

A Comparative Study of the International Perspectives of Six-Graders in Taipei and Shanghai

Yueh-Chun Huang, Huan-Hung Wu, and Yu-Liang Chang

Abstract

With the emergence of globalization, it has become increasingly important for all citizens to possess an international perspective. The trend of internationalizing educational systems has also emerged in various countries. Thus, to explore the degree to which students can possess international perspectives is an important topic worthy of studying. The purpose of this study was to develop a questionnaire to investigate the current status of the international perspectives of and the differences between sixth graders in Taipei and Shanghai. A total of 1,300 sixth -graders were randomly stratified from the two cities, with 1,111 valid questionnaires returned for further analysis. A significant difference was found in sixth graders' international perspectives between the two cities. Differences of their demographic characteristics were also identified. More similarities than differences in their backgrounds and experiences were identified. Both similarities and differences were also found in their parents' level of education and occupation.

Keywords: International Perspectives; Internationalization; Sixth Grader; Comparative Education.

Introduction

With regard to the emergence of globalization, it has become increasingly important to possess an international perspective for all citizens. In the case of the educational system, an emphasis on the internationalization is also formed and seen as a new trend in the educational policy in various countries around the world. Two major global events—“Expo 2010 Shanghai China” and “2010 Taipei International Flora Exposition”—were held in Shanghai City and Taipei City, respectively. Residents of Shanghai and Taipei participated cheerfully and enthusiastically in these world-class activities along with visitors from around the world. It seems that teachers, parents, and students in these two cities have the opportunity to expand their international perspectives through such international events.

It is important to have a general picture of the people’s international perspectives of Taipei and Shanghai in a broader scope prior to 2010. According to a survey of new social comers conducted by Pan Asia Human Resources Management & Consulting Corporation in 2004, Taiwan’s young people are not interested in international news. In addition, Du (2011) found that Taiwan’s young people pay less attention to international news than their counterparts in Mainland China. In terms of the content of international news, Taiwan’s young people pay more attention to entertainment and sports news than others, whereas Mainland China’s young people pay attention to information relating to international as well as political and economic news. Another important survey entitled “Global village of Citizen: A Questionnaire Survey of International Perspective,” conducted by King Car Education Foundation, sampled senior high school and college students in Taiwan. The survey found that 86% of students recognize the importance of international perspectives; the main motivation for understanding international affairs is to enhance their competitiveness so as to become one of the international talents needed for business and industry.

However, little research has dealt with elementary school students. Do these students hold appropriate international perspectives? This question led to the current study, whose purpose is to develop a questionnaire in order to investigate the current status of the international perspectives of sixth graders as well as the differences in these perspectives between two targeted cities: Taipei and Shanghai. The research results can serve as a guideline for future curriculum design in elementary and junior high schools in greater China. The research questions are as follows:

1. What is the current status of international perspectives among sixth graders in Taipei? Do their backgrounds have any influence on their perspectives?
2. What is the current status of international perspectives among sixth graders studying under the nine-year integrated curriculum in Shanghai? Do their backgrounds have any influence on their perspectives?
3. Is there any difference in the international perspectives of sixth graders in Taipei and Shanghai?

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundations of Expanding International Perspectives among Students

It is generally believed that if we want to expand students’ multicultural understanding and respect of differences, the best way is to help students learn about others. The idea of international education is based on this assumption, and international education and the

international perspective of teaching are based on theories of multiculturalism and multicultural education. Morey (2000) asserted that globalization has reinforced the demographic changes in the world. The diversification of people has become more significant. Schools around the world have changed their teaching materials to meet the needs of an internationalizing society, and one important mission is to prepare students with the awareness and skills necessary in a multicultural society.

Another significant theoretical foundation of expanding international perspectives among students is what policy researchers have asserted are the rationales driving the internationalization of education. The drivers of enhancing school's internationalization level and students' international perspective are human resource development, strategic alliances, commercial trade, nation building, and social/cultural development (Knight, 2004). Thus, enriching students' international perspectives can be an effective way of developing human capital, grounding social harmony, and strengthening national competitiveness within a nation state.

Empirical Studies of International Perspectives among Students

In the era of globalization, it is very important to possess an international perspective; ideally this should begin being cultivated during childhood (Li, 2007). But exactly what do we mean by "international perspective"? This is a hard concept to precisely define. Many scholars have defined international perspective according to the characteristics and attitudes of those who hold such a perspective. Liu (2006) suggested that the requirements for the cultivation of an international perspective include (1) foreign language aptitude; (2) interest in international affairs; (3) sensitivity to international culture; (4) an understanding of international issues; and (5) an understanding of globalization. Li (2007) asserted that an international perspective represents open-mindedness, a non-regional-centered orientation, a spirit of non-discrimination, and the active pursuit to make friends.

The increasing importance of students' international perspective is also evident in relevant international studies. For example, an online survey released by International Educator in August 2010 revealed that Canadian undergraduate students believe in the benefits of international education and overwhelmingly think that the ability to work in culturally diverse settings is important in terms of securing a job after graduation. Similar findings also can be found in other studies (e.g., Craiga & Piskurb, 2012; Green et al., 2008; McIntyre, 2013; Sandell, 2007).

McKenzie (1998) asserted that there are at least five definitions of "international," and the term "international perspective" can be defined in various ways as well. Hayden et al. (2000) suggested that "being international" refers to a specific set of attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors. However, practical acts such as language competence and travel opportunities are not to be excluded (Mo, 2006). Therefore, the current study defines international perspective as "one's views and knowledge regarding other nations and cultures"—a kind of international and intercultural competence which might be referred to as "cross-cultural awareness" or "international understanding."

Hayden, Rancic, and Thompson (2000) pointed out that previous studies of measuring international perspectives have seen school and peers as important sources of students'

international perspectives. However, very few studies had tested the significance of parental influence on students' international perspective. Thus, Hayden et al. (2000) included "parents who are internationally minded" as an item to measure students' and teachers' international view, considering it an important but consistently neglected source of students' international perspective.

Wihlborg (1999) studied the international perspectives of freshmen and sophomores majoring in nursing education in Sweden and defined their international perspectives based on "conceptions of internationalization." In a previous work on the subject, Sampson and Smith (1957) developed the World-mindedness Scale, which they defined as viewing the problems of mankind from an international perspective, without necessarily including interest in or awareness of international affairs, as does the concept of "international-mindedness." In sum, what all these terms have in common is that they represent the fact that an individual possesses some sort of international perspective.

Based on these definitions of international perspective formulated by both Chinese and Western scholars, it can be generalized that the concept includes an interest in international affairs, sensitivity to international culture, a broad outlook, and genuine concern about international issues. One's international perspective is related to one's knowledge and common sense about international issues and foreign cultures. In terms of competence, one of the requirements for cultivating an international perspective is foreign language ability in order to facilitate travel and access to international media outlets. In brief, having an international perspective means that one has international interests, attitudes, and values as well as the ability and willingness to put them into practice.

In investigating individuals' international perspectives, most scholars have applied a quantitative approach with a psychometric questionnaire (Gerner et al., 1992; Hayden et al., 2000; Lam & Selmer, 2004; Mo, 2006; Sampson & Smith, 1957; Wang, 2004), while few studies have used a qualitative approach (Wihlborg, 1999). To understand a targeted group of cross-cultural samples' international perspectives, three categories of content-specific items were developed and used in constructing the research tools of these studies.

First, Hayden et al. (2000) originated a 32-item questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale to examine 1,263 eleven-year-old international students' international perspectives of 75 different nationalities. A nine-dimension subscale was used in this study: international experiences, parental factors and type of institution attended, second language competence, neutrality, open-mindedness, attitude toward other value systems and culture, attitude toward one's own values systems and culture, respect for others, and tolerance of the behavior and views of others. This influential instrument was translated into 56 languages and has been frequently used or adopted in subsequent studies internationally (Lam & Selmer, 2004). Lam and Selmer (2004) applied the same structure of this questionnaire to compare the international perspectives of two groups of adolescents with an average age of 14: 63 British expatriate adolescents living in Hong Kong and 88 local British adolescents who had never lived abroad. Mo (2006) subsequently obtained permission to directly translate this questionnaire, and then used the same content structure to

measure the international perspectives of 540 adolescents studying at international schools in Taiwan.

Second, the World-mindedness Scale (W-Scale) developed by Sampson and Smith (1957) was also used internationally to explore individuals' degree of acceptance and respect for international situations. An eight-dimension subscale with 32 items was used in this world-mindedness instrument (i.e., religions, immigration, government, economics, patriotism, race, education, and war). In Taiwan, Wang (2004) combined the content structures from both the W-Scale (Sampson & Smith, 1957) and Hayden et al.'s (2000) questionnaire on students' perceptions about being international to re-design a preliminary scale and evaluate its suitability. She administered this adapted questionnaire to 1,545 undergraduates and 960 graduate students from 63 departments at 30 different universities. The final 25-item scale included four dimensions: international experience, open-minded thinking, understanding of international relationships, and cross-cultural awareness.

Third, Wihlborg (1999) applied a phenomenographic approach to interview 25 Swedish student nurses in order to describe their conceptions of internationalization. Five themes concerning issues about internationalization were used for the interviews, which intended to focus the conversations and to understand targeted students' conceptions. A perspective of internationalization that included three dimensions—international understanding, an international way of thinking, and an overall understanding of internationalization—was proposed in this study.

Furthermore, in recent years, various countries have begun to increasingly promote international education in elementary and junior high schools (Librera, Ten Eyck, Doolan, Morse, & Jensen, 2005; McConnell, 2000; Sachar, 2004) in the belief that the results are much better when the cultivation of an international perspective begins in childhood. Moreover, in order to lay the foundation of international education at the elementary or junior high school level, it is stipulated in the EU educational policy that the training of teachers must include an international perspectives component (Dooly & Villanueva, 2006). Many studies have also stressed the importance of the promotion and cultivation of an international perspective by teachers (He, 2001; Dooly & Villanueva, 2006; Wihlborg, 1999). For younger learners, such as students in elementary and junior high schools, the cultivation of an international perspective relies on their teachers' views and attitudes in particular. In fact, teacher competence is critical to the effective implementation of any curriculum designed to generate interest in international issues and foreign language ability. Finally, parental behavior and attitudes, as well as opportunities to go abroad, are related to one's family and socioeconomic background, and these clearly have an influence on a student's international perspective.

Together, these three categories of content-specific dimensions can be considered to obtain a comprehensive picture of students' perspectives of "being international." In the current study, which intended to explore and compare students' conceptions in two targeted cities, the importance discussed above was also reflected in constructing the theoretical framework. To get a better understanding of the two cross-cultural groups, Hayden et al.'s (2000) nine-dimension instrumental structure was primarily used to design the questionnaire for this comparative study in addition to taking account of those considerations in domestic studies (Mo, 2006; Wang, 2004).

Based on the above literature review, most existing studies surveyed high school or college students' international perspectives, but there are relatively fewer or even no empirical studies focusing on primary school students. However, in many countries, policy suggests cultivating citizen's international perspectives at an early age (e.g., Australia Victorian Government, 2012; Ministry of Education in Taiwan, 2011). Thus, it is important to empirically explore primary school students' international perspectives. Our research can help educational practitioners have a clear picture of the degree to which primary school students possess international perspectives and improve their teaching practices based on our findings. Most importantly, the significance of this research is its contribution of comparing the international perspectives between mainland China and Taiwan. Since mainland China and Taiwan share the same culture and ethnicity but were separated for more than 60 years, it is highly valuable to compare students' international perspectives in these two culturally similar but politically different states. The two cities selected, Taipei and Shanghai, are both the most internationalized financial centers in their respective countries, making them comparable cases that can generate further implications for policies and educational practices.

Research methodology

A survey method was employed in this study. The Questionnaire on the International Perspectives of Elementary School Students was administered to targeted sixth graders in Taipei and Shanghai to gather the data. Corresponding statistical analyses were applied to obtain the findings in order to reach the research objectives.

Participants

As stated in the research questions, this survey study aimed to investigate targeted sixth graders' international perspectives in two cities. Reflecting the cross-cultural characteristic of this comparative study, these two cities were representational areas within Chinese society, where students and their parents lived in a multi-cultural and modern environment with diverse classes of SES and abundant opportunities of being in touch with international experiences. In order to obtain substantial samples from the two cities, a sampling criterion was applied for extracting representative participants (Creswell, 2008): A stratified random sampling method (by administrative districts) was employed, and 1,300 sixth graders (650 from each city) were randomly selected from elementary schools in both cities. In Taipei, 650 questionnaires were distributed to 12 administrative districts; 611 valid questionnaires were returned (return rate = 94%). In Shanghai, 650 questionnaires were distributed to 11 administrative districts; 500 valid questionnaires were returned (return rate = 77%).

Research Tools

Based on the literature review, The Questionnaire on the International Perspectives of Elementary School Students was developed using the content structure of previous studies (Hayden et al., 2000; Mo, 2006; Wang, 2004). After completing the preliminary framework of the questionnaire, 10 elementary school teachers offered feedback, which was incorporated into the design of the preliminary draft of the questionnaire. Upon completion of the preliminary draft, five professors in relevant fields and two elementary school principals evaluated the appropriateness of its

content (i.e., expert review of validity), based on which a pre-test questionnaire with 30 items was developed. Next, 220 sixth graders in Taipei and Shanghai were randomly selected as pilot participants. After the reliability and validity analyses were conducted on the pilot data, one item was deleted to form the formal questionnaire (see Appendix). This formal questionnaire consisted of two parts: international perspective and demographic characteristics.

International perspective

Based on the factor analysis of the pilot test, three subscales were extracted from the remaining 29 items and named “international experience and attitudes” (Q1–Q6), “parental factors” (Q7–Q12), and “cross-cultural competence” (Q13–Q29). The variances explained by the three dimensions were 66.20%, 13.56%, and 8.19%, respectively, while the total variance explained was 87.95%. The result of the reliability analysis indicated that the Cronbach’s α for the three dimensions was .76, .82, and .94, respectively. The total reliability of the questionnaire was .94, and there was a significant correlation between each of the dimensions. The value of the correlation coefficient ranged between .524 and .743 ($p < .01$). The “international experience and attitudes” subscale included items concerning issues of open-mindedness, flexible thinking, and respect and tolerance for others. The “parental factors” subscale dealt with parental influences on their kids’ international perspective. The “cross-cultural competence” subscale measured issues about cross-cultural understanding, knowledge of international organizations and events, the ability to make foreign friends, and the ability to use foreign languages.

Demographic characteristics

This part collected data on participants’ personal demographic information—namely, gender, level of education, parental occupation, travel experience, study tours, friendship with foreigners, and Internet use.

Data analysis

According to the purposes of this study, corresponding statistical analyses (i.e., descriptive statistics, independent sample t -test, and one-way ANOVA) were employed to analyze the data.

Results

The results of the data analysis are divided into three parts: the international perspectives of sixth graders in Taipei; the international perspectives of sixth graders in Shanghai; and a comparison of the two groups. The value of the total reliability of the questionnaire was .91.

The international perspectives of sixth graders in Taipei

The average international perspective score of the sixth graders in Taipei was 115.29 (the average extent was approximately 79.5%). The means and standard deviations of each aspect are shown in Table 1. The demographic characteristics of the respondents were as follows: The proportion of males and females was 47.5% and 52.5%, respectively. In addition, 36.5% of sixth graders’ fathers had an educational level of high school/vocational high school or below, 43.7% were junior college or college graduates, and 16.7% had M.A.s or Ph.D.s; 39.1% of sixth graders’ mothers had an educational level of high school/vocational high school or below, 47.3% were

junior college or college graduates, and 10.8% had M.A.s or Ph.D.s. As for occupation, 30.0% of parents were employed in the service industry while 20.0% were employed in commerce. Furthermore, 61.5% of sixth graders have traveled abroad or participated in a study tour, 47.0% have made foreign friends, and only 4.6% did not have Internet access at home. Among those with Internet access at home, 34.0% use the Internet twice or less per week, 39.0% use it three to five times per week, and 27.0% use it six times or more per week.

Table 1. Distribution of Sixth Graders' International Perspectives in Taipei

| Aspect | <i>N</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | Minimum | Maximum |
|---------------------------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|---------|---------|
| Experience and attitudes | 611 | 22.94 | 4.37 | 7 | 30 |
| Parental factors | 611 | 22.27 | 6.79 | 6 | 109 |
| Cross-cultural competence | 611 | 70.07 | 11.75 | 18 | 128 |
| International perspective (total scores) | 611 | 115.29 | 19.01 | 35 | 193 |

In terms of administrative districts, the average international perspective score of the sixth graders in the Zhongshan District was the highest ($M = 122.49$), while that of those in the Wanhua District was the lowest ($M = 108.45$). In addition, there was a significant difference between administrative districts, $F(11, 599) = 2.614, p < .01$. The results of an independent *t*-test on gender, travel experience, and making foreign friends are shown in Table 2. Finally, a one-way ANOVA indicated that there was no correlation between Internet access at home and frequency of Internet use and the international perspective scores of sixth graders (despite the difference in the frequency of Internet use), $F(6, 604) = 1.369, p > .05$, as shown in Table 3.

Table 2. *t*-test of Gender, Travel Experience, and Making Friends of Taipei Sixth Graders

| Aspect | Gender | Foreign travel experience | Making foreign friends |
|---------------------------------------------|----------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Experience and attitudes | 3.188** | -2.882** | -8.566*** |
| Parental factors | 1.979* | -4.686*** | -3.82*** |
| Cross-cultural competence | 3.885*** | -1.862 | -6.576*** |
| International perspective (total scores) | 3.845*** | -3.665*** | -7.458*** |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3. *Distribution of Internet Use and the International Perspectives of Taipei Sixth Graders*

| Internet access at home and frequency of use per week | <i>N</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Without Internet (0 times) | 28 | 107.93 | 16.97 |
| 1 time | 77 | 114.35 | 20.72 |
| 2 times | 103 | 115.00 | 20.66 |
| 3 times | 111 | 116.70 | 17.71 |
| 4 times | 88 | 114.93 | 20.33 |
| 5 times | 39 | 111.69 | 18.70 |
| 6 times or more | 165 | 117.24 | 17.41 |

As for parental level of education, according to the results of a one-way ANOVA, there was a significant correlation between the international perspectives of sixth graders and their fathers' level of education, $F(6, 585) = 3.90, p < .01$. In addition, sixth graders whose fathers were Ph.D.s had the highest international perspective scores, while those whose fathers were junior high school graduates had the lowest scores. Thus, this finding in Taipei demonstrated the influence of parental educational attainment on students' international perspectives. As for the father's occupation, sixth graders whose fathers worked in the health care industry had the highest international perspective scores ($M = 120.83$); for the mother's occupation, sixth graders whose mothers worked in the field of education had the highest scores ($M = 121.14$). Finally, those whose parents both served as public officials had the lowest international perspective scores ($M = 112.02$ and 112.50).

The international perspectives of sixth graders in Shanghai

The average international perspective score of the sixth graders in Shanghai was 122.55 (the average extent was approximately 84.5%). The means and standard deviations of each aspect are shown in Table 4. The demographic characteristics of the respondents were as follows: The proportion of males and females was 51.9% and 48.1%, respectively. In addition, 50.0% of sixth graders' fathers had an educational level of high school/vocational high school or below, 40.8% were junior college or college graduates, and 8.8% had M.A.s or Ph.D.s; 50.4% of sixth graders' mothers had an educational level of high school/vocational high school or below, 42.6% were junior college or college graduates, and 6.8% had M.A.s or Ph.D.s. As for occupation, 48.0% of parents were categorized as "other," and 18.0% to 27.0% were employed in commerce. Furthermore, 63.4% of sixth graders have traveled abroad or participated in a study tour; 45.0% have made foreign friends; and only 10.8% did not have Internet access at home. Among sixth graders who have Internet access at home, 38.6% use the Internet twice or less per week, 50.4% use it three to five times per week, and 11.0% use it six times or more per week.

Table 4. *Distribution of the International Perspectives of Sixth Graders in Shanghai*

| Aspect | <i>N</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | Minimum | Maximum |
|---------------------------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|---------|---------|
| Experience and attitudes | 500 | 24.65 | 3.28 | 13 | 30 |
| Parental factors | 500 | 23.48 | 4.85 | 6 | 71 |
| Cross-cultural competence | 500 | 74.43 | 9.28 | 39 | 126 |
| International perspective (total scores) | 500 | 122.55 | 14.57 | 73 | 176 |

In terms of administrative districts, the average international perspective score of the sixth graders in the Pudong New Area was the highest ($M = 130.68$). In addition, there was a significant difference between administrative districts, $F(10, 489) = 6.522, p < .001$. The results of an independent t -test on gender, travel experience, and making foreign friends are shown in Table 5. In both cities, the opportunities of having foreign travel experience and making foreign friends are two key factors enriching students' international perspective. Finally, a one-way ANOVA indicated that Internet access at home and frequency of use were related to a significant difference in the international perspectives of sixth graders, $F(6, 493) = 2.786, p < .05$. The results of the post hoc comparison are shown in Table 6. This finding is quite important in the current society as information technology changes rapidly nowadays and Internet access popularity is still a key to internationalization. A greater use of internet means students can access international information and thus can broaden their sense of international perspective. The differences among students are even more significant in Shanghai. The digital divide is an important variable in the studies of international perspectives among students.

Table 5. *t*-test of Gender, Travel Experience, and Making Friends of Shanghai Sixth Graders

| Aspect | Gender | Foreign travel experience | Making foreign friends |
|---------------------------------------------|---------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Experience and attitudes | 2.263* | -3.462** | -3.779*** |
| Parental factors | 2.209* | -5.017*** | -4.697*** |
| Cross-cultural competence | 3.410** | -2.970** | -2.392* |
| International perspective (total scores) | 3.434** | -4.367*** | -3.884*** |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 6. Analysis of Internet Use and the International Perspectives of Shanghai Sixth Graders

| Internet access at home and frequency of use per week | <i>N</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | Post hoc comparison |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|---------------------------|
| Without Internet (0 times) | 54 | 115.70 | 16.087 | |
| 1 time | 53 | 121.58 | 15.789 | 1 time > 0 |
| 2 times | 140 | 123.19 | 12.691 | 2 times > 0 |
| 3 times | 117 | 123.68 | 13.194 | 3 times > 0 |
| With Internet | | | | |
| 4 times | 53 | 126.09 | 15.699 | 4 times > 0 |
| 5 times | 28 | 123.39 | 14.609 | 5 times > 0 |
| 6 times or more | 55 | 122.38 | 16.436 | 6 times or more > 0 times |

As for parental level of education, according to the results of a one-way ANOVA, there was a significant difference in the international perspectives of sixth graders in Shanghai in relation to their fathers' level of education, $F(6, 489) = 5.006, p < .001$. In addition, sixth graders whose fathers were Ph.D.s had the highest international perspective scores, while those whose fathers were elementary school graduates had the lowest scores. As for the father's occupation, sixth graders whose fathers worked as public officials had the highest international perspective scores ($M = 130.20$); as for the mother's occupation, those whose mothers worked in the field of education had the highest scores ($M = 128.47$). Finally, sixth graders whose fathers worked in commerce had the lowest international perspective scores ($M = 119.80$), and those whose mothers were employed as laborers had the lowest scores ($M = 116.50$). The influence of parental education attainment was again demonstrated in Shanghai, but the influence of parental occupation is quite different in the two cities, which could be due to the structural differences of work content and social status among different occupations in the two cities.

Comparison of sixth graders in Taipei and Shanghai

According to the results, a significant difference emerged between the international perspectives of the sixth graders in Taipei and those in Shanghai, $t(1109) = -7.211, p < .001$. In addition, significant differences occurred among the three aspects (see Table 7). Overall, the international perspective scores of sixth graders in Shanghai were significantly higher than those of the sixth graders in Taipei.

Table 7. *Comparison of International Perspectives between Taipei and Shanghai Sixth Graders*

| Aspect | City | <i>N</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>t</i> |
|------------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Experience and attitudes | Taipei | 611 | 22.94 | 4.37 | -7.440*** |
| | Shanghai | 500 | 24.65 | 3.28 | |
| Parental factors | Taipei | 611 | 22.27 | 6.79 | -3.445** |
| | Shanghai | 500 | 23.48 | 4.84 | |
| Cross-cultural competence | Taipei | 611 | 70.07 | 11.75 | -6.901*** |
| | Shanghai | 500 | 74.43 | 9.28 | |
| International perspective (total scores) | Taipei | 611 | 115.29 | 19.01 | -7.211*** |
| | Shanghai | 500 | 122.55 | 14.57 | |

** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Discussion and Conclusions

The results of the questionnaire are summarized in the following subsections, along with the discussions serving as a reference for the design and execution of future studies.

Differences in sixth graders' demographic characteristics

More than 60.0% of the parents of sixth graders in Taipei were junior college graduates or above, which was significantly higher than those in Shanghai (49.8%). The proportion of parents of sixth graders in Taipei with a high educational level (i.e., M.A.s and Ph.D.s) was significantly higher (father 16.7% and mother 10.8%) than that of parents in Shanghai (8.8% and 6.8%, respectively). In addition, the occupation ratios of the parents were significantly different. In Taipei, the largest proportion of parents worked in the service industry (30.0%), while in Shanghai the largest proportion were classified as "other" (48.0%). However, in both Taipei and Shanghai, the second most common occupation (approximately 20.0%) was "commerce." As there was a significant difference in the level of education of the parents, it is not surprising that their occupations varied as well. However, despite these differences, parents' efforts to provide their children with opportunities for cultivating an international perspective were quite similar. More than 60.0% of sixth graders in both Taipei and Shanghai have traveled abroad or participated in an overseas study tour, and nearly half of them have made foreign friends. Furthermore, most parents provided their children with Internet access at home, and more than 60.0% of the sixth graders used the Internet more than three times per week.

With respect to background and experience, the similarities outweigh the differences

Regarding the influence of sixth graders' background and experience on their international perspectives, several similarities were found. First, in both cities, the international perspective scores of the male sixth graders were significantly higher than that of the female ones. This finding is consistent with Lam and Selmer (2004), whose research found significant differences

in the international perspectives of male and female British adolescents in the UK and Hong Kong. Second, in both cities, the international perspective scores of sixth graders who have traveled abroad were significantly higher than those who have not. Third, in both cities, the international perspective scores of sixth graders who have made foreign friends were significantly higher than those who have not. However, as to Internet access at home and frequency of use, there was a significant difference between sixth graders in Taipei and those in Shanghai. In Taipei, neither Internet access at home nor frequency of use significantly influenced sixth graders' international perspective scores. However, in Shanghai, both Internet access at home and frequency of use had a significant impact on sixth graders' international perspective scores. Thus, there needs to be a further examination in the future to clarify this dissimilarity between the two targeted cities.

It was believed this research already highlights important correlations between students' background information and their international perspectives because the previous studies reviewed do not consider as many important background variables as this research and neglect their influential power on international perspective. Hayden et al. (2000) compared students' and teachers' perceptions of international perspectives. Wihlborg (1999) adopted a qualitative approach and generated some important categories of international perspectives among student nurses. Lam and Selmer (2004) focused on British adolescents living abroad and this experience's impact on their international perceptions. The important variables highlighted in this research include Internet use frequency, parental education attainment, parental occupation, and foreign travel and friendship experiences—all of which are worthy of further studies.

This research also suggests that policy makers in both cities should consider design programs for balancing the significant divide of international perspectives among primary school students from different social economic status backgrounds.

Both similarities and differences existed for parents' level of education and occupation

With regard to parents' level of education, sixth graders in both cities had much in common. First of all, there was a clear correlation between sixth graders' international perspective scores and their fathers' level of education; in both Taipei and Shanghai, sixth graders whose fathers were Ph.D.s had the highest scores. Moreover, in Taipei, sixth graders whose fathers only graduated from junior high school had the lowest scores. Similarly, in Shanghai, sixth graders whose fathers had only graduated from elementary school had the lowest scores. However, regarding parental occupation, there were both similarities and differences. In Taipei, sixth graders whose fathers served in the health care industry had the highest scores. In Shanghai, sixth graders whose fathers served as public officials had the highest scores. In Taipei, however, sixth graders whose parents served as public officials had the lowest scores. In both cities, sixth graders whose mothers served in the educational field had the highest scores. In Shanghai, sixth graders whose fathers served in commerce had the lowest scores, and those whose mothers were laborers had the lowest scores. It can therefore be concluded that differences in the parental level of education and occupation lead to differences in the family environment and style of raising children, which likely have a great influence on children's international perspectives. Hence, the findings suggest

that educational policy makers in both cities pay more attention to students from lower SES families if the aim is to promote an international education with equal access for all.

Implications for the future studies and educational practice in the region

This research endeavored to explore the differences in international perceptions between students in Shanghai and Taiwan, and many differences were identified. As previously mentioned, both Internet access at home and frequency of use had a significant impact on students' international perspective scores in Taiwan; however, the effects of the aforementioned two factors on students' perspective scores were more significant in Shanghai. In addition, the effects of parents' occupation and educational level on students' international perspective scores also differ between the two target cities. These are all important and interesting findings. However, as this study was conducted mainly using quantitative methodologies, it is difficult—if not impossible—to understand how these phenomena developed. Therefore, we highly recommend that further research be extended by adopting qualitative methodologies for deeper understandings and appreciation of the aforementioned phenomena.

Moreover, as previously mentioned in the literature review section, Hayden et al. (2000) included “parents who are internationally minded” as an item in their research questionnaire to measure students' international perspective and claimed that parental factors were crucial, but a consistently neglected source of students' international perspective. Although their final research results indicated that parental factors were not very important in affecting students' international perspectives, this research obtained an almost opposite outcome, indicating that parental factors significantly influenced students' international perspectives. Although it was presumed the aforementioned difference in parental effects could be attributed to the cultural differences between West and East in the family relationships, empirical research in the future to ascertain this presumption is essential and highly suggested.

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Appendix

Questionnaire on the International Perspectives of Elementary School Students
(translation of Chinese version)

Part 1: International perspective

| Questions | Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. I know much about other countries and cultures. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I communicate with foreign students via the Internet. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I take notice of news about other countries. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I have friends and relatives from different cultural backgrounds. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I hope to have more opportunities to make foreign friends. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I think that everything happening in the world is significant. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. My parents like to travel abroad. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. My parents pay close attention to international events. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. My parents share with me their opinions on international events. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. My parents encourage me to pay attention to international affairs. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. My parents encourage me to travel abroad. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. My parents understand current international events and issues. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. If I go to another country, I accept its customs and cultures. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. If I go to another country, I abide by its rules and regulations. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. I am willing to abide by group decisions, even if I disagree with them. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16. I can accept my opinions being discussed in a group. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17. I can tolerate other people's opinions, even if I disagree with them. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 18. I am willing to cooperate with students from other countries. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 19. I am willing to share my experience with foreigners. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 20. When I meet foreigners, I can understand and accept their customs. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 21. I think that different cultures make the world more interesting. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 22. I can show respect for foreign customs, even if I disapprove of them. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 23. If I have a chance, I would like to experience different cultures and lifestyles. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 24. I am willing to introduce the lifestyle of my country to foreign friends. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

25. When I go traveling abroad, I respect the local customs.
26. I am willing to correct foreigners' misunderstandings of my culture.
27. When making friends with others, I'm not biased by nationality or race.
28. If foreigners misunderstand my culture, I am willing to explain it to them.
29. I would like to help the citizens of other countries to understand my culture.

Part 2: Background information

1. Your gender: 1 Female; 2 Male.
2. Your father's highest level of education: 1 Elementary school graduate or under; 2 Junior high school graduate; 3 High school or vocational school graduate; 4 Junior college graduate; 5 College graduate; 6 M.A.; 7 Ph.D.
3. Your mother's highest level of education: 1 Elementary school graduate or under; 2 Junior high school graduate 3 High school or vocational school graduate; 4 Junior college graduate; 5 College graduate; 6 M.A.; 7 Ph.D.
4. Your father's occupation: 1 Military personnel; 2 Public official; 3 Education; 4 Commerce; 5 Agriculture; 6 Health care; 7 Laborer; 8 Service industry; 9 Other.
5. Your mother's occupation: 1 Military personnel; 2 Public official; 3 Education; 4 Commerce; 5 Agriculture; 6 Health care; 7 Laborer; 8 Service industry; 9 Other.
6. Have you ever traveled abroad or participated in an overseas study tour? Yes; No.
7. Have you ever made a foreign friend? Yes; No.
8. Is there Internet access in your home? Yes; No.

If yes, please proceed to the following question about your average weekly Internet use (1 time is defined as at least half an hour of Internet use):

- 8a. How often do you use the internet at home in an average week: 1 time or less; 2 times; 3 times; 4 times; 5 times; 6 times or more.