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EFFECTIVENESS OF AN INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL WORK COURSE

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EFFECTIVENESS OF AN INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL WORK COURSE

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work
in the
School of Social Work

by
Hazel Aguilar
Celeene Moreno
June 2019

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ABSTRACT

This study measured the effectiveness of an international social work course in increasing MSW students' understanding of global interconnectedness and cultural competence utilizing an exploratory quantitative research design. Data was collected from twelve participants from a social work school in the west coast who completed a survey prior to beginning the course and again after completing the course. The study found that participants had an increase in both cultural competency and global interconnectedness after the course. The results of this study correlate with the limited literature available on the topic of international social work and supports the expansion of study abroad experiences for social work students structured in the manner of the international social work course studied.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Formulation

The field of international social work is becoming an important component to social work practice (Xu, 2006). International social work practice contributes to the understanding of social issues that social workers confront such as social injustice, poverty, inequality, oppression and other social issues. Social work students should be provided access to a well-rounded curriculum that includes exposure to topics such as global interconnectedness (Tesoriero, 2006; Xu, 2006).

According to a study conducted by Kahn and Sussman (2015), Master of Social Work (MSW) social workers are not knowledgeable in international macro practice areas such as program monitoring and evaluation, policy development such as grant writing, and communicating with officials that have power over policies (Kahn & Sussman, 2015).

A study conducted by Xu, concluded that social workers who have knowledge and skills in global interconnectedness increase their capacity to be able to help their clients and the communities they serve. These findings contribute to the literature on international social work, suggesting that an international social work component in the curriculum is crucial in preparing for

today's social work practice (Xu, 2006). Historically, at a micro level, local social service agencies within the United States are working towards addressing issues related to international processes in their local settings for example mental health clinics and non-profit organizations, as well as contribute to social work practices by integrating international components (Xu, 2006).

In order to address concerns with the lack of international social work content in social work curricula, the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE), the accrediting body for social work education, has developed a policy that emphasizes that social workers should recognize the global interconnections of oppression and should be knowledgeable about theories of justice and strategies to promote human and civil rights (CSWE EPAS, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to assess whether an international social work course with a study abroad component is effective in increasing sense of a global interconnectedness and culturally competence in social work students.

The researchers for the current study utilized a survey and distributed it to a group of Master of Social Work students prior to participating in an international course with a study abroad component and after the course was completed. The chosen research method provides an overview of what students' understanding of international social work is as well as show if international course and study

abroad component increased the MSW students understanding of the global interconnectedness and cultural competency.

Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice

The findings from this study could have significant implications for social work curriculum and the development of social workers on both a macro and micro level. At the macro level, current social work curriculum may lack effective content on cultural sensitivity and programs can utilize an international course to increase students' cultural competence and understanding of the global interconnectedness of social issues. The findings of the present study could provide evidence-based research for social work progress to implement a curriculum that includes international social work.

On a micro level, these findings will contribute to the students' understanding of the interconnectedness of the social problems. With access to a curriculum, students are better able to interact with clients in a more sympathetic practice. Researchers have found the study abroad component of an international course may increase students' intercultural proficiency and their ability to accept cultural diversity more than students who do not experience studying abroad (Clarke, Flaherty, Wright & McMillen, 2009).

The stage of the generalist intervention process that this study will contribute to is the evaluation stage. This study is evaluating the intervention, which is the international course provided by an MSW program on the west

coast. The course has been implemented to teach social work students about international social work and gives students the ability to immerse into a different culture by participating in the study abroad component of the course. The question the study will address is: Does a course focused on international social work with an immersion component help social work students increase their understanding of the global interconnectedness of social issues and their cultural competency?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The following chapter will examine research relevant to international social work. The subsections will include the benefits and barriers to global interconnectedness, cultural competence, and study abroad courses in social work. The final subsection will cover social learning theory and how it is used to influence an understanding of international social work.

Global Interconnectedness

Global interconnectedness is often interchangeably referred to as globalization in literature. For the purposes of this paper we will refer to it as global interconnectedness. Global interconnectedness is one of the most widely used terms in the social sciences including the social work profession (Arnett, 2002). Global interconnectedness has become a critical feature that affects societies throughout the world (Chiu, Gries, Torelli, & Cheng, 2011). It is defined as the awareness of the interconnectedness between societies, economies, and cultures (Chiu et al., 2011). Through global interconnectedness, there has been an increase in knowledge of global concerns, and as a result, human interconnectedness (Reese, Rosenmann, & McGarty, 2015).

Dimensions of Global Interconnectedness

Dreher & Gaston (2008) report that the three main dimensions of global interconnectedness that make it an unstoppable force are economic, political and sociocultural. According to Dreher & Gaston (2008), the economic dimension has created inequality due to the growth of income and earnings in many countries over the last two decades. Destek (2018) reported that from a sociocultural dimension, global interconnectedness has led to integrating social norms that at times increases acceptance of inequality. As for the political dimension of global interconnectedness, there is inequality that results in poor distribution of income which results in other problems such as poor disease outbreak management, human rights problems, and global environmental problems (Destek, 2018).

Carasik (2008) found international injustice is fueled by the unequal dimensions of global interconnectedness, and thus has become a debate about economic processes. The way to approach economic injustice as a social worker is to approach anti-poverty in a way that sheds light on the failure of global capitalism to create a foundation to build equality globally (Carasik, 2008). Global interconnectedness has led to an increase of people living in poverty (Barbera, 2006). Barbera (2006) states it is vital social workers understand the process of global structures so they can challenge them effectively. To challenge the negative dimensions of global interconnectedness, social workers must understand how it affects one's personal and professional lives.

Benefits of Understanding Global Interconnectedness

Within the social work field, social workers are called to engage in a practice that responds to the basic needs of clients and they must recognize that global structures operate in transnational ways, and social workers must also do the same (Barbera, 2006). According to Tesoriero (2006) in promoting human rights and social justice, social workers need to recognize the benefit of global interconnectedness and how it may affect their clients. Global interconnectedness provides an opportunity for people to connect with other individuals throughout the world from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Global interconnectedness results in the creation of social identities that bridge the gaps between cultures and geographic distance (Reese, Rosenmann, & McGarty, 2015).

Study Abroad in the Social Work Curriculum

Schools of social work have begun providing the opportunity for students to participate in study abroad courses, which allows them to meet the CSWE competency that is to address the importance of global interconnectedness within the curriculum. International social work study abroad courses give social workers knowledge about global issues and prepare them to work locally in cultural communities (Guo, Marshall, Glasser, & Spillers, 2016). Social work students who have studied abroad receive the tools to understand and challenge

policies that contribute to global injustice to oppressed communities (Barbera, 2006).

Cultural Competence

According to Watson and Simmons (2017), social work education on cultural competency continues to be inadequate because social workers fail to conceptualize the connection between cultural factors and fail to recognize potential differences of worldview perspectives (Watson, & Simmons, 2017). Because of cultural similarities and differences between social workers and clients, social workers are now at the center of cultural tensions (Miu Chung, 2008). Miu Chung (2008) has suggested that the social work profession needs their personal biases aside because there is often a difference between the experiences of ethnic minorities and social workers.

International Social Work Education

According to Anderssen, Blair, and Wilson (2005) schools of social work can do a better job of preparing students for international practice (Anderson, Blair, & Wilson, 2005). International field experiences such as study abroad opportunities are beneficial to social work students providing a framework to work with diversity and oppression (Anderson, Blair, & Wilson, 2005).

Schools of social work are starting to examine new approaches to integrating international social work into the curriculum (Snyder, Peeler & May, 2008). One recommendation that is offered by research findings is that schools

can create a curriculum with an international emphasis that builds on providing macro skills (Snyder, Peeler & May, 2008). Courses should focus on real social issues from regions throughout the world and conduct activities abroad to address the knowledge, values, and skills needed to create change in those areas (Anderson, Blair, & Wilson, 2005).

According to Gilin and Young (2009) the most appropriate type of international curriculum provides a study-abroad program that aims to prepare students to practice 'internationally' as well as provides the opportunity for students to improve their cultural knowledge so they can better serve clients within their home country and culture (Gilin & Young, 2009). An international social work course can enhance the learning experiences for social work students, including their cultural sensitivity, and improve their professional identity development (Gilin & Young, 2009). Students who participate in an international course say they learn more from exposure to new ideas when visiting countries (Gilin & Young, 2009). Students believe that they learn how to respond to social problems better than social workers do in the United States (Gilin & Young, 2009).

In order to maximize the effectiveness of education related to international social work, social work education needs to implement a systematic approach (Tesoriero, 2006). For example, a university near Ciudad Juarez Mexico offers international field experiences to some students who are fluent in Spanish. The university utilized a systematic approach the student's interest in international

social work settings to encourage them to learn the language of the chosen region to participate in the program (Anderson, Blair, & Wilson, 2005). This study assisted in closing the gap between cultures and geographic distance by testing if having the language of the host country is essential in the student's ability to immerse in the foreign country culture.

According to a study conducted by Barbera (2006), students felt their social work education in the United States lacks in political economy and international policy analysis. Also within the study, students suggested to include increased exposure to international social welfare policy and analysis, and an understanding of how global action is the cornerstone of all practice (Barbera, 2006).

Pawar, Hanna, & Sheridan (2004) noted that there is a gap between education literature and experiences of international practicum. A study conducted by Small, Sharma, and Nikolova (2015) assessed the level of interest of social work students in international social work. They sent out surveys to students in the Bachelor of Arts Social Work, MSW, Ph.D. programs. Their results indicated that 71% would be interested studying international social work, and 51% stated that they did not have the competence in international social work. The study also found that 60% of its participants would like to participate in some form of an international placement. Without exposure to international social work students lack the ability to get a general sense of how they are

viewed by others cultures (Voss, Bolton, Rolly, Dente, Ingersoll, Bartholomew, 2015).

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

The following will explain how social learning theory can contribute to conceptualization of the research. According to Thyer and Wodarski (1990) social learning theory suggests that people learn from one another via observation, imitations, and modeling (Thyer & Wodarski, 1990). Social learning theory can explain how social work students gain cultural competency through studying abroad and experiencing diverse cultures. The benefit of social learning theory is that it can be used to develop interventions such as performance exposure, which may alter behaviors and enhance efficacy (Hamilton & Fauri, 2001).

The study abroad component to international course for social work students provides a comprehensive approach to understanding human behavior within other cultures (Thyer & Wodarski, 1990). When students are engaged in activities, they develop confidence in their ability to be effectively work with clients since they can learn from their failures to create a strong sense of competence (Hamilton & Fauri, 2001).

Summary

One of the main limits in prior research on international social work education is that all of the studies that have been conducted have had limited participants, typically between two to eight participants. The present study will help address this limitation in the literature as it utilized thirteen participants. Another limitation of prior research is that there are few studies that have conducted quantitative research to test the increase of global interconnectedness knowledge of social work students that participate in an international course. Rather, they have relied on qualitative interviews. The findings of this study will help fill that gap as the researchers aim to test the outcomes of the course in increasing both global interconnectedness and cultural competency within social work students.

This study explored the influence or understanding of an international social work course with a study abroad component on students sense of global interconnectedness and their cultural competency. It is vital that social workers understand global interconnectedness and its dimensions so they can advocate for their clients. International social work study abroad experiences give social workers the knowledge to work with diverse cultural communities and confront global issues such as oppression, poverty and social justice.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of the study is to assess if an international social work course with a study abroad component is effective in increasing MSW students' understanding of global interconnectedness and their cultural competence. This chapter will discuss how the study was conducted by providing information on the study design, sampling methods, data collection, and analysis as well as explain how the human subjects were protected.

Study Design

This study used an exploratory pre and post survey research design by measuring a small sample of students before and after a course with a study abroad component. Measures were created to detect increases in their cultural competency and global interconnectedness by using an exploratory approach since there is very limited literature and studies conducted on the effect of study abroad courses increasing students understanding and knowledge on global interconnectedness.

This is a quantitative study that utilizes a survey as the tool to measure and collect data from the research project participants. Participants completed a survey prior to the course and after the course. Using a survey tool provided the

researchers the ability to measure their change by getting baseline scores before the course started and comparing them to changes in the student's knowledge on global interconnectedness and cultural competence after completing the course. The survey was not intrusive and each participant was able to respond to the responses anonymously. This prevented participants from experiencing social desirability to respond a certain way. A limitation to using surveys is that the participants were not be able to provide details on their personal experiences and had a limited range of responses options. Another limitation is that the respondent might interpret the question differently then what the researcher intended.

Sampling

This study utilized a nonprobability availability sample of social work students enrolled in and participating in the study abroad component of the social work course. These students chose to participate in the course; therefore, they are considered volunteers for the purpose of this study. Thirteen students were invited to participate in the sample. The researcher received approval from the director of the school of social work and the professor of the international social work course.

Data Collection and Instruments

This study collected quantitative data. The data was collected from surveys distributed to the students before taking the course and after completing the study abroad component. The first survey was distributed at the beginning of the quarter, and the last survey was distributed after the participants returned from their study abroad trip. Demographic information was collected during the initial survey. The demographic information included age, gender identification, number of years working with diverse populations, number of times traveled abroad, and student status within the social work program.

The independent variable is the study abroad course. There are two dependent variables. The first dependent variable was global interconnectedness and the second variable was cultural competency. The intervention was measured via a scaled questionnaire/survey. Since the study utilized a survey, the level of measurement for this study is interval since the survey has scale values. The topics within the survey focused on global interconnectedness and cultural competency.

The instrument was created by the researchers to conduct this study. The reason a survey was created is that although there is an instrument for cultural competence, there is not currently an instrument to test the knowledge of global interconnectedness. The instrument was pretested by six MSW students and two faculty members. As a result of this pretest changes were made to the demographic questions related to academic level. The instrument's strengths

were that it was easy to understand, it is quantitative, and the questions are not intrusive on the participant's lives. A limitation of this survey is participants could choose to not answer the questions honestly or at all. The instrument was composed of fifteen questions. The first five of the questions are related to the participants demographics. The participants were then asked to respond to six scaled questions regarding global interconnectedness and four scaled questions regarding cultural competence with values ranging where 1 equals strongly disagree to 5 equals strongly agree. The following questions were presented as scale questions in the survey and are related to measuring understanding global interconnectedness 1) "I believe that social service agencies in other countries lack knowledge to effectively help vulnerable populations, 2) I am familiar with international social welfare policies, 3) I believe social service agencies outside of the United States are as effective as agencies within the United States, 4) I am able to connect global problems to local problems, 5) I am able to connect social work code of ethics to global human rights perspective and 6) I am able to interpret and compare indicators of wellbeing across different countries." The following questions were presented as scale questions in the survey and are related to measuring cultural competence 1) "I am able to provide culturally responsive interventions for clients, 2) I believe that social service agencies in other countries lack resources to effectively help vulnerable populations 3) I understand cultural influences on diverse populations such as needs, values, and

behaviors, 4) Social service agencies outside of the United States need help in order to provide adequate resources for their vulnerable population.”

Procedures

The survey was given to the MSW students enrolled in the international course at a university in the west coast. The students were given the opportunity to decline participating in the survey. The survey was given to the participants in class prior to starting the international course and again when they returned from the study abroad component of the course. The survey was completed in person before the course and another survey was emailed to the participants after they finished the study abroad component. The data collected was then entered into SPSS.

Protection of Human Subjects

This study was state approved by a Social Work Subcommittee of the IRB. Participants in this study have complete anonymity as no names or identifying information were required. The persons with access to the completed surveys are the researchers and their research advisor. Each participant was required to sign an informed consent prior to participating in this study. The informed consent's purpose was to educate the participants on the purpose of the research.

Each participant was assigned a number for data collection purposes. The participants were provided with a debriefing statement after completing the survey. The debriefing statement and informed consent reminded the participants of confidentiality that would be upheld. It also provided the participant with additional resources should they have any distress from taking the survey. There were no foreseeable risks or direct benefits to the participants.

Data Analysis

All of the information gathered from the surveys was analyzed using a systematic approach. First, the data was analyzed to identify the frequencies and percentages for all demographic data using SPSS. This method was also used for each question asked on the survey. The data was then analyzed by creating mean scores for the age of the participants and for each question on global interconnectedness and cultural competency. The researchers then performed a paired-samples T test to test for any statistically significant changes on pre and post tests scores of each question listed on the survey.

Summary

This study examined the effectiveness of an international social work course by conducting surveys prior to the course and after the course was completed. By collecting data before and after the course, the study assessed the effectiveness of the course. The survey results provided the researchers with

a baseline and post intervention score to be able to measure if the international social work course increased the participant's understanding of global interconnectedness and cultural competence.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter will present data collected for this study by utilizing tables that reflect the findings from the demographic questions and the global interconnectedness and cultural competency items completed by participants prior to taking the course and after completing the course. After presenting the participants demographics, the frequency and percentages of each pre and post survey question will be presented. This information will be followed by the results of t-tests comparing the pre and post test results. The questions in the survey have been divided into two groups. The first group that will be presented are questions related to understanding global interconnectedness followed by questions related to cultural competency.

Presentation of the Demographics

All of the thirteen participants of the sample were Masters of Social Work (MSW) students who were enrolled in an International social work course at a west coast university. All of the participants (100%) identified as female. Most of the participants (76.9%) were between twenty and thirty years old and the average age was 28.38.

Ten of the participants were enrolled in their first year of the full time program, while two of the participants were on their first year of the part time program. Fifty percent of the participants had less than seven years of social service experience, while the other 50% had more than seven years of service. For the purposes of this sampling their social service experience includes employment, volunteering, education, and internship. About two thirds (62%) of the participants had traveled abroad at least once, and one third had never traveled abroad.

Presentation of Statistics Demographics

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Mean	SD
Age			28.38	6.862
20-30	10	76.9%		
31-41	2	15.4%		
42-52	1	7.7%		
Gender				
Male	0	0%		
Female	13	100%		
Experience (Years)				
0-4	9	69.2%		
5-10	3	23.1%		
11-15	0	0%		
16-20	1	7.7%		
Status in School				
1 st Year Full-Time	9	69.2%		
1st year Part-time	4	30.8%		

Times Travelled Abroad		
0	5	38.5%
1	3	23.1%
2	2	15.4%
3	0	0%
4	1	7.7%
5	2	15.4%

Cultural Competence

The survey instrument included four statements that assessed the participants' understanding on cultural competence (see Table 2). The five response options to the statements were "(1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neither agree or disagree, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree".

Table 2. Cultural Competency

Variable	Prior to Course		After Course	
	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
I am able to provide culturally responsive interventions for clients.				
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	0	0
Neither Agree or Disagree	5	38.5%	5	38.5%
Agree	8	61.5%	4	30.8%
Strongly Agree	0	0	3	23.1%

I believe that social service agencies in other countries lack resources to effectively help vulnerable populations.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	6	46.2%
Disagree	2	15.4%	3	23.1%
Neither Agree or Disagree	4	30.8%	2	15.4%
Agree	5	38.5%	1	7.7%
Strongly Agree	2	15.4%	0	0

I understand cultural influences on diverse populations such as needs, values, and behaviors.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	0	0
Neither Agree or Disagree	2	15.4%	1	7.7%
Agree	10	76.9%	7	53.8%
Strongly Agree	1	7.7%	4	30.8%

Social Service agencies outside of the United States need help in order to provide adequate resources for their vulnerable population.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	3	23.1%
Disagree	1	7.7%	2	15.4%
Neither Agree or Disagree	6	46.2%	3	23.1%
Agree	5	38.5%	3	23.1%
Strongly Agree	1	7.7%	1	7.7%

The first statement asked participants' to respond to the following statement "I am able to provide culturally responsive interventions for clients". Prior to the course, five (38.5%) of the participants responded "neither agree or disagree" and eight (61.5%) participants responded "agree". After the course was completed, five (38.5%) of the participants still responded as "neither agree or disagree". However, there was a change in the "agree" response as only four (30.8%) of the participants responded "agree" and three (23.1%) participants

responded “strongly agree”. A change from the pre course as no one had “strongly agreed” in the initial survey.

Participants were asked to respond to the following statement, “I believe that social service agencies in other countries lack resources to effectively help vulnerable populations”. Prior to the course, none (0%) of the participants responded as “strongly disagree” and after the course there was a change as half of the participants, six (46.2%), responded as “strongly disagree”. In the pre survey, two (15.4%) participants responded “disagree”, there was a slight increase in the post survey as three (23.1%) participants responded “disagree”. There was a change from the pre survey as four (30.8%) participants responded “neither agree or disagree” and the post survey shows two (15.4%) participants responded as “neither agree or disagree”. In the pre survey, five (38.5%) participants responded “agree”, which only one (7.7%) participant responded as “agree” in the post survey. In the initial survey, two (15.4%) participants responded as “strongly agree”, which reduced to none (0%) of the participants responding as “strongly agree” after the course was completed.

Participants were asked to respond to the following statement, “I understand cultural influences on diverse populations such as needs, values, and behaviors”. Prior to the course none (0%) of the participants responded as “strongly disagree” nor did they respond as “disagree” which remained the same in the post survey responses. There was a slight change in the response for “neither agree or disagree” as the pre survey shows two (15.4%) participants

reduced to one (7.7%) participant. There was also a reduction in the “agree” response from ten (76.9%) participants to seven (53.8%) participants. There was also an increase from the pre survey one (7.7%) to four (30.8%) in the post survey for participants who responded “strongly agree”.

Participants were asked to respond to the following statement, “Social Service agencies outside of the United States need help in order to provide adequate resources for their vulnerable population”. Prior to the course, no (0%) participants responded as “strongly disagree” which increased in the post survey to three (23.1%) participants responding as “strongly disagree”. There was an increase in the “disagree” response as well, as it changed from one (7.7%) participant to two (15.4%) participants responding as “disagree”. There was a reduction from the presurvey, six (46.2%) participants to three (23.1%) participants, in the post survey for the response of “neither agree or disagree”. For the “agree” response, participants reduced their response from five (38.5%) participants in the pre survey to three (23.1%) participants in the post survey. The responses remained the same in the pre and post survey with one (7.7%) participant responding as “strongly agree”.

Understanding of Global Interconnectedness

The survey instrument included six statements that assessed the participants’ understanding of global interconnectedness (see Table 3). The five

response options to the statements were “(1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neither agree or disagree, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree”.

Table 3. Global Interconnectedness

Variable	Prior to Course		After Course	
	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
I believe that social services agencies in other countries lack knowledge to effectively help vulnerable populations.				
Strongly Disagree	2	15.4%	8	61.5%
Disagree	1	7.7%	1	7.7%
Neither Agree or Disagree	9	69.2%	1	7.7%
Agree	0	0	2	15.4%
Strongly Agree	1	7.7%	0	0
I am familiar with international social welfare policies.				
Strongly Disagree	2	15.4%	0	0
Disagree	5	38.5%	3	23.1%
Neither Agree or Disagree	5	38.5%	4	30.8%
Agree	1	7.7%	5	38.5%
Strongly Agree	0	0	0	0
I believe social service agencies outside of the united states are as effective as agencies within the united states.				
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	2	15.4%
Neither Agree or Disagree	8	61.5%	1	7.7%
Agree	5	38.5%	5	38.5%
Strongly Agree	0	0	4	30.8%
I am able to connect global problems to local problems.				
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	1	7.7%	0	0
Neither Agree or Disagree	3	23.1%	2	15.4%
Agree	8	61.5%	5	38.5%
Strongly Agree	1	7.7%	5	38.5%

I am able to connect social work code of ethics to global human rights perspective.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	0	0
Neither Agree or Disagree	2	15.4%	1	7.7%
Agree	8	61.5%	5	38.5%
Strongly Agree	3	23.1%	3	23.1%

I am able to interpret and compare indicators of wellbeing across different countries.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	1	7.7%	0	0
Neither Agree or Disagree	7	53.8%	2	15.4%
Agree	4	30.8%	7	53.8%
Strongly Agree	1	7.7%	3	23.1%

Participants were asked to respond to the following statement “I believe that social services agencies in other countries lack knowledge to effectively help vulnerable populations”. Prior to the course, nine (69.2%) of the participants responded “neither agree or disagree” and after the course one (7.7%) participant responded as “neither agree or disagree”. Another difference in the responses were that two (15.4%) participants responded as “strongly disagree” prior to course and after the course eight (61.5%) participants shared the response of “strongly disagree”. One (7.7%) participant remained the same prior to the course and after the course with a response of “disagree”. Prior to the course none of the participants responded as “agree” however after the course two (15.4%) participants responded as “agree”. One participant responded as

“strongly agree” prior to the course and after the course none of the participants responded as “strongly agree”.

Participants were asked to respond to the following statement “I am familiar with international social welfare policies”. Prior to the course, five (38.5%) of the participants responded “neither agree or disagree” and after the course four (30.8%) participants responded as “neither agree or disagree”. Two (15.4%) participants chose to strongly disagree with the statement prior to the course and none of the participants “strongly disagreed” after completing the course. Five (38.5%) participants responded as “disagree” prior to course and after the course three (23.1%) participants shared the response of “disagree”. Prior to the course there was one (7.7%) participant that responded “agree” to the statement and once the course was completed there were five (38.5%) participants that chose “agree”. None of the participants responded as “strongly agree” prior to the course nor after the course.

Participants were asked to respond to the following statement “I believe social service agencies outside of the united states are as effective as agencies within the united states”. Prior to the course, eight (61.5%) of the participants responded “neither agree or disagree” and after the course one (7.7%) participant responded as “neither agree or disagree”. None of the participants “strongly disagreed” with statement prior to the course nor after completing the course. Also, none of the participants responded as “disagree” prior to taking the course, however two (15.4%) participants responded as “disagree” after the

course. Five (38.5%) participants remained the same prior to the course and after the course with a response of “agree”. None of the participants responded as “strongly agree” prior to the course, however four (30.8%) participants responded as “strongly agree” after the course.

Participants were asked to respond to the following statement “I am able to connect global problems to local problems. In both the pre and post survey none (0%) responded strongly disagree. There was a reduction from one (7.7%) prior to the course to none (0%) after the course of participants who disagreed with the statement. Prior to the course 3(23.1%) responded that they neither agreed or disagreed to the statement. After the course that was reduced to two (15.4%). Prior to the course eight (61.5%) of the participants agreed with the statement. After the course that was reduced to 5(38.5%). There was an increase for the participants who strongly agreed. Prior to the course only one (7.7%) agreed after the course five (38.5%) strongly agreed.

Participants were asked to respond to the following statement “I am able to connect social work code of ethics to global human rights perspective. Prior to the course and after the course none (0%) of Participants responded for both strongly disagree and disagree. Prior to the course two (15.4%) of the participants responded neither agree or disagree. After the course one (7.7%) of the participants responded neither agree or disagree. Eight (61.5%) of the participants indicated that they agree with the statement prior to the course. This was reduced to three (23.1%) of the participants after the course. Respondents

remained the same before and after the course with three (23.1%) indicating that they strongly agree.

Participants were asked to respond to the following statement “I am able to interpret and compare indicators of wellbeing across different countries. Prior to the course one (7.7 %) strongly agreed. This increased after the course three (23.1) participants strongly agreed. Prior to the course four (30.8%) of the participants agreed, after the course seven (53.8%) agreed. Prior to the course seven (53.8%) of the participants indicated that they neither agree or disagree. After the course it was reduced to two (15.4%). One (7.7%) disagreed prior to the course, and none disagreed after the course. None of the participants strongly agreed prior and after the course.

T-Test Comparison of Pre and Post Survey

Table 4. Questions Related to Cultural Competency

	Pre- \bar{x}	Post- \bar{x}	Significance
I am able to provide culturally responsive interventions for clients.	3.58	3.83	.463
I believe that social service agencies in other countries lack resources to effectively help vulnerable populations.	3.58	1.83	.001*
I understand cultural influences on diverse populations such as needs, values, and behaviors.	3.42	4.08	.039
Social Service agencies outside of the United States need help in order to provide adequate resources for their vulnerable population.	3.42	2.75	.151

T-Test Comparison of Pre and Post Discussion for Cultural Competence

The researchers conducted a paired sample t-test for cultural competence. As seen in Table 4, while there were differences in the pre and post test for all questions there was only one question that resulted in a significant change. Participants were asked to respond to the following

statement “I believe that social service agencies in other countries lack resources to effectively help vulnerable populations”. The mean for this question changed from 3.58 to 1.83, which resulted in the significance level of .001.

Table 5. Questions Related to Understanding Global Interconnectedness

	Pre- \bar{x}	Post- \bar{x}	Significance
I believe that social services agencies in other countries lack knowledge to effectively help vulnerable populations.	2.75	1.75	.039*
I am familiar with international social welfare policies.	2.33	3.17	.064
I believe social service agencies outside of the united states are as effective as agencies within the united states.	3.42	3.92	.166
I am able to connect global problems to local problems.	3.67	4.25	.046*
I am able to connect social work code of ethics to global human rights perspective.	4.08	4.42	.220
I am able to interpret and compare indicators of wellbeing across different countries.	3.42	4.08	.039*

T-Test Comparison of Pre and Post Discussion for Global Interconnectedness

The researchers conducted a paired sample t-test for the global interconnectedness questions. As seen in Table 5, while changes were observed in all questions, there were three questions that resulted in a statistically significant change. The first question participants were asked to respond to the following statement “I believe that social service agencies in other countries lack knowledge to effectively help vulnerable populations”. The mean for this question changed from 2.75 to 1.75, which resulted in the significance level of .039.

The second question that demonstrated significant change is when participants were asked to respond to the following statement “I am able to connect global problems to local problems”. The mean for this question changed from 3.67 to 4.25, which resulted in the significance level of .046.

The third question that demonstrated significant change in participants responses was when asked to respond to the following statement “I am able to interpret and compare indicators of wellbeing across different countries”. The mean for this question changed from 3.42 to 4.08, which resulted in the significance level of .039.

Summary

This chapter presented data that was collected for this study through surveys completed by participants prior to taking a course on international social

work and after completing the course. The study assessed the participants increase in their understanding of the global interconnectedness and cultural competence. The findings from the demographic questions as shown in Table 1 reflects that all participants were female and a majority were between the ages of twenty and thirty years of age. About two thirds (62%) of the participants had traveled abroad at least once, and one third had never traveled abroad.

The researchers split the survey instrument questions into two categories and presented the results as: cultural competency results reflected in Table 2 and understanding global interconnectedness results reflected in Table 3. The researchers conducted paired sample t-tests that are presented in Table 4 and Table 5. The results from Table 4 showed that cultural competence had a significant change in one of the four questions. Regarding global interconnectedness three of the six questions had significant change.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the findings of this study presented in chapter four. This chapter will also discuss limitations of the study, implications it may have on Masters of Social Work programs and recommendations for social work practice as well as future research.

Discussion of Results

The purpose of this study was to examine if a course focused on international social work with an immersion component helps social work students increase their understanding of the global interconnectedness of social issues and cultural competency. The study found that participants had an increase in both cultural competency and global interconnectedness.

The survey instrument included four statements that assessed the participants' understanding on cultural competence (see Table 2) and six statements that assessed the participants' understanding global interconnectedness (see Table 3). Of the four statement to measure cultural competence, one showed significant changes in the results. The statement to measure cultural competence was "I believe that social service agencies in other countries lack resources to effectively help vulnerable populations". Therefore,

after completing the course fewer participants thought other nations lacked resources to effectively help vulnerable populations responses became “disagree or strongly disagree”. A reason why there might have been a significant change in this question is that the participants were able to immerse into a foreign country and learn what resources were available to the community directly from the agencies that they toured while in their immersion component of the international course. These findings are consistent with Gilin & Young (2009) who report students who participate in an international course say they learn more from exposure when visiting foreign countries.

Of the six statements to measure understanding global interconnectedness there were three that showed significant changes in the results. The first statement was “I believe that social service agencies in other countries lack knowledge to effectively help vulnerable populations”. After completing the course fewer participants thought social services have knowledge to effectively help vulnerable people in their communities. An explanation for this change is that through the course, and the immersion component, participants learned that countries throughout the world were aware of issues affecting their vulnerable populations. This is consistent with research conducted by Guo, Marshall, Glasser, & Spillers (2016). Their research has shown that international social work study abroad courses provide social workers with knowledge to understand global issues in local communities. According to research conducted by Gilin & Young (2009), students also learn more from exposure they receive by

participating in an international course and gain new ideas from visiting diverse countries.

The second statement to measure understanding global interconnectedness was “I am able to connect global problems to local problems”. After this course more students agreed with this statement. A reason why there might have been a significant change in this question could be because the course provided exposure to global problems and the participants were able to apply the issues to local issues. Barbara (2006) reports that social workers who understand the process of global structures helps understand local issues and how affects individuals directly.

The third statement to measure understanding global interconnectedness that saw a statistically significant change was “I am able to interpret and compare indicators of wellbeing across different countries”. After the course, more students agreed with this statement. A reason this may have occurred is because they are able to view cultural norms in a different country through the exposure of the study abroad component. This is consistent with research conducted by Tesoriero (2006), which found that studying abroad and learning about global interconnectedness can provide an opportunity for students to connect with other individuals from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Limitations of Study Design and Procedures

This study's limitations include sample size and diversity amongst participants. The sample size only consisted of thirteen participants prior to the course and only twelve completed the pre and post survey. A participant discontinued the class after completing a survey prior to the class and was not able to complete a survey after the course was completed thus only twelve participants took the survey after the course was completed.

One limitation to the sample is that all of the participants were all from the same university in the west coast. The small sample size and location limits the generalizability of the findings because the sample was not inclusive of participants outside the one university. Another limitation was lack of diversity in gender because the participants in this study were all women. Since there were no male participants in the international social work course, they were not sampled for the purpose of this research which may have changed the outcomes of the findings by providing a male perspective to the findings in the research. A majority of the participants were in their first year of their program and had little to no exposure to the rest of the MSW curriculum which might later produce the types of changes observed. A final limitation to the sample size is that other changes from pre to post test, while observed, did not reach statistical significance as they might with a larger sample.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice and Research

This study provides understanding into the benefits of an international social work course in increasing student understanding of global interconnectedness and cultural competency. Based on the findings, a recommendation to improve social work practice would be to incorporate international social work into curriculum. The finding from the study shows that the participants benefited from the course by increasing their knowledge on global interconnectedness and cultural competency. As Gilin and Young (2009) found, the most appropriate type of international curriculum provides the opportunity for students to improve their cultural knowledge so they can better serve clients within their home country and culture.

One recommendation for further research is to conduct qualitative research and utilize interviews or written responses to questions. By using a qualitative approach researchers can find out specific contributions from the participants personal experiences and allows them the opportunity to provide in-depth information and feedback about their perceptions. This can provide insight into what changed their understanding of global interconnectedness and cultural competence. Another recommendation for further research is to have a larger sample size. This can be done by distributing a survey to other schools of social work that have courses on international social work with immersion components.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine if a course focused on international social work with an immersion study abroad component helped social work students increase their understanding of the global interconnectedness of social issues and cultural competency. The study found that participants had an increase in both cultural competency and global interconnectedness. Social work practice needs to expand international course participation to all MSW students to continue to increase their knowledge on international interconnectedness and cultural competency. The results of this study correlate with limited literature that is available on the topic of international social work. Due the limitations in literature, future research should continue to examine the benefits of a study abroad course that focuses on the dimensions of global interconnectedness and cultural competence in increasing the knowledge of Master of Social Work Students.

APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

+

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee

Researcher(s) Celeene Moreno & Hazel Aguilar
Proposal Title Effectiveness of an International Social Work Course
SW1842

Your proposal has been reviewed by the School of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board. The decisions and advice of those faculty are given below.

Proposal is:

- approved
 to be resubmitted with revisions listed below
 to be forwarded to the campus IRB for review

Revisions that must be made before proposal can be approved:

- faculty signature missing
 missing informed consent debriefing statement
 revisions needed in informed consent debriefing
 data collection instruments missing
 agency approval letter missing
 CITI missing
 revisions in design needed (specified below)
- _____

James Co
Committee Chair Signature

3/27/2018
Date

Distribution: White-Coordinator; Yellow-Supervisor; Pink-Student

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT



California State University, San Bernardino
Social Work Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee
APPROVED 3/27/2018 VOID AFTER 3/26/2019
IRB# SW1842 CHAIR [Signature]

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
School of Social Work

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine the effectiveness of an international social work course in increasing participants understanding of global interconnectedness and cultural competence among enrolled students in an MSW program. The study is being conducted by Hazel Aguilar and Celeene Moreno graduate students, under the supervision of Laurie A. Smith, Ph.D. Director of School of Social Work and Professor in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-committee at CSUSB.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to examine effect of an international social work course on MSW student's cultural competence and global interconnectedness.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked of a few questions on their knowledge and perspective on cultural competence and global interconnectedness.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in the study is totally voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

CONFIDENTIALITY OR ANONYMITY: Your responses will remain anonymous and data will be reported in group form only.

DURATION: It will take 5 to 10 minutes to complete the survey.

RISKS: There are no foreseeable risks to the participants.

BENEFITS: There will not be any direct benefits to the participants.

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Laurie Smith 909/537-3837

RESULTS: Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2019.

This is to certify that I read the above and I am 18 years or older

Place an X mark here _____

_____ Date

APPENDIX C
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

The study you have just completed was designed to examine in what ways an international social work course increases Master of Social Work students knowledge of cultural competence and global interconnectedness. We are particularly interested in analyzing the relationship between the study abroad component and your knowledge prior to taking the course.

Thank you for your participation and for not discussing the contents of the study with other students. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Hazel Aguilar (haguilar@csusb.edu), Celeene Moreno (004838921@coyote.csusb.edu) or Dr. Laurie Smith at (909) 537-3837. If you would like to obtain a copy of the group results of this study, please contact Professor Dr. Laurie Smith at (909) 537-3837 at the end of Summer Quarter of 2019.

APPENDIX D
QUESTIONNAIRE

MSW Students' understanding of Cultural and Global Awareness

ID CODE: _____
_____/_____/_____

Date Completed

ID CODE instructions: Use the same ID code from the pretest survey.

Circle the best response to the following demographic questions

1. **Age:** _____

2. **Gender:** Female Male Transgender Prefer not to
disclose

3. **Number of years of experience working with diverse population (include work, school, internship, volunteer experience):** _____

4. **Student Status:**

Circle One of the following:

1st Year Full-Time

2nd Year Full-Time

1st year Part-time

2nd Year Part time

3rd Year Part Time

1st year Pathways

2nd Year Pathways

3rd Year Pathways

5. **How many times have you travelled abroad** _____.

Continue on next page.

ID CODE: _____
 ____/____/____

Date Completed

ID CODE instructions: Use the same ID code from the pretest survey.

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements. Use a scale where 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither disagree nor agree, 4= agree, and 5= strongly agree. Please circle one answer per row.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
6. I believe that social service agencies in other countries lack knowledge to effectively help vulnerable populations.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I am familiar with international social welfare policies.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I am able to provide culturally responsive interventions for clients.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I believe that social service agencies in other countries lack resources to effectively help vulnerable populations.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I believe social service agencies outside of the United States are as effective as agencies within the United States.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I am able to connect global problems to local problems.	1	2	3	4	5

12. I am able to connect social work code of ethics to global human rights perspective.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I am able to interpret and compare indicators of wellbeing across different countries.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I understand cultural influences on diverse populations such as needs, values, and behaviors.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Social service agencies outside of the United States need help in order to provide adequate resources for their vulnerable population.	1	2	3	4	5

Developed by: Celeene Moreno and Hazel Aguilar

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES

Researcher's, Hazel Aguilar and Celeene Moreno, shared responsibilities of writing, surveying, and discussing the project. To sound as cohesive as possible, Aguilar and Moreno wrote all documents together and conducted research surveys. Aguilar and Moreno worked together and did not encounter any issues in the completion of this manuscript.