



Cultural Sensitivity – The Impact of a Three-Week Physical Therapy Internship in Mexico

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INTRODUCTION

- There has been a steady growth of short-term study abroad (STSA) experiences for American college students (Institute of International Education, 2021).
- The development of intercultural competency is recognized as an important goal for institutions of higher education in general, including students pursuing careers in physical therapy (Black & Purnell, 2002).
- Study abroad programs, for credit, have been a common form of providing cross-cultural learning experiences for university students, with short-term study abroad (STSA) being the most popular intercultural immersion experience (while professional programs in physical therapy have emphasized international service-learning opportunities) (Lattanzi & Pechak, 2011).
- Non-credit education abroad (NCEA) experiences have gained popularity among university students as an alternative way to gain intercultural experiences (Henisz, Gordon, & Trivedi, 2018), including internship opportunities in physical therapy, such as offered by Toucan Abroad.
- While the impact study abroad has on intercultural competency development, including STSA, has been demonstrated (Hammer, 2012), research on the effectiveness of intercultural competency for NCEA experiences is essentially absent.
- Researchers have recognized intercultural sensitivity as a critical component of intercultural competency development models (Chen & Starosta, 2000; Hammer, 2012).
- Chen & Starosta (2000), argue that intercultural sensitivity is one of three factors contributing to intercultural competency (the other two factors are intercultural awareness and intercultural adroitness) and consists of five constructs: Interaction Attentiveness, Interaction Confidence, Interaction Enjoyment, Interaction Involvement, and Respect of Cultural Differences.
- The purpose of this study was to assess the effect on the development of intercultural sensitivity of pre-physical therapy students' participation in a 3-week NCEA physical therapy internship in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico sponsored by Toucan Abroad.
- We hypothesized there would be significant difference in overall intercultural sensitivity growth and in each of Chen & Starosta's (2000) five constructs of intercultural sensitivity.

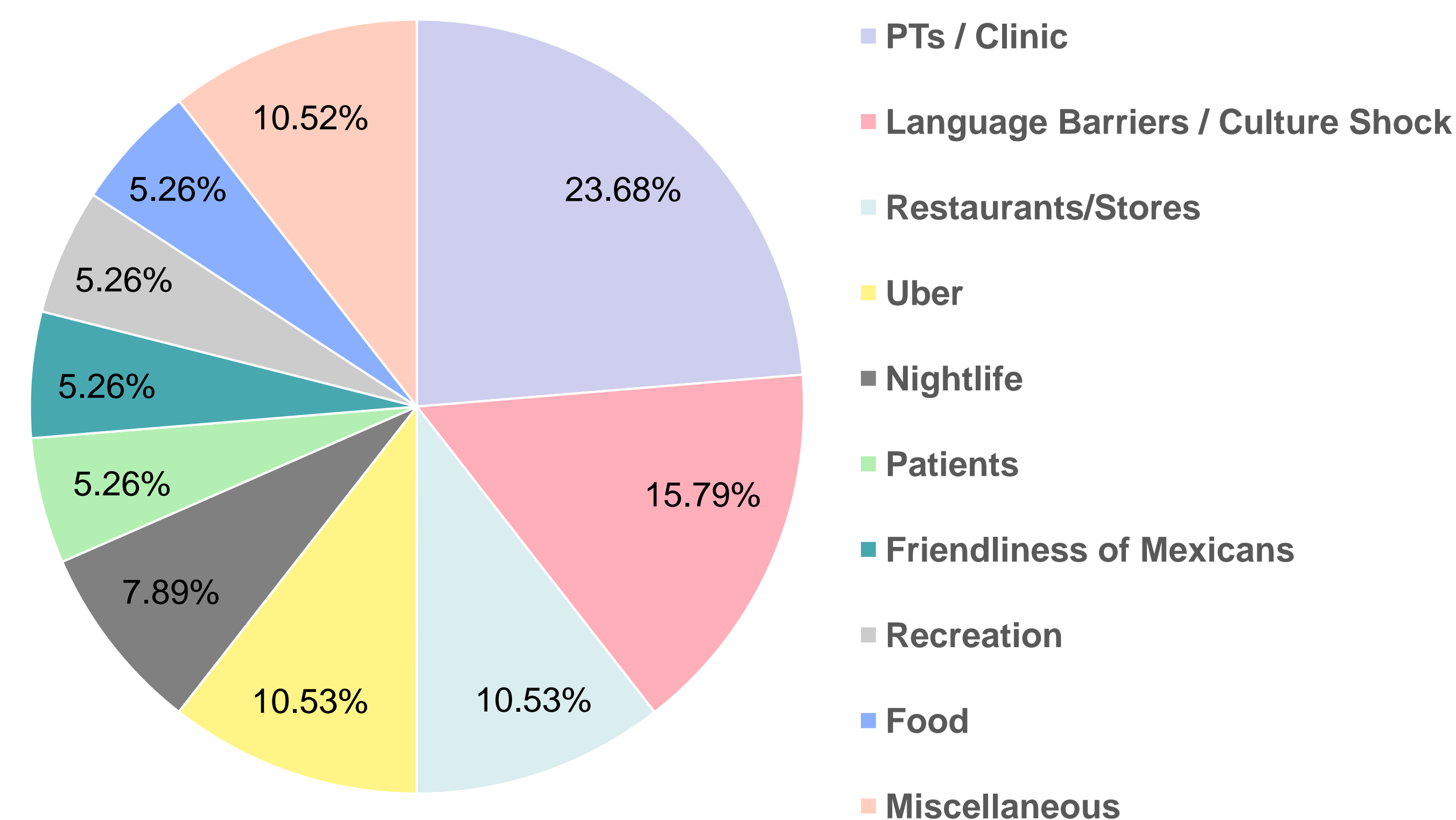
METHODS

Research Design

- Of the 20 college students who participated in a 3-week internship in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, 16 (13 female, 3 male) participated in this study.
- The Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), a 24-item Likert questionnaire (Chen and Starosta, 2000), was used to measure any changes in intercultural sensitivity.
- Three open-ended questions were also administered to obtain insights about their intercultural experiences.
- A paired T-test was performed to test the hypotheses based on the ISS results.
- Open-ended responses were clustered into categories in relation to each theme as seen in Figures 1-3.

RESULTS

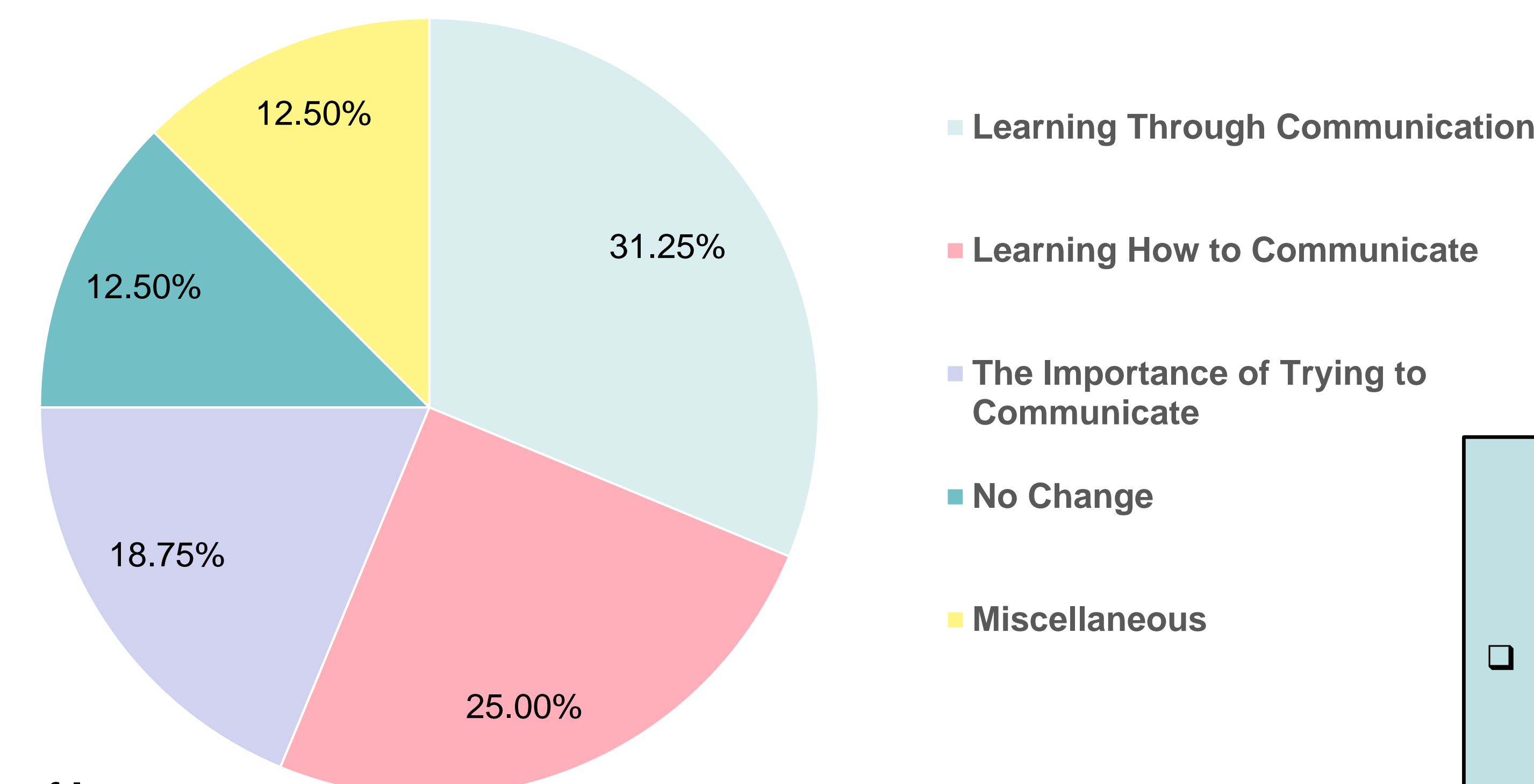
Fig. 1. Interactions Experienced Impacting Cultural Sensitivity



Notes of Interest

- A majority of the authentic interactions experienced required communication.
- Nearly half of the experiences listed above related to the student's clinical experience.

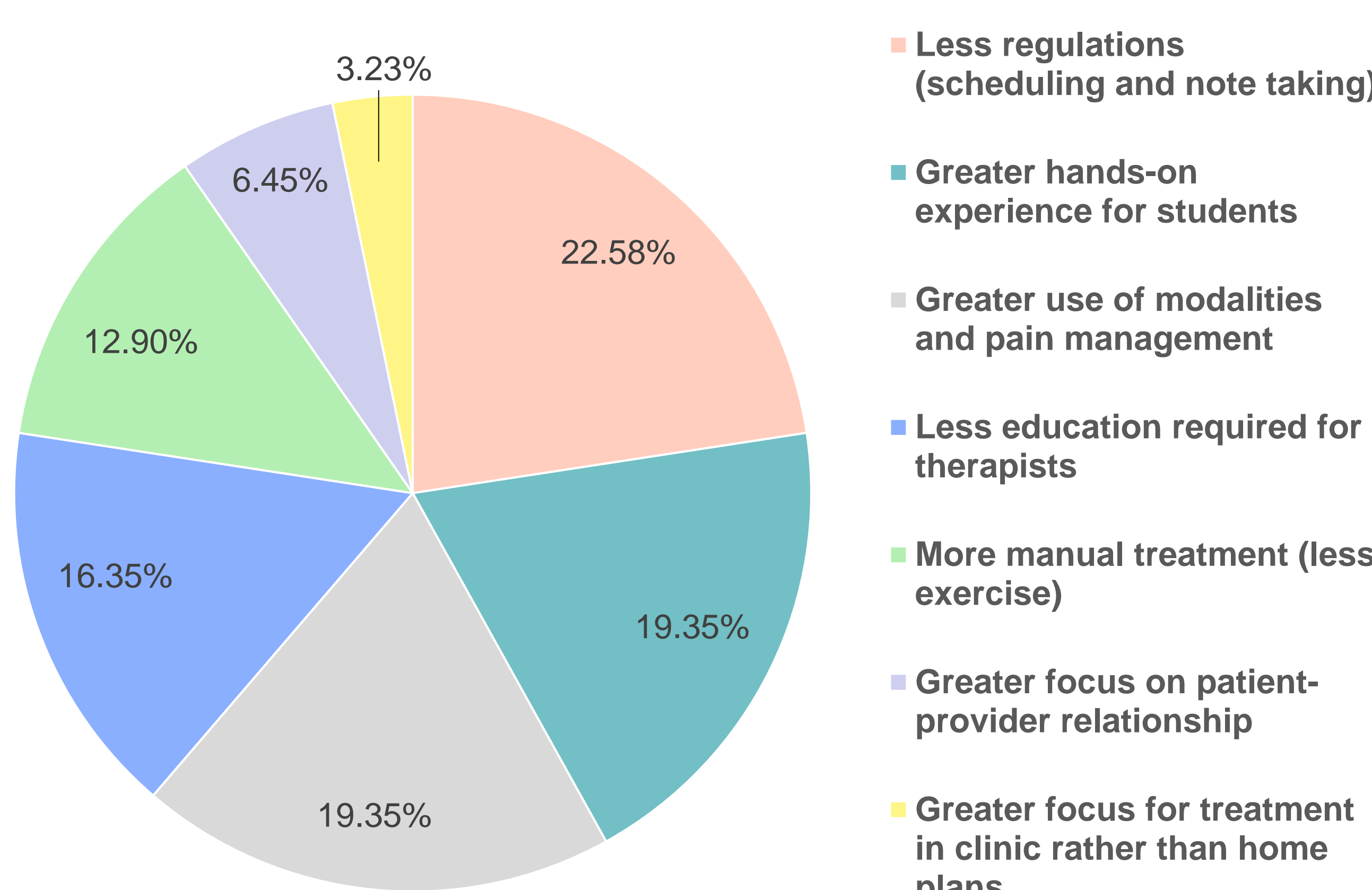
Fig. 2. Knowledge Gained Impacting Cultural Sensitivity



Notes of Interest

- Nearly two-thirds of the reflective statements were related to Communication.
- Students were placed in Physical Therapy Clinics where therapists spoke at least some English.

Fig. 3. Differences Observed in PT Clinics (Mexico vs. United States)



Notes of Interest

- There is less structure in clinics found in Mexico compared to U.S.

Table 1. Paired Sample T-Test Measuring Intercultural Sensitivity

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		Sig. (2-tailed)	
				Lower	Upper		
Question 13	0.000	0.817	0.204	-0.435	0.435	1.000	Attention
Question 14	0.063	0.854	0.213	-0.393	0.518	0.774	
Question 22	-0.500	0.632	0.158	-0.837	-0.163	0.006	
Overall	-0.146	0.608	0.152	-0.470	0.179	0.354	
Question 8	0.000	0.655	0.169	-0.363	0.363	1.000	Confidence
Question 9	-0.200	1.014	0.262	-0.762	0.362	0.458	
Question 10	-0.200	1.320	0.341	-0.931	0.531	0.567	
Question 19	-0.600	0.986	0.254	-1.146	-0.054	0.033	
Question 20	-0.400	0.632	0.163	-0.750	-0.050	0.028	
Overall	-0.280	0.452	0.117	-0.530	-0.030	0.031	
Question 11	-0.063	0.854	0.213	-0.518	0.393	0.774	Interaction Enjoyment
Question 12	-0.250	1.065	0.266	-0.817	0.317	0.362	
Question 21	-0.188	1.109	0.277	-0.778	0.403	0.509	
Overall	-0.105	0.514	0.129	-0.379	0.169	0.427	
Question 1	-0.313	0.602	0.151	-0.633	0.008	0.055	Interaction Involvement
Question 2	-0.125	0.619	0.155	-0.455	0.205	0.432	
Question 3	-0.375	0.806	0.202	-0.805	0.055	0.083	
Question 15	-0.438	0.964	0.241	-0.951	0.076	0.089	
Question 16	-0.125	0.719	0.180	-0.508	0.258	0.497	
Question 17	-0.125	0.619	0.155	-0.455	0.205	0.432	
Overall	-0.25	0.38124	0.09531	-0.45315	-0.04685	0.019	
Question 4	-0.750	1.000	0.250	-1.283	-0.217	0.009	Respect of Cultural Differences
Question 5	0.188	1.109	0.277	-0.403	0.778	0.509	
Question 6	0.000	0.966	0.242	-0.515	0.515	1.000	
Question 7	0.000	0.516	0.129	-0.275	0.275	1.000	
Question 18	-0.563	1.153	0.288	-1.177	0.052	0.070	
Overall	-0.225	0.386	0.096	-0.430	-0.020	0.034	
Overall ISS Results	-0.234	0.268	0.067	-0.377	-0.091	0.003	

DISCUSSION

- Overall, cultural sensitivity growth was found to be significant, which is similar with other short-term intercultural immersion experiences (Hammer, 2012; Lattanzi & Pechak, 2011).
- The significant difference found within the construct "Interaction Involvement" could be related to improved levels of communication (Fig. 2). This is consistent with previous studies on STSA. Interaction involvement has been identified as an intercultural development factor (Hammer, 2012).
- The significant difference found within the construct "Confidence" could be related to improved levels of communication (Fig. 2).
- The significant difference found within the construct "Respect of Cultural Differences" could be related to improved levels of communication (Fig. 2). Respect for other cultures has been identified as an important characteristic for intercultural competency development (Black & Purnell, 2002).
- The observed differences between PT clinics in the U.S. with those in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, may have increased students' understanding and respect of cultural differences (Fig. 3). Responses to the open-ended questions suggest the observed differences were made without judgement, which is key for cultural sensitivity growth (Black & Purnell, 2002).

CONCLUSION

- The Toucan Abroad program appeared to create sufficient opportunities for its participants to develop intercultural sensitivity. More specifically, there appeared to be sufficient, authentic intercultural interactions by which there were improved communication skills and overall improvement in intercultural sensitivity.
- Although there was no structured reflection, there were signs pointing towards NCEA impacting improvements in intercultural development. May need structured reflection opportunities for future research.

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