

# Pedagogical Implications of Intercultural Competence\*

Nam, Hyun-Jeong (Dong-A University)

<ABSTRACT>

The present study explored the factors affecting intercultural competence (ICC), with the aim of finding more effective ways to promote it. A total of 147 Korean English learners responded to a questionnaire which was adopted and revised for this study from Fantini and Tirmizi (2006). Study one directly compared the effects of learners' experience in an English-speaking country with the education that promotes ICC. Study two investigated whether even a short-term IC education can have a positive impact on the learners' ICC development. The results from independent-samples t-test and ANOVA suggest that both overseas experience and IC education fostered the development of ICC. However, the effect of English proficiency was not evident on the ICC development. The advantage of IC education over overseas experience was not statistically significant but educationally notable in that, even a short period of IC education led to noticeable ICC development in Study two using paired independent t-test.

★ **Key words:** intercultural competence, English proficiency, English education, overseas experience, intercultural education

## I . INTRODUCTION

Language and culture are not mutually exclusive. The culture to which people belong can have a profound effect on the content and the manner of our speech and conversations (Kramsch, 1998). For many people, coming in contact with people from other cultures and linguistic backgrounds have become everyday

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experiences. As such, being an intercultural speaker is crucial for successful intercultural communication. House (2008, p.19) defines an intercultural speaker as a person “who can perform in both his and her native culture and in another one acquired at some later date”. As such, intercultural speakers should be able to successfully interact with people from different cultural backgrounds (Aguilar, 2008). It can not be denied that being an intercultural speaker may be part of the ultimate goal of second/foreign language learners. In recent years, the field of SLA has seen rigorous efforts to understand intercultural competence (hereafter ICC) as an important element of communicative competence (e.g., Chen & Starosta, 1998; Deardorff, 2006). Celce-Murcia’s concern that “a social or cultural blunder can be far more serious than a linguistic error when one is engaged in oral communication”(2008, p.46) implies the importance of intercultural competence in language learning. Personal anecdotes with Korean and native English speakers has convinced this author that the misunderstandings resulted from the lack of ICC rather than grammatical competence is by no means uncommon. In this regards, Aguilar’s claim that “learners must become intercultural speakers” (2008, p.63) lends credence for the English learners in Korea.

“Cultural knowledge and awareness” as suggested by Wilkinson (2012, p.297), should be among the requirements that intercultural speakers should have, and therefore should be promoted in language learning. However, this aspect of language learning has not received attention in English education in Korea where linguistic competence still prevails. Skills such as “interpreting and negotiating skills” (Wilkinson, 2012, p.297), can be successfully developed through interactions with other interlocutors in an intercultural environment. Regrettably, limited oral interactions in class as well as in EFL contexts in Korea do not suffice to promote ICC. Thus, there is an increasing number of Korean English learners opting to study in an English-speaking country. However since it should not be the only answer to ICC development, we as educators should deliberate on other ways in order to promote this in language classes.

Research concerning cultures on a macro level has rigorously been conducted in many fields; however, little attention has been given to ICC in the realm of English education in Korea. In contrast to its international recognition, the investigation of factors promoting ICC development seems to be still in its early stages in Korea. Therefore, the present study explores factors affecting ICC in search for more effective ways to be an intercultural communicator. Study one

directly compares the effect of education promoting ICC (hereafter IC education) with learners' experience in an English-speaking country. Study two aims to establish whether even short-term IC education has a positive impact on the ICC development.

#### Research Questions

1. Is there any difference of ICC between Korean English learners with and without overseas experience?
2. Is there any difference of ICC between Korean English learners with and without IC education?
3. Which is a more effective way to develop ICC?
4. Is there any correlation between ICC and English proficiency?
5. Can even a short-term IC education facilitate the development of ICC?

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 1. Intercultural competence and intercultural speaker

A person engaged in communication with people from different cultures may deploy knowledge of not only his/her own culture but also other cultures that their interlocutors belong to. According to Byram (2000, p.297), ICC refers to "the ability to interact effectively with people of cultures other than one's own". This ability is crucial in building relationships between people in that it may reflect the speaker's attitudes (Byram, 1997).

This notion also applies to foreign language learners. In the past few decades, many scholars have stressed the importance of ICC in language learning and teaching (Alptekin, 2002; Byram, 2000; Hyde, 1998; Kramsch, 1993). As Byram (2000, p.10) articulates, language learners should evolve from the belief that "their understanding and perspective is natural" into the awareness that "their thinking is culturally determined". Thus learners should not interpret people in terms of their own cultural values but based on critical analysis of their own and other cultures (ibid.).

Ting-Toomey (2012, pp.286-287) introduced criteria for successful intercultural communicators. They are "appropriateness" in a given linguistic community, "effectiveness" for communication goals, and "communication adaptability" for

social milieu. Given that English learners in Korea may encounter any intercultural conflict situations in which ICC is required, the need for these requirements seems crucial.

## 2. Previous studies

Previous research has mainly focused on the effect of overseas experience (Moran, 2001; Pedersen, 2010; Vande Berg, 2007; Wilkinson, 2012). Reid (2010) found from a survey with 220 college students, that even routine encounters with people from different cultures promoted their perceived ICC. Wong (2015) also conducted a survey and interviews with 93 students from Hong Kong and China experiencing 12 weeks of English immersion in an English-speaking country. Findings reveal that the students' interaction with their host families in the English-speaking country promoted their intercultural communication strategies. Moreover, Cushner and Mahon (2002) investigated 50 student teachers with overseas experience and confirmed the positive impact of overseas experience on the student teachers' cultural awareness.

Conversely, some researchers have cast doubt on the effectiveness of overseas experience on the ICC development. Vande Berg (2007) and Pedersen (2010) argue that mere exposure to a different culture does not suffice to foster ICC. This in turn invites discussion about another way to develop ICC. Marek (2008) suggests incorporating the learning ICC in language learning in the classroom. Wilkinson (2012, p.302) also recommends "a discourse analytical approach" promoting learners not only to focus on linguistic features but also to analyze cultural meanings in the discourse. Furthermore, Nam and Condon (2010) introduce more elaborated classroom exercise DAE (describe, analyze, evaluate) for successful intercultural communication.

In relation to previous studies in Korea, Kyung-Ja Kim (2004) found that Korean college students with high level of extrinsic motivation to learn English demonstrated only a moderate level of intercultural sensitivity. In addition, students with high level of intercultural interaction were found to be the ones with the high level of English achievement. Kyung-sook Paik (2012) analyzed the curriculums of English departments at 37 universities in Korea. She discovered that the culture-related courses provided by the departments mainly focused on culture on a macro-level. As a result, ICC was not promoted in the programs due

to the college educators' lack of understanding of its importance in the overall English learning. The lack of IC education was also found in overseas training for Korean EFL teachers (Yoon-Hee Choe, 2012).

### III. METHOD

#### 1. Participants

A total of 147 Korean English learners participated in the study (102 participants for Study one; 45 participants for Study two). In Study one aimed at factors affecting ICC, the participants were English-related majors in undergraduate and postgraduate programs at three universities in Korea. Their personal profiles varied in terms of their English proficiency (TOEIC score ranging from 500 to 985), IC course-taking experience (a semester-long 'intercultural/cross-cultural communication' class: IC education), and the period of stay in an English-speaking country (overseas experience ranging from 0 to 200 months). The participants were divided into four groups based on their profiles as follows.

Groups	N	IC education	Overseas experience
1	21	X	X
2	30	X	O
3	30	O	X
4	21	O	O

In Study two which was designed to investigate the effect of short-term IC education, 45 English majors at a local university responded to the questionnaire. They had not received any of IC education and had different background (The mean of their overseas experience was 4.84 months and TOEIC score was 785).

#### 2. Materials and Procedure

All participants responded to a questionnaire which was adopted and revised from Fantini and Tirmizi (2006, appendix G). It consisted of twenty-five questions

under a section of intercultural abilities with three sub-sections. First, the section “knowledge” included questions such as “I know the essential norms and taboos of the English speaking culture (e.g., greetings, dress, behaviors, etc.)”. Second, an example question in the section “skills” was “I adjust my behavior, dress, etc., as appropriate, to avoid offending English speakers”. Third, the section “awareness” had questions such as “I’m aware how English speaking culture members view me and why”. The participants were asked to self-evaluate their ICC on the 5-point Likert scale. Since it was written in English, they were allowed to ask questions about the meaning of questions or to use their English dictionaries if necessary.

As shown in Table 1, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were measured. Given the higher the  $\alpha$  coefficient, the more the items have shared covariance, the ICC scale has acceptable internal consistency.

<Table 1> Reliability of an ICC scale

Intercultural abilities	Number of items	Alpha
Knowledge	8	.95
Skills	7	.93
Awareness	10	.95

Different from Study one, Study two included the pre- and post-tests. A survey was conducted immediately before and after a short-term IC education. It was one-time IC education implemented in a 90 minute class taught by the researcher. It was specially designed to promote their ICC, focusing on intercultural attitudes (*savoir être*) “a willingness to relativise one’s own values, beliefs and behaviours, not to assume that they are the only possible and naturally correct ones” (Byram, Nichols, and Stevens, 2001, p.5). The class presented cases of misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication and introduced concepts of individualism & collectivism, pragmatic awareness, politeness, and verbal communication. The class used eight pictures and five video clips from the Internet that may be considered normal according to the Korean learners’ own values but may possibly cause cultural misunderstanding. Group discussions were followed to share their own experience in intercultural communication. The participants were asked to self-evaluate their ICC again right after the class.

### 3. Data Collection and Analysis

Analysis proceeded in the following steps. First, the responses from 147 participants were collected manually and organized into groups based on their profiles and the study type. Second, the data were fed to the statistics program SPSS 23. For research question one in Study one, independent-samples *t*-test was used to compare the ICC of the participants with and without IC education. For research question two, independent-samples *t*-test was used to compare the ICC of the participants with and without overseas experience. Pearson correlation coefficient was used for the relationship between ICC and overseas experience. Partial correlation was also conducted to statistically control for the possible effect of English proficiency that may contaminate the relationship. Next, for research question three in order to investigate the more effective factors for ICC, all the four conditions were compared by using ANOVA. Last, for research question four, Pearson correlation coefficient was used for possible relationship between the ICC and English proficiency. For Study two (research question five), paired independent *t*-test was conducted to compare pre- and post- test of IC education.

## IV. RESULTS

### 1. Study one

Study one concerns the research question one to four aimed at the factors affecting ICC. First, the effect of overseas experience and then the effect of IC education were examined. Next, the relationship of ICC and English proficiency was investigated.

In Table 2, an independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare Korean English learners with and without overseas experience. There was significant difference in ICC for English learners with overseas experience ( $M=71.73$ ,  $SD=19.89$ ) and the ones without it [ $M=79.84$ ,  $SD=16.42$ ;  $t(100)=2.25$ ,  $p=.03$ , two-tailed]. The magnitude of the differences in the means was very small ( $\eta^2=.05$ ).

<Table 2> Difference of ICC between English learners with and without overseas experience: Independent-samples *t*-test

	with		without		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	d
	M	SD	M	SD						
ICC	79.84	16.42	71.73	19.89	2.03	.16	-2.25	100	.03	.05

Further shown in Table 3, the relationship between ICC and English learners' overseas experience was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Overseas experience was measured by months of residence in an English-speaking country. There was a small positive correlation between ICC and English learners' overseas experience,  $r=.27$ ,  $n=102$ ,  $p<.001$ , with high levels of ICC associated with more overseas experience. Partial correlation was also conducted to statistically control for the possible effect of English proficiency that may contaminate the relationship. Positive correlation was also confirmed,  $r=.26$ ,  $n=102$ ,  $p<.001$ .

As supplementary data 'experience in Korea' is also shown in the table. It was measured by hours of contact with native English speakers in Korea both in and outside the class. Contrary to positive correlation between ICC and overseas experience, the correlation between ICC and experience in Korea was not statistically significant. Limited contact with native English speakers in Korea both in and outside the class per week (2.22 hours per week) seems insufficient to expect a notable difference.

<Table 3> Relationship between ICC and learners' experience (in an English-speaking county and in Korea)

		Overseas experience	Experience in Korea
ICC	Pearson Correlation	.27**	.18
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.01	.08
	N	102	102

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

In Table 4, an independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare ICC for



English learners with and without IC education. There was significant difference in ICC for English learners with IC education ( $M=82.47$ ,  $SD=15.90$ ) and the ones without IC education [ $M=69.10$ ,  $SD=18.84$ ;  $t(100)=3.87$ ,  $p=.00$ ]. The magnitude of the differences in the means was very small ( $\eta^2=.13$ ).

<Table 4> Difference of ICC between English learners with and without IC education: Independent-samples *t*-test

	with		without		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	d
	M	SD	M	SD						
ICC	82.47	15.90	69.10	18.84	1.81	.18	-3.87	100	.00	.13

As shown in Table 5, participants were divided into four groups according to their profiles (Group 1: with neither overseas experience nor IC education; Group 2: overseas experience only; Group 3: with IC education only; Group 4: with both overseas experience and IC education). ICC was highest in the condition where the English learners had both overseas experience and IC education. ICC was slightly higher in the group with IC education than the group with overseas experience.

<Table 5> ICC in four conditions: Descriptives

	N	M	SD	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		Min	Max
				Lower	Upper		
				Neither	21		
Overseas experience	30	74.93	16.28	68.86	81.01	33	98
IC education	30	79.40	16.52	73.23	85.57	41	107
Both	21	86.86	14.22	80.39	93.33	57	110
Total	102	75.78	18.60	72.13	79.44	22	110

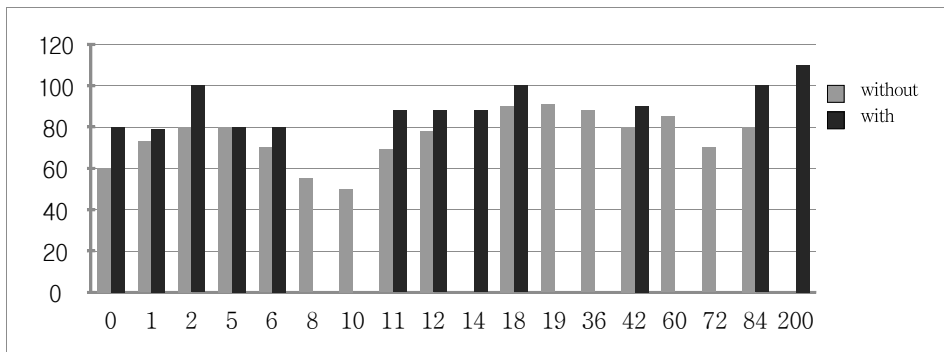
As shown in Table 6, a one-way between-groups analysis of variance was conducted to compare the impact of four conditions on ICC. There was a statistically significant difference at the  $p<.05$  level in ICC for the four groups:

F(3, 98)=9.28, p=.00. The difference in mean scores between the groups was large. The effect size, calculated using eta squared, was .22. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for Group 1 (M=60.76, SD=19.47) was significantly different from Group 2 (M=74.93, SD=16.28), Group 3 (M=79.40, SD=16.52), and Group 4 (M=86.86, SD=14.22). However, the difference between Group 2 and Group 3 did not reach statistical significance.

<Table 6> Results of ANOVA of four conditions

	Sum of squares	df	F	Sig	Eta squared
Between Groups	7727.81	3	9.28	.000	.22
Within Groups	27215.45	98			
Total	34943.26	101			

Figure 1 shows ICC in the same period of overseas experience. ICC was the same or higher if accompanied by IC education. This suggests that the effect of overseas experience can be greater with IC education accompanied.



Note. without: without IC education, with: with IC education

[Figure 1] The effect of IC education in the condition of overseas experience

In Table 7, the relationship between ICC and English Proficiency (as measured by TOEIC) was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. There was a correlation,  $r=.05$ ,  $n=102$ ,  $p<.01$ . However, it did not reach statistical significance.

&lt;Table 7&gt; Relationship between ICC and English Proficiency

		English Proficiency
	Pearson Correlation	.05
ICC	Sig. (2-tailed)	.62
	N	102

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

## 2. Study two

Study two is aimed at comparing the learners' ICC before and after short-term IC education in search of any improvement of ICC. As shown in Table 8, a paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of short-term IC education on ICC development. There was a statistically significant increase in ICC from pre-test (M=63.09, SD=17.60) to post-test (M=81.29, SD=16.15),  $t(44)=-7.98$ ,  $p<.05$  (two-tailed). The mean increase in ICC was 18.20 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 13.60 to 22.80. The eta squared statistic (.59) indicated a large effect size.

<Table 8> The effect of short-term IC education; paired-samples *t*-test

	N	pre-test		post-test		t	df	Eta squared
		M	SD	M	SD			
IC education	45	63.09	17.60	81.29	16.15	-7.98	44	.59

\*  $p<.05$

# V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

## 1. Factors affecting ICC

Findings regarding research question one and two in the present study indicate that both overseas experience and IC education have a positive impact on ICC. First, ICC of the participants with overseas experience was higher [M=79.84, SD=16.42;  $t(100)=2.25$ ,  $p=.03$ , two-tailed] than its counterparts without the

experience ( $M=71.73$ ,  $SD=19.89$ ). This is in line with previous research (e.g., Hismanoglu, 2011). The present study confirmed that English learners' interaction with native speakers of English in an English-speaking country do help them to develop their ICC. That is, the longer residence in an English-speaking country the English learners had, the higher degree of ICC they developed ( $t=.27$ ,  $n=102$ ,  $p<.001$ ). However, it is worth noting that there were some anomalies that did not follow this tendency. For example, a student (JY) who had stayed in America for 84 months before her college education in Korea had lower ICC (82) than that (95) of another student (SJ) with no overseas experience. Supplementary interviews with them revealed that the student JY had had limited contact with the local people in America. She disclosed that she had spent most of her time with Korean friends and had no close foreign friend in school. As Pedersen (2010) warns, simply staying overseas does not guarantee for the learners to develop ICC for themselves. In contrast to student JY, student SJ with no overseas experience responded that he was interested in observing the American life in American dramas and movies. He stated that "I watch American dramas every day to learn English and my goal is to speak like them and act like them". It is possible that his learning motivated with this seemingly extreme desire for assimilation into his target language culture affected his higher ICC. In this regard, further discussion including education promoting ICC seems inevitable.

The need for IC education has gained attention in recent research (Celce-Murcia, 2008; Hismanoglu, 2011; Pedersen, 2010; Vande Berg, Connor-Linton & Paige, 2009). As found in the present study, the effect of IC education seems promising. There was significant difference in ICC for English learners with IC education ( $M=82.47$ ,  $SD=15.90$ ) and the ones without IC education [ $M=69.10$ ,  $SD=18.84$ ;  $t(100)=3.87$ ,  $p=.00$ ]. In addition to the effect of IC education participants received in a regular academic course in Study one, even short-term IC education was also found to be effective for ICC development in Study two. The statistically significant increase in ICC from pre- ( $M=63.09$ ,  $SD=17.60$ ) to post-IC education ( $M=81.29$ ,  $SD=16.15$ ),  $t(44)=-7.98$ ,  $p<.05$  (two-tailed) opens up possibility for IC education in Korea. Hopefully, this can be a good start for educators who might attribute their negligence of the IC education to time constraints.

To answer research question three concerning more effective ways to develop ICC, comprehensive comparisons were made. Group 1 (participants with neither IC

education nor overseas experience), Group 2 (participants with overseas experience only), and Group 3 (participants with IC education only), and Group 4 (participants with both IC education and overseas experience) were examined. Not surprisingly the condition where both IC education and overseas experience were provided was found to be most effective. Between the condition of IC education and that of overseas experience, IC education was more effective ( $M=79.40$ ,  $SD=16.52$ ) than overseas experience ( $M=74.93$ ,  $SD=16.28$ ). Regrettably, it did not reach statistically significant difference. It is interesting to note however that the greater effect of overseas experience was found if accompanied by IC education (See Figure 1). Since overseas experience has a positive impact on ICC but does not guarantee it, IC education seems to ensure a better outcome. Pedersen (2010)'s investigation of three groups (two groups in a study abroad program and one group in a home country) confirms this. It was found that the group with both IC education and overseas experience improved ICC.

The present study also explored the relationship between English proficiency and ICC. However, statistically significant correlation was not found. Moreover ICC (79.79) of participants with over 900 TOEIC scores was not significantly different from that (78.27) of participants with below 600 TOEIC scores. The findings of the present study suggest that the effect of English proficiency was not evident on the development of ICC. This however does not rule out the possibility of positive impact of ICC on English learning. In fact, in Kyung-Ja Kim's (2004) study that English learners with high level of extrinsic motivation had only a moderate level of ICC while learners with high level of intercultural interaction demonstrated notable English achievement. Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, and Paige (2009) also yielded findings that enhanced ICC through IC education before the departure to a host country fostered learners' oral proficiency. The impact of IC education on English learning can also be found from Korean English teachers in an overseas teacher training program. Yoon-Hee Choe (2012) discovered that cultural interaction in the English-speaking country during the teacher training facilitated their own English learning.

## 2. Pedagogical implications

Explanations for the finding that high proficiency English learners in Korea do not necessarily have the equivalent ICC can be twofold; in terms of the attributes

of the test for English proficiency and the lack of IC education in Korea. First, TOEIC does not specifically entail ICC features and the score may have been obtained through strategic test preparation. Considering that an English learning focused on test preparation such as CSAT for high school students or TOEIC for college students is not uncommon in Korea, it does not provide opportunities for English learners to develop ICC.

Second, considering difficulties to recruit English learners with IC education compared to their counterparts without such experience in the present study, the IC education in Korea seems to be still a long way off. Kyung-sook Paik (2012)'s analysis of curriculum provided by English education departments at 37 universities in Korea supports this speculation. She pointed out that culture-related courses for English education majors introduce culture only on a macro-level. The lack of educators' recognition of the importance of ICC leads to a lack of IC education in the curriculum. Further, the lack of educators' understanding may be from inadequate IC education in teacher training programs. As Yoon-Hee Choe (2012) criticized, field trips to tourist attractions in an English-speaking country can not fulfill the needs. In addition to the English teachers with underdeveloped ICC, topics such as western food and festivals introduced in many English textbooks do not appear to be genuine IC education (Wilkinson, 2012).

Although English learning in Korea has been weighted towards linguistic competence, the status quo cannot be the way forward. Considering the consequence of errors emanating from the lack of ICC may be more serious than that of grammatical competence in the context where English learners encounter (Celce-Murcia, 2008), IC education in the framework of communicative competence should be the direction English educators should go. The effect of even short-term IC education in the present study suggests the potential for change in Korea. More hands-on class activities to foster ICC can be video-taped cultural dialogues, role-plays for culturally different speech acts such as suggesting and complimenting (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2008), movies (Lee, 2012), and a DAE exercise (Description, Analysis, Evaluation) for complex intercultural issues (Nam & Condon, 2010).

### 3. Conclusion

The study explored more effective ways to develop ICC. Based on

comprehensive comparisons with four conditions (neither IC education nor overseas experience, overseas experience only, IC education only, both IC education and overseas experience), IC education and overseas experience found to foster ICC development. Advantages of IC education over overseas experience was not statistically significant but educationally significant in that even a short period of IC education led to noticeable ICC development.

Although the evidence from this study appears noticeable, the findings may be tempered due to certain limitations. First, the effect of short-term IC education in Study two was measured immediately after IC education. This does not guarantee long lasting effects of IC education. Second, since the participants' TOEIC scores were deployed for their English proficiency, it may not represent their English proficiency reflecting communicative competence. Future research should overcome this when investigating the relationship between the ICC and English proficiency.

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## &lt;국문초록&gt;

**문화간 의사소통을 향상시키는 요인과 교육적 고찰**

남현정(동아대학교)

거시적 관점의 문화에 대한 연구는 다양한 분야에서 활발하게 이루어지고 있으나, 문화간 의사소통의 능숙도를 주제로 외국어학습의 분야에서 행해지는 연구는 한국에서 상대적으로 많은 관심을 받지 못하였다. 이에 본 연구는 해외체류경험과 문화간 의사소통에 초점을 맞춘 교육의 효과를 직접 비교하였다. 또한 단기간의 교육이 문화간 의사소통의 능숙도의 향상에 효과가 있는지를 교육 전, 후를 비교함으로써 알아보았다. 147명의 한국대학생과 대학원생들이 참여한 연구의 결과는 해외체류경험과 문화간 의사소통에 초점을 맞춘 교육 모두에 효과가 있음을 나타내었다. 그러나 토익으로 측정된 영어숙련도는 문화간 의사소통의 능숙도에 긍정적 영향을 주지 않는 것으로 밝혀졌다. 더불어, 문화간 의사소통에 초점을 맞춘 교육의 효과는 심지어 단기간의 교육에서 또한 확인됨에 따라 영어 교수자들에게 교육의 필요성과 긍정적 효과를 제시하고 있다.

★ **주제어:** 문화간 의사소통 능숙도, 문화간 의사소통의 능숙도, 영어교육  
해외체류경험, 문화간 의사소통 교육