

Intercultural hospitality learning in an on-campus exchange between nursing students and international students (business administration): Changes in interest and learning experiences

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INTRODUCTION

In intercultural hospitality education, goals extend beyond language proficiency to encompass mutual understanding, acceptance of cultural differences, empathic communication, and reciprocal care. This on-campus program connected nursing students with international students (Business Administration) from the same university, positioning four small-group exchanges as a practical setting for intercultural hospitality learning aligned with Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

METHOD

Design and setting

We employed an on-campus, repeated cross-sectional design. Four exchange sessions (50–70 minutes) were conducted in small groups of four students (2 international + 2 nursing). International students remained constant across sessions (W1–W4), while nursing students rotated each time. *Baseline interest (W0)* was measured prior to the exchange sessions to capture pre-existing intercultural interest.

Themes and ESD/SDGs

Each session paired two discussion themes mapped to ESD and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

W1 money (SDGs 8, 10, 12) + health (2, 3);

W2 toilets (3, 6) + social contribution (1, 16, 17);

W3 education (4, 5, 10) + disaster preparedness (9, 11);

W4 waste (including recycling and food waste) (12, 13, 14, 15) + home remedies (1, 3).

The numbers in parentheses indicate the corresponding SDG goals used as a conceptual framework. Topics were announced one week in advance with linguistic scaffolds (key terms, sentence starters, sample questions).

Procedure

After a brief plenary introduction, groups worked in two parallel tracks within the same classroom, each focusing on one of the assigned themes. Discussions followed a standardized interactional sequence (example → clarification → paraphrase → summary). Each group appointed a leader (facilitation) and a recorder (synthesis). Group outputs were shared in a brief plenary session, followed by individual reflection.

Data and analysis

Questionnaires were administered to both international and nursing students; however, the present analysis reports international student responses only. Measures included interest (top-2), perceived goal attainment (top-1), and four open-ended reflection prompts. One international participant's response was excluded during data cleaning, resulting in a minor revision of valid sample size. Descriptive statistics with Wilson 95% confidence intervals were calculated, and open-ended responses were analyzed thematically.

FINDINGS

Interest remained consistently high from baseline *W0* (84.2%) through *W1–W4* (100% at *W1* and *W3*; 92.3% at *W2*; 93.3% at *W4*). Full goal attainment showed a **session-specific peak** rather than a monotonic increase (64.7% at *W1*; 69.2% at *W2*; 83.3% at *W3*; 66.7% at *W4*). Qualitative analysis identified five recurring themes: cultural understanding; communication and reciprocity; preparation and vocabulary; awareness of Japanese language use; and collaboration and facilitation.

DISCUSSION

The session-specific peak in full goal attainment observed in *W3* is best interpreted through a hospitality lens rather than as a simple instructional effect. In *W3*, clearer preparation, shared vocabulary, and predictable interactional structures reduced cognitive and linguistic burden, enabling participants to attend to others rather than to task management. Such conditions mirror hospitality service environments, where guests feel welcomed through clarity, predictability, and anticipatory support.

Across sessions, themes such as hygiene, safety, education, disaster preparedness, and environmental responsibility revealed hospitality as a foundational social value linked to dignity, trust, and mutual respect, rather than as a context-bound service skill. Importantly, institutional trends from prior on-campus studies indicate that learning-related factors (e.g., topic relevance, satisfaction, perceived usefulness) vary in their influence across sessions. The present findings align with this pattern, demonstrating that intercultural hospitality learning reaches a **situational maximum** when thematic relevance, role clarity, and communicative scaffolding converge.

IMPLICATIONS OR CONCLUSION

Rather than increasing interaction frequency, intercultural hospitality learning appears optimized through careful design of themes, predictable structures, role rotation, and linguistic scaffolding. These findings offer practical implications for tourism and hospitality education, where effective service encounters similarly rely on anticipatory support and psychological safety. Future research will examine theme and role effects using standardization or generalized linear models and deepen discourse analysis through NLP/LLM approaches.

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