



Implementing an International Service Learning Workshop for SUNY Downstate Occupational Therapy Students

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References

ABSTRACT

International Service Learning (ISL) offers a structured academic experience where students can address international community needs, learn from direct interactions and cross-cultural dialogue with others, and reflect on the experience to gain further knowledge of the course context.

The current study implemented an ISL workshop for first and second-year OT students at SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University potentially interested in ISL.

The workshop provided students with travel precautions, education on tools to improve cultural competence, clinical reasoning skills when traveling abroad, and information regarding the host country, Belize.

The workshop's objective was to introduce the concept of ISL and prepare students interested in demonstrating their clinical skills globally and addressing the needs of underserved communities.

METHODOLOGY

Participants: 37 first and second-year OT students enrolled at SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University.

Data Collection: Students were recruited with flyers posted in school and sent to emails. Participants completed a pre-workshop survey electronically on the day of the workshop. Participants then engaged in the workshop for one hour. Discussions were facilitated to address questions from participants. Following the workshop, post-workshop surveys were taken electronically.

Data Analysis: Surveys were administered through Qualtrics platform. Analyses were conducted to compare pre- and post-workshop data. Quantitative responses gathered from Likert scale items in the pre-survey were analyzed to gather conclusions. Qualitative responses from the post-workshop survey that contained open-ended responses, were transcribed using ATLAS.ti software to recognize common themes.

FINDINGS

PRE-WORKSHOP FINDINGS:

Previous knowledge of Belize and other cultures:

- A large portion of respondents expressed a lack of confidence in their knowledge of the host country's culture
 - with 43% strongly disagreeing
 - and 27% somewhat disagreeing about their level of knowledge.
- Despite this, 57% expressed feeling somewhat comfortable with interacting with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds

Correlation between engaging in an ISL trip and future professional growth:

- 57% strongly agreed that engaging in an OT trip abroad would align with their career goals and aspirations
- 73% also strongly agreed that an ISL trip would significantly impact their cultural competency and bedside manners.
- Meanwhile, 70% strongly agreed that they expected the workshop to increase their empathy towards individuals from different cultural backgrounds

Preparedness for participating in an ISL trip:

- 35% felt they were "not prepared at all", while 24% felt "slightly prepared"
- Nonetheless, there was a strong willingness among students to actively seek opportunities for intercultural learning and engagement in their future practices as OTs;
 - 49% indicated they were "extremely likely" to do so.

Previous knowledge of what ISL is:

- In the context of occupational therapy, 51% stated they were "not familiar at all", while 31% stated they were "slightly familiar"



Workshop Presentation

POST-WORKSHOP FINDINGS:

Table 1: How prepared do you feel for participating in an ISL trip?

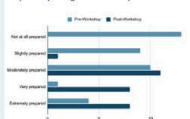
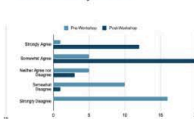


Table 2: I am knowledgeable about the host country's culture



A total of 36 SUNY Downstate occupational therapy students were surveyed after participating in the workshop. Four common themes were identified among the participants: (1) cultural awareness, (2) cultural competence, (3) learning, and (4) healthcare decisions

DISCUSSION

The implementation of an ISL workshop for first and second-year occupational therapy students at SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University provides an approach to support students who are interested in participating in ISL experiences.

Ultimately, the workshop increased participants' understanding of the host country's culture and their ability to provide culturally sensitive care to diverse populations.

This is crucial for OT students interacting with different cultural backgrounds, as it allows them to provide more comprehensive and effective care.

The workshop also helped students develop skills related to communication and empathy, which are essential for creating positive therapeutic relationships with clients and establishing rapport.

LIMITATIONS

Sample size: Relatively small, which may limit the generalizability of the findings.

Discrepancy in data: 37 completed the pre-workshop survey and 36 completed the post-workshop survey.

Generalizability: Workshop was implemented at a single institution, which may limit its applicability to other OT programs.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite the posed limitations of the current study, the results indicate the workshop's role in promoting the personal and professional development of OT students.

As the OT field aims to meet international healthcare needs, it is necessary to incorporate ISL projects into the curriculum of OT programs.

Thus, participating in a pre-travel ISL workshop can better prepare OT students and clinicians to deliver effective international care.