

EXPLORING APPROACHES TO CULTURAL COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SHORT-TERM STUDY ABROAD

by

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(Under the Direction of James C. Anderson, II)

ABSTRACT

As globalization continues to influence education and the workforce, there is an urgent need for higher education to equip students with the cultural competence required to navigate diverse, international contexts. Study abroad has emerged as a key strategy for global learning, especially within agriculture and related fields. This dissertation examines the effectiveness of short-term study abroad programs in developing cultural intelligence (CQ) among undergraduate students, with a focus on structured reflection, experiential learning, and intentional curriculum design. Chapter 2 presents a narrative review of existing literature on short-term study abroad and its role in fostering cultural competence. The review synthesizes findings related to program structures, pedagogical strategies, and best practices, emphasizing that while short-term programs offer accessible and immersive experiences, their impact depends heavily on design, instructional approaches, and student backgrounds. Chapter 3 explores how students process new cultural experiences through structured reflective assignments during a short-term program in Morocco. Using the Cultural Information Processing (CIP) model and a phenomenological approach, this study analyzed participant narratives to identify themes of self-awareness, leadership, and navigating cultural difference. Findings suggest that reflection served as a

catalyst for growth, with students' values and prior experiences influencing their learning and engagement. Chapter 4 expands on these findings through a mixed-methods study that integrated pre-post assessments with interviews and focus groups. Results revealed that while students with previous multicultural exposure were often self-directed, others benefited from scaffolded support and peer interaction. The program's supportive environment, shaped by mentors, peers, and faculty, played a vital role in students' ability to process new experiences. Quantitative and qualitative findings indicated growth across multiple CQ dimensions. Chapter 5 offers a synthesis of findings and highlights the value of the CIP model as a guiding framework for future research and program development. The dissertation concludes with practical implications for enhancing cultural competence through global learning and study abroad.

INDEX WORDS: Cultural Intelligence, Experiential Learning, Study Abroad, Cultural Competence Development

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by

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DEDICATION

In loving memory of

Curtis Pullings

Marlene Scott

Joshua Toran, Sr.

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My first acknowledgement goes to God. You have kept me this far, and I am confident that you will keep me as I continue along my path.

To my mom: Thank you for being my #1 fan. You believed in me before I ever believed in myself. I love you!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, people with different identities and cultures are connected in new and more frequent ways (Walter, 2021). Globalization has catalyzed the emergence of bicultural identities, reshaping the notions of local and global belonging (Melluish, 2014). Global leaders who can navigate the complexities of identity and culture will be required to lead effectively in globalized contexts. The relevance of this type of leadership has grown as businesses and organizations have become increasingly interconnected and multinational in their operations (Northouse, 2021). As these organizations look toward the future, higher education institutions must prepare students to enter this dynamic workforce.

The United States has experienced profound demographic shifts, primarily driven by increasing immigration rates (Cohn & Caumont, 2016). This demographic evolution has brought cultural richness, tensions and conflicts among various social identity groups. Simultaneously, as foreign-born individuals become integral to the fabric of the U.S. labor force, the recognition of diversity's intrinsic value in organizational contexts for its potential competitive edge has surged (Desilver, 2017). Increased attention to diversity and social equity issues within the U.S. agricultural system has grown due to shifts in labor demographics and the perceived failure of higher education institutions to prepare students to enter a diverse workforce (Wiersma-Mosley, 2019).

Need for Study and Problem Statement

Globalization has fostered greater interconnectedness among nations around the world through economic, political, and cultural exchanges, leading to enhanced collaboration and mutually beneficial opportunities. While these benefits have been noted, globalization simultaneously precipitates cultural tensions and divisiveness, as differing identities and values clash, resulting in backlash and perceived threats to national sovereignty and cultural ways of being (Walter, 2021). While economies, cultures, and policies related to globalization have existed in many forms for some time, tolerance for globalization has changed over time. A study examining public opinion on globalization topics through surveys in 15 countries at varying levels of development worldwide found the most prominent dissent against globalization in the political realm (Walter, 2021). Despite globalization having positive impacts on economic performance, fostering international cooperation, and promoting cultural exchange, these transformations have also been found to contribute to the perceptions of winners and losers within the global landscape (Walter, 2021). This has manifested in in-group-out-group dynamics, in which the perceived encroachment from individuals in one group threatens individuals in the other group (Hannum et al., 2010). Faultlines, or divisions between groups based on one or more attributes, form between in-group and out-group members and can be aggravated by policy changes, economic activity, or cultural shifts (Hannum et al., 2010; Walter, 2021).

As technology continues to drive connectivity worldwide, the global community must be equipped to engage in collective innovation-sharing and problem-solving. While technical prowess is necessary across industries, culturally competent members of the worldwide community will be needed for the sustained success of these interactions. Students entering the

global workforce need cultural competence, practical skills, and a diverse set of experiences to be equipped professionals. Within agriculture, there is an increasing demand for culturally competent graduates who can thrive in diverse, global contexts (Wiersma-Mosley, 2019). Higher education institutions offer a variety of outlets to develop learners' technical and human skills, like student-faculty interactions, community engagement, and experiential learning opportunities (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022). Despite the existing instructional approaches, many students are not equipped to work in global contexts. In preparing global leaders, scholars have noted that institutions have inadequate curricular designs, have limited focus and practical application for existing interventions, and are resistant to change (Wiersma-Mosley, 2019). How can institutions overcome these challenges and develop students appropriately to work in the global community?

Leadership in the 21st Century

While engaging in effective interactions across cultures is essential for 21st-century leaders, current and developing leaders in the U.S. need to be particularly attuned to this type of proficiency based on the conditions of the agricultural industry domestically and abroad (Hammer & Bennett, 2009; Wiersma-Mosley, 2019). Scholars have identified notable demographic shifts within this industry's labor force (Wiersma-Mosley, 2019). Additionally, the average age of farmers is expected to continue to rise (Cole & Donovan, 2008). As the agricultural labor force continues to change, addressing social justice issues related to identity and culture is paramount for the sustainability of local and global affairs. These demographic shifts mean that the industry will increasingly rely on a more diverse workforce, bringing new perspectives, needs, and challenges. Proactively addressing issues of identity and culture ensures

that the agricultural sector remains adaptable, equitable, and prepared to meet the demands of a changing world (Rosch & Haber-Curran, 2013; Wiersma-Mosley, 2019).

To lead effectively in an increasingly global society, people need to understand and interact effectively with those from other cultures (Rosch & Haber-Curran, 2013). As mentioned previously, this is a critical need for agriculture students (Hammer & Bennett, 2009; Wiersma-Mosley, 2019). Agricultural students should have a global perspective of the agriculture industry as an international matter, not solely a domestic matter (Garbers et al., 2022). However, this can be a difficult feat for students in the U.S. who have yet to be challenged to think beyond a Western lens (Grant, J. L. et al., 2019). Institutions in the U.S. have faced mounting pressure to adapt their educational paradigms, policies, and faculty composition to foster inclusivity and cultural competence to prepare students to navigate an increasingly diverse workforce (Coleman et al., 2021). Exposing students to the world beyond their local levels of community can help them understand and commit to a richer, more global vision of community (Rosch & Haber-Curran, 2013). Study abroad programs are an experiential learning mode that has the potential to impact students' development and growth in this realm (Garbers et al., 2022). Central to experiential learning is transforming experiences to create knowledge (Kolb, 1984). Experiential learning actively engages participants in their learning and promotes deep understanding through direct involvement in real-world situations (Kolb, 1984). Studying abroad is a popular type of experiential learning because it allows students to develop intercultural competence, gain new perspectives, and engage in personal and academic growth (Iskhakova & Bradley, 2022).

Developing Agricultural Leaders Through Study Abroad

Study abroad programs are a significant form of experiential learning in higher education, offering the potential to shape students into global citizens and professionals in our increasingly

interconnected world (Mirabile, 1997). By providing hands-on, real-world experiences, these programs serve as transformative avenues for broadening students' global perspectives and nurturing cultural sensitivity. However, it's important to acknowledge that immersion alone may not fully achieve these outcomes (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022). In agriculture specifically, students have reported that their study abroad experiences impacted personal growth and global competencies development (Zhai & Scheer, 2002). While there has been a range of study abroad formats studied within the literature (Brown et al., 2016; Gümüş et al., 2020; Iskhakova & Bradly, 2022; Safipour et al., 2017), short-term study abroad programs have gained popularity because of their potential to provide intensive cross-cultural experiences that focus on specific themes or learning objectives with a week to several weeks (Iskhakova & Bradly, 2022). This dissertation explored how study abroad practitioners can develop the programmatic components of short-term study abroad programs to promote the development of cultural competence among students, specifically by examining the Morocco: Agriculture, Organizational and Community Development program at the University of Georgia.

The Morocco: Agriculture, Organizational and Community Development study abroad program was developed as a comparative study of agriculture and organizational development in Morocco. The program allowed participants to evaluate how Morocco's agriculture, community, and organizational development compares to their home countries. Program outcomes included participants being able to discuss historical, geographic, architectural, and language considerations that contribute to current public policies that are impacting the world. Participants were asked to explain Morocco's political, economic, and educational complexities and their impact on agriculture, community, and organization. Further, participants summarized current farming practices and key development initiatives. Finally, participants were asked to integrate

findings on a topic within agriculture, community, or organizational development into a comparative analysis of the US and Moroccan practices.

Purpose and Objectives

This study aimed to explore the impact of a faculty-led, short-term study abroad program on students' cultural competence development and the programmatic factors that influenced this development. The following objectives were used to frame this study:

1. Explore the current literature on the effectiveness of study abroad programs in developing cultural competence among college students and propose a framework for guiding structured reflection in study abroad courses.
2. Describe how students process their study abroad experiences in Morocco and the resultant impact on their development of cultural competence.
3. Assess the effectiveness of a study abroad program instructional model for enhancing cultural competence among participants.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is the Cultural Information Processing (CIP) Model. The model is theoretically guided by cultural intelligence theory (Ang et al., 2006) and the Processing Value Judgements model (Brown, 1998). These frameworks have been integrated to explain the cultural intelligence development among learners by highlighting how the sub-dimensions within the four-factor model of cultural intelligence impact the processing of new cultural information.

Cultural intelligence theory is focused on the competencies needed to understand, adapt, and lead across cultures effectively (Ang et al., 2006; Kilduff & Cormican, 2022). Earlier research has identified an interplay between cultural competence development and individuals'

self-concepts (Brown, 2004a). Self-concept is an individual's perception of various aspects of their identity based on culture, family, morals, career, physical attributes, and other internal and external factors (Brown, 2004a). In the Processing Value Judgements model, self-concept and instructional methods are driving motivators for whether an individual will resist or adopt new cultural diversity information (Brown, 2004a).

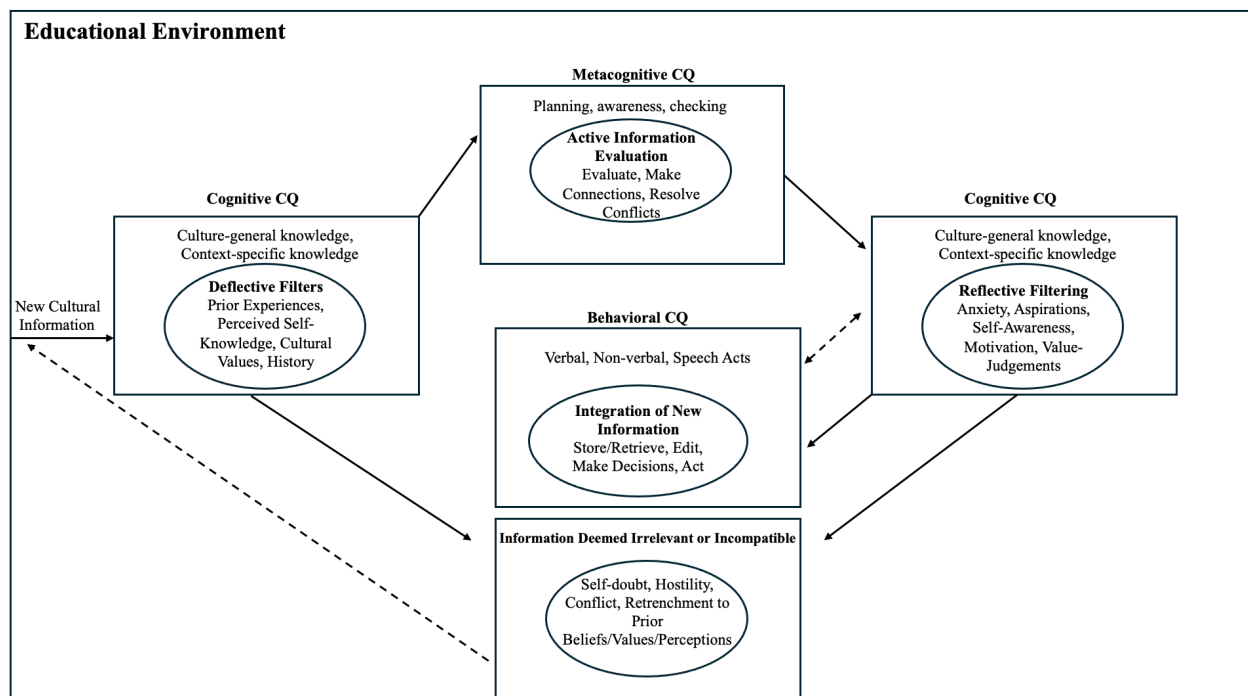
Within the Cultural Information Processing (CIP) model (see Figure 1), new information people encounter is interpreted according to their self-concept. As learners are presented with new cultural information, deflection filters are initially employed to either continue processing the information or discard the information if it is not compatible based on their existing self-concept (Brown, 1998, 2004a). The drive to engage in the educational environment and move information from sensory memory to long-term memory and adoption is moderated by *motivational CQ* (Ang et al., 2006; Brown, 2004a). Motivational CQ is the interest, drive, and energy associated with cross-cultural engagement and is represented by the solid arrows throughout the model (Hannum et al., 2010). Motivational CQ includes *intrinsic motivation* or the degree to which an individual derives enjoyment from culturally diverse situations, *extrinsic motivation* or the tangible benefits from cross-cultural experiences, and *self-efficacy* or the confidence one has in their ability to effectively engage cross-culturally (Hannum et al., 2010).

As learners are motivated to process new information, the information first goes through the knowledge dimension of cultural intelligence referred to as *cognitive CQ* using deflection filters (Brown, 2004a; Hannum et al., 2010). Cognitive CQ encompasses an individual's understanding of culture and how culture shapes their thinking and behavior (Hannum et al., 2010). When moving from deflection filtering to further evaluation through *metacognitive CQ*, facilitators of cross-cultural experiences should provide experiences that activate learners' intrinsic motivation

to encourage volition to engage, higher-order analysis, and problem-solving based on new cultural contexts (Brown, 1998, 2004a, 2004b; Hannum et al., 2010). Metacognitive CQ refers to the learner's ability to strategize while in the cross-cultural experience and encompasses awareness, planning, and checking (Hannum et al., 2010). Students who actively evaluate new information must make connections and resolve any conflicts with current beliefs before moving the information into higher-order analysis or *reflective filtering* (Brown, 1998, 2004a).

Figure 1.1

Cultural Information Processing (CIP) Model



NOTE: Dotted arrows indicate a feedback loop.

Cognitive CQ using reflective filtering is where further reevaluation and resolution of internal conflicts occurs and a deeper understanding of how culture impacts thoughts and behavior (Hannum et al., 2010). From here, environmental feedback, a form of extrinsic motivation, and *self-efficacy* influence whether new cultural information is accepted and

implemented into actions known as *behavioral CQ* or deemed irrelevant (Ang et al., 2006; Earley, Christopher, & Ang, 2003; Hannum et al., 2010). The behavioral CQ factor encompasses the verbal, nonverbal, and speech acts taken in cross-cultural situations (Hannum et al., 2010).

The dotted lines within the model represent feedback loops or the potential for information students receive to be reprocessed through the cycle (Brown, 2004b). Deeper reflection on integrated beliefs could also lead to further cementation of beliefs or deeming them incompatible. Information once deemed irrelevant could be integrated should new environmental factors motivate the learner to run the information back through the process. These feedback loops take place within the larger educational environment. As such, facilitators of these cross-cultural experiences are responsible for creating a safe, supportive space for learning. The self-concept of the instructor, cultural responsiveness of the learning environment, degree of peer support, facilitated immersion experiences, and the connection between past experiences, multicultural pedagogy, and social justice concepts impact culture-centered educational interventions (Brown, 2004a).

The CIP model consists of various constructs representing the adaptiveness necessary for effective leadership across cultures, including motivational CQ, cognitive CQ, metacognitive CQ, and behavioral CQ (Ang et al., 2006). Each of these constructs will be explored through the data collection tools utilized in this study. Students within the phenomenon of interest completed blogs, guided reflections on reading and daily site visits, case studies, and interviews. Students were asked to complete applied learning reflections on various minority social identities in blog form and submit responses to a respective blog post from a classmate. The data collected from these exercises will be utilized to explore the immediate rejection, eventual acceptance into long-

term memory, or eventual rejection of new information as it is processed and evaluated through cognition and metacognition (Ang et al., 2006; Brown, 2004b).

Methodology

To explore the cultural competence of student participants of a short-term study abroad program, a convergent mixed method design utilizing literature review, written assignments, interviews, and focus groups to understand the experiences of learners was used. Convergent mixed methods research combines quantitative and qualitative data in a study to combine the strengths of each approach while supplementing their respective limitations (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Utilizing a convergent mixed methods design supported the credibility, validity, and trustworthiness of this research in providing complementary perspectives on a single research question. Additionally, the qualitative and quantitative components of data were used to identify any inconsistencies or divergences related to the effectiveness of study abroad programs in enhancing student cultural competence (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

This convergent mixed methods design was conducted in a single phase in which qualitative and quantitative data are collected and analyzed separately and then the results from these findings will be compared to address confirmations or disconfirmations (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A systematized narrative literature review (SNLR) on culture-focused short-term study abroad programs will serve as the foundation of this study. SNLRs are appropriate for identifying and synthesizing themes within an area of inquiry (Van Dinter et al., 2021).

Sample

Participants in this study were students in the Morocco: Agriculture, Organizational and Community Development study abroad program in 2022, 2023, and 2024. Purposive sampling is a non-random approach to selecting samples based on the characteristics of the study and

research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This sample was purposive because participants were immersed in the study abroad program examined in this research. This program is available to undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Georgia and surrounding institutions. Data from a total of thirty-seven ($n = 37$) students in the Morocco study abroad program was gathered for this study.

Data Collection

Data collection in qualitative studies is often subjective and dependent on the researcher's interpretation. The phenomenon of interest and the research question are two of the most important factors to consider when considering data collection approaches (Vagle, 2018). Additionally, the theoretical or conceptual framework, the problem, and the purpose of the study determine the data collection techniques and the specific information that is considered data within the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As with many qualitative studies, I was intimately involved in the data collection process to effectively interpret participants' experiences. My phenomenological reductionist role as a researcher required accurately describing the phenomenon of interest (Vagle, 2018). My familiarity with the Morocco study abroad program as a recent participant and my previous supplementary study abroad experiences supported my interest and familiarity within this space.

Narrative Literature Review

In any research study, familiarity with previous research and theories is necessary for situating the inquiry of interest within the field's knowledge base (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Due to the ever-expanding nature of evidence-based practices and sectors, various literature review types exist. I conducted a narrative literature review on the body of literature on the effectiveness of study abroad programs in developing cultural competence among students as the

foundation of this study. Narrative literature reviews are appropriate when the aim is to provide a summary of the current state of knowledge on a particular topic based on a comprehensive literature search using intentional approaches for selecting studies and extracting and synthesizing data (Grant, M. J. & Booth, 2009).

Written Narratives

For the collection of written narratives, I used guided reflective assignments (see Appendix A) that students were prompted with as part of the Morocco study abroad program. Written narratives allow scholars to explore and understand personal perspectives, stories, and experiences to co-create meaning with participants and develop a richer understanding of complex phenomena (Vagle, 2018). In phenomenological research, narratives are used as data sources to explore how individuals understand and interpret their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Through their stories, researchers can better understand how individuals make sense of their experiences and how they understand themselves and their world. Students were provided prompts to reflect on specific points throughout the study abroad program. These prompts were meant to guide students in reflecting on internal and external happenings due to activities, site visits, or conversations during the trip. The written narratives stemming from these prompts will come directly from participants. This is necessary to better understand the essence of the Morocco study abroad experience (Vagle, 2018). All data was de-identified to remove names or information that could link a respondent's writing back to them.

Individual Semi-Structured Exit Interviews

Interviews are a common form of data collection in qualitative studies in which a researcher converses with participants to uncover what is in and on their minds to address their research questions or objectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This study utilized data from semi-

structured exit interviews that students participated in shortly after returning to their homes during the time of their respective program year. Semi-structured interviews are an intermediary type of interview in which questions and topics to explore are planned loosely. The protocol for the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B) consisted of open-ended questions developed to explore how students' processing of study abroad experiences contributed to their cultural competence development.

Focus Groups

Participants will be recruited to engage in a 60-minute focus group either in person or on Zoom. Focus groups are a type of interview that involves a group of people who have knowledge of the topic of interest (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Data collection from focus groups in this research study followed a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix C). The focus group protocol will consist of open-ended questions surrounding how students' cultural intelligence has developed. I utilized Otter AI, to transcribe the focus group discussions and listen to each recording to address any technical errors that may occur. This enhanced my familiarity with the data and supported the reliability and validity of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Pre-Post Travel Cultural Intelligence Inventory

A survey instrument was administered to participants pre- and post-trip each year to capture changes that might occur in their cultural intelligence and values after returning from the Morocco study abroad program. Only participants in the study abroad program in 2023 and 2024 were administered the Cultural Assessment Scale (CQS); therefore, only those two years will be examined in this phase of the study.

Data Analysis

Several data analysis techniques were used to interpret literature, written narratives, and focus group interviews to interpret and disseminate findings. These include the constant comparative method, content analysis, thematic analysis, inductive and framework-based analysis, measures of central tendency, and the Wilcoxon signed-rank test.

Qualitative data analysis is primarily inductive and comparative and draws heavily from the constant comparative method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Although initially proposed to develop grounded theory, the constant comparative method involves systematically comparing data like interview transcripts, field notes, or documents to identify patterns and create categories, properties, and hypotheses (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). This allowed me to move back and forth between concrete data and abstract concepts to draw meaning from participants' experiences and develop a deeper understanding of the essence of the Morocco study abroad program (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Content analysis is an appropriate form of data analysis because it is used in qualitative studies to analyze documents. Content analysis allows researchers to view the meanings, symbolic qualities, and expressive content and the communicative roles they play in the lives of data sources unobtrusively (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Content analyses typically involve codes to make sense of the data being analyzed. A codebook was developed and used to identify and organize emergent themes in this study. Thematic analysis is essential in qualitative content analysis because it guides the researcher in identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes from coded data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Thematic analysis can go beyond identification and involve layering of complex analysis, like interconnecting themes into a story or developing a theoretical model. Thematic analysis

provides a structured way to identify and interpret key themes and patterns within the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Framework analysis is a comparative form of thematic analysis that employs an organized structure of inductively and deductively deriving themes, known as a framework, to conduct cross-sectional analysis using the combination of data description and abstraction. Leveraging the benefits of these methods enabled me to gain deeper insight into the phenomenon by systematically identifying, describing, and interpreting critical patterns within and across cases and themes (Goldsmith, 2021).

Reflexivity Statement

This study and my perspective as a researcher are guided by the phenomenological tradition. Research traditions are different approaches or styles of conducting scholarly research. Each tradition represents a unique set of assumptions, worldviews, orientations, procedures, and practices (Prasad, 2018). Phenomenology is an interpretive tradition in which scholars focus on subjective, socially constructed understandings of reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Prasad, 2018). It is critical to discuss epistemologies and ontologies because they inform the foundational principles guiding research within a particular tradition (Prasad, 2018). Unlike a positivist approach, my epistemological stance within the phenomenology tradition aligns with interpretivism, which holds that reality is understood subjectively and knowledge is subjectively constructed through the interpretation of individuals. Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality and existence (Prasad, 2018). As a scholar operating with the phenomenology tradition, I acknowledge multiple, socially constructed realities (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Prasad, 2018). Within the Morocco: Agriculture, Organizational and Community Development study abroad program, each student will have a unique perspective of the planned and sporadic experiences related to the program that is informed by their respective interpretations (Prasad, 2018).

Within this research study, I am positioned as both a participant in the Morocco study abroad program and a researcher. My previous participation in the phenomenon of interest contributes to my perspective on the essence of the experience that this study hopes to capture. Participants in this research will be able to share aspects of their experience that I will be able to connect with in ways that a complete observer would not. Instead, I must first reflect on my assumptions, viewpoints, and personal prejudices to explore the phenomenon with a more open mind (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Due to the intimacy of my involvement as both researcher and participant, all materials will be deidentified prior to analysis to limit the impact of my biases on the findings of this study.

Implications of the Study

As industries like agriculture continue to become more globalized, the responsibility of higher education institutions to prepare students who can work across and within culturally diverse environments has become more critical (Coleman et al., 2021). Specifically, people proficient in navigating cultures are needed within the modern agricultural workforce (Coleman et al., 2021; Grant, J. L. et al., 2019). Experiential learning that engages these aspects can contribute to students' ability to navigate culturally diverse environments (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022; Coleman et al., 2021; Grant, J. L. et al., 2019). The combination of content coursework and the immersive experiences associated with the study abroad program provide the space for students to learn, apply, and reflect on these cultural concepts and their cultural dispositions.

Dissertation Structure

This dissertation will follow the three-chapter manuscript format. Each chapter of this dissertation provides unique insights into the development of cultural competence through

faculty-led, short-term study abroad programming. Chapter II entitled *Exploring Short-term Study Abroad in Cultural Competence Development: A Systematic Literature Review* explores the scholarship on the effectiveness of study abroad programs in developing cultural competence. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the key findings regarding the impact of study abroad programs on the development of cultural competence among college students as reported in existing literature?
2. What methodologies have been employed in previous research to assess the effectiveness of study abroad programs in enhancing cultural competence among college students?
3. What are the main challenges and limitations identified in previous studies examining the effectiveness of study abroad programs in fostering cultural competence among college students, and what recommendations have been proposed to address them?

The article concludes by proposing a conceptual framework for structured reflection in study abroad courses.

Chapter III entitled *Learner Processing of International Cultural Experiences* investigates how students process their study abroad experiences in Morocco and the impact on their cultural competence development. The research questions for this study were:

1. How do structured reflective assignments contribute to their processing of study abroad experiences in Morocco and subsequent development of cultural competence?
2. What are the key themes and patterns emerging from the reflective documents regarding students' processing of their study abroad experiences in Morocco and its impact on their cultural competence development?

3. How do the findings from the document analysis align with the Cultural Information Processing (CIP) Model, and what implications do they have for the design and implementation of study abroad programs that aim to enhance cultural competence among participants?

This article might inform how practitioners strategically design study abroad programs that aim to enhance cultural competence among participants.

Chapter IV entitled *Global Leaders: Examining Change Among Participants of a Short-Term Study Abroad Program* assesses the effectiveness of a study abroad program instructional model in enhancing cultural competence. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do participants' demographic characteristics and prior intercultural experiences influence their cultural competence development?
2. What are the perceived strengths and limitations of the study abroad program in fostering cultural competence among participants?
3. How do participants' self-reported experiences and reflections compare to changes in cultural competence?

The article concludes by providing considerations for instructional tools to develop and improve approaches to developing cultural competence among students within short-term study abroad programs.

Definition of Terms

Abstract conceptualization. Analysis and synthesis of information to form abstract concepts or theories that explain experiences (Kolb, 1984).

Active experimentation. The application of new knowledge or theories gained from previous experiences to test and solve problems in new situations (Kolb, 1984).

Behavioral CQ. A person's interpersonal skills and flexibility in verbal and nonverbal behaviors (Ang et al., 2006).

Cognitive CQ. An individual's knowledge of cultures, cultural systems, and practices, as well as cognitive processes involved in intercultural encounters. It comprises declarative knowledge (factual information about cultures) and procedural knowledge (strategies for using that information) (Ang et al., 2006).

Concrete experience. First-hand encounter with a particular phenomenon or situation (Kolb, 1984).

Cultural intelligence (CQ). the capability of one to function effectively across national, ethnic, and organizational cultural boundaries. It involves understanding diverse cultural perspectives, attitudes, values, and behaviors, and to adapt one's own behavior and communication style accordingly (Ang et al., 2006).

Experiential learning (EL). The process of transforming experiences into knowledge, represented in a four-concept cycle consisting of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984).

Global learning. an educational approach that involves the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes relevant to living and working in a global society (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022).

Metacognitive CQ. Refers to an individual's awareness and control of their thinking and learning in cross-cultural interactions. It includes planning and monitoring cognitive processes involved in intercultural encounters, such as attention regulation, information processing strategies, knowledge management, and self-efficacy (Ang et al., 2006).

Motivational CQ. A person's level of interest or drive when dealing with cross-cultural interactions. It encompasses an individual's confidence, needs, and values that encourage cultural learning, such as openness, curiosity, self-efficacy, and resilience. It also includes an individual's affective responses to cultural diversity, such as anxiety, curiosity, and enjoyment, and their motivation to engage in cultural learning activities (Ang et al., 2006).

Reflective observation. The systematic observation of interactions or experiences with the objective of extracting meaningful patterns and ideas (Kolb, 1984).

Short-term study abroad (STSA). brief study abroad experiences that can last up to eight weeks (Elmokadem et al., 2024).

Study abroad. Programs that allow students to travel to and study in a foreign country for varying lengths of time while receiving academic credit (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022).

CHAPTER 2

EXPLORING SHORT-TERM STUDY ABROAD IN CULTURAL COMPETENCE
DEVELOPMENT: A NARRATIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

Higher education institutions recognize the need to prepare students to be global citizens, a priority that has become increasingly important in today's interconnected world. Globalization has amplified the demand for individuals who can navigate cultural boundaries and collaborate effectively across diverse teams, particularly in industries like agriculture that operate on an international scale. Global learning, which emphasizes the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes for living and working in a global society, has been integrated into college curricula, with study abroad programs serving as a key component. This narrative review explores the effectiveness of study abroad programs-especially short-term experiences-in developing cultural competence among college students. The review synthesizes research on various program formats, pedagogical approaches, and best practices for fostering cultural intelligence (CQ), while also examining the challenges and limitations identified in the literature. Findings highlight that while short-term study abroad programs offer accessible, immersive learning opportunities, their impact on cultural competence varies based on program design, instructional strategies, and student backgrounds. The review underscores the importance of reflective assignments, experiential learning, and intentional curriculum design in promoting meaningful gains in CQ. Recommendations are offered for practitioners and researchers to enhance the effectiveness of study abroad as a global learning approach.

Introduction

Higher Education Institutions recognize the need to prepare students to be global citizens (Garbers et al., 2022; Wiersma-Mosley, 2019). This is critical in this era of globalization, as working across cultural boundaries can be challenging for industry leaders (Rosch & Haber-Curran, 2013). Globalization is the interconnectedness and interdependence of economies,

politics, and cultures worldwide (Walter, 2021). As people, goods, and capital flow more freely with technological advancements, those interacting in this system must understand and be committed to the responsibilities of citizenship within this global community (Rosch & Haber-Curran, 2013; Walter, 2021). Central to global citizenship is the sense of belonging to a community beyond national boundaries and cultural differences, an awareness and acceptance of different cultures, and a commitment to improving the world through responsible, active participation in local and global communities (Garbers et al., 2022; Rosch & Haber-Curran, 2013; Walter, 2021).

The concept of global learning has been integrated into colleges and universities in the U.S. in response to the need for students to be prepared to operate within the global workforce (Garbers et al., 2022). Global learning is an educational approach that involves the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes relevant to living and working in a global society. This approach seeks to prepare students who are informed, responsible, and active global citizens that can work across borders and cultures to address modern-day challenges and opportunities (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022; Garbers et al., 2022). Studying abroad is a component of global learning that has played an important role in higher education in recent years (Garbers et al., 2022).

Due to the global nature of the agriculture industry, agriculture students must understand and navigate environments with those from other cultures (Rosch & Haber-Curran, 2013). Future agricultural leaders need to conceptualize the industry's international nature beyond their exposure to its domestic contexts (Garbers et al., 2022; Hammer & Bennett, 2009; Wiersma-Mosley, 2019). Study abroad programs are a popular approach in exposing students to concepts beyond their local levels of community and developing cultural competencies necessary for

global interactions (Rosch & Haber-Curran, 2013). However, not all study abroad programs have the same impact (Terzuolo, 2018). Scholars have even called into question the sufficiency of study abroad in transforming learners into global citizens (Colville-Hall et al., 2011). By exploring the existing research on cultural competence-focused short-term study abroad programs, the research can help to identify how these programs impact learners, strengths and limitations noted by previous researchers, and contribute to effective instructional methodologies for future practitioners. Accordingly, what do we know and what do we need to further explore the impact of study abroad programs as an effective global learning approach for increasing students' cultural competence?

Research Purpose and Questions

This narrative review explores the existing research on the effectiveness of study abroad programs in developing cultural competence. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the key findings regarding the impact of study abroad programs on the development of cultural competence among college students, as reported in existing literature?
2. What methodologies have been employed in previous research to assess the effectiveness of study abroad programs in enhancing cultural competence among college students?
3. What are the main challenges and limitations identified in previous studies examining the effectiveness of study abroad programs in fostering cultural competence among college students, and what recommendations have been proposed to address them?

Methodology

This narrative literature review examines the existing research on cultural competence development through study abroad. A narrative literature review serves as an integration and

synthesis of important thinking and research in an area of focus (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The development of this review focused on gleaning insights on strengths and opportunities for study abroad programs to enhance students' cultural competencies thus yielding information that would be helpful when making decisions on study abroad development and providing a critical assessment of the research and literature (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The rigor of this narrative review was supported by a team of researchers being consulted for a span of two years. Literature for this study was retrieved electronically using ERIC, Education Research Complete, APA PsychINFO, and SocINDEX. The databases were identified as appropriate for the focus of this study by a team of research and data science experts at the University of Georgia. A hand search of literature was also conducted to capture existing research that may not have been included in the databases identified. Literature on study abroad, short-term study abroad, cultural competence, cultural intelligence, cultural awareness, and best practices were consulted in this review. The only articles included in this review were peer-reviewed and published in English. No date restrictions were used in the literature search.

Results

The following section outlines key findings from a literature review on the effectiveness of study abroad programs in developing cultural competence. The first subsection discusses various study abroad formats, the pedagogical approaches utilized to teach cultural competence, and the best practices for implementing cultural competence during these programs. The next section describes insight into student learning outcomes during immersion experiences and how these programs have been evaluated. Finally, challenges and limitations to cultural competence are discussed in concert with best practices, as described in the literature, for overcoming them.

Study Abroad Programs and Cultural Competence

The first research question sought to explore key findings within the existing literature on the impacts of study abroad programs on the development of cultural competence among college students. Three major themes that emerge from the review were defining the types of study abroad programs that exist, explaining approaches for developing CQ, and current best practices for implementing CQ development in study abroad programs.

Study Abroad Types

Study abroad programs are an experiential learning approach that immerses students in different languages, environments, and cultures, allowing learners to gain first-hand knowledge and skills. Experiential learning (EL) is the process of transforming experiences into knowledge. A framework for EL was offered as a four-concept cycle consisting of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). Concrete experience involves first-hand encounters with a particular phenomenon or situation (Kolb, 1984). Reflective observations are the systematic observations of interactions and experiences to extract meaning and patterns. Abstract conceptualization concerns individuals analyzing their observations and forming generalizations, theories, or concepts based on their reflections to explain their experiences. Lastly, active experimentation means individuals apply these concepts in new situations, allowing for further concrete experiences and continuing the learning cycle (Kolb, 1984). Institutions offer a variety of experiential, global learning programs, like short-term study abroad, as an integral component of the collegiate experience (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022).

Higher education institutions are responsible for adequately preparing students for the workforce. In the 21st century, this means engaging in the global community. Though study

abroad programs intend to prepare globally minded students, not all immersive experiences are created equally. Study abroad programs are diverse and can be organized based on factors such as length of stay and type of work. There has been a wide range of studies in recent years, with the primary focus on study-abroad formats (Brown et al., 2016; Gümüş et al., 2020; Iskhakova & Bradly, 2022; Safipour et al., 2017). Though research on short-term study abroad is growing, the current study explored these programs as they continue to become the dominant form of programming offered by higher education institutions (Ogden & Streitwieser, 2016).

Study abroad programs also vary in terms of structure, group size, location, purpose, faculty supervision level, nature of accommodations, cost, pre-departure preparation, level of cultural immersion, type of hosting organization, level of post-arrival engagement, language competence required, the language of coursework or fieldwork, and academic standards (Iskhakova & Bradly, 2022). Within the factor of length of stay, study abroad programs can be categorized as either long-term or short-term. Long-term programs tend to last for a semester or full academic year and allow students to immerse themselves in a foreign culture, language, and academic environment for an extended duration (Iskhakova & Bradly, 2022). These programs are designed to provide students with a more comprehensive understanding of the host country's culture, society, and educational system. On the other end of the spectrum, short-term study abroad programs are a distinct educational experience that has gained popularity in recent years. These programs can last from a week to several weeks and are designed to provide intensive cross-cultural experiences focusing on specific themes or learning objectives (Iskhakova & Bradly, 2022).

Research on short-term study abroad programs is rising (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022) as higher education continues to move beyond the traditional classroom approach to

develop globally minded students (Colville-Hall et al., 2011; Garbers et al., 2024). There has been interest in the diversity of factors defining various types of study abroad programs because they have been found to have academic and personal contributions for participants (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022). Researchers have noted student development of cross-cultural competencies, leadership skills, and a better understanding of global issues. Within agriculture, students can gain an understanding of the industry's historical background as well as its current economic, social, and environmental significance domestically and internationally. The impacts of globalization will affect the personal and professional lives of agriculture students today and in the future. Undergraduate agricultural students who've had international educational experiences support the value of these programs (Garbers et al., 2024). Having a global perspective of the food system can lead to more well-rounded individuals entering the global workforce (Garbers et al., 2024).

Some research has also centered on other institutional factors that impact how globally-minded students are developed. While a significant portion of CQ study abroad literature focuses on students, Buntain (2023) highlighted the impact that faculty and staff have on supporting international students and promoting study abroad opportunities for students. Despite the critical role these professional members of institutions play, they lack CQ-related professional development opportunities, experiences abroad, and the efficacy to support diverse students (Buntain, 2023; Colville-Hall et al., 2011). These insights into institutional factors and the roles of faculty and staff underscore the importance of a holistic approach to developing globally-minded students, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of CQ developmental approaches.

CQ Developmental Approaches

Various study abroad formats exist, yet the opportunity to develop globally minded students who can navigate cultures beyond their own is a common expected learning outcome among these experiences (Acker & Bocarro, 2021; Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022; Garbers et al., 2022, 2024; Terzuolo, 2018). Early cultural intelligence theorists conceptualized cultural intelligence (CQ) as a multifactor concept, including behavioral CQ, cognitive CQ, metacognitive CQ, and motivational CQ (Ang et al., 2006). Behavioral CQ includes the things individuals do and say; cognitive CQ includes knowledge and mental capability; metacognitive CQ refers to the mental processes individuals use to engage in cultural interactions; while motivational CQ is the magnitude of energy one is willing to exert to engage in culturally diverse situations (Ang et al., 2006). This conceptualization serves as the foundation for teaching CQ through study abroad programs.

The lack of curricula available that practitioners can use as a guide to prepare students who are equipped to meet the needs of the global workforce is a contributing factor to the rise in study abroad research. Various pedagogical approaches have been utilized across the literature to promote the development of CQ among students while studying abroad despite the absence of widely supported instructional frameworks (Acker & Bocarro, 2021). Traditional classroom instruction, guided excursions, interactions with locals, reflective assignments, community service, service-learning, and virtual reflective portfolios are among the approaches utilized to teach CQ during these programs (Acker & Bocarro, 2021; Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022; Garbers et al., 2024; Rosch & Haber-Curran, 2013). Traditional classroom instruction has been utilized to develop cognitive CQ, which includes transferring culture-specific or culture-general knowledge, primarily through lecturing (Rosch & Haber-Curran, 2013). Culture-general

knowledge refers to the overall capability of one to understand and adapt to various cultural settings, while culture-specific knowledge is more in-depth, including the specific customs, practices, and norms of a particular cultural group (Ang et al., 2007a).

While scholars have found that traditional classroom time can contribute to the development of CQ (Rosch & Haber-Curran, 2013), others have expressed caution in focusing on knowledge acquisition exclusively. Examinations of the impact of a short-term study abroad program in Italy presented qualitative and quantitative assessment results as evidence of growth in personal and leadership development surrounding culture. Lectures paired with group discussion and group reflection were the instructional modes employed in this study (Rosch & Haber-Curran, 2013). Traditional classroom approaches can positively impact cognitive CQ; however, the ability to reason and demonstrate fluidity within the nuances of interpersonal interactions may not be addressed through this mode of instruction (Ang et al., 2007a).

Reasoning, associated with metacognitive CQ, may be more effectively developed through excursions and other informal interactions while abroad (Acker & Bocarro, 2021; Rosch & Haber-Curran, 2013). Excursions are trips or short programs that can involve cultural experiences, hands-on activities, or field trips that offer an opportunity for learners to problem-solve and apply traditional classroom content in real-life settings (Acker & Bocarro, 2021). Informal interactions with locals while abroad have been noted as a significant point of development for learners while abroad (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022). Practicing and refining non-verbal behaviors with people from other cultures, like speech acts and social cues, is an important aspect of effective interactions in culturally diverse contexts (Acker & Bocarro, 2021; Ang et al., 2007a). Local interactions have been found to develop behavioral CQ by providing the space for learners to practice navigating differences, building relationships, and

responding to unexpected situations (Acker & Bocarro, 2021; Ang et al., 2007a). There is value in many of the approaches utilized across the literature. While there is no definitive way to approach CQ development, scholars have sought insight into the best practices for CQ development.

Best Practices for Increasing Cultural Intelligence through Study Abroad

Developing and delivering effective study abroad programs is a focal point of scholars in this space. Programs that find success in developing globally minded students support the space for learners to hone skills in real-time, yet some of these experiences fail to do so (Jin et al., 2024). Further, programs that are not informed by best practices run the risk of inadvertently hindering students' CQ development and reinforcing stereotypes, leading to people who are less capable of navigating cultural diversity than before participating (Terzuolo, 2018). Institutions recognize the critical nature of developing culturally competent students, but few institutions have incorporated the best practices associated with applying CQ learning during study abroad (Acker & Bocarro, 2021). Discussing what scholars have found to be effective in developing globally minded learners is paramount.

Various practices have been explored within the CQ-focused study abroad literature, and scholars recommend some combined or scaffolded practices to develop CQ effectively. Among these are traditional classroom instruction paired with cultural excursions (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022), individual and group service-learning projects (Garbers et al., 2022, 2024), individual CQ goal setting, mentoring (Buntain, 2023), reflective journaling, and cumulative reflective papers (Rosch & Haber-Curran, 2013), as well as opportunities for individual and group debriefing (Dykhous & Bikos, 2019). Providing the space for learners to apply the content they have engaged with in a meaningful setting contributed to personal and academic

growth as well as a better understanding of global issues (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022; Engelking, 2018). Some have emphasized the role journaling and final papers play in promoting reflection, which can serve as a bridge between the curricular and experiential components of study abroad programs (Rosch & Haber-Curran, 2013). Additionally, debriefing in one-on-one and group settings can help individuals process their lived experiences to highlight strengths and areas for growth in cross-cultural interactions (Dykhouse & Bikos, 2019). In addition to the myriad of interventions, when they are offered in relation to the immersive experience varies (i.e. pre-, during, and post) (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022).

The work of CQ development while abroad is a clear point of focus for much of the existing research, but how might study abroad practitioners set the parameters for the application of cultural competence? Implementing psychoeducation practices (Dykhouse & Bikos, 2019) has also been advocated for as a provision to encourage healthy and discourage unhealthy coping strategies among study abroad program participants who might experience cultural tension (Dykhouse & Bikos, 2019). This approach can support participants' ability to process and transfer their learning experiences and knowledge gained abroad to their home culture upon re-entry (Dykhouse & Bikos, 2019). Effective study abroad programs that support the application of culturally competent behaviors employ a combination of best practices, including structured cultural excursions, service-learning projects, mentoring, and reflective journaling, and case studies (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022; Buntain, 2023; Garbers et al., 2022). By incorporating these evidence-based interventions within study abroad experiences, institutions can foster globally minded learners who are equipped to apply their learning and adapt to new cultural environments.

Previous Research on Enhancing Cultural Competence through Study Abroad

The second research question examined the effectiveness of study abroad programs in enhancing cultural competence among college students. Major themes that emerged from the literature included learner outcomes and the evaluation of impact. Previous studies have identified evidence of the positive effects of study abroad on cultural competence. For instance, a study by Beatty and Manning-Ouellette (2022) that found that participants' leadership efficacy and capacity grew through a short-term study abroad program in Sweden, indicating that study abroad can be integral in overall leadership identity development. Similarly, Garbers et al (2024) reported inherent transformations in students' personal growth and service-learning outcomes, according to Transformative Learning Theory. Because of this theory's focus on refining, learning, and transformation, these findings suggest that participants not only gained new knowledge but also altered their understanding and formulation of meaning based on their experiences abroad (Garbers et al., 2024). Additionally, a study by Buntain (2023) using the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) found growth along the continuum for study abroad participants in comparison to the control group, showing support for the idea that structured intercultural learning experiences can lead to substantial growth in cultural competence. These themes will be discussed in more detail in the section that follows.

Learner Outcomes

A common outcome of study abroad programs explored in the literature is the development of global leaders or globally minded students. Global leaders have been defined as those who build trust in teams by empowering cross-cultural stakeholders and those cognizant of the geographical and cultural complexities of surrounding areas affecting positive change within organizations (Acker & Bocarro, 2021). While this is the expected outcome of study abroad

programs, exploration of the actual outcomes is necessary as the literature on the actual outcomes is limited and sometimes contradictory (Terzuolo, 2018). Some have questioned if the rigor of study abroad programs makes them as effective as alternative experiences learners could have in their home country (Schmidt & Pardo, 2016). Practitioners and program developers should strive to measure the impact of these programs if they aim to be aligned with the best practices of CQ development. Measuring participants' CQ development is an obvious approach to assessing program impacts and involves considering a range of individual characteristics and experiences contributing to an individual's ability to adapt and work effectively in different cultural settings (Ang et al., 2007).

Though enhanced CQ is a broad goal of study abroad programs, other specific student outcomes have been explored. Outcomes have been explored surrounding civic engagement (Acker & Bocarro, 2021; Colville-Hall et al., 2011; Garbers et al., 2022, 2024; Rosch & Haber-Curran, 2013), personal growth (Dykhouse & Bikos, 2019; Garbers et al., 2022, 2024), professional skills (Buntain, 2023; Colville-Hall et al., 2011; Engelking, 2018), and self-efficacy (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022; Dykhouse & Bikos, 2019). As the literature highlights the importance of measuring the impact of study abroad programs on student outcomes, a critical next step is to conduct rigorous impact evaluations that assess the effectiveness of these programs in achieving their intended outcomes, such as developing global leaders, enhancing civic engagement, and fostering personal growth, professional skills, and self-confidence.

Impact Evaluation

To better understand the effectiveness of study abroad programs in enhancing learners' cultural competence, researchers have employed a range of methodological approaches, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods designs. These diverse approaches have

allowed scholars to gather a more comprehensive understanding of the complex factors that influence cultural competence development. Qualitative (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022; Garbers et al., 2022, 2024), quantitative (Buntain, 2023; Colville-Hall et al., 2011; Dykhous & Bikos, 2019), and mixed methods (Acker & Bocarro, 2021; Jin et al., 2024; Rosch & Haber-Curran, 2013) approaches have been used to assess the impacts of programs that aim to enhance learners' cultural competence. Qualitative approaches have involved interviews (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022; Garbers et al., 2022, 2024), focus groups, observations, written narratives (Acker & Bocarro, 2021) as well as case studies, and critical incidents (Engelking, 2018). Quantitative methods have included experimental designs involving various survey instruments that measure and compare participants' CQ before and after their respective programs (Acker & Bocarro, 2021; Buntain, 2023; Colville-Hall et al., 2011). Mixed methods studies have involved combinations of both qualitative and quantitative evaluation approaches.

The use of multiple methodological approaches across the literature has provided a nuanced understanding of the complex factors that influence cultural competence development, highlighting the importance of considering both qualitative and quantitative perspectives in program evaluation. By leveraging the strengths of different research approaches, scholars have developed a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of study abroad programs on learners' cultural competence to inform the development of more effective interventions.

Critical Analysis of Previous Research on Enhancing Cultural Competence through Study Abroad

International expansion, technological advances, and the changing nature of work have contributed to the need for individuals in global contexts to assume global leadership responsibilities (Cumberland et al., 2016). While the value of cultural competence is evident for

those who will work in global contexts, some challenges and limitations can hinder the development of these competencies. Research question three sought to explore the challenges and limitations of previous studies in examining the effectiveness of study abroad programs in fostering CQ. Research question three also aimed to identify recommendations scholars have proposed to address these challenges within the literature. Two larger themes emerged surrounding programmatic components and participant attributes.

Challenges and Limitations

Despite the potential benefits of study abroad programs in developing CQ, several program attributes can hinder their effectiveness. The design and implementation of these programs play a crucial role in determining whether students truly immerse themselves in the host culture or merely replicate their home environment abroad. Defining characteristics of study abroad programs, including duration, host language, course content language, the context of academic work, housing, structured experiential activities, and guided reflection, impact the CQ development of participants (Colville-Hall et al., 2011). A challenge to CQ development through study abroad lies in the limited curricula for effectively developing and facilitating these programs, often resulting in missed opportunities for deep cultural engagement and the effective navigation of cultural differences. Scholars have specified the lack of formal curricula to achieve high-order outcomes such as global citizenship (Acker & Bocarro, 2021), civic engagement (Acker & Bocarro, 2021; Colville-Hall et al., 2011; Garbers et al., 2022, 2024; Rosch & Haber-Curran, 2013), personal growth (Dykhouse & Bikos, 2019; Garbers et al., 2022, 2024), professional development (Buntain, 2023; Colville-Hall et al., 2011; Engelking, 2018), and self-efficacy (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022; Dykhouse & Bikos, 2019). Equally important are

the characteristics and experiences of the participants themselves, which can significantly influence their CQ development.

In addition to the attributes of study abroad programs, the characteristics and experiences of participants can also present a challenge to practitioners working on CQ development. Individual differences in cultural knowledge, readiness to adapt, mental strategies, and motivation to engage with diverse cultures can influence participants' ability to grow from experiences abroad (Ang et al., 2006). Time, reflection, and coping mechanisms emerged as challenges to CQ development. Research on a one-month program in Stockholm, Sweden, found that while participants developed leadership skills, self-awareness, and self-efficacy, there was not enough time allotted for learners to make meaning of their experiences upon return (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022). Recent research on a six-week program in Galway and Bunbeg, Ireland, supports this finding, noting that participants had not gone beyond surface-level reflection despite learners engaging in rich cultural experiences (Garbers et al., 2024). Both programs were short-term, lasting no longer than 6 weeks.

Lastly, challenges arise surrounding the conflict participants may experience being immersed in an unfamiliar environment for an extended amount of time. This conflict has been deemed cultural dislocation, which is a state of discomfort, confusion, or loss experienced by individuals who are removed from their familiar cultural context and thrust into a new, foreign, or unfamiliar cultural environment (Dykhouse & Bikos, 2019). Interchangeably referred to as culture shock, acculturation stress, and transition distress, this concept can lead to feelings of homesickness and isolation, misunderstandings or doubts about the new culture, and difficulties adapting to the new cultural environment. Study abroad participants should be prepared for the logistical and cultural aspects of their respective programs. Inadequate pre-departure

preparations can lead to negative experiences that hinder learners' ability to adapt to new situations and locations (Acker & Bocarro, 2021). Thus, scholars have advocated for students to be provided with the education and tools to cope with their experiences in healthy ways (Dykhouse & Bikos, 2019).

Recommendations in the Literature

Developing cultural competence is multifaceted and can be impacted by several challenges associated with programmatic components and participant characteristics like cultural dislocation, inadequate preparation, and the subjective nature of lived experiences. Cultural competence development programs are enhanced if systems are in place to address these limitations, however (Dykhouse & Bikos, 2019). Practitioners have been encouraged to engage participants in intercultural learning and goal setting before, during, and after study abroad (Buntain, 2023). Cultural differences and similarities should be engaged with via pre-departure sessions, reflective journaling, and mentorship. Researchers have found that engaging with cross-cultural organizations, businesses, and local leaders while abroad can provide valuable context for learners to reflect and apply the new knowledge and skills they are developing as global leaders (Acker & Bocarro, 2021). Critical reflection throughout these engagements should be allotted for and encouraged by program developers to promote CQ development (Garbers et al., 2024).

While the literature highlights the importance of mentorship in study abroad, including faculty, peer, and cultural mentors, there is limited research specifically examining the role of graduate students as mentors to undergraduates during these programs (Jin et al., 2024). The intentional positioning of graduate students to support undergraduates' reflection and learning may offer unique benefits for participant development. Given the lack of direct discussion in the

literature, the potential impact of graduate student mentors represents an important area for future research and program innovation.

As previously mentioned, learners are susceptible to cultural friction when abroad and upon returning home. Opportunities for individual and group debriefing have been recommended to assist participants in managing this friction in a way that encourages growth (Dykhouse & Bikos, 2019). Some scholars concur, specifying that this type of debriefing should take place no sooner than six months after the end of the program (Garbers et al., 2024). Institutions have been encouraged to provide more cultural immersion opportunities for students (Rosch & Haber-Curran, 2013), with particular emphasis on diversifying the participant pool of study abroad programs as underrepresented racial groups are less likely to participate in study abroad programs in comparison to their counterparts (Acker & Bocarro, 2021). In conclusion, addressing the multifaceted challenges of developing cultural competence requires a comprehensive approach that includes pre-departure preparation, ongoing reflection, and post-program debriefing. By implementing these strategies, institutions can better support participants in navigating cultural friction and fostering meaningful intercultural learning experiences.

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

This narrative review was guided by three research questions to better understand the effectiveness of study abroad programs in developing cultural competence among college students, emphasizing diverse program structures and strategies. Short-term study abroad programs are gaining traction in higher education as they help students develop cross-cultural skills, leadership abilities, and an understanding of global issues, particularly in fields like agriculture, where students benefit from learning about the industry's global and local significance (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022; Garbers et al., 2024). Faculty and staff also

play a crucial role in supporting study abroad opportunities and international students but often lack adequate professional development in cultural intelligence, highlighting the need for a more holistic approach to cultivating globally minded learners (Buntain, 2023; Colville-Hall et al., 2011). Various approaches, such as guided excursions, local interactions, and reflective practices, have been identified as critical for fostering behavioral, cognitive, metacognitive, and motivational cultural intelligence (Acker & Bocarro, 2021; Ang et al., 2006). By integrating evidence-based interventions, study abroad programs can effectively prepare students to navigate cultural diversity and adapt to global challenges.

Researchers have utilized qualitative approaches, such as interviews, focus groups, and case studies (Acker & Bocarro, 2021; Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022), quantitative methods, including experimental designs with pre- and post-program surveys (Buntain, 2023; Colville-Hall et al., 2011), and mixed-methods studies that integrate both qualitative and quantitative perspectives (Jin et al., 2024; Rosch & Haber-Curran, 2013). These diverse methods have allowed for a nuanced understanding of program outcomes, including the development of global leadership skills, enhanced civic engagement, personal growth, professional competencies, and self-efficacy (Dykhous & Bikos, 2019; Garbers et al., 2022, 2024). While the literature highlights the broad goals of cultural competence and global leadership, it also underscores the need for rigorous impact evaluations to address the variability and contradictions in findings (Schmidt & Pardo, 2016; Terzuolo, 2018). By combining methodological rigor with a focus on measurable outcomes, future research can advance the effectiveness of study abroad programs in fostering cultural intelligence and global competencies.

Despite the potential benefits of study abroad programs in developing cultural competence, several challenges and limitations hinder their effectiveness (Cumberland et al.,

2016). Key issues included the design and implementation of the programs, where programmatic factors such as duration, host language, course content, housing, and structured experiential activities significantly impact the CQ development of participants (Colville-Hall et al., 2011). Limited formal curricula often resulted in missed opportunities for deep cultural engagement and effective navigation of cultural differences, affecting outcomes such as global citizenship, civic engagement, personal growth, professional development, and self-efficacy (Acker & Bocarro, 2021; Dykhous & Bikos, 2019; Garbers et al., 2022, 2024). Participant characteristics, including cultural knowledge, adaptability, mental strategies, and motivation, also influence CQ development (Ang et al., 2006).

Time constraints, inadequate reflection, and coping mechanisms are additional challenges, with short-term programs often failing to provide sufficient time for meaningful reflection and cultural integration (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022; Garbers et al., 2024). Cultural dislocation or culture shock can further hinder adaptation and learning (Dykhous & Bikos, 2019). To address these challenges, scholars recommend comprehensive strategies, including pre-departure preparation, intercultural learning and goal setting, reflective journaling, mentorship, and engagement with local organizations and leaders (Acker & Bocarro, 2021; Buntain, 2023). Critical reflection and debriefing sessions, both during and after the program, are also crucial for managing cultural friction and promoting CQ development (Dykhous & Bikos, 2019; Garbers et al., 2024). Additionally, institutions should provide more cultural immersion opportunities and diversify the participant pool to include underrepresented groups (Acker & Bocarro, 2021; Rosch & Haber-Curran, 2013). By implementing these strategies, institutions can better support participants in fostering meaningful intercultural learning experiences.

Scholars agree that higher education institutions have the responsibility to create more opportunities for students to be developed for a more complex, global workforce (Acker & Bocarro, 2021). Establishing more opportunities that are impactful could be difficult due to the lack of formal curricula practitioners have to develop these programs. Thus, there is a need for further exploration of what programmatic aspects are most impactful for student development (Dykhouse & Bikos, 2019). This can help identify what precipitates change and transformation in students after participating in these programs (Garbers et al., 2024). Valid concerns about the effectiveness of study abroad programs have been raised. Do the benefits of exposure to a new culture, language development, and rich non-academic experiences outweigh the disadvantages of travel disruption, potentially less rigorous academic standards, and changes to the timeline of degree completion due to integrating study abroad? These and other queries have been posed in the exploration of the tangible benefits of participating in these programs (Schmidt & Pardo, 2016).

There is a breadth of tools that have been used to develop and assess the effectiveness of CQ-focused study abroad programs. While measuring learners' CQ is a common form of assessment, should qualitative or quantitative measures take precedence in future studies? The truth of the matter is that there is no singular approach that is ideal for CQ measurement. The value of mixed methods approaches, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative measures, has been argued and examined within the literature (Buntain, 2023). Although there has been CQ development in programs that were not developed with frameworks in mind (Garbers et al., 2024), there is some consensus that intentionally utilizing specific frameworks when developing study-abroad experiences can assist practitioners in assessing where development occurs within these programs (Acker & Bocarro, 2021; Garbers et al., 2024). Therefore, I propose the Cultural

Information Processing (CIP) Model as a framework for developing and evaluating study abroad programs that aim to have positive impacts on participants' CQ.

In addition, future research should explore the necessity and comparative impact of physical study abroad versus domestic or virtual cultural immersion experiences. Investigating whether being physically abroad is essential for CQ development, or if desired learner outcomes can be achieved through culturally rich experiences at home, would provide valuable insights for program design and accessibility. Furthermore, the integration of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, to simulate mentoring relationships or facilitate case-based learning when in-person mentors are unavailable represents a promising area for innovation. Studies examining the effectiveness of AI-driven mentoring tools or virtual intercultural simulations could inform new pathways for supporting learners' cultural competence development.

Cultural Information Processing Model: Development and Evaluation

The CIP Model integrates cultural intelligence theory (Ang et al., 2006) and the Processing Value Judgements model (Brown, 1998) to explain how the sub-dimensions within the four-factor model of cultural intelligence impact learner processing of new cultural information. The CIP model consists of four constructs: motivational CQ, cognitive CQ, metacognitive CQ, and behavioral CQ (Ang et al., 2006). Motivational CQ encompasses intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and self-efficacy, while cognitive CQ involves understanding culture and its impact on thinking and behavior. Metacognitive CQ involves strategizing and awareness, planning, and checking, and behavioral CQ involves verbal, nonverbal, and speech acts taken in cross-cultural situations (Hannum et al., 2010)

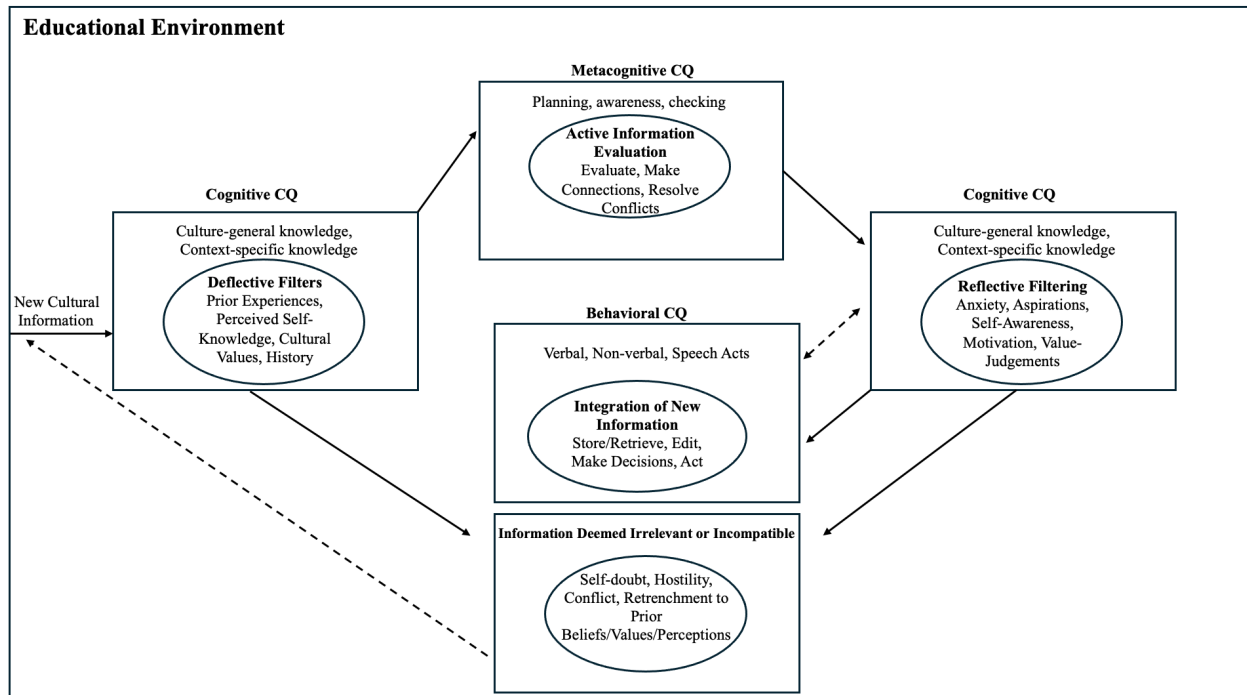
Self-concept, an individual's perception of various aspects of their identity based on culture, family, morals, career, physical attributes, and other internal and external factors, was

found to be connected to CQ development by earlier research (Brown, 2004b). Within the CIP model (see Figure 1), an individual's self-concept is engaged when interpreting new cultural information. When learners are presented with new cultural information, they initially employ deflection filters to determine whether the information is compatible with their existing self-concept (Brown, 1998, 2004b). The motivation to engage in this process is moderated by motivational CQ, which drives the movement of information from sensory memory to long-term memory and adoption.

As learners process new information, it first passes through the cognitive CQ dimension. The information then undergoes further evaluation through metacognitive CQ and is facilitated by experiences that activate intrinsic motivation and encourage higher-order analysis and problem-solving (Brown, 1998, 2004b; Hannum et al., 2010). Reflective filtering within cognitive CQ allows for the reevaluation and resolution of internal conflicts, leading to a deeper understanding of cultural impacts (Hannum et al., 2010). Finally, environmental feedback and self-efficacy influence whether new cultural information is accepted and implemented into actions, known as behavioral CQ (Ang et al., 2006; Earley, Christopher, & Ang, 2003; Hannum et al., 2010). The CIP model includes feedback loops, represented by dotted lines, which allow for the reprocessing of information based on new environmental factors and further reflection on integrated beliefs (Brown 2004b).

Figure 2.1

Cultural Information Processing (CIP) Model



NOTE: Dotted arrows indicate a feedback loop.

Institutions have a responsibility to provide experiences that shape students for the 21st-century workforce. The potential of study abroad programs as a mode of this development remains high. Facilitators of these cross-cultural experiences must create a supportive learning environment that considers the self-concept of the instructor, cultural responsiveness, peer support, and facilitated immersion experiences to enhance CQ development. In response to the encouragement for the continuous evaluation of study abroad experiences (Dykhous & Bikos, 2019), the CIP model can serve as a framework for this purpose. Study abroad strengths and areas of growth can be identified based on the programmatic aspects that correspond to the construct within the model. Particularly the modes of motivation, reflection, and opportunities for integration and application.

As globalization drives connections across political, economic, and social boundaries, higher education institutions should strive to improve their approaches to developing culturally competent learners. This narrative literature review's findings can inform study-abroad efforts and encourage practitioners to revisit empirically informed practices for CQ development. Utilizing a formal framework to develop and evaluate study abroad programs can add to the existing research on participant outcomes and best practices. Future research should examine the long-term outcomes of study abroad on participants to provide insight into the value of these efforts in comparison to alternatives toward the development of global professionals in the 21st century.

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CHAPTER 3

LEARNER PROCESSING OF INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL EXPERIENCES

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Abstract

As globalization continues to shape the workforce, higher education faces increasing pressure to equip students with the cultural competence needed for success in diverse, international environments. This study investigated how structured reflective assignments and applied learning opportunities within a short-term study abroad program in Morocco influenced students' development of cultural intelligence (CQ). Guided by the Cultural Information Processing (CIP) model, this research explored how students process new cultural information through the lenses of self-concept, motivation, and reflection. Using a phenomenological approach, written narratives and blog posts from participants were analyzed to identify themes related to self-awareness, leadership development, and strategies for navigating cultural difference and conflict. The findings highlight that students' backgrounds, values, and beliefs significantly shape their engagement and growth, with reflective practice serving as a catalyst for deeper learning and adaptation. The study underscores the importance of intentional curriculum design and evidence-based interventions in promoting meaningful gains in CQ. Limitations include the specificity of the participant sample and the influence of researcher positionality. Recommendations are offered for future research to examine the long-term impacts of study abroad and to explore the effectiveness of educational frameworks like the CIP model in both domestic and international contexts.

Introduction

The need for global learning has become increasingly prevalent in the U.S. (Garbers et al., 2022). As advancements in policy, trade, and social connection continue to impact the way we live and work, those entering the workforce should be able to navigate the global community (Walter, 2021). For many industries, international and intercultural work has become

commonplace. Historical intercultural workplace differences have been exacerbated by work teams made up of individuals from more varying cultural backgrounds (Earley & Peterson, 2004). International expansion and technological advancements have added to the complexity of these organizational dynamics (Cumberland et al., 2016). Managers in large organizations have been tasked with leading projects and teams that operate in more than one country, with directors, managers, and executives regularly moving from one location to another, spending less time in one specific location (Canals, 2014; Cumberland et al., 2016). The dynamic nature of these collaborative teams highlights the importance of adaptability and cultural competence in modern professional settings. As businesses and organizations continue to expand their operations across borders, the ability to communicate effectively and collaborate within diverse teams have become critical skills.

While opinions about connectivity stemming from globalization may differ around the world, the point remains that we depend on each other to live and thrive in this world. Higher education institutions have faced increased pressure to prepare graduates for global professional environments (Elmokadem et al., 2024). Within this global environment, institutions have accepted the role of developing students who are lifelong learners and continuously seek to enhance their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors to work effectively within diverse environments. To achieve these goals through study abroad, institutions must focus on incorporating evidence-based interventions and practices that increase students' cultural competence in global contexts (Jin et al., 2024).

The development of cultural competence has been a focal point of education and research for some time (Ott & Michailova, 2018). Cultural competence, referred to interchangeably as cultural intelligence (CQ), is the capability to shift cultural perspectives and adapt one's behavior

to unique cultural contexts. Developing CQ is signified by the internalization of various culture-specific and culture-general frameworks and strategies that aid in positive and productive interactions across cultures (Hammer, 2012). The value of culture-specific knowledge has diminished as multinational organizations increasingly recognize the competitive advantage of graduates that are adaptable and have a broader worldview, attributes associated with culture-general knowledge (Elmokadem et al., 2024). Research has acknowledged cultural competence development as a lifelong learning process and perceived it as a measurable construct that is developed along a continuum (Hammer, 2012; Jin et al., 2024). Education, application, and reflection are avenues for this competence to be taught and learned (Jin et al., 2024).

As interactions across cultures increase, global learning practices focused on increasing cultural competence are more critical than ever before. Global learning is an educational approach focusing on developing knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to integrate learning and solve shared global problems (Beatty & Manning-Ouellette, 2022; Hovland, 2009). Study abroad is a component of global learning that can impact participants' language development, intercultural growth, personal growth, career development, and academic achievement (Garbers et al., 2022). The term study abroad has traditionally included exchange programs, semester and year abroad programs, and summer/winter abroad programs. Study abroad programs now vary by factors such as length, location, purpose, level of immersion, content-language, and faculty supervision level to name a few. Cross-cultural study tours, immersion programs, language-focused programs, volunteering and community experience abroad, global service learning, and research-integrated short-term study abroad are emerging formats in this space (Iskhakova & Bradly, 2022). Thus, there is no single, globally accepted way to classify study abroad programs (Brown et al., 2016; Iskhakova & Bradly, 2022).

Short-term study abroad programs have become a more popular offering by universities in recent years. These short, intensive formats aim to develop personal and professional skills, like CQ, by incorporating intercultural experiences that challenge learners to navigate and engage within diverse environments. Interpersonal skills and cultural awareness can be developed through these experiences; components that are significant to CQ (Iskhakova & Bradley, 2022).

It has been long argued that learning outcomes must be aligned with global learning goals in preparing well-educated citizens for the twenty-first century (Hammer, 2012; Hovland, 2009). Foundational scholars assumed that educational interventions and experiencing other cultures would naturally result in CQ development (Earley, Christopher, & Ang, 2003). Though global learning approaches are effective, scholars have questioned how individuals' CQ is developed and strengthened (Ott & Michailova, 2018).

Conceptual Framework

This study was guided by the Cultural Information Processing (CIP) model, a framework developed to explain how learners process new cultural information within educational environments (Toran III & Anderson, 2025). The CIP model integrates cultural intelligence theory (Ang et al., 2006) and the Processing Value Judgements model (Brown 1998) to explore the development of cultural intelligence among learners. Specifically, it highlights how cognitive CQ, metacognitive CQ, motivational CQ, and behavioral CQ, the sub-dimensions of the four-factor cultural intelligence model, impact the way learners process new cultural information.

Cultural intelligence theory underpins the competencies necessary to effectively understand, adapt, and lead across cultures (Ang et al., 2006; Kilduff & Cormican, 2022). The Processing Value Judgements model contextualizes these competencies by emphasizing the role

of self-concept in accepting or resisting new cultural information. Self-concept, an individual's perception of their identity shaped by internal and external factors, serves as a filter through which new cultural information is interpreted (Brown, 1998, 2004a; Kilicoglu et al., 2023). Motivational cultural CQ, a key factor within the CIP model, moderates this process by influencing the learner's drive and energy to engage with cross-cultural experiences (Hannum et al., 2010).

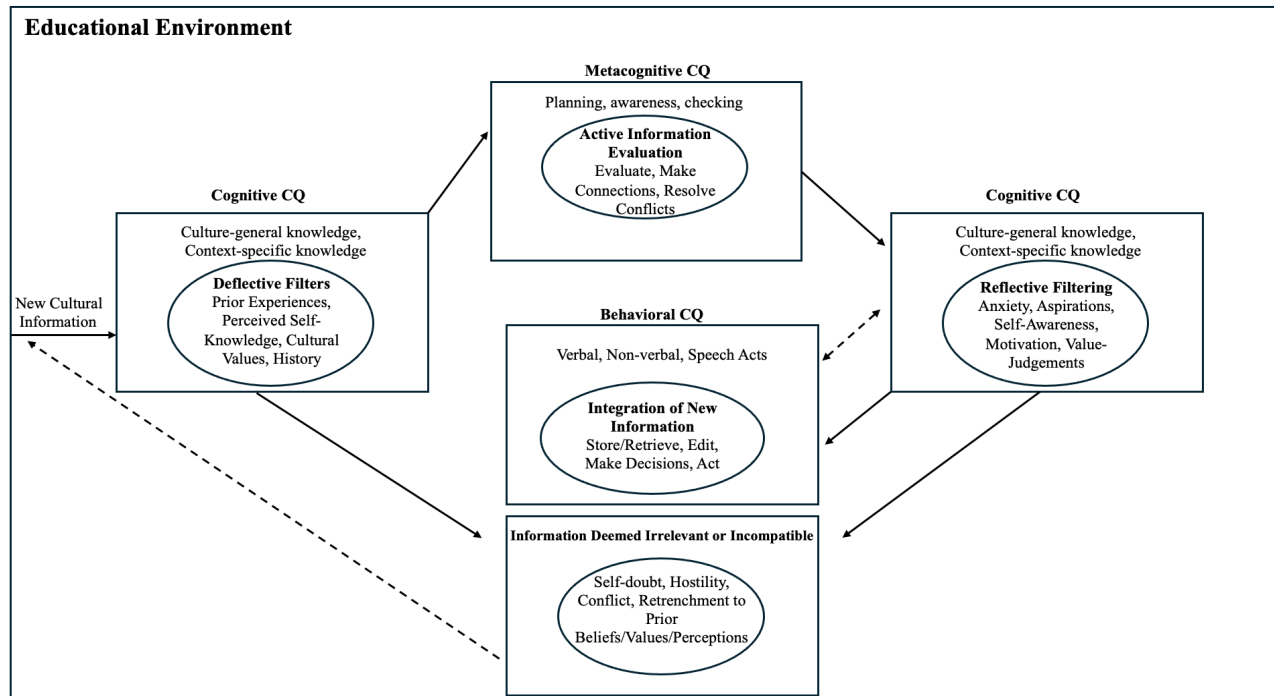
As learners encounter new cultural information within the learning environment, the CIP model (see figure 1) describes a series of steps involving deflective and reflective filtering. Initially, deflective filters help determine whether the information aligns with the learner's existing self-concept. If compatible, the information is processed further through cognitive CQ, which involves understanding how culture shapes thinking and behavior. Through metacognitive CQ, learners are encouraged to actively strategize, evaluate, and problem-solve within new cultural contexts (Brown, 2004a; Hannum et al., 2010). This phase allows students to analyze the compatibility of new information with their existing beliefs, ultimately guiding them toward either adopting or rejecting the information.

The final stage, behavioral CQ, focuses on the learner's ability to translate new cultural knowledge into actions, such as verbal and nonverbal communication in cross-cultural settings (Ang et al., 2006; Earley, Christopher, & Ang, 2003). Feedback loops within the CIP model allow learners to revisit and reevaluate previously processed information based on environmental factors and further reflection. These iterative cycles emphasize the importance of a supportive and culturally responsive educational environment, which facilitates deeper engagement with multicultural experiences (Brown, 2004a). By employing the CIP model, this study seeks to investigate how learners' interactions with new cultural information impact their CQ

development. Specifically, this research aims to explore how structured reflective practices and applied learning exercises impact the processing of new cultural information experienced during a study abroad program designed to develop more culturally competent students.

Figure 3.1

Cultural Information Processing (CIP) Model



NOTE. Dotted arrows indicate a feedback loop.

Purpose and Research Questions

This study investigated how students process their study abroad experiences in Morocco and the impact on their cultural competence development. Three research questions guided this study:

1. How do structured reflective assignments contribute to their processing of study abroad experiences in Morocco and subsequent development of cultural competence?

2. What are the key themes and patterns emerging from the reflective documents regarding students' processing of their study abroad experiences in Morocco and its impact on their cultural competence development?
3. How do the findings from the document analysis align with the Cultural Information Processing (CIP) Model, and what implications do they have for the design and implementation of study abroad programs that aim to enhance cultural competence among participants?

Methodology

To investigate how students process their study abroad experiences in Morocco and the impact on their cultural competence development, this study was guided by a phenomenological research approach. A purposive sample of students who participated in the Morocco: Agriculture, Organizational and Community Development study abroad program in 2022, 2023, and 2024 were recruited to participate. Purposive sampling is a non-random approach to selecting samples based on the characteristics of the study and research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). All students from 2022 ($n = 13$), 2023 ($n = 11$), and 2024 ($n = 12$) were recruited via email after returning from the study abroad program. Participant information, including name and email, was collected from student profiles within a secure electronic course management system. Follow-up participant recruitment emails were sent to potential participants, extending the opportunity to refuse to take part in any or all parts of this research without penalty. The Institutional Review Board of the researcher's university approved this study.

The design and implementation of the Morocco study abroad program intentionally incorporated several scholar-recommended strategies to address common challenges in developing cultural competence. Specifically, the program included pre-departure preparation

sessions, structured reflective journaling through blog assignments, and mentorship from both faculty and graduate students. In addition, the program prioritized engagement with local organizations and leaders in Morocco, facilitated by Moroccan faculty, who served both as connectors to the local community and as cultural leaders. These components were aligned with best practices in the literature (Acker & Bocarro, 2021; Buntain, 2023; Dykhous & Bikos, 2019; Garbers et al., 2024), aiming to provide participants with meaningful opportunities for intercultural learning, critical reflection, and guided support throughout their experience. By integrating these elements, the program sought to address challenges such as cultural dislocation, inadequate reflection, and limited formal curricula, thereby comprehensively supporting participants' CQ development.

This study consisted of written narratives that were prompted based on cultural identities relevant to the Morocco study abroad program. In line with the program's learning objectives, students were asked to create four blog posts based on topics corresponding to respective units of study. Identity categories included 1) Who Am I? Think Again. Exploring Authentic Identities 2) Race, Ethnicity, Culture, or Religion, 3) Sexual Orientation or Gender Roles, and 4) Ability or Social Status (Holder et al., 2020). Within each category, learners were asked to introduce an identity different from their own and discuss organizational or societal issues related to the identity. Further, students were instructed to utilize personal experiences, thoughts, observations, testimonials, and newly acquired knowledge from reputable sources within their posts to support their narratives. Blog posts were archived on blogger.com and analyzed. This study also included written narratives that asked students to synthesize their learning on leadership and how they can lead ethically in the 21st century. The leadership philosophy assignment was developed to guide students in reflecting on internal and external dynamics based on the experiences from the

program. The instructions of this assignment were focused on reflecting on the application of concepts encountered within the Morocco program. Philosophy papers were archived within a secure electronic course management system and then analyzed. The written assignments associated with this research were piloted in a previous study to support their trustworthiness (Holder et al., 2020).

To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings, several criteria were addressed throughout the research process. Credibility was established through triangulation of data sources, including multiple types of written narratives and peer debriefing sessions during data analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Member checking was also used, as participants were given opportunities to review and clarify their responses to ensure the accuracy of interpretations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Confirmability was supported by maintaining an audit trail of analytic decisions and using a codebook to ensure consistency in coding. Dependability was enhanced through peer validation, with research team members independently coding and then reconciling differences through discussion. Transferability was addressed by providing rich, thick description of the program context, participant backgrounds, and assignment prompts, allowing readers to determine the applicability of findings to other settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

A phenomenological lens guided the data analysis process for this study. Considered both a school of thought and a qualitative research approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), phenomenology has been used to explore the prereflective experiences of the world. Scholars have discussed phenomenology as the study of peoples' conscious experience of everyday life (Schram, 2003) or their ordinary day-to-day prereflective experiences (Van Manen, 2023). An assumption within this qualitative approach is that there exists an essence or essences to shared

experiences among people who undergo the same phenomenon. Essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced, like the essence of participating in a particular program (Prasad, 2018).

Narrative assignment data were analyzed using Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) software. Qualitative data analysis is primarily inductive and comparative; thus, the constant comparative method was used to identify themes and subthemes from student narratives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Utilized as a phenomenological analysis tool, the constant comparative method involves systematically comparing data surrounding the same phenomenon to identify patterns and create categories, properties, and hypotheses (Glaser & Strauss, 2017).

An abductive coding method was employed in which *a priori* codes based on the conceptual model and emergent, data-driven codes were developed and allowed to emerge (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). Coding was completed in three rounds. In the first cycle, open coding was used to label segments of data that appeared meaningful or relevant to the research questions. In the second cycle, these initial codes were grouped into categories using axial coding to examine relationships and underlying patterns. The third cycle involved selective coding to refine categories and identify core themes that captured the essence of participants' lived experiences. The codebook was developed *a priori* to establish meanings for codes and support the trustworthiness of the findings based on the cultural information processing model. A codebook is a tool used in qualitative analysis that aids in the consistency of code definitions, inclusion, and exclusion among researchers (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). The study followed a three-step process: (1) codes were identified and defined based on the CIP Model, (2) codes were assessed and reassessed via peer review, and (3) the reliability of the codebook was supported with consensus building and ongoing checks (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). To improve the

credibility and dependability of the analysis, peer validation was incorporated throughout the coding process. Members of the research team independently reviewed codes and then engaged in debriefing sessions to reconcile discrepancies and refine definitions. This peer validation process ensured intersubjective agreement and minimized individual researcher bias.

As with any qualitative study, it is critical to acknowledge the researcher's role in the process. The primary researcher identifies as an African American man who views cultural competence as an essential component to navigating social interactions personally and professionally in the 21st century. Furthermore, he has lived experiences in the southeastern United States as a graduate and doctoral candidate at a large, land-grant research institution in the southeastern United States. The primary researcher participated in three short-term study abroad programs in Uruguay, Spain, and Morocco. The research team included one Black male, one Asian female, and two White female researchers with experience studying agricultural education, leadership, communication, and capacity development. Each of these supporting researchers are faculty members within a college of agriculture in the southeastern United States.

Results

Thirty-eight students from the Morocco: Agricultural, Organizational and Community Development study abroad program in 2022, 2023, and 2024 participated in this study. These participants identified with Algerian, American, Columbian, Congolese, Latino, Rwandan, Taiwanese, and Vietnamese backgrounds. Twenty-seven participants were female and ten were male. The participants included eight graduate students and twenty-nine undergraduate students. The ages of participants ranged from twenty-one to fifty-four years old. Participants came from colleges of agriculture and environmental science; arts and sciences; computing; ecology; family

and consumer science and social work. Tables 3.1-3.3 lists participant pseudonyms and demographic information.

As described in the methodology, the program's structure was intentionally designed to incorporate strategies identified in the literature as critical for fostering cultural competence. Pre-departure preparation, ongoing reflective journaling, mentorship, and direct engagement with local leaders, particularly through the efforts of Moroccan faculty and facilitators, were central features of the program. These components provided a foundation for participants to navigate cultural differences, process their experiences, and receive support throughout the duration of the program, directly addressing the recommendations for best practices discussed in Chapter 2.

Table 3.1

Demographics of 2022 Morocco Study Abroad Participants

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Background</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Academic Field</i>	<i>Classification</i>
Nancy	White American	Female	Nursing	Undergraduate
Etta	White American	Female	Agricultural Communication	Undergraduate
Dean	White American	Male	Horticulture	Undergraduate
Hada	Latina American	Female	Agricultural Communication	Undergraduate
Zelda	White American	Female	Agric. Sci. & Environmental Issues	Undergraduate
Kavi	African	Male	Agricultural Leadership	Graduate
Fran	White American	Female	Agricultural Leadership	Graduate
Bill	White American	Male	Real Estate	Undergraduate
Lisa	White American	Female	Agricultural Leadership	Graduate
Ada	Black American	Female	Environmental Resource Science	Undergraduate
Sally	White American	Female	Ecology	Undergraduate
Zaira	Black American	Female	Animal Science	Undergraduate
Kat	White American	Female	Environmental Econ & Mgmt.	Undergraduate

Table 3.2*Demographics of 2023 Morocco Study Abroad Participants*

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Background</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Academic Field</i>	<i>Classification</i>
Gemba	Latino American	Male	ALEC	Graduate
Elisa	White American	Female	Environmental Econ & Mgmt.	Undergraduate
Alla	Arab American	Female	Ecology	Undergraduate
Andrea	White American	Female	Agricultural Leadership	Graduate
Rina	Latina American	Female	Environmental Econ & Mgmt.	Undergraduate
Brian	White American	Male	Agribusiness	Undergraduate
Jess	White American	Male	Agribusiness	Undergraduate
Veronica	White American	Female	Agribusiness	Undergraduate
Jada	White American	Female	Social Work	Graduate
Molly	White American	Female	Animal Science	Undergraduate
Hena	Asian American	Male	Computer Science	Undergraduate
Sarah	White American	Female	Agricultural Communication	Undergraduate
Mika	African	Female	Social Work	Graduate

Table 3.3*Demographics of 2024 Morocco Study Abroad Participants*

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Background</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Academic Field</i>	<i>Classification</i>
Tabba	African	Female	Computer Science	Undergraduate
Kara	White American	Female	Housing Mgmt. & Policy	Undergraduate
Nira	White American	Female	Biological Science	Undergraduate
Arica	White American	Female	Aviation	Undergraduate
Annie	White American	Female	Animal Bioscience	Undergraduate
Matty	White American	Male	Marketing	Undergraduate
Lala	White American	Female	Environmental Education	Graduate
Torie	White American	Female	Animal Bioscience	Undergraduate
Arnie	White American	Male	Agribusiness	Undergraduate
Steven	Black American	Male	Agricultural Education	Undergraduate
Robin	White American	Female	Psychology	Undergraduate
Amy	White American	Female	Accounting	Undergraduate

Reflective Practice: A Catalyst for Growth

Research Question 1 aimed to understand how structured reflective assignments contribute to their processing of study abroad experiences in Morocco and the subsequent development of cultural competence. A common theme that emerged from the reflective assignments related to *students' reflections on their strengths and weaknesses as they relate to cultural competence*, which corresponds to intrinsic motivation, prior experience, and internal cultural evaluation (see Table 3.4). This theme highlighted the way students examined their own cultural identity and biases as they relate to their cultural competence. Subthemes were related to *self-awareness* and *personal development*. Participants expressed realizations of their CQ-related

strengths and weaknesses, evaluations of their values and beliefs, and their desires to develop their CQ.

Table 3.4

Theme 1: Recognizing CQ Strengths and Weaknesses

Subtheme	Participant Statement
Self-Awareness	“What I believe with the most conviction in not just my leadership philosophy but my life’s philosophy, is the importance of one’s relationship with themselves. I believe that to be an effective leader you must be in touch with yourself, with your values, your ego, your tendencies.” – <i>Kat (2022 Philosophy Paper)</i> “I think I do a good job of the listening aspect, but I would like to work on sharing my experiences and communicating on a deeper level with people.” - <i>Zaira (2022 Blog)</i> “Because of my background and as someone who lives and works in a multicultural environment, I tend to respond and engage quickly in a conversation involving diverse groups, and getting on the balcony practice as a leader will be an excellent opportunity to question and reflect on my biases, assumptions, and ideas about other identities and beliefs that will allow creating inclusive spaces without disturbing others.” – <i>Mika (2023 Philosophy Paper)</i> “I remember that one of the first statistics that I heard when we were touring Casablanca was that something like 42 percent of new engineers in Morocco are women. My first instinct was to wonder why this was something to celebrate as it was less than 50% which is what I would think. It was only later that I learned that this 42% statistic was remarkably higher than the U.S. which is 15.9%. After this, it was clear to me that I was ignorant about the issue of underrepresentation of women in stem.”-<i>Hena (2023 Blog)</i> “I believe it is important for leaders in a culturally diverse society to lead from a point of honesty, inclusion, and an understanding of how culture impacts individuals.” – <i>Nira (2024 Philosophy Paper)</i> “Preparing for this study abroad, I heard all types of “warnings” or “concerns” from those around me as I shared my travel plans. I tried my best to not let those opinions feed into my perspective but because I’m human, I started to let them seep in.”-<i>Affa (2024 Blog)</i>

Personal (Leadership) Development	“Since being here, I have realized that in order to lead ethically, it is important to not forget who you are or where you came from when in new cultural situations.” – <i>Nancy (2022 Philosophy Paper)</i> “Personally I wish to see more of these differences and try to understand how the cultures interact more.” – <i>Dean(2022 Blog)</i> “In reflection, I sometimes have changed opinions and action plans to seek affirmation from authoritative figures and peers. Not wanting to appear stubborn or as a bad team player, I have gone against my better judgment and intelligence. Nevertheless, I recognize the importance of holding steady, especially when my intrinsic voice tells me to do so.” – <i>Gemba (2023 Philosophy Paper)</i> “I had never considered how important it is to consider the cultural norms that influence our thoughts on disabilities, not only in other cultures, but in our own. How does this influence how we handle policy, advocacy, and communication about the needs of PWDs? And what is it that we're taking for granted?”-<i>Andrea (2023 Blog)</i> “In my personal experience, I tend to invest all my energy into projects I'm passionate about, making it somewhat painful to receive negative feedback on them. However, to preserve my sanity, I understand the importance of not taking critiques of my work too personally. Instead, use these insights and critiques as opportunities to improve and excel in any leadership roles I undertake.”- <i>Tabba (2024 Philosophy Paper)</i> “Learning more about Islam and its importance within the lives of Moroccans, it started to become a lot less of a belief to be ‘feared’ and more of an art to be appreciated.”-<i>Affa (2024 Blog)</i>
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Participants acknowledged aspects of their beliefs, values, and backgrounds that motivate how they show up as leaders. The backgrounds, beliefs and values of participants were sources of internal motivation to develop their cultural competence. Internal or intrinsic motivation refers to the personal experiences, values, and beliefs that impact information processing. Participants evaluated the implications of their strengths and weaknesses on their approach to leadership in a global society. Internal cultural evaluation is the self-awareness, reflection, and regulation of personal values, beliefs, and thought processes about one’s own culture when assessing cultural information. This evaluation is a crucial component of global leadership because it enhances

self-awareness, promotes adaptability, and enables navigation of diverse perspectives, which can drive empathetic decision-making. Discussions illuminated an appreciation of the delicate nature of leadership and the skills required to lead effectively in culturally diverse environments.

Participants' awareness of their backgrounds, beliefs, values, strengths, and weaknesses contributed to the acknowledgment of areas to focus on for their leadership development.

Navigating Cultural Difference & Conflict

Research Question 2 sought to explore the key themes and patterns emerging from the reflective documents regarding students' processing of their study abroad experiences in Morocco and their impact on their cultural competence development. Participants described some of the challenges they were faced with while abroad. A common theme that emerged was the *challenge of navigating conflict in intercultural settings*. Subthemes included *fear and avoidance of conflict* and *strategies for engaging with conflict*. Students recognized the emotional discomfort they felt surrounding conflict, particularly when cultural differences are involved.

The fear associated with conflict was apparent in the participants' experiences abroad. Despite this fear, participants also discussed strategies for managing conflict constructively, including seeking diverse perspectives, validating emotions, and finding common ground. They highlighted the importance of navigating conflict in culturally diverse settings and considered how to approach conflict healthily and effectively. Participants explored various strategies for managing conflict constructively, emphasizing the need for empathy, open communication, and a willingness to understand different perspectives. Understanding how culture influences conflict and creating space for conflict was particularly evident in the data (see Table 3.5).

Table 3.5*Theme 2. Navigating Conflict*

Subtheme	Participant Statement
Fear of Conflict	“While in Morocco we all went in knowing there would be extreme cultural differences and anticipated there would be some struggle on our behalf to adapt. We each independently were anticipating conflict in our own personal ways. I know some of the ladies on our trip were concerned about catcalls and inequality and I feared unacceptance from the local people. We also had an overarching fear of the religious differing beliefs” -Dean (2022 Philosophy Paper) “Religion is one of those topics that definitely presents an opportunity for conflict. I think it is easy to see an “in-group” and “out-group” perspective where religions are concerned...Speaking from my own experiences, being raised in rural America’s Bible Belt, many Christians are closed minded and opposed to any other belief system. I think an insecurity in their own faith leads them to have a biased fear of other religions.” -Lisa (2022 Blog) “As the born peacemaker in my family, I tend to shy away from opposition and seek to smooth everything over, which results in unhealthy avoidance of uncomfortable conversations about opposition.” – Andrea (2023 Philosophy Paper) “Ahead of this trip, I knew that time and plans would be approached differently in Morocco than in the U.S. however I didn't realize the extent that relationships play into balancing time in Morocco until the past few days when I actually was able to experience it myself.”-Molly (2023 Blog) “Confrontation and addressing difficult issues does not come easy for me” -Torie (2024 Philosophy Paper) “Meeting young entrepreneurs in Morocco showed me the resilience of children, but it also highlighted the conflict with my belief in the power of education.”-Steven (2024 Blog)

Table 3.5 Cont.

Theme 2. Navigating Conflict

Conflict Engagement Strategies	“I’ve found in my personal life, I have a knack for mediating conflicts and validating emotions and perspectives on both sides of the conflict. I think that acknowledgement is a necessity in resolving conflict and bridging the gap between two perspectives.”-<i>Kat (2022 Philosophy Paper)</i> “French is taught in schools even though it is not an official language of the country which angers the population (Breunig, 2019). This tension and forceful education of a culture that does not belong to the Moroccan people can certainly lead to conflicts and issues to come.”-<i>Dean (2022 Blog)</i> “I may hate conflict and at my core be non-confrontational, but I believe in confronting conflict headstrong.”-<i>Jada (2023 Philosophy Paper)</i> “I think if a little more grace and open-mindedness to the idea of how time is a very culturally based structure, those exploring and immersing themselves into other cultures would be able to receive more from the culture than if they stick to their own cultural approaches to time.”-<i>Molly (2023 Blog)</i> “Confrontation and addressing difficult issues does not come easy for me, and that is where creating a holding environment will help me and others feel comfortable discussing concerns while also keeping things from overheating”-<i>Torie (2024 Philosophy Paper)</i> “Learning to hold steady is no easy task for me because I tend to crumble whenever someone is unhappy towards me, but understanding that conflict when leading in diverse situations is normal and learning to accept this will allow me to take the heat to a higher standard.”-<i>Torie (2024 Philosophy Paper)</i> “These encounters also made me realize my privilege, as I did not have to worry about working while going to grade school. This realization deepens my commitment to advocating for policies that ensure all children have the same opportunities I had to focus on education without the burden of economic pressures.”-<i>Steven (2024 Blog)</i>
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The Cultural Intelligence Cycle

Research Question 3 focused on how the findings from the document analysis align with the Cultural Information Processing (CIP) Model and what implications they have for the design and implementation of study abroad programs that aim to enhance cultural competence among participants. Participants discussed their understanding of CQ upon completing the program. Further, they highlighted how the concepts they learned could be integrated and their perspectives on future leadership development. Specifically, participants demonstrated their understanding of how to apply CQ in practical situations, like navigating change within diverse organizations. A commitment to maintaining and further developing their CQ was also expressed in the data. Thus, *cultural intelligence in practice* emerged as a common theme, which included two subthemes: *integration of CQ* and *continuous learning and adaptation* (see Table 3.6).

Table 3.6

Theme 3: Cultural Intelligence in Practice

Subtheme	Participant Statement
Integration of CQ	“Now I understand that to lead successfully I must approach these people and hear their stories as well. I must understand that oftentimes those who are on the opposing team have something to lose from the situation. Because of this, it is important to hear them out and see if there is any common group or further explanations to be had”-Nancy (2022 <i>Philosophy Paper</i>) “...it is important for leaders to develop cultural intelligence, which is the knowledge of others cultures, norms habits and behaviors (2008). This cultural intelligence allows for individuals to develop the capability to show respect for other while enhancing one's own effectiveness in global markets and organizations which is done through four factors including motivational, cognitive, metacognitive and behavioral cultural intelligences.”-Fran (2022 <i>Blog</i>)

Table 3.6 Cont.

Theme 3: Cultural Intelligence in Practice

Subtheme	Participant Statement
Integration of CQ	“Building my career in social work demands cultural humility – ‘respecting the validity of other cultural beliefs, not perceiving your own culture or any other as superior and trying to understand rather than to evaluate’ (Essed, 2010, p.145). I must adhere ethically to cultural sensitivity and meet my clients and peers where they are.”- <i>Jada (2023 Philosophy Paper)</i> “In learning of its initial beginnings among the enslaved people forcibly brought to Morocco, it is important to note gnaoua's status now as a cultural music and marker of the nation, a reflection in the changed status of its makers.”-<i>Sarah (2024 Blog)</i> “By applying cultural intelligence, leaders can better understand the cultural contexts of their team members, anticipate potential challenges, and tailor their approaches to meet diverse needs.”-<i>Steven (2024 Philosophy Paper)</i> “Within Moroccan society, the hijab is often hailed as a symbol of devotion and piety, worn as an act of obedience to religious precepts and a source of spiritual fulfillment. While the decision to wear the hijab is deeply personal, and influenced by individual interpretation and conviction, it ultimately reflects a firm sense of religious identity and commitment to the Islamic faith.”-<i>Annie (2024 Blog)</i>
Continuous Learning and Adaptation	“Luckily, I have many friends who are wonderful at creating community who I can learn a thing or two from by observing the ways in which they foster these connections. This is a skill that I dearly hope to build starting from this point onwards.”-<i>Sally (2022 Philosophy Paper)</i> “I believe it is important to have cultural understanding/intelligence on aspects of others that are different as this allows me to effectively function across cultures as a leader in and around my community. It's not necessary that I always agree, but I value understanding and being able to dialogue with others about our differences with no offense taken or given.”-<i>Ada (2022 Blog)</i>

Table 3.6 Cont.

Theme 3: Cultural Intelligence in Practice

Subtheme	Participant Statement
Continuous Learning and Adaptation	“I will take intentional actions to see myself objectively by being open to conversations with others from different identity groups to gain insights on what I might not see from my own social identity standpoint”-<i>Andrea (2023 Philosophy Paper)</i> “...after seeing the process of women in the argon cooperative cracking open argon seeds with blunt rocks on the floor, I then noticed their bandaged fingers and hands, which propelled my deeper dive into the healthcare system of Morocco.”-<i>Elisa (2023 Blog)</i> “To develop my own cultural intelligence, I plan to engage in continuous learning about different cultural practices and values. This includes actively seeking feedback from diverse team members, participating in cross-cultural trainings, and immersing myself in various cultural experiences such as the UGA Study Abroad to Morocco.”-<i>Steven (2024 Philosophy Paper)</i> “She (the tour guide) also shared with me that hijabs are completely optional. I was glad to hear this, because after observing the local women whom mostly had hijabs on, I felt out of place. The sole purpose is to honor God, and I respect that. It was amazing to listen to her explain it all. This is all completely new to me, but I am enjoying learning more about their religion and culture.”-<i>Annie (2024 Blog)</i>

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

The results of this study indicate that structured reflective assignments embedded within short-term study abroad programs can have positive developmental impacts of students’ cultural competence development. The Cultural Information Processing Model helped guide the exploration of the stages of processing learners experienced while engaged in a culturally immersive learning environment, such as a study abroad program. The participants described aspects of processing that were driven by reflective assignments and impacted by the planned and spontaneous experiences during the study abroad program. Further, the various backgrounds,

values, beliefs, and previous experiences played a role in how participants processed aspects of the study abroad program and global leadership concepts. For example, one participant described their skills in conflict orchestration as being cultivated from their upbringing around their self-employed parents, who managed multiple businesses. Additionally, observing their parents' approach to managing these businesses taught them the essential nature of leaders maintaining composure and resilience during challenging times. Participants processed the new cultural information they encountered during the study abroad program according to their self-concept. Thus, self-concept impacts the capacity and depth of reflection, ultimately influencing cultural competence development (Brown, 2004a; Kilicoglu et al., 2023).

These findings support the Cultural Information Processing model, which suggests that the processing of new information is influenced by an individual's self-concept, suggesting that future research should investigate the role of self-efficacy for leading in diverse contexts, like a Morocco study abroad program, and its impact on students' global leadership engagement. For instance, Andrea and Alla's disposition surrounding conflict was different from Jada's disposition, because Jada emphasized their belief in confronting conflict head on, despite explicitly expressing hate for conflict. While exploring efficacy directly was beyond the scope of this study, the concept may play a role in cultural competence development.

Utilizing the CIP model described how each student can be motivated to engage with new cultural information within the learning environment based on their backgrounds and knowledge. Each student's process was unique because of their values, beliefs, and experiences. The reflective assignments supported students' self-awareness and retention of leadership concepts. Students wanted to continue developing as leaders upon returning, developed new strategies, and were more open to being adaptive leaders in the future. Personal and professional applications

emerged from participant data. The cycle of processing within the CIP served as a guide for examining how the study abroad experience was processed by students and what subsequent impacts it may have had on their cultural competence (Brown, 2004a; Iskhakova & Kosheleva, 2023; Kilicoglu et al., 2023).

Limitations of this study included the phenomenological nature of this study. The focus on the specific experiences of these participants limits how these findings can be applied. As with all qualitative research, the positionality of the researchers as instruments is a relevant limitation. Future research should investigate differences in undergraduate and graduate student experiences abroad. Researchers should take a longitudinal approach to explore study abroad participant outcomes over time. Both professional and personal impacts should be tracked. Also, researchers should examine the effectiveness of short-term and long-term study abroad programs utilizing consistent educational frameworks. For example, exploring the CIP model in both short-term and long-term contexts can add to the existing literature on best practices for CQ development through study abroad programs.

Further, future researchers should explore the effectiveness of domestic and study abroad programs guided by educational frameworks like the CIP model. Specifically, comparative studies could examine programs intentionally designed using the CIP framework against those without structured cultural competence models, assessing differential impacts on CQ development. Cultural intelligence can be developed through various interventions thus, it may be valuable to understand if programs guided by developmental frameworks are impacted by the educational environment. Additionally, research should compare culturally immersive domestic experiences (e.g., within diverse U.S. communities) against international study abroad programs to evaluate relative efficacy in fostering cultural competence. Understanding the relationship

between educational frameworks and the educational environment can help cultural competence-focused practitioners be more effective when establishing program objectives. Educational practitioners designing short-term study abroad programs should consider implementing pre- and post-program assessments using validated instruments like the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) to evaluate student growth across the metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions of cultural intelligence. This type of assessment would support the intentional measurement of cultural competence development and allow educators to better understand programmatic impact.

Future studies should also investigate the role of mentoring structures, including peer, faculty, and community mentors, in mediating cultural learning outcomes, examining how formalized mentorship influences CQ development in immersive programs. Additionally, practitioners are encouraged to develop culturally immersive learning activities that extend beyond surface-level exposure. These might include intentional community engagement, dialogue with local leaders, and guided reflection sessions that push students to examine their assumptions and values. Based on the findings of this study, structured assignments that invite students to reflect on their own identities and engage with perspectives different from their own were particularly impactful and should be retained or enhanced.

Moreover, given participants' reflections on navigating conflict and leadership differences, educators should consider incorporating conflict navigation or cultural conflict resolution training into the curriculum. This would help prepare students to manage cross-cultural tensions in ways that foster understanding and adaptability. Programs might include scenario-based activities, case studies, or debriefs on real-life situations encountered during the program. Ultimately, the integration of reflective practice, rigorous pre- and post-assessment,

and culturally immersive, identity-conscious curriculum design can strengthen the capacity of short-term study abroad programs to support meaningful, sustainable growth in cultural competence.

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CHAPTER 4

GLOBAL LEADERS: EXAMINING CHANGE AMONG PARTICIPANTS OF A SHORT- TERM STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM

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Abstract

This mixed-methods study examined how a short-term study abroad program in Morocco fostered cultural competence among students. Recognizing the global demands of the agricultural industry, the study explored how structured curricular and experiential components-such as guided assignments, excursions, and reflective practices-contributed to students' development of cultural intelligence (CQ). Guided by the Cultural Information Processing (CIP) model and using the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS), the research integrated pre-post-quantitative assessments with qualitative data from interviews and focus groups. Findings revealed that participants' backgrounds and prior multicultural experiences shaped their engagement and growth. Students with significant prior exposure were largely self-motivated, while those with limited experience relied on structured program supports to build confidence and openness. The program's supportive learning environment, including faculty, mentors, and peers, was critical in helping students navigate cultural challenges and process new experiences. Quantitative results showed significant gains in CQ knowledge, though self-reported reflections indicated broader growth in motivation, behavior, and strategy. The study underscores the importance of intentional program design, differentiated support, and reflective practice in advancing cultural competence. Recommendations include leveraging the CIP model for future program development and research on the long-term impacts of global learning experiences.

Introduction

The international operation of companies requires employees who are prepared for the demands of the global environment (Iskhakova & Kosheleva, 2023). Agriculture is an industry that operates on an international scale and is impacted by people with various backgrounds. Therefore, the ability to effectively engage across cultures is an essential skill for those working

within the agricultural industry. Further, appreciating the global nature of industries like agriculture beyond one's familiar cultural landscape can be particularly critical in driving the behaviors for positive cross-cultural interactions in unfamiliar contexts (Garbers et al., 2022). Successful operation of organizations on this scale requires cultural competence. Cultural competence (CQ) includes the knowledge and skills needed to effectively and appropriately navigate a variety of cultural contexts (Mayer et al., 2024). In recognition of the intercultural skills and experiences needed to work in the 21st-century landscape, higher education institutions in the U.S. have begun adopting global learning approaches (Mayer et al., 2024). Global learning embeds aspects of citizenship, culture, diversity, identity, interconnectedness, and responsible actions within academic curriculums. Higher education is moving beyond traditional approaches to include high-impact modes of learning like short-term study abroad (STSA) programs (Garbers et al., 2024). As the name suggests, these programs are relatively brief encounters centered on the transformation of experience into knowledge (Kolb, 1984). STSA experiences are usually facilitated under the guidance of faculty and can last up to eight weeks (Elmokadem et al., 2024).

An integral component of this type of educational program is learning through practical experience and subsequent reflection on those experiences to develop new skills, attitudes, and ways of thinking (Iskhakova & Bradly, 2022). By actively engaging students in their learning while abroad, educators can promote deeper understanding through the involvement of real-world situations (Kolb, 1984). As it relates to cultural competence, this means that learners are provided an arena to engage in learning, planning, application, and reflection on the knowledge and abilities needed to navigate culture effectively.

Even under ideal conditions, CQ development can be difficult for students in the U.S. who have not been challenged to think beyond a domestic, Western lens (Grant, J. L. et al., 2019). Some research has shown that study abroad programs can even be an impediment to CQ development (Sobkowiak, 2019). As explained further below, CQ and its development relies on a variety of factors. Mu et al. (2022), using the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), found that many students participating in a study abroad program experienced no significant CQ growth, highlighting that some students even regressed. Lack of support and feelings of isolation were discussed as contributing factors to the lack of CQ development and regression (Mu et al., 2022). Scholars have had critical discussions surrounding study abroad and stereotype development, preconceived judgements, and the adequacy of analyzing and assessing cultural situations (Sobkowiak, 2019).

Despite inherent limitations, some scholars have reported enhanced cultural openness, cultural sensitivity, and global competency after students participated in study abroad (Mayer et al., 2024). These findings highlight the importance of intentional interventions within culturally immersive experiences that focus on CQ development (Huang et al., 2023). While it has been reported that longer experiences can be particularly beneficial for students (Mayer et al., 2024), STSA offers benefits of cultural awareness, self-confidence, flexibility, adaptability, and preparation for international careers (Elmokadem et al., 2024). For CQ development to occur during STSA, facilitators should guide students in challenging preconceived judgements and stereotypes, ways of thinking, values, actions, and their approach to analyzing and assessing cultural situations (Mayer et al., 2024; Sobkowiak, 2019).

Measuring Cultural Intelligence

To advance CQ development through STSA, scholars have discussed the best practices for assessing and evaluating CQ and its development (Al-Sumait et al., 2022; Mayer et al., 2024). In this vein, CQ measurement tools, like the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) (Earley, Christopher, & Ang, 2003) have been developed to aid people in assessing and understanding their CQ level. The Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) is an assessment instrument used to measure an individual's intercultural sensitivity and how they understand and navigate cultural differences. The tool is theoretically grounded in Cultural Intelligence (CQ) theory, which serves as a framework for understanding cultural capabilities (Ang et al., 2007a; Earley, Christopher, & Ang, 2003; Mayer et al., 2024).

Development of the CQ construct was driven by the desire to explain how some people were more effective in navigating cultural differences than others. Early scholars wanted to enhance intercultural engagement and address challenges related to cultural differences (Earley, Christopher, & Ang, 2003). The cultural intelligence construct assumes that CQ is a form of intelligence that represents one's ability to function effectively in cross-cultural situations (Ang et al., 2007a). As opposed to a fixed dimension of personality or a trait, individuals have malleable capabilities and through knowledge acquisition, practice, and reflection can adapt to cultural differences and effectively engage in intercultural relationships (Ang et al., 2015). (Ang et al., 2015; Earley, Christopher, & Ang, 2003)

The CQ framework consists of four correlated dimensions: (1) metacognitive CQ, (2) cognitive CQ, (3) motivational CQ, and (4) behavioral CQ. Metacognitive CQ refers to the mental process of understanding and acquiring cultural knowledge (Darandari & Khayat, 2024). Subdimensions of metacognitive CQ include planning, awareness, and checking (Ang et al., 2015). Cognitive CQ is knowledge about cultures and cultural difference (Darandari & Khayat,

2024). Cognitive CQ subdimensions include culture-specific and cultural-general knowledge (Ang et al., 2015). Motivational CQ refers to the energy sustained and directed toward culturally diverse situations (Darandari & Khayat, 2024). The subdimensions of motivational CQ include intrinsic motivation (drive), extrinsic motivation (drive), and self-efficacy (Ang et al., 2015) (Darandari & Khayat, 2024). Lastly, behavioral CQ is the capacity for behavioral flexibility in culturally diverse interactions. This factor included the subdimensions of flexibility in verbal behavior, non-verbal behavior, and speech acts (Ang et al., 2015).

Though the initial CQ framework was developed as a four-factor model, expansion to include the subdimensions discussed above allows for more nuanced conceptualizations of CQ and its effects while providing more concrete avenues for CQ development and training for practitioners (Ang et al., 2015; Darandari & Khayat, 2024). Subsequently, the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) was constructed to understand and measure how people interact effectively in culturally diverse situations (Darandari & Khayat, 2024). The CQS was developed as a 20-item instrument to aid in assessing how well individuals can adapt their behavior, understand different cultural contexts, and interact successfully with individuals from various backgrounds. The CQS provides a whole CQ score as well as individual scores for the four CQ components. This scoring system allows insights into a person's overall CQ as well as their specific strengths and areas for improving their effectiveness at navigating cross-cultural environments (Ang et al., 2015).

Within the existing body of literature, there has been a call for mixed methods approaches to better understand the context of students, their backgrounds, and what factors contributed to their CQ development (Mayer et al., 2024). This study addresses the gap in the literature on mixed methods approaches by utilizing quantitative and qualitative approaches to

explore how aspects of the pedagogy utilized during study abroad programs (e.g., itinerary, assignments, and excursions) impact CQ development (Jin et al., 2024). Additionally, this research will contribute to the empirical evidence on the specific impacts STSA has on student outcomes, an under-studied area within the existing literature (Elmokadem et al., 2024).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the Cultural Information Processing (CIP) Model (Toran & Anderson II, 2025). The CIP Model is an educational framework that was developed to explain how learners process new cultural information within educational contexts based on the sub-dimensions of the four-factor model of cultural intelligence. Conceptually, it is an integration of cultural intelligence theory (Ang et al., 2006) and the Processing Value Judgements model (Brown, 1998). Cultural competence theory emphasizes the skills required for effective cross-cultural understanding, adaptation, and leadership (Ang et al., 2006; Kilduff & Cormican, 2022). Previous studies have noted a relationship between the development of cultural competence and individuals' self-concept, or how they perceive themselves (Brown, 2004a). Self-concept encompasses how one views different facets of their identity, influenced by cultural background, familial ties, ethical standards, professional aspirations, physical characteristics, and other internal and external elements (Brown, 2004a). The Processing Value Judgements framework posits that self-concept and pedagogical approaches are key factors in determining whether an individual will embrace or reject new information about cultural diversity (Brown, 2004a).

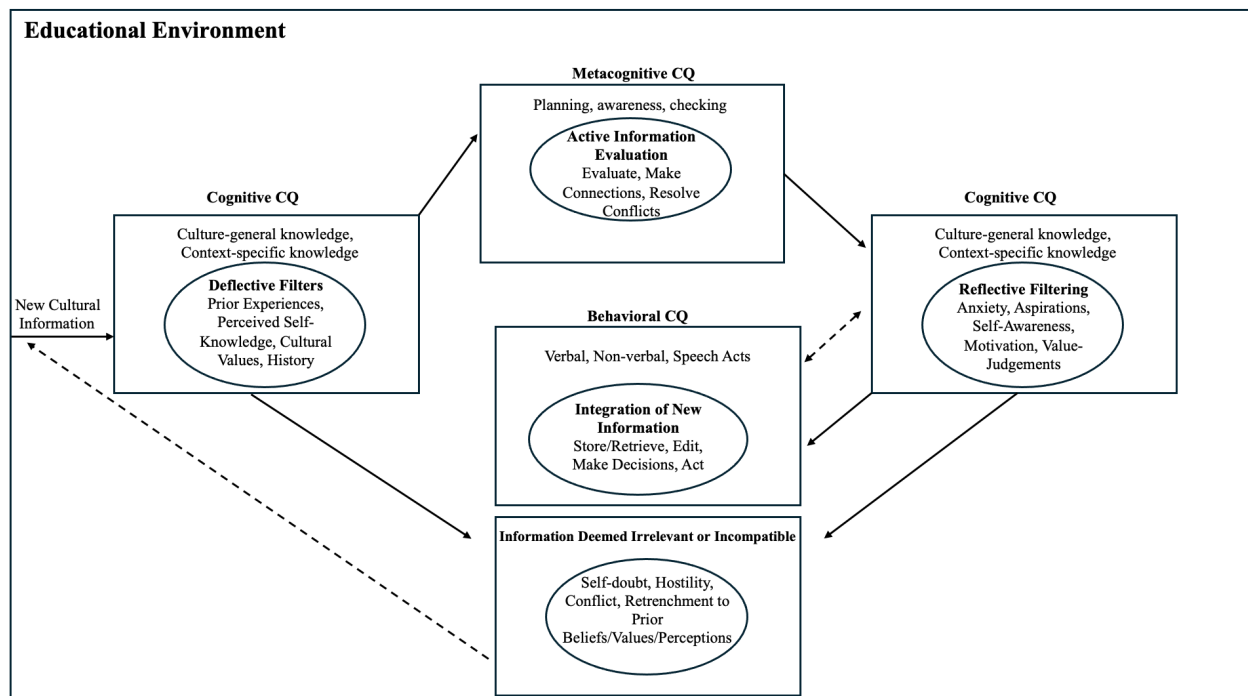
The CIP Model (see Figure 4.1) posits that individuals interpret new cultural information through the lens of their self-concept, which shapes their acceptance or rejection of unfamiliar cultural concepts (Brown, 1998, 2004a). Central to this process is *motivational CQ*—the intrinsic

drive (enjoyment of cultural engagement), extrinsic drive (tangible benefits), and self-efficacy (confidence in cross-cultural interactions) that encourage learners to transfer information from sensory to long-term memory (Ang et al., 2006; Hannum et al., 2010). This dimension acts as the catalyst for engagement, determining whether individuals initiate deeper processing of cultural content or dismiss it via *deflective filters*, which are preliminary evaluations based on compatibility with existing self-perceptions (Brown, 2004b).

Once motivated, learners employ *cognitive CQ*, their knowledge of cultural norms and frameworks, to analyze new information through reflective filtering (Hannum et al., 2010). This stage transitions to *metacognitive CQ*, where strategic awareness, planning, and self-monitoring enable learners to resolve conflicts between new cultural insights and prior beliefs (Brown, 2004b). Facilitators play a critical role here by designing experiences that activate intrinsic motivation, fostering critical analysis and adaptive problem-solving (Hannum et al., 2010). Successful resolution leads to *behavioral CQ*, the application and integration of culturally appropriate verbal and nonverbal actions, influenced by environmental feedback (peer/instructor responses) and self-efficacy (Brown, 2004a; Earley, Christopher, & Ang, 2003). Evaluating the efficacy of this progression from motivation to behavioral adaptation requires a validated framework that not only measures intercultural growth but also informs instructional design (Ang et al., 2006, 2015; Darandari & Khayat, 2024)

Figure 4.1

Cultural Information Processing (CIP) Model



NOTE: Dotted arrows indicate a feedback loop.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this mixed-methods study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the instructional model implemented in the Morocco: Agriculture, Organizational and Community Development study abroad program (2022–2024) in fostering cultural competence development among participants. By analyzing pre/post Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) assessments, participant reflections, and program design elements, this research examines how structured curricular and experiential components of the model contribute to measurable intercultural growth and self-reported learning outcomes. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do participants' demographic characteristics and prior intercultural experiences influence their cultural competence development?

2. What are the perceived strengths and limitations of the study abroad program in fostering cultural competence among participants?
3. How do participants' self-reported experiences and reflections compare to changes in cultural competence?

Methodology

This study employed a convergent mixed methods design to assess the effectiveness of a short-term study abroad program's educational model in fostering cultural competence among participants. Mixed methods research involves collecting qualitative and quantitative data to address the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The convergent mixed methods design is a single-phase approach in which a researcher collects qualitative and quantitative data in parallel, analyzes them separately, and then compares the results. This approach assumes that although qualitative and quantitative data provide different types of information, they share the same or parallel variables, constructs, or concepts that should yield complementary results (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A convergent mixed method design was appropriate for this study because the qualitative and quantitative components share the parallel construct of cultural competence. As such, quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-program surveys, while qualitative data was derived from participant interviews and focus groups. Following a convergent approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), quantitative and qualitative datasets were analyzed independently and subsequently integrated to identify areas of alignment or divergence, thereby enhancing the credibility, validity, and trustworthiness of findings. This design allowed for a triangulated examination of how program components influenced intercultural growth, addressing both quantifiable outcomes and the thick, rich descriptions of participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

This mixed methods study explored the effectiveness of an instructional model implemented during a short-term study abroad program in Morocco. The Morocco: Agriculture, Organizational and Community Development study abroad program is a two-week experience that allows participants to immerse themselves in Moroccan culture while studying connections to agriculture, economics, policy, and environmental sustainability. The program is available to undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Georgia and surrounding institutions. This study included data from thirty-eight ($n = 38$) students who were accepted and enrolled in the Morocco program from 2022, 2023, and 2024.

During the program, students participated in a range of agricultural and cultural tours and site visits, including farm tours, processing operations, governing organizations, and local markets. Assignments featured case studies where students worked through complex scenarios marked by social and cultural tension, drawing on global leadership concepts and collaborating in mentoring groups—each consisting of undergraduates led by at least one graduate student mentor who had been trained on effective mentoring practices using the transformative mentoring framework. Students were also prompted to blog about various social identity groups, write philosophy papers, and set goals for applying their experiences to their personal and professional lives. These activities were designed to deepen cultural engagement and foster reflective practice throughout the program.

Purposive sampling is a non-random approach to selecting samples based on the characteristics of the study and research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The selection of participants in this study was purposive because each participant was a student in the STSA program of interest from 2022 to 2024. Twenty-eight participants were female, and ten participants were male. Thirty participants were undergraduate students, and 8 participants were

graduate students. Participants' areas of academic focus included colleges of agriculture and environmental science, ecology, social work, and arts & sciences. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the researcher's institution. Participants were recruited to participate in this study via email solicitation. This study received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the researcher's institution. Participants were recruited to participate in this study via email solicitation.

Data Collection

Quantitative Data Collection

Quantitative data was collected via The Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) and was administered to participants pre- and post-trip in 2023 & 2024 to capture changes that might occur in their cultural intelligence and values after returning from the Morocco study abroad program. The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) was used in 2022 and will not be the focus of data analysis for this study. The CQS is comprised of four interconnected components that collectively measure an individual's ability to navigate cross-cultural interactions effectively. The meta-cognitive component, referred to as CQ Strategy, focuses on cultural awareness and mental processes used to acquire and understand cultural knowledge (Darandari & Khayat, 2024). It involves monitoring, planning, and revising mental models of cultural norms, enabling individuals to develop new strategies for social interaction in unfamiliar cultural settings. The cognitive component, or CQ Knowledge, assesses one's level of cultural knowledge, including familiarity with cultural standards, practices, and traditions acquired through education and personal experiences (Darandari & Khayat, 2024). This knowledge allows individuals to better understand and appreciate the systems shaping social interactions within different cultures.

The motivation component, referred to as CQ Drive, addresses an individual's interest and desire to engage with people from other cultures, as well as their confidence in adapting to diverse situations (Darandari & Khayat, 2024). This component is crucial as it drives the effort and energy needed to work and interact effectively in various cultural environments. Lastly, the behavior component, or CQ Action, reflects an individual's ability to display appropriate verbal and nonverbal behaviors in cross-cultural interactions (Darandari & Khayat, 2024). It emphasizes the importance of harmonizing one's actions with the cultural values of a particular environment, complementing the mental abilities of understanding and cultural motivation with observable, culturally appropriate behaviors.

The CQS can serve as both an assessment tool to evaluate program effectiveness at CQ development as well as an instructional tool for introducing the foundations of CQ and where one has strengths or opportunities for growth according to the four-factor CQ model. As such, this was an appropriate tool for the purpose of this study. Utilizing the CQS to measure the constructs of the CIP positioned this study to contribute empirical evidence on the effectiveness of STSA at enhancing students' CQ.

Only participants in the study abroad program in 2023 and 2024 were administered the Cultural Assessment Scale (CQS); therefore, only those two years will be examined in this phase of the study. The validity and reliability of the CQS was assessed across cultures through multiple methods. Classical theory testing methods were used to examine the various psychometric properties, demonstrating acceptable reliability scores and consistent measurement of the CQ construct across samples (Ang et al., 2007a; Darandari & Khayat, 2024). Research utilizing factor analyses and correlations have also supported the scale's construct validity and reliability (Ang et al., 2015).

Qualitative Data Collection

Qualitative data was collected via individual semi-structured exit interviews conducted within four months of returning from the program and a culminating focus group held in fall 2024. Interviews are a common form of data collection in qualitative studies in which a researcher converses with participants to uncover what is in and on their minds to address their research questions or objectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This study utilized data from 60-minute semi-structured exit interviews that students participated in shortly after returning to their homes during the year of their respective program. Semi-structured interviews are an intermediary type of interview in which questions and topics to explore are planned loosely. The protocol for the semi-structured interviews consisted of open-ended questions developed to explore how students' study abroad experiences contributed to their cultural competence development. Focus groups are a type of interview that involves a group of people who have knowledge of the topic of interest (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Data collected from focus groups in this research study followed a semi-structured interview protocol. The focus group protocol consisted of open-ended questions surrounding how students' cultural intelligence has developed. The focus group lasted approximately ninety minutes. Focus groups are a type of interview that involves a group of people who have knowledge of the topic of interest (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Data collected from the 90-minute focus group in this research study followed a semi-structured interview protocol. The focus group protocol consisted of open-ended questions surrounding how students' cultural intelligence has developed.

Data Analysis

The primary researcher utilized Otter AI, to transcribe the exit interviews and focus group discussion. The researcher then manually reviewed each recording to correct technical errors and

ensure transcription accuracy. This process enhanced the researcher's familiarity with the data and contributed to the credibility and trustworthiness of the data being analyzed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Participants were also invited to offer additional insights following the interviews and focus group to capture any missed reflections.

Various data analysis techniques were used in this convergent mixed methods study. The outcome variable analyzed during the quantitative phase was the change in Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) scores before and after the study abroad experience, with the educational model serving as the explanatory variable. While 38 participants were involved in the larger program, only 25 participants from the 2023 and 2024 cohorts were included in the quantitative analysis because the CQS was implemented beginning in 2023. Of these, six participants did not complete both pre- and post-assessments and were therefore excluded from analysis.

Quantitative data analysis began with descriptive statistics to examine changes in CQS scores across participants. Given the small sample size and the paired, non-normally distributed nature of the data, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, a non-parametric test designed for comparing two related samples, was utilized to assess changes in participants' CQS scores.

Qualitative data analysis was inductive and comparative, following the constant comparative method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Individual and focus group transcripts were analyzed via MaxQDA, a qualitative data analysis software. A codebook was developed *a priori* based on the CIP Model. Open coding was used initially to identify patterns and themes, followed by axial coding to refine and organize related codes. Codes were compared across participants and cohorts to identify similarities and differences in experiences. This process allowed for a deeper understanding of thematic patterns emerging across the three program years. In total, 931 coded statements were generated from the 2022, 2023, and 2024 interviews

and focus group discussions. To support trustworthiness, the researcher engaged in repeated readings of the data, iterative code refinement, and utilized direct participant quotations to support thematic interpretations.

In alignment with a convergent mixed methods design, the qualitative and quantitative data sets were first analyzed independently and then integrated during interpretation. This integration involved comparing the results from both strands to identify areas where findings converged, diverged, or complemented each other. By systematically merging the two data sets, the study enhanced the credibility of the findings and provided a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of participants' cultural intelligence development and study abroad experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses are presented in the following section, highlighting key findings related to participants' cultural intelligence development and their study abroad experiences.

Reflexivity

It is important to acknowledge the researcher's positionality in all research. As the primary researcher, I was intimately connected to this study through both personal and academic experience. I have participated in three study abroad programs, in Uruguay, Spain, and Morocco, and was a 2023 participant in the Morocco: Agriculture, Organizational and Community Development program that serves as the focus of this research. These experiences have shaped my worldview and identity as a globally minded thinker. My familiarity with the phenomenon under study provided valuable insight, but also required deliberate reflexivity throughout the data analysis process. I approached analysis with an awareness of my assumptions, striving to center participants' voices rather than my interpretations. Systematic coding procedures, the use of qualitative data analysis software, and deidentification of materials before analysis were

employed to minimize potential bias. These strategies helped ensure that the findings authentically reflected the diverse experiences of participants. The results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses are presented in the following section, highlighting key findings related to participants' cultural intelligence development and their study abroad experiences.

Results

The following results highlight the themes that emerged from participants self-reported experiences and measured CQ: *pathways to cultural engagement; program challenges and catalysts; and knowledge vs. practice: the cognitive-behavioral gap*. Tables 4.1-4.3 shows demographics and pseudonyms of the Morocco study abroad students between 2022-2024 that participated in this study.

Table 4.1

Demographics of 2022 Morocco Study Abroad Participants

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Background</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Academic Field</i>	<i>Classification</i>
Nancy	White American	Female	Nursing	Undergraduate
Etta	White American	Female	Agricultural Communication	Undergraduate
Dean	White American	Male	Horticulture	Undergraduate
Hada	Latina American	Female	Agricultural Communication	Undergraduate
Zelda	White American	Female	Agri. Sci. & Environmental Issues	Undergraduate
Kavi	African	Male	Agricultural Leadership	Graduate
Fran	White American	Female	Agricultural Leadership	Graduate
Bill	White American	Male	Real Estate	Undergraduate
Lisa	White American	Female	Agricultural Leadership	Graduate
Ada	Black American	Female	Environmental Resource Science	Undergraduate
Sally	White American	Female	Ecology	Undergraduate
Zaira	Black American	Female	Animal Science	Undergraduate
Kat	White American	Female	Environmental Econ & Mgmt.	Undergraduate

Table 4.2*Demographics of 2023 Morocco Study Abroad Participants*

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Background</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Academic Field</i>	<i>Classification</i>
Gemba	Latino American	Male	ALEC	Graduate
Elisa	White American	Female	Environmental Econ & Mgmt.	Undergraduate
Alla	Arab American	Female	Ecology	Undergraduate
Andrea	White American	Female	Agricultural Leadership	Graduate
Rina	Latina American	Female	Environmental Econ & Mgmt.	Undergraduate
Brian	White American	Male	Agribusiness	Undergraduate
Jess	White American	Male	Agribusiness	Undergraduate
Veronica	White American	Female	Agribusiness	Undergraduate
Jada	White American	Female	Social Work	Graduate
Molly	White American	Female	Animal Science	Undergraduate
Hena	Asian American	Male	Computer Science	Undergraduate
Sarah	White American	Female	Agricultural Communication	Undergraduate
Mika	African	Female	Social Work	Graduate

Table 4.3*Demographics of 2024 Morocco Study Abroad Participants*

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Background</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Academic Field</i>	<i>Classification</i>
Tabba	African	Female	Computer Science	Undergraduate
Kara	White American	Female	Housing Mgmt. & Policy	Undergraduate
Nira	White American	Female	Biological Science	Undergraduate
Arica	White American	Female	Aviation	Undergraduate
Annie	White American	Female	Animal Bioscience	Undergraduate
Matty	White American	Male	Marketing	Undergraduate
Lala	White American	Female	Environmental Education	Graduate
Torie	White American	Female	Animal Bioscience	Undergraduate
Arnie	White American	Male	Agribusiness	Undergraduate
Steven	Black American	Male	Agricultural Education	Undergraduate
Robin	White American	Female	Psychology	Undergraduate
Amy	White American	Female	Accounting	Undergraduate

Cross-Cultural Compass

The first research question for this study addressed the study abroad participants' demographics and prior cultural experiences that emerged in relation to the Morocco program.

Each participant engaged in the program with these aspects of their background influencing them in some way. Many participants reflected on how their cultural background and previous multicultural experiences, or lack thereof, shaped how they prepared for the program, engaged during their time abroad, and made sense of the experience after returning. A central theme that emerged was the different *pathways to cultural engagement* during the Morocco program. This theme highlighted the range of motivational factors that influenced students' cultural competence development. Participants described both internal and external drivers that shaped their growth. Those with significant prior multicultural experience were largely self-motivated, drawing on their familiarity and confidence to navigate new cultural settings. In contrast, students with limited exposure to culturally diverse environments often felt less comfortable at first and leaned on the program's structured elements, such as guided tours, coursework, professors, mentors, and group discussions, as external motivators. Over time, these supports helped them build the confidence and openness needed to engage more meaningfully with cultural differences. Table 4.4 shows how the participants drew on previous experience or gradually developed the confidence to engage with new cultural contexts in Morocco.

Table 4.4*Theme 1: Pathways to Cultural Engagement*

Subtheme	Participant Statement
Experience Driven Engagement	“So it just like in general, it confirmed my expectation that things would be different. There were things that I knew about it already that religious wise, they were different, predominantly Islamic and, you know, food wise, that was going to be different. There were certain foods that were not going to be available, right? So being there, it just yeah, it confirmed that, you know, you think they were different from not only here in the US, but for me, as somebody who comes from another country within the same continent, that they were going to be different from my home country and what I've experienced here in the US.” -Kavi (2022 Program, Focus Group) “I can say that I have a unique perspective because I experienced a culture from being able to speak with people, right in English, right, and how our tour guides are talking to us, being able to mix in with them in that way, but then also have side conversations, at least when we were in the north, in Spanish, with some people, right? And being able to kind of get their perspectives and them noticing that, like, "Hey, he's speaking a language that everybody else doesn't understand". Like they opened up a little more” -Gemba (2023 Program, Focus Group)

Table 4.4 Cont.

Theme 1: Pathways to Cultural Engagement

Subtheme	Participant Statement
Experience Driven Engagement	“The last time I had really done a big international trip, prior to this, it had been about 20 years. And prior to that, I had gone to Vietnam, and I had gone to like Canada or Mexico, but that's like a different experience, and it just reinforced how much I love to travel, because I love being a little, maybe not always in a moment, but I love being outside of my comfort zone, because it gives exposure to other people I really value people's experiences and listening and learning.” -<i>Fran (2022 Program, Focus Group)</i> “I do acknowledge that it is a privilege to have traveled internationally pre-Morocco, and I've always loved international travel. I have always loved different cultures. My mom taught social studies for 32 years, so I'm not sure I had much of a choice in loving history and culture and traveling, but I will say, you know, like I mentioned earlier, every time travel abroad, I experience humanity in such a moving way that it restores my hope for the future. And, you know, I even like, I try, I've been to all 50 states in the US. I love traveling, even stateside. And I feel like, I feel like every trip you make, and Morocco is no different, adds culture and connection to that humanity, that, in my opinion, if you travel right, you never come home the same.” -<i>Lisa (2022 Program, Focus Group)</i> “I can contrast it with another trip I took. I am part of the social work program at the University of Georgia, and we have a study abroad program that goes to Northern Ireland. We went to Northern Ireland last summer and it was a very heavy trip. It was about political unrest and violence and death.” -<i>Jada (2023 Program, Interview)</i>

Table 4.4 Cont.

Theme 1: Pathways to Cultural Engagement

Subtheme	Participant Statement
Experience Driven Engagement	“Like I said, it wasn't as much of a culture shock to me going there, since I've been to the Middle East before. I knew about call to prayer and all their customs and wearing a hijab and everything like that. Some do, some don't, like, you're allowed to do that. So I was definitely, like, expecting that. So I think, I think as far as like, Muslim culture, I was well prepared for it and, but I like, got better with it since it's been a while since I've been there.” “But as far as, like, North Africa, Middle East and stuff, I'm, I'm pretty familiar with it, so I didn't have too hard of a time.” -<i>Arnie (2024 program, Interview)</i> “And then culturally, my dad is also North African, so I share a lot of the, like a lot of the same stuff that they practice and use in their cultures, and the same that was in my dad's. And I had just... I was there a few days before I had started in Morocco. So, I... it was a lot of the same, like family connectivity, sharing meals, all that. It's pretty... pretty similar to me between those.” “I mean, I didn't really go in knowing anything other than what was on the sheet of paper, and, like, you know, I had heard about. And I knew like it's a developing country. I had just come back from Algeria, so I was kind of you know already in that the mindset to not expect what we would see in, like Europe. And I think for most... a lot of... some of the other students that was probably the most, like shocking. But nothing, nothing really surprised me too much” -<i>Alla (2023 Program, Interview)</i>

Table 4.4 Cont.

Theme 1: Pathways to Cultural Engagement

Subtheme	Participant Statement
Scaffolded Cultural Exploration	“I tried really hard to not do a lot of research pre-traveling to Morocco because I didn't want to have any preconceived notions, especially since I lived through 911 in the United States, and this was my first experience traveling to Islamic country.” - <i>Lisa (2022 Program, Focus Group)</i>
	“I've always wanted to like see the world and like see pretty things and meet new people. And but no one around me has ever done that. Like that was just a very, kind of like an, odd thing.” - <i>Zaira (2022 Program, Interview)</i>
	“So, going into the trip, I wasn't really sure what to expect. I knew that it would be very unique from what I currently knew and my own experiences. So, I guess in ways that it was different, I mean, I haven't even, before this I hadn't even traveled across the Atlantic or anything, so it was all very new for me.” - <i>Molly (2023 Program, Interview)</i>
	“So that was my first time abroad, so I honestly wasn't really sure what to expect” - <i>Arica (2024 Program, Interview)</i>
	“I did, like, take like language classes in high school, but I didn't really take much from them.” - <i>Annie (2024 Program, Interview)</i>
	“This is my first time ever out of the country, period, um, and like, I've never been... the first, literally, that was my second stamp on my passport. And the only reason it was my second was because my first one was in Paris when we had a layover. And so this was my first time, kind of, really, this is the first time I ever walked down the street, and I was fully content with not knowing whatever the heck anybody was saying, because I couldn't understand it. And so, I feel like it wasn't really, I don't know if I even knew what to expect.” - <i>Amy (2024 Program, Interview)</i>

Program Challenges and Catalysts

The second research question explored the perceived strengths and limitations of the study abroad program in fostering cultural competence among participants. The findings highlighted *program challenges and catalysts* as they relate to participants' personal and professional development. This emergent theme centered on both the dissonance students experienced in Morocco as well as the programmatic elements within the learning environment that supported students' growth. Participants identified various points of tension that were sources of dissonance, including expectations and cultural realities regarding food, religious practices, communication, gender norms, scheduling and activities, and lodging accommodations. These were discussed as potentially transformative challenges that drove cultural adjustment.

Participants found value in the human connections and structured experiences within the program. Professors, guides, and peers within the program and Morocco, paired with the excursions, visits, and mentor groups, were meaningful aspects of the learning environment. Subthemes that emerged included *expectation dissonance* and the *supportive learning ecosystem*. Participants agreed that their expectations of the food, schedule, and lodging accommodations were not congruent with the reality of their experiences. However, their descriptions also suggest that the professors, tour guides, and peers added value to this experience for them. Table 4.5 provides examples of participant perceptions of the strengths and limitations of the Morocco study abroad program.

Table 4.5

Theme 2: Program Elements: Challenges and Catalysts

Subtheme	Participant Statement
Expectation Dissonance	“For one, getting you to like, the foods, that did take some getting used to. There are some meals that, like the beef Tajine, loved it. But there were some other salads or things that were just a little bit different to anything I'd ever had and it took time to get used to, they're definitely was... a lot of it, but definitely was really different than what I'm used to eating” -<i>Veronica (2023 Interview)</i> “The food, the food, because, I don't know, because I'm West African, so I'm used to like West African dishes, so I don't know why I thought it would be maybe somewhat similar, but it's completely different. It's very different.” -<i>Tabba (2024 Program, Interview)</i> “This schedule? Well, I mean, lack of schedules, maybe, yeah, was maybe a little painful for me. That was very, very hard to wrap my head around and kind of accept. And not let myself be disappointed whenever we wouldn't do like something I was really looking forward to. That was by far, like the most difficult challenging thing.” -<i>Zaira (2022 Program, Interview)</i> “Um, I guess kinda like, the unknown of our schedule, you know, we just kind of like, we're just going with the flow of things, which is fine, you know, but it's like, I thought we had like certain things planned. Which is fine. But, you know, you think you're doing this, like, you're arriving back at the hotel a different time. You're doing different things on the day and so I... okay, I didn't think we're doing this today.” -<i>Hada (2022 Program, Interview)</i> “So I think for me, one thing that I, that did kind of challenge, right, what I thought I knew, or what I had assumed, assumptions. I was shocked to see the religious diversity. I didn't expect to see that religious diversity and freedom and hearing like, No, you know, people here are free to practice.” -<i>Gemba (2023 Program, Focus Group)</i>

Table 4.5 Cont.

Theme 2: Program Elements: Challenges and Catalysts

Subtheme	Participant Statement
Expectation Dissonance	“And it's one of the things that I also observed in Morocco, especially between men and women, that in a labor wise, you saw most of it being supplied by women. But in terms of the benefits from that enterprise, predominantly it went to the men. And this is something that I found, like I was struggling with.”-Kavi (2022 Program, Focus Group)
Supportive Learning Environment	“And then this, this trip to me, it was a very safe setting to learn these kinds of things as well, because we were with a tour guide or a professor, you know, we were with a leader of some type at all times. And comparing that for me, when I look back at my experience in Scotland, like they just, I just went over there for a semester by myself, like there was nobody there to meet me or greet me. There was no tour guide, like, I just showed up in another country, found my dorm, found my class, like I was by myself, like there was nobody like leading me or showing me around. So that was like, I compare those two different experiences, and I'm like, I don't even know how I survived in Scotland, like I was all on my own and I did it, but in Morocco, like it was a very safe setting, like your whole trip was planned, someone was with you. They took you everywhere. So that setting to me made it like very easy to learn, compared to the other experience, where it was like all up to me, and I had to figure out everything myself.” -Lala (2024 Program, Interview) “I think that Dr. [identifier removed]’s orientations were fantastic. His warning that we need to be flexible and that the itinerary is tentative, and we just need to learn to go with the flow of things because there are times that it may say 3 o’clock but we may not get there until 4 o’clock, like we just need to be very flexible with it.”-Jada (2023 Program, Interview)

Table 4.5 Cont.

Theme 2: Program Elements: Challenges and Catalysts

Subtheme	Participant Statement
Supportive Learning Environment	“I believe Professor [identifier removed]’s, itinerary and orientation was very well detailed. We knew where we were going and what we were gonna do, and who we were visiting. So, it was a very well-structured program. So, that was good.”-Mika (2023 Program, Interview) “I thought that the blogs, I really liked how Dr. [identifier removed] would ask us a question to kind of prompt us to start thinking when we, like entered a tour, because you could kind of direct, like, those questions were kind of directing our thinking to, sort of like more out of the box topics. And I think going into, like, the different tours and the different experiences you don't know what you don't know. So, when Dr. [identifier removed] would ask us a specific question, it would kind of lead us to start, it would give us, like, a starting place to begin thinking and like branching out. And I really liked how the blogs that we were writing, or blogs kind of directed our thinking, and so we were able to, like, pick up on more specific details, than I think if we just went into it, like, completely open minded or with, with no guidance”-Arica (2024 Program, Interview) “Yeah, I really enjoyed the mentoring groups. Yeah. I wouldn't have minded, I honestly, it probably would have. I would have enjoyed getting more than we did. We had really good conversations, and they were fun. Personally, I'm not used to just having academic conversations like that. So, it was fun for me because I wasn't used to that. We would talk about the questions, and then we would go off on tangents like still relating to the questions, but just kind of diving in deeper to the topics. Each meeting we had I enjoyed that, actually just have an academic fun conversation. He was really good at steering the talks and they always... he would think of a question bouncing off of what we were saying, and that led to like more deeper conversations as well. So, he was very interactive in the discussions, and he was really good at bouncing off of what we were talking about.”-Rina (2023 Program, Interview)

Table 4.5 Cont.

Theme 2: Program Elements: Challenges and Catalysts

Subtheme	Participant Statement
Supportive Learning Environment	“Well, not all tour guides are created equally, you know, like some would be geared towards something, some to others. But on a whole, I feel like we had really incredible tour guides that really gave us... they kind of gave us each a very different look on the Moroccan culture and I mean from different places, too.”-Sarah (2023 Program, Interview) “It was, I mean, nice having guides with us almost the whole time. Like Dr. [identifier removed]. He was the main scientist, he worked at one of the Ag universities there and so like when we go up or see something unusual, we kind of used him as a reference to what we were seeing. Like, he kind of explained it to us, like you know, like a building, or like we'd see people like doing certain things or like for food, especially, he would help us.”-Jess (2023 Program, Interview)

Bridging the Knowing-Doing Gap

The third and final research question explored how participants’ self-reported experiences and reflections aligned with measured changes in cultural competence. The 2023 CQS data revealed that overall mean scores for each dimension showed a general trend of stability or moderate increase from pre-program (T1) to post-program (T2) (see Table 4.6). Specifically, CQ Drive increased slightly from a mean of 88.58 ($SD = 7.77$) at T1 to 91.25 ($SD = 9.35$) at T2, indicating a small rise in participants’ motivation and confidence to engage across cultures. CQ Knowledge saw a more notable increase, rising from a mean of 64.75 ($SD = 16.77$) at T1 to 72.63 ($SD = 16.25$) at T2, suggesting that participants gained greater familiarity with cultural norms, practices, and standards throughout the program. CQ Strategy also increased, from 83.58 ($SD = 8.83$) to 88.50 ($SD = 5.13$), reflecting some growth in participants’ cultural awareness and planning abilities. CQ Action remained relatively stable, with a mean of 73.42 ($SD = 12.50$) at

T1 and 74.00 ($SD = 15.08$) at T2, indicating little change in participants' self-reported ability to adapt their verbal and nonverbal behavior in cross-cultural situations.

Table 4.6

2023 CQS Scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Drive (T1)	12	73.00	98.00	88.58	7.78
Knowledge (T1)	12	35.00	87.00	64.75	16.77
Strategy (T1)	12	67.00	95.00	83.58	8.83
Action (T1)	12	56.00	98.00	73.42	12.50
Drive (T2)	8	69.00	98.00	91.25	9.35
Knowledge (T2)	8	50.00	95.00	72.63	16.25
Strategy (T2)	8	80.00	98.00	88.50	5.13
Action (T2)	8	52.00	98.00	74.00	15.08

Based on the 2024 CQS data, the overall mean scores for each dimension reveal noteworthy trends from pre-program (T1) to post-program (T2). CQ Drive decreased slightly, with the mean dropping from 84.00 ($SD = 11.67$) at T1 to 79.27 ($SD = 12.98$) at T2, indicating a modest reduction in participants' motivation and confidence to engage across cultures. In contrast, CQ Knowledge showed a substantial increase, rising from a mean of 46.25 ($SD = 14.34$) at T1 to 64.82 ($SD = 14.23$) at T2, suggesting that participants gained considerable familiarity with cultural norms, practices, and standards during the program. CQ Strategy remained relatively stable, increasing only slightly from 73.83 ($SD = 12.03$) at T1 to 75.91 ($SD = 10.93$) at T2, reflecting minimal change in participants' cultural awareness and planning abilities. CQ Action also remained nearly unchanged, with a mean of 65.75 ($SD = 15.27$) at T1 and 65.91 ($SD = 21.20$) at T2, indicating little difference in participants' self-reported ability to adapt their behavior in cross-cultural situations (see Table 4.7).

Table 4.7*2024 CQS Scores*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Drive (T1)	12	56.00	93.00	84.00	11.67
Knowledge (T1)	12	25.00	69.00	46.25	14.34
Strategy (T1)	12	60.00	98.00	73.83	12.03
Action (T1)	12	45.00	98.00	65.75	15.27
Drive (T2)	11	56.00	98.00	79.27	12.99
Knowledge (T2)	11	39.00	85.00	64.82	14.23
Strategy (T2)	11	56.00	91.00	75.91	10.93
Action (T2)	11	25.00	89.00	65.91	21.20

To assess changes in participants' CQ, four Wilcoxon Signed Rank Tests were conducted to compare pre- and post-program scores in 2023 and 2024 across the CQ Drive, Knowledge, Strategy, and Action components. In 2023, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test indicated that the difference in CQ Drive scores before and after the study abroad program was not statistically significant, $z = 1.11$, $p = .269$, suggesting no significant increase in participants' interest, desire, or confidence to engage with people from other cultures. There was a statistically significant increase in CQ Knowledge, $z = 2.20$, $p = .028$, indicating a significant improvement in participants' familiarity with cultural standards, practices, and traditions. CQ Strategy did not show a statistically significant change from pre- to post-program, $z = 1.86$, $p = .063$, indicating no significant gains in cultural awareness or the mental processes used to acquire and understand cultural knowledge. Similarly, CQ Action did not significantly change, $z = 1.02$, $p = .307$, reflecting no significant improvement in participants' ability to display appropriate verbal and nonverbal behaviors in cross-cultural interactions. In summary, only CQ Knowledge demonstrated a statistically significant increase following the 2023 program (see Table 4.8).

In 2024, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test similarly indicated no statistically significant change in CQ Drive, $z = -0.93$, $p = .350$, with participants showing no significant increase in

their interest, desire, or confidence to engage with people from other cultures. CQ Knowledge, however, showed a statistically significant increase, $z = 2.94$, $p = .003$, reflecting a significant gain in cultural knowledge, including familiarity with cultural standards, practices, and traditions. CQ Strategy did not change significantly, $z = 0.92$, $p = .358$, nor did CQ Action, $z = 0.36$, $p = .722$, indicating no significant improvements in cultural awareness or behavioral adaptation. Thus, as in 2023, only CQ Knowledge showed a statistically significant increase after participation in the 2024 study abroad program (see Table 4.9).

Table 4.8

2023 Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test

	N	z	Asymptotic Sig (2-sided test)
Drive T1-T2	8	1.105	0.269
Knowledge T1-T2	8	2.197	0.028*
Strategy T1-T2	8	1.859	0.063
Action T1-T2	8	1.022	0.307

Table 4.9

2024 Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test

	N	z	Asymptotic Sig (2-sided test)
Drive T1-T2	11	-0.934	0.350
Knowledge T1-T2	11	2.936	0.003*
Strategy T1-T2	11	0.919	0.358
Action T1-T2	11	0.356	0.722

In interviews and focus groups, participants described gaining cultural knowledge and engaging in culturally competent behaviors, both during their time in Morocco and after returning home. Many expressed feeling more confident in navigating culturally diverse environments and shared a growing interest in seeking out similar experiences in the future. A key theme that emerged was the *gap between knowledge and practice*—a cognitive-behavioral

disconnect. This theme highlights the disparity between participants' measured growth and their self-reported application of cultural competence. While the CQS data showed clear cognitive gains, participants' qualitative reflections suggested more substantial growth in behavioral, motivational, and strategic dimensions than what was captured by the quantitative measures (see Table 4.10).

Table 4.10

Theme 3: Knowledge vs. Practice: The Cognitive-Behavioral Gap

Subtheme	Participant Statement
Articulating Cultural Intelligence	"I would say, I think for me it's, it definitely improved, just both verbal and nonverbal communication in general, with people from different cultures."-<i>Gemba (2023 Program, Focus Group)</i> "Somebody that has the skill and ability to, to understand and be curious about viewpoints that are not within their own culture. So, think about, like being responsive to setting... I almost wanted to...I almost said setting aside your own culture to like, be engaged, but that's not totally what I think, because I think we carry our own cultural we carry our own culture with us all the time. We can definitely say, No, you're not primary right now. But it's always going to be there. Right. So being able to, like see how your own self and culture can be merged and respecting another culture."-<i>Fran (2022 Program, Interview)</i> "So, when I think of being culturally competent, I think of more so like a willingness to engage with other cultures, not just to, like, observe them, but to like be immersed in and to engage with them without taking up space that isn't yours."-<i>Ada (2022 Program, Interview)</i> "So, reflecting on how open minded I can be, or how not necessarily understanding, but willing to try to understand, people who were raised differently, or have different cultures and different traditions than I do. So, I think the greatest thing it did for me that might help me professionally is make me more open or aware of the fact that people come from different places. And there's different cultures. And it's important to not only hear those people, but also do your best to understand where they're coming from, you know."-<i>Molly (2023 Program, Interview)</i>

Table 4.10*Theme 3: Knowledge vs. Practice: The Cognitive-Behavioral Gap*

Subtheme	Participant Statement
Articulating Cultural Intelligence	“Okay, so um for my, I think my, like my strongest factor, or like the factor that I best suit, I guess, is probably cognitive, um, CQ knowledge. I do feel like I have like, a really, like, hyper awareness of how like people around me are different, and how like my language or action could affect those people. And I feel like I'm just a really observant person. So, I definitely feel like I'm very observant of those around me, and I'll kind of like, adapt my speech and action to, kind of like, accommodate them. But I think that I'm probably most challenged at, like, metacognitive which I know that kind of sounds like I can adapt my outward appearance of the way I speak and talk, but sometimes, like, mentally, like internally, I do like to be around like, people that are kind of similar.” - <i>Arica (2024 Program, Interview)</i> “Okay, yeah, so we did the CQ survey thing and I got my results back for the second one, and I did see that there was like an increase in, like the CQ drive, which was my level of interest and persistence and confidence during multicultural interactions. I saw that greatly increased after, and I guess that would pertain to like us having to interact with Moroccan students, like almost like every day of our trip. So I think that's why that was greatly increased... Oh yeah, the CQ knowledge, but that only changed by like two points. That only changed by two points. And then for the CQ Strategy, that changed by a few points as well. And then CQ Action was greatly increased.” - <i>Tabba (2024 Program, Interview)</i> “I feel like in the US, that if you are approaching someone of like a different culture or a different background, it's a lot more you need to be a lot more giving, because it is like they're in the familiar, they're in the unfamiliar place, and they're in the unfamiliar territory. And so like, if, like, someone kind of comes to me of a different background, I just know that like, be as forgiving as those people in Morocco were to me when I didn't know what was, know what to do, or know what was going on, because it is that similar, like they are the people visiting.” - <i>Amy (2024 Program, Interview)</i>

Table 4.10 Cont.

Theme 3: Knowledge vs. Practice: The Cognitive-Behavioral Gap

Subtheme	Participant Statement
Applied Cultural Navigation	“I remember even being in the classroom pulling up a map and, you know, all the cities were written in Arabic, and one of the students coming up to me after class and saying, "I can read that" because, you know, he, he doesn't speak Arabic fluently, but he, he read Arabic, and they practice Islam and whatnot, and so, like, that was the connection I wouldn't have had otherwise, which I feel like is so value, valuable in my role as an extension agent, being able to connect to people who don't look like me, who aren't from Georgia, who you know don't speak the same language, when, when you can share that you have been to an Islamic country, to a Spanish speaking country, to a European country, to an Asian country, to whatever... I feel like, that allows them, it allows them that bridge right, that connection piece so that their more comfortable in your presence.”-Lisa (2022 Program, Focus Group) “Um, since coming back from Morocco, I've had to be doing some work in refugee communities in Clarkston in DeKalb County, here in Georgia. And I think some of that work would have been a whole lot harder in being able to relate to people and pick up on non verbal cues and and even my own communication, right? You know, being able to communicate effectively without that experience being in Morocco.”-Gemba (2023 Program, Focus Group) “So very, I will just be very specific. I am having my very first class in QUAL 8400 this semester that it is the most diverse class I have taken at the University of Georgia. Most every other class, I'm probably within the majority in some capacity, you know, white or because I'm a woman, or because I work for whatever the case may be. And this class is like it is all across the board, all different academic backgrounds, different department, different races, different genders, different ethnicities, more so than any other. It is...I love it. And I find myself just wanting to hear from everybody else”-Fran (2022 Program, Interview)

Table 4.10 Cont.

Theme 3: Knowledge vs. Practice: The Cognitive-Behavioral Gap

Subtheme	Participant Statement
Applied Cultural Navigation	“When I go into a new situation or a new culture now, I think I'll approach it more confidently because I have this experience in Morocco. And I felt like the study abroad trip was perfect for that, because we are allowed to do a lot of stuff on our own, but also in groups at the same time. So, I do feel... and also it is such unique country and culture to what I knew that I do feel like that also helped me gain more confidence because I could go into a culture that's more similar to the US and I think I'd be going in pretty comfortable or pretty confident but I also feel like I can go into a culture that's less like the US and while I might be uncomfortable, I can feel, I guess, the word isn't secure, but confident in that, I can navigate it, using some of the things I learned in Morocco.”-Molly (2023 Program, Interview) “So it's a great I feel, personally, professionally, it's a great learning opportunity to get the chance to interact with all different kinds of people that you're not used to being around, that don't speak your language. So for me, that was a great just, I guess, practical experience, just to be around people that are very different from me, because you know where I am in my little home county and extension”-Lala (2024 Program, Interview) “There were times where, I guess, like, the way that the American students would say something is not necessarily the way that the Moroccan students would say it. And I think maybe there could have been some miscommunications there, but overall I think we are all able to adapt and then assume that they have the best intentions with what they're saying. So, in terms of adapting and having to speak to people of a different culture, I think that I did pretty well.”-Arica (2024 Program, Interview)

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Together, the findings across all three research questions offer a nuanced view of how students engaged with cultural differences through the Morocco study abroad program.

Participants entered the program with diverse cultural backgrounds and varying degrees of prior multicultural experience, which shaped their individual pathways to cultural engagement. Some

students were intrinsically motivated by their previous exposure to cultural diversity, while others relied on structured aspects of the program to guide their growth. Participants identified both strengths and limitations in the study abroad program's ability to foster cultural competence. While many found the learning environment to be supportive, some experienced dissonance when aspects of the program did not align with their expectations. Quantitative assessment results indicated significant growth in cognitive cultural intelligence, while other dimensions did not show statistically significant change. In contrast, qualitative interview findings from students' self-reported experiences revealed evidence of growth in metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions, suggesting these developments may be more gradual or nuanced than the CQS assessment could detect. These findings set the stage for a closer look at how the CIP model helps make sense of the program's impact and the students' experiences.

The literature has shown that even under ideal learning conditions, CQ development can vary among students based on their demographics and prior intercultural experiences (Grant, J. L. et al., 2019; Mayer et al., 2024). In exploring this process, this study revealed evidence suggesting that students with different backgrounds and experiences are driven to engage with the learning environment in distinct ways. Students with significant prior multicultural experience were often self-motivated, drawing on their existing confidence, self-concept, and familiarity to navigate new cultural settings with ease. These students demonstrated high motivational CQ, translating into a desire for more freedom and less structured engagement, which is further discussed in the context of program design strengths and limitations below (Houser & Bornais, 2023). In contrast, those with limited exposure to diverse environments initially felt less at ease and leaned on the program's structured components, such as guided tours, coursework, faculty, mentors, and group discussions, for support. Over time, these

structured elements played a key role in helping them build the confidence and openness needed to engage more deeply with cultural differences. Within the CIP model, motivational CQ is a central factor influencing how learners process new cultural information (Toran III & Anderson, 2025). Previous research has even reported cases of stagnant or regressing CQ among students (Mu et al., 2022)), potentially due to insufficient attention to the role motivation plays in cultural learning. These findings suggest that practitioners and program developers should carefully consider how participant demographics, background, and motivations interact when designing study abroad experiences intended to foster CQ development.

These insights underscore the importance of designing study abroad experiences that meet students where they are. For example, instructors can provide differentiated support and scaffolding for students with unique needs as opposed to traditional, one-size-fits-all approaches. For instance, incorporating differentiated assignments, like optional reflective blogs or culturally grounded case studies, can offer multiple entry points for engagement depending on a student's prior experience. Similarly, offering flexible support systems like peer mentor groups, open faculty office hours, and unstructured time for independent reflection or exploration can help students with varying confidence levels process and internalize cultural experiences. These programmatic elements can serve as both scaffolds and springboards for deeper learning, depending on each student's starting point. These considerations are especially important when examining the perceived strengths and limitations of the program in fostering cultural competence among participants.

Participants also reflected on both the strengths and limitations of the program in supporting their development. Expectation dissonance, related to food, lodging, and cultural norms, was common, yet these moments also served as catalysts for deeper cultural learning.

Because many students from the U.S. have not had to navigate environments outside of their cultural norms, practitioners of these programs should be aware of student expectations and prime them for the experience that lies ahead within the program. Failure to do so could contribute to the dissonance students experience and be an impediment to their CQ development (Sobkowiak, 2019). It should be noted that some comments that were made about the itinerary not aligning with actual experience were unique to 2022. This was observed by not only the students, but the professor, and subsequently, a different service provider was hired to schedule the program in 2023 & 2024. This points to the importance of coordinated planning between instructional staff and third-party providers, as intentionally designed interventions are recommended in the literature (Huang et al., 2023). From the perspective of the CIP model, misaligned expectations can influence a student's drive to engage with unfamiliar cultural experiences and subsequently impact their motivational CQ development.

On the other hand, students with prior multicultural experience found value in the program's structure but were often ready for more freedom to engage. Because they were already highly motivated and comfortable in diverse settings, they didn't require the same level of structured guidance as their peers. This could have led to some redundancy, particularly in assignments designed to help those less familiar with multicultural environments. As a result, while the program successfully supported all participants, the structured nature of certain elements may have felt repetitive for students with prior experience (Sobkowiak, 2019). Progression through the CIP model is driven by motivational CQ, so instructors must provide the freedom within the educational environment for students with high internal motivation to engage with other cultures (Toran III & Anderson, 2025).

In terms of limitations of the Morocco program, students with limited to no prior multicultural experience often came into the program with unrealistic or misaligned expectations. These expectations led to dissonance, particularly around aspects like food variety, dietary habits, and religious practices. This dissonance is reflective of cognitive CQ gaps, as students encountered unfamiliar practices they lacked knowledge about, and motivational CQ strain, as their initial excitement gave way to the discomfort of navigating unfamiliar norms (Ang et al., 2007a; Earley, Christopher, & Ang, 2003). Their unfamiliarity with these cultural elements sometimes made the experience feel more challenging than anticipated. Conversely, students with more prior multicultural experience didn't face such dissonance, but for them, the program's structured elements, while still valuable, could have felt limiting or redundant. Their desire for more autonomy reflects high motivational CQ, which is the strong internal drive to explore and engage with other cultures without external prompting.

The presence of a supportive learning ecosystem, including faculty, mentors, and peers, played a critical role in helping students navigate cultural tensions and process their experiences. Faculty engagement, structured reflection assignments, and peer mentoring provided both encouragement and an intellectual challenge, especially for those less familiar with multicultural environments (Mayer et al., 2024; Sobkowiak, 2019). These support structures helped students strengthen their cognitive CQ through exposure to new cultural knowledge and their metacognitive CQ by encouraging critical reflection on how they engaged with cultural difference (Toran III & Anderson, 2025). For highly motivated students with prior multicultural experience, some flexibility in assignments and space for independent exploration could further support development. These findings suggest that instructors and program developers should consider differentiated supports and assignments based on students' prior cultural exposure. For

example, optional or tiered reflection prompts, case studies that allow for more complex analysis, or open-ended assignments could better challenge experienced students while maintaining support for those newer to multicultural learning. Such an approach aligns with the CIP model by scaffolding both cognitive and metacognitive development, while allowing motivated students the space to direct their own learning (Toran III & Anderson, 2025).

Finally, when comparing self-reported experiences with measured change, the cognitive-behavioral gap emerged as a key theme. While CQ knowledge scores improved significantly, participants' narratives pointed to broader growth across behavioral, motivational, and strategic domains that were not fully captured by quantitative tools. These findings suggest that participants perceived they were not only learning about culture, but they were also actively learning through it. This aligns with previous research on the CQ developmental process (Deardorff, 2006), which suggests that behavioral and motivational outcomes often develop more slowly and may not be immediately observable in short-term contexts.

The goal of the final research question was to better understand how participants' reflections aligned with measured changes in cultural competence following the Morocco study abroad program. While pre-post CQS data showed statistically significant gains in cultural knowledge, it did not reflect similar growth across other dimensions such as action, drive, or strategy. A possible explanation for this discrepancy is the program's heavy emphasis on learning and cultural exposure, which primarily supports the development of cognitive CQ before fully engaging behavioral or motivational dimensions (Ang et al., 2007b). Further, short-term programs often lay the groundwork for deeper change that manifests over time rather than immediately (Tarrant et al., 2014).

This contrast between measured knowledge gains and self-reported application suggests that while factual cultural knowledge may be more readily acquired and captured in a short-term study abroad experience, participants perceived deeper, more nuanced growth in areas like motivation, behavior, and strategic thinking. The finding that metacognitive CQ did not show significant measurable change was particularly noteworthy given the program's design around reflection and intentional processing. It is possible that while students did engage in structured reflection, they may not yet have internalized or consistently activated motivational strategies, like planning and checking assumptions, beyond the guided activities. Metacognitive CQ requires not only reflection but also independent regulation of thinking in culturally complex situations, which may require more time or repeated intercultural experiences to fully develop (Morrell et al., 2013; Ng et al., 2012).

These reflections point to the possibility that students felt more equipped and motivated to apply their knowledge, even when standardized tools like the CQS may not have detected measurable change. The gap between cognitive acquisition and behavioral application underscores the complexity of assessing cultural competence development and highlights the value of using both quantitative and qualitative data to capture the full impact of international learning experiences. Future researchers might consider longitudinal follow-ups to assess delayed gains in motivational and behavioral CQ, offering a more complete picture of student growth beyond the program's immediate timeline.

This study has illustrated the impact of the Morocco: Agriculture, Organizational and Community Development study abroad program on participants in 2022, 2023, and 2024. The researcher utilized the CIP model to highlight how aspects of the study abroad program affected learners' development based on participants' characteristics and past experiences. Findings

suggest that the CIP model not only provides an effective framework for evaluating student growth, but also offers concrete guidance for designing programs that better respond to the diverse readiness levels of students

Looking ahead, the CIP model offers value not only as an evaluative framework but also as a planning tool for designing more inclusive and impactful study abroad programs (Ang et al., 2006, 2015; Darandari & Khayat, 2024). By intentionally aligning program design with students' motivational and cognitive starting levels, practitioners can create learning environments that both challenge and support students, particularly in short-term contexts where time is limited but transformative potential remains high. Future application of the CIP model across other study abroad settings could help researchers and educators better tailor interventions that foster sustained intercultural growth.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This dissertation was framed by three research objectives to examine the effectiveness of a faculty-led, short-term study abroad program on students' cultural competence development and the programmatic factors that influenced this development. This research was guided by the need for higher education to prepare students as global leaders capable of navigating complex, multicultural environments, especially within the agricultural industry. Utilizing a convergent mixed methods approach, this study integrated a narrative literature review, pre-post quantitative assessment, and qualitative interviews and focus groups to provide a comprehensive understanding of how instructional design and program elements contribute to students' cultural intelligence (CQ) development. This chapter summarizes key findings from this study and offers recommendations for practice and future research. The chapter closes by reflecting on the implications for global learning and the utility of the Cultural Information Processing (CIP) model as a conceptual and instructional framework.

The first research objective explored the literature on the effectiveness of study abroad programs in developing cultural competence among college students. The results discussed in Chapter 2 established the critical need for global learning in higher education, particularly for students entering the agricultural workforce that is becoming increasingly interconnected around the world (Garbers et al., 2024; Walter, 2021). The literature consistently highlights the significant impact that study abroad programs can have on developing cultural competence. Concurrently, there is significant variation in program design, instructional strategies, and

outcomes across the literature. Short-term study abroad programs, in particular, have become more popular for their immersive, experiential learning capacity. Although shorter than traditional study abroad programs, these condensed experiences have gained attention from researchers and practitioners alike due to their increased accessibility and potential impact. Yet, challenges remain in ensuring they lead to meaningful improvements in cultural competence.

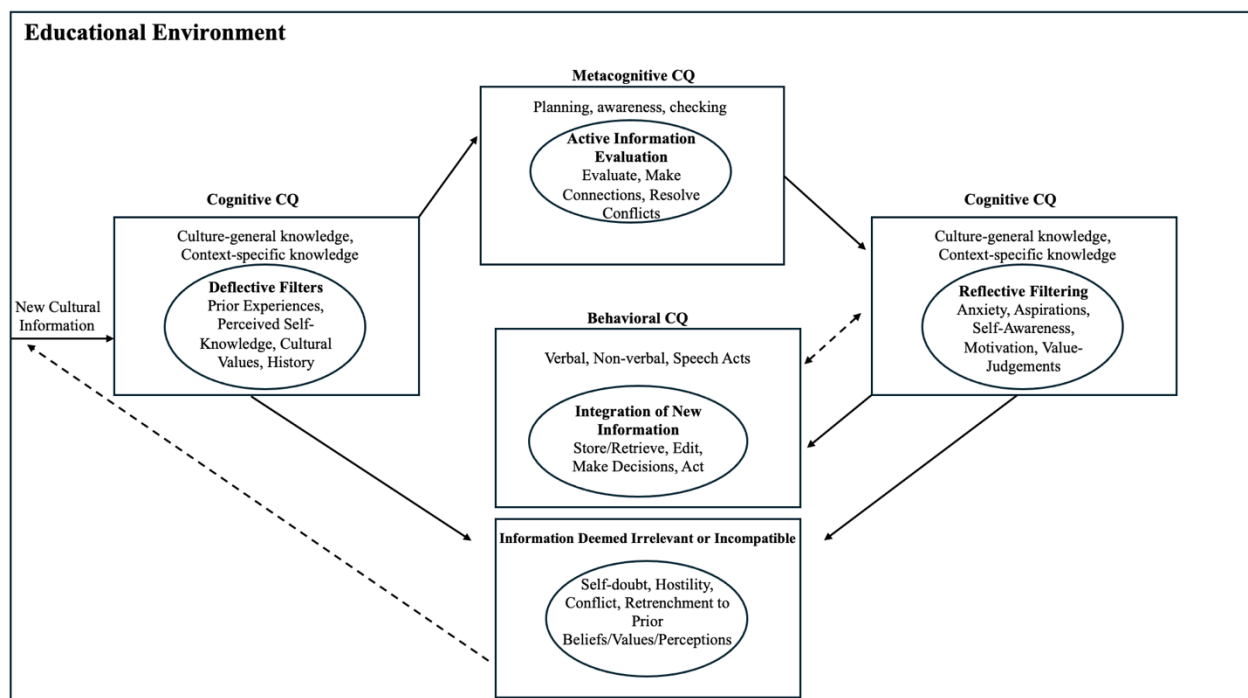
One of these challenges concerned the instructional approach that practitioners utilize to drive student learning and development. While traditional instruction can effectively enhance the knowledge component of cultural intelligence, it falls short in addressing other key dimensions of the construct, such as strategy, drive, and action. Opportunities for growth in these other dimensions arise through social interaction and higher-order thinking as individuals navigate unfamiliar social environments, experiences that traditional educational methods may not fully offer. Integrating traditional instruction with more expansive learning strategies, such as excursions, case studies, and real-world applications, can help bridge the gaps left by exclusively conventional approaches. Despite recognition of the challenges associated with developing cultural intelligence through study abroad programs, there remains a gap in the literature and among practitioners regarding formal curricula to guide the design, implementation, and evaluation of these programs.

Based on this gap, the Cultural Information Processing Model (CIP) was developed through the integration of cultural intelligence theory (Ang et al., 2006) and the Processing Value Judgements model (Brown, 1998). By integrating cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions of cultural intelligence (CQ), the CIP model emphasizes the interplay between learners' self-concept, environmental feedback, and structured educational interventions (see Figure 5.1). This framework is particularly relevant in addressing the growing need for

culturally competent graduates in globalized industries like agriculture, where effective cross-cultural engagement is critical for addressing complex challenges such as labor force diversification, international trade, and sustainable development (Hammer et al., 2003; Walter, 2021).

Figure 5.1

Cultural Information Processing (CIP) Model



NOTE: Dotted arrows indicate a feedback loop.

The second research objective was to describe how students process their study abroad experiences in Morocco and the resultant impact on their development of cultural competence. Central to the CIP model is its recognition of self-concept as a filter shaping learners' engagement with new cultural information. Individuals interpret cultural experiences through their existing beliefs, values, and prior multicultural exposure, which either motivate deeper

reflection or trigger deflective filtering (Brown, 2004a). For example, students entering the Morocco program with extensive prior cultural immersion demonstrated intrinsic motivation to engage, while those with limited exposure relied on structured program elements like mentoring groups and reflective assignments. This duality underscores the model's utility in designing inclusive educational environments that scaffold learning for diverse individuals. The findings from Chapter 3 demonstrate the value of structured reflective assignments within short-term study abroad programs for fostering students' cultural competence. Guided by the Cultural Information Processing (CIP) Model, the study revealed that students' processing of new cultural information was deeply influenced by their self-concept, backgrounds, and prior experiences. Reflective assignments and both planned and spontaneous program activities prompted students to engage in higher-order thinking and adapt their learning in real time. Participants described how personal upbringing and previous exposure to conflict shaped their approach to leadership and adaptation in unfamiliar cultural settings. These individual differences in values and beliefs ultimately influenced the depth and quality of their reflections, highlighting the importance of self-concept in cultural competence development (Brown, 2004b; Kilicoglu et al., 2023). By framing cultural competence development as a cyclical process of experience, reflection, and adaptation, the CIP model moves beyond static assessments of knowledge acquisition to capture the iterative, context-dependent nature of intercultural growth.

The results further support the CIP model's assertion that the processing of new cultural information is unique to each learner, shaped by their motivation, self-efficacy, and reflective capacity. While this study did not directly measure self-efficacy, participant narratives suggested, and motivation literature supports, that self-efficacy and prior experience played a role in how students engaged with global leadership concepts and navigated challenges abroad (Brown,

2004a). The reflective assignments not only supported the development of self-awareness but also encouraged students to apply leadership concepts personally and professionally beyond the program. This cyclical process of experience, reflection, and adaptation provided a useful lens for understanding the impacts of study abroad on cultural competence (Brown, 2004b; Iskhakova & Kosheleva, 2023).

While these results were insightful, it is the responsibility of the researcher to acknowledge limitations within any study. The phenomenological nature of the study and the influence of researcher positionality present limitations regarding the generalizability of findings. Future research should consider longitudinal approaches to track both personal and professional impacts over time, as well as comparative studies across different program lengths and educational frameworks. Examining the effectiveness of both domestic and international programs guided by instructional models like the CIP may further illuminate best practices for developing cultural intelligence in diverse educational environments. These findings set the stage for the mixed methods approach detailed in Chapter 4, which integrated quantitative and qualitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how program design and participant backgrounds converge to shape cultural competence outcomes.

The last research objective was to assess the effectiveness of a study abroad program instructional model for enhancing cultural competence among participants. Though the CIP model primarily explains how the sub-dimensions within the four-factor model of cultural intelligence influence how learners process new cultural information, its utility also extends to practitioners designing and facilitating immersive cultural learning experiences. Additionally, the framework can be used to evaluate programs on its own or in combination with other assessment tools. To address the last research objective, the researcher employed a convergent mixed

methods design, combining pre-post administration of the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) with individual interviews and focus groups. This approach allowed for a robust analysis of both measurable changes in CQ and the nuanced, lived experiences of participants. The research design was strengthened by rigorous data collection and analysis procedures, including member checking and iterative coding for qualitative data, and appropriate use of nonparametric tests for quantitative analysis (Mayer et al., 2024).

The convergent mixed methods design facilitated a deeper understanding of how students with varying levels of prior multicultural experience engage with and benefit from different program elements, an insight that emerged as particularly important in the findings presented in Chapter 4. This methodological approach allowed for the exploration of not only whether the program effectively developed cultural competence, but also how and why certain elements contributed to or detracted from students' intercultural learning experiences. Findings discussed in Chapter 4 revealed that motivation to engage with cultural differences was shaped by both prior multicultural experiences and the structure of the program itself. Students with previous exposure to culturally diverse environments demonstrated strong internal motivation, while those with limited cultural exposure relied heavily on external motivators such as assignments, tours, and the support of faculty, guides, and peer mentoring groups. For example, culturally experienced students appreciated the freedom to engage with Moroccan culture on their own terms. While the structured reflections embedded in program assignments were necessary for less experienced students, they held less value for those with more cultural experience. This dual pathway to motivation underscores the importance of designing programs that scaffold engagement for all learners.

This study's mixed methods approach further validates the CIP model's relevance for both research and practice. While the CQS revealed quantified improvements in cultural knowledge, interviews and focus groups revealed how experiential learning fostered metacognitive strategies and behavioral flexibility, outcomes that surveys alone may not detect. For instance, participants described applying conflict resolution skills learned in Moroccan markets to navigate workplace diversity, illustrating the model's feedback loops in action. These findings underscore the importance of future researchers pairing quantitative metrics with qualitative depth to capture the full spectrum of CQ development (Hammer et al., 2003; Walter, 2021).

Implications for the Cultural Information Processing Model

As a result of this study, the Cultural Information Processing (CIP) model was developed, ultimately contributing to the broader discourse on global education by demonstrating how theory-driven program design can address the limitations of traditional pedagogical approaches. As institutions seek effective approaches to preparing students for an interconnected world, the CIP model provides a guide for creating culturally responsive learning experiences that acknowledge diverse starting points and foster sustainable growth. Future research on the model could explore its adaptability across disciplines, program durations, and cultural contexts, offering a scalable framework for advancing cultural competence in higher education.

This study's application of the CIP model addresses a critical gap in global education literature: the lack of empirical evidence linking short-term study abroad programs to measurable and nuanced cultural competence outcomes. While foundational research has highlighted the potential of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), few studies systematically evaluate how program design elements-such as case studies, site visits, and guided reflections-interact with learners'

self-concept to foster growth across CQ dimensions (Acker & Bocarro, 2021). The Morocco program's integration of agricultural tours, market visits, and social identity-focused blogging created a focused setting for testing the propositions of the CIP model. Findings revealed that while quantitative tools like the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS) captured gains in cognitive CQ, qualitative narratives illuminated deeper shifts in motivation and behavioral adaptability, highlighting the model's capacity to bridge the cognitive-behavioral gap often overlooked in standardized assessments alone.

The CIP model's significance extends beyond theoretical advancement to offer applicable insights for practitioners navigating the complexities of global leadership education. In an era marked by cultural tensions and workforce globalization, higher education institutions must equip students with more than technical expertise; they must cultivate leaders capable of navigating multicultural teams and resolving cross-cultural conflicts (Wiersma-Mosley, 2019). The Morocco program's structured reflective practices, combined with real-world applications, like case studies on leadership that deal explicitly with culture, exemplify how the CIP model can guide curriculum design. By aligning program activities with learners' self-concept and motivational drivers, educators can create environments where cultural knowledge translates into effective leadership practices, even within condensed timeframes.

As with other emerging frameworks, several limitations of the CIP model warrant consideration. The model's reliance on self-concept and prior multicultural exposure means that students with limited experience or less developed reflective capacity may not benefit as fully from CIP-based interventions as their more experienced peers. Additionally, the short duration of many study abroad programs may not allow sufficient time for knowledge gains to translate into sustained behavioral or motivational change, contributing to the cognitive-behavioral gap

observed in this study. Assessment challenges also persist, as standardized instruments like the CQS may not capture subtle or incremental growth in metacognitive or behavioral CQ that emerges through qualitative narratives. The effectiveness of the CIP model is further shaped by contextual factors such as program structure, instructor involvement, and peer support, which may not be consistently aligned with the diverse needs of all learners. Finally, the transferability of the model across different disciplines, program lengths, and cultural contexts is yet to be established, underscoring the need for ongoing adaptation and evaluation as the model is applied in new settings.

In summary, this dissertation evaluated the effectiveness of a faculty-led, short-term study abroad program in Morocco for developing students' cultural competence, using a convergent mixed methods approach that integrated quantitative and qualitative data. The findings highlight that while short-term immersive experiences can significantly enhance students' cultural knowledge, deeper changes in motivation, behavior, and strategy are more nuanced and often emerge through reflective practice and structured program elements. The Cultural Information Processing (CIP) model, developed and applied in this study, offers a practical framework for understanding and designing culturally responsive educational experiences by emphasizing the role of self-concept, reflection, and environmental support in intercultural growth. However, the model's reliance on prior experience, the short duration of many programs, and challenges in assessment and transferability point to the need for ongoing adaptation and further research. Ultimately, this work contributes to the advancement of global learning by providing actionable insights for educators and researchers seeking to foster sustainable, context-sensitive cultural competence in higher education.

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APPENDIX A

BLOGGER PROMPTS

Identity Blogger Prompt

While in country, you should complete an applied learning reflection in the form of a blog entry on the class blog. You will receive an invite to become a contributor on blogger.com. The blog entries should introduce **an identity that is different from your own** in the categories identified for this post. You will describe the identity using support from a reputable source, discuss an organizational or societal issue associated with the identity you have selected, and provide a personal editorial on your findings. The editorial should be your personal thoughts; therefore, use personal experiences, observations, external testimonials, or newly acquired knowledge to support your thoughts. You are encouraged to link appropriate pictures, video clips, or website links to your entry.

Response

You will be expected to read one blog entry from classmates for each unit. Write a one-paragraph response to their blog. Things to discuss are what you learned from their post, what your reaction was to their editorial, and provide new information not mentioned in their blog that you were able to find or a probing question to encourage further discussion. To get use to the platform, watch this TED Talks video that introduces the idea of *creating authentic identity through failed imitation*. What are your thoughts about Hetain Patel's presentation?

Identity Blogger Topics

1. Who Am I? Think Again. Exploring Authentic Identities TED Talk Response
2. Race, Ethnicity, Culture or Religion
3. Sexual Orientation or Gender Roles
4. Ability or Social Status

Leadership Philosophy Paper

Write a paper that synthesizes your philosophy of leading ethically in a culturally diverse society. You should pull from all the course readings, in particular highlighting concepts from Leadership on the Line. The paper should be a minimum of nine paragraphs (see below). This paper serves as your final exam so it is important that you are thorough in your discussion and provide support from both course and external scholarly sources. The minimum requirements are:

1. Introduction (with a thesis statement and overview of content)
2. How you will:
 - a. Get on the Balcony

- b. Think Politically
 - c. Orchestrate
 - d. Conflict
 - e. Give the Work Back
 - f. Hold Steady
 - g. Manage Your Hungers
 - h. Anchor Yourself
3. Conclusion (with a substantive concluding thought - major takeaway)

APPENDIX B

EXIT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

REMINDER:

You have the right to decline to answer any of the questions or withdraw from the study without consequence to you.

1. Please state your: name, age, program of study, year in school.

Comparisons

2. How was Moroccan culture, values and beliefs like your own?

3. How was the Moroccan culture, values and beliefs different than your own?

Experiences

4. What was your favorite part about your stay in Morocco?

5. Did the experiences live up to your expectations? How would you describe your experience?

6. Did you have any encounters during the trip that you did not anticipate?

Reflection

7. Writing on the blog for class, how did that help with your experiences?

8. What were the most challenging parts about being in a country with a culture that is different from your own?

9. After participating in this experience, do you believe you have grown personally and professionally? How?

10. How did you find the itinerary in terms of contributing to your growth?

11. Were there experiences/encounters outside the itinerary? How do you think they contributed towards your growth?

12. Did you find the coordinators (faculty, translators, tour guide) useful to your experiences?

13. You worked on developing SMART Goals for developing cultural intelligence, please talk to me about how that is going? What is progress? (Probe: what they are doing)

14. The preparations you went through before going to Morocco, do you believe they were adequate?

15. Was there anything that impacted your experience negatively or that was particularly difficult?

16. If there were any experiences, how did you navigate them?

Cultural Competence

17. Strong and weak cultural intelligence framework factors, please discuss them in terms of your Morocco experience.

18. Do you believe your experience has made it easier for you to navigate culturally diverse environments?

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interviewee Names: (fill in)

1. (fill in)
2. (fill in)
3. (fill in)
4. (fill in)
5. (fill in)
6. (fill in)
7. (fill in)
8. (fill in)
9. (fill in)
10. (fill in)
11. (fill in)
12. (fill in)

Interviewer Name: Joshua Toran III

Date: (fill in)

Time: (fill in)

Location: (fill in; face-to-face or Zoom)

Research Goal

The purpose of this study is to explore how students develop cultural competencies through their time in an immersive study abroad program and what factors influence the development of these cultural competencies, specifically, examining Morocco: Agriculture, Organizational and Community Development program, an experiential learning experience designed to develop more globally minded leaders.

Research Objectives:

This research aims to understand the effectiveness of a study abroad program instructional model for enhancing cultural competence among participants through the following objectives:

1. Explore how students' demographics and prior experiences influence their cultural competence development.
2. Describe the strengths and limitations of developing cultural competence among students.

Research Questions:

This research aims to understand the effectiveness of a study abroad program instructional model for enhancing cultural competence among participants by answering the following research questions:

1. How do participants' demographic characteristics and prior intercultural experiences influence their cultural competence development?
2. What are the perceived strengths and limitations of the study abroad program in fostering cultural competence among participants?

Interview Guide

Introduction

Hello! Thank you for being here today. My name is (say name) and I am a graduate student researcher. I appreciate you making time to talk about the Morocco: Agriculture, Organizational, and Community Development study abroad program at UGA. This research is interested in understanding the Morocco study abroad program through participants' experience. This research is important as we look at how study abroad programs support leadership development both within traditional and experiential learning settings. The purpose of this study is to explore how students develop cultural competencies through their time in an immersive study abroad program and what factors influence the development of these cultural competencies, specifically the Morocco: Agriculture, Organizational and Community Development program, an experiential learning experience designed to develop more globally minded leaders. My hope is by exploring the Morocco program we can have a better understanding of how to develop more globally minded students.

This focus group discussion will last around 90 minutes. If you feel uncomfortable answering any of the questions, please feel free to pass. If you need to take a break, please let me know. Since we are on a Zoom platform I will be recording this interview on this platform. Before we begin, I would like to emphasize the importance of maintaining discretion regarding our discussions today. The experiences and opinions shared in this session are meant to remain confidential and should not be discussed outside the group. This confidentiality is crucial to ensure that everyone feels comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences openly and honestly. Your cooperation in respecting the privacy of this discussion is greatly appreciated, as it will contribute to the authenticity and transparency of the insights we gather. Thank you for your understanding and commitment to maintaining this safe and respectful environment.

Do you have any questions?

Pause for questions. If none, move forward.

Consent

Since this is for research I must have your consent to ask questions and record the interview. If at any moment you are uncomfortable or have questions then you are welcome to recuse yourself or ask follow-up questions. After I get consent from you then I will hit record and we will review the items we have reviewed thus far so I have it recorded.

Are there any questions?

Receive consent. Repeat from the beginning to this point.

Introductions

So, let's begin with introductions. Please state your first name, where you are from, and when you studied abroad in Morocco.

Interview Questions

Great, let's move right into the questions.

The interviewer will only ask the interview questions. The research questions are provided for context.

Cognitive CQ:

1. What did you learn about Moroccan culture, values, and beliefs that you did not know before participating in the program?
2. How did your experience in Morocco challenge or change what you knew about culture, values, and beliefs?

Metacognitive CQ:

1. Can you describe an instance in Morocco when you realized you needed to adjust your thinking to navigate a situation?
2. Did you become aware of any of your personal biases in Morocco? If so, how did that impact your experience?

Motivational CQ:

1. How did the experience in Morocco impact your desire to engage with different cultures?
2. How did your experience in Morocco impact your desire to pursue more international experiences?

Behavioral CQ

1. How have you adjusted your behavior towards cultures or beliefs that are different from yours since leaving Morocco? Can you share a specific example?
2. How was your verbal and non-verbal communication been impacted when interacting with people or cultures that are different from your own since leaving Morocco?

Perspectives on Overall CQ

1. How do you think the program impacted your cultural competence?
2. How do you think your perspectives on culture globally has changed?
3. What aspects of your experience in Morocco do you believe will have a lasting impact on your personal or professional life?

Closure

As we come to an end I want to thank you for your time, ability, and willingness to share your experiences from the Morocco study abroad program with me. Is there anything else you'd like to add or expound on?

Wait for a response.

I appreciate your time on this research project. As a participant, I will be in contact with you throughout the research process to support consistency between your voices and findings. Thank you!