

DEVELOPING LANGUAGE AND INTERCULTURAL SKILLS THROUGH AN IaH PROGRAMME AT UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT. *Developing Language and Intercultural Skills through an IaH Programme at University.* Following up on a project on the impact of study abroad on the language and intercultural skills of university students, this paper focuses on how such skills can be developed through a specific “Internationalisation at Home” (IaH) programme (Beelen & Jones 2015) that combines domestic students’ mentoring of international students (“study buddies”) with weekly language exchanges and an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course focusing on internationalisation and interculturality (Arnó et al. 2013). Based on previous findings that point to certain language and intercultural development as a result of a stay abroad (Cots et al., 2016; Llanes et al. 2016), we aim to find out if there are any changes among domestic students as a result of their participation in the programme. Language proficiency was measured in terms of the general score on a placement test as well as of oral skills measures. On the other hand, intercultural development was measured through closed questions about attitudes, knowledge, and behaviour—components of intercultural competence (Byram 1997)—together with open questions eliciting students’ perceptions of their participation in the programme. All in all, the results of this study can shed light on the provision of intercultural and international skills through EAP courses, based on expanded notions of EAP and ESP (English for Specific Purposes), which go beyond language to cover a wider range of skills.

Keywords: *Internationalisation at Home, study buddies, intercultural competence, oral skills, English for Academic Purposes, language skills in higher education.*

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REZUMAT. *Dezvoltarea competențelor lingvistice și interculturale prin programul academic de „internaționalizare acasă” (IA).* Lucrarea de față reprezintă etapa ulterioară a unui proiect dedicat măsurării impactului stagiilor de studiu în străinătate asupra competențelor lingvistice și interculturale ale studenților. Studiul urmărește modul în care aceste competențe sunt dezvoltate prin programe de tip „internaționalizare acasă” (IA) (Beelen & Jones 2015), care combină mentoratul asigurat de către studenții domestici celor internaționali („parteneri de studiu”) cu schimburile lingvistice săptămânale și cursul de limba engleză pentru scopuri academice construit pe politici de internaționalizare și interculturalitate (Arno et al. 2013). Pornind de la concluziile cercetărilor anterioare legate de impactul mobilităților în străinătate asupra dezvoltării competențelor lingvistice și interculturale (Cots et al. 2016; Llanes et al. 2016), scopul nostru este de a afla dacă există modificări de acest tip în rândul studenților domestici în cadrul programului menționat. Competența lingvistică a fost evaluată în cadrul unui test de plasare cu scor general și printr-un test de evaluare a competențelor de comunicare orală. Dezvoltarea interculturală a fost măsurată printr-o serie de întrebări închise care au vizat atitudini, cunoștințe, comportamente – toate componente ale competenței interculturale (Byram 1997) - căreia i s-au adăugat întrebări cu caracter deschis legate de percepția studenților cu privire la programul din care au făcut parte. În concluzie, rezultatele studiului de față pune în lumină modul în care abilitățile interculturale și internaționale pot fi gestionate prin intermediul cursurilor de limba engleză pentru scopuri academice care valorifică principiile conceptelor de limbă engleză pentru scopuri specifice și academice și care se urmărește achiziția unei game variate de abilități ce merg dincolo de competența lingvistică.

Cuvinte-cheie: *„internaționalizarea acasă”, parteneri de studiu, competență interculturală, competențe de comunicare orală, limba engleză pentru scopuri academice, competențe lingvistice în învățământul superior.*

Introduction

Nowadays, the internationalisation of universities goes beyond mobility to reach the majority of students, which is covered by the concept of “Internationalisation at Home” (IaH) (Crowther et al. 2000). IaH has been recently defined as “the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments” (Beelen & Jones 2015, 69). In this context, the present study analyses how university students can benefit from participation in an IaH programme at their own university, intended to promote students’ language and intercultural skills through the interaction between domestic

and international students. Set in an engineering school from a university in Catalonia (Spain), the IaH programme presented in this paper combines a university course focusing on internationalisation with a *study buddy* programme, by which local students act as mentors of incoming exchange students, and also become their language exchange partners. The programme aims to combine both domestic and international student communities into a single international student community, not only to maximise the opportunities for language and intercultural learning for all, but also to facilitate the integration of international exchange students in the host community, preventing the isolation of the international group—the so-called “Erasmus cocoon” (Papatsiba 2006). On the other hand, for local students, the study buddy/language exchange programme forms part of an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course intended to improve language and intercultural skills. This programme also intends to familiarise domestic students with internationalisation and, hopefully, to encourage them to participate in study abroad (SA) programmes in the near future.

In the context of this IaH programme, the present study aims at measuring the development of the language and intercultural skills of the domestic students participating in it. Considering that this programme intends to provide a “taster” of what studying abroad may involve—mainly in terms of contact with foreign students and use of other languages (mostly English as a *lingua franca*)—this study is based on previous SA research conducted by the research group that the authors of this paper belong to. In particular, the study presented in this paper is a follow-up to previous research focusing on the development of Catalan students’ language proficiency and intercultural skills after an SA sojourn (Llanes et al. 2016; Cots et al. 2016). Thus, considering the potential of internationalisation both as a mind-opening experience for intercultural development and as a context for foreign language improvement, this study aims at finding out whether and to what extent those benefits associated with SA contexts can also be obtained through IaH programmes integrated in the bachelor’s curriculum. To our view, ESP courses that aim at developing students’ language and intercultural skills for study and work in international settings constitute an appropriate format for curricular IaH (Arnó-Macià & Aguilar 2018). After a review of the literature on intercultural and language skills development through internationalisation (at home or abroad), this article provides an account of the design and implementation of the programme and analyses data obtained from students at the start and end of the term, regarding their language and intercultural gains. The results of this study are expected to provide guidelines for the design and implementation of IaH programmes integrated in curricular courses, with a special emphasis on ESP.

Literature review

The impact of students' engagement in international and intercultural activities has been studied in different contexts and from the perspective of both linguistic and intercultural development. Most studies have analysed the impact of a Stay Abroad (SA) in an English-speaking context, although recently other studies have started to analyse the impact of experiences where students are in contact with non-native speakers of English, termed English as a Lingua Franca in Study Abroad, or ELFSA, (Köylü, 2016). Thus, SA experiences are claimed to have the potential of promoting students' language and intercultural development in different ways.

First, studies comparing the impact on linguistic gains across different contexts have found higher linguistic gains in SA vs. formal instruction contexts (Perez-Vidal 2014, 2015). There is a strong tradition of research into language development in SA, especially in immersion in L1 settings – see detailed reviews in e.g. DeKeyser (2014) and Llanes et al. (2016). Greater gains have been reported in oral fluency (Llanes & Muñoz 2009), vocabulary (Dewey 2008; Foster 2009), and sociolinguistic skills (Regan, Howard & Lemée 2009). Recent ELFSA studies have also found linguistic gains in different areas, such as general proficiency and writing (Llanes et al. 2016), while Glaser (2017) has found differences in students' perceptions and use of pragmatic strategies in L1 vs. ELF contexts, after specific strategy training. Attention is starting to be paid to IaH contexts, as in the comparison between SA and an English-medium instruction programme (Moratinos et al. 2018). The present study fills a gap in this growing IaH trend, as it examines on-campus exchanges between international and domestic students.

Research into intercultural competence points to the mind-opening potential of SA to strengthen students' intercultural competencies (Byram & Dervin 2008; Byram & Feng 2006), viz. attitudes, knowledge and behaviour (Byram 1997), although the quality and quantity of the contact as well as other factors, such as critical reflection on the experience before and/or after the SA and effective preparation and guidance may result in slightly different transformational learning outcomes (Papatsiba 2006; Kinginger 2013; Cots et al. 2016; Wilhborg & Robson 2017).

Further studies have pointed to the impact that IaH can also create on local students' intercultural and international skills as an outcome of student interaction with foreign students on the home campus (e.g. Salisbury 2011; Soria and Troisi 2014). Specifically, Jones (2016) claims that *local* internationalisation can strengthen students' intercultural (IC) and employability skills. Research hints at the possibility that sheltered and short-term experiences like summer

schools or on-campus activities can raise students' interest in participating in types of mobility where transversal IC skills can be gained (Mellors-Bourne et al. 2015, in Jones 2016). As Jones (2016) puts it, experiences with greater or lesser challenge should be accommodated to different students according to their social, economic, linguistic and intercultural profile.

Given that this accommodation probably requires a mentor or institutional support, in the setting under study this was performed and facilitated by ESP lecturers. In this research, we examine how an ESP course in combination with a tandem experience with international students can create an adequate IaH environment that facilitates local students' development of *both* linguistic and IC skills in a sheltered way. The combination of both actions in the programme is important because it aligns with recent voices (Almeida et al. 2018) claiming that an IaH context can not only integrate international student cohorts but also promote equity of access to internationalised university experience to non-mobile students.

The context: an IaH programme integrated in an ESP course

This IaH programme is encapsulated in an ESP course offered at the school of engineering of Vilanova i la Geltrú, which forms part of the Polytechnic University of Catalonia (Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, BarcelonaTech). It is an elective three-credit course³ offered to engineering students in the last stages of their bachelor's degree. The course was designed to develop students' academic speaking skills, as well as foster language learner autonomy and awareness of internationalisation in engineering. With this aim in mind, and taking advantage of the presence of international students on campus, the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) unit and the international and academic affairs offices designed this programme to connect both domestic and international students and promote intercultural experience through students' immersion in an internationalised environment.

One of the main concerns of the programme designers (ESP unit and international and academic affairs office) was to integrate the IaH programme into the curriculum, which is why it took the form of a course. Similar to the experience reported by Campbell (2012), the *study buddy* experience was integrated in a course focusing on interculturality (though Campbell's course did not focus on language).

The ESP lecturer, one of the authors of the paper, then decided to organise the course syllabus in such a way as to connect language development and interculturality, with the overall aim of sensitising students towards

³ The course is worth 3 credits in the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

internationalisation (and hopefully encourage future mobility) and preparing graduates for the internationalised workplace. The specific details of how the course was designed and implemented are given in Arnó et al. (2013).

The course is offered to domestic students only, and combines a weekly two-hour class session with weekly language exchanges that domestic students have with their foreign partners. These language exchanges form part of a tandem programme, which involve the pairing of students who have signed up for the course with incoming international students (student pairs are made by the instructor prior to the start of term). Tandem language learning is understood as “reciprocal support and instruction between two learners, each of whom wishes to improve their proficiency in the other’s native language” (Wang 2018, 38). Students are introduced to the principles of tandem language learning through the materials in the eTandem website⁴, where partnerships are defined as exchanges that are beneficial for both parties, so that half of the time is devoted to communication and learning of one language and half of the time to the other language. Emphasis is placed on each partner acting as a “teacher”, giving advice and correcting mistakes.

Before the start of the term, the students who have signed up for the course are briefed in a face-to-face session and given the name of their partners in an email. They are asked to make first contacts and act as study buddies of their foreign partners. In our specific case, most of the exchanges involve the learning of English (as a lingua franca), even if it is not the native language of the foreign partner (who, in spite of that, usually has a higher level of proficiency than the participating domestic students). Although students are also offered the possibility to practise a different language (usually German or French) during their exchanges, and then are paired up with a native speaker of that language, almost all of course participants choose English. Regardless of the language of the exchanges, the language of the course is English.

In particular, we follow Appel and Gilabert (2006) in orienting our partnerships towards a task-based approach—although the instructor usually does not design tasks but encourages students to produce tangible results. Given the integration of the exchanges in an EAP course, the language and tasks promoted relate to academic environments and interculturality (as the other main focus of the course). In turn, in order to monitor and assess students’ language exchanges, a diary template is provided to record exchanges and reflect on learning outcomes (the completed *language exchange reports* are submitted as an assignment at the end of the course).

Together with the out-of-class study buddies and language exchange meetings, the classroom-based component consists of the following contents:

⁴ https://www.languages.dk/methods/tandem/eTandem_syllabus_en.pdf.

- Spoken English for Academic Purposes (EAP), which basically involves English for study and campus life and activities for promoting learner autonomy.
- Student mobility (using articles and videos from the web) and English as a lingua franca in work and study settings (using the activities in Arnó et al. 2009).
- Intercultural competence, drawing on Byram's (1997) model based on skills, knowledge, attitudes and critical cultural awareness.
- Engineering in a globalised world and employability.
- The European Language Portfolio² and the Europass CV. Considering that it is a class of engineering students, the model used is the Academic and Professional European Language Portfolio (Duran et al., 2009). Emphasis is also placed on making students aware of their intercultural experiences.

Course contents are connected to student exchanges, as students are encouraged to approach them experientially, through discussion with their international partners. Input from the classes serves as the basis for interaction in the exchanges and, in turn, students present the results of the exchanges in the classes as discussions or presentations.

Considering this dual focus on language and interculturality, it was decided to collect data on students' development of such skills, using the instruments designed by the authors' research group to investigate the language and intercultural development of SA students.

The present study

This study was approached by drawing on the findings of the above-mentioned studies on the effects of SA (Cots et al. 2016; Llanes et al. 2016), which indicated significant improvement in general language proficiency (measured through a placement test) and lexical richness (in writing) as well as a slight increase in IC, particularly in the knowledge component. Therefore, the present study was designed to investigate whether and to what extent language and intercultural development can be fostered through an IaH experience involving interaction with international students. Accordingly, the following research question was posed:

Does participation in an IaH programme have any effects on students' development of language or intercultural competence?

In turn, the following hypotheses were advanced:

- 1- Regarding language improvement, the greatest effect can be expected on oral skills rather than overall proficiency since, during the programme, students had expressed self-perceived oral fluency gains.
- 2- In terms of the development of intercultural skills, the greatest effect can be expected on attitudes, and students will have a positive perception of the IaH programme, which will be reflected in an increased interest in internationalisation.

Data and methodology

Data were collected from the cohort of domestic students ($n=26$) participating in the programme during the spring term of 2015. The instruments and methodology used were adapted from the previous studies on SA reported in Cots et al. (2016) and Llanes et al. (2016). Specifically, they consisted of a pre- and post-course survey on interculturality and overall perception of the programme, on the one hand, and a language test, on the other hand. The survey consisted of closed questions (on a 1-5 Likert scale) to measure intercultural competence (Byram 1997), in terms of attitudes (questions 1-18), knowledge (19-28) and behaviour (29-43)—see complete questionnaire in Cots et al. (2016)—as well as of open questions asking students about their expectations of the programme (pre-course survey) and evaluation (post-course), through questions 44-46, which elicited students' three main points for each item (i.e. value of the programme, difficulties, and personal change as a result of the experience).

On the other hand, language gains were measured through a placement test (*Quick Placement Test*, Oxford) and an oral narrative ("Ball story") to measure overall language gains and the development of speaking skills.

Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative analyses of the closed and open questions of the survey, respectively, were carried out. The placement test was marked to obtain the score for each student, and the score was matched against its corresponding equivalent in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which distinguishes between basic user (A1 and A2), independent user (B1 and B2) and advanced user (C1 and C2)⁵. The answers to the open questions were analysed thematically while ANOVA analyses were carried out to determine significant differences between pre- and post-test

⁵ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions>

OPT scores and answers to the closed questions in the survey. On the other hand, the oral narrative was coded and analysed with CLAN software (MacWhinney 2000) using CAF (complexity, accuracy, fluency) measures (Housen & Kuiken 2009). For the purposes of this study, both lexical and syntactic complexity were included, while accuracy was excluded. Below are the specific measures used:

- Lexical complexity, based on Guiraud's index of lexical richness (Types/ $\sqrt{\text{Tokens}}$).
- Syntactic complexity, measured as clauses per utterance or AS-unit (e.g. Köylü 2016), whereby the AS-unit (Analysis of Speech unit) is defined as "a single speaker's utterance consisting of an *independent clause*, or *sub-clausal unit*, together with any *subordinate clause(s)* associated with either" (Foster et al. 2000, 365).
- Fluency measured as per syllables per minute (SPM), considering only pruned syllables, i.e. excluding hesitations, false starts, etc. (Ellis 2009).

Twenty students completed both surveys (out of 26 students participating in the programme) as the survey and OPT were done during class sessions (at the start and end of term). However, the oral narrative was assigned as an out-of-class activity and students were asked to send the audio file to the lecturer, which led to a low response rate. As only six students sent both the pre-test and post-test audio files with the oral narratives, the analysis of this particular task could only be based on descriptive statistics.

Results

As explained above, the results obtained for this study corresponded, on the one hand, to general language development (OPT) and speaking skills based on the oral narrative and, on the other, to the questionnaire on interculturality.

Language improvement

Analysis of the pre- and post-test on overall language proficiency (placement test), yielded the following results ($n=20$):

Table 1. Comparison of pre- and post- placement tests

	PRE-	POST-
OPT	24 (SD 8)	26 (SD 7) $p=0.485$

As can be seen in *Table 1*, no significant differences were found between the pre- and post-tests for the full cohort. However, when students' initial proficiency level is taken into account, the difference in language improvement becomes significant among those students (the majority) with a very low initial level of English (A2).

Table 2. Significant differences between pre- and post- placement test

	PRE-	POST-
A2 n=14 (OPT score 0-29)	20.6 (SD 4.8)	24.9 (SD 5.15) p=0.031

With regard to students' speaking skills, the analysis of the oral narrative yielded the following results (*Table 3*):

Table 3. CAF results of the oral narrative

	PRE-	POST-
Lexical richness (GUI)	4.47 (SD 0.54)	4.98 (SD 0.60)
Syntactic complexity (CL/ASU)	1.47 (SD 0.31)	1.52 (SD 0.32)
Fluency (SPM) rate B (pruned syllables)	107.34 (SD 30.24) Mean Duration: 81" (SD 59.86)	124.92 (SD 31.29) Mean Duration: 79.33" (SD 30.76)

Given the small number of participating students, these results can only be considered trends and will need to be further investigated with larger cohorts of students, to determine statistical significance. Nevertheless, the present results (see *Table 3* above) show a slight improvement in lexical richness, syntactic complexity and fluency, which would suggest that after a semester of IaH, students have improved their productive speaking skills.

Intercultural competence

The quantitative analysis of the closed questions yielded no significant results in any of the items relative to intercultural competence (*Table 4*). However, three items in particular—curiously one for each of the three components of IC, viz. attitude, knowledge and behaviour/skills—showed a slight change.

Table 4. Comparison of pre- and post- open questions on interculturality

	PRE-	POST-
Item 6 * (Attitude) <i>"I see no good reason to pay attention to what happens in other countries."</i> * The score for this question should be interpreted in reverse form to the rest (a lower score indicates more IC)	1.3 (SD 0.75)	1.7 (SD 0.58) $p=0.099$
Item 19 (Knowledge) <i>"I could cite a definition of culture and describe its components and complexities."</i>	3.2 (SD 1.15)	3.6 (SD 0.7) $p=0.154$
Item 36 (Behaviour/Skills) <i>"When I meet someone from another country, it makes me think about the differences between the way of life in their country and my country's way of life."</i>	3.5 (SD 0.96)	4.5 (SD 0.97) $p=0.102$

While no significant improvement was found in the quantitative analysis of intercultural skills, the qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions in the survey (items 44 to 46) yielded interesting findings. Item 44 inquired about students' expectations and perceptions (*What do you find most valuable?*). In the answers to the pre-course test, three general themes emerged among students' expectations:

- (1) meeting people from other countries/cultures: e.g. "meeting new people, culturally different".
- (2) improving/practising English, especially with regard to spoken fluency: "gain enough confidence to speak English"
- (3) "sharing", i.e. a theme derived from students' references to teaching or learning (language and culture), and expressions like "showing my culture to foreign students" or "trying to help the person who will arrive in [the city]".

In the post-course survey, students' answers to #44 (*what have you found the most valuable?*) were more varied and specific, as in this example:

"other people, other cultures, other countries; different lifestyles; activities/debates in class; sharing experiences; contact with another person, friendship".

The following comment is a good summary of students' perceived learning, with friendship standing out as a major learning outcome. This finding resonates with research based in engineering settings, reflecting that the creation of a strong bond is not only a good strategy for sojourners to adapt to the new country (Omachinski 2013) but also for the local students to make the most of IaH:

"I've learnt English, I've made a friend, and I've learnt a lot about his culture. For me, that's the most important, especially friendship."

The analysis of question 45 (*Expected difficulties- how you overcame them*) in the pre-course survey yielded the following expected difficulties:

- communication difficulties
- (low) level of English
- finding time for the project
- helping foreign students
- doubts regarding compatibility or partner's (un)willingness to participate.

In retrospect, at the end of the semester, students' answers usually referred to positive assessment and perceptions regarding the difficulties anticipated in the pre-course survey, such as those related to language ("It was not so difficult to communicate") or affinity with partner ("we were lucky to share ideas, hobbies"). One of the answers is quite revealing, as the student refers to his motivation to overcome potential difficulties:

"My shyness when speaking. I approached the course with motivation and saw it as a way of making the most of the opportunity to speak English".

Finally, answers to question 46 (*Change anything about yourself?*) at the beginning and end of the semester were compared. In the pre-course survey, students mainly expected to develop their intercultural competence, through a series of positive comments referring to: motivation, enrichment; mind-opening; improving English; curiosity; and insights into culture, whether it is one's or other's ("perception of *my* own culture"). At the end of the term, comments were also positive, showing students' appreciation of intercultural learning, with mentions of personal growth, boost in confidence and empowerment (both in terms of attitude as well as behaviour and skills): "more motivated to speak a foreign language"; easier; overcoming the fear of visiting other countries; curiosity, openness ("discoveries") towards other cultures.

Discussion

Our research question (*Does participation in an IaH programme have any effects on language improvement and intercultural competence of local students?*) was based on the hypotheses that the IaH programme would have an effect on students' intercultural skills (especially attitudes), their empowerment, their (positive) perception of the project, and (increased) interest in internationalisation. We also hypothesised that rather than an improvement on global proficiency (OPT), the greatest impact would be expected on oral skills (fluency, lexical richness and syntactic complexity) given the nature of the EAP course (with no focus on grammatical accuracy).

Regarding overall language improvement gains, those were significant among less proficient students, which would be an indicator that they have more room for improvement, a finding that is in line with previous SA research (e.g. Lapkin et al. 1995; Llanes & Muñoz 2009). It is the case that the students investigated show a general low English level (70% of the 20 students scored A2 on the level test), for whom the IaH course would have created a positive impact on their familiarisation with internationalisation and foreign language use (as corroborated by their qualitative responses) and preparation for a future SA. By way of comparison, the students in Llanes et al. (2016) participating in an SA had an average score corresponding to B1 (lower intermediate). This discussion leads to the threshold level that can usually predict better performance in SA, reviewed at greater length by Llanes et al. (2016). It would appear that programmes like the one under study could be appropriate preparation before SA, especially for those students who are not yet 'optimally ready' for SA as far as linguistic proficiency is concerned, but who can benefit from friendly interactions with 'predisposed parties' (Kingingier et al. 2016).

Our results vis-à-vis the previous study on SA in the same setting (Cots et al. 2016; Llanes et al. 2016) therefore point to both linguistic and intercultural gains as outcomes of the IaH programme. In terms of linguistic gains, similar results were obtained in both the OPT and lexical richness—although the focus of the present study is on speaking (as opposed to writing in Llanes et al. 2016). In this sense, the improvement of spoken skills is coherent with students' self-perceptions and with previous SA research, both in oral fluency (Llanes & Muñoz 2009) and vocabulary (Dewey 2008; Foster 2009).

As to intercultural gains, similar results were obtained from both this IaH study and the previous SA study, considering that in both settings students showed a high initial IC and some positive impact was evidenced in qualitative analyses. No significant increase was found in the quantitative questionnaire for the present study—in the previous SA study all three

components (Knowledge, Attitude and Behaviour) were found to increase, with Knowledge showing the most considerable development. Here, the three items also showed increase, though not significant. The tendencies observed towards greater appreciation of cultural differences and ethnorelativism align with previous research (Salisbury 2011; Soria & Troisi 2014).

The qualitative analysis of open-ended questions also reinforces a positive impact on the dimensions of Knowledge (*‘I’ve learnt a lot about his culture’*), Attitude (*‘more motivated to learn’*, *‘openness’*) and Behaviour (*‘overcoming fear of visiting other countries’*). Empowerment is also an effect (*‘it was not so difficult to communicate’*), resonating with similar findings in SA studies. Students’ replies also point to growth on the personal and human side: *‘I’ve made a friend’*, *‘friendship’*.

Although our results need to be confirmed through further research with higher numbers of students and reflections over the term, this study seems to endorse prior studies (e.g. Williams 2005; Salisbury 2011; Soria & Troisi 2014) which demonstrate that international exposure prior to a SA, rather than the actual SA, is more predictive to achieving high scores in IC. Even if no dramatic increases have been found, the IaH experience analysed here seems to have had a positive impact on students’ IC and proves to be good preparation for a prospective SA like an Erasmus exchange. The fact that the transversal course was taught by ESP teachers confirms the potential role of ESP teachers to stand as “intercultural brokers” (Bocanegra-Valle 2015) in IaH and in increasingly internationalised tertiary education settings (Aguilar 2018).

Enhanced awareness about the importance of the emotional side of individuals, i.e., students’ motivations (Krzaklewska 2008), should help design appropriate courses for developing IC and therefore helping students make the most of their IaH experience. Finally, along the lines of Campbell (2012) and Almeida et al. (2018), it seems appropriate to integrate intercultural exchanges between local and international students within a course intended to raise awareness of languages and interculturality.

Implications for course design and final remarks

Several implications can be derived from this study. First, although the findings in this research seem to substantiate recent studies on IaH (Jones 2016; Almeida et al. 2018), similar studies with a larger corpus are necessary for results to be more generalisable. Second, it remains to be seen whether the range of development can be made more significant: we think that it is necessary to track and encourage students’ real engagement through qualitative instruments that measure students’ linguistic and intercultural progress.

Given the limited results obtained in this study, a recommendation would be to encourage students to maximise their contact with foreign students, as the current setup requires a minimum of exchanges, and it is left to students' willingness whether or not they wish to maximise that exposure and get involved in a truly international community. In short, it is a question of quality of—and student engagement in—the IaH experience. Finally, we believe that internationalisation should not be reduced to the traditional mobility SA route and that other actions that can boost students' foreign language proficiency and IC skills should be made available to as many students as possible. The case study described in this paper is an example that attests to how internationalisation can be made more inclusive and promote language and intercultural development (Wihlborg & Robson 2017; Almeida et al. 2018) when different types of internationalisation that go beyond SA—including virtual exchange (O'Dowd 2018) and IaH—reach the majority of students in an institution.

NOTES

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