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## Affordances of an international campus for intercultural learning: Views from MA students and faculty in two US-based teacher education programs



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### Abstract

This paper reports on a qualitative study which is part of a larger project on the affordances of an international campus for intercultural (IC) learning. The research examined two MA programs at a US postgraduate institution, TESOL and International Education Management, and two groups of participants, nine students and eight faculty members. The participants discussed intercultural interaction and learning opportunities outside coursework in semi-structured interviews. A thematic content analysis showed heavy workload as an obstacle to more meaningful on-campus interaction, the lack of the points of entry to host-country student groups for incoming (international) students, and challenges for off-campus encounters. The findings pointed to a disconnect between faculty and student perceptions: although faculty believed that students should avail themselves of IC opportunities, they did not actively encourage engagement in on-campus activities. The paper discusses the IC learning assumptions attached to a highly international program profile in comparison to the support in place, arguing that active on- and off-campus activities, coursework, and teacher guidance should work in unison to allow for IC learning.

**Keywords:** host-country students, international campus, intercultural learning, graduate student attitudes, teacher attitudes

### Introduction

Internationalisation, in terms of diversifying the student body, is often integrated in institutions' strategic plans or included in statements of purpose (Dippold et al., 2019). While some have suggested that such diversification attempts can be financially motivated (e.g., Gareis, 2012), it is also widely acknowledged that the presence of international students contributes to the enrichment of the learning

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environment (Cantwell, 2015) and creates opportunities for transformative learning (Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2019). Research suggests that international students can be a factor in the development of intercultural competence (ICC) of host-country students, especially in teacher education. This is a particularly important consideration for staff and students in degree programs such as Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), international education, international business, and other areas where ICC is considered a desirable, if not essential, attribute. Educators in these field have been confronting the challenges of developing ICC in pre-service teachers, especially when they lack the international and culturally diverse experiences which they are bound to face in the schools and communities in which they will teach (Lash et al., 2022).

The literature also acknowledges, however, that the simple presence of international students on campus does not guarantee that meaningful social contact and friendships will develop between international students and home students (Brown, 2009; Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2019). In fact, international students can be left feeling on the margin (Dippold et al., 2019), ceasing to engage with communities in which host-country students are a majority, and instead gravitating towards students of a similar national background for friendship networks (Housee, 2011; McFaul, 2016; Otten, 2003). This means that the potential for mutual intercultural (IC) learning is limited.

This paper reports on a qualitative study on the affordances of an internationalised campus for intercultural learning carried out with students and faculty in two master's programs, TESOL and International Education Management (IEM), at a postgraduate US institution. The MA students in these two programs train to teach, interact, and cooperate with learners of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Thus, the study aimed to understand host students' perceptions of incoming students, specifically whether they put an effort into meeting and collaborating with them and facilitating integration into their in-group (Calloway-Thomas et al., 2017; Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017). The study also explored if students invested in relationships outside of the classroom and if faculty had any role in initiating extra-curricular points of interaction for host and incoming student.

It is important to note here that intercultural encounters are inevitably influenced by essentialist social categorizations that are omnipresent on campus – incoming students are labeled as 'international' by host-country administration and students, and thus their identities are reduced (Simpson, 2020). International students are labeled by common discourses as 'outsiders' with different sets of values and norms viewed within a 'deficit' frame (Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002), which may lead to miscommunication (Tran & Pham, 2016). However, in reality, quite varied needs have been documented (Szabo et al., 2015; Sharma, 2019; Strauss et al., 2014; Tran & Pham, 2016, Tsang, 2020; Vulić-Prtorić & Oetjen, 2017), attesting to the diversified nature of the international student body. In this paper, the terms *host-country students* and *incoming students* are used, with the acknowledgement that the terms are simplistic.

## Literature Review

Research into interaction between host-country and incoming students has been extensive (Barron, 2006; Dunne, 2009; Gareis, 2000; Gurin & Nagda, 2006; Harrison & Peacock, 2010; McFaul, 2016; Sharma, 2019; Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2019). Below, I focus on issues with support for incoming students, intercultural learning, and intercultural interactions.

### ***Expectations and support for host-country and incoming students***

Depending on the level of study, incoming students may be offered different support from their programs. More recently, the orientation programs for BA students have become obligatory (Otten, 2003) where the students receive systemic support from the university in different formats. Student service or counsellors are made available, but host-country students are also included through buddy systems and student friendship groups, (Heng, 2018; Vulić-Prtorić & Oetjen, 2017), all of which help a smoother transition into the host culture. However, BA incoming students are given additional support only in the circumstances when they experience negative or feelings of deficiency.

On the other hand, universities seem to expect that both host-country and incoming MA and PhD students come prepared with the intercultural and academic experience for the academic challenges of postgraduate programs (Mesidor & Sly, 2016; Tange, 2019). Therefore, these students receive almost no IC support. Further, students in competitive programs might overlook the opportunities for more meaningful IC encounters if these are not more tightly bound to their curriculum (Deardorff, 2009). However, MA students represent a quite diverse grouping whose needs, requirements and wishes regarding IC connections may be varied. Diversity on campus is thus understood and analysed in this broader sense, to include cultural background, age, life and professional experiences, educational contexts (Tange, 2019).

### ***Intercultural interactions and relationships***

Research on incoming students analyses their experience through different lenses: as acculturation, assimilation, or adaptation. Given the format of the MA programs under focus in the present study, assimilation or acculturation are not seen as meaningful ways in which to explore the IC interaction and encounters. These approaches focus on incoming students' adaptation to new environment over a longer period of time, whereas a dialogical view is more instrumental in understanding the potential for mutual IC learning; especially as we do not want to put the emphasis on incoming students, but on the host students and faculty. The intercultural encounters here are understood as purposeful and engaging interaction opportunities created primarily by university organisations and through university events but continued outside campus to help easier adaptation.

Research with a focus on the adjustments and adaptations made by incoming students foregrounds the importance of their understanding of host-culture for relationship development (Gudykunst, 1991), as well as dispositional factors and social contact and support (Schartner & Young, 2016). Often, the degree of cultural distance between the host and the country of origin impacts the relationships between students (Fritz et al., 2008; Pitts & Brooks, 2017), where building a new 'network of friends' might be effortful, and research suggests that students often suffer from feelings of isolation (Johnson & Sandhu, 2007). Literature shows that co-curricular and/or on-campus participation and engagement can significantly improve incoming students' experiences (McFaul, 2016) if they are involved on campus in situations that require repeated meetings of the same individuals. Further, they are more disposed towards intercultural activities than the host ones (Tsang & Yuan, 2021; Ward et al., 2001). Although investment into new social networks with host-country students is important for incoming students' adjustment, it is difficult to initiate and maintain (McFaul, 2016), and building cohesive relationships might be even more challenging in shorter programs such as MA studies (Li & Zizzi, 2018).

The literature also acknowledges that host students can face challenges in campus interactions. American host students report feeling impatient and uncomfortable or frustrated when they have communication difficulties with incoming students on campus (Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002). As possible demotivators, Hong Kong host students report the lack of time, company, and awareness of campus activities (Tsang & Yuan, 2021). Irish host students state the contact with incoming students presents high demands but does not provide any direct rewards (Dunne, 2009). Australian host students have been reported to see incoming students as 'outsiders' with different values, norms, and behaviours, all of which prevents successful communication (Tran & Pham, 2016). They receive little support regarding their relationships with incoming students, which additionally slows down the process of building meaningful relationships, and in this respect a buddy system (Campbell, 2012) may provide a needed support. However, when host students look past the deficiency discourse, they display positive feelings (Tran & Pham, 2016). For that to happen, incoming students need to see that their input is valued and that they participate in a mutual learning process as co-constructors in knowledge and skills development (ibid.).

A positive relationship needs then to be a joint endeavour between the host-country and incoming students. If host students show signs of ethnocentrism or non-receptivity (Gareis, 2012), it is difficult to start an intercultural dialogue. The research focuses mostly on undergraduate programs, showing that students study "in parallel" (Barron, 2006, p. 11) with incoming students getting ignored in group activities, often for the fear of poor marks (Strauss et al., 2014). Literature also shows that even

when students were given the opportunity to work in culturally mixed groups in class, they believed that there was relatively little assistance provided for the development of the skills required for international perspectives development (Leask, 2009).

### ***Intercultural learning on campus***

Many institutions publicise and stress their efforts to internationalise their campus as a diverse student body and the experience of encountering different cultures is seen as potentially bringing about intercultural learning (Alred et al., 2003; Crowther et al., 2000; Tsang & Yuan, 2021; Yarosh et al., 2018). Intercultural learning, here, is understood in a broad sense as learning which helps students navigate intercultural differences within and beyond the university (Alred et al., 2003), doing so mindfully and with a view to enhancing social integration and cohesion amongst student groups.

Research has shown that it is unrealistic to expect intercultural learning to happen just by being in a culturally different environment for work and study (Alred et al., 2003; Deardorff, 2009; Hammer, 2012, Harrison & Peacock, 2010; Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2019). Yet, educators and programme administrators often make such assumptions with respect to university campuses and study abroad opportunities, even though students might return from these exchanges “more ethnocentric and less willing to interact with people who have a different linguistic and cultural background” (Jackson, 2015, pp. 91–92). Even first-hand experience of intercultural encounters does not necessarily aid students’ intercultural learning (Lantz-Deaton, 2017).

Research suggests that intercultural learning is more likely to occur if it is purposefully integrated into the curriculum and if faculty have a clear conception of learning goals and are able to address them accordingly (Deardorff, 2016). Coursework has the potential to support and encourage both contact and reflection on intercultural encounters in a new environment, providing a basis for deeper understanding (Gill, 2007). Without this, intercultural learning that derives from these encounters may remain superficial. Intercultural learning should ideally entail the development of “willingness and ability to respond effectively to others whose backgrounds, ways of thinking, communicating and behaving are significantly different from one’s own” (Lash et al., 2022, p. 121). Students would then become aware of cultural differences, their impact on all involved, and show empathy towards culturally different individuals (Calloway-Thomas et al., 2017).

The previous studies have explored student intercultural stereotypes and emotions (Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002), intercultural learning and interactions in various programs, for example, business, nursing, chemistry, art, social sciences (Dippold et al., 2019; Dunne, 2009; Halualani, 2008; McFaul, 2016; Tran & Pham, 2016). The main target groups have been mostly BA students. Additionally, research has focused on English language teaching programs, exploring incoming MA students’ ICC and consequent shift in teaching perspectives (Chen & McConachy, 2022) and the importance of study abroad experiences (Byram & Feng, 2006; Cushner 2007; Pilonieta et al., 2017; Schartner, 2016). In contrast, the present study focuses mainly on host country students in English language teacher MA programs directed towards teaching or working in intercultural and international contexts. The study, aims to provide new insights relating to English language teachers and international education administrator programs, adding to the studies focused on incoming students.

## **Methodology**

This study sets out to explore the intercultural interaction and potential for intercultural learning in a context which is advertised as diverse and interculturally rich, with students whose academic and professional profiles should allow for openness and intercultural understanding. The main focus is primarily on domestic students with some international teaching and studying experience. The study focuses on master’s-level students as this group is often under-represented in research on student mobility. Further, faculty views on informal interactional diversity are compared to the students’. The study addresses the research questions below:

### **Research questions**

The study aimed to answer these research questions:

- Do host-country students put an effort into meeting and collaborating with the incoming students?
- Do host-country students recognise the benefits of interactions with incoming students and opportunities for intercultural learning?
- How do faculty perceive the international campus and the supporting activities (e.g., student services events, informal networking, student-initiated events, etc.) as an impetus for intercultural encounters and learning?

The students' future careers as TESOL teachers and educational administrators are likely to be in international contexts and/or intercultural settings, therefore, their initiative regarding their own intercultural learning was explored. The exploration of the provisions and potential challenges of an international campus should provide useful insights for the curriculum design and intercultural resources development, helping faculty decide on the practices that would improve IC learning. In answering these questions, the study aimed to compare perceptions expressed by somewhat interculturally experienced students and experienced faculty to see if there was a mismatch in expectations from and opportunities for IC interaction and learning.

### **Setting**

The participants attended the intensive, competitive programs at a graduate school with a small number of students per program. The institution emphasises the diversity of its student body with students, on average, coming from 50 different countries, with incoming students making up a third of the student body. Out of the host students, more than 40% are white and around 70% are female. The campus is seen as an arena that fosters cross-disciplinary dialogue and provides opportunities for intercultural learning. However, in the particular courses, host-country, American, students outnumbered incoming ones. The intercultural courses are not a requirement for TESOL students, whereas IEM students do have some courses where ICC is the main focus.

### **Participants**

The first group of participants were nine MA students from two programs: TESOL (n=5) and IEM (n=4). The participants can be seen as a purposeful convenient sample (Patton, 2002), they represented one half of the first and one quarter of the second program. At the time of the interview, these five females and four males were on average 29 years old. One student identified as a person of colour. Eight American students and one incoming student from Asia participated.

On finishing the studies, the students would be working either as teachers of English to speakers of other languages or language and/or education administrators. The profile of TESOL students more straightforwardly brings them to language teaching and assessment, whereas the IEM professionals would be equipped to design curriculum, work in student services, design assessment and study programs, but also teach.

The second group of participants were the faculty members from the same institution, eight instructors (three male and five female) with long teaching and research experience. All but one were American, all were white, and all had international teaching experience as well as international and multicultural project experience. Their primary fields of teaching and research were intercultural competence (n=4) and linguistics/ applied linguistics (n=4).

### **Student participants' previous intercultural training**

The student participants had previous international learning and teaching experience (Fulbright teaching assistants, Peace Corps members, the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme, language exchange students), from a limited one to longer than five years. In that sense, they did not resemble the students who show little interest in international issues as some other research shows (Yershova et al., 2000) and their responses should be understood in the light of their international experience. They reported having been given little intercultural training before leaving to international programs and

**Table 1** *Student participants*

Pseudonym	Gender	Domestic (US)/ incoming	Study program	International experience
S1	F	domestic	International Education Management (IEM)	Teaching in Asia
S2	M	domestic	IEM	Studying and teaching in Europe
S3	M	domestic	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)	Growing up in Europe, no previous teaching experience
S4	M	domestic	IEM	Studying and teaching in Asia
S5	M	domestic	TESOL	Teaching in Eurasia
S6	F	domestic	TESOL	Teaching in Africa
S7	F	incoming	TESOL	None before studying in the USA; teaching at home-country in Asia
S8	F	domestic	TESOL	Teaching in Asia
S9	F	domestic	IEM	Studying in Europe; teaching in Asia

being seen as already willing to engage in intercultural encounters and therefore assumed to be capable of doing the study abroad programs.

Training that was given mostly provided “dos and don’ts” and not the “whys,” with no reflection period or more structured training, so the students were mostly left to their own devices. They came to the present study programs with certain attitudes and knowledge where they could claim agency in intercultural encounters, but IC training was offered only to the IEM students.

Additionally, the participants were at the postgraduate programs where one of the admission requirements was a high TOEFL score – higher than in other programs. Therefore, linguistic competence that some research shows as one of the major hindrances to intercultural friendship (Gareis, 2000) has not been hypothesised as an issue.

The researcher audited the classes and was introduced to the students by the faculty. The students were invited to participate in the study which set out to include a variety of experiences and backgrounds. The incoming student was included as an important comparison element. The ratio of one incoming to eight host-country students comes close to representing the make-up of the cohorts in the two programs under scrutiny. The faculty views were included in an effort to explore whether the students receive some incentive or guidance for IC interaction beyond coursework. Further, the study wanted to analyse if the IC opportunities were seen in the same way by faculty and students.

### **Research instruments**

To gather data, semi-structured interviews with both groups of participants were organised. The interviews lasted from 30 to 50 minutes and were conducted on campus, after the participants gave their written consent. The interview questions were informed by the findings of our previous research (Lazarević, 2015) – see Table 3 for the examples of the two scripts, one for the MA students and one for the faculty. The interview questions were not aimed only at international campus experiences – this was one of the topics discussed with the interviewees, others being their teaching goals and incorporation of intercultural elements into language teaching. Given the research shows host and in-

**Table 2** *Faculty participants*

Pseudonym	Gender	Programs taught	Primary field of research
T1	F	Writing/ ICC	ICC
T2	F	TESOL	Applied linguistic
T3	F	IEM	Ethnography, ICC
T4	M	TESOL	Applied linguistic and linguistics
T5	M	TESOL	Applied linguistic and linguistics
T6	F	TESOL/ Foreign Language	Applied linguistics and linguistics
T7	M	Language studies	ICC
T8	F	TESOL/ ICC	Linguistics, ICC

coming students live and study without much interaction (Barron, 2006; Halualani, 2008; Sobkowiak, 2019), the interview included themes that explored the experiences and attitudes more closely. After each interview, the researcher completed detailed notes to help the analysis.

**Table 3** *Semi-Structured interview scripts*

Examples of interview questions for students:
Are there on-campus opportunities for intercultural communication?
Are all students who come to study here integrating into the student body?
Do you engage in intercultural events on campus – how?
Examples of interview questions for the faculty:
What does the intercultural classroom bring to the courses you teach?
Are there on-campus opportunities for intercultural communication?
Where and how you see host-country and incoming students interact (or cooperate)?

### **Data collection and analysis**

The researcher conducted interviews and gathered the field notes over a period of three months in 2016. The data were anonymised, transcribed and coded (see Table 4 for transcription conventions).

The data was analyzed based on the definition of ICC as the willingness and ability to effectively respond to others: affectively, cognitively and with appropriate behaviour (Lash et al., 2022). Additionally, the dimensions of awareness, attitudes, knowledge and skills (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009) with their characteristics (such as flexibility, patience, openness, curiosity, empathy, tolerance for the unknown, being nonjudgmental, etc. (see Fantini & Tirmizi (2006) for more) were used to illuminate perceptions of intercultural interactions and learning.

A number of categories (themes) and codes was pre-set before the interviews and then calibrated during the thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2002). The codes were defined along the dimensions of awareness, attitudes, knowledge, and skills and a by-utterance coding scheme was used (Neuendorf, 2017). The analysis was done with both human and computer-assisted coding (with Atlas.ti v0.16.2 software) through multiple rounds of analysis because the researcher was the main coder. Each interview transcript was analysed for the units of meaning which were searched based on the purpose of the study and the research questions. Then codes were analysed for

**Table 4** *Transcription conventions*

Transcription	Meaning
[...]	Text omitted
[added text], for example: 'it fulfils [negative] stereotype'	Words added to clarify the meaning of the interview, used when the interviewee refers to an item not included in the quoted text
[silence, laughter]	Extralinguistic elements or nonverbal language
Capital letters	The emphasis the interviewees themselves used

patterns and explored for the content so that they were concise enough. The main categories that transpired after rounds of constant comparison and reflection did not change but the additional codes emerged from the dataset during the content-focused coding, as Table 5 shows, to allow for additional perspectives and concepts from the data. Where there was an overlap in content, both categories and codes were joined.

**Table 5** *Codes and categories (example)*

Category		Student interaction	Student identity	Intercultural training
Codes	pre-set	Willingness	Teacher	Intercultural competence
		Openness	Empathy	Orientation
	emergent	Time constraints	Not international enough	Intercultural sensitivity
		Welcoming acts on campus	Self-reflection	Self-disclosure
		Practical/ pragmatic	Dichotomies	

### **Researcher and interviewee bias**

The researcher was an independent observer with no vested interest. The participants were aware of the researcher's nationality and their non-native speaker status, as well as the main research fields – that of intercultural competence and English language teaching. The researcher's background both allowed for a more nuanced analysis and threatened a biased perspective. To prevent the researcher's attitudes from influencing the answers, a semi-structured interview script was used together with thick description and self-reflection process throughout the study. The personal or professional views of the researcher were not shared, although the researcher's role in the co-construction of meaning (Mann, 2011) and an organic nature of an interview were recognised. The faculty were expected to show social desirability bias (Anderson-Knott, 2008) regarding the institution's amenities and opportunities, so the topic was not foregrounded as the primary during the interviews.

## **Results and Discussion**

Results from the study are organised into four main sections. The first presents the essentialist conceptualisation of incoming students. The second elaborates on challenges that intercultural group dynamics presents and the third deliberates on opportunities for intercultural relationships. The final section explores the readiness of the host-country students to build more meaningful IC bonds with the incoming ones.

### **The question of terminology used to address incoming students**

The labelling of incoming students through the essentialist framework that influenced the way their identity was conceptualised was seen in only two instances, both raised by the same student who took a critical stand toward it. He tried to explain the divide between the host-country students and other



students by saying “the real students, I hate that word, the normal students – I also hate that word, international, no – they are OUR students” (S2). The student articulated the importance of challenging strict divisions that uphold deficit perspectives on international students.

I can say that all the professors I had had a lens to that. And a critical lens too, how do we talk about international students. Are we using deficit thinking, like a deficit model, “they don’t have this” or “they’re not proficient in English”. Can we reframe our language to be more positive as opposed to always talking about, you know, the lacks or deficits in other people, cos I think that model exists in a very real way in higher education (S2).

This comment shows that encouraged reflection does yield raised awareness and provides students with the concepts and vocabulary with which to approach the discussions about incoming students. The understanding that the dichotomies do not work and that labelling students works against their successful integration and contribution to courses is an important insight (Tran & Pham, 2016).

Meanwhile, faculty did not comment on the dichotomy in terminology or its limiting features and used the terms “international” and “American” or “domestic” to refer to students. One instructor pointed out “we have all sorts of diversity here. It’s not a dichotomy of international and domestic, it’s age, gender, background, sexual orientation, religion...” (T8), the other noted “it’s a very diverse classroom, as you’ve seen, it can span ages, you know, different racial background, different type of diversity markers, it’s so great” (T3). The faculty were expected to be positive about the diversity on campus, and they thought of it in a wide range of categories, just as T8 mentioned. The inclusive stance, however positive, was not followed by an additional elaboration on how the presence of these different kinds of diversities was beneficial or instructive.

The fact that students who were described and recruited as interculturally competent did not discuss the terminology that potentially creates out-group perspectives could be a useful insight for the host-country staff and student IC training, but also pre-service training programs. The efforts could be directed towards the creation of community of practice and against the essentialist discourse through both in-class and on-campus activities.

### ***Intercultural group dynamics***

The student who raised the question of negative labelling also recognised that ‘people would just treat international students in the way that doesn’t celebrate the strengths they bring’ (S2). He recognised that these students sometimes have “trouble finding friends, or finding points of entry to communities, finding people to connect with” (S2). Similar sentiments were repeated by S6 who concluded that “in some ways we are lacking in students reaching across cultures, which is ironic, in an international school.” S6 expanded:

I think, it’s because we’re in international school, and we associate that with business and professionalism, and like, what I’m studying and doing for work, and then socially we don’t. We’re kinda messed up [laughter], but then again, I’ve been out drinking with people who are all over the worlds.

One instructor added her concerns: T6 mentioned that the American students sometimes would seek out to work with the incoming ones, but

when the reality comes, when [they are] working on a group project, then a lot of students don’t like it. Because they find it frustrating that things don’t go smoothly, or there are tacit rules that people are expecting of each other that are not, you know, working out for everybody, because the norms are different (T6).

She experienced students complaining “about group dynamics that are intercultural group dynamics and interpersonal group dynamics.” T1 and T6 were aware that intercultural dynamic was in the way of cooperation but did not elaborate on whether they approached it with the host students. It seems

that although faculty recognises the challenges, they distanced themselves leaving it to the students to resolve it. The group work did not seem to be coached for better intercultural communication, even when the research showed that lecturers should more actively engage students in reflection on classroom participation (Murray & McConachy, 2018), so that the international classroom becomes an effective learning environment. The host students repeated T6's comments to some extent, stating that incoming students' non-native-ness (S5) and the amount of work made them choose more pragmatic grouping where they did not need to navigate IC relationship (S9). The intercultural group dynamics was left unchallenged by the faculty, and students assumed that it would be more practical to avoid 'the otherness' of the incoming students.

Understanding the challenges, one student stated that European students had an easier time 'blending in' (S1), whereas the only incoming participant, a non-European, recognised differences in how she approached work and how the US students approached it. The student reported 'my way of working is slow but deep, I need time to think, I cannot respond as quickly as American students can' (S7). Although an unexpected finding given the level of studies, it confirmed previous research which recognised that in addition to linguistic barriers (Arthur, 2016), different approach to work: industrious, serious and individual as opposed to co-constructed learning between students and faculty (Wang et al., 2012) may influence student participation, interaction, and overall academic work. Further, not being vocal and forward in classroom discussions might leave the incoming students 'invisible' for domestic ones, not leading to building any relationship outside the classroom. In fact, several students mentioned differences in the use of silence, which is quite often discussed in ICC and IC pragmatics courses (Cohen, 2012; Matsumoto & Hwang, 2012) as a factor affecting group work and relationship building. S7 stated that: "If you keep quiet, they keep going, I don't know if they intentionally do that. They might not know, or they might know but don't care until you raise your voice 'you cannot do that'."

Still, S7 did not necessarily feel that they had the power or right to question their position in these relations. S7 said, "but, I cannot say, 'your way is different from mine,' I cannot do that. I cannot say that. Instead, I have to learn to work with them. So I prepare my stuff, at home." This repeated negation and the perception that it was up to her to make adjustments rather than expect host-country students to meet her half-way might be a point of concern. Such host-country students' attitude undermines the basis on which emergent understanding can be built – recognition of the strengths of a different perspective, bringing us back to the deficit perspective (Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002).

S7's experience resonated with what S2 and S6 mentioned, that incoming students' contributions were not valued, and with T1's explanation that incoming students felt side-lined. T1 added that incoming students complained that "some of their interactions with American colleagues have been sort of negative [...] [they] tell me they are not respected when they have to do group work with American students, their input is not valued or is ignored [...] it's an interesting thing to occur on a multinational campus."

The "getting the work done" attitude may be a factor here, unwillingness to invest in intercultural encounters and friendships that might not last longer than the study program itself, but also the "deficit thinking" that S2 mentioned. Given that the host students came to the programs with both work and/or study IC experience and that they were continuing their education, such dismissal of incoming students calls for further investigation.

In contrast to these views, T8 presented the issue in a more positive way, hedging the answer to not be representative of the general opinion but her own:

In our [ICC] courses, because of who we are and our backgrounds, they [incoming students] fare really well. In part it's because even getting here says something about them, the choices they made, experiences they had, and the abilities they have, they're already bringing that with them. Our population of students, and again, what they're choosing to do professionally, already builds an atmosphere of openness and inclusion, so, our international students are integrated in and included. Our students who are domestic really

see an advantage of having a diversity in their classrooms, and we have all sorts of diversity here.

The participants, on the other hand, remarked that the program was not as international as they had hoped it to be, as the sample itself shows, and indicated more diversity was found around the campus than on it.

These opposing views could be ascribed to a number of factors: personal experience and expectations as to what an international campus means, efforts taken to participate, etc. Still, these different points of view might indicate that different faculty saw the prospective students in different roles and had different experiences with them. What T8 expressed repeated some previous findings, that the faculty see students with particular dispositions and experiences as suitable candidates for international and intercultural programs (Hammer, 2012) with already developed IC awareness and skill so that they would need little guidance and be effortlessly integrated (Mesidor & Sly, 2016).

### ***Opportunities and challenges for intercultural interactions outside the classroom***

The institution tried to offer different IC opportunities and outreach events to students. Regular gatherings for students were organized in the form of language lessons, on a voluntary basis and very informal in the format where students would chat over a coffee in a foreign language. Then, the thematic ethnic food events occurred quite regularly. A number of academic events, panels, and workshops available to all enrolled students also provided a possible networking basis.

The faculty were mostly positive about the opportunities for IC interactions. T6 thought there were “small ways” in which opportunities for IC communication and exploration were taken. Though she firstly mentioned the courses on offer, she added the value of outreach events for students. Still, she believed that not enough opportunities existed for “full-on intercultural reflection in a more systematic way.” Interestingly, faculty generally seemed not to consider their own influence or efforts in facilitating intercultural development outside the classroom. As reported in some other studies (e.g. Yarosh et al., 2018), the data suggested that those who work with incoming students are not always aware of the intercultural issues students face.

Meanwhile, some students shared the faculty’s positive views on the IC opportunities on campus. S3 believed “people actively seek it out [...] [in informal language classes] where people just for fun are learning some language they have never learned. Part of the reason [...] is that they enjoy other cultures.” The assumption about the students who attended this particular institution was also repeated by the student – “if that was not part of your goal, you might go and choose some other school” (S3). Therefore, it was assumed that students here would naturally be positively predisposed towards cultural difference and connecting with students from different backgrounds.

Some students did explicitly comment on the value of extracurricular events for discovering diversity. S8 listed all the extracurricular events she had attended, showing that she had taken the initiative to participate in, for example, Japanese forum and Spanish dance classes. Additionally, she stressed that she had never had an American roommate. Therefore, these real-life circumstances off-campus brought the domestic students closer to incoming ones. S9 stressed the possibilities for intercultural connection outside the campus as true diversity that she did not see in her classes, contrary to the views of some faculty, for example T8, who foregrounded the presence of diversity on campus. S8 confirmed this saying that the workshop she attended outside the classroom had diversity that she did not see in her other classes.

The students saw the points of connection and on-going encounters as opportunities for learning, as these settings were where true conversations happened. S4 who had lived in the international dormitory saw this as a crucial context for intercultural learning, while S6 used knowledge and experience from her study-abroad program in her work with Student Services, where she wanted to “make sure that [incoming students] feel welcomed” (S6). She explained this only by her feeling that these students “are looking for more friendliness that they’re getting. I FEEL like they’re looking for more, I’m not sure. I feel like often interactions of Americans might seem unfriendly, even when they’re

not" (S6). In this sense, her own experiences had played a transformative role in generating understanding and empathy towards the experiences of incoming students, which were further enhanced through her engagement in this role. Although these encounters might not necessarily turn into friendships, they were welcoming acts.

Despite the recognition of the importance of IC encounters on campus, the students almost unanimously mentioned the realities and demands of the intensive postgraduate program as standing in the way of more meaningful interaction. The fact that everyone's main concern was to stay abreast of their obligations was seen in S9's response: "It's not so much about them being international, it's the level of work, there might be other... if you don't show up on time, if you don't, like, deliver—I think those things are a larger deciding factor." The student expanded:

there isn't a lot of room to intermingle between programs. So, it's like you get your group of friends, they're in your program and that's it. There are a lot of opportunities, but there are also, I don't wanna say threats, but just realities, that students have to deal with that make that kinda thing harder. (S9)

The view made evident that the practical concerns outweighed others, also showing that neither extra-curricular opportunities nor course-required tasks required cooperation and interaction across programs. Another student mentioned that the amount of work was so great that he did not want "for extracurricular activities to do with school" (S2). S8 commented on this too, simply saying "everyone is so busy!" In his previous semester he had happily enjoyed the free language classes, however, with the increase of work the following semester, "the thought of extracurricular activities was stressing me out" (S2). One participant reported having done "a project with a Chinese student to see why they don't socially integrate so much," also realising that the amount of work did not leave students time for social life—"there's openness to it, but it's not perfect. Just 'cos it's hard, and we're also busy" (S1). Still, she stated that "bonds are built with students from other countries, it's harder for Chinese students because our social lives are so different" (S1). She did not provide further elaboration but indicated that the difference was not approached from either side.

Finally, some negative views of the opportunities for interaction on campus were expressed. One came from the incoming student who stated that although it was "the small community where people can be very supportive of your ideas and problems" at the same time "the population is really small, so they don't come with a lot of cultural activities that involve people" (S7). It seemed that once she knew everyone, she had little motivation to go to these events and expected these meeting spaces and events to be organised by others rather than her. This could show that when incoming students are a minority group, some structure and more guidance is needed (Leask, 2009), because other student participants were aware of the opportunities set up by the institution. S8 mentioned the size of the program as well, saying "within our program, we're very [silence] well, we have different backgrounds, but there aren't that many international students." S2 believed opportunities for IC interaction existed, however, was unsure if students used them. He too mentioned a relatively small size of the program which did not necessarily "intermingle" so that students ended up in their programs not reaching out to others. This view was repeated by S5 who saw in-grouping as "endemic to all international students' issues [...] students from the US spend their time together, and people also stay within their own program." The student concluded by saying "it would be great if we had more interaction with each other, it's just I'm not sure how that would happen."

### **Host student readiness for intercultural interaction**

All the faculty were consistent in their description of the students, recognising that they were usually well-travelled, with work and study experience abroad. T7 called them "a preselected crowd," while T2 elaborated: "I expect them to come with some experience, sensitivity and awareness [...] I expect attitudes that stand towards the world be enhanced here." The faculty expected that students "have significant intercultural experience. It's very rare to have someone who only speaks English or has only lived in America" (T4). The instructor reported that the students "[were] well-prepared in terms of skills and practices to be a transformative language teacher, a leader in their field, [...] in terms of their intercultural competence [silence], I don't have any evidence they wouldn't be" (T4).

Another instructor described the students as having “a certain disposition” and “openness [...] in a sense I’m preaching to the choir, they’re already interested and want to know more and want to be IC competent [...] they live it and breathe it [intercultural development], they’re embedded in it” (T8). Still, the view was immediately underscored by “it doesn’t necessarily mean they’re interculturally competent or that they’re developing ICC, just because they’re embedded in it” (T8). One instructor stated that even though students might have IC experience, they were not able to “engage in reflection about their experience” (T6), leaving that experience as somewhat ineffective for future actions. This resonates with previous research showing that immersion and study abroad programs have little impact without systematic reflection (de Wit et al., 2013).

T7, after positively qualifying the opportunities for intercultural interaction, stating that the international nature of the programs was an incentive for students to apply in the first place, added that he could not confirm that students realised the opportunities: “If people avail themselves to that, how do I know?” He explained interactions through contact theory (Allport, 1954), however, undermining it at the same time: “so little bit of contact theory—even though the contact theory has been debunked. But probably contact theory works in our microcosm.” The instructor did not further elaborate on any of the theory elements, but he believed that “contact theory doesn’t necessarily work OUT THERE. But because we are an intellectual and professional community, and most everybody of good will... so with these caveats, I’d say yes [the theory works for the institution]” (T7). The instructor showed that he counted on the students’ attitudes, mostly those of openness and respect (Deardorff, 2008) to allow them to seize the IC opportunities available, but he did not elaborate on why he saw the program as inherently creating the potential for intercultural learning. The caveats T7 mentioned are quite important and should not be put aside – especially in the light of studies showing the othering of students and in-group preferences (Gurin & Nagda, 2006). Further, it might be important for students to work more deliberately on IC interaction as they will be the ones to foster it ‘out there’, so reflecting on their own experience might provide additional support for their future practice.

The students echoed some of the issues T7 raised, somewhat countering the positive expectations T6 and T8 had. Discussing the proactive stance of the students, S9 said: ‘there are plenty of opportunities, I don’t know... Whether or not students take those opportunities, it’s a different question’. S8 discussed if the institution was an arena for the creation of IC friendships:

Yes and no. I mean [pause] the culture here, even though there are people from many different countries, the culture is PRIMARILY American [...] I would, like, be more aware of different ways in which what you say and do might be perceived and be more careful not to do or say those things. So, I think, it’s made me more AWARE of that issue, but not necessary taught me how to do it better.

Another potential weakness that T4 recognised was that the students might not be prepared for “different cultures of language education in different places.” What some of the graduates of the program had reported to him was that they were very prepared in this particular school’s manner, with ‘best practices, great ideas, but when they’re entering a totally different culture of language teaching, there’s such a disjoint that they end up throwing away everything they learned’ (T4). Being able to share experiences and hear from other students about different educational contexts, both formally and informally, coupled with what they learned in the program could prevent such disconnect.

It is important to state that the same instructor raised the issue of preparedness of the host-country students, saying

sometimes I think these students are so marketed to, “you’re so international, you’re so interculturally sensitive, you’re so unique,” and maybe they ARE a little bit unique compared to an average American, but you can easily spend two years abroad without being great at intercultural communication and sensitivity (T4).

As above, the data shows that although intercultural sensitivity is not likely to develop automatically in international programs (Brunner, 2006; Hammer, 2012; Schartner, 2016), faculty may overestimate

the likelihood that students have enhanced intercultural awareness and sensitivity as a result of their international experiences. This, then, might be the reason why the faculty did not encourage some additional on-campus activities or included more purposefully cooperation between host-country and incoming students.

### **Conclusion**

Although faculty and the students share considerable concern for the importance of IC learning, they had some divergent views on the topic. The importance of an international campus was discussed by all the faculty, but they did not know to what extent the students used the opportunities it offered. Faculty relied on the fact that the students would have had international experience (Mesidor & Sly 2016) and only some questioned students' awareness and reflectivity. Whilst proximity and immersion have been found as having little effect on increased intercultural awareness, positive attitudes or intercultural bonding and learning (Brunner, 2006; Hammer, 2012; Schartner, 2016), faculty in this research thought otherwise and consequently did not actively encourage students to engage in on-campus activities. Further, they did not comment on whether on-campus experiences could be integrated in the coursework for both internationally experienced and inexperienced students to strengthen IC learning (Deardorff, 2009).

On the other hand, the students were surprised by the lack of diversity and intercultural encounters, as this was unexpected from the institution that was marketed as offering intercultural encounters and opportunities to increase IC awareness. The students recognised the challenges incoming students faced, but the proactive attitude was not seen with many of them, which might question their IC attitudes (Alred et al., 2003). They believed certain incoming students would have an easier time adjusting because of slighter differences in cultural values from the host ones (Gurin & Nagda, 2006). The realities of the competitive study programs were recognised by all the students and offered as the most immediate reason for little interaction, in line with previous research (Strauss, et al., 2014; Tsang & Yuan, 2021). Faculty also saw the grades and assessment as preventing host and incoming student cooperation, primarily as host students would fear unknown learning styles and potential language problems. Without this initial contact and any initial common ground, students may not pursue off-campus relationships. Still, a number of students recognised the importance of intercultural encounters off-campus which opened sometimes more meaningful venues for IC interactions with incoming students than what was offered on-campus.

The study showed that meaningful intercultural encounters still remained a challenge for the students, even in their continuing education and after some considerable IC experience. The students showed the understanding of the dynamics of IC encounters but either did not have time or were not quite certain how to realise the interactions. The host students confirmed that incoming students brought additional value to the campus and faculty shared this view, however they also suggested the opposing trend when students had to do coursework and submit assignments. The highly international profile of the institution might have even worked against the potential relationship building between host and incoming students. Faculty left it to students to work on IC bonding while not providing any support for initial IC cooperation or actively guiding project work done by host and incoming students together. There were no obvious curriculum-required tasks which potentially could initiate IC interactions that would continue off-campus. The 'entry-points' for incoming students were therefore limited. However, the individual student initiatives were present, not necessarily deliberately intercultural but based on interest groups. Some more systemic support from faculty might be a valuable incentive for further intercultural campus encounters.

There are several limiting factors to the study. It was based on the self-reported views and attitudes of the participants, and their values and beliefs might not be representative of the whole institution or student body. Still, these individual insights inform the practices and (inter)action, and are, therefore, relevant for the overall understanding of IC encounters. Exploring the views of the faculty and students from one institution is limiting, as might be exploring only two student cohorts. However, their descriptions and reflections provided a better understanding of how student needs were perceived, whether they were appropriately addressed, and whether a mismatch between the perceptions regarding intercultural learning between the faculty and the MA students was observed. Some of the topics

broached required the participants to discuss race, gender or ethnicity which might have made them more careful in term of what and how they express. The dual perspective for the faculty and the students might have alleviated a potential social desirability bias.

The findings could provide a valuable input when designing student services and in-class activities. More attention should be paid to international “team building” within and between the courses so that students become more effective when doing coursework and learn to recognise different learning approaches and styles, building a community of practice. Programs such as TESOL and IEM can include more concrete elements where students inform each other’s practice and knowledge, in line with ethnographic or case-study approaches. The policies on internationalisation of campuses should take into consideration all the points discussed and build toward program or institution identity. The faculty should take a more active role in the process so that they do not disregard the challenges that MA or even PhD students could face in a new learning environment. Given that even positive IC experiences might not lead to ICC development (Lantz-Deaton, 2017), university policies and practices should be re-evaluated to include these insights so that they lead to positive internationalisation outcomes.

Future research should keep the focus on MA students in programs similar to TESOL or IEM because the results show that they may emotionally understand and want IC interactions, however, pragmatically and practically they see limitations. A prolonged engagement with the participants and the observation of the interaction on- and off-campus could open additional venues for analysis. Also, exploring multiple contexts and different cohorts of students would provide an in-depth understanding of the reasons behind student actions and attitudes, and consequently, a basis for comparison. As the present research is part of a larger study, the next step has been exactly that: exploration of MA students and faculty at an international institution in a different cultural context.

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