

1 **Author:** Dr. Ekaterina Arshavskaya
2 **Affiliation:** Assistant Professor at Languages, Philosophy, and Communication
3 Studies Department, Utah State University

4 **Email:** ekaterina.a@usu.edu

5 **Promoting intercultural competence in diverse U.S. classrooms through**
6 **ethnographic interviews**

7 To meet the demands of contemporary society, students need to develop the ability to interact
8 effectively with people from different cultures. To advance this goal, a project involving
9 ethnographic interviews was introduced to an intercultural communication course. Participating
10 students' attitudes toward other cultures were measured on a Likert scale at the beginning and end
11 of the project. The findings show that through the interviews, the students developed greater
12 awareness of their own cultures and of themselves within their culture and deepened their
13 knowledge of other cultures. Yet, the majority of the students did not show greater interest in
14 learning a foreign language at the end of the project. Further, even though the students did learn
15 about other cultures, their responses to becoming more open to other cultures were inconclusive.

16 The article discusses possible reasons for these outcomes and outlines future research directions.

17 **Keywords:** intercultural competence; international students; U.S. university classrooms;
18 ethnography; undergraduate education

19 **Introduction**

20 With 1.13 million international students participating in higher education in the US (U.S.
21 Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2015), both U.S. faculty and students face the challenge
22 of developing intercultural competence, including in relation to understanding the cultural
23 realities of international students and faculty members and their families. Given this context,

24 intercultural competence has constituted a recent focus in both the K-12 and higher education
25 literature. One way to promote intercultural competence is through intercultural experiential
26 learning. In terms of promoting intercultural competence on the part of faculty, research focuses
27 on preparing pre-service teachers for diverse classrooms through intercultural teaching
28 practicums (e.g., Black & Bernades, 2014; Smolcic, 2009). In order to foster intercultural
29 competence on the part of students, ideas related to students' engagement in ethnographic
30 interviews (i.e., interviews of members of a different culture to discuss their lifestyles, values,
31 etc.) have become popular in both foreign and second language university classrooms (e.g.,
32 Bateman, 2002; O'Dowd, 2006; Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996). Generally, these studies
33 report that ethnographic interviews help students develop greater intercultural competence.

34 The purpose of the present study is to promote and investigate the development of
35 intercultural competence in both second language and native English-speaking students through
36 engagement in ethnographic interviews. This research makes a unique contribution to the field,
37 as unlike existing research focused on the attitudes of U.S. college students towards other
38 cultures and languages, it sheds light on the perspectives of international second language
39 students residing in the U.S., as these unfold in their reports and focus-group discussions. The
40 implications of these perspectives for educators working with this group of students are also
41 discussed. In addition, a control group and an experimental group are used to evaluate the impact
42 of ethnographic interviews on students' intercultural competence.

43 The paper is organized as follows. The next section summarizes the literature followed by
44 a section dedicated to the design of the study. Then, the results are presented and discussed. The
45 final section offers a conclusion and reflects on the study's limitations and future research
46 directions.

47 **Literature review**

48 This paper is based on prominent language educators' (e.g., Kramersch, 1997; Schulz, 2007) call to
49 introduce a cultural component to language classes. Although many students recognize the
50 importance of speaking a foreign language in the contemporary globally integrated landscape, they
51 may not always be successful in intercultural encounters due to a lack of intercultural competence
52 (Christie, 2007; Schenker, 2002). In this paper, intercultural competence is understood as the
53 ability to interact successfully with members of other cultures in a foreign language (Byram, 1997).
54 This study also uses Byram's (1997) model of intercultural competence, which involves openness
55 to and curiosity about other cultures and an interest in studying foreign languages. Additionally,
56 international students in the U.S. often find themselves isolated from the local community, which
57 limits their opportunities to practice English (Smith, 1993). Therefore, ethnographic interviews
58 conducted in English are a partial way of addressing these shortcomings in the student experience,
59 as they enable international students to practice English and develop social relations with English-
60 speaking peers and enable the latter to develop intercultural competence.

61 In the context of foreign-language education, a number of research studies focus on
62 introducing a unit on intercultural competence into the language education curriculum with the
63 goal of promoting openness toward other cultures and increasing students' interest in studying
64 languages in general. To achieve these goals, Robinson-Stuart and Nocon (1996) introduced
65 ethnographic interviews to U.S. college students in an elementary-level Spanish course. The
66 students interviewed a Spanish-speaking person by applying ethnographic interview skills
67 demonstrated in class. As a result, the students reported greater understanding of their own culture
68 and the culture of the Spanish-speaking interviewees. In a replication study, U.S. college students
69 taking their second year of Spanish as a foreign language were required to interview a native

70 speaker of Spanish (Bateman, 2002). The results show that the students developed a more positive
71 attitude towards the language and its speakers; yet, their desire to learn Spanish remained largely
72 unchanged.

73 Another way to introduce a cultural component to language instruction is to assign cultural
74 research projects. Li and Liu (2017) showed that through research projects, U.S. learners of
75 Chinese became more motivated to study Chinese, more positive toward other cultures, and more
76 aware of differences and similarities between U.S. and Chinese cultures. Another strand of
77 research investigates the impact of study abroad programs on students' intercultural competence.
78 According to these studies, institutions need to provide training to students before study abroad
79 programs and offer ongoing support while they are abroad in order to maximize their opportunities
80 for learning about other cultures (Scally, 2015; Schartner, 2016; Townsin, 2015). Such training can
81 promote students' interest in intercultural encounters, raise their awareness of linguistic and
82 cultural differences, and support their engagement in academic endeavors while abroad (Townsin,
83 2015). Other research studies explore the use of folk literature and films to enhance students'
84 intercultural competence (Devis Arbona & Chireac, 2015; Xue & Pan, 2012). These studies report
85 that foreign-language literature and films promote curiosity about other cultures, expose students
86 to authentic language, and serve as a springboard for in-class discussions about variations in
87 cultural values.

88 In the English as a foreign language (EFL) context, an emerging body of research focuses
89 on students' intercultural competence. For example, Lázár (2015) introduced an intercultural
90 collaboration project involving EFL students in four European countries. While some students
91 experienced instances of miscommunication, most students reported developing greater
92 intercultural competence towards the end of the project. Also, O'Dowd (2006) involved EFL

93 learners in Germany in an intercultural online collaboration project with their American
94 counterparts. O'Dowd (2006) used both synchronous (video conferencing) and asynchronous
95 (email) tools and found that both tools facilitated students' ability to conduct ethnographic
96 interviews. Likewise, Thomé-Williams (2016) engaged U.S. students of Portuguese in online
97 interactions with native speakers of Portuguese in Brazil via Skype and Facebook. Some of the
98 U.S. students did not approve of using Facebook for instructional purposes. However, most
99 reported enjoying the project and showed greater linguistic and intercultural competence through
100 it.

101 Another strand of research grapples with ideas related to assessing the extent of the
102 intercultural competence achieved by students. For instance, Jacobson, Sleicher, and Maureen
103 (1999) showed how using portfolios facilitated English as a second language (ESL) students'
104 reflections on their cross-cultural encounters while in the U.S. This study also outlines criteria to
105 evaluate the extent of intercultural competence through this assignment. Elola and Oskoz (2008)
106 applied Byram's (2000) assessment guidelines to evaluating the intercultural competence of both
107 study abroad and at home foreign language students as demonstrated in their blogs. Finally, Lee
108 (2011) found that although students were mostly successful in generating their own content related
109 to cross-cultural issues in study abroad blogs, they often failed to think critically about readings
110 on cross-cultural topics posted by the course instructor.

111 The existing research discussing students' intercultural competence is abundant and multi-
112 faceted. However, the purpose of the present study is to contribute to the literature by shedding
113 light on the perspectives of international undergraduate students residing in the US. Further, unlike
114 existing research, a control group and an experimental group are used to assess the impact of
115 ethnographic interviews on students' intercultural competence.

116 **Study design**

117 *Participants and settings*

118 The study involved two groups of first-year undergraduate college students: an
119 experimental group comprising 26 international and 16 U.S. students, and a control group
120 comprising 24 international and 15 U.S. students. The data were collected over three semesters.
121 International students in both the experimental and control groups were placed in advanced-level
122 ESL courses in an intensive English program, which was the context of the study. Before the
123 semester, all the international students took a placement exam. At the time of the data collection,
124 all the students (U.S. and international) were enrolled in an intercultural communication course
125 at a U.S. public university. International students were required to take the intercultural
126 communication course based on their placement exam results. The intercultural communication
127 course combines language and content instruction for international advanced-level language
128 learners, while U.S. students were enrolled in this course as an elective. At the start of the
129 semester, all the students also completed a background questionnaire (Appendix A). The U.S.
130 students were predominantly from the same U.S. southwestern state and lived here most of their
131 lives. Two-thirds of this population consisted of male students in their twenties. Over 90% of
132 these students did not travel outside the U.S. In addition, two-thirds of U.S. students had none or
133 very limited knowledge of a foreign language, predominantly Spanish. Students in the control
134 and experimental groups were taught by the same instructor with identical materials.

135 The international students in the experimental group hailed from a number of countries,
136 including Taiwan, Japan, Qatar, South Korea, Somali, Algeria, China, and Iraq. In the control
137 group, the international students were from China, Thailand, Mexico, Taiwan, Japan, South

138 Korea, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The majority of international students in both groups
139 were from China.

140 The students in the experimental group were introduced to ideas related to ethnographic
141 interviews and were asked to interview a classmate or another person from a different culture
142 using the ethnographic interview skills discussed in class (Appendix B) and focusing on a topic
143 of interest (e.g., lifestyle, values, beliefs, etc., in a different country). Generally, the students
144 were encouraged to individually interview one of their classmates from a different culture.
145 Before the project, the students were asked their preference in regard to the country of origin of
146 the interviewee. If their preference was not available (e.g., there was only one Japanese speaker
147 in the class), the students sought interviewees outside the class. The students were asked to meet
148 with the interviewee at least two or more times. Towards the end of the project, the students
149 presented their findings in oral presentations and written reports. The written reports were
150 collected and analyzed using conventional qualitative methods. The students in the control group
151 were not assigned ethnographic interviews.

152 The assignment involving ethnographic interviews (Appendix C) developed for the
153 experimental group was grounded in Robinson's (1988) theory of intercultural learning, which
154 privileges one-on-one interactions between members of different cultures. Also, the theory posits
155 that during cross-cultural encounters, focusing on similarities first reduces or even eliminates the
156 potential for distancing, which may occur due to cultural differences. Accordingly, the students
157 were required to focus on both cross-cultural similarities and differences. Further, students were
158 asked to state the similarities that emerged between themselves and the person interviewed.

159 The ethnographic interview project required students to (1) report what they learned
160 about a different culture using at least three course concepts (e.g., culture, identity, and

161 language), (2) discuss cross-cultural similarities and/or differences of which they became aware,
162 and (3) narrate any personal insights gained, i.e., what they learned about themselves.

163 In order to evaluate the impact of the ethnographic interviews on the students'
164 intercultural competence, their attitudes towards studying other languages and cultures were
165 measured via Likert-scale items (Appendix D) at the beginning and towards the end of the
166 project. The Likert-scale items were designed to evaluate the extent of intercultural competence
167 students developed through doing the project. For example, they were asked about how likely
168 they thought knowledge of a foreign language would allow them to make new friends or whether
169 a foreign language requirement was a good educational policy. International students were
170 required to consider Likert-scale items regarding English, while U.S. students were asked to rate
171 the same statements, but with regard to a foreign language they may know. Likert-scales items
172 were adapted from Bateman (2002) and Robinson-Stuart and Nocon (1996). The range of the
173 Likert-scale items was 1 from 5. The minimum point on the scale amounted to 1 (i.e., strongly
174 disagree), while the maximum point equaled 5 (i.e., strongly agree).

175 Through focus groups, several students in the experimental group were also surveyed at
176 the end of the project regarding their views of ethnographic interviews overall (Appendix E).
177 Focus group questionnaire was adapted from Bateman (2002) and O'Dowd (2006).

178 ***Research question***

179 The central research question explored was 'How does conducting an ethnographic interview
180 with a member of a different culture impact participants' intercultural competence?'

181 ***Data analysis***

182 The data analysis was performed in two steps: a qualitative analysis of the students' written reports

183 and focus group data and an analysis using conventional statistical methods of quantitative data.
184 The mixed-method approach was based on Bateman (2002) and Robinson-Stuart and Nocon
185 (1996). The objective of the qualitative analysis of students' reports and focus group data was to
186 investigate how the ethnographic interview project impacted development of intercultural
187 competence of students in the experimental group, while the goal of the quantitative data analysis
188 was to determine whether the introduction of the ethnographic interview project made a significant
189 difference in students' attitudes towards a culture and a language other than their own.

190 First, qualitative data from the students' written reports were analysed using conventional
191 qualitative methods (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researcher (also, the author of this article
192 and the instructor) read the reports multiple times to identify the most salient themes prevalent in
193 the dataset. The initial themes were revised using the constant comparison method (Glaser &
194 Strauss, 1967): i.e., texts representing the same theme were re-read and reconsidered in terms of
195 the main theme description. In accordance with the grounded theory method (Charmaz, 1990),
196 the analysis was informed by previous research discussing international students' experiences
197 (e.g., Jacobson, Sleicher, & Maureen, 1999). However, as in most investigations, the method
198 chosen has limitations (Bryant & Charmaz, 2006). In particular, the researcher was the sole
199 coder of the qualitative data. Yet, as a former international student in the U.S., she had
200 experiences similar to those of the international students in the study and therefore, could offer
201 an insider's perspective and empathy toward the participating international students.

202 Triangulation (Nunan, 1992) was achieved through the students' evaluations of the
203 impact of ethnographic interviews on their intercultural competence in focus group settings. The
204 students in the experimental group were asked via email to participate in focus group
205 discussions. Several students replied. A moderator facilitated the focus groups, which were

206 conducted in a university classroom. The focus group session lasted approximately 1 hour. The
207 researcher attended the session, but did not participate. At the end of the session, which was
208 audio-recorded for transcription purposes, the participants were asked to complete a
209 questionnaire (Appendix E).

210 Second, based on the quantitative data, statistical tools (i.e., chi-squared tests) were used
211 to compare the attitudes of the students in the control group towards studying foreign languages
212 and other cultures with those of the students in the experimental group (Jamieson, 2004).
213 Following guidelines outlined in educational research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000), a
214 non-parametric test (i.e., a chi-squared test) was used to evaluate the significance of the findings.
215 For this purpose, frequencies, standard deviation (*SD*), and means (*M*) were calculated for
216 Likert-scale items prior to and after the project in the experimental group and at the start and end
217 of the semester in the control group.

218 **Results**

219 *Qualitative findings*

220 In accord with conventional qualitative methods, several salient themes were identified in the
221 students' reports. Most of the participants focused on (1) learning more about themselves and their
222 own culture, (2) committing to explore other cultures, (3) discussing cultural similarities rather
223 than differences, and (4) acknowledging the limiting nature of stereotyping. A series of excerpts,
224 which illustrate the students' responses, is given next.

225 *Learning more about themselves and their own culture*

226 In terms of self-reflection, some international students reflected on the need to become more
227 active class participants. This realization is particularly important for international students who

228 plan to continue studying at a U.S. university. The bold text in each dataset demonstrates its
229 most important aspects for the analysis:

230 Excerpt 1.

231 **What I learned about myself is that I shouldn't be shy and silent in class, but be**
232 **more active to share my opinion in class and should participate in many kinds of**
233 **activities to exercise my practical ability....** U.S. students start this early, even in
234 kindergarten.... And what I learned about cross-cultural differences and similarities is
235 that we should respect other cultures and any culture has its advantages and
236 disadvantages, so we should adopt our good points and avoid our shortcomings. (An
237 international student's written report)

238 Another international student stressed the need to interact more with U.S. faculty, which
239 differs from the educational experience in some students' home cultures:

240 Excerpt 2.

241 **All in all, I think I should adjust my learning attitude to the American way. Because**
242 **by interacting with teachers, you can know how much your understanding on the**
243 **subject is, and then you may improve it.** (An international student's written report)

244 Similarly, U.S. students commented that they had gained more understanding of their
245 own as well as other educational cultures. This insight led to a better understanding of their own
246 educational preferences, a finding that will be helpful in future academic endeavors:

247 Excerpt 3.

248 After evaluating the differences between the U.S. educational system and the Chinese
249 educational system, I was able to see advantages and disadvantages to both systems.... **I**
250 **was able to learn more about myself in the sense of what education styles work best**
251 **for me.** I believe that having a more relaxed learning atmosphere provides me with a
252 more positive attitude towards school, which in turn helps my overall college success.
253 Having some freedom to choose my classes also helps me better understand myself and
254 my strengths and weaknesses. **I've gained a greater appreciation for the education I**
255 **have already received and have yet to receive.** (A U.S. student's written report)

256 Another U.S. student focused on some personal insights gained through the project that
257 would have a positive impact on his future more generally:

258 Excerpt 4.

259 I honestly am grateful for this opportunity to talk with and learn about someone from a
260 different country and completely different culture and **am sure that I will be able to**
261 **apply many of my findings into my life to become a successful person.** (A U.S.
262 student's written report)

263 Likewise, international students reported learning about a different approach to life through
264 the project:

265 Excerpt 5.

266 After communicating with American students this time, **their words gave me a lot of**
267 **courage and considerations....** Many things cannot be planned in life ... so the important
268 thing is to not worry too much about future and just live in the moment and do your best
269 now. (An international student's written report)

270 *Committing to explore other cultures*

271 After the project, many U.S. and international students expressed a desire to explore other
272 cultures:

273 Excerpt 6.

274 **I hope I can have more chances to learn more about the different cultures from**
275 **different countries.** I have to say this interview is like a wonderful trip! (An international
276 student's written report)

277 Another student not only reported increased interest in other cultures, but also explicated
278 reasons for this interest:

279 Excerpt 7.

280 According to this interview, I think I should go out for travel and read more books....

281 **Because it allows me to understand the differences between cultures more directly**
282 **and can reduce the stereotypes and culture shock about different culture. It can**
283 **broaden my horizons.** When I talk with people who have the different life environment,
284 if I know a lot of things, the communication between us will be more smooth. That can
285 also help us to be friends. **In the other word, I am willing to make friends with**
286 **brilliant and wise people.** (An international student's written report)

287 Similarly, U.S. students reported becoming more interested in other cultures:

288 Excerpt 8.

289 I am so grateful that I had this opportunity to interview and learn about life in China. I
290 love the Chinese culture and hope to visit someday.... **I believe that this assignment**
291 **alone has changed my life considerably; my desire to travel, learn, and experience**
292 **other cultures has grown and I have realized I want this to be a part of me for the**

293 **rest of my life.** (A U.S. student's written report)

294 Furthermore, some students thought the project meant they were better prepared to travel
295 abroad:

296 Excerpt 9.

297 In this interview, I get some new things about Muslim in Somalia. They shock me. **If I**
298 **have no this interview and I go to Muslim region for travel, I think some habits will**
299 **shock me at that time....** After this interview, I know these habits before I go there, thus
300 it will decrease my culture shock in the future. (An international student's written report)

301 Other students mentioned making a friend from a different culture through the project:

302 Excerpt 10.

303 **It is well worth all the effort in the end to have such a new and diverse friend.** (A
304 U.S. student's written report)

305 Some students even compared the assignment to travelling abroad:

306 Excerpt 11.

307 I learned a lot from this assignment, **I really feel that I am one of them and I feel like I**
308 **lived there,** actually this is the first time I learn that much about a country. (An international
309 student's written report)

310 Some other students expressed appreciation for the personal aspect of the assignment:

311 Excerpt 12.

312 **If I did not do this interview, I would never know about the inside ideas of Americans.**

313 I received tons of information about the education in America from social media....

314 Although there were some truly good analyses among them, **there is nothing can compare**
315 **to a personal experience.** Only by this way you can deeply know the core of the culture,

316 or you would just see the surface of the culture. (An international student's written report)

317 *Discussing cultural similarities rather than differences*

318 Many students focused on cultural similarities rather than differences:

319 Excerpt 13.

320 She and I do look different and act different but **when I looked deeper I found out that**
321 **she and I are really not so different.** She and I are expected to have kids and get
322 married but we also want jobs and to see the world. We do fit into our gender roles but
323 we also aren't bitter about it like some people I know. We both want our culture to grow
324 and change for the better. (A U.S. student's written report)

325 Another U.S. student highlighted similarities between himself and the person he had
326 interviewed, but in more general terms:

327 Excerpt 14.

328 **I find that we are one in the same** if you dig deep enough through that onion model.
329 The outside edges might seem completely different such as the iceberg model suggests
330 that what we see on the surface can't be taken at face value.... Yes, we will have our
331 differences. But let us always remember that what unites us far outweighs whatever
332 divides us. (A U.S. student's written report)

333 An international student noted that due to some similarities in values, she found it easy to
334 relate to the interviewee:

335 Excerpt 15.

336 This has been a great opportunity for me to discuss with an individual their culture, what
337 they value, and how they perceive the world around them. It has given me an opportunity
338 to think about what I value. Not only that, but how the cultures that surround me have

339 influenced me. I've also learned that even though Tibetan and United States cultures are
340 different in that the U.S. is more individualistic and a low power distance, **but that we**
341 **are similar** in being more direct.... My partner and I found that **what we value is very**
342 **similar**, not only because of our cultures, but because of religious beliefs. **It has been**
343 **interesting to find those similarities and be able to relate on those levels.** (An
344 international student's written report)

345 *Limiting nature of stereotyping*

346 One of the other salient themes in both the U.S. and the international students' data concerned
347 their becoming aware of the limitations of stereotypes and the need to refrain from relying on
348 stereotypes:

349 Excerpt 16.

350 I was able to learn so much about [the student's name] and her culture. **It was really**
351 **interesting to be able to hear how China is very different from the way it is**
352 **portrayed in media**, and pretty awesome to realize that even though they are on the
353 other side of the world, they are very similar to us here, in the U.S. (A U.S. student's
354 written report)

355 Another U.S. student also focused on the stereotypes of the Chinese culture, particularly
356 those relating to parenting styles:

357 Excerpt 17.

358 The differences and similarities of these cross-cultural meetings were that I noticed that
359 like us American students and as a people we are all different. **This is very true of the**
360 **Chinese as well as shown that unlike what stereotyping might suggest, [the student's**
361 **name] parents weren't and aren't overbearing/control freaks. This leads to that**

362 **even though cultures might be very far apart, but in the things that matter I find**
363 **that we are one in the same.** (A U.S. student's written report)

364 Similarly, international students argued against stereotyping people or cultures and for
365 the need to 'step back and look at the person for who they are, not who we think they are.'

366 Excerpt 18.

367 I come from the north part of China. I know that there are many differences in our life,
368 food is the only one part of that. With the development of the whole society, we
369 definitely have to communicate with others who come from a different city, a different
370 country with a different culture. **At that time, we could not use our stereotypes to**
371 **think of our friends because they come from the different culture....**What we need to
372 do is to respect their culture. At the same time, we need to find some similarity between
373 us. (An international student's written report)

374 Another international student focused on the limiting nature of stereotyping as a major
375 personal discovery:

376 Excerpt 19.

377 **I think that my main discovery was that I cannot stereotype any culture.** Everyone is
378 different and individual. However, many may be similar in one culture because they are
379 in that culture and surrounded by similar things. For instance, in China there is a strong
380 high power distance, so they learn to respect teachers, leaders, and bosses much more and
381 value silence. (An international student's written report)

382 In addition, various themes emerged from the focus group relating to the impact of
383 ethnographic interviews on students' intercultural competence (e.g., 'fixing' some stereotypes).

384 The focus group also discussed the advantages of conducting actual interviews over searching
385 for information online. Lastly, the focus group tended to like ethnographic interviews, as these
386 enabled international students to practice English, whereas the U.S. students were exposed to
387 other cultures. Both U.S. and international students noted that during the interviews, they were
388 not always sure how ‘far they could go’ without offending the interviewees.

389 *Quantitative findings*

390 The findings presented in this section failed to reach statistical significance, which is probably
391 due to the limited population sample (also see *Limitations* below). Yet, it is worthwhile to note
392 some apparent upward and downward trends and discuss their possible interpretations.

393 Many students (both U.S. and international) in the experimental group had a positive
394 response to the ethnographic interviews and recommended their use with prospective students:
395 95% of the U.S. students and 75% of the international students recommended their use with
396 future students.

397 Most of the U.S. students and most of the international students in the experimental group
398 responded positively toward ethnographic interviews. Yet, overall, ethnographic interviews do
399 not appear to have had a positive impact on the international students’ attitudes toward learning a
400 new language or a new culture (Table 1). Fewer (than prior to the project) international students
401 agreed that English can help them make more English-speaking friends, that they enjoy living in
402 an English-speaking country, or that English helps them understand people from other cultures.
403 The students’ attitudes remained the same (as before the project) in relation to the following
404 statements: that English is a useful educational policy. Compared with at the beginning of the

405 project, at the end of the project, more international students agreed that English could help them
406 find a better job and broaden their perspectives and ideas.

407 [Table 1 near here]

408 In contrast, the U.S. students in the experimental group developed slightly more positive
409 responses towards other languages and cultures than they had at the beginning of the project
410 (Table 2). Specifically, after the project, more U.S. students than international students thought a
411 foreign language could help them make more international friends, find a better job, and
412 understand people from other cultures. In a similar vein, more U.S. students than international
413 students thought a foreign language requirement would be a useful educational policy. Fewer
414 U.S. students agreed that they would enjoy living in a foreign country and that a foreign
415 language would help them broaden their perspectives and ideas.

416 [Table 2 near here]

417 In the control group (Table 3), the international students' attitudes towards English and a
418 new culture were inconclusive. After the project, more of the international students agreed that
419 English could help them make more English-speaking friends than thought the opposite, whereas
420 fewer international students agreed that English could help them broaden their perspectives and
421 ideas, that English can help them understand people from other cultures, or that they enjoyed
422 living in an English-speaking country. The statements relating to English being useful for finding
423 a job or is a useful educational policy were rated the same (as at the start of the project).

424 [Table 3 near here]

425 Similarly, for the U.S. students in the control group (Table 4), attitudes towards a foreign
426 language or culture varied. More students thought that they would enjoy living in a foreign

427 country, that a foreign language could help them understand people from other cultures, and that
428 a foreign language requirement is a useful policy than thought the opposite, and fewer students
429 thought a foreign language could help them broaden their perspectives and ideas than thought the
430 opposite. The statements relating to a foreign language being useful in finding a job or making
431 more friends were rated the same.

432 [Table 4 near here]

433 None of the quantitative findings proved to be statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), which
434 may have been due to the limited sample size (Tables 5 and 6).

435 [Table 5 near here]

436 [Table 6 near here]

437 **Discussion**

438 This study has multiple implications, particularly in the context of intercultural competence and
439 foreign and second language education. First, the results confirm an earlier research finding (e.g.,
440 Bateman, 2002; Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996) according to which ethnographic interviews
441 can be effective in mediating learners' development of intercultural competence. In this study,
442 both international and U.S. students externalized some new understandings of a number of
443 aspects of intercultural communication (e.g., the limitations of stereotyping). Also, they reported
444 greater understanding of some aspects of their own cultures (e.g., educational systems) as well as
445 of themselves in relation to their own culture. Further, U.S. and international students alike
446 expressed a desire to travel and explore other cultures and countries.

447 Previous research (e.g., Bateman, 2002; Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996) suggests that
448 students can develop greater openness to and greater interest in foreign cultures through
449 ethnographic interviews. However, although many students expressed a desire to travel and
450 explore other cultures, this study's quantitative results only partially support this claim. Some of
451 the students' attitudes towards other cultures and languages remained unchanged, whereas others
452 became either more positive or more negative. There may be several reasons for this. First, the
453 ethnographic interview was only one of the factors contributing to students' development of
454 intercultural competence. Other factors (e.g., students' experiences in the local community and at
455 the university) could also account for these findings. Second, the fairly limited sample of the
456 student population in both the control and the experimental groups is not sufficient for the
457 findings to be generalized or for far-reaching conclusions to be drawn. The field could benefit
458 from examining the impact of ethnographic interviews on students' development of intercultural
459 competence using larger samples as a basis for generalizing the findings.

460 Next, the study findings show that the U.S. students, similar to previous research (e.g.,
461 Bateman, 2002), developed slightly more positive attitudes towards other cultures at the end of
462 the project. This could be because most U.S. students (in this study) had no or very limited
463 experience living abroad or studying a foreign language, whereas the international students were
464 living abroad and studying in an intensive English program. This limited experience of living
465 abroad or studying a foreign language on the U.S. students' part meant that they had limited
466 awareness of the challenges faced by people living abroad and/or learning a different language.
467 Previous research (Kinginger, 2004) likewise reports on ways in which students became
468 disillusioned in study-abroad contexts.

469 By comparing the attitudes towards other cultures and languages of two distinct groups of
470 students (i.e., international and U.S. undergraduate college students), this study adds a new
471 perspective to our understanding of intercultural competence and the ways it can be promoted in
472 educational settings.

473 Finally, given the mostly positive responses expressed by the students toward
474 ethnographic interviews in an intercultural communication course, it would be worthwhile to use
475 this tool more extensively. Intercultural competence is a necessary component of language
476 instruction (Kramsch, 1997), and the ethnographic interview is an effective way to address this
477 need. Further, the study findings showed that the U.S. students found the assignment more
478 beneficial and enjoyable than the international students did. Accordingly, researchers could
479 consider the difficulties experienced by international students in completing the assignment and
480 suggest modifications to facilitate their development of intercultural competence.

481 **Limitations**

482 Yet, as most investigations, the paper has limitations. First, as mentioned earlier, the student
483 population size was relatively limited and the data was collected over several semesters, at the
484 same university. An investigation encompassing larger samples of both populations (i.e., the U.S.
485 and international students) would shed further light on the cross-cultural experiences of both
486 groups of students. Second, some variables (e.g., U.S. students' cultural heritage) were not
487 investigated or considered at great extent, which could have impacted the study findings. While
488 the background questionnaire (Appendix A) allowed to delineate certain similarities in the U.S.
489 and international student body (e.g., travel-abroad experience or lack of thereof), more in-depth
490 research could provide additional insights. Lastly, students in the control group were asked to

491 state their preference in regard to whom to interview, which may have influenced the attitude
492 values after doing the interviews.

493 **Conclusion**

494 The study findings show that the use of ethnographic interviews (1) increased students'
495 awareness of their own culture and of themselves in relation to it and (2) enhanced students'
496 knowledge of other cultures. However, unlike previous research, ethnographic interviews did not
497 seem to have a significant positive impact on the students' interest in other cultures. In fact, there
498 was no positive impact in this regard on the majority of international students, while U.S.
499 students were able to develop slightly more positive attitudes toward other cultures and
500 languages. The article discussed reasons for the outcomes and provides recommendations for
501 further research in this direction.

References

- Bateman, B. (2002). Promoting openness toward culture learning: Ethnographic interviews for students of Spanish. *Modern Language Journal*, 86(3), 318–331.
- Black, G. L., & Bernades, R. (2014). Developing global educators and intercultural competence through an international teaching practicum in Kenya. *Canadian and International Education/Education canadienne et internationale*, 43(2). Retrieved from <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cie-eci/>
- Bryant, A., & Charmaz, K. (Eds.). (2006). *The SAGE handbook of grounded theory*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Byram, M. (2000). Assessing intercultural competence in language teaching. *Sprogforum*, 18(6), 8–13.
- Charmaz, K. (1990). Discovering chronic illness: Using grounded theory. *Social Science and Medicine*, 30(11), 1161–1172. doi:10.1016/0277-9536(90)90256-R
- Cohen L., Manion L., & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods in education* (5th ed.). London: Routledge Falmer.
- Christie, K. (2007). Learning to speak the world's languages. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 88(9), 645–647.
- Devis Arbona, A., & Chireac, A-M. (2015). Developing intercultural competence through oral folk literature for students in a bilingual context. *Journal Plus Education*, 12(2), 58–67.

- Elola, E., & Oskoz, A. (2008). Blogging: Fostering intercultural competence development in foreign language and study abroad contexts. *Foreign Language Annals*, 4(5), 454–477.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Jacobson, W., Sleicher, D., & Burke, M. (1999). Portfolio assessment of intercultural competence. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 23(3), 467–492.
- Jamieson, S. (2004). Likert scales: How to (ab)use them. *Medical Education*, 38, 1212–1218.
- Jandt, F. E. (2013). *An introduction to intercultural communication: Identities in a global community* (7th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Kinginger, C. (2004). Alice doesn't live here anymore: Foreign language learning and identity reconstruction. In A. Pavlenko & A. Blackledge (Eds.), *Negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts* (pp. 219–242). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Kramsch, C. (1997). The cultural component of language teaching. *British Studies Now*, 8, 4–7.
- Lázàr, I. (2015). EFL learners' intercultural competence development in an international web collaboration project. *The Language Learning Journal*, 43(2), 208–221.
- Li, F., & Liu, Y. (2017). The impact of a cultural research course project on foreign language students' intercultural competence and language learning. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 8(1), 97–105.
- Lee, L. (2011). Blogging: Promoting learner autonomy and intercultural competence through study abroad. *Language Learning & Technology*, 15(3), 87–109.

- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Nunan, D. (1992). *Research methods in language teaching*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Dowd, R. (2006). The use of videoconferencing and email as mediators of intercultural student ethnography. In J. Belz and S. Thorne (Eds.), *Internet-mediated foreign language education* (pp. 86–120). Boston, MA: Thompson Heinle and Heinle.
- Robinson, G. L. N. (1988). *Cross-cultural understanding*. New York, NY: Prentice Hall.
- Robinson-Stuart, G., & Nocon, G. (1996). Second culture acquisition: Ethnography in the foreign language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, 80(4), 431–449.
- Scally, J. (2015). Intercultural competence development in three different study abroad program types. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 24(2), 35–60.
- Schartner, A. (2016). The effect of study abroad on intercultural competence: A longitudinal case study of international postgraduate students at a British university. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 37(4), 402–418.
doi:10.1080/01434632.2015.1073737
- Schenker, T. (2002). Intercultural competence and cultural learning through telecollaboration. *CALICO Journal*, 29(3), 449–470.
- Schulz, R. A. (2007b). Language, culture and transcultural German studies: Where do they meet? In S. D. Martinson & R. A. Schulz (Eds.), *Transcultural German studies: Building bridges* (pp. 87–99). Bern: Peter Lang.

- Smith, K. S. (1993). A case study on the successful development of an international teaching assistant. *Innovative Higher Education*, 17(3), 149–163.
- Smolcic, E. (2009). *Preparing teachers for diverse classrooms: An activity theoretical analysis of teacher learning and development* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA.
- Thomé-Williams, A. C. (2016). Developing intercultural communicative competence in Portuguese through Skype and Facebook. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 25(1), 213–233.
- Townsin, L. (2015). Towards maximizing intercultural learning for Australian university students in an English-speaking study abroad program in Malaysia. *Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Student Services Association*, 45, 52–64.
- U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. (2015, March 25). SEVP releases 2015 international student data, launches interactive mapping tool. *ICE Newsroom*. Retrieved from <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/sevp-releases-2015-international-student-data/launches-interactive-mapping-tool>
- Xue, J., & Pan, Q. (2012). The effects of film appreciation on improving the students' intercultural communication competence. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2(8), 1741–1745. doi:10.4304/tpls.2.8.1741-1745

Tables

Table 1. Attitude Questions: International Students in the Experimental Group

Survey statement	<i>M</i> (before the project)	<i>M</i> (after the project)	<i>SD</i> (before the project)	<i>SD</i> (after the project)
1. Learning English will help me make more English-speaking friends.	4.3	4.1	0.91	0.94
2. English will help me find a better job.	4.2	4.3	0.79	0.88
3. I enjoy living in an English-speaking country.	3.7	3.4	0.9	0.88
4. English helps me broaden my perspective and ideas.	4.1	4.2	1.22	0.99
5. English helps me understand people from other cultures.	4.4	4.1	0.66	0.87
6. An English requirement is a useful policy.	4.0	4.0	0.93	0.84

Table 2. Attitude Questions: U.S. Students in the Experimental Group

Survey statement	<i>M</i> (before the project)	<i>M</i> (after the project)	<i>SD</i> (before the project)	<i>SD</i> (after the project)
1. Learning a foreign language will help me make more international friends.	4.5	4.6	0.72	0.48
2. A foreign language will help me find a better job.	4.3	4.4	0.77	0.71
3. I would enjoy living in a different country.	4.2	4.1	0.83	1.03
4. A foreign language helps me broaden my perspective and ideas.	4.8	4.7	0.44	0.47
5. A foreign language helps me understand people from other cultures.	4.6	4.7	0.49	0.45
6. A foreign language requirement is a useful policy.	3.9	4.2	1.06	0.73

Table 3. Attitude Questions: International Students in the Control Group

Survey statement	<i>M</i> (start of semester)	<i>M</i> (end of semester)	<i>SD</i> (start of semester)	<i>SD</i> (end of semester)
1. Learning English will help me make more English-speaking friends.	4.8	4.9	0.43	0.28
2. English will help me find a better job.	4.1	4.1	0.28	0.28
3. I enjoy living in an English-speaking country.	3.8	3.7	0.37	0.62
4. English helps me broaden my perspective and ideas.	4.7	4.5	0.28	0.68
5. English helps me understand people from other cultures.	4.9	4.7	0.60	0.28
6. An English requirement is a useful policy.	4.0	4.0	0.20	0.20

Table 4. Attitude Questions: U.S. Students in the Control Group

Survey statement	<i>M</i> (start of semester)	<i>M</i> (end of semester)	<i>SD</i> (start of semester)	<i>SD</i> (end of semester)
1. Learning a foreign language will help me make more international friends.	4.7	4.7	0.47	0.47
2. A foreign language will help me find a better job.	4.5	4.5	0.62	0.62
3. I would enjoy living in a foreign country.	3.3	3.4	0.57	0.49
4. A foreign language helps me broaden my perspective and ideas.	4.6	4.3	0.49	0.50
5. A foreign language helps me understand people from other cultures.	3.5	4.2	0.81	0.47
6. A foreign language requirement is a useful policy.	4.1	4.6	0.57	0.54

Table 5. Statistical Analysis: International Students

Survey statement	X^2	<i>p-value</i>
1. Learning English will help me make more international friends.	1.31	0.86
2. English will help me find a better job.	3.04	0.55
3. I enjoy living in an English-speaking country.	9.06	0.06
4. English helps me broaden my perspectives and ideas.	2.02	0.73
5. English helps me understand people from other cultures.	4.35	0.35
6. An English requirement is a useful policy.	0.23	0.99

Table 6. Statistical Analysis: U.S. Students

Survey statement	X^2	<i>p-value</i>
1. Learning a foreign language will help me make more international friends.	2.08	0.72
2. A foreign language will help me find a better job.	0.26	0.99
3. I would enjoy living in a foreign country.	4.62	0.32
4. A foreign language helps me broaden my perspectives and ideas.	0.27	0.99
5. A foreign language helps me understand people from other cultures.	0.42	0.98
6. A foreign language requirement is a useful policy.	5.09	0.27

Appendix A

Background questionnaire

1. Full Name

2. Gender

3. Native Language

4. Country of origin

U.S. students only: If you were born outside the U.S., at what age did you arrive in the U.S.?

5. U.S. students only: In which U.S. state have you lived the longest, up to now?

6. U.S. students only: Can you speak other languages than English? If yes, specify the language and your proficiency.

7. U.S. students only: Have you travelled outside the U.S.? If yes, where and for how long?

Appendix B

Ethnographic interview skills

- Ethnography is direct observation and reporting of customary behavior of a culture (Jandt, 2013)
- How we collect data about a culture: with a limited number of key informants (10–12), artifacts, open-ended interviews, observations, including participants' observations, films/videos/photos
- What skills are necessary to conduct an ethnographic interview and why: commitment of time, depth of discussion and observations, creative/active listening, and self-awareness (Robinson, 1988)
- Who famous ethnographers are: Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942), anthropologist, studies of Pacific Islanders; personal diaries' controversy
- What ethnographic studies have become well-known and why: *Street Corner Society* by W.F. Whyte, *Asylums* by E. Goffman, and others

Appendix C

Ethnographic interviews

In your final report, please include:

- Interviewee background information (e.g., origin, gender, age, major, etc.)
- Statement of purpose (i.e., explain the goal of the interview, personal interest)
- Data collection methods (e.g., how many times you met, where, how you recorded your data)
- Questionnaire (i.e., the questions you asked the interviewee)
- Summary of findings (i.e., what you learned from the interview)
- Interpretation of data (i.e., use at least 3 concepts, e.g., cultural values, from the course to explain what you found)
- Reflection (i.e., tell me what you learned about yourself, about cross-cultural differences and similarities, from the project overall)

Grading rubric:

CATEGORY	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Fair (2)	Poor (1)
Content				
Language/style				
Organization				
Format				
Final score	/16			

Appendix D

Likert-scale items

Match the statements (a–f) below with the number (1–5) that best reflects your feelings about a particular statement.

1 Strongly disagree ... 2 Disagree ... 3 Neutral ... 4 Agree ... 5 Strongly agree

- a) Learning English will help me make more English-speaking friends.
- b) Learning English will help me find a better job.
- c) I enjoy living in an English-speaking country.
- d) Learning English will help me broaden my perspective and learn new ideas.
- e) Learning English will help me understand people from other cultures.
- f) An English language requirement is a useful educational policy.

Appendix E

Focus group questionnaire

In your group discussion, please provide some general comments on your overall experience with the project:

- Generally speaking, what would you say you have learned from this intercultural experience (i.e., ethnographic interviews)?
- How did you find the task of interviewing a person from a different culture?
- Did you find the ethnographic interview skills we learned in the course useful in the assignment you carried out? How about the theoretical concepts covered in the course? Why (not)?
- Continue the statement: *I and the person I interviewed are similar in ...*
- Would you recommend ethnographic interviews for prospective students? Why (not)?