

Developing in a developing country

A study on the attainment and further development of international competencies during an internship in Uganda

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Summary

To be able to 'survive' in a more and more globalising world, students of universities and universities of applied sciences must attain international competencies, in this study defined as respectively general personal, social competencies, intercultural competencies, a command of foreign languages and international academic and professional competencies. International competencies can be attained in different ways by students: internally (via foreign teachers and/or students) and/or externally (via internships and/or exchanges). The external attainment of competencies is far more successful when students are well prepared and when they receive proper supervision, both during and after their stay abroad. If this is not the case, students often tend to develop at a personal, social and (inter)cultural level, but significantly less at an academic and professional level (Stronkhorst, 2005). These students are also often unable to recognise and express which knowledge and skills they attained during their stay abroad (Orahoud et al., 2004; CERI, 2008; Deardorff, 2009).

With the preceding information as a starting point, the Social Work degree programme of Windesheim University of Applied Sciences in Zwolle started the minor 'Social Work in Africa & Asia' in the beginning of 2014. Students who participate firstly pass through a six-week preparatory theoretical programme, followed by a three-month internship in Uganda or Vietnam. The minor concludes with a two-week postmortem programme. The practical component of the minor involves Eye4Africa, a Dutch internship supervision agency for internships in Uganda, Kenya and Vietnam. Eye4Africa arranges the internships, prepares the students for their stay abroad, both in the Netherlands and abroad, and then offers them support, coaching and intervention meetings.

At the initiative of and in collaboration with Eye4Africa The Hague University of Applied Sciences carried out a qualitative study amongst eight female students of the Social Work degree programme of Windesheim University of Applied Sciences who followed the minor 'Social Work in Africa & Asia' during the academic year 2014-2015.

The following was key to the research conducted: the question of the extent to which preparation for the Social Work in Africa & Asia minor at Windesheim University of Applied Sciences and the supervision that the Eye4Africa internship agency offers fourth-year Social Work students during their internships in Uganda in the autumn of 2014 had a positive impact on the attainment and further development of international competencies.

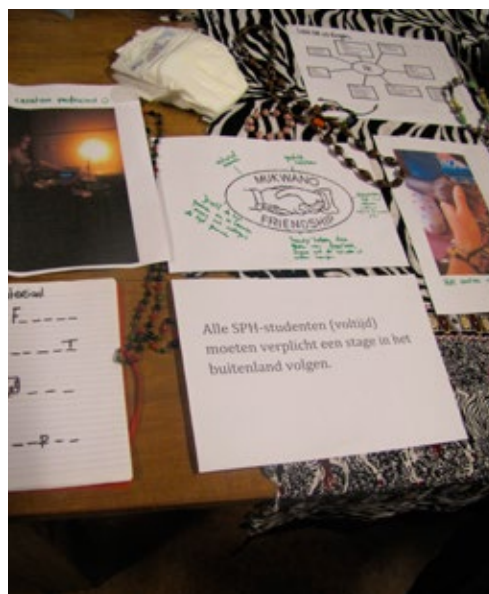
The results have shown that the students found it very easy to recognise and express the knowledge and skills they gained during their internships. Secondly, the students mentioned clear professional, intercultural and personal, social growth. No growth or development in relation to academic competencies was observed in this study. However, this is not unusual, as the students were doing internships. Academic competencies are particularly attained when studying abroad, while professional competencies are particularly attained during internships (Hoven & Walenkamp, 2013; 2015). The main conclusion of this study is that the preparation and the supervision by Windesheim University of Applied Sciences and Eye4Africa within the framework of the minor 'Social Work in Africa & Asia' has aided students with regard to growth and the (further) development of international competencies. Some important short comments are that a relatively small, very one-sided sample has been interviewed and that there was no control group.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, universities and universities of applied sciences worldwide have increasingly shifted their focus to internationalisation (Forsey et al., 2012). By doing this, they hope to deliver graduates with international competence, an open and respectful attitude to other cultures and different ways of thinking, a feel for social involvement, a sense of responsibility for the world, an international knowledge of their profession, of their own culture, the cultures of others and other countries, skills like multilingualism and the ability to listen and observe, analyse and relate and reflect. Armed with these qualities or competencies, they will be able to perform better and with fewer difficulties in a globalising world and multicultural environment. They have learned to act appropriately and are able to communicate effectively (Hoven & Walenkamp, 2013; 2015).

As such, universities and universities of applied sciences are responding to the wishes expressed by organisations, which are looking for employees that are able to perform well and with ease in the international arena (Daly & Barker, 2005). It is certainly not always necessary for them to go abroad. They could equally have to do this in their own country, whether in an international organisation or in an organisation that employs people from a number of different cultures.

Students are able to attain international competencies at their own universities. This can be achieved by recruiting and attracting foreign lecturers and students, for example. However, other possibilities are available to students outside their own institutions: giving students the opportunity to participate in a summer school or allowing them to spend some time studying or doing an internship abroad, for example. However, it will be vital for students to go overseas for the country in question well prepared, particularly where language proficiency and intercultural competencies are concerned. Added to the above, they must receive proper supervision, both during and after their stay abroad. If this is not the case, students often tend to develop at a personal, social and (inter)cultural level, but significantly less at an academic and professional level (Stronkhorst, 2005). These students are also often unable to recognise and express which knowledge and skills they attained during their stay abroad (Orahood et al., 2004; CERi, 2008; Deardorff, 2009).



2. What are international competencies?

In existing literature, various terms are used to define the concept ‘international competencies’: *international*, *intercultural* or *global competence*, *global citizenship*, *intercultural effectiveness* or *sensitivity* and *cross-cultural competence*. The International Cooperation Research Group has chosen to include intercultural competencies under the general term ‘international competencies’ (Hoven & Walenkamp, 2013; 2015). For the purpose of this research, the term ‘international competencies’ includes:

- General personal, social competencies;
- Intercultural competencies;
- A command of foreign languages;
- International academic competencies;
- International professional competencies.

2.1 General personal, social competencies

An individual who has attained general personal, social competencies has the ability to interact with others in a positive and effective way. These competencies include a range of behaviours, varying from communication and listening skills to showing initiative and flexibility. General personal, social competencies are not exclusive to an international context and may be needed in any context: national, international and even regional.

2.2 Intercultural competencies

Where intercultural competencies are concerned, this research will draw on the intercultural competency model developed by Deardorff (2006). In this model, Deardorff identifies a number of inextricably linked levels of intercultural competency. These can be displayed as a number of different layers in a pyramid. As an intercultural competency develops, each layer of the pyramid is worked through one by one, from the bottom upwards. As the development referred to above continues, this process repeats itself continually.

The basic layer of the pyramid is formed by attitudes, which influence every other aspect of intercultural competency. The starting point required is a fundamentally positive attitude to intercultural situations: an attitude of respect and appreciation of cultural diversity, an open, inquisitive and unbiased attitude towards people with a different cultural background and an openness to situations that are unknown and unclear and involve uncertainty.

The second layer is formed by extensive cultural knowledge and intercultural skills. Cultural knowledge can be defined as extensive knowledge of those cultural elements that influence one’s own way of interaction or the interaction of others:

- An understanding of another individual’s global vision, norms and values and lifestyle;
- An understanding of the role and impact of cultural elements on behaviour and communication;
- An understanding of the historical, political and religious context;
- A socio-linguistic awareness of the connection between language and meaning in a social context.

The intercultural skills are necessary to process the knowledge mentioned above. Particular examples of these skills follow below:

- Listening, observing and interpreting;
- Analysing, evaluating and recognising relationships between different cultural elements;
- Managing differences and conflicts, including the ability to understand and manage different cultural approaches to conflict resolution.

A combination of the right attitudes, knowledge and skills results in the 'desired internal outcomes'. This involves critical cultural awareness, the ability to reflect on cultural matters, change perspectives and to put into perspective and broaden the frame of reference on which one's thinking and actions are based. Ultimately, this will culminate in the 'desired external outcomes': the ability of a person to communicate effectively and act appropriately in intercultural situations.

2.3 A command of foreign languages

A command of foreign languages involves more than just a general vocabulary or the ability to express oneself fluently in a foreign language. This competency includes a range of aspects, including receptive and productive skills (listening and reading versus speaking and writing) and sub-competencies like socio-linguistic competencies (knowing and understanding how language can be used with the right social meaning, depending on the context) and strategic competencies (the ability to enhance the effectiveness of communication or to keep communication on track if it is interrupted).

2.4 International academic competencies

International academic competencies include a knowledge of other education systems, international academic literature and handbooks, the ability to do research with colleagues from other countries, the use of international subjects and case studies in education, the creative use of different international teaching methods and learning in one's own classes and an awareness of the latest international developments in one's own discipline.

2.5 International professional competencies

International professional competencies involve a knowledge and experience of the various ways in which one's own profession is practised in other countries and the ability to utilise this knowledge and experience effectively in one's own work.



3. The Social Work in Africa & Asia minor

In 2014, the Social Work degree programme of Windesheim University of Applied Sciences in Zwolle developed a minor, based on the findings outlined above. The minor, the content of which ties in with graduation specialisations in the social domain, consists of a six-week preparatory theoretical component at the university of applied sciences, followed by a three-month internship¹ in Uganda or Vietnam (since 2015-2016). After students arrive back in the Netherlands, the minor will conclude with a two-week postmortem programme. The minor was launched in the first semester of academic year 2014-2015.

The practical component of the minor involves Eye4Africa, a Dutch internship supervision agency for internships in Uganda, Kenya and Vietnam. Eye4Africa arranges internships, prepares students for their stay abroad, both in the Netherlands and abroad, and then offers them support, coaching and intervision meetings. More information about Eye4Africa will follow in the next section.

There were three reasons for developing the minor (Van Brug & Muis-Pruim, 2015):

1. The Welfare Worker in the Mental Healthcare Sector and Youth Services graduation specialisation

Because the field of work and government are making more and more demands on individuals working in youth services and the mental healthcare sector (*GGZ*), an increasing number of Social Work students is choosing Youth Services or Welfare Worker in the Mental Healthcare Sector as a graduation specialisation. These graduation specialisations are gaining an ever clearly significance for the field of work because an increasing amount of care funding is reserved for the help provided by care providers with these degree certificate supplements. As a result, the number of students opting for a graduation specialisation has increased in recent years. Because these students are required to include fixed components of the curriculum in their learning programme, it is (almost) impossible for them to gain international experience any more. By offering this minor, which takes into consideration the curriculum requirements for students doing a graduation specialisation, it is possible for this group of students to gain experience at an international level too and, by doing this, gain the ability to place their views on the profession in an international context.

2. Intercultural competencies (field of work)

Currently, a small number of students opt to go abroad as so-called 'freemovers' each year. This happens at the request of an individual student, via the Examination Board. Where the above is concerned, it has been observed in recent years that the international learning experiences that students gain in this way are primarily evident at a personal level. There is little integration with professional development. Having said this, there is an increasing demand from the Social Work field of work for professionals with intercultural competencies. Research by The Hague University of Applied Sciences (Hoven & Walenkamp, 2013) shows that if international experience is gained in a developing country, this can help individuals to attain the international competencies necessary to be able to work with various target groups. However, it is important for learning experiences to be embedded in an education programme properly; preparation and aftercare are important elements.

1 Instead of 'internship' the Social Work degree programme uses the term 'fieldwork'. Many students believe an internship implies less initiative than 'fieldwork'. However, they have – to some extent – to pioneer, and they also have to conduct research.

3. Student mobility

The development of this minor has made it possible to start to improve student mobility, in line with the performance agreements. The Social Work degree programme in Zwolle and Almere and the Educational Theory and Social Work and Services (MWD) degree programmes have expressed great interest in linking up with this minor. It has been found that students want to gain more in-depth knowledge by doing an international Social Work minor. This enables them to place their profession in an international context and attain the graduation profiles required.

The starting points for the Social Work in Africa & Asia minor are as follows:

- Students receive supervision and support lessons before, during and after their time abroad, making it possible for them to optimally integrate personal learning experiences into their professional attitude.
- Lessons focus on specific themes in the 'social work' field of work.
- Students contribute to and attain knowledge and skills during their internship period and do not contribute any financial resources or goods. In this way, equality is promoted in the collaboration relationship as much as possible. Students work on assignments issued by partner organisations.
- Students work as little as possible directly with the vulnerable target groups themselves. They are not given any caring duties. They focus more on supporting local staff who work with the target groups in question.
- Critical consideration is given to the role played by student interns in orphanages or in relation to other vulnerable groups and the meaning of changing volunteers and students for the bonding process of orphans/children.

The education received prior to and after the practical component abroad is broken down into four learning tracks:

- The exploration of theoretical aspects (bonding, addiction, health, culture, research and papers);
- Fieldwork (working with limited resources as a creative professional);
- Personal development (academic career coaching, intervention and coaching);
- Vision of the profession (professionalisation and debate).

The following themes are raised for discussion during the theory provided prior to the internship:

- **Bonding: bonding problems, bonding disorders, adoption and growing up in orphanages.**
There is a relatively strong focus on this theme, because Social Work students will (want to) work with vulnerable children in developing countries a lot. The Social Work degree programme of Windesheim University of Applied Sciences believes that the constant change in students (volunteers) could seriously disrupt the bonding achieved by these children. As such, students will primarily be prepared to work side by side with local staff and not so much in direct contact with the children (also see 'Starting points' above).
- **Themes relating to culture and development cooperation.**
During their fieldwork, theory/knowledge aids students in their search for explanations, the analysis of differences and the development of reflections and learning experiences.
- **Themes relating to vision development: 'from passion to professionalism'.**
This involves two lessons: one on the concept of voluntarism and the other on awareness (including the question of what help is and when it has or has not been successful for you). Object: for students to learn to place their views about the profession in an international context (qualifying their views and having the confidence to put them to the test). Next to this there are lessons about vision of illness and about addiction.

Explicit intercultural competencies have not been utilised in academic year 2014-2015 (yet).

Lessons are supported by English-language academic literature, documentaries, visual material and additional articles. Students attend group lessons, receive academic career coaching and work independently in literature groups and 'country-in-the-spotlight' groups.

The students then spend thirteen weeks in Uganda or Vietnam. In the first week of their stay, they attend a three-day preparatory training course, delivered by Eye4Africa. Having completed this, they spend twelve weeks doing fieldwork with local organisations in the field of community work, care for the disabled, the identification and prevention of domestic violence, addiction services, parenting support or refugee work. During their internships, students primarily do outreach² work in collaboration with local social workers. They also work with staff to do a (small) research project on a specific theme that is relevant for their graduation profile (in 2014-2015, this was 'bonding in Uganda' (differences, views, parenting)). While doing fieldwork, students have two intervision sessions with a supervisor/coach from Eye4Africa who has been trained in the Netherlands. They may also benefit from individual coaching in Uganda or Vietnam as and when they require.

In the last two weeks, students complete a lecture programme in the Netherlands. This consists of a number of concluding meetings that focus on the integration of learning experiences for professional practice. Vision development and transfer are key. Students conclude the minor with a debate on their views on development assistance and on the profession in an international context. They also write a paper about the research that they did during their fieldwork. Finally, there is a final exhibition in which the students use words and images to show how they, as creative professionals, set to work with limited resources during their fieldwork. Personal learning experiences and ethical dilemma's are represented in a final portfolio together with assignments with respect to content.

The command that students have of the professional task at Bachelor level must be evident from the following four points:

- The student shows **independence**: he manages the performance of professional tasks;
- The student is able to cope well with **complexity**: he comes up with solution strategies for multiple complex questions;
- The student displays **transfer**: he translates knowledge and skills into an approach in a different situation;
- The student displays **responsibility**: he is accountable for the approach adopted and for coordination, continuity and the result.

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2 'Outreach work' is a term that is used in the social domain. Basically, it means that professionals do not wait until a client approaches them, but identify problem situations themselves and offer their help.

4. Eye4Africa

Founded in 2004, Eye4Africa offers students at universities and universities of applied sciences the opportunity to complete an internship programme in Uganda, Kenya or Vietnam in their specific areas of expertise, with the object of achieving professional and personal growth. At the current time, Eye4Africa employs two trainers and two coaches; all of them are Dutch. Eye4Africa promotes itself via its website (www.eye4africa.com) and via a brochure. It also regularly presents itself at internship information meetings organised by universities and universities of applied sciences.

The mission of Eye4Africa has been formulated as follows:

Eye4Africa strives to achieve the fair division of prosperity and well-being in the world, by initiating the exchange of people and exchanges between people. Eye4Africa believes that people can learn from each other and enrich each other, literally and figuratively; cultural exchanges and learning about each others' backgrounds and situation can result in a growth in an awareness of and involvement in each others' well-being. The activities in which Eye4Africa is involved contribute to awareness, personal and professional growth and mutual understanding.

Eye4Africa finds internships for students. It also helps them to prepare for their stay and provides them with assistance during their time abroad. Students can opt for a basic package or for a basic package with individual supervision (three variants). Amongst other things, the basic package includes finding an internship, a transfer from the airport to the initial accommodation, an introduction meeting, a city tour, two intervision group sessions with all of the other student interns, a goodbye meeting and a 24-hour emergency telephone number. The packages with individual supervision also include meetings with a coach and telephone consultations (just packages 3 and 4). The basic package costs € 595.00, while the most extensive package costs € 750.00.³

The entire Eye4Africa programme focuses on the attainment of seven international competencies: resilience, negotiation, establishing a connection, self-management, results orientation, creativity and giving feedback (see Appendix 1). Self-reflection is an important aspect too.

The one-day meeting in the Netherlands, which Eye4Africa organises in preparation for the internship, is used to provide students with information about Uganda, discuss the competencies referred to above and complete a number of case studies in which they feature. Students are also made aware of the opportunities and challenges with which development work will present them.

The primary object of the three-hour intervision meetings is to establish how well the students are doing, help them with any problems they have and give them tips on how to create structures. Everything they learn will also be related to the Eye4Africa-competencies via the STARR method⁴. Consideration will again be given to the themes that were key to the theoretical component of the minor. This happens at an individual level in the coaching meetings.

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³ The gross prices mentioned above apply for 2015.

⁴ The supervisor/coach uses the STARR interview method to gain the most reliable and structured impression possible of student behaviour without actually having been present. The Situation, Task (or object), Action, Result and Reflection structure is used to gather examples of behaviour. This reveals how the student operates, which abilities he or she already has for the tasks to be completed and which abilities could still be developed further.

5. The search question for the research

The research to be done will focus on the added value of preparation prior to and support provided while doing an internship in Uganda by fourth-year students enrolled for the Social Work degree programme at Windesheim University of Applied Sciences in the autumn of 2014.

In this context, added value can be defined as the added value of internship preparation and supervision in comparison with foreign internships in which students are not offered either of them. This added value can be achieved in a number of areas:

- general personal, social competencies;
- intercultural competencies;
- a command of foreign languages;
- international academic competencies;
- international professional competencies.

The following will be key to the research conducted: the question of the extent to which preparation for the Social Work in Africa & Asia minor at Windesheim University of Applied Sciences and the supervision that the Eye4Africa internship agency offers fourth-year Social Work students during their internships in Uganda in the autumn of 2014 had a positive impact on the attainment and further development of international competencies.



6. Research substantiation

This research was carried out by the International Cooperation Research Group at The Hague University of Applied Sciences, at the initiative of and in collaboration with Eye4Africa, in the period from September 2014 up to and including August 2015. It ties in with previous research done by The Hague University of Applied Sciences on the added value of study or an internship abroad for the development of international competencies by students and the conditions and factors that influence the development of these competencies (Hoven & Walenkamp, 2013; 2015).

Initially, the intention was to use a number of research tools: quantitative research in the form of an online questionnaire (baseline evaluation and first evaluation), a 360-degrees feedback evaluation among family and friends of the students, qualitative research in the form of in-depth interviews and a self-reflection report. A control group was to be studied too, consisting of Social Work students that did internships in Uganda without the supervision of Eye4Africa or a similar organisation. It was also the intention to interview a minimum of 15 respondents per research group. Despite the fact that everything was done to carry out the research in line with the research design envisaged – customised questionnaires and a list of items for discussion, a number of briefings and requests sent to both the test group and the control group – the qualitative research alone was completed and then only in part, among a non-random sample of eight female respondents from the test group. However, it was decided to go ahead and publish the research results obtained, as they offer interesting insights at aspect level into the development and attainment of international competencies during an internship in a developing country.

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The interviews took place at Windesheim university of applied sciences in Zwolle on Monday 12 January 2015. The students had been back from Uganda for just several days at the time (because of which they had not attended the postmortem programme yet). Each of the interviews – conducted by two researchers from The Hague University of Applied Sciences, on the basis of a list of items for discussion that Eye4Africa had prepared in advance – lasted approximately 45 minutes and were recorded on an audio-tape. Four of the eight interviews were conducted via Skype, since the students in question lived too far away from the research location to attend in person. Notes were made during the interviews and were transcribed straight away afterwards.

The report did not make any distinction between the impact of preparations by Windesheim University of Applied Sciences and the impact of supervision by Eye4Africa. This was not possible because both organisations used virtually the same (international) competencies.

The evaluation of the intervention and coaching provided by Eye4Africa was reported on separately.

7. Research results

7.1 Frame of reference

General

The eight Social Work students from Windesheim University of Applied Sciences who were interviewed for this research varied in age from 21 up to and including 26. Most were living at home still (in Zwolle (and the surrounding area), Kampen and Almere).

During their internships in Uganda, the students were housed near the project, in simple, but well-equipped accommodation (furnished, lockable single rooms, with electricity, clean sanitary facilities and cooking facilities).

Students were free at the weekends, which they spent doing all kinds of activities together in Kampala. They all stayed in the same hotel there.

Motivation

The reasons that students had for opting to do an internship in Uganda were primarily personal: 'to improve mental strength', 'to test whether they could cope mentally' and 'to get out into the big wide world'. The fact that students would be going to Africa as part of a group was of key importance: nice, not alone, the possibility to fall back on others (people that you know).

Projects

The students were deployed primarily as student interns - in pairs - in existing social projects in villages and places around Kampala, the capital city. Examples included a project for disadvantaged single mothers and an aid project for poor families. Their activities included those listed below:

- Delivering training courses to the local population (on subjects including HIV, nutrition, child abuse and setting up their own businesses);
- Training group workers involved in their projects (on subjects including alternative punishments and giving compliments);
- Accompanying group workers on house visits;
- Administrative work;
- Giving English lessons to children between the ages of five and fourteen;
- Creative activities with mothers (making jewelry and similar products to sell);
- Creative activities with children;
- Writing success stories for sponsors and the government about families that took part in a social project.

According to students, they generally had a professional level that is higher than staff and project team members in Uganda. As a result, students were usually able to make a very valuable contribution during the internship. It was also often necessary for them to be creative. For example, if there was a sudden power cut or if certain equipment was not available, like a beamer or craft supplies. Ultimately, less work was done than initially expected. According to the students this was due to the mentality of the local population. Ugandans like to take their time and not get too stressed about anything: breaks lasting hours and hours were the rule rather than the exception - for Ugandans and students alike.

Several students were forced to switch to a different project and accommodation because a dangerous virus had broken out in their area (the Marburg virus, related to the Ebola virus). However, none of the students had considered going home. This was because they had not received any negative travel advice and they did not want to leave before finishing the project. According to the students, the people from Eye4Africa played a positive role in this respect. It said that the students could go home if they wanted, but that this was not actually necessary, because the situation was not as dangerous as people back home in the Netherlands believed. Eye4Africa turned out to be right.

Eye4Africa supervision packages

Of the eight students interviewed, four had the basic package (package 1), three had the basic package plus two coaching meetings (package 2) and one had the basic package with four coaching meetings (package 3).

7.2 The attainment and (further) development of international competencies

All of the students feel that they have greatly improved their international competencies by doing the internship in Uganda. This applies first for 'general personal and social competencies' and 'intercultural competencies', followed by 'professional competencies'. Some students also say that their English improved a little too. The students did not report any development and/or growth in relation to international academic competencies. This is in line with previous research, which revealed that, in addition to general personal, social competencies and intercultural competencies, students that study abroad primarily develop international academic competencies (further), while students that do internships particularly developed international professional competencies (Hoven & Walenkamp, 2013; 2015).

According to the students themselves, self-reflection enabled them to achieve deeper insights in themselves and the world around them.

The subsections below will look in more detail at the (further) development and attainment of international competencies. The Eye4Africa core competencies have been integrated into the international competencies discussed in Section 2.

7.2.1 General personal and social competencies

All students say that their stay in Uganda firstly made them more independent and decisive at a personal and social level. There were many things that they had to make decisions about (themselves). One good example is the outbreak of the Marburg virus: do I stay or not? Another example is the situation where two students had to change from one project to another because of this virus. When they wanted to get to work on the new project, they found that there was no work for them to do there. Instead of sitting around, they created work themselves by writing 'success stories': stories about families that had been helped successfully by the internship organisation. The organisation was then able to use these success stories when applying for (new) subsidies.

Secondly, the students said that they had become more flexible. They found it easy to adjust to the culture in Uganda, which was completely different to their own. One example is the different concept of time there in comparison to the Netherlands: they took a number of extended breaks every day just like their Ugandan colleagues. Another example: they ate lunch with their colleagues every day too, using their hands to eat - even though they did not always enjoy the food put in front of them.

A number of students said that they tried not to lose sight of their own limits or opinions. One of them expressed this as follows:

You have to be flexible, because everything is very different to what you are used to in the Netherlands. However, you do have to stand your ground too. For example: your disagreement with the practice of hitting children at school.

Thirdly, the students felt that they had become more resilient. For example, one of them had had her telephone stolen. In the past, this would have bothered her for a long time, but she had got over the situation very quickly.

Finally: thinking in terms of solutions. For example, two students who worked with children said that they had started to use water and sand to draw with the children when they found that there were no drawing materials left. Other students told the interviewers that they had used hair pins to repair a broken plug (which other students soon did too).

7.2.2 Intercultural competencies

The intercultural competencies will be discussed in the order in which they feature in the pyramid developed by Deardorff (2009) (see Subsection 2.2):

1. Attitudes;
2. Knowledge;
3. Skills;
4. The desired internal outcomes (critical cultural awareness);
5. The desired external outcomes (communication and behaviour).

Attitudes

The majority of students said that they had always had an open, flexible attitude towards other people, but that their stay in Uganda had made them even more open and flexible in their attitudes towards others. The other qualities were named too: more patient, calmer and more inquisitive, more interested in other cultures.

I had always had a good attitude. I was naturally open, which is why I chose the study I am doing today. But I did become more open, more patient and calmer.

I have become more open; I tend to judge others less quickly.

I'm more open to other cultures now; I understand them quicker too

Knowledge

The knowledge gained during the internship in Uganda pertains to the Ugandan culture on the one hand and the students' own (Dutch) culture on the other hand. Where the first is concerned, the students felt that Ugandans generally have a strong group orientation. They do a lot together, particularly with their families. Older people do not live alone but with their children and grandchildren

It's a 'we culture' there; family is very important. An old people's home would be unimaginable; the elderly are cared for at home.

Secondly, the students experienced Ugandans as far calmer than them. For example, they regularly took long breaks during working hours- often for several hours at a time. Ugandans also live for the moment and were found to consider time a flexible concept:

A driver who had driven us around for several days suddenly stopped showing up. He had earned far more than normal and had enough to take a couple of days off.

If I said 'Tomorrow afternoon at two; no later!'; they would laugh and still be late. However, if something really needed to be done, they would always throw themselves into it completely.

Thirdly, the students experienced Ugandans as very hospitable and helpful towards foreigners. If their own people had problems, the Ugandans would not help them. However, they would not ask for help either. They did share their food though.

What was also striking were the traditional male-female relationships. According to the students, (many) men feel that it is normal to hit their women and women do nothing to stop this.

According to the students, Ugandans find it difficult to change. A student:

Uganda is not as far with Social Work as we are. If we said that something could be done better, they found it difficult to change things. To achieve something, we had to be patient and maintain contacts with them: keep communicating.

The final point that the students made about Ugandan culture was that they had learned that it was very hierarchical. According to them, this manifested itself not just in work situations, but also in families and at schools: children do not have much of a say. If they do not do what they are told, they are hit.

As regards their own – Dutch – culture, the students say that they realise that it is very individualistic. According to them, the Dutch are difficult to please, they are demanding – children too – and complain often and a lot. Other things they mentioned were that living standards in the Netherlands are very high in comparison with Uganda and that the Dutch focus on the future much more than Ugandans do.

Skills

Giving feedback is a skill that students had already developed as part of their degree programme prior to their internships. However, they learned to be less direct in the way they gave feedback in Uganda. This was particularly due to the high status that white people have there: if you say what you think, this comes across as confrontational. One of the students said the following about what she experienced in her work:

Ugandans respond very differently to constructive criticism; they feel attacked. For example, our colleagues told us to write everything down on paper first and then enter it into the computer. That really wasn't efficient at all! We then asked whether we could show them that you could actually enter the information straight away without writing it down first. They agreed with us after that.

Most students said that they learned to 'see' better too. For example, one of them said that she had the impression, at the start of her internship, that nothing was being done to raise the children properly. Later, she saw that she had been wrong.

Finally, several students said that their English improved during their stay in Uganda.

Desired internal outcomes: critical cultural awareness

Where critical cultural awareness is concerned, empathetic skills increased during the internships in Uganda: the students said that they now find it easier to empathise with other people, not just in Uganda but in the Netherlands too. As a result of the above, they gained an understanding of others faster too.

They also currently find it easier to put their own culture into perspective:

The Dutch are antisocial individuals!

The people in Uganda are more modest, less open. They don't complain. Complaining isn't considered polite. People in the Netherlands complain a lot.

The students also realise that the Dutch aren't alone in the way they stereotype minority groups:

I am now really aware of what it is like to be part of a minority group, to be different to everyone else. You get a lot of attention; it's always about your money. They always think that you're rich. You could compare it with what we are like here in the Netherlands: here, people always think that you can't trust people from minority groups. You can't tar everyone with the same brush.

Desired external outcomes: communication and behaviour

Initially, the students found that their communication with the Ugandans was not effective. The people were very tight-lipped and gave socially desirable answers, probably as a result of the high status that white people have there. It sometimes also seemed difficult for them to understand what the students were trying to explain. However, as the students started to find out more about Ugandan culture and customs, they found it easier to empathise with people and then understand them better. They were able to communicate more effectively as a result too. For example, they no longer said what they were thinking out loud any more and gave colleagues indirect feedback. The improved communication made it possible for the students to achieve a better connection with the Ugandans.

According to the students, it was not difficult to display appropriate behaviour. They say that it is in their nature to have the ability and want to adjust quickly to an unfamiliar environment. If they felt that they were not doing something properly or did not know exactly what they were supposed to be doing, they asked for feedback from the people around them straight away.

7.2.3 General professional competencies

Where general professional competencies are concerned, the students firstly say that they have grown in terms of creative thinking and being creative. They regularly found that the resources they need to be able to carry out their professional duties and for their everyday lives were not available. These ranged from chalk for the blackboards and drawing materials to electricity:

We often had to get things done with very limited resources.

It teaches you to be creative differently. For example, we had a lot of power cuts. So, we started to use pen and paper again instead of our laptops.

Secondly, the students say that they became more skilled negotiators, about money but about certain customs too:

Negotiating? It never ended! Negotiating about the price of a scooter ride, for example.

About punishments too: alternative punishments versus hitting. I felt that hitting shouldn't be allowed, but that's a Western way of thinking. We decided to look for a compromise that would be right for Ugandan culture.

Thirdly, several students said that they had gained experience teaching Ugandans to adopt a professional attitude to work. One of the student expressed this as follows:

The children there get really attached to you; they don't have anything. That's when you have to learn and ask yourself a number of questions: which approach is best? How do I handle the situation? You'll be gone soon and then they'll be alone again and they'll only have themselves to rely on again. For example, there was a deaf girl that attracted negative attention all the time. She started to cling to my leg all the time. I kept my distance from her and occasionally ignored and moved away from her. This was the right thing to do, because she then started to play with the other children. Afterwards, I rewarded her behaviour by doing something fun with her and the other children. So, not just with her; that would have been wrong.

7.2.4 Self-reflection

All of the students realised what poverty actually is during their time in Africa. As a result, they now appreciate their lives in the Netherlands more. However, their experience has made them more critical of this too.

When I got home, I realised how spoilt we are! I live on a farm and there's not a lot of luxury there. But we do have a shower and hot water, etc.."

I am now far more grateful for the life that I have here in the Netherlands. Before I went to Africa, I just took everything for granted.

The students also learned to see what really matters in their lives because they were forced to cope by themselves in Uganda, far away from the people closest to them. Suddenly, all of the comforts that we take for granted in the Netherlands were not there anymore.

I appreciate my mother more now and she appreciates me more too. She visited me in Uganda for a week.

Added to the above, students find it easier to empathize with ethnic minorities in the Netherlands now, because they learned about Ugandan culture and also because they experienced firsthand what it is like to be on your own in a foreign country.

Finally, several students said that they know themselves better now too.

7.2.5 The effect of the postmortem programme

As already indicated above in the research substantiation, the interviews with students took place before they did the last part of the minor: the postmortem programme. As a result, this programme, which focuses on the INTEGRATION of learning experiences for professional practice, could not be discussed with them. However, their lecturer did pass on several comments to the researchers after the second semester had ended. These will be discussed below.

In retrospect, the postmortem programme was very informative. On the one hand in the sense that certain 'pieces of the puzzle fell into place' for students and, on the other hand, because they started to realise that personal growth and development also meant that they had grown as professionals. During intervention sessions, the students were also asked to reflect on five key tasks (originating from the Youth Care Worker graduation profile): 'distance and vicinity', 'the importance of the educator versus

the importance of youth', 'adopting a position', 'transparency versus privacy safeguards' and 'coping with limited possibilities'. Students were effortlessly able to link these core tasks to practical situations in Uganda. They also found it easy to use the theory provided in advance (in the lessons on culture and development cooperation, for example) to substantiate and explain matters.

7.3 Competitive advantage in comparison with others

Asked about which competencies they now have that other students will not have if they have not done an internship in Africa, the students said: flexibility, the ability to act quickly, the ability to work independently, empathy with others (minority groups in the Netherlands) and creativity:

I am able to find the middle ground in a different culture with different norms and values.

We are able to cope well in hectic situations.

8. Analysis and discussion

8.1 Conclusions

The preparatory lessons provided by Windesheim University of Applied Sciences to the Social Work students from this research prior to their internships in Uganda and the supervision provided by Eye4Africa during their internships aided students in two respects at the very least where growth and the (further) development of international competencies are concerned.

Firstly - in contrast to what is stated in literature on the subject (Orahoud et al., 2004; CERI, 2008; Deardorff, 2009), the students found it very easy to recognise and express the knowledge and skills they gained during their internships.

Secondly, the students mentioned clear professional growth: they said that they had grown in terms of creative thinking and creativity and in negotiations about money and customs. They also indicated that they had gained experience of training others to adopt a professional attitude to work. By contrast, literature states (Stronkhorst, 2005) that development in terms of academic and professional development while studying or doing an internship abroad is achieved significantly less than development at a personal/social and intercultural level respectively.

The students have experienced significant development as well in terms of the attainment of general personal and social competencies on the one hand and intercultural competencies on the other hand. However, it is not possible to establish with any degree of certainty whether the development they have achieved is greater than the development applicable for students from other research projects, who did not attend any preparatory lessons or receive any supervision.

At a personal/social level, the students are more independent, decisive, flexible and resilient. They are also able to think in terms of solutions better.

As regards intercultural competencies, the students have grown in all five aspects of the pyramid developed by Deardorff (2009). Where attitudes are concerned, the students are not only more open and more flexible than before, but also calmer, more patient and more curious about other cultures. The knowledge gained pertains to Ugandan culture (including its strong group orientation, strong hierarchy

and traditional male-female relationships) on the one hand and their own culture (including the fact that it is very individualistic and future-oriented, a complaints culture) on the other hand. In terms of skills, the students have learned to be less direct in the feedback they give and also to 'see' better. For example, Ugandans do actually raise their children properly. Several students improved their English too. The critical self-awareness that students have has improved in the sense that their empathetic skills have improved, they find it easier to put their own culture in perspective and realise that stereotypes are not limited to the Dutch alone. Finally, they learned to communicate with Ugandans better as their internships progressed. It was already natural for them to display appropriate behaviour.

The results obtained clearly show that the students successfully completed the pyramid developed by Deardorff a number of times. For example, the open attitude that a student had led her to notice that her Ugandan colleagues experienced direct feedback as confrontational. She responded to this by actually showing that a certain approach was more efficient than communicating directly would be. As a result, she was able to work better with them afterwards too. In another example, several students wanted to establish a good relationship with their Ugandan colleagues. By keeping their eyes and ears open, they soon learned that lunch was an excellent time to do this. This is because Ugandans use lunch as a time to socialise: by sitting together in a circle and sharing food from the same bowl, eating with their hands, a convivial, relaxed atmosphere was created in which it was easy – even for outsiders – to have a chat with all kinds of different people. By taking part in the above – even if they did not enjoy the food and would have preferred to have used a knife and fork – the students were soon accepted by everyone at their internship addresses and were not afraid to approach anyone with any questions they had.

No growth or development in relation to academic competencies was observed in this research. However, this is not unusual, as the students were doing internships. Academic competencies are particularly attained when studying abroad, while professional competencies are particularly attained during internships (Hoven & Walenkamp, 2013; 2015).

8.2 Discussion

The outcomes of this research must be treated with a certain degree of caution. This is related, firstly, to the size and composition of the sample. Just eight of the 30 respondents envisaged were interviewed. It was a non-random sample. Added to the above, the sample was very one-sided in its composition: all of the students were female and white.

Secondly, the interviews were limited to students from the test group. All of the students from the control group refused to cooperate in the research or could no longer possibly be reached via the (address) details provided.

Thirdly, circumstances – as indicated above in the research justification – meant that just one research tool was used, namely individual in-depth interviews. A combination of tools and sources would almost certainly have resulted in the attainment of more and better results (Deardorff, 2009; Deardorff & Jones, 2012; Fantini, 2009). Added to the above, some interviews were conducted face-to-face and others via the digital medium Skype (four for each type of interview). The above was necessary because the students in question would not have taken part otherwise (they lived relatively far away from the research location). In itself, Skype is a suitable research tool in the sense that you can ask all of the questions you have and converse with each other. However, it is more difficult to respond as directly to each other, as you can only say something when the other person is completely quiet.

Finally, the following observations must be made:

- A number of students said that they already had a relatively high natural command of a number of international competencies. For example, empathy, openness and helpfulness (for them this was another reason to opt to do a study like Social Work). Given the above, the results are perhaps more positive than they would have been if the research had been conducted among students from a different – non-social – degree programme.
- The research focused on students who went to Uganda as part of a group and who already knew each other well from the university of applied sciences. They virtually never did anything alone: at the weekends, they sought each other out in Kampala and spent the week working in pairs at the same internship address. As the students say themselves, they had a lot of support from each other as a result. So, because of this and also because the students in question had already had a lot of experience with coaching and intervision as part of their studies, a number of students had less to gain from (or less of a need for) supervision from Eye4Africa.
- The Marburg virus played an important role during the intervision and coaching meetings with Eye4Africa. The original programme (working on competencies; feedback to themes that were raised during preparations in Zwolle) did not come into its own as well as it usually does as a result.

8.3 Improvements to the research approach

The following improvement points are advised for a repeat evaluation:

- The sample must be well-differentiated: students from different degree programmes (not just social studies), men and women and Dutch individuals and minority groups.
- The degree programme must ‘encourage’ students to take part in the research. This will avoid a repetition of the situation encountered in the current research: the sample is too small, it is not possible to use some research tools and interviews are limited to the test group alone.
- The fieldwork must be carried out straight after the postmortem programme, so that the entire minor can be evaluated.
- Either a suitable control group is part of the study or other means of testing the *added* value of preparatory training and guidance should be put in place.

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REFLECTION

Added value Windesheim University of applied sciences

Research about the 'best' way students can be prepared for one of the greatest learning experiences within the curriculum is very interesting to us lecturers, coordinators internationalisation and developers of education. Particularly learning how to translate the personal growth of students into the professional growth they need for their specific profession is often a challenge for us, regardless the course domain.

Social domain Windesheim

The fact that students personally learn a lot from an international experience, is something that we can also distinguish in the courses in the social domain. Furthermore we see that students who choose the profession of social worker or educator (also called: Social Work) already possess some important intercultural competencies to start with. Internships within social work, lessons in critical self-reflection, and dealing with resistance, own boundaries, fears or uncertainties ensured that students already experienced a lot of growth before going abroad.

Nevertheless, students indicate that an international experience still brought them more skills in the field of personal growth and development. Creating a link to their growth as a professional, however, is more difficult for them, especially when a student has experiences in a developing country, where theoretical knowledge, course level, possibilities and means differ level from the one the student is used to. Making this translation is a challenge for our course. The article gives a first impression of the experiences of students. We can use it in further developing the curriculum. Because of the small size of the research population, the absence of a control group and the fact that the course was not completed, we can draw only a few conclusions. We are looking forward with great interest to Jantien's further research, and of course we are willing cooperate.

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