

The Role of Short-Term Study Abroad Experience on Intercultural Communication Competence

Authors : Zeynep Aksoy

Abstract : Since global mobility of capital, information and people increase more and more, intercultural communication and management become a growing study field of investigating various aspects of the interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds. Human mobility, caused by several intentions from tourism to forced migration, often put people in facing communication barriers, issues or sometimes conflicts. This reality naturally enforces education institutions to develop international policies and programs for students in order to improve their intercultural experiences along with the educative objectives. Study-abroad programs, particularly the student exchanges in higher education provide an environment for participants to encounter with cultural differences. Therefore, international exchange programs (i.e. Erasmus Student Mobility, Global Exchange Program) are accepted to bring opportunities for intergroup contact, which may lead students to obtain new perspectives about the host culture, either in positive or negative ways, and new intercultural communication skills. This study aims to explore the role of short-term study abroad experience on intercultural communication competence with a qualitative approach. It attempts to reveal a comparative analysis, which is derived from two field studies conducted in Izmir (Turkey) and in Amsterdam (the Netherlands) in 2015 and 2016. They were both organized in two phases as pre-and-posttest to gain an insight into the changes (if any) in students' attitudes and knowledge regarding the host culture, and their further motivations towards cross-cultural interactions. With this aim, focus group sessions and in-depth interviews have been taken place with participants at the beginning of their stay and at the end of the semester. The sample covers students mainly from Erasmus program (20 students in Izmir and 14 students in Amsterdam), and few from Global Exchange Program (5 students in Amsterdam). Data obtained from both studies were thematically analyzed and essential themes were identified within the framework of intercultural communication competence.

Keywords : Erasmus student mobility, intercultural communication competence, student exchange, short-term study abroad

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