

Tunisian Students' Intercultural Identity Development in Study Abroad

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Abstract

This paper investigates Tunisian students' development of intercultural identity in study abroad (SA) programs. The data were collected by means of the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters (AIE) (Byram et al. 2009) from 12 Tunisian English language students who participated in SA programs in the USA, the UK, and Canada, with a view to exploring the participants' definition of who they are, their description of a specific encounter, their attitudes and reactions during the encounter, and the perceived change after it. The research, which follows a qualitative analysis of the participants' experiences of intercultural encounters, was conducted using Kim's (2008) stress-adaptation-growth dynamic. The findings revealed that the participants' stress was generated from their inability to function in the new community, on the one hand, and from the gap between their familiarity with the home culture and unfamiliarity with the host culture, on the other.

To overcome these difficulties, participants were found to use varied adaptive strategies, including stress management and linguistic and intercultural adjustments. The analysis also demonstrated that there was a meaningful link between the participants' definition of 'self' and the transition towards intercultural identity growth.

Keywords

autobiography, intercultural encounters, intercultural identity, cross-cultural adaptation, intercultural competence, study abroad, identity development