic]

Other students also expressed their concerns about this situation and that they would not feel too comfortable in it. As already seen in the comments of the previous encounter they mainly focus on the assessment aspect of their coursework overseas which naturally made them feel uneasy, since passing the courses abroad is one of the conditions of the program. Also, the fact that most students had not experienced this before, and therefore did not know what to expect, contributed to students' concerns. However, most students said that they would try to make it work, because they had no other choice.

The comfort in this situation did not improve much after the sojourn, and the comments after their return and half a year later show that students were still not really comfortable or happy with the way they adapted to different study practices. In fact, some statements even show that students were quite lost and did not have much guidance or support in this situation.

- Having to adapt to the final exam being the only form of assessment
- I found it hard to adapt to other study practises because I am not exposed to that here.
- I would just hope I got it right if I didn't know what to do I would be stressed.
- This was really difficult to gauge what the teachers wanted from you in different tasks.

Without a doubt, tests and assignments in another study system made students feel very wary, even after their return, which shows that this must be a major stress factor. The comments students made in the previous two encounters show why they ranked them so low and why it had not changed much after the return.

Encounter 14 was ranked quite high before the sojourn and comfort in encounter 16 gained a significant increase and both are therefore looked at further in the following two sections.

- **Encounter 14** (*'Relating to students from other cultures, e.g. learning what they like to talk about during breaks etc.'*)

Relating to students from other cultures was ranked as the second most comfortable situation before students' SAS, which was surprising, as encounters at university were in general ranked as less comfortable. However, students demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviours for this situation. The fact that students already interacted with people of many different cultural backgrounds in their home country, positively contributes to their comfort in this encounter.

- I would enjoy knowing that there are people from different backgrounds who can understand my position.
- I tend to speak well and am not very shy so this has not been a problem though in another language is another story
- I have friends from many different backgrounds so this is easy for me to do.

After their return, students' comfort level of this encounter remained relatively high, confirming that meeting and interacting with other students was still an enjoyable task they would seek out regularly. Also their knowledge on the importance of this matter is demonstrated; however this is not further elaborated on.

- It was awesome meeting other Erasmus students from Europe, the U.S. and Asia!
- It was a case of listening and getting a feeling for the type of conversation that they would partake in.
- I like asking these types of questions, it's interesting.
- was a really interesting aspect of uni life

- This important if one wants to have friends. Adaptability [sic].

➤ **Encounter 16** (*'Building bridges between colleagues of my own country and those of the different culture, e.g. sensing that someone of my culture has said the wrong thing and explaining the misunderstanding to both sides.'*)

This encounter essentially asks for students' ability to mediate between people of their own and the target culture. Although initially, students' comfort in this situation was not too high, their comments before the SAS reflect mainly positive attitudes towards it and willingness to mediate if they hadn't already.

- I feel I am relatively empathetic so I hope I could sense that situation and help to bridge any misunderstandings.
- I would be happy to explain a misunderstanding to both sides.
- This hasn't occurred as of yet

After their return, students exhibit an increased comfort, although their comments do not give away hints to why that is⁹⁵. Only one student mentions a concrete situation where they used their mediation skills. The others only mentioned that they encountered these situations often and seemed at ease with it.

- I encounter such thing regularly and handle it very well.
- this occurred often
- Having to explain slang words to help aid misunderstandings when with other Australians who couldn't speak Italian

The analysis of single encounters and the comments is finished at this point, but since the last encounter refers to the ability to mediate and this was also addressed in the survey, results of this question are continued to maintain the topic and to verify the findings further.

⁹⁵ The analysis of other comments from the entire group of students was similarly non conclusive.

Mediation

Since the ability to mediate between people of different cultural backgrounds is seen as an important skill for an intercultural speaker (Byram, 1997), students were asked in the surveys 'Do you think you could successfully mediate between people of your own and your study abroad culture? (i.e. explaining why misunderstandings happened, mediating problems etc.)'. None of the students taking the second survey said they did not feel able to mediate successfully and only a very few said they weren't sure. That doubt was explained by two students:

- At times yes, though I would feel more confident if I were to live in that country for a while longer to understand the culture even better. But yes, I do think I could mediate between the two cultures now.
- I can try to help as much as I can but such experiences are often subjective, the best thing in my opinion is to let people have their own experience.

Results from the *RIE* and the survey confirm that this important skill of an intercultural speaker can be found in these students, especially after their SAS. Students feel confident enough to engage in this situation in future private or professional circumstances.

6.1.4 Summary and Discussion of the RIE findings

The quantitative data have to be interpreted carefully, since the number of students was quite low. Consequently, they were only used for tendencies and as a guide to what encounters were to be explored further. The numbers show, that the SAS helped students mainly to gain more comfort in intercultural encounters in their home country and at university, as their comfort in encounters in other countries was relatively high already. It was expected that they would become more comfortable in academic intercultural situations, since most students had never studied abroad before and this unknown factor alone would contribute to them initially ranking these encounters lower than others. Why students felt less comfortable in

encounters in another country after their return can only be speculated on: either they generally overestimated their ease in these situations that mainly involved contact and communication with others before the SAS and then ranked their feelings more realistically after their return, or their experience during the SAS was not exclusively positive and they developed a more neutral/negative attitude towards these encounters. The former seems to be a more logical explanation, as students did not mention anything negative or disappointing in their comments. Reactivity to pre-tests might also be a possible explanation as a typical time-series phenomenon; higher comfort in intercultural situation might have been induced by the assessment methods as students might have been sensitised to the topic through the assessments tools themselves (Sutton et al. 2007). The overwhelming amount of affective comments can further be explained with the nature of the questions and the ranking system that asks students about how it would make them feel, so it naturally triggers comments on attitudes.

For most encounters in which students' comfort rose, it seems that their experience during the SAS might have helped them to lose their concerns and to gain more self-confidence in dealing with them. When it comes to concrete components, as assessed in the first research question, only a few comments give meta-cognitive hints on what students think is necessary to deal with in this encounter. 'Respect', 'openness', 'empathy' and especially 'interest' were explicitly mentioned as attitudinal traits in the second *RIE*, which basically confirms findings of the first research question. The skills that students thought had helped them in certain encounters were 'discovery', 'observation' and 'adaptability' which again were listed among the behavioural components in the first research question. The general ability and willingness to learn and gain new knowledge was mentioned several times as cognitive developments during the SAS. This does not necessarily mean that students did not gain the previously mentioned ABC components; it might just show that their metacognitive skills might not be developed enough to analyse their own thinking/behaviour, or they were still too emotionally involved in this experience right after their return and with some time and practice this might change. Also, in commenting on a concrete example for each encounter, intercultural components

had not necessarily to be mentioned. Half a year later, however, students' comments were not found to reflect more meta-cognitive skills, even after using the material by the Council of Europe and learning more about IC in theory. However, during the essay analysis it could be seen that many students had incorporated their newly gained knowledge of IC and many comments of the *RIE* were found to already show meta-cognitive skills before students left, so this skill was already quite developed in some of the students.

Apart from those encounters that students felt more comfortable in after their return, there were also some that students felt less drawn to after the study abroad semester. Students' comments indicated why their comfort in certain situations was so low. Being confronted with otherness, or feeling imposed on in the own country; not being able to clarify and identify problems in other countries; not knowing what to expect in assessments and classes, an absence of support or clarity, and a general concern or lack of confidence to use the foreign language were major stressors that were still perceived as such half a year after their return. More influencing factors are examined in the third research question. It also seems like situations that were only hypothetically commented on, since students had not encountered them before, were often ranked more cautiously before the SAS, and later more positively.

At this point, it has to be emphasised that also the research methods as well as the chosen way of analysing the data both comprise certain limitations. The nature of the data leaves a lot of room for speculations, and limitations of self-reports are further discussed in the last chapter of this thesis. Students' comments also varied in their quality ranging from very extensive descriptions to single-word comments. Since the findings on students' IC development had to be verified, it was decided to assess students' IC not just with the help of the *RIE*, but also to self-assess single IC components, as previously introduced in the research literature. These findings are presented and discussed below.

6.2 Data Analysis of the Surveys

Moving on to the surveys, students were asked to rank their interests in certain intercultural matters, specific IC traits and attitudes, intercultural skills, as well as culture-specific and culture-general knowledge and their language levels. This shows in more detail how the SAS influenced their intercultural competence. Selected components were chosen from the research literature and were previously discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. Since they were assessed separately, they will also be analysed separately and later compared to the findings of the first research questions and the *RIE* results.

6.2.1 Interests

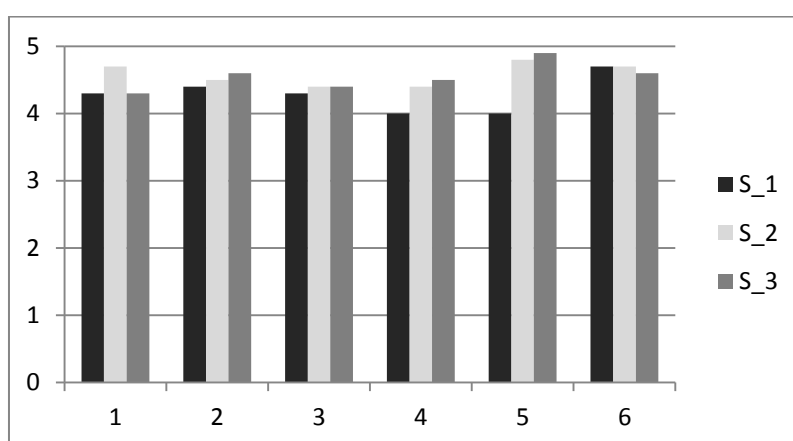
The six interests students were asked to agree on were, interest in:

- (1) learning languages;
- (2) different cultures and countries;
- (3) world affairs;
- (4) meeting people from different cultural background and communicating with them;
- (5) enjoy travelling;
- (6) I want to become a competent speaker of my target language and be able to communicate appropriately and effectively with members of the target culture.

The results of all six self-rankings in the first survey clearly show that students agreed to be already 'fully' or 'very strongly' interested in these matters. This shows a high/very high interest in these fields already before their study abroad semester. Through the course of the year the means did not change significantly for the complete group of students that did the three surveys and only rose by .03 points (Figure 25). Statement (6) was generally ranked very high, which confirms students' high interest in becoming intercultural speaker. Interest in meeting people of different cultural backgrounds and travelling was initially the lowest. Both increased

over the year with interest (5) showing the greatest increase. Interests (2), (3) and (5) had medium high initial scores and rose slightly during the course of the year. Students' interest in learning languages did not improve over the course of a year and the last statement scored slightly lower in the last survey than initially, but still remaining on a high level.

Figure 25: Interest changes over time – 'matches' group



To sum this up, students' interest was already high before their SAS.⁹⁶ Hence, their self-perceived interest levels did not significantly rise after the exchange semester. Students' interest in traveling increased the most which can presumably be linked to the SAS, as many students took advantage of their overseas stay to extensively travel and therefore gain more confidence and interest in this activity.

6.2.2 Traits/Attitudes

The following analysis will show if the same is true for character traits/attitudes that are associated with intercultural competence (respectful, open-minded, flexible, tolerant, world-minded, empathetic), which would further help to explain why students have a higher or lower self-perceived intercultural competence.

⁹⁶ Interest in language, world matters and cultures were also main reasons for studying this degree and abroad, which confirms these findings.

The results of the first survey more or less reflect the previous findings about students' general comfort in intercultural encounters and their interests. The same 5-point Likert-scale was used as in the 'interest' questions. All traits ranked 4 and above with the mean of all six being 4.2 before the sojourn, 4.28 after and 4.33 half a year after the SAS (Figure 26). Although the general mean increased, some of the individual trait scores did not, in fact, some traits that initially score high, where ranked lower after a year and vice versa.

All six traits changed in a different way and so did the scores students used to self-assess their traits level (Figure 27). Generally most students assessed their respectfulness and open mindedness the highest before the sojourn; their flexibility and empathy on a medium high level and tolerance and world mindedness were their weakest traits. Two traits, 'respectful' and 'empathetic', did not change after the sojourn. However, some students ranked themselves less empathetic after the study abroad semester and some as more. Half a year later, this trait received the biggest gain and was then ranked the highest. Generally, the distribution shows that most students' self-evaluation fluctuated, with some agreeing to have these traits completely and some just to a certain degree. The increase for 'open minded' and 'world minded' scores was significant after the SAS too and for 'tolerant' just slightly. The score for 'flexibility' decreased and stayed at this lower level even in the third survey, and 'respectful' received a lower ranking in it as well.

Figure 26: Individual trait changes over time_ 'matches' group

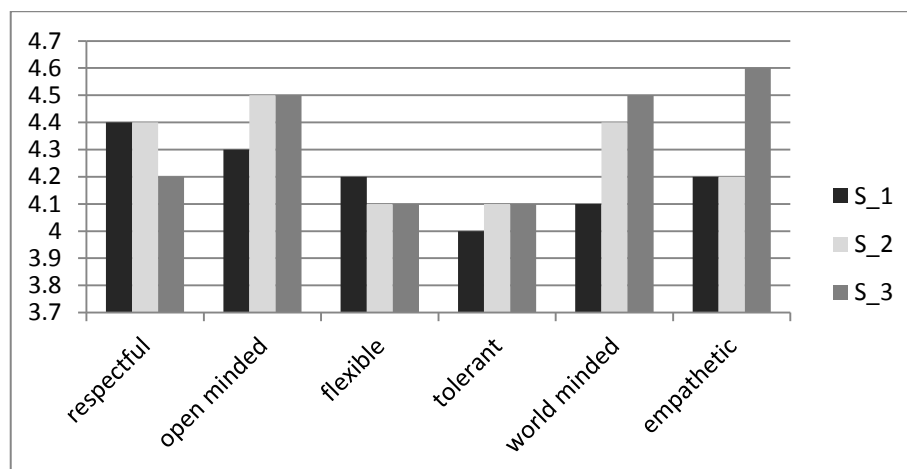
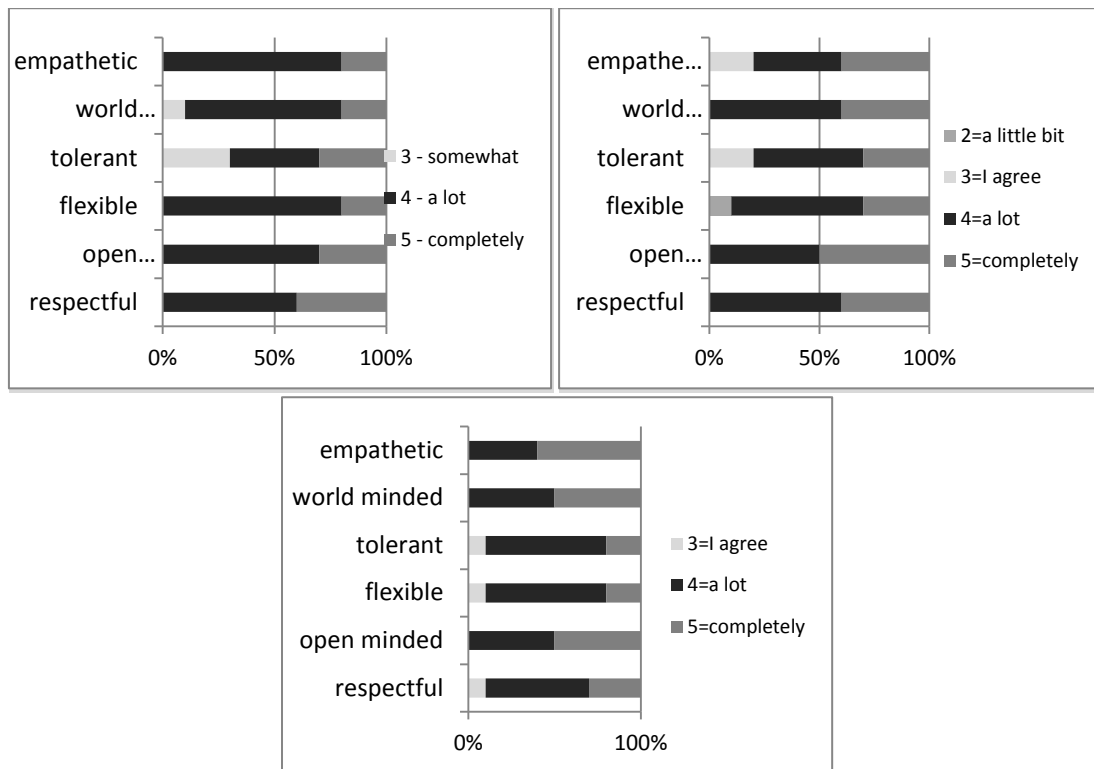


Figure 27: Traits_distribution of scores – ‘matches’ group_S1 (left), S2 (right), S3 (below left)



Being asked which of these traits students think had changed the most throughout their study abroad semester, ‘flexible’, ‘world-minded’ and ‘tolerant’ were ranked first, ‘empathetic’ and ‘open-minded’ ranked second and ‘respectful’ ranked last.⁹⁷ This confirms that world-mindedness is indeed a quality that changed significantly; however, students did not feel their empathy had changed as much as it actually had. It further shows that, although students ranked their tolerance and flexibility level lower than the other traits, they still thought that the SAS had a big influence on improving them. It also confirms that their ‘respect’ score was indeed lower after their return, which is a surprising result.

⁹⁷ One student thought that none of the mentioned traits were influenced by the SAS.

6.2.3 Skills

The six skills/behavioural traits, students were asked to rank were: 'listen', 'observe', 'interpret', 'analyse and compare', 'adapt well to unknown or uncertain situations', and 'withholding and suspending judgment'. The IC skills ranking before students left for their sojourn was lower than their traits ranking. However, this rose steadily in the second and third survey (see Figure 28)

The skill that was initially ranked the highest was 'observe well' and as second highest 'listen well'. These two "passive" skills were ranked much higher than the other ones, right from the beginning and even in the other two surveys. The other four skills ranked lower, with the lowest being 'analyse and compare'.

Looking at the changes over time (Figure 29) it can be clearly observed that all skills improved, or at least remained the same, before and after the sojourn. The rankings of 'listen well' and 'interpret well' did not change after the sojourn, with students' listening-skills not changing at all over the entire survey period. The four initially lowest ranking skills all improve after students' return. Given that in the second survey the number slightly rose, but then declined again in the third survey, the result of students' observation skills can be described as unchanged.

Being asked what students thought had improved the most, the skill of 'adapt well to unknown or uncertain situations' was ranked first and did indeed improve a lot. So did the skill of 'analysing and comparing', but it wasn't perceived as such by the students (Figure 29). This shows that students' perceived changes and actual improvement do not match and actual changes could therefore not be verified.

Figure 28: Skills-changes over time – ‘matches’ group

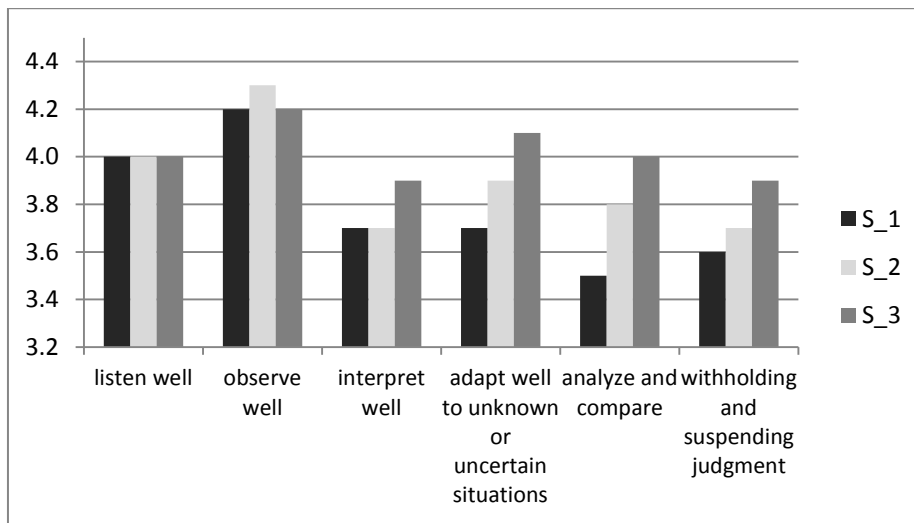
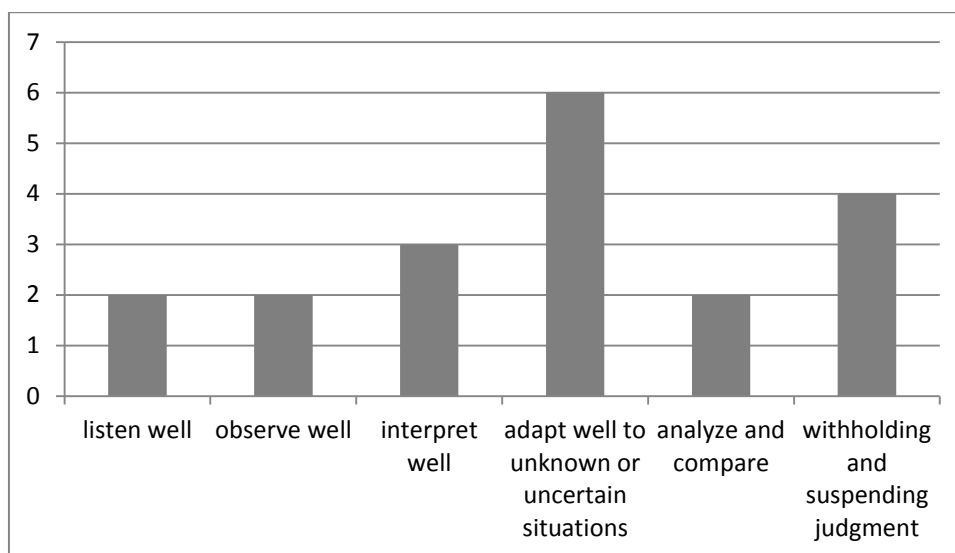


Figure 29: What students think had changed the most – ‘matches’ group



6.2.4 Knowledge

This set of items contains four knowledge items referring to culture-specific as well as culture-general knowledge: understand how others see the world, a clear understanding of my own cultural values and biases, a good knowledge about my study abroad country, and have a clear understanding of what one expects me to behave like in my study abroad country (Figure 32).

In comparison to the traits and skills, IC knowledge was ranked much lower in the first survey. This improved significantly after the sojourn but declined slightly half a year later, still staying much lower than the traits ranking.

The lowest knowledge item in the first survey was ‘a good knowledge about my study abroad country’, although students had at least 2–3 years of formal instruction in the country’s target language/culture and half of the students had visited their target country, or another country where the same language is spoken, before. Still, this seemed to be an issue that students were not confident with and many comments in the *RIE* reflected that students concerns about not knowing what to expect and not feeling properly prepared⁹⁸. This item is the only one of the four that shows a significant enhancement over time. Half a year after their exchange, students ranked this as the one point that had changed the most and indeed it had (Figure 30).

The highest ranking knowledge item was ‘a clear understanding of my own cultural values and biases’. Surprisingly, the ranking for ‘having a clear understanding of what one expects me to behave like in my study abroad country’ followed the first ranked item very closely, which shows that they gained a clear understanding of their SA country’s norms and mannerisms.

⁹⁸ Previously discussed encounter 11, 12, 15, and 16.

Figure 30: Knowledge-changes over time

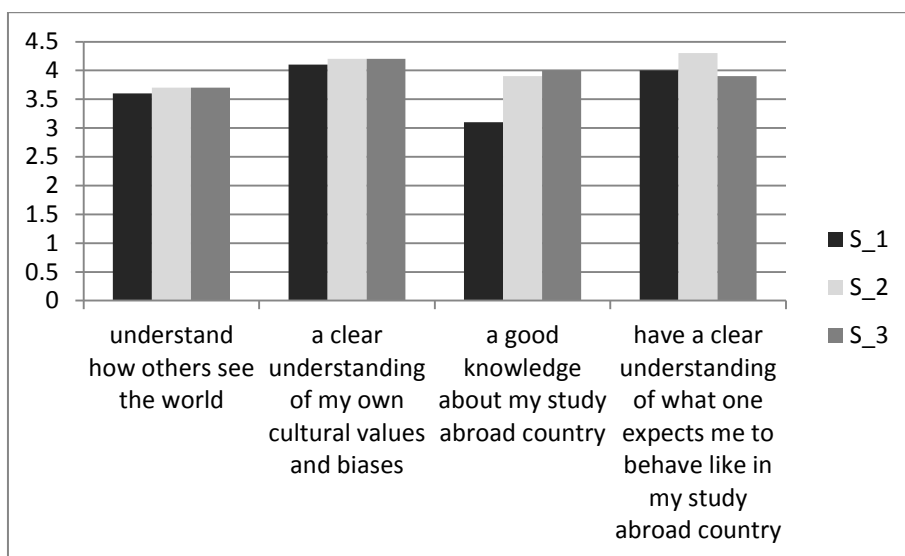


Figure 31: What students think had changed the most

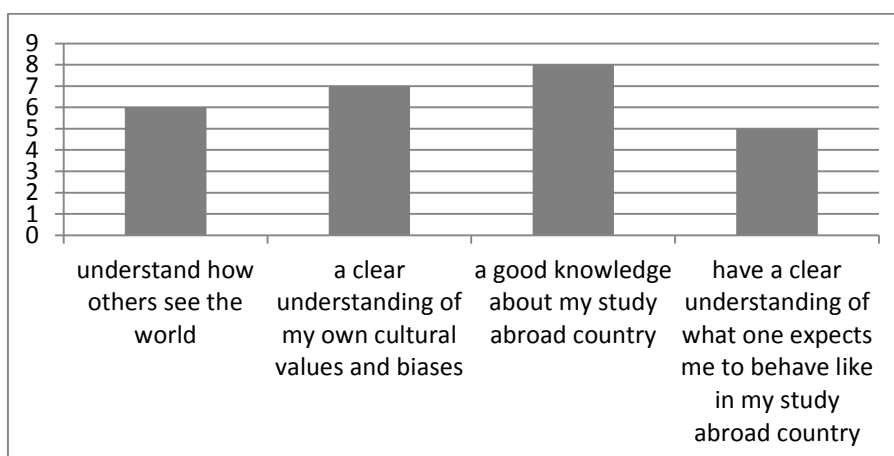
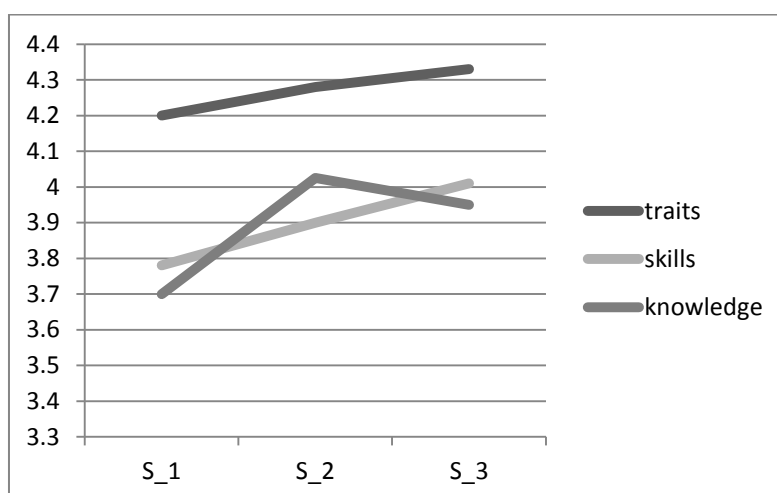


Figure 32: Traits, skills and knowledge changes over time



The results of the before–after evaluation of students’ interests, traits, skills and knowledge (Figure 32) show that their initial interest and IC traits were quite high, whereas their confidence in their IC skills and especially their knowledge was rather average. Although the rankings of their traits, skills and knowledge rose after the SAS, individual character traits did not improve, whereas most behavioural and cognitive items did.

To summarise and gather more information on what students thought had changed the most through the SAS, they were also asked to comment on the question: ‘Do you think you’re still the same person as before your exchange?’ A slight majority (6/10) answered with ‘yes’, however relativising their answers by further commenting on this question. Being asked about changes to their personality, it is not surprising that their answers included a lot of personal and attitudinal features, but also some behavioural points (adapting, fighting stereotypes,). Amongst the personality features were open-mindedness, determination, a different perspective on the world, new virtues, higher ‘self-value’ and maturity, determination, independence and confidence which were listed several times.

- I am much stronger in the sense that I can see the world from different point of view, and I understand how it feels like to study abroad in a different language and culture. I have developed and or strengthened certain virtues that I could not have otherwise developed if I did not go abroad [sic].
- All my friends comment on how much I have grown. I do feel like I am more capable of achieving my goals than I was before and I am more independent.
- It is true that I have changed from many perspectives, mostly for the better, but I have essentially stayed the same. I have maybe become a "better, improved" version of myself from a cultural point of view.
- If anything I am more confident and independent, but none of my core values or the ways I act have changed.
- I've learnt to listen more attentively, not to accept stereotypes, and most important of all that sometimes silence is the best answer

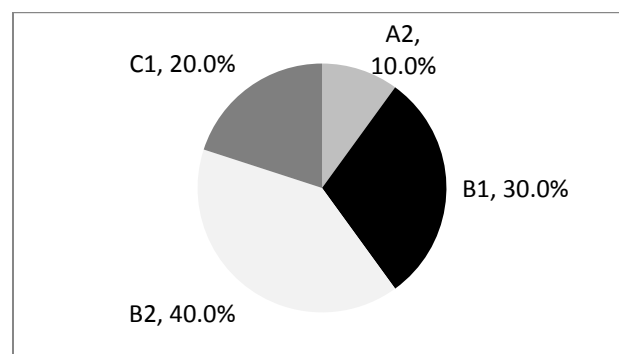
- became more independent and confident in my study abroad language
- This is not completely true [answered with 'yes'], there are things that have changed. My drinking habits for example...Spain has a distinct drinking culture.
- though I feel like I have more opportunities and more to offer others

These comments show that the study abroad semester did indeed have a stronger impact on many different areas for these students, not just the ones that were asked for in the survey.

6.2.5 Language gains

According to their language levels and skills, this group of students was quite heterogeneous. Being asked to evaluate their language skills according to the Common European Framework of References, one student assessed their language skills on the A2 level, three on B1, four on B2 and two on C1 before the sojourn. None of the students ranked their language skills as A1 or C2.

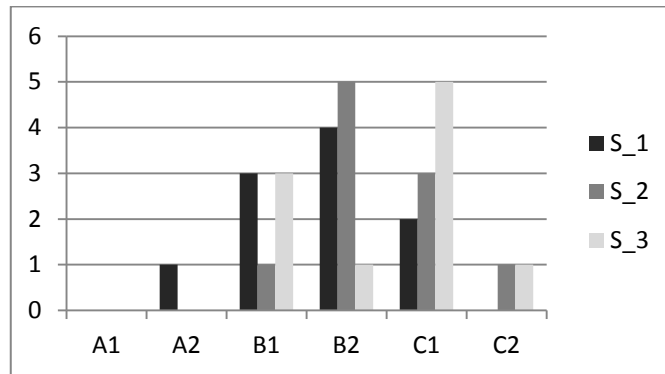
Figure 33: Language distribution before sojourn



Note: according to the Common European Framework of Reference

Comparing these results to the second and third survey shows a clear gain in the overall language level, with none of the students being in the A-range after their return and half of them at C1 level.

Figure 34: Language changes over time



Comparing individual students' levels before and after the sojourn, seven students felt that their language level improved, for some of them even considerably (A2 to B2), and four remained on the same level. None of them believed that the language level decreased. From the second to the third survey, five students remained on the same level; three claimed that their language level decreased again and only two students improved their language skills further. Ultimately, about half of these students felt like they improved their skills from before the sojourn to after the return unit and the other half remained on the same level (Table 22). Two students perceived their language skills as not having changed at all; all the others underwent some changes.

Table 22: Self-perceived language level in all three survey stages

Student	S1	S2	S3
ST 3	A2	B2	B2
ST 9	B1	B1	B1
ST 4	C1	C2	C1
ST 2	B1	B2	B1
ST 1	B2	B2	C1
ST 10	B2	C2	C1
ST 11	B1	B2	B1
ST 7	C1	C1	C2
ST 6	B1	B2	B1
ST 5	C1	C1	C1
ST 8	B2	C1	C1

6.3 Summary and Discussion

Together with the previous findings of the essay⁹⁹, these survey results reveal what outcomes an SAS can bring to students and to what extent it can influence students' interests, intercultural attitudes, behaviour, knowledge and language gains. To summarise all findings of the impact of an SAS on students' development of their intercultural ABCs, the results of the three *RIEs*, the categorised and quantified ABC findings of the essay, and the survey questions on students' traits, skills and knowledge were compared. This form of triangulation allowed the researcher to not only receive a greater number of results, but to actually confirm findings and to exclude certain validation threats (Sutton et al. 2007).

⁹⁹ The general trends of the essay findings are repeated here to achieve a form of triangulation of the results for the second research question.

Findings were slightly contradicting, however also confirmed certain trends. The essays results show a large impact of the SAS on attitudinal features, resulting in a long list of new or improved character traits and attitudes that students felt the SAS had created. These results could also be confirmed in the survey, showing a continuing increase of attitudinal components. The general decline in the number of attitudinal comments in the RIEs was outweighed by their greater positivity and students' increased traits levels. The same is true for their self-assessed skills level in the third survey. Self-assessed knowledge level in the survey declined slightly, although students thought they were one of the things that improved the most and that they would be very important for their future.

Comparing the findings of individual IC components with the ones of the first research question, results for some behavioural and cognitive factors could be confirmed, whereas the attitudinal findings were more ambiguous. 'Listening well' was among the skills that students had already listed for successful communication in the first research question and the rankings show that they already had this skill before their sojourn. The ability to 'observe' was also ranked quite high by the students before the SAS, but was also among the items that students thought had been influenced by the SAS in their essays. However, the survey rankings after their return could not quite confirm this and also the results of what students thought had changed the most did not reflect these findings. Students further thought that their adaptation skills had improved the most in the essay and the survey, and it was also among the few meta-cognitive items in the comments of the *RIE* and the results of the first research question. The importance of adaptation skills and also the influence of the SAS on their development can hereby be confirmed through all three methods. Also, target country specific knowledge was found to be largely influenced through studying abroad, which could be confirmed through all three methods – the essay, the *RIEs* and the survey results.

Looking at these outcomes, it has to be kept in mind that excelled and natural maturation effects during study abroad could also explain the increased levels of skills and attitudes. However, since the data "derived from participants' own

retrospective reflections [they] might serve as a means for isolating the effects of program impact versus maturation” (Sutton et al. 2007, 30). Using different assessment methods further confirmed the actual effect of studying abroad, even if they showed divergent trends.

As the statistical trends of the language gains confirm, most students in this study felt they improved their language skills, just as most of them had improved their ABCs. Summarising all of these results and especially the survey findings, a very important result becomes obvious. The previously introduced models of IC development seem to be right, at least about the points that the three areas that IC consists of are attitudes, behaviour and knowledge in combination with language development, and that all of these areas seem to develop together (as seen in the helix or circular models). Further, any kind of culture input – even if students’ prerequisite IC components are not ranked as high or if the only input is the return unit – helps them to further develop their intercultural attitudes and skills (Kennedy 1999, Bennett 2010). However, knowledge and language skills did not develop as rapidly after students’ return, which was expected. This can be explained because of its drastic incline during the SAS, that could not continue on at the same speed after their return to their home country. The impact of the return unit on students’ culture knowledge could not be clearly analysed through these methods; however, the essays showed a high meta-cognitive knowledge which could partially be explained by the return unit. So, culture contact seems to be a salient contributing factor for language learning and cognitive development. However, the lasting effect of the SAS, as well as a possible impact of the return unit, can be witnessed in the steady incline of the traits and especially the skills. Having a control group would have helped to emphasise this point (Sutton et al. 2007). Therefore, the previous result from the first research question, where students thought the most lasting effect of the SAS was on their behaviour and skills, could therefore be confirmed.

As a last point it should be mentioned, that a discrepancy between the *RIE* scores and the students’ traits, skills and knowledge ranking could be found. Looking at the three students with the highest and lowest *RIE* scores after the SAS, it does not

become apparent that their self-ranked traits level is significantly different. The same is true for their skills and knowledge self-ranking, so the question arose if the *RIE* really reflects on students' intercultural competence or if a comfort level in certain encounters depicts a different notion. One has to keep in mind that the *RIE* was not designed as a validated test instrument to measure students' IC, but as a self-assessment tool. Nevertheless, the results show the developments in these areas over the course of a year and therefore create a valid and justified point.

7. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF THE THIRD RESEARCH QUESTION

In this chapter, students' IC and language development is examined in two different sub-chapters. Predictors and stressors for their self-perceived changes and their influence on the development in these two areas are explored to find answers to this third research question.

7.1 Intercultural Development – Predictors and Stressors

As shown in the literature overview (chapter 3) and outlined in the methodology chapter (chapter 4), it is assumed that a high intercultural competence (as reflected by students' *RIE* scores) helps students to have more contact with the local culture and language, therefore to adapt and learn better, and consequently have a more satisfying study abroad experience, which leaves students with an even higher comfort in intercultural situations. Consequently a low *IC* might have restricted them in having sufficient culture contact, or vice versa might have been the result of little contact with locals. Numerous different factors are believed to have had an influence on students' intercultural competence before and during the sojourn and are assessed in the following sub-chapter. Students were grouped into high and low *RIE* score groups, for each of the three assessment times, and the influence of the previously mentioned predictors and stressors are assessed for each group individually and then compared with the others to prove this hypothesis. Starting with the predictors helps to see what might have had an influence on students' initial *RIE* score before they left for their SAS.

7.1.1 Predictors

The comparison of the high and the low *RIE* score group shows what differences there were and how they might have been beneficiary for students' intercultural learning and adaptation.

Initially, the six students (three that improved the most and the three whose *RIE* score deteriorated the most) with the highest *RIE* score changes from the first to the second *RIE* were arranged in two groups. Their surveys were scanned for any kind of difference in their initial and later answers, but no differences between the two groups could be found and results were inconclusive. Therefore, it was decided to look at the students with an initially very high and very low *RIE* level separately, in order to see what might have had an impact on their high or low score.

7.1.1.1 Initial RIE Score as Predictor – High RIE Score vs. Low RIE Score Students

The first surveys of the ten students that had a very low (53-47¹⁰⁰) or very high (68-75) score in the first *RIE* were looked at to see if there were any similarities (predictors) that might explain their initial comfort level in intercultural encounters. Also, the ten students with the lowest (58-47) and highest (67-80) *RIE* scores after their return were analysed, which not surprisingly were ten different students. So, no before–after comparison could be made, but only comparisons between the two groups at that specific point in time¹⁰¹. The following two tables show the *RIE* score of each group.

¹⁰⁰ That is out of a possible 80.

¹⁰¹ The *RIE*-3 scores could not be considered, since only 13 students completed the *RIE*-questionnaire and their results were too close together with the highest of the low-score group being 59 and the lowest of the high-score group 64.

Table 23: Low and high *RIE* score students in *RIE-1*

student	RIE_1	
ST 19	47	Low (1)
ST 22	49	
ST 11	51	
ST 7	53	
ST 9	56	
ST 25	68	High (2)
ST 18	68	
ST 2	70	
ST 26	71	
ST 12	75	

Table 24: Low and high *RIE* score students in *RIE-2*

Student	RIE_2	
ST 24	47	Low (3)
ST 10	49	
ST 8	51	
ST 23	55	
ST 2	58	
ST 26	67	High (4)
ST 27	67	
ST 13	68	
ST 25	70	
ST 7	80	

Table 25: Low and high *RIE-1* – changes over time

Group 1	low <i>RIE-1</i>	<i>RIE-2</i>	<i>RIE-3</i>	Group 2	high <i>RIE-1</i>	<i>RIE-2</i>	<i>RIE-3</i>
ST 7	53	80	72	ST 2	70	58	64
ST 8	56	66	55	ST 12	75		
ST 19	47			ST 18	68		
ST 22	49			ST 25	68	70	
ST11	51	59	64	ST 26	71	67	

As a first point of examination, it was explored if the initial *RIE* score could predict the subsequent one (Tables 25 and 26). The initial low and high *RIE* score groups were hence identified and students' *RIE*-changes over time were analysed. This shows if the initial score had a ongoing effect on students' IC self-reflection. Since not all students took part in all survey stages, their individual changes could not be tracked for all of them. In the low *RIE-1* group all students that participated in all three surveys improved their *RIE* scores after the SAS with one (ST 7) even reaching the highest possible score number in *RIE-2*. This student later remained in the high *RIE-3* score group. One student (ST 3) ranked their IC comfort higher after the sojourn, but then lower half a year later. Another one (ST 11) slowly improved their score over time. In the high *RIE-1* group two students (ST 25, ST 26) remained in the high group and one student's (ST 2) score went down drastically after the SAS, only to rise again half a year later.

Table 26: Low and high *RIE-2* – changes over time

Group 3	<i>RIE-1</i>	low <i>RIE-2</i>	<i>RIE-3</i>	Group 4	<i>RIE-1</i>	high <i>RIE-2</i>	<i>RIE-3</i>
ST 2	70	58	64	ST 13	61	68	
ST 8	63	51	64	ST 7	53	80	72
ST 10	60	49	51	ST 25	68	70	
ST 23		55	58	ST 26	71	67	
ST 24		47		ST 27		67	

Looking at the results of group 3 and 4, it becomes apparent that they are similarly vague, since not all students participated in all three *RIEs*. None of the students in

group 3 were in the lower group before the SAS and only one student (ST 2) was in the high group. Two students (ST 10, ST 23) remained in the low group half a year after their return and two (ST 2, ST 8) went up to the high level group. In the high *RIE*-2 group two students (ST 25, ST 26) rated their comfort in intercultural encounters as very high right from the beginning, whereas one student (ST 7) gained 27 point from the first to the second *RIE*. As all of these numbers fluctuate a lot, no generalisations can be made judging solely based on the *RIE* score and this is therefore excluded as a single possible predictor for a student's later *RIE* score.¹⁰²

7.1.1.2 Influencing Factors for IC Learning

As a next analysis point, students were directly asked to rank a number of items that were believed to be influential for their intercultural learning in the second survey. First, an overview of the entire group is given, since answers to this question are of wider interest for this study, followed by a more differentiated view on the two *RIE* score groups. Following that, specific items of this ranking and additional ones are looked at for their influence on the high and low *RIE* score group.

Most students found the pure facts of 'living in another country' and 'being surrounded by/speaking a different language' as having had the biggest impact on their intercultural learning. This was directly followed by 'teachers and fellow students'. Interestingly, the importance of 'international friends' was listed higher than 'friends from the host culture', and 'friends of the same mother tongue' were, not surprisingly, ranked as quite unimportant. Another surprising outcome is that students ranked 'travelling' higher than 'studying' which is confirmed by their very high travel activities.¹⁰³ 'Working' and 'living away from parents' were not found to be of major importance for intercultural learning.

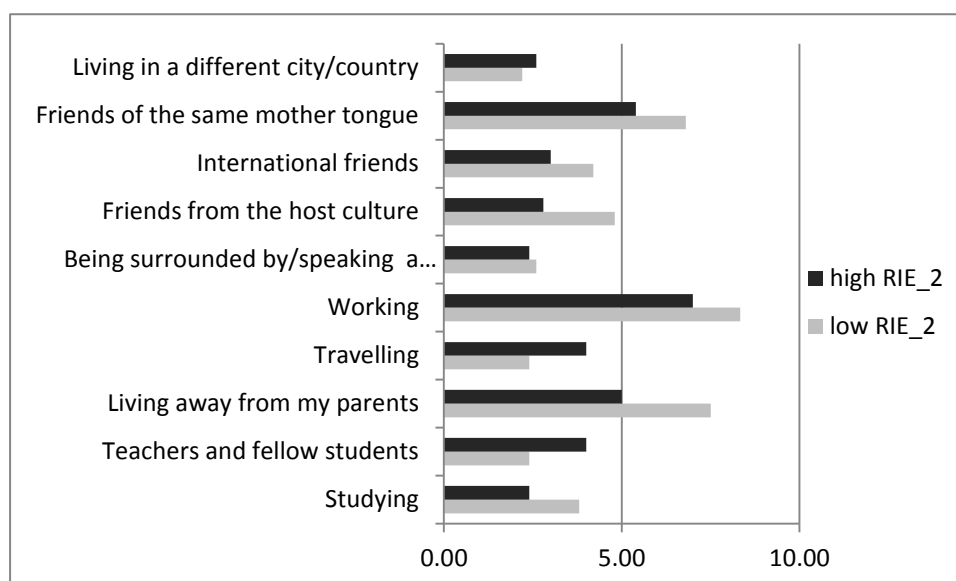
A more differentiated view on what students with a high or a low *RIE* score found especially influential is presented in the next figure (Figure 35). It shows that

¹⁰² Even looking at all students' results, no tendencies could be detected.

¹⁰³ 65% travelled to two or more other countries during the SAS.

‘living in another country’ and ‘being surrounded by/speaking the target language’ was similarly seen as the most influential factor for students’ IC learning. However, other results for the two groups varied. Students with a lower *RIE* score found that ‘travelling’ and ‘fellow teachers and students’ were more influential, whereas students with a higher *RIE* score found ‘studying’ to be very important, and all types of friendship networks (local, international and friends with the same mother tongue) were seen as more influential as by the low *RIE* group. It seems as if students who later scored themselves higher in the *RIE*, had more direct culture contact through friendships and possibly more target language exposure than the lower students, who believed they learnt the most through travelling and fellow students. Having established these different rankings, the impact and differences of single factors is presented in the following section and the important topic of culture contact is emphasised later on.

Figure 35: List of factors that influenced intercultural learning



Note: shortest bar=most influential

In terms of intercultural outcomes, there is no difference between high and low level students. Most students of both groups feel able to mediate between people of different cultural backgrounds, and feel like they have changed their view on their

own culture and on how they communicate with foreigners in their own country now.

(Previous) travel and target country experience was believed to be one of the factors that might have influenced students' initial *RIE* scores. Travel experience during the SAS was earlier established as being helpful for students' intercultural learning. Hence, it was of interest if students with initial high *RIE* scores had a lot of previous travel experience and if students' travel activities during the SAS were reflected in their subsequent *RIE* score.

Of the group that had low initial *RIE* scores, it became apparent that they had only previously been to one or two other countries (or none) without their parents. None of them had been to their travel abroad country or another country where the same language is spoken. As opposed to this group, four out of the five students with the highest *RIE* scores had travelled extensively before¹⁰⁴ and those four had even been to their study abroad country or a neighbouring one before. This result shows that there might be a correlation between previous travel experience/having been to the study abroad country before and students' comfort in IC encounters. Their *RIE* scores show high rankings in all three question sets. So it can be assumed that their IC comfort not only applies to living in the SA country, but is also reflected in their behaviour and attitudes for IC situations at home. However, not all students who have been to their SA country before have automatically had higher *RIE* scores. Only those who had spent an extended amount of time there (more than a month) actually had higher IC comfort scores. One might even suggest that the quality of the culture contact had more of an impact on students' IC comfort than the amount of different countries they had been to. This could confirm the findings of studies on the impact of previous culture contact and subsequent easier adaptation (Parker & McEvoy 1993, Kennedy 1999, Masgoret 2002, Bennett 2010).

After their return, students were asked how much they had travelled to see if their travel experience during the SAS made a difference to their *RIE* scores. About

¹⁰⁴ To more than five countries without their parents.

half of the students had travelled to more than two countries. Among them were students that had high, medium and low *RIE* scores. Hence, travel activities during the SAS could not be found influential for students' comfort ranking of intercultural encounters right after their return.

When it comes to having friends from a different cultural background in the home country, there was no big difference in the two groups, with most students saying they had friends of other cultural backgrounds and therefore this couldn't be seen as a predictor for the initial IC score. However, the friends students made during the SAS could be seen as influential for their IC development. Quite surprisingly, most students saw having international friends as more influential to their IC learning than having local friends. This was confirmed by three students in each group. These results were identical in both groups, with three students saying they made mainly international friends and one of each having made more local friends or friends with the same mother tongue. Consequently, it could not be confirmed that having mainly local friends is more influential than having international ones. Apparently having other international friends might expose one in exactly the same way to the target culture as local friends do. As previously stated in Chapter 3, friendship networks are very important and having international friends can be just as helpful for adapting and learning as having host country friends (Bochner et al. 1977).

The same is believed to be true for students' housing arrangements, where living together with locals or others that speak the target language is believed to be more beneficial for students' intercultural learning than living alone or with people of a similar cultural background. Of the high *RIE* score group, two students lived together with locals and two with other internationals. One student lived together with other English-speaking students. Of the low *RIE* score group, one student stayed with a host family, one with other locals, one with internationals and two lived by themselves without flat mates. For this point, a slight tendency towards the initial hypothesis, that living with locals would enhance someone's intercultural learning, can be found due to the increased exposure to the target culture and language of the high *RIE* score students. This was also earlier suggested by Dwyer (in Hulstrand

2006a). Following this thought, the influence of the exposure to the target language is explored further.

Looking at the role of the target language in particular, several factors (and therefore survey questions) had to be taken into account. First, knowledge of another language (apart from the target language) was not found to be an influential factor. It was even found that of the lower *RIE* group more students spoke another language than in the higher group. When it comes to the self-perceived language level, students in the high *RIE* group ranked their target language knowledge higher than the lower group before their SAS: all of the higher group students had a B2/C1 language level, whereas in the lower group one student estimated their language skills as A2, three as B1 and one as C1 (background speaker). After the exchange, however, students' language level could not be found to be influential in the two *RIE* groups, with students in the lower *RIE* group even showing slightly higher self-ranked language levels. Not surprisingly, all students with a higher language level (B2 and above) found it easier to get along with their language level during the SAS, independently from their *RIE* scores, whereas students of the B1 level often struggled with the language. This might again suggest a minimal language level for students undergoing an SAS, since it was already shown that the amount and quality of culture contact, and hence language contact, is a major influencing factor for someone's adaptation and learning during an SAS.

The number of years of formal instruction in the target language was not found to be significant for the *RIE* score either; only the students that listed their language skills in the C1 level had generally more years of practice, but not all students who had 6–8 years of language instruction had reached the C1 level before the SAS. Another surprising fact was that students in the lower *RIE* group generally used the target language more, with most of them saying that they mainly used the target language as opposed to English in everyday life, but students of the higher *RIE* score group however only used it about 50% of the time. The only other thing that might be worth mentioning is that three of the five students in the higher *RIE* score group had German as their target language, the other two Spanish. In the lower

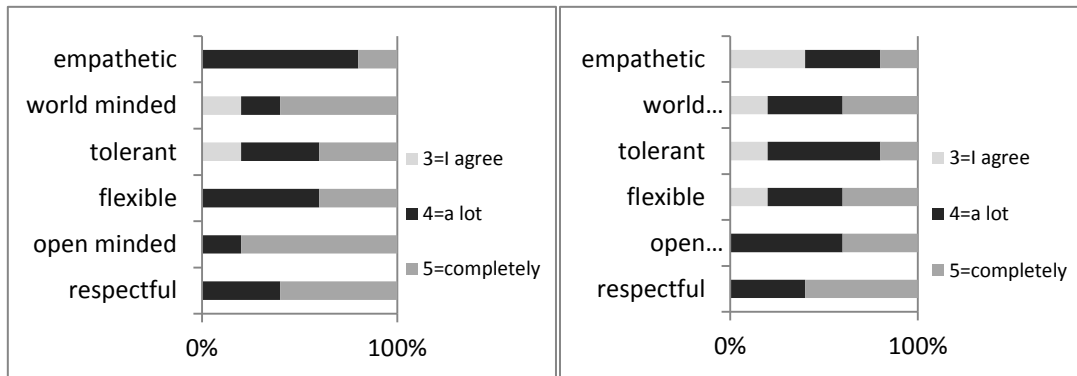
group two students spoke French, two Spanish and one Italian. This should not be further discussed however.

All these results might suggest that the level of the target language might have influenced students' initial *RIE* score – the more proficient the language skills, the higher the *RIE* score and vice versa, but this was possibly due to the fact that most of these students had lived in the SAS country before. After the SAS, however, students in the lower *RIE* score group actually had higher language levels and had used the target language more frequently during the sojourn, but still ended up not showing a higher comfort in IC encounters. Therefore, the influence of the language level on students' comfort levels in intercultural encounters after the SAS could not be proven and might even indicate the opposite trend. The discrepancy between whom students had contact with and how much they used the target language, again leads to the assumption that the quality of the contact must be of importance. So, even if a student mainly used the target language, it might have been only with teachers, fellow students and locals in everyday situations, which did not provide the same depth of culture contact that local/or international friends and housemates might offer.

Students' interests, traits, skills and knowledge were studied in more detail. All of these components were found to be ranked differently in both groups before and after the sojourn. The lower *RIE* group was found to have lower self-rankings in the first survey, especially in their IC traits, skills and knowledge, but only marginally in their interests. After students' return, the results show the complete opposite. Here, students with a lower *RIE* score had the same or slightly higher IC traits, skills, knowledge, and interest rankings than the higher *RIE* students.

Figure 36 not only shows the general higher traits of the lower *RIE*-2 group, but also the distribution of these rankings which demonstrates that students with a low *RIE* had higher rankings in all six traits.

Figure 36: Traits distribution of low (left) and high (right) RIE-2 groups



The next two figures (Figure 37 and 38) show a more varied picture. Here the distribution of how much students think they exhibit a certain IC skill and knowledge is shown. Students of the lower *RIE* group ranked themselves on average more or less the same as the higher *RIE* score students; however, ‘observe well’, ‘have a clear understanding of one expects me to behave like in my study abroad country’ and ‘a good knowledge of my study abroad country’ are ranked higher by the higher *RIE* students. So, when it comes to target country specific knowledge and behaviour, students with a lower *RIE* exhibited these cognitive features less. In contrast to this, students of the lower *RIE*-group ranked slightly higher for ‘listen well’ and ‘a clear understanding of my own cultural values’. Students’ interests in language and cultural matters did not differ much in both groups and will therefore not be illustrated further.

Figure 37: Skills and knowledge distribution of low RIE-2 group

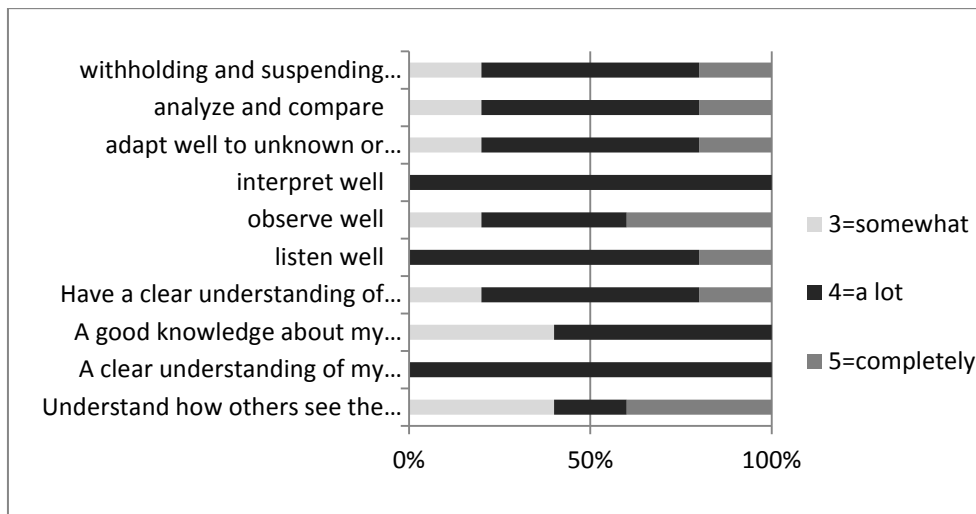
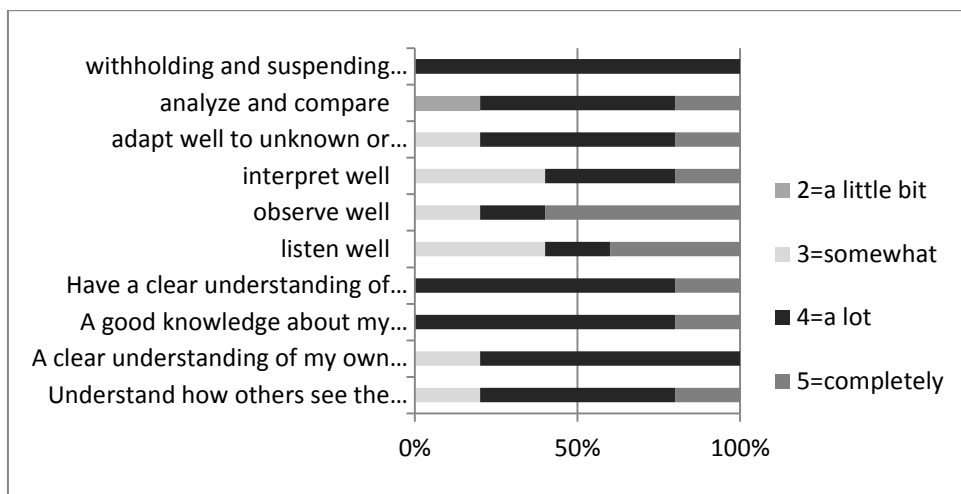


Figure 38: Skills and knowledge distribution of high RIE-2 group



Students' personal and family background might also explain why they had more exposure to different cultures before the sojourn, either within their families or amongst their friends. First, in both groups there was one student each that was not born in Australia. Of the entire group of the research subjects, there were three more students who had migrated to Australia, their *RIE* scores were merely average. Being asked where their parents came from, it became apparent that more students in the

lower RIE score group had parents that were not born in Australia.¹⁰⁵ Hence, having grown up with different cultural influences (if they did) in the family did not make students feel more comfortable in intercultural situations; in fact quite the opposite is true for this group.

As a last point, students' were asked about their reasons to study this degree and to study abroad in general. Students in the high *RIE* score group mainly listed their interest and wish to improve their target language further as main reason for studying this degree. Also the importance of international issues was stated once. Four of them mentioned the language as reason for studying abroad and one said that it was compulsory. None of the higher *RIE* score students mentioned culture learning in either of the two questions.

The lower *RIE* score students, in contrast, listed more extrinsic reasons for both decisions: career aspirations and the vast range of unit options were mentioned. As instrumental reasons, the improvement of language skills was mentioned twice and the gain of an international perspective once. Only one student listed culture learning amongst their reasons to study this degree.¹⁰⁶ As main reasons to go studying abroad, the 'compulsory' aspect was stated by three students and so were language improvement and the wish to gain (life) experience. Two students in this group also mentioned the culture learning factor. Thus, language improvement seemed to have been the most important reason for students to study this degree and abroad. Interest in the subject matter was only mentioned by the higher *RIE* score students, whereas cultural learning was only mentioned by the students in the lower group. However, the lower *RIE* level students' reasons generally seemed a bit more instrumental or external, but considering that many of them did not have the experience of travelling or living abroad and therefore have not experienced its benefits, this is not too unexpected. Nevertheless, these findings confirm general

¹⁰⁵ Two had a father from a different country and two where both parents were not born in Australia. In the higher *RIE*-score group, two had fathers from different countries and one where both parents were born in another country; however, of those four parents three were from other English-speaking countries.

¹⁰⁶ There were more students listing culture learning, but they were not in one of these two groups.

research trends about motivation and adaptation (Byram & Morgan 1994, Isabelli-García 2006, Chircov et al. 2007). It seems that students who decided to study this degree and to study abroad had a more intrinsic motivation and a high interest in learning about languages and cultures. These results could be retrieved from the survey questions about their motivation; however, the self-ranking about their interests does now show a difference between high and low *RIE* level students. Motivational aspects might have influenced their IC development; however, it could not be confirmed for their language learning.

To sum these findings up, it was assumed that more exposure to the target language and culture would be beneficial for students' comfort rankings in intercultural situations and would thereby be reflected in their *RIE* scores. This hypothesis could be proven partially for the *RIE* scores before students went on their sojourn, but not after their return. Students' with initially high *RIE* scores seemed to have certain factors in common as opposed to the low level group: most of them had previous extensive travel experience, especially to the target country and they had a higher initial target language level (which could be reason for or cause of the travel experience). Also, students' higher level of IC skills, knowledge and traits seemed beneficial before their sojourn and so were their reasons for studying this degree and abroad, like interest in the subjects and improvement of their language skills.

Other factors, however, could not be shown as influential for students' initial *RIE* score, like having many friends of different cultural backgrounds at home, oneself or parents having a migration background, speaking other languages and interest in language and (inter-)cultural phenomena. After the SAS, only the amount and quality of contact with local and international students and housemates were found to be different in the high *RIE* level group. Other factors could not be linked to students' *RIE* rankings. These were the target language level after the SAS, the percentage of daily target language use, and IC traits, skills and knowledge. This suggests that the language level and the amount of time one speaks it, did not have an influence on how comfortable a student found themselves in intercultural encounters after their SAS. Since these results do not seem as expected, one can assume that there must

have been other stressors influencing students' experiences during the SAS and as a result had an impact on their *RIE* score.

7.1.2 Stressors – Frequently Occurring Problems

7.1.2.1 Results of Entire Group

After their return, students were asked to rank a number of issues according to how often they occurred during their SAS to assess their influence on the adjustment process. They were given a list of nine stressors (academic, language, cultural, interpersonal, housing and financial problems, homesickness, loneliness and discrimination) that were retrieved from the research literature and discussed in Chapter 3.4 (Ward et al. 2001). Also, they were asked what would probably be hard/easy to adjust to and if they expected certain problems after their return. The fact that some problems might have been unexpected might have made it even more difficult for students to adjust to it. Firstly, results of the entire group are presented to gain an overview of how important certain stressors were in general to the entire group of students.

What seemed to be the biggest problem was 'academic difficulties' and hence students' academic performance. This was confirmed through students' low comfort ranking of the third question set (encounters at university) of the *RIE* before as well as after their sojourn. However, in the list of what was difficult to adjust to, students ranked this only second (after language problems), so apparently academic problems occurred quite often, but students were able to adjust to them. Language problems in academic contexts were; however, not mentioned as reasons; instead the university system, bureaucracy, and missing support were criticised. Although most students experienced these problems, only a few expected them and only three mentioned them before their SAS:

- I didn't expect the university system to be so opaque and unhelpful [...]
- Yes, I have heard that Hamburg university isn't quite as integrated as Macquarie [sic].

- Also, I did not expect the support system to be as basic as it was- the enrolment process was very complicated and confusing, particularly because international students could not enrol until Week 3 of class, but many teachers did not accept any more students into the class after Week 1, so you kind of had to stick with whatever you tried in the first week (which was vague enough because there was no description of the class content on the university website, merely the unit name) [sic].

'Homesickness' and 'loneliness' were the next two most frequently occurring problems that were experienced by most students. As they are student-internal stressor it is surprising that so many students said they experienced them. It emphasises that psychological problems are frequently occurring adjustment issues (Ward et al. 2001). Several students expected 'being away from family and friends' and 'having to do things on their own' as being hard to adjust to; however, only one student mentioned it as being especially difficult after their return:

- Being away from my family and friends. I found this especially hard on Sundays which was usually spent with family and all the shops being closed on this day did not help either.

These two issues seem to be similar to the previous one of academic problems, which were only expected by some students, but experienced by many. Only two students commented on whether they had expected this problem after their return:

- I definitely expected to be lonely on numerous times during the exchange as well the homesickness! I was already homesick before arriving at my host country [sic]!
- I knew I was going into an unknown situation where I would have to be independent for the first time.

'Language problems' ranked fourth in this list of frequently occurring problems, which is surprising since it was seen as the most difficult thing to adapt to, mentioned by almost half of the students, before the SAS. Also, after their return the largest number of students said that this was the most difficult thing to adapt to and many had also expected this problem.¹⁰⁷ So the question is why it was only ranked fourth.

¹⁰⁷ See also language as stressor (7.2.2).

Looking at individual students rankings, it becomes apparent that it occurred 'very often' to one-quarter of the students, which was the item that received this particular score the most. Since other students did not experience language problems that frequently, the average score decreased and thereby language problems were only ranked fourth. Looking at students' comments, only three mentioned that they expected language problems and were therefore not surprised by them.

'Cultural adaptation problems' ranked fifth out of the nine possible issues, with quite an even distribution over the scale. It was of special interest for this study to research IC development and hence (inter-)cultural factors that influenced it. When referring to cultural adjustment, bureaucracy, and different methods of organisation and time management were mentioned before and after the sojourn and the 'cultural barrier' once after the SAS, without any further specification. Apparently, students did not think that adjusting to the new culture was a major struggle, neither before nor after their SAS, and concrete examples of differences only included the climate, time zone and retail opening hours. In fact, across the *RIEs* and the surveys very rarely students mentioned cultural hurdles at all, as students said they feel quite comfortable with other values and ways of living in other countries (second question set in *RIE*). Some students even commented that they did not find the SA country to be too different to their home country.

- My family is Western European, so a lot of the culture was very similar
- A love of food, the night life and the importance of family and friends is similar in both cultures.
- I didn't find it too different so it was ok
- Not many differences

So the notion of culture distance might help to explain why they did not struggle with cultural adaptation, if they found their home and host culture to be similar (Searle & Ward 1990, Gudykunst & Kim 2003, Berry 2006, Masgoret & Ward 2006). However, being asked if they thought the study abroad country's culture was culturally similar to their culture, two thirds of the students answered with 'no' which shows that there must have been still significant differences, but that students did not struggle adjusting to them or they did not cause major disruptions. Although students found

the home and the host culture dissimilar, most of the countries were still “First World” countries and although they might not share a common history, there were still many commonalities in daily life and not too much struggle when it came to finding accommodation, food and a safe environment.

- No, but there are still some similarities due to globalisation

It could also be shown that they learnt to see and accept differences, moving on from *the Minimization*-phase of intercultural sensitivity where all cultures are perceived as similar (Bennett 1993).

Followed by a larger gap, interpersonal, financial and housing problems were ranked 6th, 7th and 8th and were therefore only seen as minor issues during the SAS. Looking at the distribution however, it became apparent that ‘financial problems’ showed the greatest scattering on the scale, with three students actually listing it as the most frequently occurring problem during the SAS, but on the other side of the spectrum eight students saying this was never a problem. Further, although housing or accommodation problems were not ranked as prominent, a few students mentioned it in their comments, venting problems they were faced with:

- I expected housing problems due to the bureaucratic inefficiency. But other than that I looked at everything in a positive way and problems were not many.
- The accommodation company that immediately contacted all students from Macquarie who were accepted into Complutense University, was very overpriced. It was nice to have a place to go to immediately, however I did not meet a single person who was paying as much as me for accommodation. Thus, I looked for a new apartment.

As the least frequently occurring problem, students listed discrimination/prejudice, which was also never mentioned in their comments or adjustment expectations, proving that it was probably not a big issue during the SAS.

The list of how often certain problems occurred to students shows that they struggled quite often with academic and language problems, as well as with personal feelings of loneliness and homesickness. These are common problems students face in study abroad situations and usually they can adjust to them. This was shown by the

fact that most students expected these problems and retrospectively did not struggle much. External factors like accommodation and finances were not too dominant and neither were cultural (adaptation) problems.

Because adjustment problems and strategies were of special interest for this study, students were further asked about how they adjusted. In their answers many of them show good meta-cognitive skills and an awareness of how to use these situations as learning opportunities. Being asked what was especially difficult to adjust to, answers of students confirmed the previous findings that especially language and a different academic system were hard to adjust to. Apart from these previously discussed items, other things students found difficult to adjust to were:

- Total lack of communication from my host university.
- Feeling vulnerable, not being able to be eloquent was harder than expected and being shy and nervous with people (loss of confidence).
- The most difficult aspect for me was with one of the language teachers who I found to be very arrogant and who gave me such a hard time I considered coming back home on many occasions. This made it very difficult for me to participate in class activities when I was made to feel that I didn't have the potential to improve. We also had too many readings for each unit.
- The weather - was extremely cold, went down to -20/30
- The climate was and other students attitude toward exchange students
- leaving my study abroad country
- The local students were a little unfriendly to the exchange students

Being asked to provide an example of a particularly challenging intercultural moment students' narratives provide an even bigger range of incidents, however they were rather unexpected moments than actual issues.

- The style of driving was particularly challenging- the aggressive nature opposed to Australian defensive- you really had to step out in front of the traffic to make it stop
- For me it was the openness of the Swiss to want to exclude and isolate migrants that was quite shocking for me. We were shown campaign photos of the 'black and white sheep' and I found that confronting.
- People begging on trains and metros in Madrid was really confronting i never really managed to get used to it.

- opening up a bank account completely in French was difficult as it was one of the very first things I did on my exchange, after eventually succeeding in opening to account the experience became a morale booster
- I for example went to a drugstore with a French colleague, as soon as the pharmacist saw us he rushed in to shake our hands, I was like wait a minute, I don't even know you. But they explained to me later that, that was the French culture people shake hands as a sign of friendliness.
- In greeting people, kissing people on each cheek. Initially it was a surprise because I wasn't used to it and found it to be almost personal space invasion. I did get used to it.
- In order to move into my room I required a lot of paperwork such as registration with the city and my student identification card, however, it was impossible to get the paperwork with having paid the Semesterbeitrag [uni admin fee] to the university, but in order to do that i required a bank account in Germany, but to open one i needed a residential address and confirmation with the city, so it was just a frustrating circle of bureaucracy which i was only able to overcome with the help of a German friend of mine who kindly paid the Semesterbeitrag from her German account.
- When I emailed a teacher to raise my concerns about not knowing where I stood in the class (due to lack of feedback, which was non-existent until May) whether or not foreign students are graded the same as the local students, I had to repeat the question in front of the class the following day because the teacher did not like to receive emails from students. I was surprised because at Macquarie the teachers seem eager for communication with students. I reacted by simply accepting this was the format of teaching at the particular university.

Students were then asked how they managed to adjust and reacted to unknown situations. Their reactions ranged from passive approaches such as just observing or looking up things, to actively approaching people such as classmates, friends but also strangers and asking them about these situations:

- It differed at times, if it was important, I would try understand, if not, I'd ignore it
- Sat quietly and tried to work it out, or asked a friend if they were there.
- Took note, either asked someone or looked it up later
- I think I would observe and deduce what I could before I asked for help sometimes put off asking till necessary if I was nervous to speak to someone.
- Always asked my Italian friends.
- I would always ask questions, it's the best way of immersing yourself in a culture and being pro-active in your learning.

- I would ask my friends for an explanation but when not with friends I would seek assistance from the person confusing me.
- I had decided, before leaving, that I would try and make myself understood and I would do my best to understand those around me; so every single time I was unsure or confused about something I asked for explanations which people were more than happy to provide me with.

7.1.2.2 High RIE Score vs. low RIE Score – General Problems

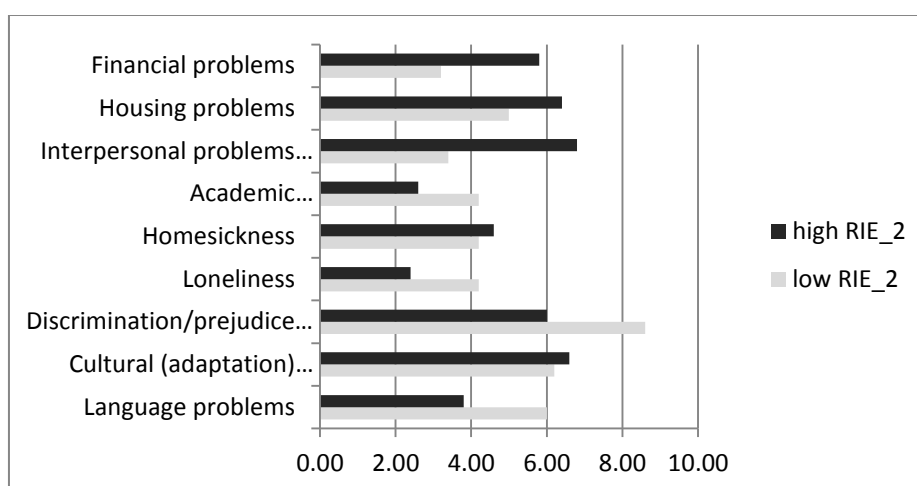
Examining the previously mentioned stress factors in particular for the groups of students with high and low *RIE* levels is the next step, to see if they had a specific influence on those two groups' IC comfort rankings. On the average, students with a high *RIE* score ranked academic problems, loneliness and language problems first. Looking at the three most frequently occurring problems of each student, loneliness was listed by all five students of this group, academic problems by three of them, discrimination/prejudice, finances and language problems twice, and housing once (Figure 39). These results show that problems at university and loneliness were indeed the most pressing issues which was quite surprising considering that the third question set ('encounters at university') did not show many concerns of these students at university. Another point was that, as opposed to the students of the low *RIE* group, none of the high *RIE* score students lived by themselves or mentioned problems making friends, which could have explained why they experienced loneliness that often. As previously seen, high *RIE* score students had slightly lower languages levels after their return; having experienced language problems frequently is therefore not that surprising. This suggests that it is not linked to students' low *RIE* scores at all and the language findings in the next sub-chapter (predictors) support this. Four out of these five students said that they absolutely expected these problems, which might be the reason why they still adapted and learnt quite well, not having been to overwhelmed by these issues.

On average, the lower *RIE* score students ranked financial and interpersonal problems as quite severe, followed by academic problems, homesickness and loneliness. Looking at the most frequently occurring problems, the five students of

the lower *RIE* score group listed finances and homesickness three times, housing, interpersonal, loneliness and academic problems twice, and cultural problems once (Figure 39).

Comparing these different problems with the high *RIE* score students, it cannot be assumed that certain problems were more severe than others. The only difference that can be seen is, that certain problems seem out of one's hands or more on-going, i.e. financial problems and interpersonal issues, whereas academic or housing problems can possibly be resolved by oneself. Maybe overcoming them and feeling empowered to decide one's own fate is an important factor for adjustment and general satisfaction during an SAS. Also, expecting certain problems might help students to feel the impact of culture shock less and to adjust better. Three out of these five students said that they did not expect these problems, which is the opposite of what the high *RIE* level students said. The fact that obvious problems like language or academic issues did not affect students with a lower *RIE* as much, might further suggest that maybe it was students' mindset or behaviour or even other external factors that created the real barrier. Having experienced financial and interpersonal problems a lot supports this theory. Other external factors are explored further below.

Figure 39: Problems according to how often they occurred during the SAS – low vs. high *RIE* group



Note: low bar means occurred often

7.1.2.3 High RIE vs. low RIE group – other influencing aspects

The fact that students might not have expected these problems and were overwhelmed, intimidated or simply surprised might have caused them to not have been able to cope sufficiently. More students in the lower *RIE* group found certain problems unexpected, especially the language barrier and getting used to a different university system, even though they did not rank them as the major problems occurring.¹⁰⁸ Some of these students also did not feel well prepared for the SAS, for the same reasons: language insufficiency and facing different university routines. These two factors were also often mentioned as especially hard to adjust to and were reasons students did not fully enjoy their SAS.

Being asked what students found especially hard to adjust to, only one student in the lower *RIE* group mentioned the language and another one complained about the lack of communication by the host university. Two other students mentioned that they struggled most with the local students' attitude towards international students (which they did not acknowledge as discrimination/prejudice in their problem ranking). Problems with finding accommodation and adjusting to a different climate were mentioned, too. Compared to that, two of the high *RIE* level group students mentioned the language barrier and by two others, the differences in the academic system as being problematic. This again shows that the two most frequently mentioned problems do not necessarily influence students' comfort ranking in intercultural situations in general and it confirms their previous problems ranking.

What did seem to have an impact was the way students dealt with these and other problems. Being asked how they managed to adapt to these problems and what they did when they faced a situation that they did not understand, all students in the high *RIE* group mentioned an active approach by asking questions or for help.

¹⁰⁸ Three students of the lower *RIE*-group did not expect the individual problems they had mentioned, as opposed to one in the higher *RIE*-level group. Generally most students, who were surprised by the intensity or frequency of certain problems, mentioned the language barrier and the differences in academic systems.

Most students in the low *RIE* group behaved the same way; two, however, exhibited rather passive behaviours, saying they would just sit and observe or wait until the problem had passed. These were the same students that did not get along with their target language well and who did not feel prepared enough for their SAS.

As a last point, students' general satisfaction about their SAS was looked at and if the SAS met their expectations. This will close the intercultural-adjustment cycle, which is then summarised below. Generally students in both groups had most of their expectations met. All of the higher *RIE* level students said that their SAS was what they expected; however, two students limited this statement, because they thought their language skills would improve more and one student found the support system from the host university not sufficient. This was backed by the earlier findings of problems they faced and expectations they had. The latter reason was given by one of the lower level students too while the others found their SAS to be as expected or even better. All of the students would recommend studying abroad for various reasons, but especially for the personal development and the language improvement.

To sum this up, although language and academic problems were seen as the biggest stressors by the entire group, students of the low *RIE* score group did not rank them as most frequently occurring problems. Loneliness was seen as a very common stressor for all students in the high *RIE* group and financial problems for the lower *RIE* group. However, most of these students expected these problems and actively dealt with situations they did not understand. In the lower *RIE* group, however, some students were surprised by some of the problems they experienced and could only marginally cope with them as they did not feel well prepared to face these problems. An active approach to dealing with problems, realistic expectations and a feeling of preparedness might therefore be seen as influential for students' intercultural learning and adjustment during the SAS. This confirms previously introduced findings of Lillie (1994), Kim (2001), and Cushner and Karim (2004) on expectations and preparedness. Since the influence of the target language has often

been mentioned, its role for adjustment and intercultural learning during the SAS is examined in the next chapter.

7.1.3 Summary and Discussion

The initial hypothesis was that a high comfort in intercultural situations was helpful in adapting to the new culture and achieving maximal learning results from an SAS, further resulting in a higher satisfaction and again in an even higher *RIE*. This could primarily not be confirmed as students' *RIE* scores individually varied over time, with no consistent trends. This helps confirming the methods' and results' validity as a regression to the mean did not occur over time (Sutton et al. 2007). It was assumed that certain factors could predict students' higher or lower *RIE* level before and after the sojourn and that students with higher *RIEs* would have generally faced less adaptation problems and dealt with them better.

Many predictors that were thought to be influential before students' sojourn could indeed be confirmed. Most students with a higher initial *RIE* had more previous experience in travelling and studying abroad, they had a higher language level and their intercultural trait, skills and knowledge levels were higher than the low *RIE* students' ones. Also their reasons for studying the degree and abroad were closer connected to their interests, as opposed to career aspirations or the obligations due to the degree's requirements. However, other factors like the family or migration background, international friends and other languages students spoke could not be found to be influential.

During the SAS, most predictors that were assumed to have an effect on students' intercultural development did in fact not. Students with a lower *RIE-2* were found to have a higher language level, used the language more and had more language contact with locals, internationals, teachers and other students. This shows that their culture contact and learning experience must have been meaningful, even though they assessed their comfort levels in intercultural situations as lower. They

adapted faster to the SA country and were found to have slightly higher traits, skills and knowledge on average. Higher *RIE* level students were found to have travelled more within the country and might have had more contact with speakers of the target language in their housing arrangements and due to more friendships with locals and other internationals. Many predictors that were assumed to increase students' *RIE* during the SAS did not have that effect and can therefore be excluded from the intercultural-adjustment-cycle (Chapter 3.5). Although it is assumed that questions about students' language use, contact to teachers, students, housemates and locals reflect on the degree of their culture contact, it cannot automatically be assumed that students also actively engaged with others and therefore the host culture, active engagement is one of the significant feature for the learning process, as previously stated (Paige & Vande Berg 2012).

This leaves this exploration to specific stressors students encountered, if they expected them and how they dealt with them. Students who scored their comfort in intercultural situations higher after their SAS experienced mostly expected problems related to academic and language issues as well as loneliness. Lower *RIE* students, however, struggled more with unexpected issues resulting from the contact with others, financial constraints and feelings of homesickness and loneliness. Some of these students felt less prepared for their SAS and were found to behave more passively in uncertain or unknown situations. Therefore, it can be assumed that it is not so much single stress-factors themselves that influenced students' IC development, but rather if they expected them, how they dealt with them and handled uncomfortable situations during their SAS that makes a difference to students' IC development.

So far it was shown that most predictors during the SAS did not affect students' comfort in intercultural situations or their SA outcomes, as it was expected. Since all students felt similarly satisfied with their SAS semester and would hence recommend it to other students, the underlying hypothesis or the intercultural-adjustment-cycle could not be proven right at this point in time and is discussed further in the next chapter. Since the influence of students' IC on their adjustment

and learning process and especially language outcomes was so unexpected, the role of the language in the adjustment and learning process is looked at separately below.

7.2 Language Development – Predictors and Stressors

The role that the language plays in the study abroad scenario is studied in a similar way as in the previous exploration of students' intercultural competence. The language-adjustment-cycle (see 3.5) predicts a similar outcome as the intercultural-adjustment-cycle: the higher the language skills, the easier and the more contact with the target language and culture, the better the adjustment and the higher the learning outcomes and students' satisfaction of their SAS experience. In order to explore this hypothesis, a similar approach as in the previous sub-chapter was followed.

But first, a general overview of the student groups with low, medium and high self-perceived language levels is given and their language contact is explored as a possible reason as well as outcome of adjustment during an SAS. This demonstrates the role of the language for adjustment and learning processes as well as how students perceived their study abroad experience in general.

In the first survey, four students were grouped in the lower language level group corresponding with the A2 level. Half a year later, no student was at this level anymore, and the lower language group became the B1 group. In order to receive more or less similar group sizes, the higher language level group in S2 and S3 consisted of two levels (C1+C2), since the very highest group (C2) in all three surveys was very small. For the three surveys the following numbers were consequently extracted:

Table 27: Language level groups in all three surveys

	Lower self-perceived language level (CEFR level)	Medium self-perceived language level (CEFR level)	Higher self-perceived language level (CEFR level)
S1	4 (A2)	13 (7xB1, 6xB2)	5 (C1)
S2	5 (B1)	8 (B2)	6 (4xC1, 2xC2)
S3	4 (B1)	2 (B2)	7 (6xC1, 1xC2)

Since only the second survey is of interest for the subsequent analysis, the students' answers of the second survey are looked at: the five students that ranked their language level the lowest (B1) after their return were compared with the eight students of the medium level (B2) and the six students that ranked themselves the highest (C1/C2).

7.2.1 Predictors (*Language Predictors and Language as a Predictor*)

7.2.1.1 Language Development

The first predictor for students' higher or lower language level after their return was possibly their initial language level. In order to give a complete overview of their language development, the following table (Table 28) shows the students that participated in the second survey and how their language level changed during the course of the year. Since not all students participated in all three surveys, it is difficult to analyse students' language development in a longitudinal form, therefore only surveys at one point in time could be taken into account for the following analysis.

Table 28: Students' language level in first (S1), second (S2) and third survey (S3)

	S1	S2	S3	level
ST 13	A2	B1		low
ST 9	B1	B1	B1	
ST 23		B1	B2	
ST 27	B1	B1		
ST 15		B1		
ST 2	B1	B2	B1	medium
ST 26	B2	B2		
ST 6	B1	B2	B1	
ST 11	B1	B2	B1	
ST 14	A2	B2		
ST 3	A2	B2	B2	
ST 1	B2	B2	C1	
ST 24		B2		high
ST 4	C1	C2	C1	
ST 10	B2	C2	C1	
ST 5	C1	C1	C1	
ST 7	C1	C1	C2	
ST 8	B2	C1	C1	
ST 25	C1	C1		

Generally, nine students improved their language level from the first to the second survey and seven felt like they remained on the same level. Looking at the different levels helps to differentiate these findings. Students in the lower level (in S2) mainly remained on the same level or improved slightly over time. The medium level students mainly improved their language level from S1 and S2. Half of the higher level students improved their language skills from S1 to S2, the other half remained on the same level. None of the students' self-perceived language levels deteriorated from S1 to S2, but some did from S2 to S3. Only three students had improved their language level significantly, two (ST 14, ST 3) from a low A2 level to B2 and one (ST 10) from an already high B2 level to C2. Since numbers are not complete, it is difficult to make general assumptions about patterns in language gain and language development. As most students had only improved their language level slightly, there seems to be a trend in the medium and high group of students to remain on that level. The initial language level might be seen as influential, at least for most of these students.

In the following section, certain predictors and stressors to students' self-perceived language level are explored, similar to what was done for students' *RIE* scores before.

7.2.1.2 Language Contact

Of most interest in comparing these three groups were the questions about students' language use and language contact, such as contact with locals, friends they made and housing arrangements. This reflects on their amount of contact with native speakers and their ability to create meaningful relationships.

Being asked what percentage the target language had in their everyday communication compared to English, the low language level students stated they used the target language 25% and more, the medium level students about 50% and the higher level students mainly used the target language 75% of the time. This clearly shows that the lower level students used the target language the least often and the higher their self-perceived language level the more they used it. This could be cause or effect at the same time and therefore has to be explored more. However, it confirms the findings of Brecht and Robinson's (1995) study that more advanced students interact more in the SA country and consequently take more advantage of it.

Further, it was of interest to see whom students had contact with/became friends with/lived with. The lower and medium language level group mostly had contact with locals, and local students and teachers, whereas the high level group's contact was mainly with local students and teachers and international people and students. The lower level group mainly made international friends, compared to the medium group who made international and local friends and the higher group that mainly had local friends. Compared to the higher level students who mainly lived together with locals, more students in the lower and medium group shared their flat with international and local students as well as other English native speakers or lived on their own.

In order to find even more possible language predictors, students were asked what helped them most to improve their language. The lower language level students

said that being surrounded by the language, speaking with locals, and classes in the target language helped them the most. Similar answers were given by some of the medium and higher level students too, but they more frequently said that studying in the target language helped them and also talking to locals, other students as well as housemates/host family had a tremendous impact. Moreover, self-studies like reading academic texts and novels as well as their dictionary had helped them. Only three students all together (2x medium, 1x low) mentioned that language classes were beneficial.

These four results suggest that the lower language level students might have had less meaningful relationships and hence language contact, because of their more sparse relations to locals and the overall more frequent use of English. The higher level students, however, used the target language more to create meaningful relationships and make friends with locals and other students.

7.2.1.3 Language Outcomes

Being asked what language skills students had developed the most, higher language level students ranked 'speaking' the highest, followed by 'listening', 'reading' and 'writing'. Medium and lower level students, however, believed that they had mainly improved their listening skills with lower levels students even ranking speaking last. This also shows that higher language level students probably improved this skill the most, because they spoke more with local friends and acquaintances, whereas the lower language level students were probably less active and improved their perceptive skills more. Rivers (1998) explains this by saying that more advanced learners could take more advantage of the constant flow of target language input. Being asked what situations they could master in the target language now, two students confidently answered that they could pretty much deal with any situation now, which is also reflected by their high self-perceived language level. In contrast to that, one lower level student thought that they could not master any situation in the target language at all.

Students were further asked what the most important outcome of their SAS was in general. Since students could state any possible outcome, it was especially interesting to see if and by whom target language improvement was listed. The lower self-perceived language level students mainly found their improved language skills and their ability to adapt to the new culture to be the most important outcomes. This shows that they were mostly concerned with enhancing their language skills again:

- Improved French skills and coping skills (i.e. proving to myself that I can cope with being out of my comfort zone)
- Living in another country and adapting to another culture and way of living.

The medium language level students listed independence and improved language skills as well as cultural awareness and adjustment:

- New experiences, independence and cultural awareness
- To overcome the challenge of studying in-depth subjects in another language and to pass them.
- Improvement of Spanish and knowledge of new cultures

Students of the higher language group did not mention language improvement at all, but stated that their academic and intercultural skills improved and believed that the SAS was important for personal development:

- I will never be the same person again. I learnt so much about myself that I never knew. I now know the road I must take, I've found serenity, yet I count down the days I will go back to Bologna.
- My academic results were the most important outcome because they reflect the effort I put in to study.
- Greater knowledge of intercultural relations at an academic level

This again reflects that students with a lower self-perceived language level were more concerned with their language skills and gains, whereas students with higher language skills moved away from this and focused more on the improvement of their intercultural as well as academic skills. However, becoming more independent and

living on their own was an important outcome for students of all three language level groups:

- Low: I achieved a sense of what was available in the wider world, the opportunities and a feeling that I could take them.
- Medium: I gained independence and was able to manage my time well between cooking, studying, having time to talk to family and going out with friends which I could never do here. It was great to realise that I am capable of doing so many things.
- High: Not only was it a chance to perfect my academic skills (language and learning abilities in general) but it was also a time of self-discovery and growing as a person from many points of view (having to get used to being in a completely new environment, and practical matters such as cooking for myself etc.).

Further, students were asked about their future language use intentions. All of the students were sure that they wanted to use the language in the future right after their return, which might explain further improvements as reflected in the third survey, but not the few declines in their language levels. Half a year later, students were asked what they will use the language for in the future and were given a number of choices. The most frequently agreed on items by the entire group were 'for travelling' and 'entertainment/book reading' purposes. All students with a higher language level at that point said they would use it with family and friends and for entertainment purposes (TV and books). All but one student of this group intended to use it for travelling, for their future career and/or while living in the target country again.¹⁰⁹ The only item all students with the lowest language level could agree on was for travelling purposes, but also most of them would use it for language classes, and media and entertainment. This very clearly shows that mostly students with higher

¹⁰⁹ The medium language level group, half a year after the SAS, consisted only of two students, so their answers are not representative. Those two said they would mainly use it for entertainment, in language classes and for travelling, but one of these students also expects to use the language in their future profession and for living abroad again.

language skills expect the language to be of significance in their future professional life, whereas students of the lower group would rather use it for leisure purposes.

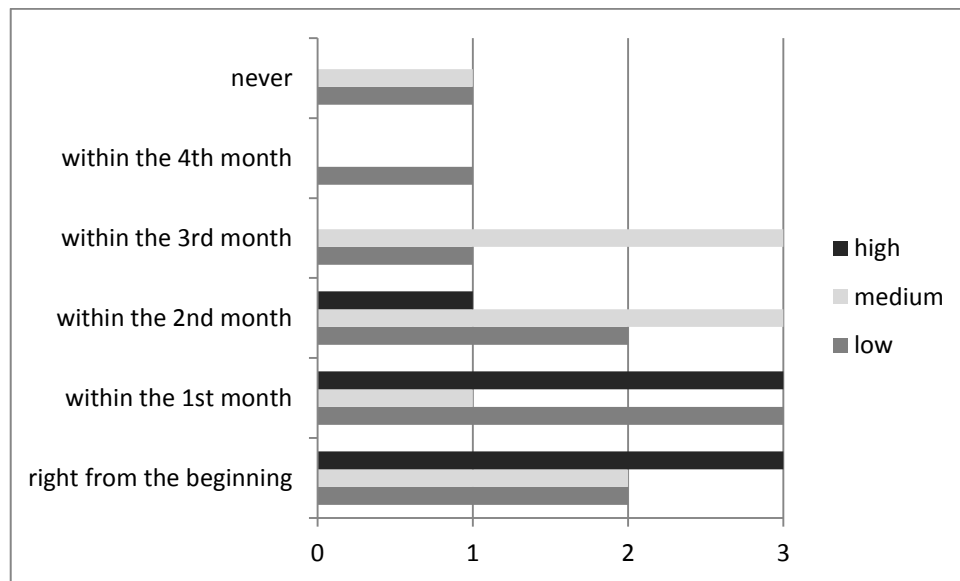
This analysis of students' language contact proved the assumption that lower language level students generally used the target language less. This was shown by their lesser amount of language contact, the quality of the contact being probably more situational and superficial and their enhancement of rather perceptive skills. The higher the language degree the more frequently students had used the target language, also engaging in more meaningful relationships with locals, local friends and housemates, resulting in the improvement of their active/productive language skills. Still, this only shows that students used the target language more or less, but not if this resulted in a more successful adaptation and satisfaction with their SAS, as assumed in the language-adaptation-cycle (3.5). However little the language contact, students with lower language levels still felt that language improvement was the most important outcome of their SAS. The impact the self-perceived language level had on students' adjustment and adaptation process is explored next, to receive a deeper insight into the role of the language and clarification for this hypothesis.

7.2.1.4 Language as a Predictor for Adaptation

In order to explore if the language level was a predictor for how fast students adapted to the new culture, they were asked the question: 'At what point in time did you feel really comfortable for the first time in your study abroad country?'¹¹⁰ Students from the lower language level group gave very different answers, ranging from 'right at the beginning' to 'never', but compared to the other students it was rather later (Figure 40).

¹¹⁰ Group overview: 20% from the beginning, 25% within 1st month, 20% within 2nd month, 20% within 3rd months, 5% within 4th months, 10% never.

Figure 40: Point in time students felt comfortable in their SA country – according to language levels



A closer look at the comments and demographics of the students who felt comfortable the earliest (right from the beginning – Switzerland) and the latest (within the 4th month – France) of the low *RIE* group, reveals more about these ambiguous answers. The student who felt comfortable right from the beginning commented: “I didn’t really notice it never felt like home and I always felt a bit surreal but I wasn’t actually uncomfortable.” This shows that the answer that was chosen does not really match up with what this student stated later. Looking at reasons why the student adjusted easily although their language level was relatively low, it became apparent that this student had been to the study abroad country and a neighbouring country, where the same language is spoken, before, as a tourist as well as for a 3-week language class. The student who felt comfortable the latest also commented on this, saying: “I was only just becoming more confident with the language and the society as I was gearing myself up to leave at the end.” They explicitly mentioned the language having an impact on their confidence and adjustment to the new culture. This student had not been to the SA country before and for them a longer stay would have probably been more beneficial. One other student out of this lower language group had been to the study abroad country

before and they said that they felt comfortable within the third month.¹¹¹ This student had visited the target country before for less than a month and only for travel purposes. These three student examples show that the speed of their adaptation in the SA country was not necessarily influenced by their previous experience, although their previous stays could simply have been too short to have had an impact.

Out of the medium language group most students felt comfortable within the 2nd and 3rd month. The higher self-perceived language level students all felt comfortable within the first two months, most students even within the first weeks. Single students believed that speaking the target language at home, the welcoming locals and having visited the host country before were reasons for the quick adjustment. Half of these students had visited the target country before, for several weeks or months, for high-school exchanges, travelling and visiting friends. This certainly helped students to improve their target language before their SAS, but not exclusively, since half of the high language level students had not been to their SA country before.

These results suggest that the higher the language level, the earlier the adjustment started, but not in all cases. Also, having previous experience makes adjustment easier, but also the length and quality of previous visits mattered (as already shown earlier). Longer stays and study-related sojourns probably helped students to learn more about their target country and consequently to adjust easier. However, a higher self-perceived language level showed more correlation with an easier adjustment than a previous visit to the SA country. How language impacted on students' adaptation as a stressor is explored in the next sub-chapter (Language as a Stressor), but first the role of the target language for intercultural learning is further discussed.

¹¹¹ Not all of the lower self-perceived language level students from the S2 did the first survey, so certain demographic data are not known, i.e. if they have been to the study abroad country.

7.2.1.5 Language as a Predictor for Intercultural Learning

As an important component of intercultural competence, the ability to mediate between people of different cultures, as well as students' opinion on how the view on their own culture had changed after their SAS, is analysed in the following.

First of all, the actual connection between students' RIE score and language level is explored, as the most obvious connection between the two. Before the sojourn, results of this cross-match were not surprising. Students with the lowest language self-ranking also had the lowest RIE average rating (57.6), the medium language group a slightly higher one (58.1) and the higher language group also had the highest RIE rating (60.75). After the sojourn, average results are much higher with the surprising outcome that students of the lower language group had on average the highest RIE scores (64), followed by the higher language level students (62.8) and then the medium ones (59.3). This result shows that the low language level students had a lower RIE score before the sojourn, but after the SAS the lower language level does not necessarily result in a lower comfort in intercultural encounters. Although rather unexpected this trend was already shown in the previous sub-chapter's findings.

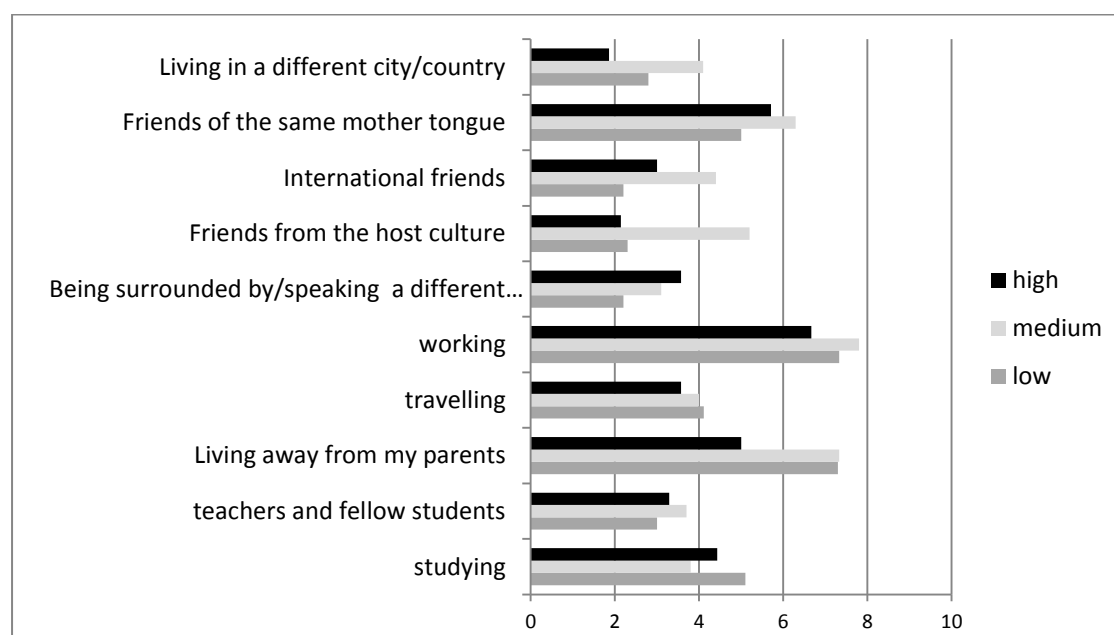
The results of single students prove this further: in the first survey a student of the low language group had also the lowest RIE and the highest RIE score had a student of the medium language group. After the sojourn, a student of the medium language group had the lowest RIE score and the highest one was in the higher language group. Two students with the highest language level had some of the lowest RIE scores, however. This shows that there is not necessarily a connection between the self-perceived language level and the comfort in intercultural situations. The following outcome analysis explores if students of the lower language group reached equally good results in other intercultural outcomes and the results of the stressor analysis enlightens this further.

Being asked to rank a number of factors that influenced their intercultural learning (Figure 41), students ranked 'being surrounded by/speaking a different language(-s)', 'teachers and fellow students' and 'studying' as having the highest influence on their intercultural learning. Looking at the three language level groups

separately, influencing factors were ranked differently. The lower language level students ranked 'having friends from the host culture' and 'living in a different city/country' the highest. Almost as important were 'being surrounded by/speaking a different language/-s' and 'international' friends. The 'friends' aspect was similarly ranked by the higher language students, but not by the medium group who found studying and travelling to be more important. This finding is not consistent with the earlier one about the impact on students' IC development according to their *RIE* results. Students with high *RIE* scores were found to have more meaningful relationships with locals, but here the students with a low language level showed the same result. This again leads to the conclusion that the comfort in IC encounters and a students' language level are influenced independently, or at least that the impact of different friends networks is ambiguous.

Generally, the higher language group ranked more factors as having had an influence on their intercultural learning whereas the lower and medium group only picked a few as especially influential. Maybe these students' restricted exposure to certain benefactors, due to their lower language skills, also limited their ability to benefit from them. All students, however, agreed that 'working' and 'friends of the same mother tongue' did not have a strong influence.

Figure 41: Influence of specific factors on intercultural learning across language levels



Note: 1=very important, 9=least important

Also, students' ability to mediate between people of their own and the other culture reflects on their intercultural competence and is analysed with regards to the self-perceived language level in the second and third survey. The results, however, were only conclusive for the second survey. Only two students with a lower self-perceived language level said they could indeed successfully mediate, whereas the other three were not sure. In the medium group only one student, who was not sure, stuck to this answer, whereas all of the others answered with 'yes'. In the higher language level group all students felt competent enough to mediate between members of their own and the other culture right after the sojourn. These results suggest that students with a lower language level did not exhibit the ability to mediate as much as students of higher language levels, maybe due to the language skills they would have to employ while mediating. However, half a year later, all but one student in each group seemed sure about their mediation skills, which only partially supports the hypothesis that the self-perceived language level is of influence for students' mediation skills. The increase in students' confidence in their mediation skills might be explained with the cultural knowledge and confidence they gained in their return unit.

Also, students' change of their view on their own culture was asked for, to see if they 'decentred' and relativised their perspectives during the SAS. In the lower and higher language level groups, all but one student (in each group) admitted that they had changed their view on their own culture. In the medium group, however, three students said that they had not changed their view. Since these numbers do not really provide a clear picture, the comments most students gave will be looked at closer.

One of the students that answered with 'no' explains that they had been overseas several times and had therefore not changed their perspective anymore (since they already had a 'decentred' view before the SAS). Another student shows their rather ethnocentric view, even after their SAS; however, their comment does not really refer to the question:

- Since this was not the first time I had been overseas or indulged into another culture, my perception of Australian/English culture has not changed.

- My culture will always be my culture I believe. Being away allowed me to view another culture but to remain connected to the one I already had.

Other comments on this question range from positive to negative and from general to particular. This was observed after analysing all comments. There was a tendency that the lower and some medium language level students discovered new positive aspects about the Australian culture and gained a better view on it. Two students in the lower language group and two in the medium group explained their changed views:

- I appreciated how friendly Australian people are as soon as I arrived back at the airport.
- Instead of seeing aussie culture as the norm I now see it as special and unique [sic].
- I became quite patriotic whilst overseas and came to really appreciate my own culture much more than I ever thought possible.
- See the differences between cultures and how fortunate the majority of us are [sic].

Some students, however, started seeing different or even negative sides of their own culture, relativising their previous views. These comments were mainly made by students of the higher language group:

- I find that people in Australia don't put themselves out there or approach strangers as easily as the Spanish. Often strangers in the street would at least make eye contact whereas here in Sydney most people keep their head down.
- Australians seem more crass now, also very inefficient [sic].
- Even though Italy finds itself in political and economic turmoil, it is a country with a soul, a vibrant people, and POWERFUL cultures. Australian contemporary culture is the perfect product of a capitalist market economy; superficial and consumerist. Even the renowned "simplicity" of the Australian people is also fading away generation by generation.

As seen in students' answers and comments, there is a slight tendency of lower language level students to perceive their culture as more positive and higher language level students as more negative after their SAS. However, this could not be confirmed by the comments given half a year after their return. In contrast to the previous findings of positive and negative perspective change, higher language level students seemed to have gained more of a general appreciation of cultural differences half a year later rather than the negative view on their own culture they exhibited right after their SAS.

- I definitely noticed the difference in the Spanish culture to my own German upbringing and I found it very interesting interpreting these differences.
- I understand more how culturally divided we are as Italians.
- Although there are similarities in the basics human needs, I can see some particular points in my culture different from the other.

The results of the third survey suggest that an increasing number of students from all language levels gained a more general view on cultures, which might be a result of the return unit or of getting a clearer view on their SAS half a year after their return. This is in contrast to the findings of the second research question that saw a slight decrease of culture-general and culture-specific knowledge half a year after students' return.

As a third intercultural outcome, students' answers to if the SAS had changed them in terms of how they communicate with foreigners in their own country now, are examined according to the self-perceived language level, too. The results show that all lower and medium language level students and most of the higher level students in the third survey felt like the SAS had an impact on how they communicate with foreigners now, but three of the higher level students did not think so. Generally, most students developed a new awareness towards how one feels like to be in a different country and towards foreigners in Australia in particular. Some students see the situation of foreigners in a new light, paying them more respect, and empathise more with them.

- I would like to show foreigners here how respectful we are. I have always helped people with directions and what not but I am now more aware of how they must be feeling.
- I am more understanding of what they are experiencing and willing to help them.
- I don't particularly go out of my way to give them special treatment, but if asked for help I certainly comply without reservations because I know how it feels.
- I understand more clearly why people want to come to this country from all over the world.

Others see their situation in terms of their language difficulties:

- I always realised it was difficult for people to travel or communicate outside of their own language but I guess I'm more aware of how it feels I definitely respect people who learn another language more.
- I feel more sympathy for those struggling with English.

Some students actively approach foreigners and seek out opportunities to get in contact with them.

- Yes, I am excited to talk to exchange students who are here, especially if they are German.
- Yes I think I want to get to know as many people from other backgrounds as possible and learn more about their countries and cultures.

Another student sees how their own communication skills have changed:

- I feel like I have adopted some Spanish communication traits such as being more direct in my speech.

Although students did not show the hypothesised division of answers according to language levels, they more or less all show a gain in empathy and communication skills with foreigners in their own country, a trait that benefits their personal

experience as well as the wider society. This also confirms the findings of the second research question that found students' comfort in encounters in their own country steadily increasing over the year.

As a summary of the analysis of language as a predictor for intercultural learning, the results show that living in a different country and having local friends were the two most influential factors for students with a high language score, whereas being surrounded by the language and having locals as well as international friends seemed most important for the lower language level students. The ability to mediate was found to be higher in the higher language level group, whereas students' way of communicating with foreigners in their own country had mostly changed for lower level students. Students in both groups had changed in terms of how they see their own culture.

7.2.1.6 'What does it take to communicate effectively and appropriately with people of other cultural backgrounds?'

Cohering with the previous approach and in order to see if the self-perceived language level had an influence on how students answered this question about IC components, students' comments in both surveys (S1+S2) were examined accordingly.

Of the group that ranked their language skills the lowest before the SAS, three-quarters mentioned language in their comments and one student listed 'confidence to speak' as the most important component. Amongst the five students that ranked their language skills the lowest after the return, two mentioned concrete language skills. 'Understanding of the culture' was stated once and 'patience' twice.

In the medium group, results on the B1 level were similar, with students mentioning language (3x), cultural understanding, patience, confidence and other attitudinal factors before their SAS. On the B2 level, one student mentioned language as well as cultural understanding, and the other three some kind of attitudinal components. In the second survey, half of the students were convinced that language

skills are important for successful communication, and the other half listed attitudinal traits and behavioural skills.

Before their sojourn, the seven students that ranked their skills the highest (B2/C1) only mentioned language (slang) once and culture knowledge twice. Their answers included mainly attitudinal features. After their return, the six students with the highest language self-ranking (C1/C2) mentioned language features twice, different attitudes twice and understanding and culture understanding, too.

From a quantified standpoint, these answers show that students of a lower language level tend to find language more important for successful communication than students of higher language levels, especially before the sojourn. Other answers included cultural understanding and different attitudinal features in all three groups. Especially in the medium group, language was mentioned quite often after students' return. This leads to the assumption that the self-perceived level of the target language does not conclusively have an influence on how important these students thought the language is for appropriate and effective communication, because students of any level said that it is important. It does, however, seem as if it had an influence on what other concrete components they mentioned, with the higher language level students mentioning more different items, possibly showing better meta-cognitive skills.

7.2.1.7 'Is language the most important key component for successfully living and studying abroad?'

Looking at individual answers and the distribution across self-perceived language levels, it becomes apparent that students with low, medium or high language self-rankings gave different kinds of answers to the above question; however, in general many students changed their mind during the course of the semester.

Most of the lower language level students believed that knowing the other language is the most important component for successfully living and studying abroad in all three surveys. Although most of the students answered with 'yes', their comments included some confinements and restrictions:

- Language is important, but so is the rest of the experience.
- It helps but there are other important factors, being able to communicate is more than words but mannerisms.
- Culture and understanding the local people is equally as important [sic].
- In general yes, but not always and certainly not in Geneva.
- It plays a prominent part in understanding but I think the most important aspect is getting out and meeting people and trying to interact in their lifestyle—language will eventually come to you.

In the medium language level group, about half of the students thought that language is not the most important component in the first survey, but in the second one this changed completely, with all but one student saying that it is the most important one. Students' answers ranged from negation of the necessity of target language skills, to the opinion that knowledge of the language greatly assists with the adaptation and learning process:

- People can live abroad and not know the language as long as they try to interact with local people and they will eventually pick up the language. I do think it's necessary to know the basics however.
- Helps you adapt to other parts of culture and you're less of an outsider
- It's very beneficial because this is what allows you to communicate your feelings and also communicate with others. It is very important to have an understanding of their language and make the effort to speak to them in their native tongue.
- Not the most important, but certainly the best was to enhance your experience and meet people.

Compared to that, the higher language level group offers a different insight. In the first survey, quantitative results were mostly the same as in the lower and medium group. In the second survey, however, all but one of the higher level students believed that knowing the other language is not the most important component of successfully living and studying abroad. This changed again half a year later where a

slight majority answered with 'yes' again. So results on this are not conclusive, but since not all students commented on this question, their change of mind cannot be completely understood. The one student that answered with 'yes' in the second survey commented on their answer saying:

- I answered 'yes' because I feel that communication is one of the most important aspects of living in a foreign country. And even if the locals speak English, it is always better to be able to communicate in any situation.
-

Other comments included openness and understanding of the culture, and that language is:

- But one piece to the jig saw.

The language level results can only show a tendency, because different students participated in the different surveys. Therefore, a closer analysis of individual students was undertaken. The comment given by the student that ranked their language ability the highest in S3 was:

- Understanding social norms and behaviours through the language learning process is most important.

This mirrors the students' advanced understanding of language and culture learning and the link between both as part of their cultural learning process. Also, this student changed their mind from saying 'yes' – language is the most important factor of successfully living and studying abroad – in the first survey to 'no' in the other two.

The student with the initially lowest self-ranking answered this question with 'yes' in all three surveys, but their comments also reflect a deeper understanding of the connection between language and intercultural learning by saying:

- It certainly creates a huge insight into culture and the way of the country. It makes you more approachable and independent and allows you to gain more from your experience. (S2)
- It contributes tenfold to your experience, ability to communicate and allows more insight in the culture of the country. (S3)

This suggests that the perceived language level does not necessarily reflect on how students feel about the role of the language. Also, students' meta-cognitive and reflective skills do not differ greatly in this question.

The self-perceived language level could not be found as having had an impact on how students developed their IC during the SAS and their *R/E* results surprisingly show higher levels of the lower language level students. When it comes to how important students felt knowing the TL is for appropriate and effective communication and for successfully living and studying abroad, there was a slight tendency of students thinking it is very important in the lower and medium language level, whereas students of the higher level mentioned other aspects.

7.2.2 Language as a Stressor

As previously seen, language was perceived as one of the major stressors for students of all *R/E* levels, but was not found to have a major influence on how students scored their IC comfort after the SAS. However, its role in the adaptation and learning process should be observed more, especially for the language learning outcomes.

7.2.2.1 Language Level and Adaptation

In order to further explore the impact of the target language, students were asked what situations were especially difficult to adapt to. It was also of interest if students felt like they got along easily with the target language and if it was one of the decisive factors that made their SAS especially distressing/pleasant etc. Moreover, the ranking of common problems is looked at in terms of language level again, together with if students expected these problems and if they felt well prepared for their SAS.

Asking students what was especially difficult to adjust to, all of the lower level students said that not being able to communicate in the target language and its effect on them was the most difficult thing to adapt to. One student explained how it affected her emotions and self-perception:

- Feeling vulnerable, not being able to be eloquent was harder than expected and being shy and nervous with people (loss of confidence) [sic].

However, being asked how students coped with this situation most of them mentioned that over time and with practice they managed to adapt:

- Confronting the problems in language as they arose and trying my best to make myself understood [sic].
- As my skills improved, it became easier, but in the beginning, this was very intimidating!

Only one student said that they did not adapt well to not being able to communicate effectively and appropriately:

- In terms of language ability, honestly I didn't because of the environment. When I failed with my language they just spoke to me in English, Geneva was very international.

All other students in this group felt they got used to the language over time and with practice. Compared to this, only two students from the medium language level group mentioned language problems. As other common problems, classes, teachers, organisation, being away from home and culture were mentioned. As a significant contrast, none of the higher language level students mentioned the target language as having been especially difficult to adapt to and encountered different problems with their studies, bureaucracy, climate etc. These results suggest that the target language had a major influence on students' speed of adjustment and extent of it. While higher language degree students adjusted to the academic and everyday life easily, lower level students were mainly concerned with the language barrier and the problems that were brought along with it.

To further explore what had an influence on students' adjustment, they were asked if there was one single decisive factor that made their study abroad semester very pleasant/successful/distressing/disappointing etc. or that influenced their study

abroad experience especially. Two of the lower language students found the language barrier especially distressing:

- I felt stressed out for a lot of the time during my semester abroad, I found the language barrier overwhelming and intimidating and also felt a lot of pressure to have to succeed in my studies as my whole degree depended on my success during the exchange.
- The language was the only difficult aspect of the exchange.

None of the medium or higher language level students found the language especially worrying; in fact, one of the higher language level students mentioned the benefits of speaking the language well:

- The fact that I could already speak German opened a lot more doors for me to take more interesting classes and meet more people.

Being asked to rank certain problems, three out of the five lower language students said that language problems arose very often (Figure 42). Compared to that, major cultural problems were only mentioned once. Also, loneliness and homesickness occurred quite often¹¹², and academic difficulties, interpersonal problems and financial restraints relatively often, too. Because language problems were perceived as so intense, three out of the five lower language level students still felt that they could not get along with their knowledge of the target language, at least not right from the beginning:

- Not right at the start, but after a month or so yes.
- Not initially, it felt as though I had not learnt anything! This improved with my listening comprehension.

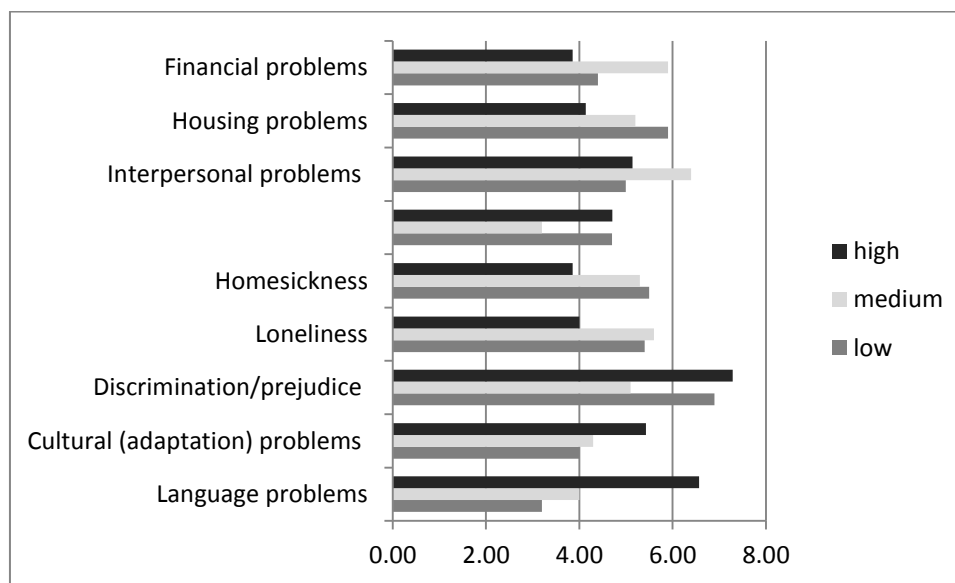
As restricting as these problems were, most of the students expected them, however, apart from some language aspects they felt quite prepared for the SAS.¹¹³

¹¹² Loneliness was ranked 2nd and 3rd and homesickness 1st, 2nd, 4th, and 5th.

¹¹³ Three out of five felt prepared, two out of five answered 'no' and amended the language aspect.

The main problem for medium language level students was the language, too, but to a lesser extent¹¹⁴. The higher language level students ranked academic problems, homesickness and loneliness as major problems and language as one of the two least occurring problems. One of the students with the highest self-ranked language level even said that the language was one of the things they easily adjusted to.

Figure 42: Frequently occurring problems according to language level



Note: short bar means frequently occurring

That language was a major stressor for students' adjustment and that the self-perceived language level proved to be influential, was shown here too. The lower the students' language level, the more problematic the language became and influenced the adaptation process in a negative way. This corresponds with the findings of many researchers that found language to be one of the most influential stressors for students' adjustment (Ward and Kennedy 1993b, Furukawa and Shibayama 1994, Kang 2006). However, its impact on students' academic satisfaction could not be confirmed in the way Kennedy's (1999) study did. The previously assumed connection between target language level and adaptation success could be confirmed, as part of the language-adjustment-cycle. Financial and academic problems, but also

¹¹⁴ Classes, university life, the culture, homesickness and loneliness were other concern mentioned.

accommodation and homesickness, were further described as quite severe by Schreier and Abramovitch (1996) and were also found to be quite influential here – to students of all levels (see also Oppen et al. 1990).

However, most of the lower and higher language students were not surprised by these problems and most students commented that the language barrier and communication problems were expected at the beginning. More surprising were other factors like the lack of support, problems with accommodation and homesickness, especially by the medium level students.

7.2.2.2 General Satisfaction

Students were asked if their SAS was what they expected, if they had done anything differently and if they would recommend it to other students. That way, the language-adjustment-cycle can be closed and the initial hypothesis if high language knowledge supports more language exposure, and therefore easier adjustment and intercultural learning, which leads to a higher satisfaction with the entire experience, can be fully examined.

The quantitative data show that in the lower language level proportionally more students (three out of five) said that the SA experience was not what they had expected it to be, than compared to the medium (two out of eight) and higher language group (one out of six). In the lower group, students' comments reflect their struggle with the language barrier and with homesickness. In the medium language group, two students complained about the missing support system by the university and again one felt quite homesick at the beginning. One student in each group (lower and medium) also admitted that they did not know what to expect and therefore did not have expectations. Only one comment was done in the higher language level group, saying that it was challenging but enjoying. This shows that students of the higher language level were generally more satisfied with their exchange, whereas students' expectations of the lower levels were not necessarily met.

Asking students half a year after their return what they would have done differently two students with a lower language level at that time said they wished they had improved their language and cultural understanding better and two others said that they wished they had travelled more. Although some students had regrets, they still felt like their SAS was very positive: “My main reason for studying abroad was because it was a degree requirement which I am so thankful for now. After coming back and looking back on my journey, I believe it was better than I expected.” Two students on the medium level at that point expressed some regrets and wished they had immersed themselves more in the target culture. None of the students that were in the higher language level group after their exchange said they would have done anything differently, which is a good indication that they took full advantage of their SAS and made the most of it. Students of all language levels would recommend studying abroad to other students. Some of their reasons for recommending it included:

- It genuinely is an exciting experience and a time of intellectual development.
- It is a great experience to open your mind become independent and experience life before entering the workforce.
- As they say, it's always going to be the best way to learn the language, and learn about yourself and what you want out of the language.
- It was an amazing experience, I am very hard on my language capabilities but it was very good for me to be able to try to use what I had learnt.

These comments are probably the best accounts for promoting studying abroad and showing its benefits for students of all language levels (of this study). None of the students would mention reasons for not doing it and all of them felt like they benefited from it somehow, even if they struggled at some point. Travelling however, was one of the major activities that students attended while they were overseas and often wished they would have done it more.

These results show that students of all language levels would recommend studying abroad, but some of the students with a lower or medium self-perceived language level right after the SAS and half a year later said that they wished they would have done certain things differently, whereas none of the students of the higher language level group had any regrets and their expectations were fully met.

These students even feel confident enough to use the language for their future career and hope to live in a country where their target language is spoken.

7.2.3 Summary and Discussion

It was the aim of this sub-chapter to evaluate the role of the language for the adjustment and outcomes of students' SAS. First, it could be shown that students' higher self-rated language level was the result of them having more contact with native speakers and for them using the language more. Students with a higher language level used the language more on a daily basis, they had contact with local students and teachers as well as with internationals, had many local friends and lived together with locals. Students with a lower language level had more contact with locals that was rather superficial, more international friends and friends of the same mother tongue and lived alone or with other English native speakers. According to the higher language level students, studying and fulfilling academic tasks in the target language helped them a lot to improve their language level, which proofs earlier findings of the importance of active engagement for effective learning (Kolb 2012). Having more contact with locals helped them mainly to improve their productive skills, especially speaking, as opposed to students with lower language levels, who felt like they mainly improved their receptive skills. Even if students felt like they did not improve their language skills much, they could have still had enough input to acquire new cognitive skills, even though they might have not had the chance to use them much. Kramsch (2014, 300) reminds us about the difference of language learning and language use in this situation: "In this view, learner first have to acquire the forms of the language and only once they have acquired them may put them to use in authentic communication activities". Apart from students' perceived language gains, most of them thought that the language improvement was indeed the most important outcome of their SAS.

A study conducted on the same students as part of their return unit, came to similar results, showing that the students understood the importance of their own efforts in improving their language skills very well. Möllering (2012) showed that for these subjects 'surrounding yourself within the language environment',

'communicating with locals' and 'culture immersion' were the most helpful ways to benefit their language gains in general. Also 'confidence' and 'being courageous' were mentioned as prerequisites for successful language immersion. At the same time, she could also show that students thought that contact with other English speakers or other internationals impeded on their language acquisition, which does not necessarily correspond with the answers students previously gave and Bochner et al.'s (1977) findings on friendship networks, at least when it comes to adjustment in general.

The majority of the students of the high language group would use the target language in their future professions or when living in the target country again. Most other students will rather use it for travelling and entertainment purposes. So far, it was clearly shown that the students who had a high target language level after their return were the ones that had the most contact with locals and hence linguistically benefited the most from the SAS.

Not surprising was also the fact that, when it came to adaptation, the students that ended up with a higher language level were the ones that adjusted the fastest, usually within the first two months, whereas some of the students of the lower or medium level only managed to feel comfortable in their target country at the end of their sojourn or never at all. Lower level students found the language and its consequences on their ability to adapt very overwhelming as it had, in some cases, a very profound impact on their experience. Not surprisingly, language problems occurred very often to students with lower language skills whereas students with higher language proficiency suffered more from homesickness and loneliness. Nonetheless, most students expected these problems, knowing that language would be a problem at the beginning and would later pass, as opposed to missing support by the local university or ongoing problems with accommodation.

So far, the results were mostly as expected, but looking at the impact of their language level on students' IC development, however, revealed controversies, similar to the previous hypothesis' ones. The students with the lowest language level had the highest *RIE* on average after their return, and the medium language students the lowest. Nevertheless, those students who had the lowest language outcome after the exchange believed that being surrounded by another language had the highest

impact on their intercultural learning. This is inconsistent with earlier findings on language and IS development (Burstall 1975, Martinsen 2010). Looking at single IC outcomes, it becomes apparent that the higher the language level the more the students felt able to mediate between a person of their own and the target culture. Their views on their own culture and the way they communicate with strangers in their own country were two outcomes that had changed by most students, independently of their self-evaluated language level. The same is true for the answers to the question of what it takes to communicate appropriately and effectively with members of another culture. Language was here mentioned amongst other things, but could not clearly be linked to the language level. The result to the question whether knowledge of the target language was the most important component of successfully living and studying abroad was more distinct: the higher the self-perceived language level the less important the students found the language to be in this context.

As students who had a lower language level faced more problems, especially with the language and adaptation, they were less satisfied with the SAS and some of them said that their expectations and learning goals were not met. Half a year after their return, some low and medium level students expressed that, in retrospect, they would have done certain things differently, regretting not having made the most of their SAS and the learning opportunities it provided.

As opposed to the intercultural-adjustment-cycle, many predictors for students' language development were actually found to have an impact. More language contact and use, especially with host nationals and on a daily basis, was found to be influential and led to a faster and more problem free adjustment. Hence, their experience was more satisfying in general. However, intercultural outcomes were not impacted by students' language level. How language and intercultural learning are connected, although being strongly emphasised especially by the lower language level students, cannot be fully explained. These results are summarised and further discussed along with what conclusions can be drawn from them in the last, concluding chapter.

8. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND APPLICATION

8.1 Summary and Conclusion

The scope of this study was to research intercultural competence and its development from a student perspective before and after their study abroad semester and the effect of the sojourn on their intercultural and language development as well as their general adjustment. These aims were pursued in three research questions, the first one exploring students' opinion on what intercultural competence consists of, what components are important for living and studying abroad and what students think about the role of the target language in this scenario. The answers to these questions were sought through surveys that were administered before and after the sojourn and half a year after the students' return, as well as with the help of a self-reflection essay that students wrote as part of the assessments for their return unit. For the second research question, students' IC development was assessed with the help of an IC comfort questionnaire and IC components self-ranking to see how their IC had changed over the course of a year. In order to see what predicted or negatively influenced students' IC and language development as well as adaptation during the SAS, extensive surveys were administered and their answers cross-referenced with students' self-perceived IC and language levels. With the help of these three different assessment tools, triangulation of the data for the first and second research question could be achieved in quantitative and qualitative form, although most findings are based on individual and narrative accounts in all three research steps.

It was shown that a study abroad semester can influence a student's intercultural and language learning positively, but it is a very individual process of: a) what students see as IC or part of it, b) how students perceive their IC and language development and c) what influences the two of them. This study's findings mostly agree with the research literature in the fields of intercultural development and study abroad, but it has also found gaps and overgeneralisations on outcomes and effects of a study abroad semester. In general, students report a lot of different components

they believe are important for intercultural competence and studying abroad, that mostly fit in the ABC categories many models suggest. Commonly used theories of IC and their categories can be supported by the findings of this study. However, mainly the attitudinal components students' listed differ from what a majority of the research literature and the two introduced models suggest, with traits like 'patience' and 'confidence' being mentioned more than 'tolerance' or 'cultural awareness'. It remains questionable, however, if many of these items are indeed intercultural and not just general (inter-)personal attitudes that students were lacking, which suggests that specific intercultural traits might not be distinguished from general attitudinal ones. The most widely improved skill 'to adapt' shows not only that the SAS assisted in developing it, but also that this skill is very essential during an SAS. The clearly perceived gain of cognitive elements, especially culture-specific knowledge, was expected from an experiential learning experience.

It was further confirmed that intercultural learning does develop around the ABC components, with a strong emphasis on attitudinal features at the beginning and a clearly perceived gain of B and C components during the sojourn. The strong tie of all three components for intercultural development could therefore be shown and the fact that they develop together. This was shown through all three assessment methods and the effect was even ongoing after their return. If this was caused by the return unit students attended could not be clarified due to the lack of a control group, but students' newly gained meta-cognitive skills were clearly demonstrated in their self-reflection essays as contents of the return unit were used in them. Students' general comfort in intercultural situations only improved slightly during the sojourn, as opposed to their skills and knowledge, which they improved more significantly. It was initially wondered if these components could be examined separately, but this study showed that in fact they could be studied individually as well as in the light of the entire experience.

Global and personal skills, that are advertised by universities and the government could indeed be acquired, especially an international worldview and understanding, a greater independence and self-confidence and the creation of

international relationships/networks. Also, a changed view on their own culture, critical cultural awareness, a greater understanding of otherness, and target-culture-specific knowledge could be gained. This accords with the governmental goals in the field, as study abroad (at least in this study's setting) does help to create global citizens. When it comes to employability skills, students feel that especially knowing another language and the ability to communicate successfully will help them in the future, and many of the students even express their wishes to work in an international context. The essential proof of the application of their SAS skills in their future lives, however, would be the scope of an ongoing study.

The third research question examined the influence of certain student and program predictors as well as stressors. Not surprisingly, language problems and academic difficulties were the main concerns before and during the sojourn. Further, loneliness and homesickness, as well as financial, interpersonal and accommodation issues, were shown to have had an impact on students' overall experience and satisfaction, whereas cultural adaptation issues only rarely occurred. Contact with teachers, fellow students, locals, other internationals and housemates all seemed to have positively influenced students' intercultural learning. Differences in how students approached and dealt with problems could be found and realistic expectations and a feeling of preparedness might affect a student's confidence and therefore way of dealing with issues. However, all of the students would recommend an SAS and most were satisfied with the overall experience. Many participating students were sure that they had changed at least some personality traits and learnt or improved important skills. None of the students would mention reasons for not going on exchange or why these sojourns are sometimes ill reputed and they all felt like they benefited from it somehow, even if they struggled at some point.

So far, these findings more or less supported previous studies and theories on IC and ICC. The two most interesting findings of this study are related to the role of the target language and the observation of predictors and stressors on different self-perceived levels of language and IC comfort. As a first outcome, it could be shown that students developed a more integrated view on the role of the language for IC

and living and studying abroad during the course of a year. Initially many of them thought that knowing the target language was not that important, although many concerns about not being able to cope with the language barrier were uttered. Their experiences abroad changed their view on the importance of knowing the target language for communication, culture contact, making meaningful relationships, clarifying problems, successfully passing classes and for adjustment reasons. Just as Byram (1997) did, students also assigned the language a key role for intercultural competence and adaptation when living abroad – even though many students had to go through the experience first to realise it. The influence of the return unit students attended might be responsible for further changes in this area and a deeper appreciation of the target language. Insofar, the commonly used definition of IC as the ability to communicate effectively as well as appropriately could strongly be supported by the finding of this study.

It was further confirmed that students with a lot of contact with local friends, fellow students and housemates, who therefore used the language extensively, also ranked their language level higher after the sojourn. The quality as well as the quantity of the contact seemed to be important for this observation to guarantee a truly INTER-cultural exchange. Before the sojourn, a lower language level equalled a lower IC comfort level and a high comfort level a high language level – more or less. However, the results after the SAS did not match with these findings. As this study's most important finding, low language level students generally exhibited a higher IC comfort than the higher language level students did after the SAS. Although the latter group used the target language more, they ranked their comfort in IC encounters lower than the other group after their SAS. So, even without a high level of target language knowledge, students still managed to adjust and make the best out of their experience. This suggests that other factors were just as influential.

As one of the predictors of students' initial higher IC comfort level, an internal motivation for studying the degree and going abroad in the first place could be found. Further, a previous, extended visit to the SA country seemed to be most influential before the SAS. The concept of culture contact was found to be of the same influence

during the sojourn, predicting a student's IC comfort; however, it did not result in a higher self-perceived language level at the same time. This leads to the conclusion that language is not necessarily a predictor or facilitator for intercultural development during an SAS, or at least not in the way students assessed their comfort in intercultural situations. As language and intercultural competence development are intertwined in a study abroad situation, this result was rather unexpected. However, previously mentioned studies (Wilkinson 1997, 1998a, Bennett 2010) also found that language contact and language use as well as IC development are not necessarily related. For the case of this present study, only speculations on the reasons for this missing connection can be made. Possibly, students with a lower language level had to open up more to the new culture, had to be more cautious of communicative mistakes, which could lead to misunderstandings and disrupted relationships, and had to learn more during their SAS, rather than assuming they already had a proficient knowledge about how they were expected to behave. Maybe this experience taught them that their initial concerns were not justified. A newly gained confidence to be able to manage any kind of situation in a different country or involving people with different cultural backgrounds or different study systems helped them to gain more comfort. Although situations involving communication made students feel wary, encounters at university were ranked as even more uncomfortable, which explains the often very low comfort rankings in students' self-ranking in the *Reflection of Intercultural Encounters*.

As in any qualitative study, these results are subject to certain limitations that might have had an influence on the way the questions were received by the subjects, the data analysed and interpretations and conclusions were found.

8.2 Limitations

A number of internal as well as external limitations in the validity of the data derive mainly from the assessment methods and are mentioned here in order to relativise the outcomes. *The Reflection of Intercultural Encounters* is not a validated test to

measure a person's actual IC level against certain thresholds and therefore no comments on students' actual level of IC can be made. The use of quantification words like 'high', 'medium' and 'low' derives from a comparison of numbers within this group and not from external measurements. If students perceived their comfort in intercultural encounters as higher or lower after their sojourn, there must have been reasons for it and this was to be explored. It has to be kept in mind though that students' comfort in intercultural situations does not necessarily reflect on their actual IC, as they might be comfortable in and seek out certain situations frequently, but still not communicate appropriately and vice versa. Moreover, the limited amount of *RIE* questions could not cater for all intercultural situations students might have encountered during their SAS and is only exemplarily for what they might encounter in their own countries, in other countries and at university. The way questions, especially in the *RIE*, were phrased also suggests that students were naturally more inclined to give certain examples about how an encounter makes them feel, which would be a possible explanation for the overwhelming number of attitudinal comments. As answers in all three research methods were prompted through the questions the occurrence of new categories or completely different perspectives on IC and its development might have been limited though. The expected large amount of qualitative data of students' comments in the *RIE* could also not be gathered, since students often skipped this step. Hence, finding answers to why students' IC comfort had changed could have been clearer, especially on what happened during the semester and after their return. Moreover, it was not considered so far that students might interpret certain IC components differently (like 'adapt well', 'being empathetic' or 'analyse and compare') from what researchers suggest. Hence, there might be a great variation in answers that actually refer to different things. It is further important to mention, that commenting on the actual quality and intensity of intercultural learning in experiential settings is a difficult task to do as experiences are narrated and perceived differently among individuals. Also, students primarily commented on questions in the third questions set of the *RIE* which might be representative of their experiential background of intercultural situations at university and a lesser awareness of them in their daily interactions. Reflections on their encounters using the target language would have

been preferable (Scarino 2007), as “storytellers use language to interpret experiences and position themselves as particular kinds of people” (Pavlenko 2007, 167). However, this was not practical due to the different languages involved in the program.

Moreover, findings of social research are only ever as reliable as the researched subjects are true to themselves. Known as the Hawthorne-Effect students might have self-evaluated their skills, attitudes and knowledge higher than they are, knowing they are part of a research study (Sutton et al. 2007). Further, using Likert-scales and self-rankings always carries the risk of students overestimating their abilities. With “inflated opinions” (Jackson 2011, 174), especially in the context of formal education, students try to make themselves look better or at least to maintain their status and self-esteem, as part of their language learning identity. Self-reflections and reports always bear the risk of not objectively showing what students had actually experienced and how they feel about it. Further, of the disadvantages that Pavlenko (2007) lists about narratives, especially the overreliance of repeated instances that can lead the researcher to overlook some other themes as well as the focus on what is IN the text as opposed to what is excluded, are applicable for this study too. The interrelation of subject, text and reality can therefore easily be misleading and all three have to be taken into consideration (ibid.). As the reliance on one method would therefore not have been conclusive, the triangulation through different methods seemed to have provided a deeper insight as well as a verification of many findings. The longitudinal research design further helped to confirm findings and make them more feasible.

The researched subjects of this study pose certain limitations in themselves as well. First, they are a self-selected group that possibly exhibit a higher motivation, knowledge, interest and maybe even attitudes towards IC to start with. Therefore, a control group could have been a salient feature to verify many of the outcomes and measurements (Sutton et al. 2007). The actual impact of the SAS can only be interpreted from what students report in their essays and comments. However, by asking questions so they are specifically related to their SAS, it could be extensively

shown on what students thought their sojourn had impacted. The fact that at every time of the assessment the number of research subjects changed made it very difficult to extract generalised findings about the cohort. Also, the limited number of participating students was a disadvantage. Since only ten students had completed all three assessment methods at all three points in time, only this small group could actually reveal changes and developments, as was one of the aims of this study. However, as “experimental mortality” can often be expected in such studies it might reflect on the resilience and awareness of the importance of reflection on learning outcomes of these ten students’, which in itself would be another research finding (Sutton et al. 2007). Since the number of the entire cohort was naturally limited, other students could not have been included in this study. However, a larger participation number would have helped to verify the quantitative as well as quantified findings and therefore the original aim to present rich quantitative data supporting the qualitative ones, could not entirely followed through in all of the research questions. The heterogeneity of the research subjects has to be considered too. Although their personal background was partially assessed, age, maturity, gender and migration background could have played a role too and were neglected because of the reasons mentioned in the methodology chapter. Moreover, as the students studied five different languages, with different pre-knowledge, contents of language classes and teachers, it was never a homogenous group with exactly the same previous learning experiences. Of course, all languages classes should somehow focus on the teaching of communicative competences and capabilities, but they do this to a different degree that is difficult to assess in retrospect. All students previously attended lectures about cross-cultural communication, history, culture and so on, but even in that, their background knowledge and competence level might differ.

Further, the target country and language themselves could have been influential factors, as culture distance is often assumed to have an impact on how students adjust. It could have made a difference between the students studying in Europe and in Latin America, but was not followed up further. Since most students studying in Middle or South America only went in small groups or on their own (as

opposed to some of the 'Europe students' that often went together with others in their degree), it could have further had an influence on their immediate support networks at the beginning, their feelings of loneliness and homesickness etc.

Comparing the data with established research findings was not only difficult because of the previously mentioned limitations, but also because different assessment methods were used. For instance, if students had been given the same questions and tasks as in Deardorff's Delphi study, the results might have been different and maybe even more conforming. As there were similar as well as conflicting results with the existing research literature, the question remains if it is even possible to design a model that combines all of the IC components and aspects to be taken into consideration for study abroad designs. The criticism can even go so far as to ask if it is even possible to capture this process comprehensively in form of a model as it might restrict the experience to mere categories not leaving room for individual cases and varying explanations.

Another limiting point was that original research in Australia is still limited and more case study research is on demand to compare findings and results. Consequently, a middle course between the plurilingualism claims on the European side and the often complete neglect of other languages in American models had to be faced, although Byram took that into account and his core notion of the 'intercultural speaker' does not refer to a certain country or language group. Its main aspect is that all language learners should acquire these competences, no matter what background or education system. However, his model serves formal education purposes better and therefore was not quite as applicable for the reality of Australian undergraduate students studying overseas. Also, the fact that Australian language learners might have a family background that is linked to their target language and may not learn it as a completely new language, has to be taken into account in models of IC (as it is done in the new National Curriculum for Languages, ACARA 2013). Other influencing factors like personality, the environment, culture contact and distance and other factors that are specific to the study abroad situation should be further examined. This might suggest that IC development is not a universal process that is the same for

everyone, but in fact has many different and individually influencing factors, that should be reflected in models.

As a last point, the researcher's own cultural background, being European of a non-English speaking background, has to be taken into consideration when it comes to the choice of assessment methods and analysis of the qualitative data. The knowledge and view on the English-speaking subjects and the Australian socialisation background was therefore limited and seen from an outsider's perspective, which in turn helped to stay rather objective, although still regarded from a 'Western' viewpoint. Having been the only person to categorise and analyse the data could have, nevertheless, influenced the results.

8.3 Applications and Future Research

As Liddicoat and colleagues stated: "It is important that the scope of culture learning move beyond awareness, understanding, and sympathy and begin to address the ways in which culture learning will be practiced by learners" (Liddicoat et al. 2003, 7). The findings of this study show the effects of a semester-long exchange on students. It could be shown that the SAS semester offers a lot of learning opportunities for students to develop different IC components as well as to improve their target language. First of all, these results confirm findings of many studies on the outcomes of an SAS, which broadens the research basis as well as validates such programs. Future studies could pick up on the findings and further explore the students' perspective. The positive impact of studying abroad could especially be shown for Australian undergraduate students studying a language degree with an integrated study abroad component. However, these results are not limited to this case study's subjects, but are of wider importance encouraging students, their parents and educators to decide to undergo a study abroad semester. Educators, administrators, program designers, policy makers and other officials want to receive clear results about what to expect realistically from a SA abroad semester to not only advertise program outcomes right, but to help students in deciding for a certain program that

suits their needs and expectations. Studying abroad is not a magic stimulus to speed up students' intercultural development. Only with the right combination of previous knowledge, motivation, realistic expectations, the ability to adjust to and study in a new environment abroad, and support from as many sources as possible, will students gain the results they expect.

The importance of longer stays, especially for students with a lower initial language level, should be stressed here. Further, a minimal language level (B1) prior to students' departure can be suggested, since those students generally felt more comfortable in intercultural encounters and therefore more prepared and confident and were able to handle difficult situations better.

As could be shown, culture contact is one of the major predictors for language gain and adjustment and should therefore be optimised, not just by prior language instructions. Contact to host culture nationals or native speakers of the target language at the home institutions can help students to get in contact with their target culture even before their sojourns (Möllering 2012). Host universities could assist international students in getting in touch with local students or locals in general. Mentoring programs, mixed classes and accommodations or special events where students can easily get in touch with others could be facilitated by the faculty.

As at least some extent of adaptation is one of the expected outcomes of an SAS, the understanding and prediction of students' social and adaptation problems is important, since such information can be used to help students to avoid them or at least diminish them. This can contribute to students' wellbeing, general satisfaction and essentially their study outcomes. On a greater scale, lower discontinuation rates might help to guarantee universities' incomes, especially in English speaking countries where they form a salient part of universities' revenues (Ward et al. 2001). In order to lower the impact of certain stressors, program-specific factors can be assisted with by the home and host university. Prearranged accommodation (at least temporarily), scholarships to lower financial constraints (as in this program), information and facilitation on enrolments and class-specific contents, help with bureaucratic hurdles, or even the abolishment of some obstacles for temporary

international students would help students to settle in at the beginning. Overcoming these issues might help many students to gain new confidence and develop new skills and knowledge that are needed to live in the target country.

Altogether, more research on the impact of specific stressors and predictors and how students deal with them, as well as guided assistance from the faculty's side, might bring more insights into the study abroad phenomenon. Eventually, this will help students to make the most out of their time overseas and to reach an optimum of competencies evolving from their study abroad experience.

Knowing what an SAS can realistically achieve can further help program designers, administrators and even policy makers to take certain factors into account when developing exchange programs. Since language and academic problems were seen as major stressors already before the departure, intensive language instruction as well as preparatory units, information material or students' reports on university and academic life in the target country might be helpful in lowering students' concerns. Preparatory training seems to achieve good results in preparing students in the first place so their expectations are realistic (Cushner 1994, Bhawuk & Triandis 1996, Bhawuk & Brislin 2000). However, not just culture-specific knowledge, but general insights into culture shock and adjustment theories, possible problems and how to overcome personal, interpersonal, academic and intercultural problems, as well as general tips on organisation, budgeting and self-care, might be helpful in preparing students for the challenges to come. Interventions or culture classes during the SAS can further assist them to understand the target country and its residents better and to cope with adjustment problems. Allowing students 'cultural downtime', by contact with friends and family at home or with people of the same cultural background in the SA country, the possibility to live out their traditions and act as 'cultural ambassadors' showing interest in their culture, might help them to first learn about their own culture, before indulging in a new one, eventually overcoming their homesickness. Further, psychological assistance or mentoring provided by the host university, or even as an online distance-program by the home university, can help

students to deal with and to overcome more severe forms of distress and adjustment problems.

Nevertheless, formal education can only partially achieve this and teaching of certain attitudes (i.e. confidence, patience, willingness) and behavioural skills is especially limited. However, through knowledge, a higher motivation, and more interest in the study abroad culture and its language many obstacles can be overcome and it seems that those students generally learn and adjust well while they are overseas. Research on the impact of such preparatory training could help to prove its impact. Courses developed by language educators and interculturalists (Jackson 2011) or even by students who had previously undergone such an experience, could help to pass on first-hand knowledge, without imposing unnecessary or irrelevant knowledge on them. Another salient point is, that assessment of study abroad outcomes and effects, as a fairly young research field, needs more exploration of what instruments effectively provide an insight into students' learning process.

Observing the return unit students attended after their SAS, their immense need to reflect on their experiences and to exchange opinions on cultural matters showed that these forms of units help students to gain a wider perspective on intercultural matters and on what they had gained from the sojourn. They could now apply theoretical knowledge to their own experiences and further reflect on intercultural encounters they had during their stay. Further, their metacognitive skills on IC developed and they were shown how to apply the newly gained skills and knowledge in a professional environment. Future research that solely focuses on the effect of such return units, again including the students' perspective, will help to explore their impact and importance further. Jones (2013, 100) requests a framework to integrate "transformational student learning and the development of transferable employability skills" into higher education curricula, so that skills learnt during an overseas sojourn can be transferred into the job market. Future employers should know about SA students' unique skills and the positive impact of studying abroad, so

students have to learn how to 'sell' these and take advantage of them in a professional or academic environment.

Study abroad indeed seems to be an accelerator for all these learning processes and the acquisition of life-long skills. Since the creation of global citizens involves so many actors and factors, conducting more research in the field of intercultural competence development will be a salient task for future researchers as programs, societies and the world are continuously changing. Lastly, it should be kept in mind that "the reality of transformation may not be apparent for years; knowledge of its existence may not ever reach our consciousness" (Zull 2012, 180), but yet can affect an individual lastingly.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: REFLECTION OF INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS (RIE)

Section 2

How I see myself in intercultural contexts

These are brief notes on how you feel about various intercultural situations. Place a short comment in each topic box and, against each, tick a column conveying your feelings about this area of contact expressed on a 5-point scale:

- 1 This makes me feel very uncomfortable.
- 2 This feels strange but I make allowances.
- 3 This feels fairly normal – I have neutral feelings.
- 4 This feels quite good – I tend to be at ease.
- 5 This feels very good – I often seek out such a situation.

Here is an example of the type of answer you might give:

A	Encounters with different cultures in my own country	1	2	3	4	5
	Eating and drinking in other cultural contexts, e.g. mealtime procedures, menus etc. <i>Comment: Being offered a glass of strong spirit (like vodka?) with my starter salad in Bulgaria was strange at first, but I've acquired a taste for it!</i>					✓

My comments (examples personal to me under each heading)

A	Encounters with different cultures in my own country	1	2	3	4	5
	Eating and drinking in other cultural contexts, e.g. mealtime procedures, menus etc.					
	Encountering the different customs of people from other cultures, e.g. dress, special occasions, etc.					
	Encountering the different values of people from other cultures, e.g. rules, beliefs etc.					
	Encountering the different behaviour of people from other cultures, e.g. ways of greeting one another, courtesies, expression of feelings etc.					
	Communicating with people of different cultures, e.g. coping with their spoken language, facial expressions, hand gestures, body language etc.					
	Communicating with people of different cultures, e.g. coping with misunderstandings, a different sense of humour etc.					

B Encounters with people of different cultures in their own countries or communities		1	2	3	4	5
Coping with the customs of host countries or communities, e.g. rules and courtesies that local people observe and may expect me to observe.						
Encountering the different customs of people from other cultures, e.g. dress, special occasions, etc.						
Adapting to the rhythm of life in other cultures, e.g. getting used to different mealtimes etc.						
Integrating with the customs or behaviour of host countries, e.g. beginning to use forms of greeting that are very different from my own.						
C Encounters with different cultures in the workplace		1	2	3	4	5
Clarifying areas of uncertainty about work arrangements, e.g. describing what I am used to and asking what happens in the other culture.						
Adapting to other work practices, e.g. using unfamiliar procedures to complete a work task.						
Coping with different formalities, e.g. learning new ways of showing respect to senior colleagues from other cultures.						
Relating to colleagues from other cultures, e.g. learning what they like to talk about during work breaks.						
Being aware of issues arising within a different cultural group, e.g. learning what topics seem to be avoided and what the group's views are likely to be about a current political situation.						
Building bridges between colleagues of my own culture and those of a different culture, e.g. sensing that someone of my culture has said the wrong thing and explaining the misunderstanding to both sides.						

APPENDIX B: PRE-DEPARTURE SURVEY (S1)

study abroad

1. consent site

You are invited to participate in a study on your study abroad semester. The purpose of the study is to find out how your study abroad experience influences your intercultural communication skills. This is done by finding out about how your motivation and expectations towards your study abroad experience and its potential outcomes changes before and after your sojourn.

The study is being conducted by Beate Mueller, Department of International Studies (Tel: (02) 9850 7017, E-Mail: beate.mueller@mq.edu.au) to meet the requirements of the Doctorate of Philosophy under the supervision of Prof. Martina Möllering (Tel.: (02) 9850 7012, E-Mail: martina.mollering@mq.edu.au) of the Department of International Studies.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to fill in this short online questionnaire about your (inter-) cultural and language background as well as an online intercultural profile form. Also you are asked to answer some questions about your motivation and expectation about studying abroad and. This may take up to 30 minutes and will have to be undertaken two weeks before your departure. Resulting from your given answers there will be a second online survey after your return in which you will be asked to reflect on your experience and expectation and to self-assess your intercultural profile again. In the end of your capstone unit you will be asked for a third time to self-assess your intercultural profile and reflect on your study abroad experience. During your capstone unit you will be observed in classes, your answers about your reflections on your study abroad semester may be noted down and recorded and assessments and LEUs may be looked at to obtain more detailed information about the impact of your study abroad semester. You might even be approached by me to participate in an interview about your study abroad experience. This study provides you with an opportunity for self-assessment and reflection on your motivation, expectations and goals as well as on your preparedness for your study abroad encounter.

There will be no payment or other remunerations involved. Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential. No individual will be identified in any publication of the results. Only the Co-Investigator and partially the Chief-Investigator will have access to the data. The online survey is protected by a password and gathered data, recording and results will be securely saved and locked. A summary of the results of the intercultural profile can be made available to you on request.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary: you are not obliged to participate and if you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

By proceeding to the questionnaire I declare that I have read and understand the information above and any questions I have asked (to beate.mueller@mq.edu.au) have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without consequence.

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Committee through the Director, Research Ethics (telephone (02) 9850 7854; email ethics@mq.edu.au). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

*** 1. I have read and understand the conditions and agree to participate in the whole study.**

☒ yes

2. Please provide your MQ student number!

*** 1. student number:**

study abroad

3. Demographic Survey

Please provide some information about your person. Tick the appropriate box or fill in the gaps.

*** 1. your gender:**

☐ female

☐ male

*** 2. Your age when you will commence your study abroad semester:**

4. your study abroad experience

*** 1. Country you'll be studying in:**

☐ France

☐ Switzerland

☐ Germany

☐ Italy

☐ Spain

☐ Mexico

☐ Chile

☐ Colombia

☐ Peru

*** 2. Have you visited your study abroad country or another country where the same language is spoken before?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

5. your previous experience with your study abroad country

*** 1. If yes,
Which country/-ies?**

*** 2. When?**

☐ this/last year

☐ 2-4 years ago

☐ more than 4 years ago

Other (please specify)

study abroad

* 3. For how long?

- ☐ less than a month ☐ 1-6 months ☐ longer than 6 months ☐ other

Other (please specify)

4. What was the purpose of your stay?

- ☐ I lived/grew up there
☐ travelling
☐ visiting friends
☐ language course
☐ visiting family
☐ high-school trip/exchange
☐ studying (field trip, short term, semester abroad, degree)
☐ work/internship/language assistant
☐ other

Other (please specify)

6. your previous study abroad experience

* 1. Have you previously participated in a study abroad program? (other than the one mentioned before; tertiary education only).

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

7.

* 1. Where?

* 2. When?

- ☐ this/last year ☐ 2-4 years ago ☐ 5+ years ago ☐ other

Other (please specify)

study abroad

*3. What was the purpose/length of your stay?

- ☐ field trip/excursion
- ☐ short term program (i.e. language course)
- ☐ semester abroad
- ☐ complete degree
- ☐ other

Other (please specify)

8. your intercultural background

*1. Were you born in Australia?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

2. In which country were you born?

3. How old were you when you came to Australia

9. your intercultural background - part 2

1. What other country/-ies have you lived in? (from.....to.....)

*2. Were your parents born in Australia?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no
- ☐ only mother
- ☐ only father
- ☐ n/a

Where is he/she from?

*3. How many of your friends (including partner and previous partners) are from a different cultural/ethnic background to you?

- ☐ none ☐ few ☐ some ☐ many ☐ most of them

study abroad

4. Where were the majority of those friendships/relationships formed?

☐ here (Australia)

☐ abroad

☐ both

10. other intercultural experiences

*1. How many countries have you visited without your parents?

☐ None

☐ 1-2

☐ 3-5

☐ more than 5

2. Are there any other factors that influenced your intercultural experience?

11. your language background/skills

*1. What is your first language?

☐ English

☐ Other (please specify)

*2. For how many years have you formally learned/studied your study-abroad-country's language?

☐ 1-2 years

☐ 3-5 years

☐ 6-8 years

☐ longer

comments

study abroad

*3. How would you evaluate your study abroad country's language level according to the Common European Framework:

<input type="radio"/> A1: Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.	<input type="radio"/> A2: Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.	<input type="radio"/> B1: Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.	<input type="radio"/> B2: Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	<input type="radio"/> C1: Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.	<input type="radio"/> C2: Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
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4. How did you learn your study abroad country's language?

- ☐ using it with members of my family
- ☐ using it in the community
- ☐ high school
- ☐ university or TAFE
- ☐ evening classes/languages school
- ☐ travel
- ☐ friendships/social contacts
- ☐ work
- ☐ newspapers/magazines/books
- ☐ movies/TV/radio
- ☐ social networks (Internet, chats, Facebook etc.)
- ☐ other

Other (please specify)

study abroad

5. What other languages do you speak? (not including your study abroad country's language)

12. ...just a few more questions

***1. Before commencing the Bachelor of International Studies, had you completed course work in another subject about cultures, languages, linguistics, intercultural communication etc.?**

☐ No

☐ Yes

please specify

2. In your professional life, what do you want to become/ work in?

3. Do you think that this degree will help to realize it?

☐ Yes

☐ No

4. Do you think that studying abroad will help you to realize it?

☐ Yes

☐ No

***5. Do you plan on doing postgraduate studies?**

☐ Don't know yet

☐ No

☐ Yes

please specify

6. Do you think that studying abroad will help you with your further academic career?

☐ Yes

☐ No

13. your motivation and expectation

Please answer the questions about your interests and motivation

study abroad

*1. State to which degree you agree to the following statements!

	don't agree at all	agree a little	mostly agree	fully agree	very strongly agree
I am generally very interested in learning languages.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am generally very interested in different cultures and countries.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am generally interested in world affairs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I generally enjoy meeting people from different cultural background and communicating with them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I enjoy travelling.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I want to become a competent speaker of my target language and be able to communicate appropriately and effectively with members of the target culture.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. your expectations

Now answer the following questions shortly and tick the appropriate boxes.

*1. Why did you choose this degree?

*2. What is your main reason for studying abroad?

*3. What do you think will you learn during your semester abroad?

*4. Which situations/encounters do you think will help you to achieve this?

*5. In which situations during your semester abroad do you think you will mainly use your study abroad country's language?

*6. Which areas of daily living do you think you will easily adapt to?

*7. Which areas of daily living do you think will be hard to adjust to?

study abroad

*8. Do you feel well prepared for your study abroad semester?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If not, in which areas would you like to have more knowledge/skills?

*9. Do you think you will use your study abroad country's language after you finished your degree?

☐ No

☐ Yes

If yes, for what?

*10. Do you intend to travel a lot during your study abroad semester? (several answers possible)

☐ I already made arrangements

☐ sure, but I haven't planned anything yet

☐ I want to travel in neighboring countries

☐ only within the region of my host university

☐ not necessarily

☐ no

*11. Do you think that knowing the other language is the most important component of successfully studying abroad?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If not, please comment

12. Which other key components are important for living abroad?

13. What does it take to communicate appropriately and effectively with members of another culture?

15. personal traits

study abroad

*1. To which degree do you consider yourself to be... (Please tick)

	1 - not at all	2 - a little bit	3 - somewhat	4 - a lot	5 - completely
Respectful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Open minded	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Flexible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tolerant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
World minded	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Empathetic (ability to take the perspective of the other person)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Curious (about other cultures)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*2. To which degree do you have the following skills and behavioral traits? (Please tick)

	1 - not at all	2 - a little bit	3 - somewhat	4 - a lot	5 - completely
understand how others see the world	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
a clear understanding of my own cultural values and biases	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
a good knowledge about my study abroad country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
have a clear understanding of what one expects me to behave like in my study abroad country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
listen well	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
observe well	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
interpret well	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
adapt well to unknown or uncertain situations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
analyze and compare	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
withholding and suspending judgment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

APPENDIX C: POST-RETURN SURVEY (S2)

post return survey

*** 2. Was your study abroad semester generally what you expected?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please comment. What was good/not that good/unexpected/challenging/surprising etc.)

3. Did you have access to some sort of help or assistance with adjustment problems (i.e. by your host university, mentoring program, counselors etc.)?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please comment:

4. What was the most important outcome of your semester abroad for you personally?

*** 5. What was the most difficult thing/aspect to adapt to in your study abroad country?**

6. How did you manage to adapt to it?

7. Please provide an example of a specific encounter that was interculturally challenging or surprising. How did you react to it?

post return survey

*** 8. What areas of daily life and student life did you adjust to easily in your study abroad country?**

*** 9. At what point in time did you feel really comfortable for the first time in your study abroad country?**

- ☐ right from the beginning
- ☐ within the 1st month
- ☐ within the 2nd month
- ☐ within the 3rd month
- ☐ within the 4th month
- ☐ never

comments:

*** 10. What was your housing arrangement like during your semester abroad?**

- ☐ homestay (with host family)
- ☐ shared with other international students
- ☐ shared flat with locals
- ☐ shared with other English speaking students
- ☐ prearranged college on campus
- ☐ lived by myself without much contact to others
- ☐ Other (please specify)

post return survey

11. Did you travel a lot during your semester abroad?

- ☐ not at all
- ☐ within the area
- ☐ within the country
- ☐ to 1 or 2 neighboring countries
- ☐ to more than 2 other countries

comments:

* 12. Do you think that your study abroad country's culture is similar to your home culture?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Please comment:

* 13. Do you see your own culture with different eyes now?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Please comment:

14. How do you think members of your study abroad country's culture perceive people from your culture?

15. What did you do when you faced a situation that you didn't understand? (i.e. ask someone for an explanation, ignore it etc.)

post return survey

16. Was there one single decisive factor that made your study abroad semester very pleasant/successful/distressing/disappointing etc. or that influenced your study abroad experience especially?

*** 17. Please rate the following problems according to how often they occurred and affected you during your study abroad semester. (from '1' the most often to '9' the least often)**

	1 (very often)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 (never)	N/A
Language problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cultural (adaptation) problems (i.e. food, transportation, culture shock, health system...)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discrimination/prejudice (racial or ethnic)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Loneliness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Homesickness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Academic performance/difficulty (educational system and support, attended classes, teaching methods, requirements etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interpersonal problems (i.e. making friends, maintaining relationships, contact with others, gender behavior etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Housing problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

post return survey

* 18. Did you expect these problems? Please comment!

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please comment:

* 19. What do you think had the biggest impact on your intercultural learning process during your study abroad semester? (Rank the following items according to how they influenced you during your study abroad experience with '1' being the most influential and '11' the least)

	1 (very strong influence)	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11 (no influence)	N/A
Studying	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers and fellow students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Living away from my parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Travelling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being surrounded by/speaking a different language/s	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friends from the host culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
International friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friends of the same mother tongue	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Living in a different city/country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

post return survey

* 20. How would you evaluate your capabilities of your target language(your study abroad country's language)now?

- ☐ 1.I can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. I can introduce myself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where I live, people I know and things I have. I can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.
- ☐ 2.I can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. I can describe in simple terms aspects of my background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
- ☐ 3.I can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
- ☐ 4.I can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in my field of specialisation. I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. I can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
- ☐ 5.I can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. I can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
- ☐ 6.I can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. I can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. I can express myself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.

* 21. In which area/s do you think you improved your language skills the most?

- ☐ speaking
- ☐ writing
- ☐ listening comprehension
- ☐ reading comprehension

Which situations can you now confidently master in the target language?

post return survey

*** 22. Did you generally find it easy to get along with your knowledge of the target language?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please comment:

*** 23. What percentage did the target language have in your everyday communication compared to English/your mother tongue.**

☐ about 0-10% target language

☐ about 25% t.l.

☐ 50/50

☐ about 75% t.l.

☐ mainly target language

☐ other (please specify)

*** 24. In which situations/with whom did you mainly use the target language?**

☐ locals

☐ local students and teachers

☐ international people/students

☐ host family

☐ other (please specify)

25. Was there any particular situation you remember when communication with members of the target country failed? Why do you think communication failed? Please comment:

post return survey

*** 26. Do you think you could successfully mediate between people of your own and your study abroad culture? (i.e. explaining why misunderstandings happened, mediating problems etc.)**

- ☐ yes
- ☐ not sure
- ☐ no

27. What helped you most to improve the host language while you were overseas?

*** 28. Do you think you will use your target language after your degree?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Please comment: Which situations? Why not?

*** 29. What does it take to communicate appropriately and effectively with members of another culture?**

*** 30. Do you think that knowing the other language is the most important component of successfully living abroad?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Please comment:

31. What other key components are important for living and studying abroad?

post return survey

* 32. Do you think you were well prepared for your study-abroad semester?

☐ Yes

☐ No

What skills/knowledge/attitudes etc. do you think were insufficient?

* 33. To which degree do you have the following skills and behavioral traits?

	1=Not at all	2=a little bit	3=somewhat	4=a lot	5=completely
Understand how others see the world	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A clear understanding of my own cultural values and biases	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A good knowledge about my study abroad country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have a clear understanding of what one expects me to behave like in my study abroad country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
listen well	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
observe well	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
interpret well	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
adapt well to unknown or uncertain situations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
analyze and compare	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
withholding and suspending judgment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

post return survey

* 34. Which of these skills do you think changed the most throughout your study abroad semester?

- ☐ understand how others see the world
- ☐ a clear understanding of my own cultural values and biases
- ☐ a good knowledge about my study abroad country
- ☐ have a clear understanding of what one expects me to behave like in my study abroad country
- ☐ listen well
- ☐ observe well
- ☐ interpret well
- ☐ adapt well to unknown or uncertain situations
- ☐ analyze and compare
- ☐ withholding and suspending judgment
- ☐ none of the above

* 35. To which degree do you consider yourself to be... (Please tick)

	1=Not at all	2=a little bit	3=I agree	4=a lot	5=completely
respectful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
open minded	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
flexible	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
tolerant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
world minded	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
non-judgmental	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
empathetic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

* 36. Which of these traits do you think changed the most throughout your study abroad?

- ☐ respectful
- ☐ open minded
- ☐ flexible
- ☐ tolerant
- ☐ world minded
- ☐ non-judgmental
- ☐ empathetic
- ☐ none of the above

post return survey

* 37. State to which degree you agree to the following statements:

	don't agree at all	agree a little	agree	fully agree	very strongly agree
I am generally very interested in learning languages.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am generally very interested in different cultures and countries.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am generally interested in world affairs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I generally enjoy meeting people from different cultural background and communicating with them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I enjoy travelling.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I want to become a competent speaker of my target language and be able to communicate appropriately and effectively with members of the target culture.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 38. Most of the friends I made during my semester abroad were....

- ☐ from my home country (or with the same first language)
- ☐ from the host country
- ☐ international
- ☐ other (please specify)

* 39. Do you plan on doing postgraduate studies?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure yet

If so, in what field?

post return survey

40. Do you think that having studied abroad will help you with your future academic career?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not sure

Please comment:

41. In your professional life, what do you want to do?

42. Do you think that having studied abroad will help you to pursue your career goals?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not sure

Please comment:

*** 43. Would you recommend studying abroad to other students?**

- ☐ Yes
☐ Not

Please comment:

44. Do you expect any problems upon your return to your home country? (Have any occurred yet?) (i.e. reintegrating, friendship and family relations, returning to your former life/studies etc.) Why is that? Please comment:

post return survey

45. Is there anything that you learned/adapted to overseas that you want to keep/integrate in your life after your return?

APPENDIX D: POST-SEMESTER SURVEY (S3)

post semester survey

***2. Please read the information above carefully and tick the box below to proceed with the survey.**

☐ I have read and understood the information above and agree with it.

comments:

***3. Please provide your student number, so that we can match your survey with previous surveys.**

***4. What was your main reason for studying abroad? Was your study abroad semester generally what you expected?**

***5. Do you think you made the most out of your exchange?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please comment

***6. Would you recommend studying abroad to other students?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please comment

post semester survey

*7. How would you evaluate your capabilities of your target language(your study abroad country's language) now?

- ☐ 1.I can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. I can introduce myself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where I live, people I know and things I have. I can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.
- ☐ 2.I can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. I can describe in simple terms aspects of my background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
- ☐ 3.I can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
- ☐ 4.I can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in my field of specialisation. I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. I can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
- ☐ 5.I can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. I can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
- ☐ 6.I can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. I can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. I can express myself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.

*8. In which area/-s do you think you improved your language skills the most?

- ☐ speaking
- ☐ writing
- ☐ listening comprehension
- ☐ reading comprehension

Which situations can you now confidently master in the target language?

*9. Do you think that knowing the other language is the most important component of successfully living abroad?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Please comment:

post semester survey

***10. What other key components are important for sucessfully living abroad? (Please tick as many boxes as you see as essential)**

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> cultural awareness | <input type="checkbox"/> motivation | <input type="checkbox"/> independence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> understanding of other cultures | <input type="checkbox"/> making friends | <input type="checkbox"/> flexibility |
| <input type="checkbox"/> tolerance | <input type="checkbox"/> regular communication with family and friends at home | <input type="checkbox"/> knowledge of country and its people |
| <input type="checkbox"/> understanding social etiquette and cultural mannerism | <input type="checkbox"/> confidence | <input type="checkbox"/> being outgoing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> being open minded | <input type="checkbox"/> maturity | <input type="checkbox"/> willingness to adapt |
| <input type="checkbox"/> willingness to interact with locals | <input type="checkbox"/> cross-cultural sensitivity | <input type="checkbox"/> already knowing people in the target country |
| <input type="checkbox"/> budgeting | <input type="checkbox"/> financial support | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> friendliness | <input type="checkbox"/> good accommodation | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | | |

11. What sort of skills and knowledge does one need to STUDY at a university overseas? Did you have these before you left or did you gain them during your exchange? Please comment:

post semester survey

***12. How will you continue using your target language in the future? (multiple answers possible)**

- ☐ travel
- ☐ work
- ☐ in language classes
- ☐ using media
- ☐ entertainment and books
- ☐ when living in a country where the language is spoken
- ☐ my next degree
- ☐ family and friends
- ☐ not at all
- ☐ Other (please specify)

***13. Do you think you could successfully mediate between people of your own and your study abroad culture? (i.e. explaining why misunderstandings happened, mediating problems etc.)**

- ☐ yes
- ☐ not sure
- ☐ no

Please comment

***14. To which degree do you consider yourself to be... (Please tick)**

	1=Not at all	2=a little bit	3=I agree	4=a lot	5=completely
respectful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
open minded	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
flexible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
tolerant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
world minded	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
empathetic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

post semester survey

***15. Which of these traits do you think changed the most throughout your study abroad?**

- ☐ respectful
- ☐ open minded
- ☐ flexible
- ☐ tolerant
- ☐ world minded
- ☐ non-judgmental
- ☐ empathetic
- ☐ none of the above

***16. State to which degree you agree to the following statements:**

	don't agree at all	agree a little	agree	fully agree	very strongly agree
I am generally very interested in learning languages.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am generally very interested in different cultures and countries.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am generally interested in world affairs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I generally enjoy meeting people from different cultural background and communicating with them.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I enjoy travelling.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I want to become a competent speaker of my target language and be able to communicate appropriately and effectively with members of the target culture.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

post semester survey

*17. To which degree do you have the following skills and behavioral traits?

	1=Not at all	2=a little bit	3=somewhat	4=a lot	5=completely
Understand how others see the world	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A clear understanding of my own cultural values and biases	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A good knowledge about my study abroad country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have a clear understanding of what one expects me to behave like in my study abroad country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
listen well	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
observe well	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interpret well	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
adapt well to unknown or uncertain situations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
analyze and compare	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
withholding and suspending judgment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*18. Which of these skills do you think changed the most throughout your study abroad semester?

- ☐ understand how others see the world
- ☐ a clear understanding of my own cultural values and biases
- ☐ a good knowledge about my study abroad country
- ☐ have a clear understanding of what one expects me to behave like in my study abroad country
- ☐ listen well
- ☐ observe well
- ☐ Interpret well
- ☐ adapt well to unknown or uncertain situations
- ☐ analyze and compare
- ☐ withholding and suspending judgment
- ☐ none of the above

post semester survey

*** 19. Do you think you're still the same person as before your exchange?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please comment on what changed (or not) and why did it change?

*** 20. Has your study abroad sojourn changed you in terms of how you communicate with and see foreigners in your own country now?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please comment

*** 21. Do you see your own culture with different eyes now?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please comment

*** 22. Have you faced any problems since your return to Australia? (i.e. reintegrating, friendship and family relations, returning to your former life/studies etc.) Why is that?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please comment

post semester survey

***23. Did your study abroad semester contribute in any way to how prepared you feel for the next steps in your life?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please comment

***24. Do you think that having studied abroad offers you advantages in your future career?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please comment! What kind of advantages?

***25. Did your career goals change since your return?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

If so, how and why?

***26. Do you think that having studied abroad offers you advantages in your future academic endeavors?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ N/A

Please comment: What kind of advantages?

post semester survey

***27. Do you think you could successfully work together with people from your target culture in a professional environment either in Australia or abroad?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

Please comment

***28. Do you think you could successfully work together with people of a different cultural background than yours and your study abroad country's?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

Please comment

post semester survey

***29. How important do you think will the following things be for your future? (Please tick as many categories as are important to you and comment on what is the most important one)**

- ☐ Knowing a foreign language
- ☐ In-depth knowledge about one culture (your target culture)
- ☐ Knowledge about cultures and cultural phenomena in general
- ☐ Knowledge about how people communicate and socio-cultural phenomena in general
- ☐ Intercultural competence
- ☐ Being able to communicate effectively and appropriately with people of different cultural backgrounds
- ☐ Making meaningful relationships with people of a different cultural background
- ☐ Being able to travel independently
- ☐ Knowing that you could survive in any country
- ☐ Having international friends
- ☐ Being able to adapt to different cultural settings
- ☐ Having mastered the academic challenges of a different educational setting
- ☐ Having lived with people from different cultural backgrounds
- ☐ Gaining a different perspective on my own culture
- ☐ Being able to solve intercultural misunderstandings or problems

Please comment or add

30. Were the following activities and assessment tools useful regarding the reflection on your study abroad experience. (Please tick what was useful!)

- ☐ Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters
- ☐ Language portfolio
- ☐ Group talks and presentations in class

APPENDIX E: ETHICS APPROVAL



Faculty of Arts Research Office
Building W6A, Room 233
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109

Phone +61 (0)2 9850 9663
Fax +61 (0)2 9850 7054
Email ArtsRO@mq.edu.au

25 November 2010

Reference: 5201001316(D)

Prof. Martina Möllering
Department of International Studies
W6A213
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY NSW 2109

Dear Prof. Möllering,

FINAL APPROVAL

Title of project: 'Effects and Outcomes of a Study Abroad Semester on Bachelor of International Studies Students.'

Thank you for your responses to the Faculty of Arts Human Research Ethics Committee conditions of approval, as outlined in our email dated 3 November 2010. Your responses have been reviewed by the Chair of the Committee and approval of the above application is granted effective 25 November 2010, and you may now proceed with your research. The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

Prof. Martina Möllering - Chief Investigator/Supervisor
Beate Müller - Co-Investigator

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1. The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*.
2. Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision of annual reports. Your first progress report is due on 25 November 2011.

If you complete the work earlier than you had planned, you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to submit a Final Report on the project.

Progress Reports and Final Reports are available at the following website:
http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics/forms

FACULTY OF ARTS ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE (HUMAN RESEARCH)
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics

www.mq.edu.au

3. If the project has run for more than five (5) years, you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).
4. All amendments to the project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee before implementation. Please complete and submit a Request for Amendment Form available at the following website:

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/forms

5. Please notify the Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
6. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University. This information is available at:
<http://www.research.mq.edu.au/policy>

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/policy

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project, it is your responsibility to provide Macquarie University's Research Grants Management Assistant with a copy of this letter as soon as possible. Internal and External funding agencies will not be informed that you have final approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Management Assistant has received a copy of this letter.

Yours sincerely



Andrew Buck
Professor
Associate Dean Research Faculty of Arts
Chair, Faculty of Arts Human Research Ethics Committee

Copy: Beate Müller

FACULTY OF ARTS ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE (HUMAN RESEARCH)
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/researchers/ethics/human_ethics