

A Research on Impacts of Accommodation Alternatives for Tour Study Students Abroad from the Perspective of Cross-cultural Adaptability

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ABSTRACT

This study sets out to investigate the impact of accommodation modes on the cross-cultural adaptability of university students during study tours abroad. Research subjects are participants from Guangzhou College of Commerce engaged in the English and Cultural Awareness Program at the University of Adelaide, whose accommodation were separately arranged with 14 in homestays and 9 in hotels. A mixed-methods approach was employed, utilizing the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI) to quantitatively measure adaptability across four dimensions: Emotional Resilience, Flexibility/Openness, Perceptual Acuity, and Personal Autonomy. Qualitative interviews provided deeper insights into students' experiences while findings reveal that homestay students exhibited greater adaptability, suggesting that immersive experiences in host families enhance cultural adjustment. The study highlights the importance of accommodation choices in short-term study programs abroad and their influence on students' cross-cultural competencies.

KEYWORDS

Cross-cultural adaptability; Accommodation modes; Tour study abroad

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In an age of globalization, the ability to navigate across cultural boundaries has become a critical skill for university students, particularly those engaging in international educational experiences. English-speaking nations such as Australia, with their robust higher education system and diverse cultural landscape, have attracted a significant number of international students seeking to enhance their academic and cultural competencies. The University of Adelaide, , offers a English and Cultural Awareness Program designed to immerse university students from China in the Australian way of life while improving their English proficiency. It provides an backdrop against which to investigate the influence of different accommodation arrangements on students' cross-cultural adaptability. This study gleans insights from 23 students from Guangzhou College of Commerce (GCC), who engaged in the intensive 3-week Tour Study of English and Cultural Awareness at the University of Adelaide, Australia. Within the myriad aspects of studying abroad, the selection of accommodation is considered crucial in molding students' cross-cultural adaptability—the ability to acclimate and flourish within an unfamiliar cultural setting. For the scope of this research, accommodation arrangements are primarily divided into two categories: homestay, where students are embedded with local host families; and hotel stays, where students typically cohabitate with peers from China. Each alternative offers unique social interactions and opportunities for cultural immersion, potentially impacting students' adaptability in diverse manners.

1.2 Research objectives and method

This study aims to fill in the research gap of empirical study on the impacts of choices of accommodation modes on intercultural adaptability of university students from China, by specifically conducting a comparative case study that looks into the experiences of participants from Guangzhou College of Commerce (GCC) in the English and Cultural Awareness Experience at the University of Adelaide. Oriented by the purpose of investigating the correlation between accommodation modes and cross-cultural adaptability, students with two different accommodation modes are invited to participate in survey questions of the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (Kelley & Meyers, 1995). The results are expected to be able to answer the following questions:

(1) How does the choice of accommodation mode during study tours in Australia impact the cross-cultural adaptability of University students from China?

(2)How can study abroad programs be optimized to support students' cross-cultural growth and prepare them for the global workforce?

The development of students' cross-cultural effectiveness will be assessed using the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI), a well-established and reliable instrument for measuring changes in cross-cultural adaptability. The CCAI evaluates strengths and weaknesses across four key dimensions: Emotional Resilience, Flexibility/Openness, Perceptual Acuity, and Personal Autonomy (Kelley & Meyers, 1995). The collecting data afterwards will be using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software for accurate analysis.

1.3 Significance

The significance of this study is twofold: Firstly, this research is particularly timely given the increasing emphasis on the correlation between choices of accommodation modes and university students' cross-cultural adaptability during their study experience abroad. It also intends to fill in the gap of empirical studies for such a more concrete perspective for cross-cultural studies. The findings will not only inform educational institutions and program providers on the design of effective study abroad programs but also provide insights for students considering similar programs. It also highlights the relevance and potential contributions to the field of international education.

Secondly, it suggests a reevaluation of cultural teaching objectives within curricula, with the aim of expanding the global perspective of second language programs. This research will inform the setting and design of cooperative programs with English-speaking countries. The development of curricula, program design, and pedagogical approaches, ensuring that college graduates are equipped to contribute positively to the global community. It is expected to provide new insights into the development of more effective strategies for integrating cross-cultural education into study tours and beyond.

1.4 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are crafted to delve into the correlation between accommodation types and the enhancement of cross-cultural adaptability among participants in the Cultural Awareness Program:

(1) Hypothesis 1: Students opting for homestay arrangements will display higher levels of cross-cultural adaptability than those residing in hotel accommodations.

(2) Hypothesis 2: A positive correlation is anticipated between the choice of accommodation and overall satisfaction with the study tour program, with students in homestay arrangements likely to report higher satisfaction levels owing to the enriching cultural experiences they encounter.

2 Literature review

The literature review provides a solid foundation for understanding the complexities of cross-cultural adaptability and competence, and offers a comprehensive overview of the concept and development of cross-cultural adaptability, the importance of cross-cultural competence, and strategies for enhancing cross-cultural communication skills.

2.1 Overview of cross-cultural adaptability

Cross-cultural adaptability is a multifaceted construct that encapsulates the dynamic process by which individuals adjust to new cultural milieus. Pioneering works in this domain have been contributed by various scholars, each bringing a distinct perspective to the concept. Y.Y. Kim (1988) was instrumental in highlighting the continuous self-adjustments required of communicators when confronted with the challenges of an unfamiliar cultural environment. This process, according to Kim, leads to the gradual adaptation to a new lifestyle and the formation of an intercultural identity. Sverre Lysgaard's (1955) U-shaped curve theory of adaptation is a seminal work that posits an initial honeymoon phase followed by a period of cultural shock, culminating in gradual adaptation. This model underscores the most arduous phase of adjustment, offering a framework to understand the ebb and flow of cultural adaptation. Building on these foundations, Ward and Kennedy (1994) delineated two interrelated dimensions of cross-cultural adaptation: sociocultural and psychological adaptation. Sociocultural adaptation pertains to an individual's capacity to manage daily life and social interactions within a new cultural context, whereas psychological adaptation encompasses the psychological outcomes associated with personal and cultural identity clarity, subjective well-being, and emotional satisfaction. John W. Berry's (1997) substantial contributions to the field further elaborated on these concepts, emphasizing the importance of both sociocultural and psychological adaptation in achieving cross-cultural competence. Knutson (2006) advocates for a relational approach to culture learning, stressing the importance of understanding the interplay between the target and home cultures from the learner's culturally subjective position. The Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI) has been extensively validated in various studies. Studies also carried for the validation of Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory while Nguyen (2010) examined the factor structure of the CCAI using confirmatory factor analysis, while DeWald & Solomon (2009) employed the inventory to measure cultural competence in a dental hygiene program.

2.2 On strategies for cross-cultural communication

Chen (2023) investigated the barriers to foreign students' cross-cultural communicative competence in China, such as diverse multicultural backgrounds, weak cross-cultural abilities, and low Chinese proficiency. Chen proposed a comprehensive set of teaching methods and strategies to overcome these obstacles by expanding the cross-cultural communication platform for these students. Michele (2023) explored the impact of cultural excavation activities on the intercultural sensitivity of teacher candidates during their study abroad in Peru. The study's findings, supported by the

Intercultural Development Inventory, indicated increased sensitivity among participants, with a notable enhancement in contextual awareness regarding their own and others' identities. Dong (2023) focused on enhancing students' cross-cultural awareness through interactive English second language teaching. The study proposed a suite of teaching methods and encouraged practical cross-cultural communication activities, which were found to be beneficial for language learning and expression ability development.

Despite the existing body of research, there is a noted scarcity of studies focusing specifically on how study tours to English-speaking destinations, such as Adelaide, contribute to university students' cross-cultural adaptability during their empirical experiences.

3 Research design

3.1 Program descriptions

The intensive 3-week English & Cultural Awareness Program, organized by the English Language Centre at the University of Adelaide, provides an immersive educational experience aimed at refining participants' English language skills. The curriculum is designed to enhance not only their linguistic proficiency but also their confidence in utilizing English in practical, real-world contexts, both within Australia and on the international stage. The program's objectives, closely mirrored in its schedule, encompass the following:

- Enhancing English language proficiency
- Deepening understanding of the structure and function of the English language
- Developing the ability to communicate in English for daily needs
- Gaining insights into Australian society and education
- Discussing various aspects of Australian life and culture
- Cultivating negotiation, cooperation, and teamwork skills
- Fostering intercultural and international awareness

3.2 Research subject

The thesis will take the relationship between accommodation arrangement and Chinese students' cross-cultural adaptability as the research subject. The survey sample consisted of a total of 23 students enrolled in the English and Cultural Awareness program at University of Adelaide, with 14 opting for homestay arrangements and 9 preferring hotel accommodation. Employing a two-group experimental design, the study evaluates the impact of short-term study abroad programs on cross-cultural adaptability, with participants divided into two groups based on their accommodation preferences: the homestays group (14 students) and the hotel-stay group (9 students). The homestay group lived with approved local families in Adelaide and its suburbs, while the hotel group stayed in hotels primarily with their Chinese peers.

3.3 Research methods

This research adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative surveys with qualitative depth-interviews, to explore the development of students' intercultural effectiveness as measured by the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI) instrument. The data collected from the questionnaires was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Upon the completion of the study tour, participants were invited to complete the CCAI form, a 52-item instrument that measures cultural adaptability across the four aforementioned dimensions. Responses were recorded on a Likert scale ranging from "Definitely not true" to "Definitely true" for all subscales, providing a nuanced understanding of each participant's cross-cultural adaptability.

The inventory, comprising 52 questions, evaluates participants' self-awareness across four key dimensions using a Likert scale: Emotional Resilience, Flexibility/Openness, Perceptual Acuity, and Personal Autonomy. The collected data will be analysed by SPSS. These dimensions are defined as follows:

- (1) Emotional Resilience: The ability to cope with challenges, respond positively to new experiences, and manage culture shock effectively.
- (2) Flexibility/Openness: The readiness to embrace diversity and interact comfortably with a broad spectrum of individuals.
- (3) Perceptual Acuity: The skill in demonstrating empathy, attending to interpersonal dynamics, and interpreting verbal and nonverbal cues.
- (4) Personal Autonomy: The ability to respect others while maintaining a strong sense of personal identity.

4 Case study

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Quantitative results from questionnaire surveys

The data collected from the questionnaires was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The research findings presented offer valuable insights into how different accommodation modes during study abroad programs can influence the cross-cultural adaptability of university students in English-speaking countries, specifically focusing on the case of students from Guangzhou College of Commerce (GCC) participating in the English and Cultural Awareness Program at the University of Adelaide. The study's comprehensive analysis, based on the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI), reveals distinct patterns in emotional resilience, flexibility/openness, perceptual acuity, and personal autonomy between students who chose host family accommodation and those who opted for hotel accommodation.

Emotional Resilience: The average score for the host family group in Emotional Resilience was 4.21, while the hotel accommodation group scored 4.6. This suggests that students in hotel accommodation may be more effective at maintaining a positive attitude and coping with cultural shock when facing the pressures and challenges of a new environment.

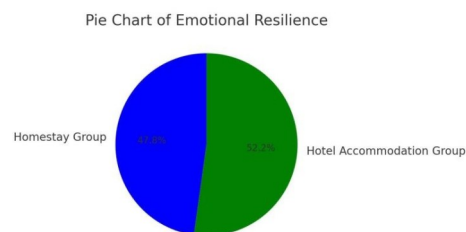


Figure 1

The higher average score of 4.6 for the hotel accommodation group in emotional resilience may also suggest that these students might have had a more effective coping mechanism when dealing with the pressures and challenges of a new cultural environment. This could be attributed to the perceived stability and comfort that hotel accommodations provide, which can act as a buffer against cultural shock. In contrast, the host family group's slightly lower score of 4.21 indicates that they might have experienced a greater degree of cultural stress, which could be a result of the closer and more constant interaction with a host family, leading to more frequent encounters with cultural differences.

Flexibility/Openness: The host family group scored 4.14 in Flexibility/Openness, slightly lower than the hotel accommodation group's score of 4.2. This suggests that both groups demonstrated a high level of openness to engaging with people from different cultural backgrounds. The slight difference could be interpreted as the hotel accommodation group having slightly more opportunities to explore and interact with the local culture on their own terms, which might foster a sense of adventure and openness.

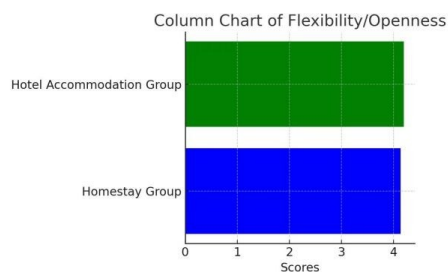


Figure 2

Perceptual Acuity: The host family group's average score in Perceptual Acuity scored at 4, on par with the hotel accommodation group. This indicates that both groups scored equally in perceptual acuity, indicating that they were equally effective in understanding and perceiving the emotions and behaviors of people from different cultural backgrounds. This result is encouraging as it shows that regardless of the accommodation mode, students were able to develop a keen sense of cultural awareness and empathy, which is crucial for successful cross-cultural interactions.

Personal Autonomy: The host family group scored 4.57 in Personal Autonomy, higher than the hotel accommodation group's score of 4.3. This suggests that students in host family were more confident in maintaining their personal values and self-identity. The result also suggests that living with a host family might afford students more opportunities to

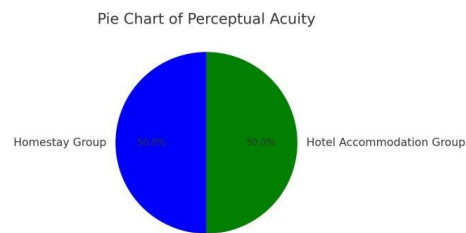


Figure 3

exercise independence while being supported by a local family. This setup could foster a sense of responsibility and self-reliance, as students navigate their new environment with the guidance of their host family.

4.1.2 Qualitative analysis from depth-interviews

Additionally, qualitative analysis from in-depth interviews to some percentages of participants have presented more solid and reliable data contribution to this study., 5 of 18 questions of the Emotional Resilience subscale were particularly crafted to gauge participants' ability to rebound from negative emotions and maintain a positive outlook towards new experiences. Qualitative results prove to be truly coherent with the results from questionnaire surveys.

On "I believe I can live a fulfilling life", with host family respondents revealed that host family participants are more likely to 'strongly agree' and 'agree' compared to those in hotel accommodations, achieving a slightly higher overall average score. Homestay respondents have higher recognition in "Strongly Agree" and "Agree", yielding an average score of 4.5. This suggests that host family environments may more effectively nurture students' belief in leading a fulfilling life during their study tour in Adelaide.

In terms of "I strive to comprehend the perspectives and emotions of others" during the study tour, 64.29% of host family students "Strongly Agree", compared to 60% of those in apartment accommodations. This indicates a greater propensity for students to engage with and understand others' viewpoints and feelings within a host family setting. In conclusion, a host family environment appears to enhance students' capacity for empathy.

The reflection from "I feel confident in my ability to cope with life" also shows that 57.14% of host family students express confidence in coping with life, with over 57% 'strongly agreeing' and 35.71% 'agreeing.' For apartment accommodation students, 50% 'strongly agree' and 40% 'agree.' This indicates that students choosing host family are more likely to feel confident in their abilities compared to those opting for apartment accommodation.

When asked if "I can laugh at myself when I make cultural mistakes", students from both host family and hotel accommodations scored an average of 4 points. However, there are nuances in the distribution about 7% of host family students express disagreement, while the rest believe they can generally laugh at themselves during awkward moments. This suggests that some host family students may have faced real challenges or conflicts not experienced by those in apartment accommodations.

4.2 Discussions

First and foremost, the findings reveal that while both groups demonstrated a commendable level of cross-cultural adaptability, students in homestay accommodations exhibited a more pronounced ability to navigate and communicate within diverse cultural contexts. This is evidenced by their higher scores in Emotional Resilience, Flexibility/Openness, Perceptual Acuity, and Personal Autonomy as measured by the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI). These results underscore the significance of the homestay experience in fostering a deeper understanding of the host culture and providing a supportive environment that encourages personal growth and autonomy.

Secondly, the data analysis results show that students who chose host family performed more prominently in multiple dimensions of cross-cultural adaptability. This may be because host family provides a more immersive cultural experience, allowing students to directly engage with and understand the local culture, customs, and lifestyle. This aligns with the argument that homestay context provides a more immersive cultural experience, which can accelerate cultural learning and adaptation. The structured and supportive environment of a host family can facilitate cultural integration, as students are encouraged to participate in family routines and traditions, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of the host culture.

Furthermore, the higher emotional resilience scores observed in the hotel accommodation group suggest that these students may have developed effective coping mechanisms to deal with the pressures of a new cultural environment. However, the homestay group's marginally lower scores in this dimension indicate that the intensity of cultural interactions in a homestay setting could lead to more frequent encounters with cultural differences, thus presenting a greater adaptive challenge. In contrast, students in hotel accommodations might have missed out on these immersive

experiences, as they are more likely to interact within a familiar social circle, which can limit their exposure to the cultural nuances of the host country. They may have been more limited to interactions within their tour group or classmates, lacking opportunities for in-depth cultural exchanges with the local community. This could explain the observed differences in cross-cultural adaptability scores between the two groups.

4.3 Implication of the study

This research is particularly timely given the increasing emphasis on intercultural competence in higher education and the growing number of students participating in international study experiences. The findings not only inform educational institutions and program providers on the design of effective study abroad programs but also provide insights for students considering similar programs. It would also be beneficial to conduct comparative studies across multiple English-speaking countries to understand the broader implications of accommodation modes on cross-cultural adaptability. Further research is needed to explore these nuances and to what extent the findings are generalizable across different cultural and educational settings. Future research are expected to further explore the long-term effects of different accommodation modes on cross-cultural adaptability and the extent to which these experiences transfer to professional settings.

5 Conclusion

The research findings align positively with the hypotheses, highlighting the importance of accommodation mode as a significant factor influencing cross-cultural adaptability. It suggests that educational institutions and program providers should consider the type of accommodation when designing study abroad programs, as it can significantly impact students' intercultural learning outcomes. The nature of the host family or the social dynamics within a hotel can greatly affect the student experience. Homestay arrangements, often considered a cultural immersion strategy, provide students with firsthand exposure to local customs, language, and lifestyle. This setup can accelerate cultural learning and enhance students' emotional resilience, flexibility, perceptual acuity, and personal autonomy—key dimensions of cross-cultural adaptability. Given these factors, the general trend observed in the study—that host family accommodations may enhance cross-cultural adaptability—might hold true in other English-speaking countries, with more concerns on the specific context of each country and institution.

Overall, the findings of this study align with the existing body of literature that advocates for a relational approach to culture learning, emphasizing the importance of understanding the interplay between the target and home cultures from the learner's culturally subjective position. By providing a structured and supportive environment, homestays can facilitate cultural integration and enhance students' intercultural communicative competence.

About the Author

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