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Term Paper

Cross-Cultural Learning as a prerequisite for acquiring Intercultural Competence - Case study on working as a workcamp team leader at Ecumenical Youth Services (EYS)

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1 Introduction

In today's world, internationalization and globalization are an integral part of our society. People with different cultural backgrounds interact with each other in political, business or private relationships.

Know-how and technical specialization are not enough to be successful in an international context or to work effectively with an international team. In order to communicate and cooperate with people from different cultural backgrounds in a way that is satisfactory for all sides, the acquisition of intercultural competence is an indispensable prerequisite. This includes, among other things, intercultural sensitivity, understanding, and the willingness to engage with culture-specific differences (Thomas, 2010, p. 11). The complex networking makes it necessary to have a deeper understanding of the processes that accompany intercultural contacts and enable successful exchange between people from different cultures (Yue & Quynh, 2012, p. 133). The acquisition of intercultural competence is not the result of a single experience. It should be seen as an ongoing process of intercultural learning (Deardorff, 2006, p. 259), which is characterised by a multitude of formal and informal variables. It takes place within the family, the educational system, the workplace and society in general and could not go without regular intercultural encounters (Engel & Kempen, 2017, p. 40).

Youth exchange projects can be an important platform for low-threshold intercultural learning (Thomas et al., 2007). Numerous schools, universities and other organisations therefore offer opportunities to learn or work in an unfamiliar cultural context. These exchange programmes often last from several months to a year. However, studies have shown that even short periods of two to four weeks have a positive influence on the personal development of young people and a lasting effect in terms of intercultural learning, supporting social, intercultural and foreign language skills (Ilg, 2020, p. 132).

This case study aims to build on this topic. In order to examine how short-term but recurring international encounters affect intercultural learning and the intercultural competence of young people compared to limited intercultural contacts, the work camp organisation Ecumenical Youth Services (EYS) in Berlin was chosen. The author of this paper took part in the programme as a volunteer team member 25 years ago. The EYS work camps are a place where young people from numerous countries live and work together for two weeks. The case study addresses the following research question: *What is the impact of recurring short-term international volunteering on young people's intercultural learning and competence, compared to limited intercultural exposure?*

2 Theoretical Part

2.1 Intercultural Competence

About 65 years ago, Kalervo Oberg developed the Culture Shock Theory. Since then, the topic of intercultural competence has been the focus of research from various perspectives (Yue & Quynh, 2012, p. 139). Because a definition of the term is based on an understanding of culture (Genkova & Flohr, 2022, p. 97), the following subchapters will first focus on this before defining the term and presenting two several related models to illustrate and further explain the theoretical principles used here.

2.1.1 Understanding culture – The Iceberg Model

The concept of culture is complex and difficult to describe. Since culture is inseparably linked to the identity of individuals, it is taken for granted. It encompasses human behaviour and thinking and enables people to satisfy their needs for identity, inclusion, boundary regulation, adaptation and communication in their living environment (El Amri, 2024, p. 10195). Communication is the central factor to incorporate or organize these different needs. Through social interaction between individuals and their environment, people become co-creators of culture on the one hand, and on the other hand, they are actively and passively shaped by their surrounding culture from birth (El Amri, 2024, p. 10196).

When different cultures interact, it is essential for mutual understanding to expand knowledge and awareness of other cultural norms. Furthermore only encounters with other cultures create awareness of one's own culture. Cultural differences may be visible, but the greater part is not visible. To illustrate this, anthropologist Edward T. Hall developed the iceberg model of cultures for the field of cultural studies in 1976.

The conscious, directly observable aspects of culture, which make up only ten percent of cultural identity, include artefacts, symbols, practices, art and architecture, language, clothing and rituals and so on. The other ninety percent remain invisible. These are unconscious, formative elements such as values, beliefs, norms, ways of thinking, belief systems, expectations and assumptions. Hall noted: "Culture hides much more than it reveals, and strangely enough what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants" (quoted from El Amri, 2024, p. 10196). The invisible aspects are crucial for understanding culture and intercultural communication. The boundaries between the "visible" and "invisible" areas are fluid and not always clear-cut. In a similar way, Geert Hofstede described the phenomenon of culture in 1980 using an onion model (El Amri, 2024, p. 10197).

For successful intercultural communication or cooperation, it is particularly important to take into account the hidden aspects of culture. Otherwise, misunderstandings and problems arise when people underestimate or overlook the underlying, invisible values and assumptions (El Amri, 2024, p. 10197).

Figure 1: Iceberg Model of Cultures

Visible, conscious level of culture — food, language, fashion, music, games etc.

unvisible, unconscious aspects of culture — values, traditions, beliefs, meaning of life, morals, philosophy, ethics, customs, body language, self-concepts etc.

geography

family

religion

history

educational systems

ideologies

economics
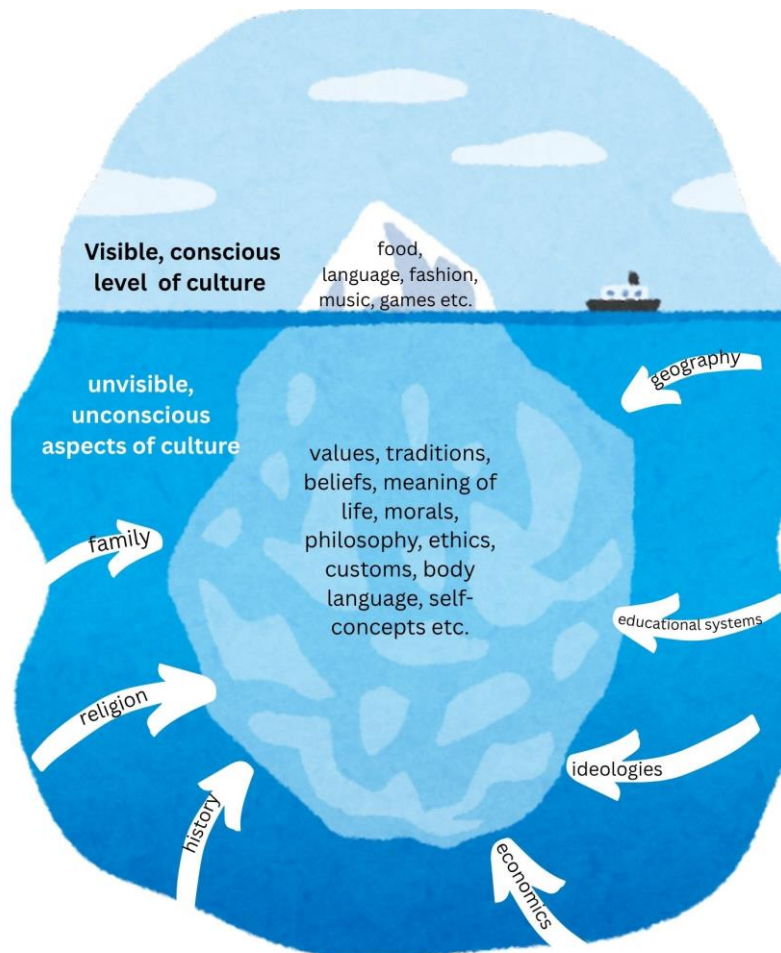
Figure 1: Own representation based on El Amri, 2024, p. 11096.

2.1.2 Definition of the term "Intercultural Competence"[1]

Even though Intercultural Competence has become significantly more important in recent years, there is still no standard definition of the term (Deardorff, 2006, p. 242; Bergann et al., 2023, p. 5). Instead there is little agreement on important conceptual issues such as the prerequisites, core elements and consequences of intercultural competence (Engel & Kempen, 2017, p. 41). The minimum consensus is that it describes a

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[1] The terms "intercultural intelligence" and "cultural competence" are used synonymously. See Genkova et al., 2022, p. 180.

person's context-specific ability to act effectively across cultures (Leung, p. 490; see also Hammer et al., 2003, p. 422; Bergann et al., 2023, p. 5). Darla Deardorff, an American educational scientist, characterises intercultural competence as 'behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately (based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes) to achieve one's goals to some degree' (Deardorff, 2006, p. 254). The European Commission's Committee of Experts on the Intercultural Integration of Migrants (ADI-Int) advocates understanding intercultural competence as a holistic approach that includes values, understanding, attitudes and skills and is based on the four principles of intercultural integration (ensuring equality, valuing diversity, promoting intercultural interaction and promoting active citizenship and participation) (Committee, 2022, p. 6). Overall, it is clear that intercultural competence is a multidimensional construct that consists of various qualifications, knowledge and personal characteristics and encompasses a broad spectrum of skills (Genkova & Flohr, 2022, p. 97; Committee 2022, p. 6; Johnson et al., 2006, p. 530).

2.1.3 The Affect-Behaviour-Cognitive Framework (ABC Model)

The Affect-Behaviour-Cognition Model (ABC Model) summarises numerous studies in the field of intercultural contact (Yue & Quynh, 2012, p. 139) and originally comes from the field of social psychology. Its transfer to research on intercultural competence is mainly due to the work of Colleen Ward, Stephen Bochner and Adrian Furnham, who developed the ABC model of acculturation as an integrative and theoretical framework model to explain adaptation processes of people in intercultural contexts and used it as a basis for operational measurement of intercultural competence (cf. Bergann et al., 2023; Engel & Kempen, 2017). Key dimensions are affective, cognitive and behavioural aspects, the successful interaction of which is essential for dealing successfully with cultural diversity and which are seen by various scientists as basic dimensions of intercultural competence (Yue & Quynh, 2012, p. 137; Bergann et al., 2023, p. 2; 6; Engel & Kempen, 2017, p. 42). A similar model developed by van Dyne et al. (Cultural Intelligence) adds a fourth dimension: metacognitive CQ. This corresponds in part to the cognitive aspect of the ABC model, but goes beyond it (Genkova et al., 2022, p. 181).

The ABC model serves as a theoretical framework, but also as a basis for the operational measurement of intercultural competence (cf. Bergann et al., 2023; Engel & Kempen, 2017). It forms the theoretical basis for the case study presented here.

The following table shows the individual facets in more detail:

Table 1: ABC Model

Dimension	Definition	Subcategories (examples, additions are possible)
Affective	• In the context of intercultural competence, also referred to as attitude or motivation • Willingness to embrace new things • Motivation to interact with people from other cultures	• Openness, empathy, tolerance • Tolerance of ambiguity • Self-confidence • Flexibility • Ability to reflect • Appreciation of and interest in other cultures
Behaviour	• Ability/skill to put intercultural knowledge and openness into practice • Adequate response to cultural differences • Ability to adapt communication to different contexts • Actively promote understanding in exchanges with different cultures	• Respect • Flexibility • Appropriate verbal and non-verbal behaviour • Adaptability
Cognition	• Knowledge of one's own and other cultures • Knowledge of stereotypes, prejudices and their effects • Ability to separate observations and interpretations (e.g. not rushing to judge unfamiliar behaviour negatively)	• Knowledge and understanding of cultural differences, social norms, communication codes, values and traditions • Communication skills (language skills, non-verbal communication) • Foreign language skills

Source: Own representation based on the ABC Model of intercultural competence by Bergann et al., 2023, p. 2; 6.

2.1.4 The Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence by Deardorff

Based on her research, Deardorff compiled various facets of intercultural competence, which she assigned to the different areas of affect, behaviour and cognition. Her Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence illustrates intercultural competence hierarchically and at the same time focuses on its development. She establishes four dependent and level that are based on each other as prerequisites and claims that openness, curiosity and respect for other cultures are the fundamental basis for successfully acquiring intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006, p. 254). Building on this, the second level of the pyramid contains knowledge and understanding of both - one's own and other cultures and world views – and practical skills of the individual that are necessary

for successful intercultural communication and interaction: listening, observing, inter-preting, analysing, evaluating and being able to relate to different cultural contexts. The second level thus comprises the cognitive foundation and analytical skills necessary to understand and process cultural differences. The third level initially focuses on the desired internal result and the extent to which a person is able to adapt internally to different cultural contexts, which Deardorff refers to as an 'informed frame of reference' or 'reference/filter shift'. In addition to an ethnorelative perspective and empathy, this includes the ability to change perspectives and to tolerate cultural ambiguity. The top stage of the pyramid symbolises the observable application of competence and its effectiveness and appropriateness in intercultural situations. 'Appropriateness' is defined here as the avoidance of violations of valuable rules (Deardorff, 2006, p. 256). Each person achieves this level individually and can adapt to and interact in different cultural contexts by applying their acquired knowledge and existing attitudes. This level creates a connection between internal understanding and the external result that is recognisable to everyone (Deardorff, 2006, p. 254). The pyramid model takes into account the fact that intercultural competence is a developing factor. With the help of the model, assessment indicators can be developed for specific or general assessments of intercultural competence. In addition, the model emphasises that recognisable intercultural competence initially requires an internal process of change (Deardorff, 2006, p. 255).

Figure 2: Pyramid model by Deardorff
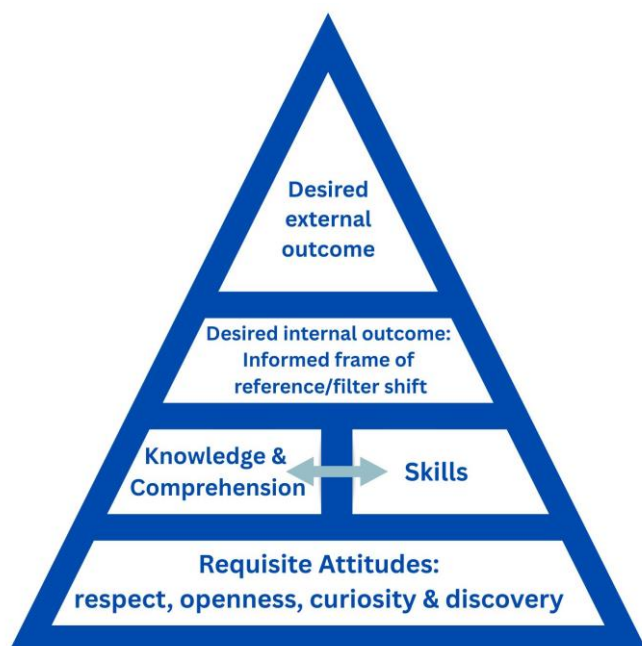
Source: Own representation based on Deardorff, 2006, p. 254.

2.2   Definition of the term Cross-Cultural Learning

The concept of intercultural competence used here is based on the ideas of van Dyne et al., Deardorff et al., and assumes that intercultural competence is a skill that can be actively learned and practised over time, rather than just a personality trait that only develops through life-changing experiences (Genkova et al., 2022, p. 181; Engel & Kempen, 2017, p. 40). This learning process is understood as intercultural learning. In the course of this process, individuals acquire knowledge and skills through engagement with other cultures that enable them to understand and interact with foreign people. They further develop their patterns of thinking and behaviour, thereby building intercultural competence (Genkova & Flohr, 2022, p. 98; Vromans et al., 2023, p. 2). The current literature on intercultural learning describes the elements that are essential for the development of intercultural competence: knowledge about a specific culture and about cultural differences in general, the necessary application of what has been learned and reflection on the respective interactions, as well as the resulting further behavioural planning and adaptation of actions (Genkova et al., 2022, p. 180). In contrast, the learning process itself has been little studied to date and how and why intercultural learning takes place is predominantly theoretical and lacks empirical basic research (Vromans et al., 2023, p. 2; Genkova et al., 2022, p. 181).

### 2.2.1   The DMIS model by Milton Bennett

A well-known model that attempts to schematically illustrate how intercultural competence develops through learning is the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) by American sociologist Milton Bennett. It describes in a theoretical continuum of six phases how individuals develop growing sensitivity and competence in dealing with cultural differences from denial to integration (Paige et al., 2003, p. 469; Vromans et al., 2023, p. 2).

The ethnocentric phases start with the lowest stage of denial at stage one (denial of difference). One's own culture is perceived as the only relevant one, and other cultures are met with ignorance or indifference. This can be unintentional (isolation due to life circumstances) or intentional (separation) isolation. People who are in this phase have often grown up in culturally homogeneous environments with little contact with people to other cultures. People at stage two (defence against difference) view the differences they recognise negatively and feel threatened by them. Dualistic 'us-them' thinking and negative stereotyping are widespread, as are positive evaluation of one's own group and negative evaluation of other groups, and the reversal phase, in which the other culture is considered superior to one's own, leading to negative evaluation of one's own group and positive evaluation of other groups. At stage three (minimisation of differ-

ence), individuals recognise superficial cultural differences but focus on similarities and view all people as fundamentally equal.

The three ethnorelative phases commence with stage 4 (acceptance of difference). Cultural differences are recognised, accepted as normal and desirable, and viewed in their own cultural context. The guiding principle is cultural relativism, according to which no culture is better or worse than another. At the stage of adaptation to difference (stage five), individuals strive to put themselves in their counterpart's shoes and adopt their perspective (insider's point of view). Effective communication and interaction with people from other cultures is possible without any problems. Empathy and pluralism are of essential importance. People who operate at level six (integration of difference) have expanded their cultural identity to such an extent that they can switch easily between different cultural perspectives and have integrated cultural differences into their own identity. They can promote constructive contact between cultures (Bennett, 2017; Paige et al., 2003, pp. 469-472).

Figure 3: Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)
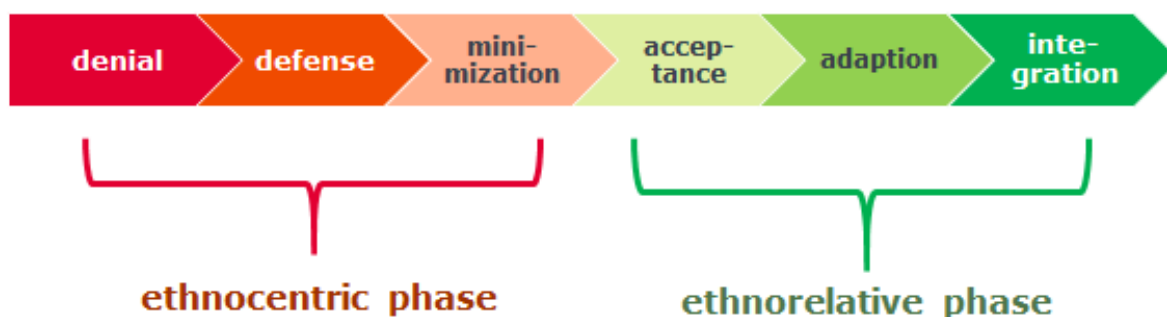
Source: Own illustration based on Bennett, 2017; Paige et al., 2003, pp. 469-472.

2.2.2 The Process Model by Deardorff

The fact that acquiring intercultural competence requires continuous learning and practice as a lifelong, dynamic process is emphasised more strongly in Deardorff's process model. It should therefore be used here as a complementary model for intercultural learning. This model contains the same elements as the pyramid model, but illustrates the complexity and process-oriented nature of the continuous adjustments and developments that lead to internal changes and visible, appropriate behaviour. Intercultural learning is seen as an integral part of the process and displays attitudes, knowledge, skills, reflection and communication as interlinked and coherent. The model illustrates the transition from the personal to the interpersonal level, i.e. intercultural interaction.

Here, too, attitude-related elements serve as the starting point of the cycle (Deardorff, 2006, p. 257).

Figure 4: Process Model of Intercultural Competence by Deardorff
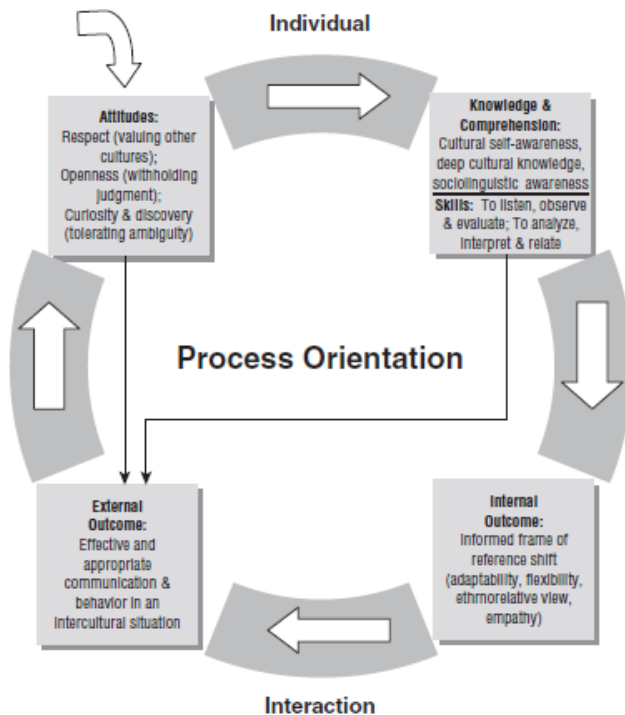
Source: Deardorff, 2006, p. 257.

3 Casestudy: The EYS as a place of intercultural learning

3.1   The Ecumenical Youth Service

The Ecumenical Youth Services (EYS) is an international youth camp programme in the tradition of the Ecumenical Reconstruction Camps, which were developed after the Second World War. Young people between the ages of 17 and 26 from Europe and beyond live together for two weeks and work for free about six hours a day on a cultural or ecological project in Germany. The EYS is organised by the Evangelical Church of Berlin-Brandenburg-Silesian Upper Lusatia. A group usually consists of 10-15 participants from at least five countries and has two to three volunteer team leaders (EYS, n.d., International). For example, in the summer of 2024, five international camps with 83 participants from 14 countries on three continents were held. In preparation for their work as team leaders, two training seminars (online and in person) are held each year. These seminars focus on topics that teach basic skills for leadership tasks, such as organisational issues, conceptualising content-related work and legal, insurance or

financial issues, but also methods and forms of intercultural learning and knowledge about group processes (EYS, n.d., Teamer preparation).

3.2   Research design and implementation

The following research question was the guide for the case study: *What is the impact of recurring short-term international volunteering on young people's intercultural learning and competence, compared to limited intercultural exposure?*

The term 'short period' refers to the duration of the work camps (two weeks) as well as the joint preparation and follow-up work in the team (approx. eight days per year).

A comparative study was conducted and two groups were surveyed using a standardised interview questionnaire over a period of 14 days:

- The first group (Group one) consisted of volunteer team members of the EYS Workcamp organisation who come from all over Europe and act as camp leaders. The questionnaire was sent to 67 team members and filled out by 13 people. The age of the study participants was later than originally expected.

- A second group (Group two), consisting mainly of young people who are not active in the work camp organisation and do not have a regular international work context, was recruited by passing on the interview request to acquaintances of the author and, in turn, their acquaintances. Of the 43 people to whom the link to the survey was sent, 12 completed the questionnaire.

The interview questionnaire was based on the theories of intercultural competence explained at the beginning. In order to achieve the highest possible validity and reliability, following tested models were used as a basis: the short questionnaire developed and validated in 2023 by the Free University of Berlin to assess intercultural competence (Bergann et al., 2023) and the interview questions developed by Engel and Kempen (Engel & Kempen, 2017). These two works are founded on recent research findings and on affect-behaviour-cognition theory (Engel & Kempen, 2017, p. 40; Bergann et al., 2023, p. 2). In addition, their goal is to develop a short scale with a limited set of items that nevertheless covers the most important aspects of intercultural competence (Engel & Kempen, 2017, p. 40). The items were partially adapted for the study conducted here.

The interview questionnaire (see appendix) consists of the following sections:

- Sociodemographic information (age, gender, nationality, occupation) as well as information on the frequency of participation in work camps, language skills and other international contacts (10 questions).

- Section on ability to establish relationships/contacts with strangers (2 questions)
- Three sets of questions on affective, cognitive and action-related aspects, each rated on a five-point Likert scale (5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Quite agree; 3 = Moderately agree; 2 = Slightly agree; 1 = Disagree) (22 questions). Since these questions were intended to measure the intensity of the attribute 'intercultural competence', a unipolar Likert scale was chosen (Menold & Bogner, 2015, p. 3). For the evaluation, the arithmetic mean was calculated for each question, each dimension and each group.
- Finally, respondents were asked to answer five qualitative questions regarding the influence/connection between their work camp experience and their own personal history. This section was omitted from the questionnaire for the comparison group. The responses were transcribed into keywords for evaluation purposes.

3.3   Evaluation and discussion

The 13 participants in the first group are from Germany (seven people), Spain (three people), the Czech Republic (one), Serbia (one) and Poland (one person). On average, the seven women and six men are 35 years old. The youngest participant is 25 and the oldest 49 years old. This explains why 12 of them are working and only one is a student. Surprisingly, all respondents had already spent a longer time (more than four weeks) outside their home country for various reasons, and 12 out of 13 had even lived abroad for more than three months. Almost all (10 out of 13) had participated in a work camp several times (on average 1.54 times) and had taken on the leadership of an average of four work camps. The frequency varied between one and ten work camps.

All of the 12 participants in the comparison group are from Germany. The average age of the six women and six men is 28.5 years (ranging from 18 to 45 years old). Accordingly, six are students, three are employed and two have unknown status. To the interviewer's surprise, none of the respondents had spent more than four weeks abroad. Contact with people from other cultures in everyday life occurs 'sometimes' (average value), while the work camp team members answered this question with 'often' ($x = 4.31$ for group one, $x = 3.17$ for group two). So it is not unexpected that the EYS team members have more frequent contact with people from other cultures, speak slightly more languages and are better able to express themselves in them.

Since numerous studies have shown that openness and curiosity are important factors for successful intercultural contact (e.g. Deardorff, 2006, p. 257), two questions were first asked about openness towards unknown groups/contacts. Differences were already at this stage apparent. While the first question on topics of conversation showed only minor differences, the members of the second group found it significantly more
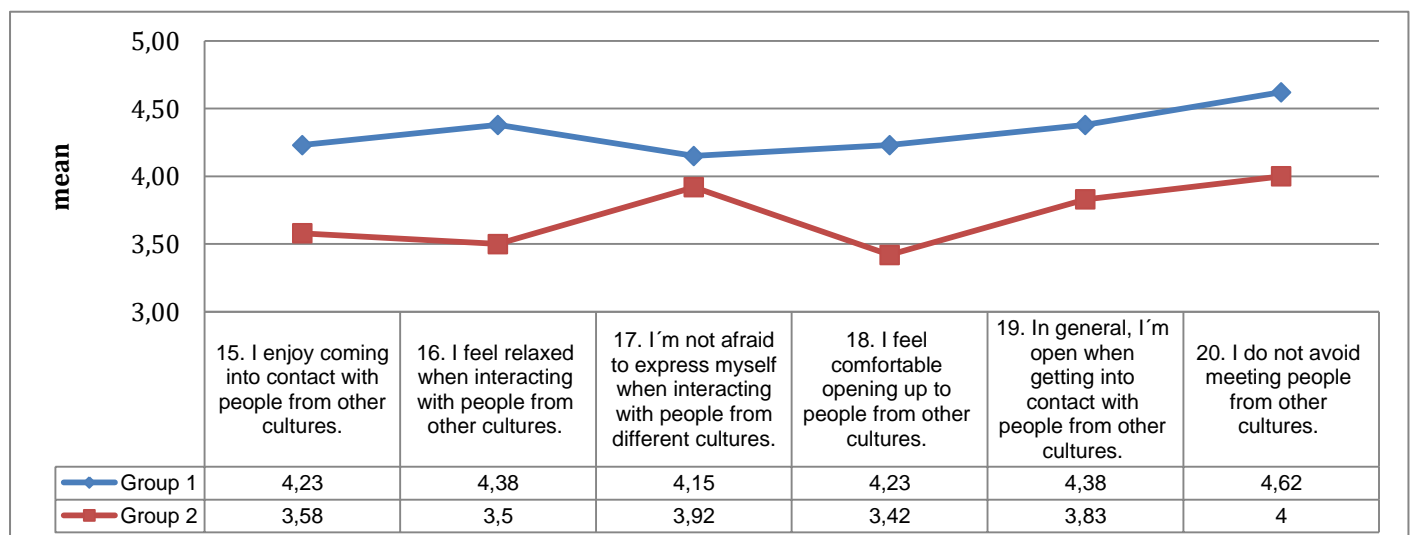
difficult on average to quickly establish relationships within a new group. This raises the question of the extent to which sociability is a prerequisite for a willingness to engage more intensively in intercultural activities. Or whether the work camp leaders perform better in this area because they have continuously developed this skill in the course of intercultural encounters and as leaders, and the higher score is attributable to this process. It is undisputed that these points influence each other, but further research would be helpful to explain this process in more detail.

Table 2: Results "Building relationships"
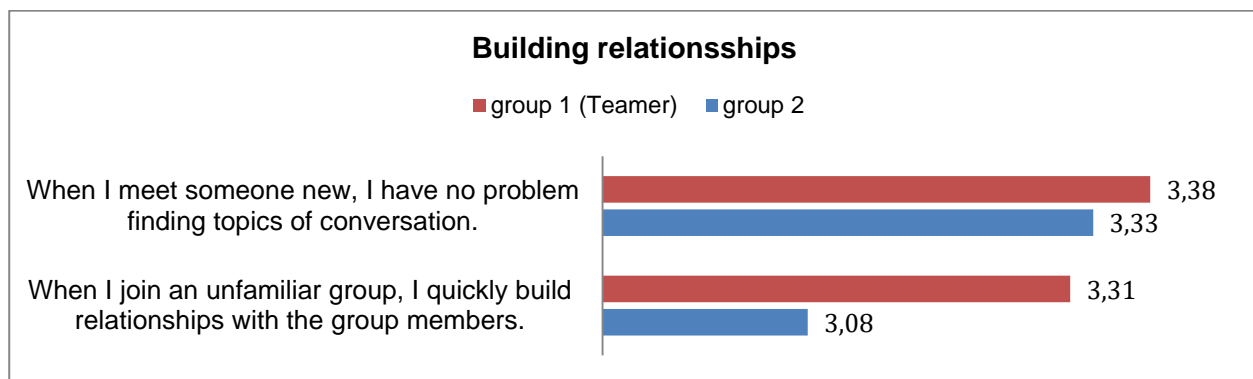
First we will have a look at the behavioural dimension. There is a significant convergence between the two groups in statement no. 17, while the difference is considerably greater in no. 16 and 18 (relaxed interaction/feeling comfortable). This reveals a subtle difference: the person feels no fear, but is nevertheless tense and uncomfortable. This does not correspond to the positive feeling of inner well-being and relaxation expressed in questions 16 and 18. This second, positive emotional attitude is significantly less pronounced in group two.

Table 3: Results "Affective dimension"

	15. I enjoy coming into contact with people from other cultures.	16. I feel relaxed when interacting with people from other cultures.	17. I´m not afraid to express myself when interacting with people from different cultures.	18. I feel comfortable opening up to people from other cultures.	19. In general, I´m open when getting into contact with people from other cultures.	20. I do not avoid meeting people from other cultures.
Group 1	4,23	4,38	4,15	4,23	4,38	4,62
Group 2	3,58	3,5	3,92	3,42	3,83	4

Table 4: Results "Cognitive dimension"

	21. I acquired knowledge about the history, politics and the social structures of another culture.	22. I reflect about the cultural values and the believes about other cultures.	23. In general, I try to acquire a good knowledge about the culture I interact with.	24. I engage in the literature, art and music of other cultures.	25. I read up on rules for expressing nonverbal behaviours in other cultures.	26. I am aware that I use my cultural knowledge when dealing with people from other cultures.	27. I find it easy to explain what my culture ist about.	28. In general, I actively deal with my own culture.	29. I can easily put my worldview into words.
group 1	3,92	4,38	4,15	3,92	2,85	4,08	3,23	3,92	3,69
group 2	3	3,5	3,17	2,92	2,33	3,25	2,5	3	3,33

In terms of the rise and fall of the measurement points, the curves created in the cognitive and behavioural dimensions are relatively similar, but always show differences. In the 'cognitive dimension,' both groups achieve the highest average for statement 22, which asks about reflection on the cultural values of other cultures. Statement 25 (reading up on rules about nonverbal behaviour), on the other hand, causes both values to fall below the mean of 3 (group 1 = 2.85; group 2 = 2.33). This may be because knowledge about nonverbal behaviour in other cultures is less often acquired through theory and more often through practice.

Table 5: Results "Behavioural dimension"

|	30. I respect the values of people from other cultures, even if they are not consistent with my own values.	31. I respect the way people from other cultures behave even if I do not support that behaviour.	32. I respect the opinions of people from other cultures, even if they do not agree with mine.	33. I use pauses and silence in different ways to adapt them to different cross-cultural situations.	34. I change my nonverbal behavior (e. g., accent, tone) when a cross-cultural situation requires it.	35. I´m able to adapt my behavior to the cultural context even if this behavior seems unusual to me.
Group 1	4,08	4	4,31	3,69	3,92	3,92
Group 2	3,83	2,58	3,5	2,58	3	3

In the third area (behavioural) one can see a particularly large deviation between the groups in statement no. 31 (respect for behaviour). In contrast, they are very close in statement 30 (respect for values). The team group remains almost constant in its assessment, while group two shows a significant decline in value. Apparently, people

find it easier to accept the invisible values of other cultures because they are abstract, less tangible and more difficult to assess. They do not pose an immediate threat to their own worldview. Instead, other people's behaviour can be experienced directly and is compared (often unconsciously) with one's own cultural values. If this does not correspond to one's own norms, it is more likely to be perceived as unacceptable. Hall's Iceberg Model illustrates this fact very well. To promote intercultural acceptance, it is important to be aware of the different levels. People who have more frequent intercultural contacts learn to reduce hasty judgements about behaviour in order to minimise misunderstandings or conflicts (El Amri, 2024, p. 10197). Obviously, this can be clearly seen in this example.

A comparison of the dimensions affective, cognitive and behavioural shows that the work camp team members achieved higher scores in all questions without exception. It is interesting to note that the differences in the area of affect/motivation are a little bit less pronounced than in the cognitive and behavioural dimensions (see table 6).

Table 6: Results "Intercultural Competence"

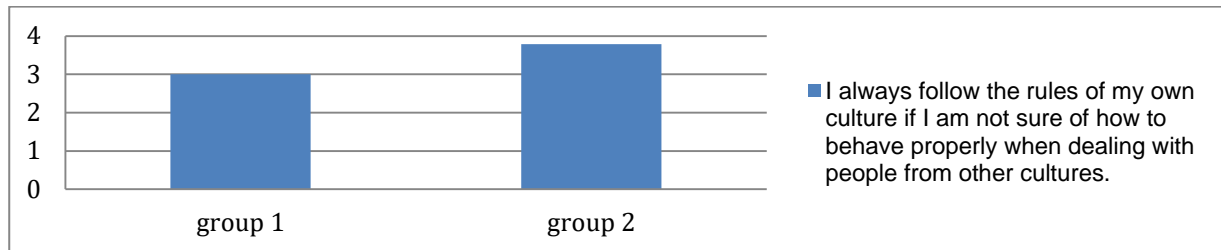|	affectiv	cognitive	behaviour		mean
group 1	4,33	3,79	3,9		4,01
group 2	3,71	3	3,08		3,26
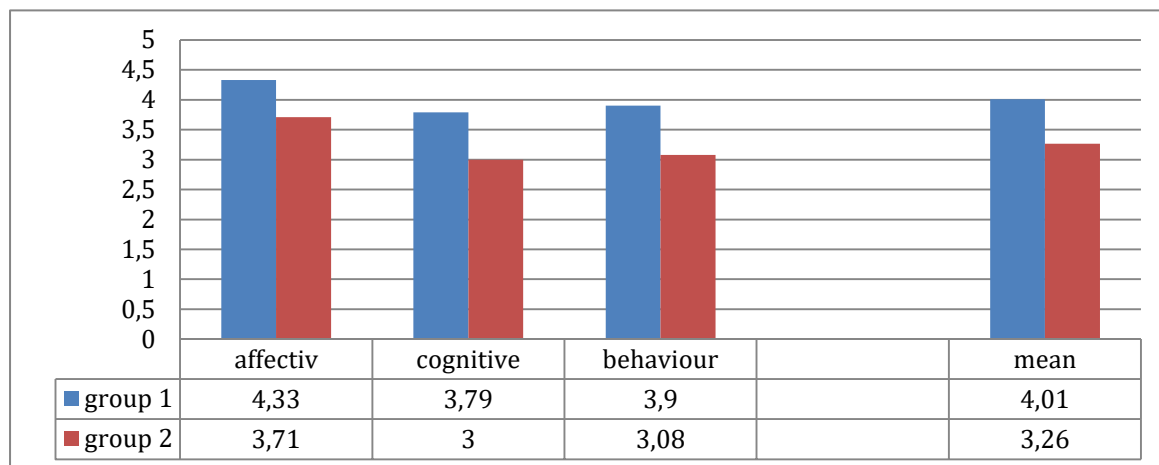
Examining the connection between the cognitive and behavioural dimensions of the team members, the correlation is already stronger at r = 0.57 (see Table f, appendix). That could indicate that in-depth knowledge of other cultures has a positive or direct impact on behaviour in an intercultural encounter. The theory, that in a continuous learning process, the factors "attitude, knowledge, skills, reflection, and communication" intertwine and mutually influence each other, is illustrated by Deardorff in her process model (Deardorff, 2006, p. 257).

The fact that group one consistently exhibits higher scores and thus more pronounced intercultural competence is confirmed by the statement in item 36. Due to its wording, this item must be evaluated separately from the other items, but it supports the previous results. The EYS team members try to follow the rules of the other culture more

strongly than the comparison group. Or, to say it in another way: the comparison group with fewer intercultural contacts orients itself more frequently toward its own culture.
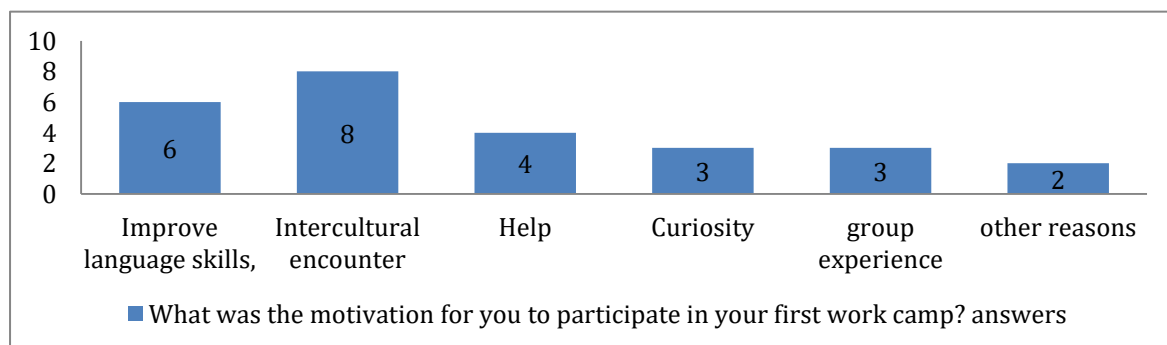
Table 7: Item „Follow the rules of my own culture"

A bar chart showing group 1 at value 3 and group 2 at nearly value 4. Legend: I always follow the rules of my own culture if I am not sure of how to behave properly when dealing with people from other cultures.

With regard to the research question, it is interesting to investigate whether there is a relationship between the frequency of work camp leadership and the level of intercultural competence. While the Pearson correlation here is only 0.047, thus indicating no relationship, a somewhat clearer relationship is evident between the frequency of intercultural contact and the level of intercultural competence (Pearson correlation 0.369; see Tables d and e, appendix).

A closer look at the individual correlations (Table f, appendix) reveals that the correlations between the frequency of work camp leadership and the individual items are significantly less pronounced than the correlation to the frequency of intercultural contact. Here, in turn, strong correlations exist in the cognitive area. This raises the question of the extent to which the long stays abroad and intercultural contacts in everyday life ("often" for Group 1) overshadow the relatively short work camp activities. To explore this in more detail, the qualitative interview questions must be used for interpretation. These questions were only asked to Group 1 and are important as a supplement to the study participants' self-assessment. The open-ended questions had no predefined criteria. The answers were converted into keywords to facilitate statistical analysis (see Appendix, Table b).

Table 8: Results to question about motivation for participation in work camps

A bar chart with values: Improve language skills 6, Intercultural encounter 8, Help 4, Curiosity 3, group experience 3, other reasons 2. Legend: What was the motivation for you to participate in your first work camp? answers

The main reasons for participation were the intercultural encounter and the improvement of foreign language skills. None of the team leaders had any prior concerns about working with people from other cultures. When asked about experiences in camp leadership that have become important for their lives, the following points were mentioned: development of personality traits and skills in general (organizational skills, acceptance, interaction with organization, experience of gratitude, democratic cooperation, social competence) and the increase in intercultural experiences (intercultural competence, openness for life in other countries, cultural acceptance, intercultural interaction, better understanding of other cultures, improved language skills, openness). Only one team leader did not answer and another could not remember. The importance for later careers and volunteer work was also mentioned several times. The answers to the question about the influence on later life were similar: positive influence on intercultural and language skills, self-confidence and a sense of responsibility, leadership skills, problem-solving skills, and the ability to reflect. One participant is now intercultural married, and another describes himself as a ´cosmopolitan´ as a result of his camp leadership work. Several participants mentioned the influence on their careers (see answers in appendix). Another component identified by one team leader as having a significant impact on intercultural learning are the preparatory seminars at the EYS. Topics covered include: accompaniment of group processes in linguistically, culturally, and denominationally mixed groups, crisis intervention planning, methods and forms of intercultural learning (language animation), conception and implementation of thematic work, camp organization and planning, legal and insurance issues, camp billing/finances, and camp follow-up (EYS, n.d., Teamer Preparation Seminars).

The qualitative responses, combined with the quantitative results, underscore the assumption that recurring short-term international volunteer work at the EYS provides a platform for intercultural learning. This occurs, on the one hand, through the experiences and encounters within the work camp itself, but also during preparation and follow-up. At the same time, these brief encounters often provide an impetus for more intensive engagement with other cultures, for example, by following up with a year abroad or pursuing career guidance in this area. In contrast to the comparison group with limited intercultural experience, language skills are at a higher level, and the measured affective, cognitive, and behavioral areas are characterized by consistently higher ratings. This suggests a higher level of intercultural competence.

This cross-sectional study is subject to numerous limitations. Due to its small sample size, it cannot be considered representative. Further studies with larger samples and, above all, a more comprehensive and diverse pool of measurement instruments (cf. Deardorff, 2006, p. 257) could examine different aspects of intercultural competence

more intensively and reliably. Furthermore, the chosen form of self-assessment using the Likert scale carries the risk of response bias due to the problem of social desirability or subjective misperceptions. The decision to use a five-point Likert scale and its classification is also open to critical discussion. The individual dimensions of cultural competence are difficult to measure. The knowledge and behavioral levels can be captured more clearly than the affective level. To achieve reliable results, a comprehensive time frame for a longitudinal study would be necessary. Then, the EYS team members could be surveyed at the beginning of their leadership role and then repeatedly at intervals of several years. In this case, the discriminatory power between the items "work camp leadership" and "longer stays abroad" could most likely also be increased.

4 Conclusion

Despite the limitations mentioned above, the present study, using the example of the work camp organization EYS, was able to clearly confirm that recurring, numerous intercultural contacts contribute to the development of higher intercultural competence in a continuous and dynamic learning process. EYS team leaders demonstrated higher scores in all areas of "affect, cognition, and behavior" than the comparison group. However, it remains unclear what percentage of short-term (two-week) contacts represent compared to longer stays abroad and the everyday life of the team leaders. The majority of the respondents specifically chose the work camps as places for intercultural encounters. In some cases, they were a continuation of longer intercultural contacts abroad, but more often they formed the starting point for more intensive engagement with other cultures, e.g., through a subsequent year abroad or career choice. On the one hand, they offer the opportunity for short-term but intensive cross-cultural learning. At the same time, they serve as a "gateway" to other encounter spaces.

Interestingly, interculturally active team leaders also have a greater ability to easily engage in conversation with strangers and feel at home more quickly in unfamiliar groups. It would be worth investigating further whether this is promoted by intercultural contact or, conversely, whether people with these characteristics are more likely to seek out situations with intercultural contact. This is also indicated by Deardorff's pyramid model, which states that openness, curiosity, and respect for other cultures form the basis for the successful development of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006, p. 254). Both factors appear to mutually reinforce and influence each other.

The team leaders' involvement within the work camp organization also begins at an age when the young people are in a crucial phase of their personal development. The work at the camp, along with the active interaction and intercultural encounters, also

have a positive influence on the development of personal skills and characteristics (self-confidence, social skills, leadership skills, organizational talent, growing openness to further experiences, etc.). At the same time, they offer opportunities to gain intercultural experience alongside normal school or training routines and to later apply these experiences in professional life. These experiences, in turn, apparently contribute to fostering openness, curiosity, and a willingness to engage in further intercultural contact. The training of foreign language skills and the growing self-confidence in one's own language abilities are also positive aspects.

Intercultural competence is an individually developing factor. Deardorff's Pyramid Model illustrates how the degree of acquired intercultural competence depends on the components introduced (Deardorff, 2006, p. 254). This was demonstrated in the present study, for example, by the apparent relationship between the degree of cultural experience of the respondents and their tendency to follow their own cultural rules in uncertain intercultural situations. The comparison group with less intercultural experience relied more heavily on their own cultural norms (see Table 7). Apparently, more frequent contact with different cultures promotes more flexible and adaptable behavior. In any case, intercultural learning is extremely complex and an ongoing process that cannot be the direct result of a single experience (Deardorff, 2006, p. 259; see also Bennett's DMIS). This confirms the importance of frequent intercultural encounters. The repeated confrontation with different cultural norms offers ever new opportunities to reflect on one's own reactions and gradually broaden one's perspectives.

In our globalized world, intercultural competence is a key skill. The level of acquired intercultural competence cannot be improved through a one-time training program; rather, it requires ongoing intercultural learning. Informal, recurring, and temporary interactions can contribute to this, as the study confirmed using the example of the work camp organization EYS. Therefore, given the ever-growing importance of intercultural competence in both professional and private life, it is important to promote such encounter formats and make them accessible to a broad clientele among adolescents and young adults.

This case study has raised numerous questions, even beyond the scope of the research question. The outlined framework sets limitations, so it must be pointed out that further research appears necessary and worthwhile.

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6 Appendix

List of tables

6.1   Questionnaire

The questionnaire was created using an online tool (https://www.empirio.de) and could be completed by participants on both computers and mobile phones. Below there are an overview of the questions, possible answers, the assignment to the individual sub-categories, and the source reference for each question.

Table a: Questionnaire

Item	Answer	Subscale	Refer-ence
		Sociodemo-graphics	
1. How old are you?	free		
2. What is your gender?	female/male/non-binary/genderqueer/no gender/no answer		
3. Which country do you come from?	free		
4. I´m a …	… pupil/student/in pro-fessional train-		

	ing/employee/other		
5. How many workcamps have you already taken part in as a participant?	Free (relevant number!)		
6. How many workcamps have you already taken part in as a team leader?	Free (relevant number!)		
7. Have you been living abroad for more than three months?	No/Yes		FUB (p. 12)
8. Have you ever spent a long period of time (more than 4 weeks) abroad for personal reasons (e.g. holiday, work & travel, etc.)?	No/Yes		FUB (p. 12)
9. How often do you personally interact with people from other cultures (e.g. work, school, friends)?	1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 =- Very often		FUB (p. 12)
10. How many languages do you speak well in addition to your native language?	Free		
11. What language do you normally use at workcamp?	Free		
12. Can you communicate with this language without any problems in everyday life at the work camp, express your thoughts and understand the others.	5-point scale ranging from 1 = very bad, 2 = bad, 3 = average, 4 = good, 5 = very good		
		Building relationships	
13. When I join an unfamiliar group, I quickly build relationships with the group members.	5-point scale ranging strongly agree" to "disagree" (1 = disagree; 2 = slightly agree; 3 = moderately agree; 4 = quite agree; 5 = strongly agree).		FUB, p. 21
14. When I meet someone new, I have no problem finding topics of conversation.	5-point scale like no. 13		FUB, p. 21
		Affective	

15. I enjoy coming into contact with people from other cultures.	5-point scale like no. 13	Motivational intercultural intelligence	FUB, p. 21
16. I feel relaxed when interacting with people from other cultures.	5-point scale like no. 13	Openness	E/K, p. 57
17. I´m not afraid to express myself when interacting with people from different cultures.	5-point scale like no. 13	Openness	E/K, p. 57
18. I feel comfortable opening up to people from other cultures.	5-point scale like no. 13	Openness	E/K, p. 57
19. In general, I´m open when getting into contact with people from other cultures.	5-point scale like no. 13	Openness	E/K, p. 57
20. I do not avoid meeting people from other cultures.	5-point scale like no. 13	Openness	E/K, p. 57
		Cognitive	
21. I acquired knowledge about the history, politics and the social structures of another culture.	5-point scale like no. 13	Knowledge/cognitive intercultural intelligence	E/K, p. 57
22. I reflect about the cultural values and the believes about other cultures.	5-point scale like no. 13	Knowledge/cognitive intercultural intelligence	E/K, p. 57
23. In general, I try to acquire a good knowledge about the culture I interact with.	5-point scale like no. 13	Knowledge/cognitive intercultural intelligence	E/K, p. 57
24. I engage in the literature, art and music of other cultures.	5-point scale like no. 13	Knowledge/cognitive intercultural intelligence	E/K, p. 57
25. I read up on rules for expressing nonverbal behaviours in other cultures.	5-point scale like no. 13	knowledge/cognitive intercultural intelligence	E/K, p. 57
26. I am aware that I use my cultural knowledge when dealing with people from other cultures.	5-point scale like no. 13	metakognitive intercultural intelligence	FUB, p. 21
27. I find it easy to explain what my culture is about.	5-point scale like no. 13	self reflexivity	E/K, p. 57
28. In general, I actively deal with my own culture.	5-point scale like no. 13	self reflexivity	E/K, p. 57

29. I can easily put my worldview into words.	5-point scale like no. 13	self reflexivity	E/K, p. 57
		Behaviour	
30. I respect the values of people from other cultures, even if they are not consistent with my own values.	5-point scale like no. 13	respect	E/K, p. 58
31. I respect the way people from other cultures behave even if I do not support that behaviour.	5-point scale like no. 13	respect	E/K, p. 58
32. I respect the opinions of people from other cultures, even if they do not agree with mine.	5-point scale like no. 13	respect	E/K, p. 58
33. I use pauses and silence in different ways to adapt them to different cross-cultural situations.	5-point scale like no. 13	behaviour flexibility	E/K, p. 58
34. I change my nonverbal behaviour (e. g., accent, tone) when a cross-cultural situation requires it.	5-point scale like no. 13	behaviour flexibility	E/K, p. 58
35. I´m able to adapt my behaviour to the cultural context even if this behaviour seems unusual to me.	5-point scale like no. 13	behaviour flexibility	E/K, p. 58
36. I always follow the rules of my own culture if I am not sure of how to behave properly when dealing with people from other cultures.	5-point scale like no. 13		
		open questions	
37. What was the motivation for you to participate in your first work camp?	free		
38. Think back to the time before you became a team leader at EYS. Was there anything that worried you about working with young people from other cultural backgrounds?	free		
39. Which experiences that you had as a participant or team leader in the work camp have become	free		

	particularly important in your life?			
40.	In what way has leading a work camp shaped your (future) life?	free		

Abbreviation:

FUB = Freie Universität Berlin = Bergann et al., 2023.; E/K = Engel & Kempen, 2017.

6.2 Evaluation of the qualitative questions

Table b: Evaluation of the qualitative questions

| Question	Answer	Keyword
What was the motivation for you to participate in your first work camp?	• Improve English, meet people from other cultures • Opportunity to spend some time abroad with other people. • I thought that the people might have the same attitude as I do, and the group simply "click" together. • Meet new people from around the world • Adapt into a new group of people and learn from them • Practise my language skills • Coming from a one year exchange and having gained a lot of new skills and language tools in addition to having time over the summer. The Workcamp was the best fit for keeping these skills strong and giving them a meaning • to help; curiosity • To experience something new on my own, away from my country, to meet people from different country and practice English and German skills • To do something useful, to meet people, to have an active vacation • Contact with peers from other countries, doing something useful for a community, chance to speak English and German • curiosity • A good friend asked me if I was open to lead one, as there was a teamer shortage and I already had experience with other youth organizations. • interesting experience, no idea of what to do after school, cheap way to spend the holidays and at the same time doing sth. good for the community/ environment, meeting other young engaged	• Improve language skills, intercultural encounter • intercultural encounter • group experience • intercultural encounter • group experience • Improve language skills • Improve language skills; after a one year exchange • help, curiosity • Improve language skills, intercultural encounter, new experiences • help, group experience • intercultural encounter, help, Improve language skills • curiosity • asked by friend • curiosity, help, intercultural encounter, cheap holidays

	- people from other contries... - getting to know people from other cultures; practising my English - In my first workcamp, my main motivation was to have an experience with people from other countries and learn about them	- Improve language skills, intercultural encounter - intercultural encounter
Think back to the time before you became a team leader at EYS. Was there any-thing that worried you about work-ing with young peo-ple from other cultural back-grounds?	- No. I enjoyed it - I had doubts if I were a good leader and if I could be tolerant enough (especially when being under pressure) - Not really - Sincerely no, I was young and open-minded, it would have been hard being older and starting to become a teamer - language barrier; be an accepted authority figure - No, nothing worried me about working with them - I came from European voluntary service in Poland where I met many Europeans, I felt at easy with different backgrounds. But I am queer, I was worried about that during the camps and was insure if I could be out and proud. - I can't say I worried because these people were from other cultural backgrounds. I had other concerns, e.g. will they be safe? Will they enjoy they camp? But these concerns were not related to cultural backgrounds. - not at all - No. - No. I had worries about leading a camp - about the responsibility, but not about the other cultural backgrounds.. - will they accept my authority as a teamleader - I was worried about making everyone feel good, but not focused specifically on culture	- no - no, tolerance, ability to lead - no - no - no, language barrier, ability to lead - no - other reason (queer) - no - no - no - no, ability to lead - no, ability to lead - no, ability to lead
Which expe-riences that you had as a participant or team leader in the work camp have become particularly important in your life?	- How to deal with different cultures, that you can also apply at work - When planning something or solving a problem, I shouldn't go too much in detail. Leaving some freedom makes these thing easier. - All the workcamps gave me a more open view of how people develop in other countries, which helps me understand life with a way wider view - The feeling of coming from different backgrounds, but being the same - overall the same key values and wants/needs and worries - Even though none of us knew each other, we had a great time. So, knowing each other isn't necessary to enjoy the moment. - The fact that no matter where someone comes from and what their cultural background is, we still might have a lot in common, like the way we percieve life - Interaction with the people from the place where the camp took place - I was impressed and moves by how the community we helped during one of the camps showed their gratitude, they organised barbecue	- Intercultural competence - Organisational skills - Openness for life in other countries - Acceptance of other cul-tures - acceptance - acceptance of other cul-tures - interaction with organisa-tion - Experience of gratitude

|		
	parties, firefighter shows and other events for us. Cooking together with others was also an important element. I was also moved by how some participants put great effort into presenting their countries Games were also really important as I later worked as a language teacher and used many of them with my pupils.	• Intercultural interaction
	• No answer • Nothing that can be singled out really. Maybe a better understanding how (east) european cultures are connected to each other.	• No answer • Better understanding of other cultures
	• As a participant (and a leader): I really loved to speak so many languages in the camps. - That was great - and I guess it helped also to not to forget and to refresh some of my former language skills. As a leader: What was really important for me were the preparation-seminarys. - Before I couldn´t imagine to lead a camp on my own (with other teamers of course). - But the athmosphere, which Mary (and others, but especially also Mary) created in the preparation-seminarys, the really lived-democracy, that I felt there, the time we had there to develope ideas and to try out and to co-work there together, to really participate and to engage, that gave me trust and the courage to do it/ to try it out. - And than it became a really good experience! - And I tried it out more than once... ;) That was very important for my later career and for my profession as well and I myself later founded and still lead teamer-groups and teamer-(preparation)-meetings in the church-comunities, where I work. - And really it is great to see, how much young people can do and support and take responsibility if you give them trust and some ideas, a good structure, preparation-time and the knowledge, that there is someone (a comunity and an organisation) helpful behind them... - Yeah, that was really mind-opening. - And I never had such an experience in my whole school-career!!	• Improve language skills • Preparation seminars • Democratic cooperation • Importance for later profession/career and volunteer work
	• Don't remember • I think the most important fact is to be open minded to Listen and trying to understand everyone. It Is also important to be able to help anyone, specially when they have communication difficulties to try to avoid that problem	• No memory • Openness for other people • Social competence
In what way has leading a work camp shaped your (future) life?	• Learning other cultures and languages • It gave me a portion of self-confidence, but also taught me a lot about responsibility • It helped me handle difficult situations and solve problems while dealing with people with several points of view • It made me reflect better about other's behaviour and myself as well as let me be even more excited about other cultures of the world. Now I'm married to a person from a different culture • Especially in a professional context. I became a teacher and am therefore constantly confronted with people who are initially strangers. • It helped me to develop leadership skills, learn to organize events	• Intercultural & foreign language skills • Self-confidence, sense of responsibility • Problem solving • reflective ability, intercultural skills, married to a person from different culture • professional context - become teacher

| | and made me a cosmopolitan :)
• It gave me self-confidence to organize anything weird with little frame
• I later decided to volunteer for a whole year in a foreign country. This experience showed me how incredible intercultural contacts can be and I have often looked for opportunities to work in an international environment.
• No answer
• I would not say it had a shapening impact.
• see other question before... ;)
• curiosity about different cultures and countries, confidence when leading youth groups
• I think leading a Camp made me see when I am in a group, the ability to see if someone IS not understanding or having any dificulty. It also helped me to be ready to open myself in any circumstance. | • leadership skills, become a cosmopolitan
• self-confidence
• year abroad, intercultural skills
• no answer
• no impact
• Improve language skills, democratic cooperation, Importance for later profession/career and volunteer work
• Intercultural curiosity, leadership skills
• Social competence |

6.3   Further evaluation results

Table c: Correlation between participation in a work camp and the average level of intercultural competence

Participation Workcamp

$y = 0{,}0087x + 3{,}9593$
$R^2 = 0{,}0022$

m = interc. competence

frequency workcamp
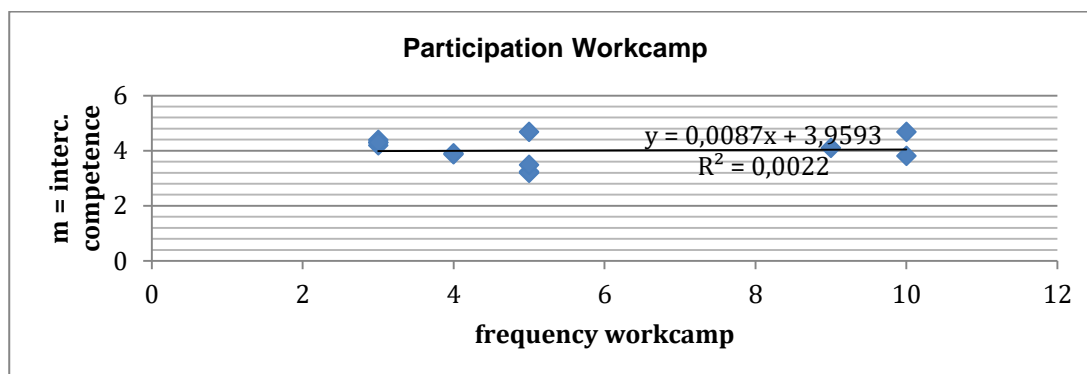
Table d: Correlation between frequency of intercultural contacts and the average level of intercultural competence

$y = 0{,}2096x + 3{,}1023$
$R^2 = 0{,}1364$

m = interc. competence

frequency of interultural contacts
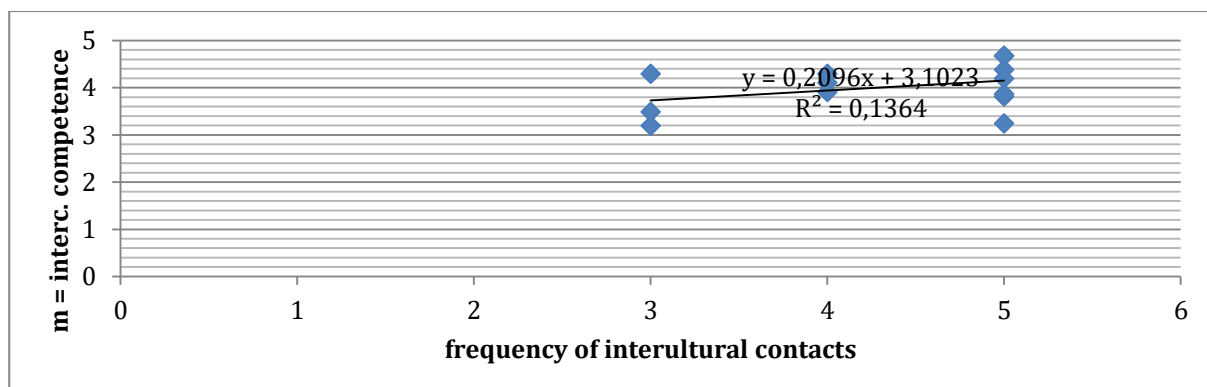
Table e: Interpretation of the correlation coefficient r according to Cohen

If Cohen's guidelines are applied to interpret the correlation coefficient r, the following results are obtained:

	Participation Workcamp	Gruppe 1 How often do you interact with people from other cultures ...?	Gruppe 2 How often do you interact with people from other cultures ...?
I enjoy coming into contact ...	0,04	-0,11	-0,28
I feel relaxed when interacting ...	0,12	-0,08	0,19
I´m not afraid to express ...	0,23	-0,18	0,46
I feel comfortable opening up ...	0,11	-0,20	-0,16
In general, I´m open ...	0,02	-0,07	-0,06
I do not avoid meeting people ...	0,07	-0,21	0,61
I acquired knowledge ...	0,35	0,64	0,23
I reflect about the cultural values ...	0,12	0,67	0,23
In general, I try to acquire a good knowledge ...	-0,02	0,26	0,06
I engage in the literature, art and music ...	-0,16	0,24	0,13
I read up on rules for expressing nonv	0,30	0,41	0,48
I am aware that I use my cultural knowledge ...	0,22	0,68	0,41
I find it easy to explain what my culture is ...	-0,20	0,19	0,19
In general, I actively deal with my own culture.	-0,09	0,13	0,00
I can easily put my worldview into words.	-0,23	0,44	0,11
I respect the values of people from other cultures ...	-0,26	-0,20	-0,19
I respect the way	-0,12	0,12	-0,34
I respect the opinions ...	-0,05	-0,03	0,10
I use pauses and silence ...	0,01	0,54	-0,16
I change my nonverbal behavior ...	-0,28	0,20	0,14
I´m able to adapt my behavior ...	0,05	0,49	0,00

Beige = weak correlation |r| = .10; light green = moderate correlation |r| = .30; light red = strong correlation |r| = .50

Table f: Correlation r between the three dimensions of intercultural competence in Group 1

Correlation r between the three dimensions of intercultural competence in Group 1

	affective	cognitive	behavioral
affective	1,00	0,40	0,28
cognitive	0,40	1,00	0,57
behavioral	0,28	0,57	1,00

Affidavit

I, Angelika Rotter, hereby certify that I have written this thesis entitled "Cross-Cultural Learning as a prerequisite for acquiring Intercultural Competence - Case study on working as a workcamp team leader at Ecumenical Youth Services (EYS)" independently and without outside assistance, and that I have not used any resources other than those indicated. I have identified and verified the source of all passages in this thesis, including tables and figures, that are taken verbatim or in spirit from other sources. This thesis has not previously been used in the same or a similar form, even in part, as an examination paper, and has not yet been published.

Altenbach, 20th August 2025

Angelika Rotter