

# **INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT: ICT-BASED INTERCULTURAL TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN THE U.S. AND KOREA**

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**Abstract:** Today's global society requires interculturally competent individuals who have an understanding of different cultures and the ability to solve problems effectively and appropriately in international environments. The school's role of producing such competent human resources is important. International Virtual Elementary Classroom Activities (IVECA) was designed to provide upper elementary students with an intercultural learning opportunity through an online course management system. Three classes of students in an American school and three classes in three Korean schools participated in this study. The classroom teachers, the school principals and the resource teachers were also involved. This paper demonstrates 1) the effects of IVECA and 2) the processes of electronically facilitated intercultural teaching and learning. Findings indicated students improved their intercultural competence, increased motivation to learn at school, enhanced writing skills, and expanded worldviews. Student language and Information Communication Technology (ICT) competencies influenced the intercultural teaching and learning processes. The need of preparing teachers with intercultural competence and pedagogical uses of technologies was addressed in boosting the effectiveness of IVECA.

## **INTRODUCTION**

As technology has evolved, today's world society has become more globalized and interconnected than ever before. People are exposed everyday to cultural diversity characterized by "differences in values, beliefs, and behaviors learned and shared by groups of interacting people defined by nationality, ethnicity, religion, and any other grouping that generates identifiable patterns" (Bennett J. M. & Bennett, M. J., 2001, p. 9). Along these lines, competency in dealing with cultural diversity and globalization is attracting more attention as one of the most important factors of attaining success in the field of business (Huang, Rayner, & Zhuang, 2003). The challenges of globalization and cultural diversity require world society to define "the role of education in building dynamic and versatile societies that are respectful of cultural differences" (UNESCO, 2006a, p. 7). The European Ministers of Education also encouraged the Council of Europe to emphasize the importance of education in managing cultural diversity including the language differences of European societies (The Council of Europe, 2003).

The role of education as such, is grounded in The United Nations Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples, which emphasizes the importance of education in "fostering peace, solidarity, understanding and cooperation on the international level" (The United Nations, 1965). In addition, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (The United Nations, 1948-1998) adds human rights and freedom to the goal of education, and stresses that education "shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups." Currently, the influence of religion is more emphasized due to the increased violence and conflicts between religious groups in the world (Bouma, 2006; Said & Funk, 2002; The Council of Europe 2003). Bouma (2006) thus suggests the need of educating children about religion, faith, and spirituality "to know about themselves and the world and how to live together" (p. 29). It seems clear that education should play the role of providing exchanges of ideas and opportunities to promote mutual respect and understanding beyond nationality, ethnicity and religion. The importance of this role lies in that the result will help bring peace and security and introduce or reinforce human rights and freedom.

Thus, it is not so difficult to deduce that such educational roles are required due to the needs of our culturally diverse, interconnected, and globalized society. That is also the reason why intercultural education is necessary more than ever within the fields of education (UNESCO, 2006a).

Intercultural education develops learners' abilities of interpreting and reconciling the cultural differences by means of effective communications and conversations in order to equip learners with intercultural competence (UNESCO, 2006b). The brief definition of intercultural competence (ICC) is the ability to work appropriately and effectively in international and multicultural working environments with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself in collaboration (Fantini, 2006; Lasonen, 2006). However, few studies have focused on both developing ICC and discovering feasible ways of providing intercultural education for public schools. Hence, this study designed an electronically facilitated cross-cultural exchange program, named International Virtual Elementary Classroom Activities (IVECA), as one of the forms of intercultural education.

The significance of this study is primarily in that the IVECA program is based on local curricula such as the American schools Standard of Learning objectives and the Korean schools' national curriculum. Thus, the program was not simply add-on activities, but it became a part of curricula integrated with local school systems in different countries. The study also provided practical guides/models of integrating such electronically enhanced intercultural education programs with classroom teaching and learning. Since the model was established with consideration of the different school/curriculum systems of each country, the applicability of the program is promising. That is, this study not only proved the effectiveness of the program but also demonstrated models of intercultural teaching and learning suitable for different curriculum systems.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The construct of ICC was based on the five ICC dimensions (AL+ASK) model adopted from Fantini's (2000, 2006) ICC construct—Awareness (A), and Language proficiency (L), Attitudes (A), Skills(S), Knowledge (K). Knowledge is the information necessary to interact with people from different culture appropriately and effectively. The Knowledge dimension is considered as requisite cognitive orientation to facilitate the acquisition of such information, which was included in the IVECA weekly topic. Attitudes (motivation) are one's affect toward other and intercultural communication: confidence, interest, likes, and good intentions. Skills are the needed behaviors to interact appropriately and effectively with members of different culture (Wiseman, 2001). Awareness is an ability to critically look at the values, the self in a social situation, and one's relations to others (Byram, 2001; Fantini, 2000). Lastly, Language proficiency is the ability to understand and communicate with others who are using languages other than one's own (Fantini, 2000, 2006). Fantini's model of the ICC dimensions guided this study as a conceptual framework in designing the program and in discovering, measuring, and analyzing participant students ICC development since it was used as the rubrics of developing curriculum, survey items, observation protocol and coding lists.

Teachers need to understand which classroom activities foster the effectiveness of ICT utilization for student learning. Kozma (2004) examined the findings from 174 case studies of innovative pedagogical practices using technology from 28 participating countries, he suggests four main models for ICT integration in classrooms. In each model, the classroom activities are mainly student-centered, and the teacher's role is that of a guide and advisor. Table 4 provides a brief description of the four models: Student Collaboration Model, Product Model, Student Research Model, and Outside Collaboration Model.

Table 1. ICT Integration Models for Classroom Activities (adopted from Kozma R., 2004)

ICT Integration Models of Student-Centered and Project-Based Activities	
Student Collaboration Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students work together with computer while searching information.</li> <li>• Teachers prepare the activity by structuring the task and then serve only as an advisor or guide.</li> </ul>
Product Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students create products and publish the results of their group work by using ICT tools including multimedia.</li> <li>• Teachers collaborate with their colleagues to design materials.</li> </ul>
Student Research Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students collaborate with peers to search for information, conduct research and solve problems - Students should attain ICT skills, problem-solving skills, and collaborative skills.</li> <li>• Teachers need to acquire new pedagogical skills.</li> </ul>
Outside Collaboration Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students have access to outside experts or to students and teachers from schools within one's own nation or outside of the country.</li> <li>• Teachers may also use this model to foster intercultural understanding.</li> </ul>

Since these models only deal with local classroom activities using ICT, guides for online teaching and learning, which need to be provided for integrating IVECA with school classrooms' activities in different countries, were considered in this study. Erbaum et al. (2002) provides 17 essential elements in preparing, designing and teaching a online course. The excerpted elements useful for online teaching are 1) Facilitating discussions in a way that keeps students on-task, 2) Promoting full participation, 3) Encouraging peer collaboration, 4) Engaging with students without over-engaging, and 5) Assessing student work and provide student feedback. These ICT integration models and online teaching rudiments became observation protocol when exploring the processes of the electronically facilitated intercultural teaching and leaning in both physical classrooms and virtual classrooms. They were also used when coding the activities and interactions of the teachers and students.

## METHOD AND SETTING

Mixed method model of concurrent transformative (nested) strategy was used (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative data was collected through classroom observations, interviews, student journals, discussion board postings, and school documentations. Quantitative data was obtained via surveys, which measured student ICC and its five dimensions. Miles and Huberman's data analysis approach and NVivo program were used for qualitative data analysis. Descriptive statistics, paired t-test, and repeated measures ANOVA were conducted for quantitative data analysis on the pre- and post-surveys. As shown in Figure 1, the sources of the data collection units were the six experimental classrooms (total 154 students), four control classrooms students (total 100 students), six experimental classroom teachers, ten support teachers, four school administrators in four schools in the U.S. and Korea. Specifically, in the one U.S. school, there were two 5<sup>th</sup> grade Reading and Writing in English (RWE: coded name for Language Art classes of the American school in this study) classes (indicated with the codes, Class1 and Class2, respectively in Figure 1.), their teachers (T1 and T2), one 6<sup>th</sup> grade RWE class (Class3) and their teacher (T3), four technological and instructional support teachers (ST1– ST4) and a school administrator (P1). Korean site sources of the data collection units were the three regular 6<sup>th</sup> grade classes (Class 1– Class 3), their teachers (T1–T3), two support teachers (ST1 and ST2) in each school, and three school principals (P1– P3) in the three Korean schools. In addition, each nation had two control classrooms (Class 4 and Class 5) respectively, and only survey data was collected from these classrooms. The main unit of the data analysis is one IVECA context, which consists of three virtual classrooms. Each virtual classroom

was paired with one American classroom and one Korean classroom. Students in the three virtual classrooms studied together once or twice a week for a whole semester, based on the common weekly topics provided via IVECA.

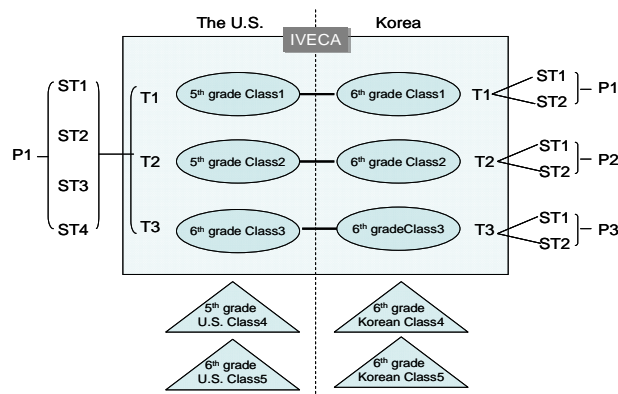


Figure 1. Participants and Setting (T: teacher, ST: support teacher, P: principal)

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### I. The processes of intercultural teaching and learning in IVECA

This section presents an investigation of what ICT integration models (Kozma, 2004) teachers utilized for ICT integration, and which instructional and pedagogical strategies they applied to the IVECA activities in both online and offline teaching and learning environments. Overall, teachers in both nations displayed their instructional and pedagogical strategies in diverse ways. While employing the ICT integration models, teachers generally used four strategies of the essential elements of online teaching (Erbaum et al., 2002): facilitating discussions, promoting students full participation, providing feedback for student work, and appropriately engage students by sharing postings together. On the other hand, encouraging peer collaboration and blending individual and group activities were employed differently due to the nature of the student activities and their technology and language competencies.

The outside collaboration model is basically the nature of all IVECA activities, and the student collaboration model was most commonly observed in both American and Korean classrooms. While Korean teachers were able to employ the product model and student research model due to the high ICT competency of their students, American teachers collaborated with their technology support teachers in order to apply these two models. For example, Korean students searched information through the Internet and edited their messages including images relevant to the activity topics. The students could perform such activities with the guides from their teachers and in collaboration with their peer students. However, American teachers and technology specialists found relevant information ahead of time and provided their students with pre-edited images, which they selected from the web and converted to appropriate size files. Accordingly, the forms of the students learning appeared differently in the classrooms in the two countries. While Korean students frequently performed their projects in cooperative group activities, Americans completed their tasks individually and occasionally work with paired partners with the collaborative assist from their teachers and technology specialist.

Korean students' cooperative activities were also effective in overcoming their language barrier, and the teachers' instructional strategies were required in guiding the Korean students activities. While the American teachers did not have to deal with a language barrier in the IVECA activities, the Korean

teachers had to figure how to guide students whose English levels were diverse—some of the students could not communicate at all in English. Some teachers allowed their students to make a group with their close friends, and others intentionally formed groups comprised of students with different levels of English proficiency. Either way, the teachers reported that they ensured each group had at least one English proficient student. It was occasionally observed that these teachers were guiding their students to read American students' writing first with group members. They allowed the students to copy the structures of the sentences and to replace words necessary to express themselves. In addition, low-level students also reported that they learned how to write while composing messages with their group members.

In introducing Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, Hedegaard (Daniels, 2005) quotes, "The child is able to copy a series of *actions* which surpass his or her own capacities, but only within limits. By means of copying, the child is able to perform much better when together with and guided by adults than when left alone, and can do so with understanding and independently" (p. 227). Wu (2007) adopts this rationale for undergraduate Taiwanese students' English (L2: English as a second/foreign language) writing in collaboration. She reports, "When less capable learners collaborated with more capable learners in small group learning activities, the learning outcomes were greatly enhanced." When regarding the "action" as "writing" in Vygotsky's comment, the Korean teachers' instructional strategy, *encouraging peer collaboration*, seems to be appropriate in that the teachers guided the less proficient students to learn from the more proficient peers and their writing. Importantly, the goal of the collaborative learning in L2 classrooms is to "acculturate students into the wider world of the target language and culture" (Oxford, 1997). Thus, it becomes certain that the instructional strategy of encouraging peer collaboration for the Korean students' IVECA activities was pedagogically suitable as well as empirically effective in the context of intercultural exchange program.

Especially, use of appropriate engagement strategies in the classrooms often appeared to be effective in stimulating student motivation. Skinner and Belmont (1993) supposed that teachers' interpersonal involvement is the central predictor of students' optimal motivation, higher student engagement induces teacher responses, and in turn student motivation increases. The teachers prudently guided their student performance and expressed their considerate mindset toward the counterparts while engaging the students. According to Van Hook (2005), it is important that teachers have intercultural sensitivity in multicultural classroom environments because, "what teachers say, perceive, believe, and think can support or impair students" (p. 67). The importance of teachers' appropriate engagement with their intercultural sensitivity was revealed through the IVECA teaching and learning situations.

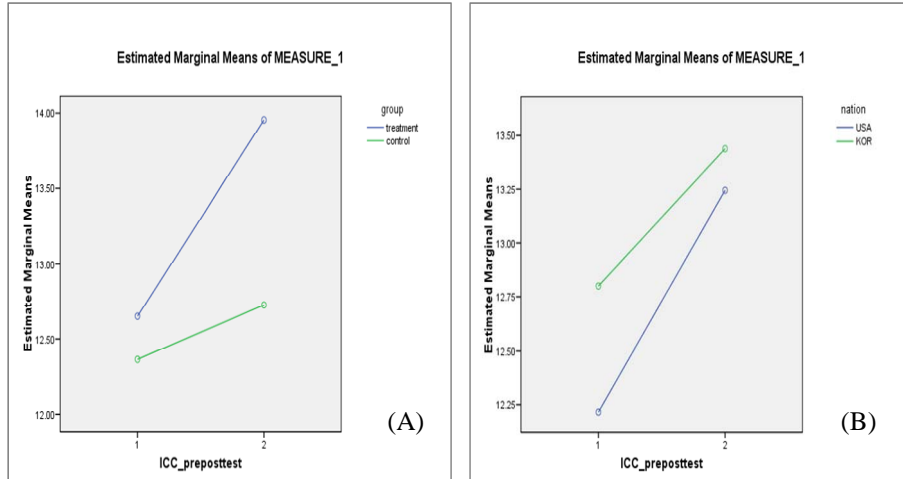
## **II. Effects of International Virtual Elementary Classroom Activities**

The qualitative results on ICC development suggest that IVECA enhanced student ICC. However, each nation showed different developmental patterns of the ICC dimensions. In addition, cognitive developmental status of the students in DMIS, which was the indicator of ICC developmental stages, showed that their ICC entry and final stages were diverse, and the orientations and the forms of ICC development differed respectively.

Quantitative outcomes revealed that IVECA significantly improved both American and Korean students ICC. Students in both nations showed the greatest improvement in the Knowledge dimension and the least changes in the Awareness dimension. Yet, American students showed a noticeable increase in Knowledge scores, more so than in other dimensions, while the scores of Korean students in each dimension showed similarly distributed enhancement. Both American and Korean students' Language proficiency also showed statistically significant improvement. Further, the qualitative analysis results

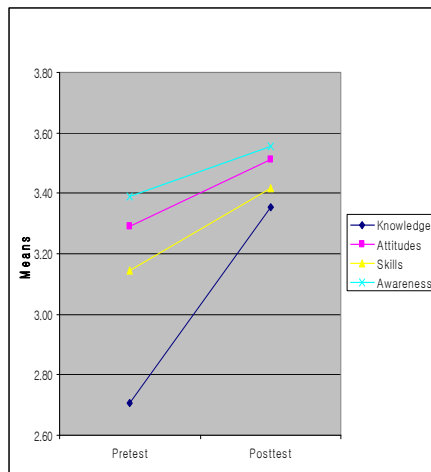
provided evidence that IVECA also promoted student motivation to learn at school, improved writing skills, and expanded worldviews. Following are the key graphs depicting the main results related to the student ICC changes through the IVECA program.

***Intercultural Competence Development***



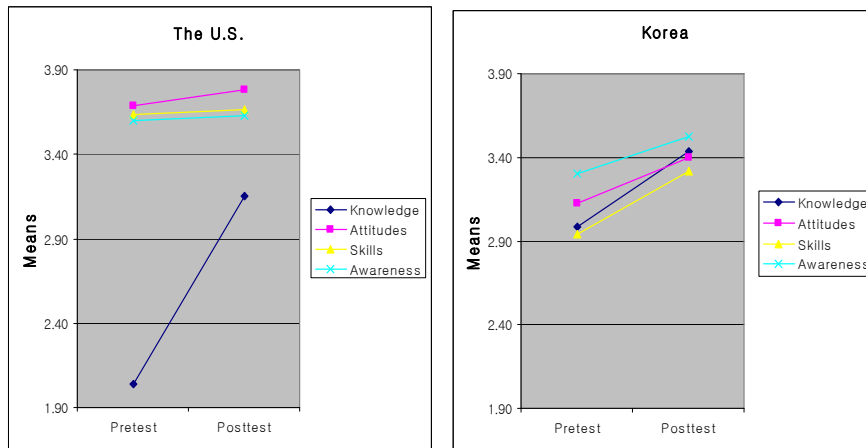
Graph 1. ICC Mean Score Differences between Groups and Nations

The graphs were created through Repeated Measures ANOVA (alpha level .05). “1” refers pre-treatment survey and “2” indicates post-treatment survey. Experimental (IVECA participants group) showed significant improvement in the scores between pre- and post- treatment scores, while control group’s score changes were not statistically significant (A). Both American and Korean students showed significant changes in the ICC mean scores; however, American student ICC mean score changes were somewhat greater. Comparisons that are more specific are provided the graph 2 and 3 as shown below.



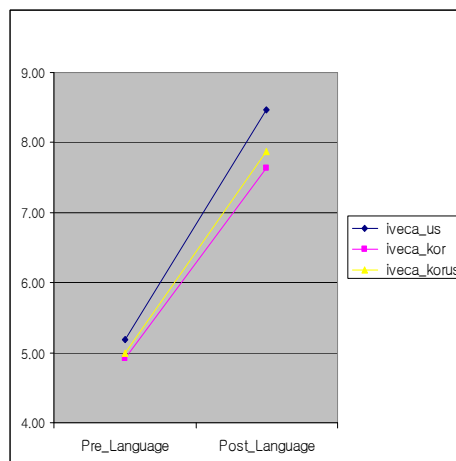
Graph 2. ICC Dimension Means Differences of All Participant Students

The graph 2 was created through paired t-test analysis (alpha level .05). Except for Awareness dimension, other dimensions of all participants showed significant changes. However, the development patterns were different by nation, when the each nation’s changes in the means scores of each dimension were examined.



Graph 3. Comparisons of the Means Changes of Each Dimension between Nations

The graph 3 was created through paired t-test analysis (alpha level .05). While American students' Knowledge mean scores between pre- and post-treatment survey showed significant differences, all dimensions' mean score differences of Korean students varied significantly. In his report on the Experiment in International Living service program, Fantini (2006) asserts that learning the host language (second/foreign language) while living in different cultures affects ICC development. He posits, "What does seem clear is that a total lack of any proficiency in the host tongue most certainly constrains one's entry (*Attitudes*), adaptation (*Skills*), and understanding (*Knowledge*, *Awareness*) of the host culture on various levels and in many ways" (p. 49). Even though American students could significantly develop their *Knowledge* and *Language proficiency* through IVECA, as "monolingual speakers" American students seemed to have some limitations in developing the integral ICC construct (Fantini, 1995). However, it should be noted that there might be other variables influencing these results, such as different instructional applications. In addition, American students' beginning scores of *Attitudes*, *Skills* and *Awareness* were relatively higher than that of Korean students.



Graph 4. Language Proficiency Mean Measures

The graph 4 was created through paired t-test analysis (alpha level .05). Both American and Korean students mean scores of Language proficiency showed significant improvement. However, Language proficiency of American students was somewhat greater than that of Korean students. Seidlhofer (2002) proposes that "English as an international language (EIL)" needs to be differentiated from the English subject (English as a native language: ENL) in schools. He recognizes the fact that the majority of

English speakers in the world is non-native speakers and emphasizes the importance of teaching realistic English (Seidlhofer, 2002). Seidlhofer (2002) further advocates re-orientating English toward the cross-cultural role of EIL facilitating “intercultural communication,” which is required in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Scollon & Scollon, 2001). Along with Byram (2001), Seidlhofer suggests embracing “the realistic goals of intercultural competence” that can be achieved through EIL learning (p. 23). It is meaningful that IVECA could provide American students with an opportunity to learn EIL by having second language learners as their intercultural communication partners. Consequently, IVECA provided American students with opportunities of developing their strategic communicative skills in understanding foreign students’ English.

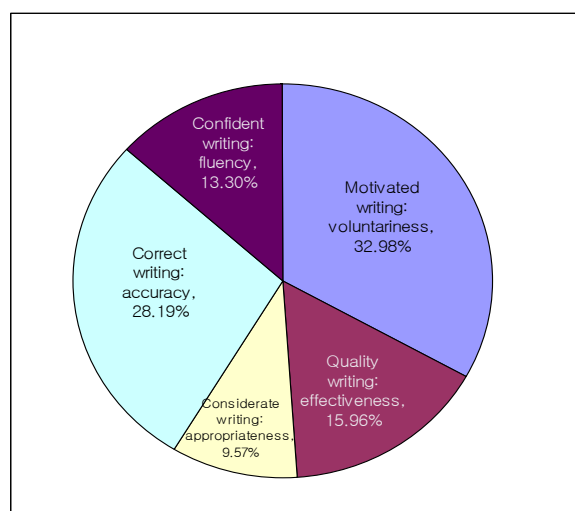
### ***Motivation to learn at school***

Students recognized IVECA as a valuable learning method in that they could obtain Knowledge about different cultures while communicating with counterpart students. It made students excited to attend their classes. Students also became motivated to learn relevant subject content. American students showed an increase in their motivation to learn Language Arts, and the Korean students showed elevated interest and motivation in their Social Studies activities. Moreover, Korean student motivation to improve their English noticeably increased. Student motivations to learn language were associated with their ICC development of Language proficiency and Skills dimensions.

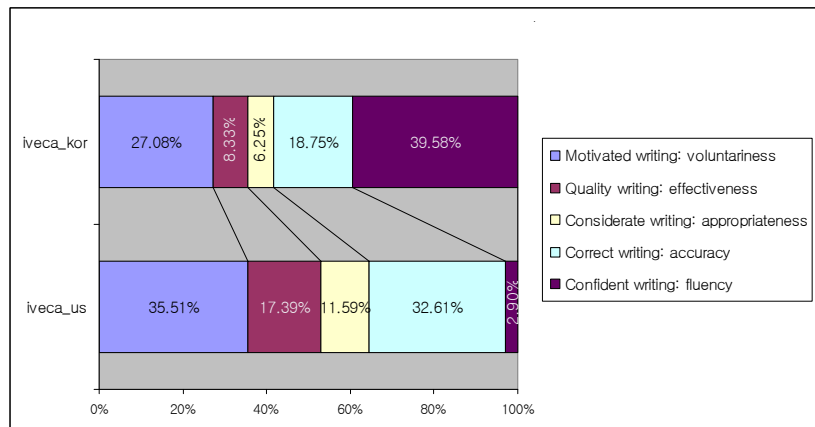
Students’ increased interest in cultural exchange activities across the world provided unmotivated and low-achieving students with reasons to attend school and helped them enjoy school life. Both Korean and American teachers reported some of their problematic students showing more motivation or improvement in their writing. An American student commented that IVECA motivated him to perform his schoolwork better as a result of reading encouraging replies from Korean students about his bad feelings at school.

### ***Enhanced writing skills***

The following graphs present the types of writing that the students focused on or improved through the IVECA. Graph 5 shows that students enjoyed writing (32.98%) and they focused on writing correctly (28.19%).



Graph 5. Emphases and Influences on IVECA Students Writing



Graph 6. Emphases and Influences on IVECA Students Writing by Nation

Graph 6 shown above displays the different influence of IVECA on the students writing in each nation. The graph was created through coding student journals, interviews and observation field notes. Both nations' students were motivated to write (Korean: 27.08%, The U.S.: 35.51%). While Korean students reported their improvement mainly in confident writing (fluency: 39.58%), American students practiced correct writing (accuracy: 32.61%).

Culhane (2004) suggests that the intercultural “interaction motivation” enhances second language (L2) acquisitions. The Korean students' enhanced Language fluency in IVECA resonates with the theory that second language learners develop conversational language (a communicative dimension—fluency—of language proficiency) in social contexts before they move to develop academic language. Monolingual learners enhance their academic language (cognitive dimension—accuracy—of language proficiency) after completing the basic structure of their native language (fluency in conversational language) around the age of six (Cummins, 2000). Their language proficiency continues to develop through schooling and with “greater knowledge and options for language uses” throughout the lifetime. This indicates that IVECA effectively provided American students with knowledge to write about and options to use language through real-life intercultural interactions.

### *Expansion of Worldviews*

While reflecting on their experience with IVECA, students showed that their perceptions on cultures and other countries were changed and that their perspectives toward the world were also expanded. Students commented that IVECA helped them to 1) overcome their prejudices and racism, 2) think broadly, and 3) feel close friendships by understanding one another. The possibility that IVECA creates was evident in the students' perspective about world peace and philanthropy as a result of what they had experienced. Their perspectives toward the world peace were derived from their experience of becoming aware of their prejudice; students realized that they had misperceptions about their counterparts after obtaining correct knowledge through their interactions. They pointed out that people who interact with each other directly obtain more accurate cultural knowledge, and are therefore more likely to become friends rather than hate or fight with each other. After the program ended, a Korean student voluntarily left her final discerning message on the IVECA discussion board, and she integrally summarized how IVECA works for making a peaceful world. Below is the message directly excerpted from her writing:

I am back. Hum um... I think IVECA activities are really great for students to develop [develop] their ways of thinking. It's hard to explain but, this is the way. If you continue to share stories with foreign countries, you students naturally get used to think widely. What I mean is that their thoughts and the basic

structure and ways they think will become based on the whole world not only their own country. And if that happens, all students would care about overseas friends and further more, the danger and worries about war between each countries would decrease as well. The International Virtual Elementary Classroom Activities are the first start of all those great stuff. I fill [feel] proud and honorable for being the first class to experience it. I believe this activity would spread to more countries and help students all over the world develop [develop] themselves.

## **CONCLUSION AND DIRECTIONS OF THE FUTURE RESEARCH**

I cannot forget Paul's sincere and serious face while he was trying to help me understand the meaning of IVECA for him.

“Ahm... (He moves to sit closer to me) It's like you and me how close we are together... uhm... but then I could touch you like that (He touches my shoulder), but then, if we are this close, that is like a IVECA. You are in Korea and I'm in America. We are this close though, but I can't reach out to you (He tries to touch my shoulder again but stops right before his hand reaches me), but we can interact everything else.”

IVECA was designed to help our children to be capable of living together with people in different cultures and countries as friends. Children like Paul understand their friends' feelings and thoughts, as they understand themselves. These friends also know appropriate ways to treat each other and effective ways to express their considerations to each other. To build this friendship, children do not need to live in the same area in this global society connected via ICT. When people in the world build authentic relationships, the world will become more peaceful. It sounds ideal. However, my belief is that education should provide children with ways to experience such cross-cultural interactions so that they become capable and willing to make a better world. Such people have intercultural competence (ICC).

This study proposed IVECA as a realistic method of such education facilitating the development of ICC in upper level elementary students. I conclude that IVECA is an effective form of intercultural education. IVECA helped students understand themselves (Awareness), open their minds to other cultures (Attitudes), learn about other cultures (Knowledge), interact appropriately with the people from other cultures (Skills), and effectively communicate with the others' language (Language proficiency). When the children interacted with students in different culture through IVECA, they were motivated to learn at school, improved their writing skills, and demonstrated expanded worldviews.

However, the students in each nation showed different developmental patterns of ICC. Noticeably, while L1 (English as a first language) students showed more rapid improvement in their Knowledge of the ICC dimensions than the other dimensions, L2 (English as a second/foreign language) students all ICC dimensions were evenly developed. It will be interesting to conduct longer-term research to see whether eventually the developmental patterns will even out. Or, what if an L1 learner begins to learn L2 in another IVECA setting? The future research to find the predictors of ICC developmental directions and patterns with controlled variables will be helpful to better understand those patterns. Such research results might allow educators to plan more concrete curricula and apply individualized instructional strategies to enhance students' ICC.

The role of the teacher was critical in guiding these students to acquire such outcomes. I am certain that the use of appropriate instructional strategies will make IVECA even more effective. In particular, in order to genuinely engage students in the intercultural exchange activities, teachers themselves need to be interculturally competent. Well-trained teachers in terms of integrating ICT uses with online teaching and learning principles will doubtlessly increase the effectiveness of IVECA. Thus, future research should

include developing teacher education programs that prepare teachers to be interculturally competent and able to apply appropriate instructional strategies in guiding their students with IVECA.

Lastly, this study demonstrated the possible global impact of developing young students' ICC through IVECA integrated with public school curricula. Thus, plans for IVECA in multiple countries should be developed for further diffusion. Since the spirit of IVECA is for all children, and humanity at large, future research should also consider ways of implementing IVECA in developing countries. Establishing an international organization for IVECA administration would expedite the diffusion. I am motivated and encouraged to promote the diffusion of IVECA on a global scale, based on the findings of this study and with the words of IVECA students echoing in my mind:

“When can we do IVECA again?”

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