

Enhancing the international educational experience of undergraduates



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Outline of presentation

- CUHK's Internationalization efforts
 - The provision of international educational experience for students
- My research on the international educational experience of CUHK undergraduates
 - Key findings
 - Implications for ways to enhance the experiences of students who take part in international educational exchanges (build on courses like *Understanding Japanese Language & Culture*)



CUHK's internationalization aims & initiatives

- Since its founding in 1963, CUHK has been concerned with the provision of international experience for students and faculty;
- In recent years, due in part to increasing globalizing forces, internationalization efforts have intensified;
- CUHK's internationalization aims are embedded in the Mission Statement, Strategic Year Plans & the speeches of Vice-Chancellors

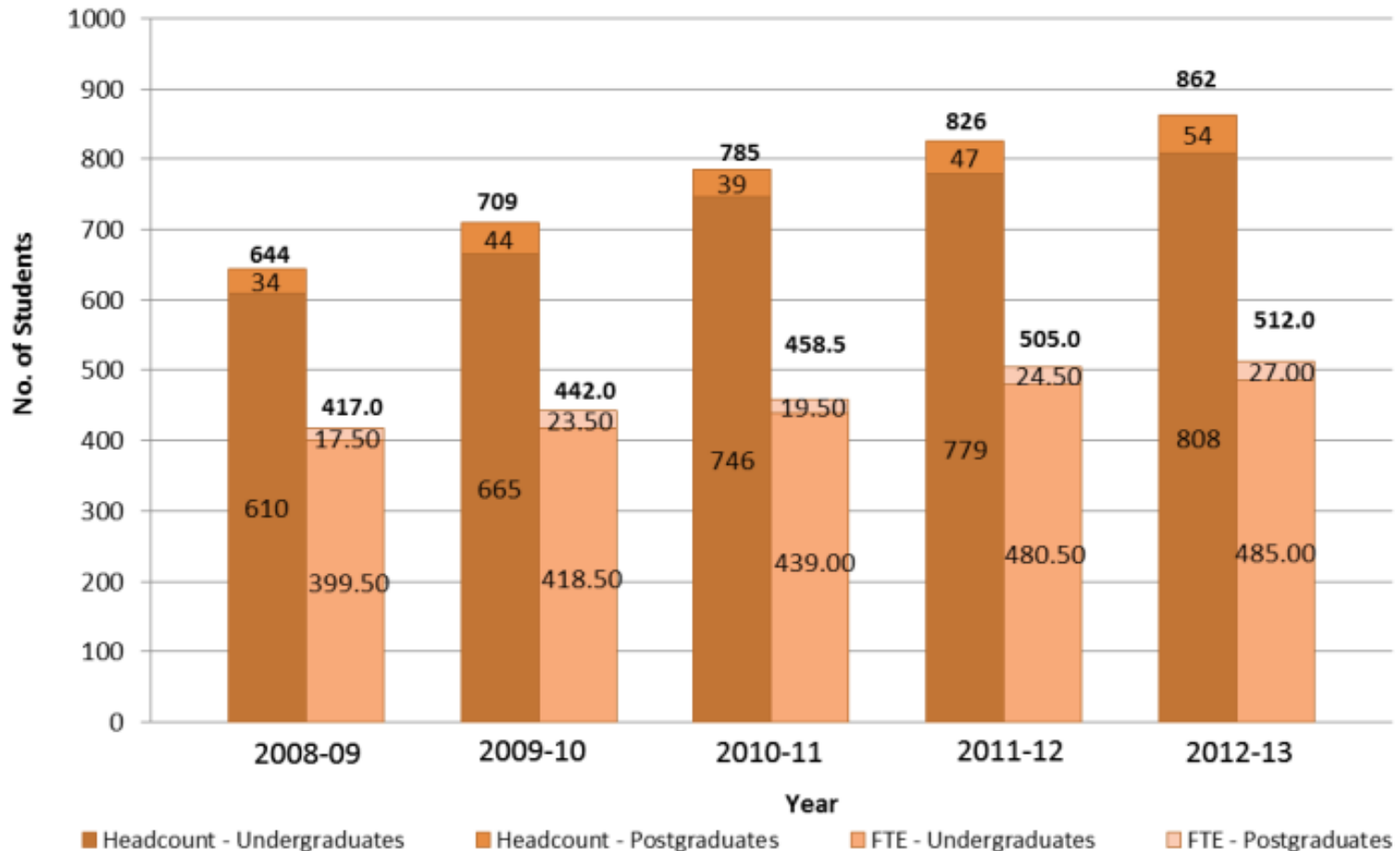


CUHK's Internationalization plans

- The University aims to increase the exchange quota so that 30% of each UG cohort will go on exchange for a semester or a year; students may also join micro- or short-term programs (e.g., summer exchange programs, college immersion programs, faculty-led tours);
- In 2012-13, 862 (UG & PG) students took part in a bilateral student exchange program for a semester or one year (28 countries/regions);
- In 2014-15, 1200+ are expected to participate in outgoing international exchange programs.

Outgoing Student Exchange

(Regular Term-time or Equivalent*)



* Excludes U-wide Summer Exchange Programme

(as at 31 August 2013)

Expectations of Int'l experience

- 'Language learning through study abroad relies on the expectation that massive exposure to the L2 will lead to L2 acquisition, exposure both in interactions with native and expert speakers of the L2 and non-interactive input from the L2 environment' (Coleman, 2013: 26).
- It is widely expected that students will be **immersed** in the host language/culture and they will naturally develop **intercultural communicative competence** through SA.

Common beliefs about SA...

- Formal L2 learning coupled with SA (immersion) provides the best opportunity for L2 enhancement;
- SA leads to more positive attitudes toward the host culture/host nationals and greater intercultural communicative competence;
- Sojourners need to be in the host environment for at least one academic year to experience significant growth (e.g., L2, intercultural sensitivity, global-mindedness).

But what does the research say???

Research findings: SA and SLA

- SA *can* offer an abundance of out-of-class opportunities for 'host language' enhancement in a range of situations (Cohen, 2004; Freed, 2004).
- More researchers are challenging the assumption that SA automatically leads to enhanced L2 prof., (inter)cultural understanding & identity expansion (Jackson, 2008, 2012; Vande Berg *et al.* 2012);
- The emergence of intercultural communicative competence is increasingly recognized as a complex developmental process (Byram, 2006, 2012).
- The impact of SA may not be fully realized until long after re-entry (Kinging, 2009, 2013; Paige *et al.*, 2012).

Barriers to internationalization

- With limited intercultural/L2 competence, interactions with people who have a different linguistic and cultural background may lead to misunderstandings and misattributions. Individuals may then choose to avoid intercultural interactions and valuable learning opportunities are lost;
- While students may wish to develop friendships with local students when they go abroad, many do not and spend much of their time with conationals (Gareis, 2012; Hendrickson *et al.*, 2010; Jackson, 2012, 2013; Mendelsohn and Citron, 2006; Vande Berg *et al.*, 2012; Weber-Bosley, 2010).

My research with CUHK sojourners

- Short-term sojourners (English majors from Hong Kong who spent 5 weeks in the UK)
 - Ethnographic investigations (2001-2009)
- Semester- and academic year-long int'l exchange students (2009-present)
 - Mixed method, experimental design
 - Current project with CUHK, Tsinghua, Nanjing & Fudan Universities (Students from all Faculties)



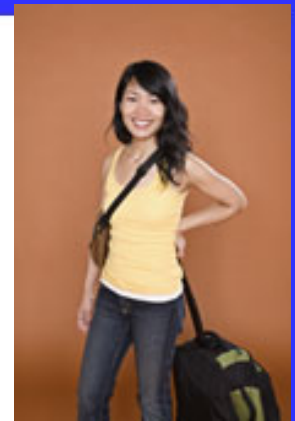
Key findings: L2 development & IC competence of short-term sojourners

- Learners may be ‘advanced’ in terms of proficiency in the host language but their intercultural sensitivity may lag far behind;
- Those who acquire higher levels of IC sensitivity & sociopragmatic awareness go beyond superficial observations of differences in the host environment (e.g., use of honorifics);
- The relationship between L2 proficiency & intercultural sensitivity is complex and variable; it is *not* necessarily parallel.

Key findings (Exchange Ss)

- Students who made the least gains in L2 proficiency/IC sensitivity did not appear to have a strategic plan for how to optimize their stay in the host culture;
- Individuals with a higher level of IC sensitivity were more aware of strategies to use to increase their IC exposure to the host language/environment; their social networks abroad included int'l students from diverse backgrounds as well as some locals;
- A high level of proficiency in the host language did not ensure a high level of IC sensitivity/competence;
- A complex array of **internal** (e.g., attitudes towards host culture, degree of openness, resilience) and **external factors** (e.g., host receptivity, degree of access to CoP) impacted their international learning experience and the development of their intercultural competence.

Differing developmental trajectories



- A complex mix of sociocultural factors, personality attributes, agency, and degree of investment or motivation in language and (inter)cultural growth/personal expansion influenced the learning of the sojourners as they grappled with unfamiliar linguistic and cultural experiences;
- This led to differing developmental trajectories and sojourn outcomes (e.g., variations in language gains, intercultural communicative competence & attitudes towards host nationals & interest in international affairs);
- The learning of L2 sojourners is complex, dynamic, variable, context-dependent, relational, and sometimes contradictory. L2 sojourns are highly idiosyncratic.

Individual factors impacting developmental trajectories

- Adaptive stress management (e.g., coping strategies)
- Psychological adjustment (e.g., reaction to cultural difference/ use of L2; feeling vulnerable & insecure)
- Personality attributes (e.g., flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, resilience, attitude)
- Openness to personal/ identity/ linguistic expansion
- Investment in host language learning (informal L2) & relationship-building across cultures
- Ethnocentric or ethnorelative mindset (degree of intercultural sensitivity/ competence)
- Agency; Where some see only obstacles, others recognize & take advantage of affordances.

Sociocultural factors impacting developmental trajectories

- Host culture receptivity (degree of mutuality)
- Degree of socio-emotional support & encouragement (e.g., hosts' understanding of students' needs and insecurities in alien environment)
- Hosts' recognition and respect of participants' preferred self-identities
- Quality & quantity of host-sojourner interaction/dialogic relations (differing access to home-stay/host culture activities and resources)



Pedagogical implications

(Faculty-led, short-term SA programs)

- **Pre-sojourn:** Include sociopragmatic awareness activities & exposure to informal host language; encourage the setting of realistic goals for sojourn
- **During sojourn:** Encourage deep, critical reflection (e.g., diary-writing/bloggging, discussions & full-group debriefing sessions); provide opportunities for individualized problem-solving
- **Post-sojourn:** Facilitate guided, critical reflection on progress made during SA & prompt the setting of new goals for language & cultural learning/ personal development; debriefings should also explore identity issues & encourage further L2/IC learning

Pedagogical implications

(Outgoing exchange students)

- Generally, students have limited preparation to be language and culture learners in an international environment; the current pre-departure orientation sessions for outgoing exchange students, which largely focus on logistics, do not/cannot adequately address this;
- Students who perceive their intercultural sensitivity to be far higher than it actually is may not realize the importance of intercultural communication or pre-sojourn preparation until they are abroad;
- Intensive preparation, ongoing support (e.g., online contact), & reentry debriefings can help students get more out of int'l experience and extend their learning on home soil;
- Any intervention (e.g., pre-sojourn intercultural communication and reentry coursework, online support during and after the stay abroad) must taken into account the students' actual and perceived levels of intercultural sensitivity (IDI scores); curricula must be appropriate.



Meeting internationalization aims: The research-teaching nexus

- Research (e.g., mixed-method experimental design studies, ethnographic investigations of student sojourners) can provide much-needed direction for intervention in study abroad programming for outgoing and incoming international exchange students (e.g., pre-sojourn orientations, sojourn support, reentry debriefings).

Research-inspired initiatives (TDG-supported)

- *Intercultural communication and engagement abroad* (an online, elective, 3-credit General Education course for students who are currently abroad) (To be offered in Sept. 2014)
- *Intercultural Transitions: Making Sense of International Experience* (an elective, 3-credit ENGE course for students with recent or current international experience)
- *CUHK's Annual Study Abroad Writing Contest*

UGED 2184/ENGE 2180: Intercultural communication & engagement abroad

- Elective, 3-credit course for CUHK Ss who are abroad (e.g., semester or year-long exchange Ss)
- Primary aims: to help students enhance their intercultural competence and encourage them to take a more active role in the host environment
- Critical, structured reflection and experiential/autonomous learning lie at the heart of the course
- Activities: Weekly tasks, online Forum chats/ blog entries, reflective essays, IDI-guided development

In summary

Educators can make a significant difference in the *quality* of international educational experience.



Well-designed programs can *empower students* and help them optimize their stay abroad!

Research can and should inform practice!

Thank you for listening!

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CUHK's Annual Study Abroad Writing Contest

(Visit the OAL website)

<http://www.oal.cuhk.edu.hk/index.php/study-abroad-a-exchanges-for-cuhk-students/term-time-exchange/returned-from-exchange/student-sharing>

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