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Short-Term In-Country Language Immersion and the Intercultural Development of Foreign Language Students

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Abstract

In a highly globalised world where cross-border movements and cross-cultural contact have grown exponentially, policy-makers and educationists have increasingly focused on intercultural education and the development of intercultural competence. Foreign language (FL) education, which prepares learners for interactions and exchanges with foreign peoples and cultures, can play a pivotal role in developing interculturality. This article focuses on a mixed-method study that investigated the impact of short-term language immersion in France, Germany, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand on the intercultural development of Singapore university FL learners. Quantitative and qualitative data collected through pre-/post-immersion questionnaires, journals, interviews, and lesson/activity observations were analysed based on Byram's (1997, 2008) model of intercultural competence, and Lave and Wenger's (1991) Situated Learning Theory and their notion of legitimate peripheral participation. The results of the analysis suggest that the immersion programmes had a positive effect on FL learners' development of intercultural competence. It was ascertained that learners developed positive attitudes towards the target language cultures, discovered and learned to interpret new cultural practices, and gained new perspectives to the target language and their own cultures. The key to these developments lies in the interactions with and participation in the target language societies, afforded by the instructional and

cultural programmes as well as social encounters with host families, student buddies and other members of the local communities.

1 Introduction

In today's globalised world with increased cross-cultural contact, the cultivation of intercultural competence (IC) has become an important goal of foreign language (FL) education, as the intercultural speaker can act as "an interpreter, an intermediary, a catalyst" of intercultural communication (Risager, 2007, p. 234) and has a crucial role in establishing relationships between their own and other cultures (Byram, 1997). In-country language immersion (ICLI), a common out-of-class component and extension of the FL curriculum, has the potential to make a significant contribution in this respect, as it takes learners to the target language (TL) country for a first-hand experience and to discover for themselves the country's sociocultural practices. Learners will be in the position not only to observe these practices, but also to partake in them. Sociocultural theories of learning have long since posited that learning is situated in the interactions between novices and expert others. In Lave and Wenger's (1991) Situated Learning Theory (SLT), learning and the development of competence results from the participation in a community of practice. While participating in ICLI and interacting with the TL community, FL learners engage in the negotiation and co-construction of new cultural meanings with members of that community, leading them to critical reflections of both the TL and their native cultures, and thus helping them to foster IC.

It is thus not surprising that many university language departments have been organising study abroad programmes, particularly those of a short-term and intensive nature, lasting less than eight weeks (Schwieter & Kunert, 2012). Remarkably, there have been relatively few studies on the effect of such short-term programmes on IC. This article presents a study to investigate the impact of short-term ICLI in six different countries on the intercultural development of Singapore university FL learners, drawing upon the theoretical framework of Byram's (1997, 2008) model of intercultural language education and Lave and Wenger's (1991) SLT.

2 Literature review

2.1 Intercultural communicative competence and intercultural competence

A comprehensive model of intercultural language education was proposed by Byram (1997), who reasons that communicative competence in the TL alone does not suffice for successful communication with members of the TL cultures: "FLT [foreign language teaching] however has the experience of otherness at the centre of its concern, as it requires learners to engage with both familiar and unfamiliar experience through the medium of another language" (p. 3). To enable learners to interact successfully across languages and cultures, FL teachers need to teach intercultural communicative competence. Byram (2015) argues that, besides communicative competence, learners will need a good measure of IC in order to achieve intercultural communicative competence. Byram (1997) identifies five sub-areas of IC:

1) *Savoir être* or attitudes of curiosity and openness in interacting with interactants from the target and other cultures, and the willingness to decentre from one's own cultural perspectives;
2) *Savoirs* or knowledge of one's own and the foreign culture, including knowledge of the sociocultural norms of interaction in both cultures;
3) *Savoir comprendre* or skills of interpreting other cultures and relating them to one's own culture. This also involves the ability to recognise ethnocentric perspectives in the way information about other cultures are presented;

4) *Savoir apprendre/faire* or skills of discovering knowledge about other cultures and applying it in interactions with interactants from those cultures; and
5) *Savoir s'engager* or critical cultural awareness which enables one to critically reflect on and appraise one's own and other cultures.

Of these five components of IC, Byram (1997) considers critical cultural awareness to be the most significant and the ultimate goal of intercultural language education, for it allows intercultural speakers to bring "to the experiences of their own and other cultures a rational and explicit standpoint from which to evaluate" (p. 54).

With the growing mobility of FL learners, Byram (1997) suggests that IC can be acquired through visits, exchanges and other forms of contact with the TL and other cultures, which would include short-term ICLI programmes in the TL environment. Lave and Wenger's (1991) SLT and their notion of legitimate peripheral participation provide a theoretical framework to explain the learning of the TL culture and the development of IC through ICLI.

2.2 Situated Learning Theory

In their conceptualisation of learning within the framework of SLT, Lave and Wenger (1991) move the focus away from the traditional notion of learning, which sees learning as an act of internalization. Instead, they view learning as active social participation within a community of practice (COP) and thus as situated in the professional and sociocultural practices of this community. Learning takes place through learners' interactions with expert members of this community, who act as mediators helping learners to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in its practices and activities. SLT postulates that novices will be engaged initially at the periphery of a COP, moving from what Lave and Wenger calls legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) to full participation in the centre of the community. The novice status of newcomers is acknowledged by the community and they are given support and scaffolding to aid their LPP. Through their interactions, new and expert members jointly negotiate and construct meanings and knowledge relevant to the community. Learning thus involves the establishment and maintenance of relationships between new and expert members, as well as transformations in the identity of new members, as they assimilate into the COP. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the process of LPP in a COP.

Fig. 1. Situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation

SLT provides an appropriate theoretical basis to comprehend and explain the learning of a foreign culture and the development of IC through ICLI. In ICLI, FL learners visit and enter the TL community, typically for the purpose of learning the TL and its culture. A typical ICLI programme would include language instruction, cultural instruction and experience, homestay, contact with members of the local community (such as local students), and excursions and field trips. In analogy to SLT, ICLI participants are thus accorded LPP status and provided with opportunities to interact with and participate in the TL community – as novices to its culture and practices. Full members of the local community (such as instructors, host families, local student buddies, and even casual interactants from incidental encounters), who are proficient and knowledgeable in its sociocultural practices, support and mediate the learners' interpretation of their cultural experiences and the construction of new cultural meanings. By relating these new meanings to their existing cultural knowledge and critically reflecting on the differences between the TL and one's native culture, learners develop and acquire the skills and knowledge (Byram's different forms of *savoirs*) necessary for the cultivation of IC. Figure 2 summarises this process and shows how LPP and the interaction and participation it affords play a key role in the development of IC.

Fig. 2. In-country language immersion and legitimate peripheral participation

2.3 Studies on FL study abroad programmes and intercultural development

A number of studies (e.g. Elola & Oskoz, 2008; Goldoni, 2013; Harrison and Malone, 2004; Pedersen, 2010; Savicki, Adams, & Binder, 2008) have investigated the effects of longer periods of overseas study (e.g. a study abroad semester or year) on learners' intercultural development. These studies have produced mixed results suggesting that while overseas study can help learners in developing various sub-areas of IC, this does not automatically result from just being overseas and requires the mediation of various factors, including instructional methods, preparations, study programme design, and personal experience and encounters. Most of these studies have, however, focused on longer-term study abroad experiences, and there have been comparatively few studies on the impact of short-term study abroad on FL learners, perhaps because doubts have been cast on the effectiveness of short-term programmes – for instance by Davidson (2007), who believes that "development of linguistic and cultural proficiency for second language learners is extremely unlikely to occur" (p. 279) within the short time-frame of one to six weeks.

One of the earliest studies on short-term study abroad and the intercultural development of FL learners was reported by Jackson (2006), who focused on the experiences of 15 Cantonese-speaking English majors from a Hong Kong university on a five-week programme in England, which included literary, language and current affairs courses, homestay with local families, interactions with other international students, attendance at cultural events, and excursions. Jackson employed an ethnographic approach and a wide array of quantitative and qualitative instruments of data collection (including pre- and post-sojourn surveys, participant observation, reflective diaries, individual and group interviews, informal discussions and field notes). The data indicated that, despite initial difficulties encountered by the students in adapting to the English lifestyle and social discourse, they made some gains in their IC, particularly in the area of *savoir être*, displaying a more positive attitude towards cultural differences, and a greater degree of curiosity and openness towards the TL and other cultures after the programme. In a follow-up study involving a largely identical five-week programme in the same country and 13 participants of a similar profile, Jackson (2009) used the Intercultural Development Inventory (Hammer & Bennett, 2002) to measure gains in students' intercultural sensitivity following the study abroad experience. The results were mixed, with nine of the 13 students registering a gain in intercultural sensitivity, but only five advanced to a higher level of development. Jackson found that those who reached a higher level of development reported observations that went beyond superficial aspects of the TL culture, as evidenced by more substantive, comparative and analytic diary and survey reports.

Bloom and Miranda (2015) investigated the effect of a four-week study abroad programme on the intercultural development of ten undergraduate and two graduate FL students of Spanish from different academic disciplines. The programme in Salamanca, Spain, consisted of two intensive courses focusing on the Spanish language and culture, respectively, as well as homestay with local host families. By administering the Intercultural Sensitivity Index designed by Olsen and Kroeger (2001; cited in Bloom & Miranda, 2015) before and after the programme, Bloom and Miranda sought to measure changes in the participants' intercultural sensitivity arising from their immersion experience. In addition, reflective journal entries written by students on their impressions of the TL culture and culture in general were collected and analysed to triangulate and interpret the ISI data. The researchers concluded that the short-term programme in Salamanca did not produce any dramatic shifts in the intercultural sensitivity of the participants, and recommended that further research be conducted to study the reasons for this result (e.g. if it could be attributed to the duration or the design of the programme).

In a larger-scale study involving 405 upper secondary German and French-speaking students (with an average age of 16) from Switzerland who went on short-term language exchanges ranging from one to six weeks in TL-speaking areas, Heinzmann, Künzle, Schallhart and Müller (2015) found that such short-term exchanges can have a positive effect on students' IC. However, they concluded that the length of the programmes does matter and that very short programmes of only one- to two-week durations will limit the opportunities for interactions with the host communities and the development of intercultural skills. They further pointed to the importance of interactions and the opportunities to use the TL with local people (including host families and local tandem partners), which affords students a true and beneficial experience of the TL culture. The willingness of students to engage with local people depends, however, largely on their predisposition to do so and their level of IC before the start of the exchange.

Another study that also indicated that short-term study abroad can have a positive impact on the development of IC was reported by Schwieter and Kunert (2012). The participants of this study were 28 Canadian learners of Spanish on a three-week programme in Spain consisting of an intensive language course, guided tours and homestay. During open-ended interviews, most of the participants reported being more sensitive and open to other cultures. The researchers concluded that key factors in the participants' positive development were pre-departure cultural sessions to prepare them and to pique their interest in the TL culture, as well as the interactions with the host families.

While the review above shows that there is increasing interest in the relationship between short-term ICLI and FL learners' intercultural development, the currently available literature is still comparatively sparse, and none of the previous studies have sought to illuminate the effect of ICLI from a sociocultural perspective or, specifically, on the basis of SLT and LPP. The research questions for this study were:

1. Does short-term ICLI provide FL learners with opportunities for LPP?
2. Does short-term ICLI have a positive impact on the IC of FL learners?
3. In which areas of IC do FL learners benefit from ICLI?
4. How does the ICLI experience contribute to the development of IC?

3 Background, objectives and method of study

3.1 Context and background

The study was conducted at the language centre of a public university in Singapore, which teaches 13 FLs – Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Malay, Spanish, Tamil, Thai and Vietnamese. Enrolled students include area studies majors in the Arts Faculty, for whom it is a requirement to read a prescribed number of language courses, as well as non-major students from all faculties at the university.

The centre has been organising non-compulsory short-term ICLI programmes of two to four weeks' duration on an annual basis. Currently, it offers ICLIs in ten different countries in Europe and Asia for the following objectives: 1) to support students in the development of their communicative competence in the respective TLs by exposing them to language instruction and authentic communicative situations in a native-speaker environment; and 2) to give students the opportunity to experience and participate in the TL cultures, and thus to support the development of their IC.

3.2 Participants

The participants of this study were 93 FL learners (56 females and 37 males) who attended ten different ICLI programmes of two to four weeks' duration in six different countries (France, Germany, Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Thailand) during the summer vacation from May to July 2015. All participants were volunteers who gave their informed consent to the study. Table 1 details the various TLs, sites, duration, and number of participants for these programmes.

Table 1. In-country language immersions included in this study

Languages	Countries	Cities/Universities	Duration	No. of Participants
Chinese	Taiwan	1 university in Taipei	2 weeks	7
French	France	2 language schools in Paris and Brest	4 weeks	21
German	Germany	2 universities in Freiburg and Münster	3 weeks	17
Japanese	Japan	2 universities in Kyoto and Tokyo	3 weeks	13
Korean	South Korea	2 universities in Seoul	3 weeks	31
Thai	Thailand	1 university in Chiangrai	3 weeks	4

The participants were mostly undergraduates from different faculties and years of study, with the majority having completed two semesters of language study prior to ICLI. Their ages range from 19 to 25. Table 2 summarises the participants' particulars.

Table 2. Respondents' demographic information

		Frequency
Average age		21.0
		Mean
Gender	**Female**	56
	Male	37
Year of Study	**Year 1**	62
	Year 2	13
	Year 3	12
	Year 4	4
	Graduate	2
Faculty of Study	**Arts and Social Sciences**	45
	Business	6
	Computing	3
	Design and Environment	3
	Engineering	14
	Science	21
Number of Semesters of Language Study (Prior to ICLI)	**1**	2
	2	76
	3	5
	4	6
	5	3
	6	1

3.3 Data collection and analysis

The study employed a mixed-method research approach to collect quantitative and qualitative data through pre- and post-immersion questionnaires, weekly journals, site visits, activity observations and document inspection. The varied nature of the data collected allowed for greater data triangulation and deeper insights into the intercultural development of the participants.

3.3.1 Pre- and post-immersion questionnaires

Personal and quantitative data were collected through a pre- and a post-immersion questionnaire (see Appendices 1 & 2), both of which were made available to students online and contained the 24-item Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) developed by Chen and Starosta (2000), which has been tested, validated and applied in a considerable number of studies on intercultural competence in different countries (e.g. Chen & Starosta, 2000; Coffey, Kamhawi, Fishwick, & Henderson, 2013; Fritz, Mollenberg, & Chen, 2001; Ruiz-Bernardo, Sanchiz-Ruiz, & Gil-Gómez, 2014). A higher score on the ISS provides an indication of a higher level of intercultural sensitivity.

All 93 participants completed the pre-immersion questionnaire about a week before their respective ICLIs and the post-immersion questionnaire about a week thereafter. Frequency and mean analyses were carried out on the personal data of the participants, where appropriate. As the current study sought to determine if there were any gains in the participants' intercultural sensitivity, and thus IC, through the ISS, the differences between the pre- and post-immersion ISS scores were calculated for all participants. A paired samples t-test was conducted to ascertain the statistical significance of the mean difference between the pre- and post-immersion ISS scores.

3.3.2 Journals and interviews

29 of the 93 participants also consented to providing qualitative data by writing journal reports prior to, during and after their ICLI experience. The journals provided the main body of rich and insightful data for this study. Journal participants were asked to submit a journal report at least three days before departure about their previous overseas experience, their knowledge of the TL culture, their motivation and expectations with regard to the ICLI programme, and any problems they might anticipate for the stay in the TL community. Subsequently, for every week of their ICLI programme, they were required to submit a report in which they recorded their immersion experience, including classroom and other activities, incidents and problems, contact with local people, insights into the TL culture and community, and feelings and perceptions in relation to the above. They were instructed, in particular, to report any new knowledge and perspectives they had gained about the TL and their own native cultures. In the post-immersion journal report, submitted not later than seven days after the ICLI, journal participants were asked to write about their feelings and perceptions with regard to the ICLI and its various components, including the instructional and cultural activities, accommodations, and visits and excursions. They were also asked to comment on the new knowledge and perspectives they had gained about the TL culture, their own native culture, and themselves. Thus, a student participating in a three-week programme would have to submit a total of five journal reports, consisting of a pre- and a post-immersion report as well as three weekly reports. All journal reports were submitted to the researchers through e-mail.

After an initial analysis of the journal reports, the 29 journal participants were invited to attend individual semi-structured interviews, aimed at verifying the findings from the analysis of the questionnaire and journal data, and at seeking supplemental information, where necessary. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

The analysis of the qualitative journal and interview data was guided mainly by Byram's (1997) model of IC and Lave and Wenger's SLT (1991) to: 1) ascertain how the participants responded and adapted to the ICLI programme, and to the TL community and its cultural practices; and 2) identify the specific areas (i.e. attitudes, knowledge, skills and awareness) in which the participants' IC may have benefited from the ICLI experience. The data were read and re-read to identify emerging themes that pertain particularly to these two areas. These themes were then categorised under larger, overarching themes.

3.3.3 Activity observation and document inspection

Site visits, lasting between three to five days, were also conducted, with at least one member of the research team assigned to each site. During these visits, the researchers observed selected ICLI activities both in and outside the classroom, including classroom instruction, project work, field trips and excursions, and interactional or activity sessions with members of the local community (such as local students). Wherever possible, they also met and had informal discussions with teachers and administrators of the respective programmes. Field notes were taken to document insights from the observations and discussions. In addition, relevant documents, including programme schedules, course curricula, field trip itineraries and samples of instructional and information materials, were collected and inspected.

The activity observations and document inspection were intended to provide insights into: 1) the instructional approaches, and the focus of the curricular and cultural activities for the various ICLI programmes; and 2) the extent of LPP afforded by the programmes.

4 Findings of study

4.1 ICLI and access to LPP

The ICLI programmes all included an intensive language course, with 15–20 contact hours per week, and a culture-focused programme with additional 3–6 hours of activities per week (excluding visits and excursions). Most of the language courses were dedicated, customised classes. Only in the Brest, Kyoto and Seoul 2 programmes were the students, who were relatively few in numbers, placed among other international students in the partner institutions' standard courses.

The lesson observations and inspection of the curricular materials reveal that the language instruction at the various partner institutions to be guided by the communicative approach, with lessons and tasks designed mainly to prepare learners for interactions with the TL communities, and thus for LPP. These tasks include practice tasks to internalise vocabulary and grammar, simulations of communicative situations such as role-plays, as well as out-of-class information gathering and interactional tasks such as interviews with host families, local students and residents.

The courses in Münster and Freiburg in Germany also adopted an intercultural approach, with tasks that focused explicitly on aspects of the TL culture, critical reflection of the TL and students' native cultures, and the development of intercultural understanding. For instance, it was observed in Freiburg that students were given the task of interviewing passers-by in different parts of the city to gather information about multiculturalism in the city and to ascertain their attitudes towards it. The results were then discussed in class and compared to the situation in Singapore. In the first week of the Freiburg course, the instructor also enacted a short pantomimic scene about a fictitious culture and asked students to characterise the culture from their observations. When the students all agreed that the society of the culture was clearly patriarchal, the instructor then explained how it was in fact matriarchal and how the students' judgements were affected by their own subjective cultural notions. The instructor explained in a subsequent meeting with the visiting researcher that it was designed to demonstrate the influence of one's existing cultural knowledge on the interpretation of new cultural knowledge, and to help students decentre from the beliefs and notions of their own culture.

The language course in the Tokyo ICLI adopted a project-based approach that required students to plan and carry out a theme-based project that culminated in a presentation at the end of the course. Students were asked to choose themes focusing on aspects of Japanese culture and society and to compare these with the culture in Singapore. Examples of the themes chosen by the students were recycling, and cosmetics and make-up culture. The entire course centred on the projects and students were required to gather information, mainly by interviewing local students, including student buddies who had volunteered to interact with and support them during the programme. Classroom instruction focused on the scripting and preparation of their oral presentations. The Singapore students were thus afforded opportunities for LPP through their interactions with local students and their project research on the TL culture and its practices. The programme's coordinator, in a discussion with the researchers, said the programme and its project-based approach was aimed at developing students' socio-pragmatic competence to allow them to experience and learn the language as it is applied in real-life interactions in Japan.

While the language instruction took place typically in the mornings, culture-focused activities were organised for the students in the afternoons. These activities consisted of content-focused classes (e.g. on the role of the monarchy and Buddhism in Thailand) and culture experience sessions (such as calligraphy sessions in Taipei, lantern-making in Chiangrai, and communal cooking with Japanese students in Tokyo). Included in the cultural programmes are also visits to places of historical and cultural interest or to cultural events (such as local festivals and theatre performances),

and excursions to other cities or scenic areas. Many of the cultural activities were integrated into the language instruction with pre-visit introductions to these places and events, or post-visit discussions of their experiences. The cultural activities were severely curtailed for the two programmes in Seoul because of the MERS outbreak in the summer of that year. For the safety of the students, most off-campus cultural activities, visits and excursions were cancelled.

Most of the ICLI programmes also arranged for social contact with local students. For example, in the Tokyo programme, a volunteer support group of 15–20 local Japanese students interacted closely with the Singapore students, providing them with information about campus and city life, accompanying them in their cultural activities, and serving as interview partners and language resource persons for their projects. In the Chiangrai and Seoul programmes, the ICLI students were paired with local student buddies who acted as orientation guides and partners for language practice after class.

The students' accommodations also contributed to their access to LPP. Three programmes provided full homestay with local families for the entire duration of the programmes. The homestay in Freiburg, Münster and Paris afforded students direct contact with local families and opportunities to experience sociocultural practices in the TL communities at first hand. In six other programmes – in Brest, Chiangrai, Kyoto, Seoul and Tokyo – students were put up in university hostels (or a university guesthouse in the case of Chiangrai), mostly on or close to the campuses. The accommodation arrangements thus afforded students contact with local and other international students in the same hostels or on campus. While homestay would have offered more abundant LPP opportunities, this was difficult to arrange in these cities because of the local conditions. For instance, in Tokyo, family residences tend to be small and do not typically have guest rooms. Instead, a one-night homestay was organised to facilitate interactions with Japanese families and to provide a glimpse at Japanese family life. A one-night homestay was similarly offered for the Seoul 1 programme. The Taipei ICLI participants were the only ones to be accommodated in a city hotel, as the language course was conducted at a small branch campus in the city centre, far removed from the main university campus on the outskirts of the city.

The descriptions above indicate that the various ICLI programmes did not afford all participants the same opportunities for TL contact or equal access to LPP. It would seem apparent that the accommodation arrangements in Taipei offered students less opportunities for LPP in comparison to the other programmes. Furthermore, the partner institution did not arrange for interactional opportunities with local students. The difference in LPP access and its impact will be discussed more fully in a later section of this article.

Table 3 summarises the components and activities at the various ICLI sites that afforded opportunities for interactions with the TL communities and facilitated LPP.

In addition, the ICLI programmes also afforded students ample opportunities for incidental contact with the TL communities in the form of chance encounters and interactions, as well as observations of local life and culture while travelling, dining, shopping, or visiting places at the respective ICLI sites. As the journal and interview data will reveal, much of the students' intercultural development can be attributed to such incidental encounters and experiences.

Table 3. ICLI programme components that afforded opportunities for LPP

	Language Course	Cultural Classes and Activities	Accommodations	Additional Social Contact Arrangements
Taiwan - Taipei	- Communicative approach - Dedicated class	- Culture experience classes - Visits and excursions	- Hotel	- None
France - Brest - Paris	- Communicative approach - Intercultural approach - Students placed in international classes (Brest) - Dedicated class (Paris)	- Culture experience classes - Visits and excursions	- Hostel (Brest) - Homestay, 1–2 students to a local family (Paris)	- Optional 1-night homestay (Brest)
Germany - Freiburg - Münster	- Communicative approach - Intercultural approach - Dedicated classes	- Culture experience classes - City discovery activities (e.g. treasure hunt) - Visits and excursions - Integration of cultural activities and visits with language course	- Homestay, 1–2 students to a local family	- Student language tutors (3-4 per programme) serving as interactional partners and guides, as well as facilitators of cultural activities and visits
Japan - Kyoto - Tokyo	- Communicative approach - Students placed in international classes (Kyoto) - Dedicated class (Tokyo)	- Culture experience classes - Visits and excursions	- Hostel	- Volunteer support group of 15–20 local students serving as guides, resource persons and interview partners (Tokyo) - 1-night homestay (Tokyo)
South Korea - Seoul 1 - Seoul 2	- Communicative approach - Dedicated class (Seoul 1) - Students placed in international classes (Seoul 2)	- Culture experience classes (some of which were cancelled due to MERS outbreak) - Visits and excursions (cancelled due to MERS outbreak)	- Hostel	- Individual student buddies assigned as interactional partners and guides - 1-night homestay (Seoul 1)
Thailand - Chiangrai	- Communicative approach - Dedicated class	- Content-focused instruction on culture, society and history - Culture experience classes - Visits and excursions	- University guesthouse	- Individual student buddies assigned as interactional partners and guides

4.2 Effect of ICLI on learners' IC – ISS scores

Table 4 shows the mean difference between the pre- and post-immersion ISS scores of all 93 participants. The mean of the pre-immersion ISS scores was 94.13 (out of a maximum of 120). This rose by 5.36 to 99.48 for the post-immersion ISS scores. A paired samples t-test shows this increase to be statistically significant at the 0.05 confidence level. The ISS data thus provide an indication that the ICLI had a positive impact on the intercultural sensitivity, and thus the IC, of the participants. This finding is corroborated by evidence from the journal and interview data, presented in the subsequent sections.

Table 4. Pre- and post-immersion ISS scores for all participants

Mean of pre-immersion ISS scores	Mean of post-immersion ISS scores	Mean difference in pre- and post-immersion ISS scores	Significance (paired samples t-test)
94.13	99.48	5.36	< 0.001*

*n = 93; maximum ISS score = 120; * significant at 0.05 level*

4.3 Benefits of ICLI for learners' knowledge, attitudes and skills for intercultural development

In Byram's (1997) construct of IC, *savoirs* and *savoir être*, the knowledge and attitudinal components, constitute necessary pre-conditions for the development of *savoir s'engager*, or one's critical cultural awareness. On the other hand, *savoir apprendre/faire*, the skills of discovery and interaction, and *savoir comprendre*, the skills of interpreting other cultures, provide the means to acquire and make sense of new cultural knowledge.

4.3.1 Savoirs

For most of the journal participants, it was their first extended stay in the respective TL countries. It was thus predictable that they would acquire much new knowledge about the TL countries and their sociocultural practices through the ICLI experience, as evidenced by ample data from the journal (all student names mentioned in this paper are randomly assigned pseudonyms):

> Excerpt 1:
> The home-stay experience was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. It felt as though I was immersed in the German culture – seeing the way they live their life, seeing how they speak to one another, etc. Rather than learning about the German way of life, we experienced it first-hand. (Nor Alinah, Münster, post-immersion report)

> Excerpt 2:
> Having spoken with my host family, quite a bit, I've picked up quite a few little quirks of how they speak. One of these is the use of *oder* at the end of a sentence … It is sort of a way of seeking agreement, or perhaps a way to soften the sentence. (Jordan, Freiburg, weekly report 2)

> Excerpt 3:
> […] the *wushu* class was truly fulfilling. We learned about the *wuxing* philosophy of Chinese martial arts and the 5 fundamental moves that each correspond to the 5 elements. (Abdulah, Taipei, weekly report 2)

In Excerpt 1, Nor Alinah wrote about the insights she gained about the German culture in general, and attributed this to her homestay experience, which gave her the chance to actually participate in the German way of life. In Excerpt 2, Jordan described how he acquired new knowledge about sociolinguistic aspects of the German language and learned to apply it in his own language use. In Excerpt 3, Abdulah attributed his new cultural knowledge of Chinese martial arts and the philosophy behind them to a cultural experience class organised by the Taiwanese partner institution. In acquiring new *savoirs*, the participants had benefited from the formal elements and

activities of the ICLI programmes such as the language and culture classes, and homestay. Beyond this, incidental encounters and unplanned events also contributed to the construction of new cultural knowledge. For instance, when Yen Shan developed a problem with her eye, she was pleasantly surprised that healthcare in Korea was quite affordable even for a non-subsidised foreigner like her and that the fees were lower than in Singapore (Seoul 1, weekly report 1). Jennifer, in France, reported her observations about recycling practices, gained through her own participation in local life:

> Excerpt 4:
> Recycling and being environmentally friendly is not as widely practiced in Singapore as in France. Products were wrapped in paper and each bag is chargeable. There were also plenty of recycling bins and special bins for batteries etc. that are rare in Singapore. I have learned to always carry a bag for groceries around and I really commend the French for their effort to sort trash and reduce waste. (Jennifer, Brest, weekly report 2)

The observations recorded by Yen Shan, Jennifer and many other participants about the sociocultural practices of the TL communities are fairly detailed, reflective and comparative, and provide insights beyond the superficial, which, as Jackson (2009) asserts, is usually indicative of significant intercultural development.

4.3.2 Savoir être

Attitudes of curiosity and openness tend to contribute a greater willingness to engage and interact with other cultures, and to accept and appreciate differences between those and one's own culture (Byram, 1997). Similar to the findings reported by Jackson (2006), and Schwieter and Kunert (2102), there is evidence here of how participants, when confronted with differences in sociocultural practices during their ICLI programmes, learned to recognise and accept these differences, which in turn helped them to adapt to life in the TL communities.

The case of Nadyah, who lived with a local host in Freiburg, provides an example of how *savoir être* developed in the course of the ICLI experience. Nadyah, a 20-year-old Malay Muslim student, had only limited overseas experience beyond Southeast Asia before the ICLI trip. She was thus concerned about her stay in Germany and the problems that could arise from the cultural differences (e.g. with regard to her diet, religion and dress). Indeed, these concerns were apparent in the first few days of her Freiburg stay, when she confessed to being homesick and became aware of two significant differences in the sociocultural practices of Germany and her native Singapore:

> Excerpt 5:
> Another memorable experience that happened on our second night here was an issue brought up by the host about the washroom. After dinner, she explained to us that the steam from the hot shower needed to escape, and that the shower area needed to be kept dry, to avoid bacterial growth. She then provided us with a small towel that could be used to wipe down the area after our shower. Although having a dry bath area was never the case in Singapore, this difference was backed by logic, and I could somewhat understand the reasoning behind it. Her way of (bringing up and) addressing the issue was straight to the point: pointing out what was wrong, how we could rectify it, and providing us with the means to rectify it. (Nadyah, Freiburg, weekly report 1)

While this practice was vastly different from the situation in Singapore, where bathrooms are often wet and one never attempts to wipe them dry (because of the high humidity), she was quick to grasp the rationale behind it. But an even more significant difference that proved harder for Nadyah to accept was the directness of her host's attempt to teach her the local bathroom practices – which is incidentally an example of the kind of mediation provided by a full member of a community in the peripheral participation of a newcomer, as described by Lave & Wenger (1991). Later in the same journal report, Nadyah hinted at her discomfort towards her host's directness, writing that "hedging to not humiliate someone is something we [her own community in Singapore] do a lot." Later journal entries as well as further explications during her interview reveal that she meant to say that, in her native culture, one would be hesitant to voice criticisms or to instruct others

in a direct manner lest they be offended or feel humiliated. However, by the end of her stay, she had learned to accept this difference in the Germans' interactional practices and even gained an appreciation for their directness, as the following excerpt shows:

> Excerpt 6:
> In the Malay society […] we try not to be so direct? Like, even if you'd like to criticize someone, it'll be, I won't, it will never be direct. […] But, with Frau F. [the host], then she would say stuff direct, yeah, so that was different. […] I wasn't really comfortable with that at first. […] When it was directed at me, I didn't really feel that it was positive? But looking back, then I realized that it cuts down, like it brought the issue across very fast. So she addressed the issue, then we went to talk about other topics. So she didn't really built up to it, she didn't really waste time. So it brought the point across very fast, so it was something I appreciated. (Nadyah, Freiburg, interview)

The attitudinal developments were however not always or exclusively positive. For Abdulah in Taipei, different – both positive and negative – experiences contributed to ambivalent impressions and feelings about the Taiwanese, as Excerpt 7 shows:

> Excerpt 7:
> My trip to the National Palace Museum was rather eventful. At the station, a man was nice and comprehensive enough in his instructions to get to the bus stop to the palace. He even made sure I got there. Same goes for the elderly lady museum officers who thought I was a student who missed his tour group and asked me about it. They even made sure I went to the right bus stop. […] But one thing I learned is to never ask help from Taiwanese school kids who look like they are from elite schools … the worst of the lot. They are rude and snarky but pretend to be nice on the surface. They would make jokes about your language abilities and skin colour in Mandarin while everyone else laughs near them. This is what happened on a bus from the palace to Shilin station where many such schools are found. (Abdulah, Taipei, weekly report 1)

As the Taipei programme did not arrange for contact with local families or student buddies, much of Abdulah's opinion about the Taiwanese culture was based on his incidental encounters and observations. He developed both positive and negative attitudes towards the Taiwanese community; he was highly positive about the friendliness, kindness and sincerity of elderly Taiwanese, but was almost just as negative towards the younger generations, whom he characterises as rude, snarky, materialistic and superficial. He seemed to be painting an overly simplistic and dualistic picture of the Taiwanese, which could be attributed to the lack of more extensive and deeper interactions with the local community. This characterisation continued into the second week, when he again contrasted the "sincere intentions and efforts" of older Taiwanese to engage him in the TL against the behaviour of the "youth and young adults," who seemingly had little patience for his "mediocre Chinese" and always chose to reply to him in English with "a pseudo-American accent" instead (weekly report 2). He did, however, relativise his own negative perceptions at the end of the trip, and was more positive in his attitudes towards Taiwan in admitting that Singaporeans might not be better than the unpleasant Taiwanese he had met: "I feel that I could blend in well in Taiwan once I get used to the differences in procedures there. […] Although there are people in Taiwan who are of unsavoury natures, as a whole Singaporeans fare worse." (post-immersion report)

4.3.3 Savoir apprendre/faire

Byram (1997) asserts that new cultural knowledge "may be discovered in interaction with interlocutors from another country" (p. 33). Heinzmann et al. (2015) have also pointed to the importance of interactions with local people in the TL, which had promoted the intercultural development of their subjects.

The ICLI language courses were communicatively oriented and designed to enhance participants' ability to interact with the local communities. While not all participants responded well to the language instruction or applied themselves fully to improving their communicative competence, there was evidence that most found the language courses to be effective and beneficial in developing their interactional ability:

Excerpt 8:
The instructional part of the programme was very well executed, with Mr H. W. [the instructor] providing practical lessons that equipped us with various linguistic tools. Besides greetings, we were taught how to search for furniture, look for jobs, interview people on the street, etc. As a whole, the instructional part of the programme was well-rounded, multi-faceted and was incredibly effective in boosting our confidence in speaking German to native Germans. […] For me, the benefits of this immersion programme include the rare opportunity to practice the German language with Germans, and in a wholly German environment. (Nadyah, Freiburg, post-immersion report)

Excerpt 9:
I think it was an excellent opportunity for me (or even anyone) to interact with many Japanese students in a meaningful way. Rather than simply holding conversations at a personal level, having this chance to speak with Japanese students about something more serious and impactful – national culture – and comparing between Singapore and Japan before providing our views on the topic, is something I value highly. I have learnt to be more vocal when speaking in a foreign language, not afraid to make mistakes because it is a rare learning opportunity and the support students are all so friendly! (Yolanda, Tokyo, post-immersion report)

Nadyah highlighted the importance of learning and using German in a German-speaking environment, as well as the benefits of the language course in boosting her confidence to communicate in the TL. In the case of Yolanda, the course adopted a project-based curriculum and the conversations with the local support students constituted a planned component of this curriculum. These interactions had similarly enhanced her confidence to engage the Japanese students, even on more serious cultural topics.

4.3.4 Savoir comprendre

Savoir comprendre, the skill of interpreting new cultural information and experiences, plays a key role in understanding new cultures and constructing (and reconstructing) cultural meanings. As Byram (1997) contends, this ability is relational and draws upon existing cultural knowledge, especially the knowledge of one's own culture, which serves as a "resource for learning new cultures" (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). There are ample journal data that underline this, as the following two samples demonstrate:

Excerpt 10:
I have learnt plenty about Germans and their culture from this immersion experience. I could see both similarities and differences between the Singaporeans and Germans. Like most Singaporeans, Germans are also extremely hardworking. This could be seen from the efficiency of the transport systems and also when I observed my host. However, a difference I noticed was that courtesy was more prevalent among Germans who would often greet strangers they meet on the streets. (Deeraj, Münster, post-immersion report)

Excerpt 11:
[…] unlike in Singapore where people often sit on the reserved seats for the sake of comfort, here in Korea, people take the rules seriously and do not take away this privilege from those who need it more. Even when the subway is extremely crowded during peak hours, people do not sit on these reserved seats and hence if there are no elderly or those in need, these seats are left empty in the midst of a huge peak hour crowd. Such good social behaviour is something I find missing in the Singaporean community. (Hongmei, Seoul 2, weekly report 2)

In these and countless other similar accounts, the participants displayed a natural tendency to immediately relate their new experiences to similar and comparable situations in their own culture in order to interpret and make sense of the TL culture. Indeed, the myriads of new cultural experiences and information that flooded the students' senses in the course of their ICLI programmes afforded them opportunities – or perhaps even compelled them – to constantly apply and hone their skills of interpreting and relating. The internal mediational process of connecting new and existing cultural knowledge represents an important and necessary step in their intercultural

development and provides the basis for the critical reflections that precipitate the cultivation of the participants' critical cultural awareness.

4.4 Benefits of ICLI for the development of critical cultural awareness

For Byram (2008), *savoir s'engager*, or critical cultural awareness, occupies the central position in his model of IC, because it represents a key goal in the political education of an individual and his socialisation towards intercultural citizenship. Byram (1997, 2008) describes it as one's ability to identify, analyse, interpret and evaluate one' own and other cultures based on explicit and critical criteria. The native culture will usually provide the reference base and initial criteria for the interpretation and evaluation of the other culture. At the same time, such critical analysis and reflection will invariably result in the re-examination and re-alignment of one's own cultural norms, beliefs, and values.

4.4.1 Critical reflections on the TL and one's own native culture

Some of the data samples cited above had in fact provided examples of the critical appraisal of practices in both the TL and the participants' own culture – for example, Nadyah's comparison of social discourse in Germany and Singapore, and her contemplations about the advantages and disadvantages of being direct in one's interactions (see Excerpt 6). Another instance of such critical reflection was Hongmei's appraisal of subway commuter behaviour, in which she questioned and criticised Singapore commuters' lack of respect for the privileged seats (Excerpt 11). The following example from the Seoul 1 programme shows how the emergent MERS epidemic in South Korea had caused the participant to reflect on and appraise the Korean authorities' handling of the outbreak:

> Excerpt 12:
> For the past week, the situation of MERS in South Korea has worsened. […] I was quite surprised that the Korean government was not able to handle the first case of MERS appropriately and had allowed a few voluntary quarantine patients to travel out of the country. I feel that Singapore is much more prepared for outbreaks like MERS, especially after the SARS epidemic in 2003. Relatives or friends visiting patient at the hospital would have to register themselves before they are allowed into the ward. The failure of the Korean government in containing the spread of MERS might be because South Korea was not affected seriously by SARS with only 4 cases reported. (Yen Shan, Seoul 1, weekly report 2)

Yen Shan commented on the manner in which the Korean government had been handling the outbreak, based on practices in Singapore as criteria. Her evaluation of the MERS situation in South Korea was critical and yet differentiated, as she tried to put her views and criticisms in perspective by explaining that the country was not seriously impacted by SARS and therefore lacked the experience Singapore had. Not only was she demonstrating a growing sense of *savoir s'engager*, but she was also developing a good measure of *savoir être*, learning to consider the different historical context of South Korea in dealing with such epidemics.

Such critical reflection can also lead to a re-appraisal of one's own culture. To speak with Phipps and Gonzalez (2004), "to enter other cultures is to re-enter one's own" (p. 3). The ability to decentre from and to re-construct one's own cultural beliefs and values similarly provides an indication of one's critical cultural awareness and IC. The case of Natasha, who was in Freiburg, provides an example of how her homestay experience had brought about a change in her perspective of her and her own family's notion of respect. In her first weekly report, she wrote highly critically about the way the host mother and her daughter interacted and the daughter's behaviour, based on the notion of respect held by her own family in Singapore. She was quite perturbed by daughter's apparent lack of respect by talking back to her mother in a disrespectful manner, which would have been "severely punished" in her own family in Singapore. She explained that, in her family, if "you wanted to be treated respectfully, you had to gain it by giving it mutually" (weekly report 1). In fact, because of this, she was thinking momentarily of requesting a change of host. Her evaluation of

German family relations and interactions was to change drastically in the subsequent two weeks of her immersion stay, brought about by more intensive and frequent interactions with her host and her extended family, as documented by her post-immersion report:

> Excerpt 13:
> Germans have a direct way of communication in most social contexts as well. But I appreciate that fully because it meant that any potential misunderstandings could be dealt with immediately before it led to bigger problems, and I do think that that's what leads to stronger bonds being formed between them and the people they meet, as well as the family bonds. Parents and children are free to talk about anything they want and both sides are heard. They know how to listen and yet are not afraid to be heard. That makes for a very honest and (even if somewhat blunt at times) candid conversations. […] As for my culture, I discovered a lot of differences between the host family(ies) in Freiburg and my own at home. […] In my host family, mother and daughter (as well as occasionally grandparents) can come together and talk about all sorts of things, even personal and intimate issues. But it shows care and concern for each other's well-being. And while everyone had their individual separate views, they understood not to impose it on someone else. And because of that there was a lot of respect for each other, whereas in my family, there was a lot of respect for authority and seniority. (Natasha, Freiburg, post-immersion report)

Through her ICLI experience, Natasha had not only gained a better appreciation of the openness and frankness in German family relationships, but she had apparently also re-examined and re-constructed her notion of respect, arriving at a more critical view of her own family culture and demonstrating clear gains in the development of her critical cultural awareness.

4.4.2 Corrections of pre-conceptions and stereotypes

Salient new experiences of the TL culture can also lead us to reflect on our pre-conceptions of that culture and to come to the realisation that these may be wrong or simply not generalisable to one and all in that culture. Byram (1997), in fact, emphasises the importance of teaching methods of critical analysis to study and compare stereotypical views that one's own and the other culture may have about the other. As the following selection of journal excerpts show, the ICLI experience and the interactions with the TL communities, planned or incidental, had stimulated participants to question and correct their pre-conceptions and to re-construct their existing cultural knowledge:

> Excerpt 14:
> One of my biggest takeaways from this programme is that the stereotype of French people being rude and snobbish is not entirely true. In Brest, I was touched by the kindness that was shown to me by everyone. People were very patient when I tried communicating with them in French, and even strangers were more than willing to help me communicate with shopkeepers when they saw me having difficulty communicating certain things in French. (Rahim, Brest, post-immersion report)

> Excerpt 15:
> I learnt a lot in terms of how, while many German stereotypes are true (they're direct), there are many that simply aren't (house shoes). It's really broadened the way I think about Germans because I now realize that they aren't just one culture – it differs from region to region, and even from family to family. (Jordan, Freiburg, post-immersion report)

> Excerpt 16:
> I was surprised to see Mr Na [the male host] helping Mrs Shin [the female host] for cooking. I always thought that Korea is a patriarchal country and that men would not do housework like cooking, washing the dishes or cutting fruits. Mr Na cooked a dish for dinner and cut lots of fruits for us during breakfast the next day. Mr Na also washed the dishes after breakfast. I think Korean drama is part of the reason why I would have such thought that men in Korea would not step into the kitchen. […] I have also dropped my stereotype about the man not stepping into the kitchen after the homestay. (Yen Shan, Seoul 1, weekly report 3)

4.5 LPP and intercultural development

4.5.1 Students' participation in practices of the TL cultures

In Section 4.1, we described the opportunities afforded by the various ICLI programmes for students to interact with the TL communities and to participate in their sociocultural practices. The subsequent sections presented data that showed how the students had availed themselves of these opportunities, consisting of both planned interventions and incidental encounters, which in turn contributed to their intercultural development. For instance, we saw how Jennifer had observed and decided to adopt the French consumers' eco-friendly practice of carrying their own shopping bags (Excerpt 4). In Freiburg, Jordan reported picking up and then applying new sociolinguistic features in his interactions with his host family (Excerpt 2), and Nadyah had learned how and why she had to dry the bathroom after her showers – a practice she had to follow for the duration of her homestay (Excerpt 5). The examples in Excerpts 17 and 18 relate the attempts of two participants in Seoul to learn and engage in the practices of the Korean culture:

> Excerpt 17:
> I find that the way my buddy orders food is very interesting. Immediately after sitting down, she just shouted our order and the *ahjumma* in the shop caught the order. Me and my friends tried shouting like that, but we did not speak loud enough to catch attention from the owner. It is a unique experience because we do not shout across the shop to order food in Singapore because that is deemed to be aggressive and rude. But over here, it feels as though you share a bond with the owner to be able to do that. (Samnatha, Seoul 1, weekly report 2)

> Excerpt 18:
> It is extremely important to show utmost respect to elders in Korea and Koreans use very polite language to people they meet for the first time. Hence, this made me very cautious when I was talking to elders, making sure I use formal polite tone at all times. (Hongmei, Seoul 2, post-immersion report)

These examples illustrate how students were seeking to adapt to and emulate sociocultural and sociolinguistic practices in South Korea, believing that it is important for them to "share a bond" with the restaurant owner and to show "utmost respect to elders in Korea," respectively. While their attempts at LPP were perhaps still rather tentative (e.g. Samantha's first attempt to shout an order did not catch the attention of the restaurant owner), this is natural and consistent with the notion of LPP, as the students were new and peripheral entrants to the TL communities, still learning to negotiate new cultural meanings and to engage in new practices. Over time, through the LPP process, some of the participants had moved subtly from the periphery closer towards the centre of the TL communities, as evidenced, for instance, by the following remarks by Michael, who felt that he was more a resident of Paris than a tourist by the fourth week of his stay:

> Excerpt 19:
> Thanks to the duration of the stay (now entering its final week) I have been able to appreciate some things in the culture a shorter stay would not have allowed. In part this is a result of long-term exposure and study of the language, but also because I have already visited most of the "tourist" attractions in Paris, and now feel less like a tourist and more like someone living in Paris, even if only for a short period. (Michael, Paris, weekly report 4)

4.5.2 Contributions of the ICLI programmes to students' LPP

As mentioned in Sections 4.1 and 4.3.3, the language courses contributed to the students' ability to engage in LPP, as they were aimed at developing their communicative competence and giving them the linguistic means to interact with the local communities. The course instructors acted as pedagogical mediators, who scaffolded the students' LPP and intercultural development. In addition, as the site visits and observations revealed, many of the courses used project and information-gathering tasks to enable students to interact with local people and to discover cultural knowledge outside of class.

Many of the programmes had also arranged for peer interactions. For instance, the programmes in Chiangrai, Seoul and Tokyo had provided social contact opportunities with local students, and the journal data reveal that the local student buddies had in fact served as peer mediators who also scaffolded their LPP. Donna, for example, described the interactions with the local students as "enriching, as they could explain things such as the significance of certain landmarks or cultural practices" (Chiangrai, post-immersion report). In the case of Samantha, she had gained insights into Korean restaurant interactions (Seoul 1, weekly report 2) and critical perspectives of Korean political culture (post-immersion report) through the weekly meetings with her buddy. In Excerpt 9, we had seen how Yolanda had benefited from her discussions with the local support students in learning about more complex social topics in Japan and in preparing for her course project (Tokyo, post-immersion report).

The Münster and Freiburg programmes had also assigned local students to help with the organisation of the cultural activities, and to act as guides and resource persons. They too performed the role of peer mediators in informing about the TL culture and its sociocultural practices. For instance, one of the local student guides in Freiburg taught the participants that they could drink from the fountains in the city:

> Excerpt 20:
> In addition, the student guides were a wealth of information. […] During the tour by Mandy through the city, we were told that the water from fountains are also potable! (unless it was explicitly stated that we weren't to drink it). This shocked us greatly, until we saw the state of water running through the small "canals" of the city. The water there was clean, cold, and clear! (Nadyah, Freiburg, weekly report 1)

The programme component that afforded the participants the most and most telling opportunities for social discourse and LPP was, on the evidence of the data, the homestay with local families, which was extended only to the participants in Münster, Freiburg and Paris. As the partner institutions informed the researchers, the homestay hosts had been prepared to provide interactions in the TL and to support participants in adjusting to and participating in local life. In other words, they were asked to act as expert mediators – knowledgeable full members of the TL culture – to aid the participants' LPP. In Excerpts 1 and 2, Nor Alinah (Münster) and Jordan (Freiburg) had pointed to the importance of the homestay for experiencing the TL culture and learning about its practices. Another example was provided by Yann in Paris, who wrote:

> Excerpt 21:
> I believe that the most useful part of this programme is the homestay. The homestay will help the student to practice the language every day and for me, I learned the most from my host. My kind host had taught me much about their culture and customs. (Yann, Paris, post-immersion report)

The strongest statements about the crucial significance of the homestay as a platform for direct participation in the local culture stem perhaps from those who lamented at not being offered this opportunity:

> Excerpt 22:
> That our programme no longer includes a homestay [because of the MERS epidemic] will inevitably limit the range of interaction we will have with the local Koreans, and that is a shame. (Steven, Seoul 2, weekly report 1)

> Excerpt 23:
> I was only there for two weeks and I was only exposed to their "culturalness" only on the superficial level. Yeah, so … whatever I see is probably on the surface or possibly what the false front that they put … or maybe a front that they put … So I'm not sure what's exactly, really underneath the surface. So, I suppose if I were to live in a homestay, it'll be a lot different. (Abdulah, Taipei, interview)

The importance of social contact and access to LPP is underlined by the comparative lack of intercultural development observed among the Taipei participants. Access to LPP is restricted for the Taipei programme by several factors: 1) it is the shortest of all the programmes, lasting just two weeks; 2) there were few authentic interactional tasks that took them beyond the centre; 3) they

were accommodated in a hotel in town and had no contact with local families or students; and 4) there were no arrangements for regular social contact with student buddies or other members of the local community. The journals of the Taipei participants reveal that interactions were limited mostly to casual, incidental encounters with restaurant owners, museum staff, commuters in public transport, and people on the street. We had seen how Abdulah had given an overly simplistic, black-and-white account of the elderly and the younger generations of Taiwanese, portraying the former as exceedingly friendly and helpful ("the best of Taiwanese people") and the latter as rude, materialistic and pretentious ("the worst of the lot"). Eventually, as we had seen in Excerpt 23, he came to the realisation that he had only been superficially exposed to the culture in Taiwan and wished he had been afforded deeper insights through a homestay.

4.5.3 Motivation and LPP

Lave and Wenger (1991) assert that learners' peripheral participation is highly dependent on how they value and desire full participation in a community of practice. Heinzmann et al. (2015) found that their subjects' willingness to interact with the TL communities is dependent on their predisposition to do so prior to the study abroad programmes. There are two cases in the current study that seem to confirm that motivation is a key factor determining if and how students take advantage of the LPP opportunities afforded by their ICLI programmes. In the first of these cases, Gerry's participation in the Seoul 1 programme was apparently primarily motivated by touristic intentions, as he stated: "[…] my main motive in joining this immersion program is to visit Korea and travel there" (pre-immersion report), which is in stark contrast to the objectives expressed by the other two journal participants in the same programme, Samantha and Yen Shan. Samantha was motivated by the wish to "experience Korea like a native and not a tourist" and to see it "in a different way and to get a glimpse of how Koreans carry out their daily activities" (pre-immersion report), while Yen Shan wanted "to learn Korean culture through interactions with Koreans" (pre-immersion report). In comparison, Gerry appears to be more the "tourist" than the "sojourner" (Byram, 1997). His journal reads in fact more like a travelogue, as he focused largely on recounting the various sights he had visited. There were hardly any attempts to engage in deeper or more critical reflections of the Korean culture or that of his native country, Indonesia, or his adopted country, Singapore, which were abundant in Samantha's and Yen Shan's journal reports. Not even the MERS epidemic, which was the focal point of Korean media during the programme, could draw any deeper comments or comparisons with similar health crises in Indonesia or Singapore, other than the lament that it had adversely affected the excursions originally included in the programme. It was thus not surprising that he did not report any changes to his perspectives of the Korean or his own culture. Even after his one-night homestay, Gerry was to write: "I don't think there is any particular difference between Korean culture and our culture (Indonesian and Singapore)." (weekly report 3)

Conspicuously missing from his journal reports were accounts of any lengthy and more meaningful interactions with members of the TL community. Although he was assigned a student buddy and could have contacted friends of his brother's, he avoided such contact, ostensibly because he did not want to be a bother to his brother's friends or his student buddy. That Gerry lacked an interest in meaningful social interactions seems to reflect his touristic motivation and further confirms the significance of such discourse for one's LPP and intercultural development.

In the second case, Samuel, who was in Münster, also failed to take advantage of the LPP opportunities offered to him. Prior to the trip, he had admitted to being "extremely introverted by nature" and was concerned that "the constant need to interact will be extremely draining" (pre-immersion report). His stated goal for the ICLI was to achieve a higher level of fluency in German, although he had doubts about his own ambition right from the onset: "Anyway, I'd like to think that I'd come out of this programme fairly fluent, but realistically I don't expect that to happen." (pre-immersion report) His doubts about the attainability of his own goal was to become a recurrent theme in his journal. Perhaps because of his introverted personality and his lack of conviction in pursuing his ICLI goal, he had reservations about interacting with locals, including his host family,

attributing this partly to his lack of communicative ability. Instead, he seemed to interact more with his fellow ICLI participants – in English and not in the TL:

> Excerpt 24:
> However, it is perhaps unfortunate that the lot of us all come from Singapore, because then it very quickly becomes much easier to speak using English or Singaporean references, which hinders the progress of German learning. […] I guess one more thing that I could mention is that it is still surprisingly difficult to communicate with the host family as much as I would like. Overcoming the language barrier takes much more fluency than I'd thought. (Samuel, Münster, weekly report 2)

Tellingly, there were few mentions in his journal of contact or interactions with members of the local community. In fact, Samuel did not even attempt to describe his host family. On the contrary, he focused in his journal on his relationships with his fellow participants and their common activities. In the interview, he revealed that his interactions with his host got "progressively less" during his stay, and that he and his roommate had stayed out late on occasions and missed the dinners their host mother had prepared for them – and thus also opportunities for interactions with the family. Apparently, as he explained later, he gave up on his "unrealistic" linguistic goal and decided to focus on enjoying the stay in Germany instead: "[…] my priorities changed during the immersion itself because I started to see it more as … okay … since it's like … okay, let loose and have fun. Rather than the whole focus on language learning, that sort of thing." (interview)

Because of this "change" in motivation (we will recall that he had doubts about his own goal and perhaps did not really apply himself to its pursuance from the onset), he admitted to not having made full use of the interactional opportunities available to him:

> Excerpt 25:
> So if that [making use of the interactional opportunities] is not your focus, then naturally you won't try to do that so much. So even for myself, that's what I said … like … at the start, I did focus more on communication, but as my focus changed, then it became less and less important. Yeah. (Samuel, Münster, interview)

These two examples from the Seoul 1 and Münster programmes point to the importance of the participants' motivation for their willingness to engage in interactions and LPP in the local communities, as claimed by Lave and Wenger (1991), and Heinzmann et al. (2015).

4.6 Summary

Contrary to Davidson's (2007) view that short-term study abroad may not be effective in helping students learn the TL culture, the findings of this study show that positive intercultural development can result from the ICLI experience given the right constellation of ICLI programme design, and individual characteristics and encounters – for instance, when the ICLI programme is designed to provide sufficient and appropriate opportunities for LPP, and to support and prepare learners pragmatically and linguistically for social interactions and participation. The learners also need to be properly motivated to avail themselves of the LPP access afforded to them.

The data collected through the site visits and document inspections provide an affirmative answer to Research Question 1, as the language course activities, homestay, student buddy interactions, and cultural activities for most of the programmes – with the Taipei programme being the most notable exception for reasons discussed above – offered ample opportunities for students to discover and participate in the TL culture. In fact, as the journal and interview data reveal, much of these interactions enabled students to engage meaningfully in LPP and to learn the sociocultural practices of the TL community.

In response to Research Question 2, the ISS and the extensive qualitative data from the journals, interviews and activity observations suggest that the ICLI programmes had, in general, a positive impact on the intercultural development of the participating students. There was a significant and positive gain in the mean ISS scores of the 93 respondents to the pre- and post-immersion questionnaires. In addition, there were many lengthy and substantive journal reports with critical

reflections and well-balanced evaluations that are indicative of positive intercultural growth (Bloom & Miranda, 2015; Jackson, 2009).

With regard to Research Question 3, we have similarly seen much evidence from the qualitative data that the ICLI experience can benefit participants in all areas of IC described in Byram's (1997) model, enhancing their *savoirs*, *savoir être*, *savoir apprendre/faire*, *savoir comprendre*, and *savoir s'engager*. An important observation is that the development of these components was closely interlinked. For example, a positive and open attitude towards the TL culture predisposed the participants positively towards active participation in the local community, thus promoting their discovery, interpretation and critical reflection of the new cultural knowledge and experiences.

As regards Research Question 4, the qualitative data point towards the pivotal role of the opportunities afforded by ICLI for social contact and interactions (such as with instructors, student buddies, homestay hosts, and incidental interlocutors), confirming the findings of previous studies (e.g. Heinzmann et al., 2015; Schwieter & Kunert, 2012). This study has further shown that the resultant intercultural development can be explained by Lave and Wenger's (1991) SLT and the participants' LPP in the TL community. We have seen many examples of participants seeking to engage actively in the practices of the TL culture, and subsequently interpreting and reflecting on these and similar practices in their own culture. That not all participants achieved the same degree of intercultural development is not unusual and has been documented in other studies (e.g. Bloom & Miranda, 2015; Heinzmann et al., 2015; Jackson, 2006, 2009). Indeed, in this study, this serves to underline the importance of LPP. Not surprisingly, those participants with more limited access to LPP, such as those in the Taipei programme, seemed to have profited less in terms of intercultural development. Further support for this view is evident in the cases of Gerry in Seoul 1 and Samuel in Münster, who were not properly motivated to avail themselves of the LPP access offered to them and thus hardly showed any signs of positive intercultural development.

5 Conclusion

This study investigated the effect of short-term ICLI on the intercultural development of Singapore university learners of six different FLs. It was found that ICLI offered the learners opportunities to discover the TL culture and to engage meaningfully in LPP in the TL community. Both quantitative and qualitative data indicate that the ICLI experience contributed positively towards the enhancement of the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary for the development of the participants' IC. The findings also suggest that SLT and the notion of LPP can explain this development, as those who had more opportunities for LPP and sought to participate in the local community benefited more from the ICLI experience and apparently made greater gains interculturally.

Future research can seek to further investigate the impact of ICLI and LPP on the development of IC and if sociocultural theories such as SLT can be used to ground and explain culture learning. It is recommended that studies that adopt a sociocultural perspective also examine the role of the expert members of the TL community who mediate the participants' culture learning and intercultural development, as most studies to date have tended to focus on the participants and paid far less attention to the perspectives of mediators such as instructors, programme coordinators, student buddies and host families.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

PRE-IMMERSION QUESTIONNAIRE

Please fill out both sections of this questionnaire. Your honest inputs will be much appreciated.

Section A

Personal information

1. Please state your full name. _____
2. How old are you? _____
3. Please state your gender. ☐ female ☐ male
4. What is your nationality? _____
5. Please state the length of your residence in Singapore. _____ years
6. What is your year of study?
   Undergraduate: ☐ Year 1 ☐ Year 2 ☐ Year 3 ☐Year 4
   Graduate: ☐ Master's programme ☐ PhD programme
7. Are you a non-graduating student (e.g. an exchange student)? ☐ yes ☐ no
8. Which faculty are you from? _____
9. Which subject(s) are you studying? Major(s): _____ Minor(s): _____
10. Which of the following language immersion programmes are you attending?
    ☐ Chinese ☐ French ☐ German (Münster)
    ☐ German (Freiburg) ☐ Japanese (Tokyo) ☐ Japanese (Kyoto)
    ☐ Korean (Seoul 1) ☐ Korean (Seoul 2) ☐ Thai
11. Which was the last module you took in the target language of your immersion?
    _____ (Module code)

Section B

Below is a series of statements concerning intercultural communication. There are no right or wrong answers. Please work quickly and record your first impression by indicating the degree to which you agree or disagree with the statement. Thank you for your cooperation

5 = Strongly agree 4 = Agree 3 = Uncertain 2 = Disagree 1 = Strongly disagree	Please put the number corresponding to your answer in the blank before the statement

___ 1. I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.
___ 2. I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded.
___ 3. I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures.
___ 4. I find it very hard to talk in front of people from different cultures.
___ 5. I always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures.
___ 6. I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures.
___ 7. I don't like to be with people from different cultures.
___ 8. I respect the values of people from different cultures.
___ 9. I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures.
___ 10. I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.
___ 11. I tend to wait before forming an impression of culturally-distinct counterparts.
___ 12. I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures.
___ 13. I am open-minded to people from different cultures.
___ 14. I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures.

___ 15. I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures.
___ 16. I respect the ways people from different culture behave.
___ 17. I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures.
___ 18. I would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures.
___ 19. I am sensitive to my culturally-distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during our interaction.
___ 20. I think my culture is better than other cultures.
___ 21. I often give positive responses to my culturally different counterpart during our interaction.
___ 22. I avoid situations where I will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons.
___ 23. I often show my culturally-distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues.
___ 24. I have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between my culturally-distinct counterpart and me.

Appendix 2

POST-IMMERSION QUESTIONNAIRE

Full Name: _____

5 = Strongly agree 4 = Agree 3 = Uncertain 2 = Disagree 1 = Strongly disagree	Please put the number corresponding to your answer in the blank before the statement

___ 25. I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures.
___ 26. I think people from other cultures are narrow-minded.
___ 27. I am pretty sure of myself in interacting with people from different cultures.
___ 28. I find it very hard to talk in front of people from different cultures.
___ 29. I always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures.
___ 30. I can be as sociable as I want to be when interacting with people from different cultures.
___ 31. I don't like to be with people from different cultures.
___ 32. I respect the values of people from different cultures.
___ 33. I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures.
___ 34. I feel confident when interacting with people from different cultures.
___ 35. I tend to wait before forming an impression of culturally-distinct counterparts.
___ 36. I often get discouraged when I am with people from different cultures.
___ 37. I am open-minded to people from different cultures.
___ 38. I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures.
___ 39. I often feel useless when interacting with people from different cultures.
___ 40. I respect the ways people from different culture behave.
___ 41. I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures.
___ 42. I would not accept the opinions of people from different cultures.
___ 43. I am sensitive to my culturally-distinct counterpart's subtle meanings during our interaction.
___ 44. I think my culture is better than other cultures.
___ 45. I often give positive responses to my culturally different counterpart during our interaction.
___ 46. I avoid situations where I will have to deal with culturally-distinct persons.
___ 47. I often show my culturally-distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues.
___ 48. I have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between my culturally-distinct counterpart and me.