

Engagement in Continuing Subject Knowledge
Development: A Year After Short-Term
International Courses

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Abstract

This paper examines how students' subject knowledge acquired in short-term international courses (SICs) developed while engaging in university studies in the year following their SICs. It also explores factors associated with their engagement and disengagement. Two interviews with a one-year interval with 25 students revealed their transformations in their SIC subject matter knowledge. Some students' engagement in continuing studies of the SIC-related subject matter was supported in a multifaceted manner by their personal motivation, teaching-learning environment, educational structure, and wider social relationships. However, the analysis demonstrated that many students discontinued deepening their knowledge of the subject matter. Students' personal factors and certain dimensions of the institutional educational system explained their disengagement in continuing studies. Concerning the continuing SIC impacts on students in interdisciplinary liberal arts programs, the study discusses some suggestions drawing on the concepts of integrative learning and formative assessment.

Introduction

Among varied formats of international education practices, faculty-directed short-term international courses (SICs) where students study in international settings for a few days or weeks have become popular (Kurt et al., 2013; Slotkin et al., 2012). Research has suggested that students develop intercultural communicative skills (Assaf et al., 2019; Sakurai, 2019), global perspectives (Cushing et al., 2017; Kurt et al., 2013), social connectedness, willingness for self-development, (Weaver & Tucker, 2010), and

knowledge of the visit sites (Kurt et al., 2013). However, few studies have explored how students engage in university studies drawing on their SIC outcomes.

Review of the Literature

Student Engagement in Studies

Engagement refers to students' active cognitive, emotional, and behavioural involvement and effort in educational activities and tasks, which may enhance their success (Fredricks et al., 2004; Kahu & Nelson, 2018). Student engagement in studies accounts for a university's educational excellence and effectiveness (Kahu, 2013; Kahu & Nelson, 2018). Student engagement occurs in the intricate and dynamic interaction between students and their educational contexts. (Kahu & Nelson, 2018).

Student engagement is substantially regulated by relationships among students and pedagogical opportunities (*psychosocial influence*). For example, it refers to the interplay of the students' motivation, identity, and personal traits with peers and the instructional design. The psychosocial influence is governed by institutional *structural influences* that include university policies, degree curricula, and culture, as well as the students' background and personal life circumstances (e.g., Picton et al., 2018). What happens in universities, namely, psychosocial and structural influences, are also associated with a wider *sociocultural context*, for example, off-campus friendships, volunteering, and part-time job experiences (Dyer et al., 2018; Picton et al., 2018). Through engaging in studies, students produce academic outcomes including knowledge, skill, and attitudes, as well as socio-personal development pertaining to self-satisfaction, pride, and well-being (Kahu, 2013; Kahu & Nelson, 2018).

Short-Term International Courses

Faculty members typically design SICs with local experts, collaboratively organising lectures, activities, and site visits. The students in these courses enjoy first-hand international experiences, such as gaining knowledge of destination sites and global awareness (Huffman et al., 2020; Kurt et al., 2013; Ruth et al., 2019), which they seldom attain on campus (Twombly et al., 2012; Weaver & Tucker, 2010). Students also develop their self-confidence, relationships with peers and teachers, and potential prospects of academic and career pathways (Cubillos & Ilvento, 2012; Engle & Engle, 2003; Huffman et al., 2020; Ingraham & Peterson, 2003; Ruth et al., 2019; Weaver & Tucker, 2010). Challenging situations enhance belief in their self-efficacy in terms of their language learning, cultural competence, and professional problem-solving (Cubillos & Ilvento, 2012; Nguyen et al., 2018; Simmons et al., 2019). Students may also attain a positive self-concept and clearer self-understanding (Huffman et al., 2020; Moorhead et al., 2014).

Most studies on students' global experiences have investigated their communicative, personal, and intercultural development (Tracy-Ventura et al., 2016), and very few studies have examined their development of subject matter knowledge in global learning experiences. Some examples have indicated that even short travel experiences gave students a tangible understanding of subject knowledge. This applied to local ornithological studies (Malloy & Davis, 2012), social welfare practices (Moorhead et al., 2014), healthcare nursing (Philips et al., 2017), agricultural industry (Roberts et al., 2019), and novel educational approaches (Assaf et al., 2019), for example. These studies have often probed the impact of SICs immediately after their participation. However, a lacuna exists in the literature concerning the significance of

SIC outcomes in relation to students' post-SIC engagement in their university studies (Cushing et al., 2017; Nguyen et al., 2018; Ruth et al., 2019).

Longitudinal Impacts of Short-Term International Courses

Studies have shown longitudinal impacts of traditional semester- and year-long programs on graduates' career life, such as the increased awareness of the global world (Asada, 2019), professional practices (Gibson et al., 2015), and transborder career paths (Paige et al., 2009). Moreover, students who studied abroad exhibited higher cognitive engagement in studies in their senior year and perceived greater academic and personal achievements (Gonyea, 2008). According to the engagement literature, students' learning outcomes may serve as the foundation for their further engagement in studies (Dyer et al., 2018). For instance, students' engagement in learning develops their confidence, motivation, and collegiality as outcomes, which further fuel their long-term engagement in studies (Dyer et al., 2018; Wilson et al., 2016).

Accordingly, outcomes from SICs may sustain, transform, or interrupt how one engages in learning. Students' negative experiences of SIC can also be transformed positively to help in creating a meaningful foundation for future careers (Tucker & Weaver, 2013). Graduates with employment experience recognised that their international trip experiences enhanced their employment potential, teamwork capability, and intercultural communication skills (Tucker & Weaver, 2013). Other researchers have expressed doubt about the long-term impacts of SICs. Positive impacts on students' intercultural sensitivity may cease after returning home (Rexisen, 2013). It may not be until students find employment that they can adequately assess the value of their SIC experiences (Tucker & Weaver, 2013). Salisbury (2015) argued that it takes time to bear fruit from intercultural learning experiences. Others claimed that students

have fewer lasting impacts from the exposure of subject matter knowledge than from experiences stimulating their attitude and interest (e.g., Weaver & Tucker, 2010).

These studies suggested that the outcomes of SICs are not static but may be re-evaluated and transformed as students have new experiences. Researchers have also emphasised the importance of post-study interventions and support abroad (Twombly et al., 2012). Learning in SICs should be associated with pre- and post-SIC experiences and degree studies (Brewer et al., 2019). Research has suggested that students attain new academic inspiration during SICs (Twombly et al., 2012). Hence, students participating in SICs are likely to develop new subject-specific interests related to SIC contents. Nevertheless, we have little understanding of how students, during their university studies, continue to engage in learning of subject knowledge acquired in SICs after their participation. Hence, the general research shortage of long-term studies and the unclarity of the continuing SIC significance necessitate more systematic studies (e.g., Assaf et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2018).

The Study

This study, with a specific focus on subject matter knowledge as the SIC outcome, intended to determine: 1) how students' outcomes from SICs developed while engaging in regular university studies in the year after their SICs; and 2) what factors emerged during their engagement and disengagement. This study adopted a qualitative interpretive approach and explored how students made sense of their SIC experiences and engagement in studies over time (Hermanowicz, 2013; McCoy, 2017). A phenomenological approach is suitable for a long-term design to extract the essence of students' agentic behaviour, thinking, and feeling involved their transformation (e.g., McCoy, 2017).

The Setting

The SICs investigated for this study are credit-bearing courses offered at a competitive Japanese university which have been designed to help students understand various academic topics from global perspectives. Annually, roughly 150 students are enrolled in the SICs during summer and winter breaks. The SICs are offered as part of a two-year liberal arts undergraduate program where students study various science, social sciences, and humanities subjects, followed by advanced disciplinary programs in the third and fourth years prior to graduation.

The SICs' themes and locations are heterogeneous (Table 1): cultural landscapes (Australia & Japan), area studies (Hungary), peace construction (Kazakhstan & Turkmenistan), European Union politics (Germany), and language and cultural studies (Germany, Australia, China, and Korea). Local students and experts are often involved in lectures, group work, presentations, and/or field visits. Some courses require prerequisite courses or pre-departure meetings. The SIC in Japan is an inbound course with students from an Australian university. Few formal post-SIC activities are included except for a summary essay submission. Some leaders invite students to their SICs as auditors in the following year or to informal lectures by embassy officials of a destination country.

Table 1

Summary of Courses and Informants' Pseudonyms

Country	Major theme	Length	Language of instruction	Informant
Australia	Cultural landscapes	2 wks.	English	Ray, Haruki, *Karen, Lena, Lisa, Emma, Alan
Japan	Mt. Fuji	2 wks.	English	Leo, Sho, Naomi, *Karen, Lena, Lisa, Emma, Alan

Hungary	Hungarian history, culture, and architecture	2 wks.	English	Maria, Erika, Ken, Hanna
Turkmenistan	Peace and conflict	2 wks.	English	**[undisclosed]
Kazakhstan	Peace and conflict	2 wks.	English	Dan, Eugene
Germany	European Union	10 days	English	George
Germany	German language and culture	2 wks.	German and English	Jay, Sam
Australia	English and Australian culture	2 wks.	English	Hiro, Martha, Ben, Anna
China	Chinese language and culture	3 wks.	Chinese and English	Anna, Ben
Korea	Korean language and culture	3 wks.	Korean and English	Sage, Kane

**Note.* Karen, Lena, Lisa, Emma, and Alan participated in both Cultural landscapes and Mt. Fuji courses.

**A student in the Turkmenistan SIC also participated in another course. This student's name is undisclosed since few students participated in the two courses.

Participants

To begin the data collection process, I emailed SIC participants who had expressed an interest in the research in the post-course survey I had conducted. The research participants at the university were all Japanese. To solicit the information on their experiences, two interviews were conducted in Japanese with each student from 2015 to 2018. Of 28 first-wave interview participants, the author reached 25 (10 females and 15 males, 18–21 years old) for second-wave interviews. Most students had previously travelled abroad independently or with their families (23 students), while seven had lived overseas in early childhood (Anna, Ben, George, Naomi, Lisa, Emma, and Sam). Eugene and Sho lived abroad in their mid-late teens for about four years and one year, respectively.

My positionality afforded an insider understanding of the SICs, leaders' responsibilities, students' reactions, post-SIC activities, university structures, and their missions. My duties as the only coordinator included SIC publicity, website maintenance, support of SIC leaders, subsidy arrangement, committee course

registration, and institutional risk management approval. I also belonged to a unit for the internationalisation of undergraduate education.

Data Collection

In the first-wave interviews, I collected data on participants' motivations for taking the SICs, pre-departure preparation, course experiences, and prospects of future study. I also asked biographical questions about their age, educational history, academic interests, language test scores, international experiences, and future career visions. In the second-wave interviews following 10–14 months after the SICs, I asked about students' university experiences and personal events over the past year, retrospective perceptions of SIC experiences, and potential career paths. I provided each participant with a summary of their first-wave interview to readdress their experiences and explore any additional relevant information. The timespan between the interviews allowed students adequate time to fully experience their annual academic events, thus generating a sufficient number of accounts concerning their post-SIC experiences (Hermanowicz, 2013). All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Analysis

Each student's interview transcript was collated into an individual episode. I read the transcripts several times, listening to the recordings to glean subtle meaning in the students' accounts (NVivo ver. 11). Initial open-coding of the first-wave interviews identified text segments explaining students' SIC outcomes. I compared the segments among the participants and within the thematic codes, and the iterative inductive processes enabled me to combine, sort, and refine the themes (Hermanowicz, 2013). Among the outcome themes, the following analysis exclusively focused on learned content knowledge, which referred to the systematic and elaborated information

presented in the SIC lectures, seminars, or site visits. The themes also included students' elaboration of SIC-related knowledge. The episodes of the themes served as a baseline for the second-wave interviews.

After the analysis of the second-wave interviews, I compiled the chronological summaries of major experiences associated with both SIC experiences and subsequent academic studies. Saldaña's (2009) classification of longitudinal transformation was useful in systematically capturing students' emerging and cumulative transformation. I used only three basic transformations: *increase*, *decrease*, and *constant* (Saldaña, 2009), as more frequent data collections would have been necessary for finer transformation categories. Students who were analysed as picking up new knowledge related to their SICs and deepening existing SIC knowledge over time were categorised as *increase*, while those exhibiting attrition and obliviousness of SIC knowledge were classified as *decrease*. The code *constant* was applied to students whose descriptions of subject knowledge did not clearly differ between the interviews.

I then focused the analysis on the factors affecting the transformation. I mapped factors supporting or impeding students' post-course engagement in continuing SIC knowledge development onto the student engagement framework, referring to the psychosocial influence, *structural influence*, and sociocultural context (Kahu, 2013; Kahu et al., 2015).

Results: Transformation of Students' Subject Matter Knowledge

I determined that six (out of 25) students' quality of SIC subject knowledge developed in the intervening year (*increase*), seven receded (*decrease*), and seven seemed to retain their knowledge (*constant*). No codes were assigned to five students since they had not narrated any episodes related to their development of subject matter

knowledge in their interviews (Anna, Ben, Lena, Lisa, and Alan). In the next analytical phase, I probed factors contributing to students' engagement in further developing their SIC subject knowledge.

Psychosocial influences

The factors of psychosocial influences directly affected students' engagement. In the second interviews, many talked about their interest in the subject matter as a reason why they still felt impressed by the learned content:

I was originally interested in how artwork was analysed. I took some courses about that I still love art and sometimes visit to see paintings. (Ray, Australia)

Students also emphasised the significance of their relationships with university learning opportunities and peers as incentivising their continuing engagement. Studying relevant topics in regular courses was commonly described as continuing knowledge development. Hiro learned about Australian culture in his SIC, and back home, he took a course that dealt with visual representations of Australian indigenous people in movies. Naomi gained new knowledge about Japan in her SIC and was shocked by her ignorance. In her second interview, she said:

I think I can talk more about Japan than last year I read some recommended books for written assignments of a [regular] course, and I studied as others did, so I believe that I am now more confident about that. (Naomi, Japan)

Another major factor in the psychosocial influences was interpersonal interaction. Students' peer relationships often encouraged them to engage in learning opportunities. For instance, Dan had already been interested in international relations as his potential major before his Kazakhstan SIC. During and after the SIC, he increased

his knowledge based on advice given by a senior SIC peer and clarified his vision of the field. Moreover, Emma learned how Australian indigenous people took advantage of local flora and then consulted her advisor about cultural landscapes.

Conversely, major factors impeding long-term development also resulted from psychosocial influences. Some students frequently related episodes concerning the decline of their interest in SIC topics. Ken, Hanna, and Erika said in their first interviews that they found Hungarian history interesting, but commonly expressed in their second interviews that it did not interest them that much, for example:

I learned history and Christianity in the SIC However, I thought it was not my thing. It's impossible for me to study history, Roman history, and things like that. It's fine to memorise facts, but I can't closely think about it like the instructor [in the SIC] did. (Erika, Hungary)

Furthermore, in her first interview, Martha expressed the importance of learning about Japanese culture, having been inspired by cultural issues unique to Australia. However, she did not maintain her learning aspirations and said in her second interview that it was because of the "lack of my effort".

Structural influences

Some systemic factors of the educational structure supported or discouraged students' engagement in learning opportunities. They included the undergraduate degree structure, extracurricular programs, and exchange programs. For instance, students moving on to the third year must choose their major, which makes them rethink their academic paths. One student, who learned about university student support in Australia, said in her second interview:

I took a wide range of education major courses before moving on to the third year. I could overview different perspectives of the field. I realised that [because of SIC experiences] I became interested in psychological support for students.

(Martha, Australia)

Many students were willing to apply for an exchange program, and some had already made successful applications. The prospect of studying abroad helped Sho and Kane clarify their interests. Sho, who became interested in diversity and multiculturalism during his SIC, explained:

There is an American ethnic studies program at [a U.S. university] It sounds interesting to study and look into identity politics, which is considerably related to multiculturalism. (Sho, Japan)

Another episode related to exchange programs originated from the provocative experience of new knowledge provided in SICs. Through their SIC experiences, some students became aware of the paucity of their knowledge base and established future objectives for pursuing better studies overseas. Martha, having already been accepted to an exchange program, said in her second interview:

Reflecting on my SIC experience, I am strongly aware of what I need to do before going abroad. I need to increase knowledge about Japan and learn more English expressions. The SIC experience gave me a guide. It tells me what to do before I leave Japan. (Martha, Australia)

Two other students explicitly commented on some drawbacks of the university curriculum structure. They noted that knowledge learned in the first- and second-year liberal arts program, including SICs, was often unrelated, and Hanna added that, “I

forgot many things.”, while Erica explained that “the subject matter in the SIC was among many unrelated topics”.

Sociocultural context

Social dynamics and interpersonal networks beyond the university influenced students’ engagement in the continuous development of SIC subject knowledge, and they recounted most episodes positively. A salient factor was concerned with the dynamics of the global society. Naomi was struck by her observation during the SIC that the Kazakhstan authoritarian regime worked surprisingly well. As a result, after considering media reports about North Korea, she subsequently explored books to better understand autocratic governments. Sam heard a lecture on Chinese politics in his SIC in Germany. He reflected on the lecture in his second interview: “China is nowadays perceived negatively because of recent media broadcast if you are in Japan, but I still remember German people’s perspectives were different from ours.” Sho changed his major after his SIC to focus on diversity issues and became concerned with the political ethnocentrism in the United States:

I want to broaden my perspective. It’s not merely about academic subjects, but, let’s say, about those who do not receive university education and those who support President Donald Trump, people who are beyond my understanding. I found it important to talk with them. In this regard, I am yet an amateur but am keen on understanding them. (Sho, Japan)

Likewise, a domestic sociocultural context was a comparative catalyst for Karen to recall her SIC experiences of learning about Christianity and history. She compared the religious contexts of different countries, including Japan:

The religion and history topics were impressive and still vivid in my memory.

Such things are not around me in Japan. Of course, international students are not the embodiment of them I can only understand local religion and history from texts when I'm in Japan. (Karen, Australia/Hungary)

A few students mentioned off-campus interpersonal networks. Kane had opportunities in his off-campus active peer group to discuss issues related to his major: public transportation systems. He became interested in emulating the Korean transportation system he observed during his SIC in a geographically similar area in Japan. Also, in Ken's case, his network via social networking services (SNSs) influenced his continuing engagement. He shared his ideas about immigrants, which he had learned about in his regular lectures, with a SIC friend:

I recalled what I learned about immigrants in the SIC. My Hungarian friend asked me through SNS chatting about the lecture. I explained what the professor said.

Karen also maintained her relationship with a peer from an Australian SIC using SNSs. They occasionally shared their reflections and insights about the Australian course topics.

Naomi recounted an episode which interrupted her continuing engagement. Although she increased her interest in Japan, she decided to major in law and focused on those studies more from the third year because she believed that "law speaks eloquently to the public" in the Japanese sociocultural context and that it would ultimately offer her better career prospects.

Complex Relationships of Student Engagement and Supporting Factors

The students' episodes have thus far been presented in a linear manner for convenience. However, the students' engagement in learning sometimes took place in multifaceted ways. For example, Sho learned about multiculturalism in his SIC and developed his understanding by exchanging ideas with peers (psychosocial influence). His engagement in learning was simultaneously supported by the prospect of the exchange program (*structural influence*) and stimulated by global dynamics (sociocultural context). Furthermore, the curriculum structure (*structural influence*) suspended the students' major selection and pursuit of their academic interest for a time (psychosocial influence). Before finally deciding on a major, Martha needed to take many courses (*structural influence*), which prevented her from addressing her knowledge deficit that she had acknowledged during her SIC. Naomi updated her academic interest (psychosocial influence), but her recognition of the disciplinary value in society (sociocultural context) led her to major in law when she needed to choose her disciplinary area (*structural influence*). Evidently, courses offered in the degree program (*structural influence*) were often combined with students' emerging interests inspired by their SIC experiences (psychosocial influence). Students made agentic decisions on which courses they would take based on their interests related to their SIC experiences.

Discussion

Methodological Reflections

The results were dependent on the contexts, such as the unique institutional setting, academic level, subject area, program type, and university curricula. Challenges in controlling individuals' variables deserves methodological attention (Twombly et al., 2012). A future focus on those with specific disciplinary interests would be worthwhile

because most students in this study were still exploring their disciplinary pathways. Moreover, students with less cultural sensitivity tend to develop their cultural intelligence more during SICs than those possessing more (Nguyen et al., 2018; Savicki & Price, 2017; Yngve, 2019a). Therefore, students' pre-course cultural sensitivity, which this study did not systematically examine, might explain their development in SICs, and this might further impact their post-course development in a different manner. In addition, Tucker and Weaver (2013) revealed that SIC participants re-evaluated their international experience by incorporating their workplace experiences. Therefore, students' engagement in learning may be transformed in distinctive ways in the longer run.

Reflections on Findings

The immediate impacts of SICs on longitudinal engagement in learning relevant subject matter have not always been promising (e.g., Donnelly-Smith, 2009; Ingraham & Peterson, 2003). Studies have suggested that students often promote their intrinsic academic interests through international program participation (Twombly et al., 2012). Indeed, this study suggested that the effectiveness of SICs on students' long-term development of academic knowledge should be re-evaluated with caution. Rexisen (2013) similarly claimed that students' intercultural competence reverted to pre-sojourn levels after four-months' time. In this study, eight students were enrolled in language intensive SICs, although they included some lectures, seminars, and site visits. Therefore, they seldom related their development of subject matter knowledge in their interviews. It was unsurprising that any conspicuous subject knowledge development was rarely mentioned by those in the language intensive courses.

Overall, only six out of 25 students showed clear post-course engagement in their development of subject matter knowledge associated with SICs. Many students explicitly commented on their learning uptake in their first interviews, but some disappointingly noted in their second interviews that they had forgotten it. SIC leaders have often emphasised subject knowledge as an outcome to the same extent as students' personal capability growth (Cushing et al., 2017). However, the results suggested that participants' longitudinal learning may not automatically occur regarding subject knowledge.

Among the major reasons for disengagement was the lack of students' interest in the subject (psychosocial influence). Kahu et al. (2015) argued that students' topic-related interest intertwined with their personal life is key for greater engagement. The students in this study were enrolled in the liberal arts interdisciplinary program and had not yet chosen their disciplinary pathway and so were enrolled in a variety of subject courses (*structural influence*). As such, they did not necessarily choose SICs based on their potential major, and students' subject matter knowledge of SICs was not automatically cultivated. Nonetheless, the university has encouraged students to become acquainted with various fields before narrowing their disciplinary focus. Padgett et al. (2013) suggested that first year liberal arts education contributes to students' life-long desire for learning. Therefore, I would not suggest that there is some defect in a liberal arts education, but I would call for critical attention to more strategic interventions and advice.

This study offers an insight into SICs within a liberal arts program where students do not yet have traditional disciplinary orientations. Also, as education abroad is a common instructional strategy in interdisciplinary programs (Newell, 1999, 2010),

this study delved into the challenges which interdisciplinary-oriented programs may face in integrating short-term education abroad. Twombly et al. (2012) warned that educational practices in universities have been criticised for their disconnected nature and that “we have made the same mistake” in education abroad (p.114). Bearing this in mind, the effort of degree and education abroad convenors is crucial for offering students integrative learning by which they can develop understanding and move through their learning pathway, combining varied learning experiences across different opportunities on and beyond campus (Newell, 2010; Yngve, 2019b).

The results illustrated students’ institutional and external personal networks contribute to their post-SIC engagement in developing subject knowledge. An external network created their sociocultural community beyond campus (sociocultural context), where student engagement was embedded and regulated (Kahu & Nelson, 2018). Researchers have supported the importance of interpersonal interaction beyond one’s classes, claiming that students’ engagement both in university and beyond should be more integrated for better learning (Dyer et al., 2018; Fredricks et al., 2004). Additionally, peer support provides students with novel perspectives that facilitate their development (e.g., Dyer et al., 2018; Fredricks et al., 2004). Picton et al. (2018) stressed that students’ peer relationships emotionally and cognitively engaged them in learning, by which they achieved better subsequent learning.

Online communication tools played an important role in the students’ continuous engagement in developing their SIC knowledge. SNSs are the “social glue” that can enhance students’ generic skills, relatedness to peer communities, and information sharing about academic practicalities (Madge et al., 2009, p. 152; Valenzuela et al., 2009). However, Madge et al. (2009) found that the percentage of students who

discussed academic matters informally via SNSs was at most 50%. In this study, likewise, there were only a few students who used SNSs for similar purposes. However, students with close ties to overseas students increased their “social capital” (Valenzuela et al., 2009, p. 889), which created more opportunities for their engagement in studies and deepened what they learned in their SICs.

Moreover, this study provided empirical evidence of engagement feedback relationships. Dyer et al. (2018) showed the value of friendships beyond the classroom as an enhancer of students’ subsequent engagement. Juvonen et al. (2012) stated that little was known regarding how students’ out-of-school friendships could complement their learning. Their study suggested that previously formed friendships in a field trip course promoted students’ access to various information, a peer community, and emotional support. This study additionally demonstrated that this “virtuous cycle in motion” (Dyer et al., 2018, p. 50) also enhanced SIC participants’ continuing engagement and further cultivated their academic knowledge.

Student engagement literature has primarily focused on students’ learning within institutional opportunities. The findings here provide a glimpse into how students’ engagement is associated with their sociocultural settings beyond their university. Kahu and Nelson (2018) enumerated students’ socio-economic status as the sole example of sociocultural factors, but this study adds evidence derived from novel episodes about external interpersonal networks and social dynamics occurring outside of their university. Arguably, the idea of integrative learning represents the ubiquitous potentials of university student engagement in learning (Brewer et al., 2019; Newell, 2010), whilst traditional curriculum exclusively dedicates effort to formal learning. The continuity of learning in conjunction with a series of on- and beyond-campus experiences should

become an integral component in modern educational practice (Assaf et al., 2019; Brewer et al., 2019; Newell, 1999; Twombly et al., 2012). Education abroad is inevitably embedded in institutional and personal learning contexts where students' pre- and post-study abroad experiences should be meaningfully intertwined (Twombly et al., 2012). Teachers' awareness and practices should be liberated from the traditional disciplinary mindset (Brewer et al., 2019). Varied relationships on and off campus can increase the learning opportunities (Brewer et al., 2019). As a result, integrative learning can synthetically achieve students' holistic development and prepare them for the complexities of society (Newell, 1999, 2010).

This study corroborated that SICs spur students' motivation for longer exchange programs (Engle & Engle, 2003; Kato & Suzuki, 2019; Sakurai, 2019). The novel insight here is that the students became cognizant of the deficiency of their knowledge necessary for prospective exchange studies (*structural influence*) and set personal resolutions. Also, this study, with a long-term perspective, showed that some succeeded in attaining immediate academic goals, but others did not, since their motivation for other commitments (*structural influence*, e.g., the curriculum requirement to take advanced courses) trumped their resolutions.

Concluding Remarks

Unfortunately, many students did not engage in post-course cultivation of subject matter knowledge acquired in their SICs. Institutional structural influences and students' psychosocial influences mainly explained their disengagement. Although the early interdisciplinary curriculum of the university, the so-called "liberal arts education", has both pros and cons, as an insider, I partly agree with students' claims that they must take many courses in different disciplines, and that they forget what they

have studied. Bearing these realities in mind, both teachers and students should enhance their awareness to integrate what students have learned earlier and in SICs, and to associate their knowledge among subjects with an interdisciplinary mind. As Engle and Engle (2003) advised, international activities should be mutually associated. Assigned tasks should allow leeway for students to use their past experiences, including those from SICs, since students' autonomous control of learning may increase their interest and success in learning (Rytönen et al., 2012; Sakurai et al., 2016). SIC leaders should also pay close attention to how other courses and SICs are meaningfully linked, either by themselves or with other faculty members. Although most faculty members have little understanding of students' intercultural competence and integrative learning (Yngve, 2019b), integrative learning cannot effectively be accomplished without educational staff's collaborative effort and conversation (Brewer et al., 2019). International education offices can contribute to students' integrative learning via working with other offices and administrations to facilitate policies and practices that can vary the connections between learning opportunities and increase students' motivation to engage in such learning (Brewer et al., 2019).

Students develop their subject knowledge while exchanging their ideas with peers in class, during their spare time, and online. Thus, the nature of multi-layered interpersonal relationships should be more deliberately acknowledged by teachers, other extra-curricular coordinators, and students themselves. The impact of SICs declines even within three to four months (Kato & Suzuki, 2019; Rexisen, 2013). Thus, SIC leaders should explicitly insist that participants act assertively in a timely fashion, for example, by joining new student communities, talking about their experiences with

peers, and/or maintaining their newly formed cross-border relationships before they lose their initial enthusiasm or other commitments arise.

For students to be able to facilitate these positive actions, their reflective processes on both academic and emotional experiences are crucial (Krishnan et al., 2017; Savicki & Price, 2017). Support is vital for students to have a time for reflection and proactively find tangible meaning in their experiences and sensible future pathways (Brewer et al., 2019; Engle & Engle, 2003; Krishnan et al., 2017; Newell, 1999, 2010; Rexisen, 2013; Savicki & Price, 2017; Yngve, 2019b). Increased ownership of their learning may help them gain more from their experiences (Brewer et al., 2019). Unreflected international experiences cannot adequately result in meaningful learning (Krishnan et al., 2017; Savicki & Price, 2017). Moreover, although prior studies have focused exclusively on students' cultural sensitivity development, explicit backward design of SICs using rubric assessment may help students grasp course goals and ensure that these are more in congruence with their overall degree objectives (Yngve, 2019b). Rubrics presented before SICs can enhance students' awareness of desired outcomes in SICs and their motivation towards learning (Yngve, 2019b).

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