



Examining Singaporean Students' Perceptions of Quality Interaction with International Students During an Intercultural Communication Course

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Abstract: This investigation identifies contextual characteristics associated with meaningful intercultural interactions between domestic students enrolled in a 13-week intercultural communication course and international students. After participating in an international student welcome and games event and three cultural encounters, domestic students completed post-activity reflection surveys that included a quality intercultural interaction scale and open-ended contextual questions. This mixed-method, convergent design approach employed factor analysis to assess the quantitative scale and utilized process and magnitude coding procedures for the qualitative data. Results suggest that meaningful intercultural interactions tend to occur when students have the opportunity to discover commonalities and experience cultural exchanges during unforced, natural, and enjoyable initial encounters. Additionally, self-disclosure, cultural learning, and personal growth characterize meaningful intercultural encounters with longer duration. These findings provide several recommendations for universities, administrators, and educators seeking to facilitate meaningful initial interactions and prolonged encounters between domestic and international students. This study also offers theoretical implications regarding intercultural relationship development and the role that domestic students play in creating a receptive host environment. Finally, this research introduces a newly developed quality intercultural interaction instrument that international educators can use to evaluate, compare, and enhance intercultural learning interventions.

Keywords: Social Integration, Meaningful Intercultural Interaction, Domestic Student Perspective, Singapore, Intercultural Communication, Intercultural Relationships

1. Introduction

Universities across the world strive to assemble student bodies that provide students with culturally diverse educational environments, preparing them to be global citizens (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2014). To achieve this, universities recruit international students and design initiatives to help them integrate into the host community (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2014). These integration efforts often focus on encouraging social interaction and dialogue between international and domestic students and creating situations where both groups share the same learning environments (Harrison & Peacock, 2010). However, shared learning environments do not guarantee that the two groups will mix and interact (Harrison & Peacock, 2010). Consequently, international education researchers have concentrated their efforts on evaluating the effectiveness of initiatives that foster interaction (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2014). In addition to directly assessing international students' intercultural friendships (Gareis, 2012), satisfaction (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2017), and perceptions of the university environment (Wang et al., 2014), researchers have analyzed integration efforts and intercultural interactions from the perspective of host students (Campbell, 2012; Colvin & Volet, 2014; Dunne, 2009; Jacobi, 2021; Jon, 2013; Peacock & Harrison, 2009; Zou & Yu, 2021).

Those examining the nuances of intercultural interactions from the host students' perspective have predominantly adopted qualitative research methods, including in-depth interviews (Colvin & Volet, 2014; Dunne, 2009), focus groups (Zou & Yu, 2021), and student reflections (Campbell, 2012; Jacobi, 2021). These studies conclude that intercultural interactions are multidimensional and complex (Colvin & Volet, 2014), result in personal growth and learning (Campbell, 2012; Jacobi, 2021), but require institutional facilitation and thoughtfully planned instruction (Zou & Yu, 2021). The current mixed-method study incorporates this qualitative insight and develops a quantitative scale to assess and compare university and classroom integration initiatives. Singaporean domestic students enrolled in a 13-week intercultural communication course organized a welcome and games event involving international students. They also completed three cultural encounters in which they spent a minimum of two hours interacting with individuals not born or socialized in Singapore. Following the games event and three cultural encounters, domestic students completed a reflection survey with both closed and open-ended questions, contemplating the interaction quality.

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Two principal research questions guide this study: 1) Which activities in an intercultural communication course influence the quality of interaction between domestic and international students? 2) What aspects of these activities do domestic students describe as most meaningful? By addressing these questions, this research aims to offer practical suggestions for future international education initiatives and intercultural learning interventions (Paige & Vande Berg, 2012). The theoretical goal is to deepen scholarly understanding of intercultural interactions and intercultural relationship development. This study is particularly interested in organized intercultural interaction as it can influence both the initiation and developmental stages of intercultural friendships (Sias et al., 2008). The subsequent sections will present a theoretical framework, describe the intercultural communication course, develop the quality intercultural interaction scale, analyze open-ended question responses, and discuss the principal findings and implications for both theory and practice.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory

Kim's (2001) cross-cultural adaptation theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the transformative process that individuals (strangers) undergo when they cross cultures. In her theory, the principal variable influencing the adaptation process is the interpersonal communication that strangers experience in the host country. Kim (2001) identified three environmental conditions that impact a stranger's interpersonal communication activities: host receptivity, host conformity pressure, and ethnic group strength. The current analysis applies the host receptivity concept, which is the "degree to which a given environment is open to, welcomes, and accepts strangers into its social communication networks" (Kim, 2001, p. 79). In the micro-environmental context, host receptivity describes the interaction opportunities that host nationals offer through their face-to-face communication behaviors (Kim, 2001). At universities, domestic students contribute to private expressions of host receptivity and play an integral role in the intercultural relationship development process (Harrison, 2015; Hendrickson, 2018). Thus, the current study attempts to better understand and explain host receptivity by examining domestic students' perceptions of quality interaction with international students.

2.2. Integration & Quality Interaction From The Host Students' Perspective

Dunne (2009) asserts that creating a culturally diverse student body on university campuses is insufficient and does not inherently lead to greater intercultural contact. Mere exposure to students from other countries does not increase student experience ratings (Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2015) nor guarantee interaction (Groepel-Klein et al., 2010; Spencer-Oatey et al., 2014). Furthermore, proximity and shared university environments do not always offer significant gains for the internationalization agenda (Peacock & Harrison, 2009). International and domestic students tend to inhabit semi-distinct social spaces within the university, making social encounters coincidental and unplanned (Harrison & Peacock, 2010). Educators have recognized this reality and made concerted efforts to facilitate interaction (Campbell, 2012; Senyshyn, 2019). From a theoretical perspective, Kudo et al. (2019) advance the affordances concept to highlight the role that strategically designed university environments play in enabling intercultural relationship development. Indeed, reports of effective integration programs abound. Spencer-Oatey et al. (2014) present case studies describing successful housing and orientation initiatives, social integration both on and off campus, and intercultural learning interventions that occur in the classroom. Research assessing intergroup attitudes suggests that successful initiatives likely depend on the interaction quality between groups (Dejaeghere et al., 2012).

Social integration requires domestic student openness to international students (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2014) and an assortment of scholars have made efforts to better understand the integration process from a host student perspective. Much of this literature paints a promising picture for those seeking to improve intercultural interactions, but at the same time highlights a variety of challenges. First, host students tend not to initiate interaction with international students (Peacock & Harrison, 2009), and voluntary contact rarely occurs (Ward et al., 2009). On the other hand, intercultural contact that does occur is typically perceived positively, and there exists a minority of proactive host students who are motivated to interact with international students and perceive the benefits of doing so (Peacock & Harrison, 2009). For example, Korean domestic students participating in a buddy program reported increased intercultural competence while also perceiving that the program impacted their intercultural learning and development (Jon, 2013). Host students recognize the potential for academic assistance and intercultural competence acquisition, although this recognition tends to be rather surface-level and not associated with a deep appreciation of diversity or global awareness (Peacock & Harrison, 2009).

Second, meaningful engagement between domestic and international students can lead to friendships and collective solidarity (Kudo, 2023) while promoting international education goals (Senyshyn, 2019); however, exchanges that are not mutually beneficial can be potentially burdensome for the host students (Miles et al., 2019). Host students complain about international student language deficiencies (Peacock & Harrison, 2009) and feel that international students should be speaking the local language more and their own language less (Ward et al., 2009). Host students perceive a heightened need to adapt their communication style (Dunne, 2009) and interacting with international students potentially produces anxiety (Dunne, 2009; Ward et al., 2009). Domestic students also perceive differences related to age, humour, clothing, work ethic, attitudes related to alcohol consumption (Peacock & Harrison, 2009), and attitudes toward academic work (Dunne, 2009).

Third, researchers in Australia found that 86% of domestic students reported that the inclusion of international students resulted in a variety of advantages to their educational experience. However, only 12% considered that the presence of international students was an opportunity to meet new people and make friends (Barron, 2006). Domestic students already have established friendship networks and, although they may recognize the benefits of interacting with international students, they lack the motivation and are largely indifferent to developing relationships with international students (Alkharusi & Segumpan, 2024).

In summary, the new cultural environment and university affordances that international students encounter are important factors influencing their ability to engage in interpersonal communication with host students. Domestic students recognize the benefits of interacting with international students, but important challenges inhibiting intercultural contact remain. The general conclusion is that intercultural contact and interaction can and does occur, but requires intervention (Summers & Volet, 2008) and effective management (Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2019). The next section presents a theoretical framework for understanding the intercultural friendship development process.

2.3. Intercultural Friendship Development

Intercultural communication scholars have incorporated a variety of interpersonal communication theories to examine relationship development between culturally different individuals (Chen & Nakazawa, 2009; Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Two of the more prominent theories are Social Penetration Theory (SPT) (Altman & Taylor, 1973) and Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). SPT describes relationship development as a systematic process driven by verbal self-disclosure, while URT explains the strategies individuals use to acquire information about others in order to reduce uncertainty and increase predictability (Griffin et al., 2019). Gudykunst and Kim (1997) maintain that cultural background plays a more prominent role during the earlier stages of relationship development than in later stages, due to cultural differences regarding self-disclosure tendencies, and the type of background information that communicators seek to reduce uncertainty. For example, people from individualistic cultures use person-based information (e.g., attitudes, feelings, beliefs, past behavior) to reduce uncertainty, while people from more collectivistic cultures use group-based information (e.g., age, status, group membership) to do the same (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Kastner (2021) notes that communication and behavioral uncertainty are more prominent during the initial relationship stages but subside as individuals acquire cultural understanding through self-disclosure. Furthermore, individuals tend to have more negative expectations regarding interactions with out-group members than with in-group members; however, these expectations become more positive as relationships become more intimate (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Perceived similarity, which functions to ease initial interactions, also increases over time, thus reducing social distance and enhancing interpersonal attraction. Consequently, while cultural differences likely impact initial interactions, if strangers manage to perceive similarities and reduce uncertainty, more intimate relationships can develop (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). As individuals engage in more self-disclosure and move from acquaintances to friends, to close friends, they begin using psychocultural level information, as opposed to the more superficial cultural and sociocultural levels, to make predictions about each other. Thus, in their view, close intracultural friendships and close intercultural friendships are quite similar in nature (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997).

The current research seeks to contribute to a scholarly understanding of the intercultural relationship development process by examining factors that influence meaningful interactions during initial encounters and more prolonged interactions. The subsequent methodology section describes an intercultural communication course designed to facilitate initial interactions between domestic students and international students and encounters of longer duration.

3. Methodology

This study incorporates a mixed-method convergent design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) by combining a meaningful intercultural interaction scale with open-ended questions. The convergent design approach is appropriate because it is efficient, allows for the simultaneous collection of quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011), and facilitates the student reflection process. In addition, this study's coding procedure incorporates two convergent design variants (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011): data validation, which is useful for expanding on and validating quantitative findings, and data transformation, which makes paradigmatic corroboration possible when the qualitative analytic outcomes not only complement but also correspond with the quantitative results (Saldaña, 2016).

3.1. Intercultural Communication Course

3.1.1. Participants & Reflection Surveys

The participants in this study were 45 Singaporean undergraduate students (39 female, 6 male) enrolled in a 13-week upper-level intercultural communication course at a university in Singapore.² Students were required to

² Students were informed that their reflection survey responses might potentially be used in a research study. After the semester all students had the opportunity to opt out of research participation, yet chose to participate. The university IRB reviewed and approved this consent procedure and deemed this study to be exempt from committee review (IRB ID#: 00007100). Five of the enrolled students were international students and were not included in the analysis. Three students were unable to attend the games event due to illness.

participate in four active learning activities during scheduled class time and complete three cultural encounters on their own time. Each active learning activity took place on a Friday afternoon, and students completed a reflection survey in class the following Tuesday. Additionally, students completed a reflection survey regarding their three cultural encounters at the semester's end as a final class participation requirement. Reflections are an essential element of intercultural learning interventions that allow students to make meaning of their intercultural encounters (Paige, 2015; Paige & Vande Berg, 2012). Due to challenges in international student recruitment and logistics, most students did not experience intercultural interactions during all the active learning activities.³ Thus, the current study only compares data from the first active learning activity (games event) and the three cultural encounters.

3.1.2. International Student Welcome And Games Event

Enrolled students organized an international student welcome and games event based on the premise that empowering students to design integration activities is an effective way to increase engagement (Spencer-Oatey et al., 2014). Students were divided into one of four committees: 1) Welcoming, greeting, and closing remarks; 2) Event promotion and recruitment; 3) Designing integration and ice-breaker activities; 4) Game master committee. The event lasted 2 1/2 hours and included an icebreaker session followed by a series of board games. The university's Board Games Society (11 members) managed the board games, and the university Student Development Department provided food and refreshments and helped recruit international students through the seven international student clubs they support (Indian Society, Malaysian Community, Myanmar Community, Indonesia Community, Chinese National Network, Vietnamese Community, and International Multicultural Mix). Seventy international students attended (40 pre-registered and 30 registered at the door). The main objective of the welcome and games event was for students to help make international students feel welcome on campus, initiate the relationship development process, and establish connections to meet again independently.

3.1.3. Cultural Encounters

For the cultural encounters, students participated in three off-campus social activities with three different individuals who were not from (or socialized in) Singapore. Students were encouraged to complete these assignments with international students from the university and/or individuals they met during the welcome and games event; however, it was not required. The activities lasted at least 2 hours, and students submitted written reports in which they described and reflected on their experiences. Each cultural encounter varied considerably in terms of contact intimacy, with some involving partners meeting for the second time and others involving established friendships. In all cases, students reflected on interactions with an individual with whom they had experienced prolonged interaction.

3.2. Quality Intercultural Interaction Scale

The post-activity reflection survey included a 21-item quality interaction scale. Measurement items were generated using deductive scale development and previous qualitative research findings (Hinkin et al., 1997). A deductive approach is appropriate considering that researchers across disciplines have examined nuances of quality interaction, for example, between organizational leaders and members (Bhal & Ansari, 1996), in online student group discussions (Nisbet, 2004), in nurse-patient interactions (Molin et al., 2016), and specifically between domestic and international students (Campbell, 2012; Colvin & Volet, 2014; Dunne, 2009; Jacobi, 2021). The latter studies suggest several overlapping dimensions, themes, and intercultural issues that inform the current scale development.

Colvin and Volet (2014) identified and operationalized several dimensions associated with positive intercultural interactions (agency, duration, self-disclosure, affect). They describe agency as the initiation of a positive intercultural interaction by a local student. They operationalize duration as a means to distinguish one-time interactions from more sustained interactions and self-disclosure as evidence of personal or intimate information shared between interactants. Finally, affect refers to the positive emotions elicited during intercultural interactions. In the current study, students reported the degree to which they agreed (*strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree*) with the following seven statements. Agency: "I initiated the intercultural interactions that I had with international students"; Duration: "I anticipate meeting the international students who I interacted with sometime in the future"; Self-disclosure: "During my interactions, I shared personal information (e.g., personal feelings, emotions, values, beliefs, opinions, or insights)," "During my interactions with the international students I had deep conversations," "During my interactions, I discovered commonalities with the international students," and "During my interactions, I had reciprocal, back and forth conversations"; Affect: "My interactions with the international students felt meaningful."

Dunne (2009) identified several issues associated with intercultural contact between domestic and international students. Domestic students experience heightened anxiety, perceive interactions to require more effort and to be less rewarding, and thus, tend to avoid intercultural contact. Host students also perceive a need to adapt their communication style, which leaves them unsatisfied with the quality of the interaction (Dunne, 2009).

³ The other three active learning activities included a Little India exploration activity, a cross-cultural comedy show, and an online mixed class with Croatian university students.

Language modification influences intercultural interaction quality and is essential for international students (Amos & Rehorst, 2018), but is potentially a burden for domestic students (Dunne, 2009). The current instrument addresses communication modification, creating three items: "The interactions with international students required an increased effort on my part," "During my interactions, I felt I had to modify my communication considerably," and "My interactions with the international students made me feel anxious."

Campbell (2012) identified several themes when examining intercultural interactions during a semester-long intercultural communication course. She highlights the importance that domestic students place on personal satisfaction and cultural learning stemming from enjoyable intercultural interactions. She also suggests that quality interactions should be spontaneous in nature and not feel forced. Her study inspired the following categories and seven items: Personal satisfaction: "I am happy with the interactions that I had with international students"; Cultural learning: "During my interactions, I had the opportunity to learn about the international students' culture" and "During my interactions, I had the opportunity to share aspects of my culture with the international students"; Nature of interaction: "my interactions felt natural," "My interactions felt superficial," "My interactions felt awkward," and "My interactions felt forced."

Jacobi (2021) identified several prominent themes, some of which coincide with the previous studies above. Her non-overlapping themes include thought-provoking, self-learning, and connection and inspired four items related to Personal growth: "My interactions with international students were thought-provoking," "My interactions with international students were interesting," "During my interactions, I learned more about myself," and "During my interactions, I connected with an international student or students."

3.3. Quality Interaction Open-Ended Contextual Question

This study includes the following open-ended questions to better understand host students' perceptions of their interactions and learn more context. "Please consider the previous 21 questions and provide more context. Can you identify any reason why your interactions with international students were particularly meaningful? Or not? What emotions or feelings would you use to describe the interactions?" Jacobi (2021) used a similar open-ended question methodology to assess in-class semi-structured interaction between domestic and international students.

4. Results

Table 1: Exploratory factor analysis results summary for the quality intercultural interaction scale for international student welcome & games event ($N=42$).

Item	Rotated Factor Loadings		
	Nature/ Personal Satisfaction	Self-Disclosure/ Cultural Learning	Personal Growth
My interactions felt superficial	.84	.46	.05
My interactions felt forced	.80	.15	-.09
My interactions felt awkward	.77	.19	.05
My interactions felt natural	.75	.27	-.08
My interactions felt meaningful	.70	.47	.30
I am happy with the interactions that I had	.62	.49	.19
My interactions were interesting	.60	.30	.36
During my interactions I learned about the other person's culture	.24	.84	.25
During my interactions I shared personal information	.21	.77	.33
During my interactions I shared aspects of my culture	.12	.64	.44
I had reciprocal, back and forth conversations	.49	.53	-.02
During my interactions I discovered commonalities	.48	.50	-.03
During my interactions I had deep conversations	.25	.47	.11
During my interactions I learned about myself	-.11	.10	.63
During my interactions I connected with the international students	.55	.43	.62
My interactions were thought provoking	.20	.45	.55
I anticipate meeting with those I interacted with in the future	.29	.33	.44
Eigenvalues	6.00	2.50	1.52
% of variance	35.30	14.73	8.92
α	.88	.78	.67

Note: Highest factor loadings for each item appear in bold. Source: Author

4.1. Quality Intercultural Interaction Scale Analysis

A principal axis factor analysis was conducted on the 21 items with oblique rotation (direct oblimin). Initial correlation coefficient analysis revealed that four items (anxiety, increased effort, modify communication, initiate conversation) had low correlations with many variables and also had KMO values below 0.5, thus these four items were left out of the analysis (Field, 2024). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, KMO = .67, and the individual KMO values ranged between .340 and .816, which is hovering near the acceptable limit of .5 (Field, 2024). An initial analysis was run to obtain eigenvalues for each factor in the data.

Four factors had eigenvalues over Kaiser's criterion of 1 and in combination explained 65.78% of the variance. However, the scree plot showed inflections that would justify retaining either 2 or 3 factors. The analysis retained 3 factors because they all had eigenvalues above 1.517 and converged with the scree plot. Table 1 shows the factor loadings after rotation. The items that cluster on the same factor suggest that factor 1 represents the nature of the interaction and personal satisfaction, factor 2 represents self-disclosure and cultural learning, and factor 3 represents personal growth. Scale reliability for the 17-item composite measure was $\alpha = 0.86$ for the games event and $\alpha = 0.88$ for the cultural encounters.

4.2. Open-Ended Contextual Question Coding Procedure

The initial coding procedure included a combination of process coding (data-validation)—a technique that uses gerunds to signify action in the data—and magnitude coding (data-transformation)—a method that applies numbers to represent values on a scale (Saldaña, 2016). Each participant response received relevant process codes (e.g., Learning about their culture, enjoying oneself, having an interesting experience) and a magnitude code to capture the extent to which participants described the event as meaningful. Magnitude code results for coded responses are as follows: Games Event: 1 = not meaningful ($n = 14$), 2 = neutral ($n = 11$), 3 = yes, meaningful ($n = 17$); Cultural Encounters: 1 = not meaningful ($n = 0$), 2 = neutral ($n = 7$), 3 = yes, meaningful ($n = 38$). Because students were prompted to think about the previous questions, the second cycle coding process began with 8 provisional categories, including Nature of Interaction, Personal Satisfaction/Affect, Cultural Learning, Self-disclosure, Personal Growth, Duration, Agency, and Communication Modification. See Table 2 for all process codes and corresponding categories.

4.3. Open-Ended Contextual Question For International Student Games Event

The first cycle coding procedure produced distinct process codes (25 for the games event and 36 for the cultural encounters) that were placed under 8 provisional categories (See Table 2 for process code frequencies and corresponding categories). Student contextual responses varied considerably, leading to an initial conclusion that an individual's predisposition to experience meaningful intercultural interactions likely plays an influential role. Students' initial emotion and attitude descriptions ranged from "indifferent," "uncomfortable," and "awkward" to "refreshing," "heartwarming," and "eye-opening" about interacting with international students.

Students who described their intercultural interactions as not being meaningful often connected this to the nature of the event. For example, one fourth of the responses received the code "not having meaningful conversations (Games Event)." Students suggested that the large group setting, noise, and chaos of the games made it difficult to engage in meaningful conversation and disclose personal information. Furthermore, four respondents felt that they did not have enough time for meaningful intercultural interactions, discussing the role that time plays in self-disclosure and relationship development. Indeed, one frequently occurring code related to the Nature of the Interaction category was an initial awkwardness that subsided over time and eventually became natural. Student comments suggest that the nature of the interaction is a key dimension of quality interaction because it impacts the potential for self-disclosure and personal satisfaction. One student commented on the relationship between time and meaningful interaction: "Unfortunately, we didn't manage to spark any deep, meaningful conversations due to the lack of time and the setting we were in, where there were always many people around us."

Students who described the games event as meaningful tended to associate their interactions with the Cultural Learning, Self-Disclosure, and Personal Satisfaction/Affect categories. Firstly, students enjoyed sharing aspects of Singaporean culture, learning new things about the international students' home countries, and hearing about the international students' experiences adapting to Singapore. Importantly, during these early conversations and disclosures, students began to cultivate empathy. The student comment below reflects the connection between meaningful intercultural interaction, intercultural learning, and empathy: "I got to hear about their experiences coming to Singapore for studies as well as exchanging what we know about our own culture. I was more aware of how the international students felt having to move away from their families and come to a foreign country all by themselves, and how they have to adapt to the Singapore culture."

A majority of the cultural learning process codes reflect empathy development, including learning about their culture, learning about their adaptation, hearing their perspective of Singapore, acquiring new cultural insight, and realizing that international students long for interaction with host nationals.

Secondly, along with intercultural learning, several students described having meaningful interactions while realizing similarities and discussing commonalities. Thus, self-disclosure and information sharing played a role but tended to be more surface level. For example, students discussed language nuances, their shared multicultural origins, dietary restrictions, and previous international experiences. The following comment highlights conversations focused on realizing similarities and commonalities: "I would say that I am glad and happy that I've met these people because it is really nice to know that one can have so many similarities even though we are born and raised in a different country."

Thirdly, several frequently occurring process codes connecting meaningful interaction and the Personal Satisfaction/Affect category were enjoying oneself, meeting new people, having an interesting experience, and having a new experience. Students may not have had deep conversations or shared personal intimate information,

but they realized that meeting and interacting with culturally different others can be incredibly interesting, fulfilling, and fun. "I'm really glad that we held this event because some of the international students shared that they'd recently been feeling stressed out over exams, and the past 2 years of online studies were really boring for them. I feel that the event was a good way for both our local and international students to relax, meet new people, and just have fun!"

This personal satisfaction and enjoyment aspect is not trivial considering that initial encounters, such as those that occurred during the games event, potentially play an important role in long-term relationship development (Sunnafrank & Ramirez Jr., 2004). Even though students may not have had time to engage in deep conversations, some managed to exchange contact information and set the foundation for future interactions. These short-lived interactions are necessary for progressing to more advanced relationship development stages (Kudo et al., 2019).

Table 2: Process Codes And Frequency For Games Events And Cultural Encounters

Games Event (n=42)		Cultural Encounters (n=45)	
Category: Nature of Interaction			
Not having meaningful conversation (games event)	12	Having time to interact	1
Feeling natural (awkward at first)	6	Feeling Natural	5
Feeling awkward	2		
Category: Personal Satisfaction/Affect			
Enjoying self	10	Enjoying Self	3
Having new experience	6	Having new experience	4
Meeting new people	7	Meeting new people	1
Making new friends	1	Making new friends	6
Having interesting experience	5	Feeling humbled, sincere, touched, grateful	5
		Enjoying the challenge	1
		Empathizing with partner	1
		Having unexpected moments	1
		Feeling proud of own country	1
Category: Cultural Learning			
Learning about their culture	7	Learning about their culture	19
Sharing own culture	4	Sharing own culture	2
Hearing their perspective of Singapore	4	Hearing their perspective of Singapore	5
Acquiring new cultural insight	4	Acquiring new cultural insight	6
Learning about their adaptation	3	Learning about their adaptation	3
		Considering cultural differences	8
		Applying class concepts to interactions	3
		Deepening theoretical understanding	1
		Trying different foods	1
		Realizing that international students long for interaction with host nationals	1
Category: Self-Disclosure			
Realizing cultural similarities	5	Realizing cultural similarities	9
Exploring commonalities	10	Exploring commonalities	3
Diving into deeper conversations	1	Diving into deeper conversations	8
Taking time to self-disclose	4	Bonding with partner	3
Having reciprocal conversations	3	Sharing intimate moments	1
		Making lifelong friends	1
Category: Personal Growth			
Being shy and having space to open up	1	Learning about self	4
Motivating to make more friends	1	Feeling less judgmental of foreigners	1
Motivating to live abroad	1	Becoming more open-minded	1
		Seeing the world differently	1
		Expanding tolerance for difference	1
Category: Duration			
Exchanging contact information	4	Planning to visit their country	1
Setting foundation for future interaction	2		
Category: Agency			
Initiating conversation	1	Initiating the interaction	1
		Reaching out to strangers in future	1
Category: Communication Modification			
Speaking slower	1	Not needing to modify communication	1

Source: Author

4.4. Open-Ended Contextual Question For Cultural Encounters

After completing the 21-item instrument, students provided context to their responses following the same prompt described in Section 3.3. It should be noted that students were reflecting on a combination of the three cultural encounters they had completed throughout the semester.

The first major difference between the cultural encounters and the games event is related to the Nature of the Interaction and Self-Disclosure categories. Students mentioned feeling natural diving into deep conversations, and associated meaningful interactions with the amount and quality of personal information exchange. Several students learned more about their partner's cultural background, highlighted their realizations of cultural similarities and differences, and intensified their empathy development. The comment below highlights this relationship between self-disclosure, intercultural exchange, empathy, and meaningful interaction: "I think it is also pretty eye-opening and fulfilling to interact and have deep conversations with them while we exchange knowledge about our own culture."

During both the games event and cultural encounters, students associated meaningful interaction with learning about their conversation partners' culture while sharing aspects of their own culture. However, students tended to go much more in-depth during the cultural encounters and reflected on the new cultural insight they acquired when exposed to new perspectives, worldviews, values, and practices. The nature of the cultural encounters allowed them to have deeper conversations, form stronger bonds, cultivate empathy, and strengthen friendships while learning more about their partner's culture and intercultural communication processes. The two comments below reiterate the connection between meaningful interaction, deep conversation, empathy building, and cultural learning: *"I think it was particularly meaningful as there were many deep conversations about themselves and where they are from. Thus, I got to have a better insight into what their life back home looks like and not just have a superficial view of life in another country."* *"Reflecting upon each encounter in reference to the theories we have learned in class was additionally insightful, to take those theoretical concepts and see them in the flesh. I would say that the encounters satiated parts of my curiosity about other nations, and at the same time ignited a deeper desire to learn even more moving forward."*

The latter comment not only illustrates cultural learning but is also connected to personal growth, which is the second major distinction between the two-course activities. Only a few personal growth process codes appeared during the "games" event and these were related to individual motivations and communication style. However, in reflecting on the cultural encounters, students discussed both learning about themselves and becoming more open-minded, less judgmental of foreigners, having more tolerance for differences, and having a changed worldview. The two quotes below highlight the personal growth function of the cultural encounters: "Overall, the interactions were thought-provoking and allowed me to learn more not only about others but also myself." "It felt as though I was expanding not only my knowledge of other cultures but my tolerance for people who are different from me."

Overall, students described the cultural encounters as positive, profound, and impactful experiences that pushed them out of their comfort zones, made them feel alive, filled their hearts with contentment, and even moved them to reassess the word "culture."

4.5. Comparing Quality Intercultural Interaction For Games Events And Cultural Encounters

A paired samples t-test compared students' perceptions of meaningful interaction for the welcome and games event and cultural encounters. On average, students reported having more meaningful interactions during the cultural encounters ($M = 4.49, SE = .06$) than during the games event ($M = 3.84, SE = .07$). This difference, 0.65, BCa 95% CI [-.82, -.49], was significant " t " (41) = -7.9, $p < .001$ and represented a large-sized effect, $d = -1.2$.

Comparing responses to the open-ended question reveals an emergent conceptual framework (Saldaña, 2016) with implications for future investigations examining quality interaction. Students associated personal satisfaction, exploring commonalities, and intercultural exchange with meaningful interaction during the games event, while deep conversations and personal growth played more important roles during extended encounters.

4.6. Intercultural Interaction Scale And Open-Ended Contextual Question Combined

To compare the quantitative intercultural interaction instrument and the magnitude-coded open-ended questions, a Kendall's tau correlation analysis was run. Results revealed a significant relationship, $\tau = .31, 95\% \text{ BCa CI } [.11, .48], p = .01$, between the intercultural interaction instrument and the magnitude-coded open-ended questions. Kendall's tau suggests a moderate relationship between how students completed the intercultural interaction scale and the words they used to describe their interactions. Additionally, the four items (anxious, increased effort, modified communication, initiating interaction) that were dropped from the quantitative measure during the factor analysis scarcely surfaced while coding the open-ended questions (e.g., modifying communication and initiation each appeared only once). Thus, the open-ended contextual question not only provided important insights and context but also corroborated the factor analysis findings (Saldaña, 2016).

5. Discussion

This study posed two research questions examining Singaporean domestic students' perceptions of quality interaction with international students and culturally different others in general. The results have implications for intercultural communication pedagogy, provide a quantitative scale that educators can use to objectively measure quality intercultural interaction, and lead to a theoretical discussion of intercultural relationship development and Kim's (2001) host receptivity concept.

5.1. Administrative And Pedagogical Implications

When comparing the games event and cultural encounters a conceptual framework emerged, offering specific strategies that educators can use to facilitate meaningful interactions and intercultural learning interventions (Paige, 2015) across a variety of contexts and relationship development stages. First, one way to achieve meaningful exchanges during initial encounters between strangers is for facilitators to prompt participants to focus on discovering commonalities and intercultural exchange. Second, initiatives should focus on incorporating strategies that make conversations natural, and creating contexts in which interactions are enjoyable and interesting, but not awkward or forced. Third, for extended encounters between individuals who have time to comfortably move through relationship stages, educators should explicitly stress self-disclosure while encouraging participants to engage in deep conversation, demonstrate empathy, and exchange more intimate personal information.

Findings extend previous quality interaction frameworks (Campbell, 2012; Colvin & Volet, 2014; Dunne, 2009; Jacobi, 2021) and highlight the potential of intercultural communication courses. Many cultural learning process codes reflecting empathy development appeared in the games event and cultural encounters. Heightened empathy and perspective-taking are not only important for intercultural relationship development but can also lead to more positive attitudes between groups (Pettigrew et al., 2011). Further, during the cultural encounters, participants emphasized learning intercultural communication concepts, deepening their theoretical understanding, learning about themselves, and learning about their partners. This awareness of learning is a promising theme that also emerged in Campbell's (2012) intercultural communication course. Designing intercultural communication courses that encourage students to have meaningful interactions with culturally different others is related to a variety of positive outcomes such as practical experience, satisfaction, inspiration, and increased intercultural communication competence (Campbell, 2012). Thus, identifying and implementing intercultural learning interventions (Paige & Vande Berg, 2012) that foster more meaningful interactions and empathy development could potentially enhance and magnify these positive outcomes. Overall, these strategies contribute to a university context laden with environmental affordances (Kudo et al., 2019), heightened host receptivity (Kim, 2001), and provide international students with more opportunities for meaningful interaction with domestic students.

Factor analysis coupled with a contextual analysis highlights five major quality interaction categories (Nature of Interaction, Personal Satisfaction/Affect, Self-Disclosure, Cultural Learning, Personal Growth) and suggests that they are interrelated. The nature of the interaction not only influences personal satisfaction but also the amount and type of self-disclosure that participants can engage in. The depth of cultural learning is closely related to self-disclosure and the time that individuals have to exchange cultural information. The amount and depth of cultural exchange are what potentially lead to self-learning and personal growth. This interrelated category sequence underscores the importance of university-supported intercultural learning interventions and their potential to impact the nature of the interaction during the early phases of intercultural relationship development.

Finally, the quality interaction scale developed for this study has several potential uses for international education and research. First, to assess and objectively compare initiatives attempting to aid interaction between international students and host students (e.g., class activities, orientations, workshops, social events). Second, to assess tutor program effectiveness and/or identify tutor characteristics that lead to meaningful intercultural interactions. Third, to use as a reflection tool for intercultural learning interventions (Paige, 2015).

5.2. Theoretical Implications

A magnitude coding procedure suggests that approximately 40% of students had meaningful interactions during the games event, and approximately 84% of the students had meaningful interactions during the cultural encounters. Additionally, a paired samples *t*-test indicated a significant difference in interaction meaningfulness between the games event and the cultural encounters. Students did report meaningful interactions during the games event; however, by comparing with the cultural encounters, it is possible to explore the nuances of meaningful intercultural interaction. Students potentially have positive intercultural interactions at both shallow and deep levels (Colvin & Volet, 2014). Shallow-level encounters are one-time interactions that tend to be factual in nature with more impersonal self-disclosure, whereas deep-level positive experiences are characterized by intimate and highly personal self-disclosure over an extended period (Colvin & Volet, 2014).

The current study's examination of meaningful intercultural interaction provides insight for better understanding intercultural friendship development. Findings suggest congruency with the assertion that relationship development between culturally different others follows similar patterns as with culturally similar others (Gudykunst, 1985; Gudykunst & Kim, 1997). Communication researchers note that expectations and perceptions of intercultural interactions affect initial encounters (Chen, 2002; Gudykunst & Kim, 1997), culture influences the type of information that individuals are willing to self-disclose, and individuals seek distinct information to reduce uncertainty (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997); however, once intercultural friendships form, individuals tend to perceive similarities in the same way as with intracultural friendships (Gudykunst, 1985). Findings from this study suggest that intercultural relationships follow the Social Penetration Theory (SPT)'s systematic process (Altman & Taylor, 1973) and develop as individuals exchange personal information and penetrate each other's personality structure, moving from peripheral, superficial layers to more central intimate

layers (Griffin et al., 2019). Students experienced initial interactions characterized by shallow-level conversations where they realized cultural similarities and discovered commonalities regarding peripheral layer information ranging from university majors and experiences in Singapore to food and music preferences. During the initial information and cultural exchange period, participants reduced uncertainty, overcame initial awkwardness, and exchanged contact details. Thus, the nature of the interaction is crucial; if educators afford contexts for students to have meaningful initial conversations and opportunities to realize cultural similarities, explore commonalities, build empathy, and enjoy themselves, it will potentially lead to positive assessments of their new intercultural acquaintance and future relationship development. Subsequently, during longer-lasting cultural encounters, students can engage in deeper-level conversations characterized by more intimate self-disclosure and bonding. SPT was conceptualized while examining same-sex intracultural friendship formation (Taylor, 1968); however, later research supports the applicability of SPT to intercultural friendships (Chen & Nakazawa, 2009; Gudykunst et al., 1987).

Even though intercultural and intracultural relationships develop in similar patterns, it does not mean that all individuals are equal. Students in the current study varied in their disposition and attitudes toward interacting with international students, especially during the games event. Some domestic students simply have more intercultural skills and are more interested in meeting and interacting with culturally different others (Harrison, 2015). Further, an individual's degree of cosmopolitanism, or openness towards others whose origin is non-local, allows intercultural relationships to develop (Kudo et al., 2019). Previous research examining the role that tutor programs play in friendship development suggests that certain individuals play the role of intercultural connectors, central, socially active host nationals that facilitate information flow between domestic and international students (Hendrickson, 2018). It is plausible that intercultural connectors possess heightened cosmopolitanism and the ability to identify commonalities during initial encounters and understand how to appropriately exchange more intimate information as intercultural relationships develop. Identifying host individuals with intercultural connector characteristics and recruiting them to participate in interaction initiatives potentially presents international students with micro-cultural environments laden with host receptivity and individuals who communicate expressions of acceptance, understanding, inclusion, and support (Kim, 2001). Future research examining the communication characteristics of intercultural connectors is needed to better understand their contribution to host receptivity and university integration initiatives.

6. Conclusion

This investigation provides a clearer picture of what meaningful intercultural interaction between domestic and international students entails and connects this insight to intercultural relationship development theory. Further, educators can use the quality intercultural interaction scale developed in this study to assess and objectively compare initiatives that promote meaningful intercultural interaction. Readers are encouraged to incorporate this instrument into their own research projects and as a reflection tool for intercultural learning interventions.

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