



Research paper

Homestays as a resource for preservice teachers studying abroad

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ABSTRACT

Although the literature on educators studying abroad points to the importance of community and other non-classroom interactions, no study has examined how a homestay specifically might contribute to the development of educators while abroad. In this article we discuss how perceived gains in Spanish proficiency, as well as increased orientation to cultural difference as measured by the Intercultural Development Inventory, were attributed to the homestay experience by preservice teachers studying in Cusco, Peru. Findings illuminate how homestays can play a positive role in educator development by providing linguistic and cultural scaffolds, as well as increased empathy for language learners.

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1. Introduction

The internationalization of K-12 teacher education has become an increasingly crucial priority in recent years. [Kissock and Richardson \(2010\)](#) stated that teacher education must include the preparation of “globally minded professionals who can effectively teach any child from, or living in, any part of the world” (p. 89). Cultivating global perspectives among K-12 educators is even more important when we consider the current demographics of these educators, who are overwhelmingly White and monolingual in stark contrast to the multicultural, multilingual students they teach. As [Marx and Moss \(2017\)](#) noted, “These teachers often hold ethnocentric beliefs that negatively influence the educational experiences of diverse students” (p. 36). Therefore, global mindedness in teacher education not only involves recruiting and retaining a more diverse slate of teachers, but also enabling all teacher candidates to cultivate critical cultural competences that will enable them to work with students from diverse backgrounds.

Given these issues, [Cushner \(2011\)](#) and [Marcus and Moss \(2015\)](#) argued that a purely multicultural approach is insufficient to prepare pre-service teachers; rather, an additional set of experiences

built around intercultural understanding or competence could build on and complement social justice education. While international study abroad is often cited as the quintessential experience for gaining this type of competence ([Brecht & Ingold, 2000](#)), it can frequently include episodes of discomfort that, in turn, are counterproductive to the development of global mindedness ([Santoro & Major, 2012](#)). Therefore, understanding what elements of study abroad might allow participants to process this discomfort can enable teachers and teacher candidates to maximize this experience in a way that fosters their development as global educators.

Although much literature on educators studying abroad points to the important role of community and other non-classroom interactions on developing global awareness and teacher professional development (e.g., [Hauerwas et al., 2017](#); [Okken et al., 2019](#); [Pence & Macgillivray, 2008](#)), to our knowledge no study has focused on how a homestay specifically might contribute to the development of educators during their experiences abroad. This may be because homestay experiences are not readily available, at least for pre-service teachers ([Morley et al., 2019](#)). Moreover, the homestay component of any study abroad experience is a particularly complex unit of analysis, with the extant literature demonstrating mixed results regarding the homestay’s role in fostering linguistic and intercultural growth. Recognizing this complexity, our study contributes to the existing body of research on educators studying abroad through a deeper exploration of a currently underexplored

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intersection; teacher candidates, homestays, and linguistic/intercultural growth. We employ a mixed methods approach to obtain a deeper picture of both overall trends in growth and details about the study abroad experience. Findings strongly suggest that homestay experiences can give pre-service teachers valuable skills (linguistic, intercultural, and otherwise) that they will be able to use in their future careers as globally minded educators.

The study was centered around the following research questions:

1. Did participants experience growth in perceived linguistic competence and orientation to cultural difference?
2. What role, if any, did participants believe their homestays played in this growth?
3. How did the participants perceive this growth and the homestay experience as contributing to their development as educators?

2. Literature review

2.1. Educators studying abroad

A complete overview of study abroad literature is beyond the scope of this paper; recent reviews and analyses focus on its role in language learning (Borràs & Llanes, 2021; Isabelli-García et al., 2018), cultural awareness (Haas, 2018), and teacher preparation (Sharma, 2020), among other topics. With respect to educators, research speaks to multiple benefits of study abroad for both pre-service and in-service teachers. Sharma (2020) stated that “study abroad has become part of ‘best practices’ in teacher education aimed at preparing predominantly White teachers with the knowledge, competencies, and dispositions for teaching students who are culturally and linguistically diverse” (p. 311). Within the literature, teacher-focused study abroad programs have been found to foster a greater appreciation of diversity (Kyei-Blankson & Nur-Awaleh, 2018; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Stachowski & Sparks, 2007); generate increased empathy for and understanding of the difficulties faced by English Language Learners (ELLs) (He et al., 2017; Lindahl et al., 2020; Pilonieta et al., 2017); and offer valuable exposure to educational practices and philosophies outside of the home country (Baecher & Chung, 2020; Vatalaro et al., 2015). Additionally, research on educator study abroad has found benefits of increased confidence (Mikulec, 2019; Shoffner, 2019) and an awareness of “how culture and language relate to each other, as overlapping systems of meaning” (Smolicic & Katunich, 2017, pp. 51–52).

However, researchers such as Sharma (2020), Major (2020), and Klein and Wikan (2019) have cautioned against viewing study abroad for educators in overwhelmingly positive terms. For example, Klein & Wikan found discourses of limited tolerance and “neocolonial connotations” in focus group interviews and open-ended survey responses from Norwegian teacher candidates studying abroad in Namibia (p. 98). Findings such as these are rarely interrogated in subsequent studies; indeed, Major and Sharma highlighted a lack of criticality in the extant literature, particularly with respect to the acknowledgement of asymmetrical power relations between wealthier sending nations and poorer receiving nations. These authors and others (e.g., Jackson, 2021; Shannon-Baker, 2020) pointed to the importance of adopting a more critical lens on the study abroad experience regarding power imbalances between sending and host countries. They also recommend careful scaffolding of this experience through pre-departure, in-country, and reentry work focused on confronting bias and developing intercultural sensitivity.

2.2. The role of the homestay in study abroad

Researchers in study abroad for educators and other populations can draw from a large, established body of research on the role of homestays. By far the largest number of studies in this area focus on the relationship between the homestay and target language gains. However, research examining the connection between type of housing (e.g., homestay or dormitory/shared apartment) and language gain has yielded mixed results; as Kinginger (2015) noted, “We still know very little about the extent to which the homestay conveys a real advantage for language learning” (p. 215).

Rivers's (2008) oft-cited large-scale study examined over 2500 individuals from two decades of study abroad experiences in Russia, finding that “participants who had a homestay experience gained less in speaking skills, less in listening skills, and more in reading skills, when compared to dormitory participants” (p. 492). These findings mostly correlate with later studies involving participants in other host countries (e.g., Magnan & Back, 2007 for France; Van de Berg et al., 2009 for multiple countries), which also found no effect for homestays on language gains. Researchers have explained this lack of correlation between homestays and language gains by pointing to the often limited or formulaic nature of interactions between host families and study abroad participants, as well as lowered linguistic expectations on the part of the host family (Sanz & Morales-Front, 2018). Kinginger and Carnine (2019) also noted that a “variation in the orientation to hosting taken up by local families and the dispositions of students” can contribute to mixed results with respect to language gains (p. 853). Some recent studies have addressed this variation by taking a more microanalytical approach to the complexities of homestay interactions (e.g., Greer & Wagner, 2021; Lee et al., 2017), using frameworks such as conversation analysis to examine how host families and study abroad participants are communicating in real time.

Yet although no direct link has been established between homestays and language gain, study abroad participants' perceptions of their homestays have been consistently, overwhelmingly positive. Di Silvio et al. (2014) highlighted several studies citing strong majorities of participant satisfaction with their homestay experience (60–85%), as well as participants' high desire to recommend homestays to others. These authors also found a statistically significant relationship between participants' oral proficiency gains and their being glad to have lived with a host family, suggesting that a *positive* homestay experience, rather than a homestay experience in general, may play a key role in language gains. Other studies have also discussed participants' perceptions of their homestays; Diao et al. (2011) discovered that the majority of their participants (66%) identified their French families as their primary source of language learning and believed that their homestay unequivocally contributed to their linguistic and cultural learning. Similarly, Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight (2004) discovered that the time their participants spent with host families during summer and semester programs in Spain and Mexico correlated significantly with students' belief that they had learned as much language as they had anticipated learning during the time abroad (p. 171). Hence, as Di Silvio et al. concluded, “even if there is not an inherent homestay advantage, there is an advantage to be found in a happy homestay,” which could be characterized by, among other things, frequent opportunities for learning and practicing the target language (p. 180). However, Kinginger and Lee (2019) cautioned that “The intimate bond students can develop with their hosts thus far has appeared mainly in studies based on self-report only” (p. 20), again pointing to the need for different methodological approaches to homestay research.

A growing, yet still small number of studies examine the role of the homestay experience in enhancing participants' intercultural

learning. Whatley et al. (2021) found a negative correlation between staying with a host family and the development of global perspectives, although they noted that the short-term program under study may not have been sufficiently long enough for students to “process the initial shock of living in a foreign household” (p. 313). Torii et al. (2020) examined the complexities of two-way cultural transmission among Japanese study abroad students and their host families in the U.S., finding tensions and eventual resolutions between participant (both student and host family) quests for cultural “authenticity” and reconsideration of cultural practices through reflection and critique. In one of the few research articles offering insight into host family perspectives of study abroad, Knight and Schmidt-Rinehart (2002) explored host family perceptions of their roles, as well as factors that the families believed affected participant adjustment during a study abroad experience. The authors found that homestay families considered themselves an integral part of the study abroad experience and learning for participants, and that the three main areas in which host families felt they helped students were linguistic, cultural, and psychological.

The limited research on homestay experiences abroad for teachers and teacher candidates, like study abroad research in general, tends to focus on linguistic gains. For example, Jarvis and Mady (2021) examined homestays in the larger context of a French immersion Community Leadership Experience in Quebec, Canada. The authors noted that teachers described the homestay experience as “powerful” in terms of developing their French language skills, highlighting the “informal, non-threatening” atmosphere of the homestay as an ideal context for practicing the language (p. 523). Nero (2018) described the homestay portion of a teacher study abroad program in the Dominican Republic as “the most important experiential component” (p. 198). Candidates on this program considered these families as “a major source of linguistic input, offering the participants a vivid link between language and culture” with the teaching of region-specific vocabulary, such as “*un chin*” for “a little bit” and “*mangú*” for a typical plantain-based dish (Nero, 2009, p. 190). Finally, some earlier work on teacher homestays abroad has pointed to the development of intercultural skills. Çiftçi and Karaman’s (2019) meta-synthesis on international experiences in language teacher education noted that homestays “seem to have a remarkable impact on intercultural experiences,” pointing to their role in shaping educators’ intercultural perspectives and helping solve cultural misunderstandings (p. 105).

In this review of the extant literature on study abroad and the role of the homestay, we found that while most participants were positive about their homestays and found them to be essential contributors to their linguistic and intercultural gains, findings on actual gains were mixed in both areas. Moreover, studies tended to focus on either language or culture, rather than examining how gains in these areas might intersect in a homestay context. While more recent research in study abroad has demonstrated welcome increases in both criticality and innovative, ecological approaches to language acquisition, we believe a holistic consideration of these factors, as well as their impact on educator development, is an important contribution to the ongoing discussion of the benefits of study abroad for educators.

3. Context

Participants were teacher candidates studying abroad in Cusco, Peru during their fifth year of a five-year Integrated Bachelors/Masters teacher education program. The goal of the Masters year is to develop teacher candidates as future leaders in the profession. Candidates, having completed a semester of student teaching,

engage in research and school-based internships focused on department- or schoolwide initiatives. Nearly half of these teacher candidates opt to study abroad during the fall semester of their Masters year.

The Cusco program was in its inaugural year; a pilot program had taken place in Lima, Peru the previous year with two participants. The Cusco program was closely modeled after established programs at the sending institution. Although advertised as a 15-week fall semester program, the program spans an entire calendar year, beginning the summer before departure and extending into the spring semester. Participants from any content area were welcome to apply for the program; prior knowledge of Spanish was not required, although it was encouraged. During the summer, teacher candidates take a 3-credit, graduate-level course titled *Seminar in International Education* to prepare them for their semester abroad and begin the process of developing an action research project focused on examining aspects of their experience abroad. Data from one of these action research projects informs the current study. Upon return to the United States, candidates take a 3-credit reentry seminar designed to promote further reflection on their experiences and support the continued development of their intercultural understandings.

During the semester abroad, the sending institution offers support, services, and coursework in the form of an online seminar, but candidates are also affiliated with a local higher education institution, where they take courses in Spanish language, service learning, and Peruvian history and culture. While abroad, participants also engage in internships at local schools with whom the local university has established partnerships. Participants are placed according to the needs of these schools and the proposed certification area of the candidates. In this study, six participants worked in a rural, bilingual Quechua-Spanish elementary school located 45 min from the city center, one participant worked at a trilingual (Quechua-Spanish-English) private school on the outskirts of the city, while another worked at a small girl’s school in the city center.

Unlike most programs sponsored by the sending institution, the study abroad program in Cusco offered a homestay option, which all participants chose. Participants were placed with host families at the beginning of their study abroad experience and stayed with the same families for the duration of the semester. Homes were located in various residential neighborhoods in Cusco, a small but vibrant city in the Southern Andean region of Peru. Known as the “Inca Capital” of South America, Cusco attracts numerous tourists from the global North, who mainly come as part of travel to the famed archeological site Machu Picchu. However, Cusco locals, or *cuzqueños*, are less likely to see non-Peruvians in residential areas such as the ones where participants stayed; participants commented on how they were viewed with some surprise as they walked around these neighborhoods, took local buses, or engaged in other activities close to home.

Host families were established members of the study abroad program, having participated in several iterations of the program after being vetted by program directors through an extensive application form and frequent home visits. In keeping with the program’s usual practice, two study abroad participants were placed in each homestay; each participant had their own room. While some participants felt this practice led them to speak more English than they would have liked to, most were happy to have a companion in the same household and felt that the arrangement helped mediate the adjustment to a new culture and country. These space demands also dictated that the host families were predominantly middle class, socioeconomically speaking, which opened up a space for many comparisons between host family lives and the lives of the students in participants’ internship schools.

Eight teacher candidates participated in this study. One student was studying music education, while the other seven were studying elementary education. One of the participants had studied abroad previously, while two participants had participated in a domestic experiential learning program in a different region of the United States. It is unknown whether or not participants had traveled abroad for other reasons (see Table 1 for participant demographics and pseudonyms). Of the eight participants, three are co-authors of this study; these authors took the same assessments and responded to the same journal prompts as their co-participants.

4. Methodology and methods

4.1. Conceptual framework and positionality

Following Kinginger’s (2015, p. 218) call for “methodological ecumenicalism” in study abroad research, our conceptual framework draws from collaborative autoethnography, comparative case study, and mixed-methods approaches (Isabelli-García et al., 2018; Lapadat, 2009; Yin, 1994). The autoethnographic component involves recognizing our own roles as participant-researchers as “a route to illuminating aspects of a culture or society” and challenging positivist research epistemologies by highlighting the personal and the emotional rather than an artificial “objectivity” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ohito, 2019, p. 252). Our process for constructing narratives about our experiences enabled us to capture the “process of praxis,” while our reading and analysis of both our peer’s and each other’s work fostered “opportunities for solidarity” among us as teacher candidates, who are typically not engaged in academic research (Cann & DeMeulenaere, 2010, p. 147).

At the same time, we acknowledge that we were not the only participants in this research, and we strove for a mutual understanding among all participants. We discovered that our non-researcher participants, as teacher candidates themselves, were equally invested in processing their homestay experience and the role that this experience might play in their future careers. In keeping with our autoethnographic approach, we made an effort to ensure that our findings were “lifelike, believable, and possible” (Ellis, 2004, p. 124) through ongoing discussions among the participant-researchers and member checks with the non-researcher participants. Moreover, our collaborative analytical process allowed us to triangulate inferences across our different stories, enhancing both believability and possibility. The findings parallel emerging research trends in study abroad with its “increasing emphasis on particularity,” rather than objective, generalizable knowledge (Kinger, 2015, p. 26).

Still, we firmly believed that the addition of quantitative data would further illuminate our findings. Comparative case study

highlights common themes within and among cases and is strengthened by using mixed methods (Sakata et al., 2021; Yin, 1994). Quantitative data collection and analysis allowed us to track growth in perceived linguistic and intercultural competence post-study abroad. This approach subscribes to Isabelli-García et al.’s (2018) emphasis on mixed methods for study abroad research, which can “evaluate measures of linguistic gain against accounts of learners’ experiences in the host culture, contributing to a fine-grained analysis of individual students’ behavior” (p. 448). We agree with the authors that “combining quantifiable measures of linguistic or intercultural gains with qualitative descriptions of learners’ experiences, beliefs, and behaviors lends validity to the research” (p. 449). Thus, although our primary data source in this study is participant narratives, statistically analyzed measurements of perceived linguistic and intercultural competence before and after the program allowed us an overview of participant development throughout the study.

Finally, we discuss the role of Michele, a non-participant researcher. As the developer of the Cusco study abroad program, Michele was clearly interested in how teacher candidates processed this experience. Moreover, as our instructor for the three study abroad—related seminars, Michele maintained close contact with all participants as they prepared for, experienced, and returned from Cusco. However, the conception of this study, as well as the data collection and preliminary analysis, was entirely that of the three participant-researchers. Michele suggested the instruments to track growth in perceived linguistic competence and intercultural growth and served as an advisor on collecting, analyzing, and writing up data. She also assisted us with subsequent analyses of the data in NVivo, updated the literature review, and helped to frame the study in the overall picture of educator study abroad research. Throughout the transition from action research paper to article, Michele was in constant communication with the participant-researchers to ensure that the findings adhered to the original idea of the study.

4.2. Data collection and procedures

For quantitative data on participant perceptions of language gains, we used a modified version of Clark’s (1981) “Can-Do” self-assessment scale, consisting of a series of statements that allow participants to rate on a scale of 0–3 how confident they are with specific language skills (see Appendix 1). The “Can-Do” scale was administered one week before and one week after participants studied abroad to track participants’ perceived language gains. Similarly, we used the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI; Hammer et al., 2003) to assess participant growth in intercultural competence. The IDI is a cross-culturally validated survey instrument that includes 5-point Likert Scale questions relating to

Table 1
Participant demographics

Pseudonym	Previous study “abroad”	Previous Spanish experience	Gender and racial/ethnic identity	Content Area	School Placement in Cusco (School Pseudonym)
Evelyn	Domestic study abroad in Alabama	High school (3 years)	Female/White	Elementary	Rural public (Huanipaca)
Fiona		High school (2 years)	Female/White	Elementary	Rural public (Huanipaca)
Jill	Study abroad in Florence, Italy	High school (2 years)	Female/White	Music	Urban private (Yachasunchij)
Kelly		High school (2 years)	Female/White	Elementary	Rural public (Huanipaca)
Lisa		High school (2 years)	Female/White	Elementary	Urban public (Escuela Primaria Virgen de Belén)
Mayra	Domestic study abroad in Alabama	High school (2 years)	Female/Indian	Elementary	Rural public (Huanipaca)
Owen		High school (2 years)	Male/White	Elementary	Rural public (Huanipaca)
Penelope		High school (2 years)	Female/Asian and Latinx	Elementary	Rural public (Huanipaca)

perceptions of culture, as well as open-ended questions (see Hammer, 2011 for further info on validity). As discussed by McGregor et al. (2019), the IDI has been psychometrically tested and found to possess strong validity and reliability across diverse cultural groups internationally and domestically, including predictive validity within educational sectors. IDI scores are associated with stages on a scale from denial to adaptation, which represents the intercultural development continuum. The monocultural, also known as ethnocentric, stages are denial, defense, and minimization, followed by the intercultural (ethnorelative) stages of acceptance, adaptation and integration (see Fig. 1). The IDI was administered to participants the summer before their study abroad experience (three months before) and one week after their return to track participant growth in intercultural competence.

To gather qualitative data on the homestay experience, we asked participants to respond to journal prompts at the beginning, middle, and end of study abroad (weeks 3, 7, and 13). There were three main prompts that asked participants to reflect on their homestay experience in terms of culture, language, and as a resource for their development as future educators; see Appendix 2 for the full instrument. The prompts remained consistent so that we could look for growth or changes over time. We framed our questions to give us relevant information, but also be open enough to give participants room to fully reflect on their homestay experience and not lead them to a particular answer. Participants responded to the journal prompts through Google Forms; we then downloaded their responses for analysis.

In Fig. 2 we offer a timeline of the data collection procedures.

4.3. Data analysis

For the quantitative data, we conducted a repeated measures, time series analysis on the pre- and post- Can Do and IDI assessments using one-tailed t-tests. Although the number of participants in this study was small ($n = 8$), de Winter (2013) has stated that t-tests are feasible for small data sets if the within-pair correlation is high. What is of potential concern when working with small sample sizes is the statistical power; therefore, we calculated both the correlation coefficient and effect size to give further weight to the conclusion of statistically significant change between the assessments.

We first categorized qualitative data by participant (who were assigned pseudonyms) and journal entry (first, second, or third) before undergoing the first round of open, thematic coding (Gibbs, 2018). These data were then uploaded to NVivo, where careful, reiterative readings of the data sets and selective coding took place

(Glaser, 2016). Michele coded selections from journal entries in NVivo by theme (to explore in-depth the ways that participants felt their host families served as resources) and case (to track narratives suggesting intercultural development in the homestay context). A code map was created to nest subthemes under each main theme (see Appendix 3). The code map was then shared with Rebecca, Anna, and Hana, and all authors discussed the findings.¹ Analytic memo writing expanded these mappings into a cohesive narrative, providing a deeper look at the homestay's role for each participant, as well as the development of this role throughout the course of the semester.

Analysis of all three data sources required careful monitoring of the various, often overlapping factors contributing to linguistic, intercultural, and professional gains during study abroad. For example, participants took a Spanish course during their stay and also practiced Spanish at their school placements. We made every attempt to not attribute language gains to the homestay experience when they might have experienced these gains elsewhere. The journal entries helped us gauge how relevant the role of the homestay was in terms of any perceived language gains that the "Can-Do" assessment indicated. We undertook similar monitoring for factors such as intercultural development and contribution to participants' role as educators, recognizing that these supposedly separate factors overlapped considerably in participant narratives. Our own participation in the study allowed for further reflection on these factors as we completed the journal prompts about our own homestay experiences.

5. Findings

To answer RQ 1 (Did participants experience growth in perceived linguistic competence and orientation to cultural difference?) we analyzed quantitative data from the "Can Do" assessment scale and the IDI.

5.1. "Can-Do" assessment scale

The "Can Do" pre- and post-assessment showed growth in perception of Spanish ability among all participants. Participants improved their scores by an average of 9 out of 26 possible points, or 88% (see Fig. 3). The lowest increase was 4 points (22%) by a participant who started with one of the two highest initial scores. The highest increase was 17 points from a participant who tied for the lowest initial score. After conducting a paired t-test on these data, we found these differences to be statistically significant, with a modest positive correlation and strong effect size ($t = -6.1482$, $r(7) = 0.3784$, $p = 0.0002342^*$, $Cohen's\ d = 2.645752$; see Table 2).² These findings suggest that participants felt increased confidence in their Spanish language abilities and believed that they were able to engage in more complex forms of interaction in the language towards the end of their semester stay versus towards the beginning. It is important to emphasize that this instrument measured only perceived ability, rather than actual language proficiency; however, self-assessments such as the Can-Do scale have been found to be highly reliable when compared to standard language proficiency measures (Brown et al., 2014; Ma & Winke, 2019).

¹ Due to the focus on educator development, as well as space considerations, not all themes in the concept map are discussed in this article.

² With a Cohen's d of 2.00, 97.7% of the "treatment" group will be above the mean of the "control" group (Cohen's $U3$). 31.7% of the two groups will overlap, and there is a 92.1% chance that a person picked at random from the treatment group will have a higher score than a person picked at random from the control group (probability of superiority; Magnusson, 2021).

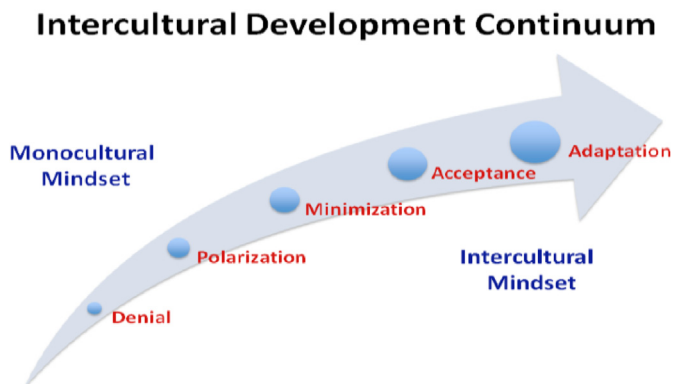


Fig. 1. The intercultural development continuum. Retrieved from <https://idiinventory.com/generalinformation/the-intercultural-development-continuum-idi/>.

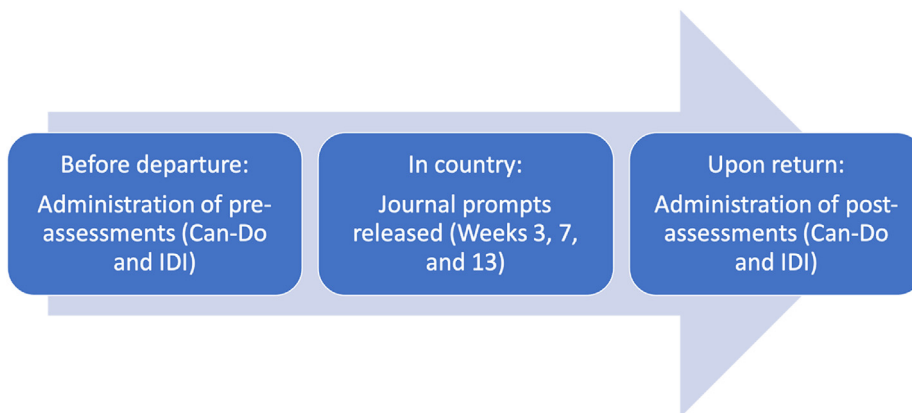


Fig. 2. Data collection timeline.

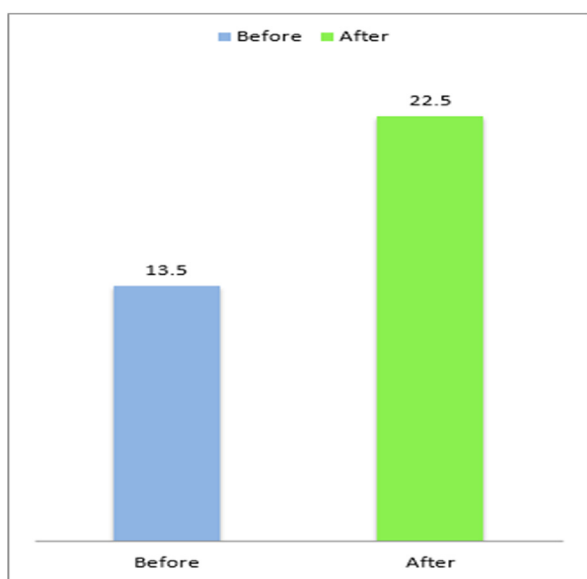


Fig. 3. Average increases in can-do scores.

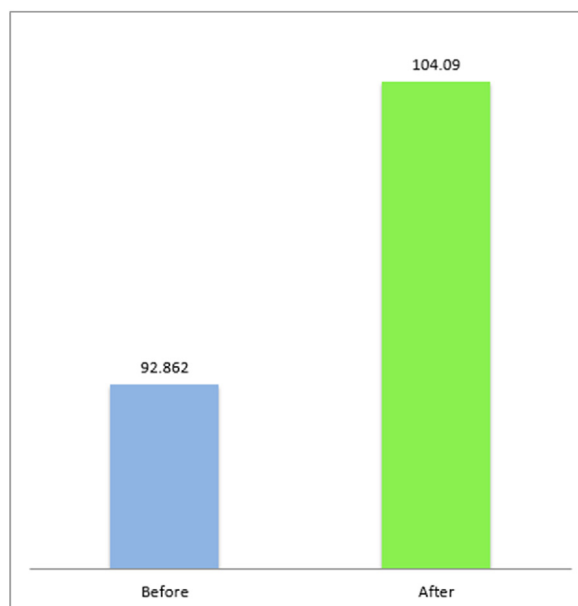


Fig. 4. Average growth in IDI scores among all participants.

Table 2
Means and standard deviations for pre- and post-assessment Can Do results.

	Pre-study abroad	Post-study abroad
Mean	13.5	22.5
St. Dev.	4.18	1.66

$t = -6.1482, r(7) = 0.3784, p = 0.0002342^*$.

5.2. Intercultural Development Inventory

Similar to the results of the “Can-Do” assessment, the IDI pre- and post-assessment indicated significant growth in intercultural competence scores upon return from study abroad. The average increase in scores across the group was 11.223 points, or 12.78% (see Fig. 4). Every participant experienced growth with the

³ With a Cohen's *d* of 0.94, 82.6% of the “treatment” group will be above the mean of the “control” group (Cohen's U3), 63.8% of the two groups will overlap, and there is a 74.7% chance that a person picked at random from the treatment group will have a higher score than a person picked at random from the control group (probability of superiority; Magnusson, 2021).

Table 3
Means and standard deviations for pre- and post-assessment IDI results.

	Pre-study abroad	Post-study abroad
Mean	92.861	104.09
St. Dev.	13.04	11.53

$t = -3.5536, r(7) = 0.6996, p = 0.004639^*$.

exception of one participant, who experienced a slight decrease in score. This outlier may be because this participant had health issues mid-trip and had to return to the United States for two weeks. A paired *t*-test on the pre- and post-assessment data found the overall increase in scores to be statistically significant, with a moderately positive correlation and large effect size ($t = -3.5536, r(7) = 0.6996, p = 0.004639^*$, Cohen's *d* = 0.940451; see Table 3).³

Although significant, it should be noted that all participants but one remained in the minimization stage of the IDI. However, Moss et al. (2018) noted that a minimization orientation is neither ethnocentric/monocultural nor ethnorelative/intercultural, but rather a transitional stage indicating movement toward acceptance and adaptation. As the IDI website (2020) states, “Minimization

highlights commonalities in both human Similarity (basic needs) and Universalism (universal values and principles) that can mask a deeper understanding of cultural differences” (n.p., our emphasis). Thus, the IDI results indicate that participants were at the very least moving through this transitional phase, with two participants moving from Polarization to Minimization.

5.3. Cross-case analysis: homestays as supports for linguistic, cultural, and professional growth

To answer RQs 2 and 3 (What role, if any, did participants believe their homestays played in this growth? How did the participants perceive this growth and the homestay experience as contributing to their development as educators?) we analyzed participant journal entries. Thematic coding of these data led to the emergence of three main themes regarding the homestay experience. First, participants believed that the homestay served as a *linguistic resource* by providing a comfortable, supportive environment, but also one with multiple, varied opportunities for conversation. Second, participants believed that the homestays were important *cultural resources*, as they mitigated culture shock and provided authentic experiences with local culture. Lastly, participants believed that the homestay provided additional resources for themselves as educators by not only supporting linguistic and intercultural development, but also *fostering dispositions of empathy and patience* for students of multilingual backgrounds.

As the prompt questions were focused on how host families may have served as resources for culture, language, and participants' lives as educators, it is not surprising that responses to these prompts focused on these three areas. As described previously, themes overlapped considerably in the journal entries; for example, evidence of linguistic support provided by families was closely tied to participant roles as educators both in Cusco and at home. In the following two subsections, we discuss how these themes were addressed in the journal entries, including representative participant quotes.

5.3.1. Homestays as linguistic resources for educators

In their journal entries, participants repeatedly noted that their homestays served as crucial resources for their development of Spanish. This was presented through several different subthemes, the first being that *homestays helped language development by providing unavoidable communication practice*. In her first journal, Lisa stated that because her host family only spoke Spanish, the homestay was “a place with consistent Spanish language communication,” while Fiona noted in her final journal that “Living with a host family [...] forced me to practice speaking and listening to Spanish frequently.” Although the inevitability of these interactions was a struggle at first, participants expressed that they led to large gains in their language skills.

The *ability to interact with multiple generations of Peruvians* within their host families was a second subtheme that participants also felt contributed positively to their language development. As Jill stated in her final journal, “After having multiple, daily opportunities to communicate with three different generations of Peruvians (8–13, 40's, 70's) I am now much more proficient and conversational [in Spanish].” There were several reasons that interacting with multiple generations was seen by participants as a positive contributing factor to their language development. First, participants noted that different generations used different registers of Spanish, which in turn expanded their own linguistic repertoires. Second, many participants wrote about how interacting with younger members of their families necessitated additional creativity and circumlocution, as these members possessed neither the patience nor the extra-linguistic skills for extensive

intercultural communication. For example, Kelly recounted an episode in which her five-year-old host sister, responding to a lack of understanding, “rolled her eyes and said, ‘*chicas, no entienden nada*,’ [girls, you don't understand anything],” but also noted that “talking with her and playing with her has [...] quickly sharpened my Spanish.” Similarly, Mayra wrote, “living with a three-year-old that does not speak your native language kind of forces you to find creative ways to communicate,” while Fiona discussed how her 11-year-old host sister “tells me that she doesn't understand, so then I have to try to say it in a different way to get her to understand.” These quotes highlight both the difficulty and the value of deeper interactions with different generations in the target language, something that a homestay is often able to provide.

A fourth subtheme that arose in the journals around language development was that the homestay *provided a comfortable environment that fostered confidence*, further aiding language development. For example, Penelope noted that although the inevitable necessity of speaking Spanish with her host family was a struggle initially, “with repeated exposure to speaking Spanish in my home [...] my self-consciousness began to fade,” improving her confidence and fluidity in speaking. In her third journal, Evelyn wrote, “I find myself very confident when communicating with others because I practiced with my family every day.” These quotes illustrate participant perception of confidence as an important quality for language development and the utility of having a host family to boost this confidence. The homestay's informal, relaxed environment allowed participants to practice with ease and focus on growing their abilities without trepidation. Owen spoke to this in his final journal entry, explaining, “Speaking to my family members in an informal setting allowed me to build up my confidence for when I had to use Spanish in other settings.”

Participants also made clear connections to how their improved language skills in the homestay were *essential for their development as educators*, both in Cusco and in their future careers in the U.S. In earlier entries, participants described how their host families provided resources that helped them with their school placements in Cusco. These resources included assistance with useful classroom-related vocabulary in Spanish, such as commands. Moreover, linguistic resources were not limited to Spanish: host families also provided information about and in Quechua, the home language of many students in participants' school placements. For example, Mayra discussed how her host family “helped me with finding the names of different animals in both Spanish and Quechua so that I could better help the students at school.”

In later journal entries participants wrote about how they planned to use their improved Spanish with future students and their parents. When discussing how the homestay, specifically, contributed to this development, participants pointed to their interactions with younger children in the family as beneficial for helping them develop patience, empathy, and even classroom management skills; stated Mayra, “I found myself getting better with managing student behavior because when I would take care of my host sister's daughter, I found myself using classroom management strategies,” while Kelly wrote “I have also improved [sic] some Spanish that is very useful in the classroom-like commands” as a result of her interactions with children in her host family.

Finally, many participants noted that experiencing daily life as a language learner would enable them to understand the experiences of their emergent multilingual students and provide the necessary scaffolding to help all students with their own language acquisition. Penelope articulated this sentiment as follows: “Participating in my own language learning has enlightened me to what's the most helpful and what are common difficulties when learning language, which will help my teaching of ELLs and all students as well.” Jill also mentioned that the homestay experience

had sparked a desire to “create a welcoming, warm environment for Spanish speaking parents of my students,” highlighting an important aspect of engaging in communication with communities beyond the classroom.

5.3.2. Homestays as cultural resources for educators

Host families were important sources of emotional support during the first “fish out of water” weeks of participant stays, when school placements and living environments were unfamiliar. As such, host families’ initial contribution as cultural resources was to *help mediate culture shock*. For example, in her first journal entry, Lisa wrote that her host family “asked similar questions that my own mom would ask at the end of the day. They have made the transition into a new culture smooth and attainable.” This demonstrates how Lisa felt safe with her host family and believed that living with them helped her adjust to local life more easily. Similarly, Kelly wrote, “My homestay has been a huge help adjusting to the culture in Peru. I think that I would feel so much more overwhelmed with the newness of it all without having my family to help me navigate this totally new culture.” Several participants also wrote specifically about how their families mediated culture shock by giving participants a space to discuss their school placements. In her second journal entry, Kelly wrote, “I was able to reflect on my school day everyday with one of my host parents at lunch, and talking about it with someone who understood helped.”

Throughout all three journal entries, participants mentioned how living in a homestay provided participants with *frequent opportunities for cultural learning*. Living with a host family allowed participants to be exposed to authentic Peruvian culture on a daily basis; as several noted in their journals, this exposure would not have been possible had they been living in an apartment. From outings with families to religious events, to discussions about local politics and the education system, participants shared many details about the myriad aspects of Peruvian culture they learned from their homestays. Of particular note was the immediacy with which these opportunities presented themselves; for example, Evelyn noted; “I really got to experience cultural differences in terms of food and certain family dynamics right away.” Lisa also discussed family dynamics in her second journal when she wrote, “I am able to see how my host parents interact with other people, such as their parents or other family members. I can also see how extremely family-oriented they are.” Many other participants mentioned how they learned about family norms by watching their host families interact with each other. For some participants, becoming more involved in these interactions helped them feel more a part of Peruvian culture. Penelope explained:

Because of my relationship with my host family towards the last few weeks of my trip, I began to feel like I was a part of Peruvian culture in a way [...] because I was engaging in meaningful relationships with cultural members: my family.

The ability to engage in meaningful relationships with members of the target culture was a possible contributing factor to the increases in intercultural competence found in the IDI results. However, it should be noted that there were several instances in the journal entries in which participants appeared to conflate their families’ particular cultures with Peruvian culture in general. Participant narratives about family routines, such as meal times and bedtimes, were often written about as though these routines were applicable to all Peruvians. For example, one participant stated, “here [in Peru], we don’t wait for everyone to be at the table before we eat,” while another participant attributed their family philosophy of “being compassionate and going out of your way to help others” as “social norms.” These types of conflation might

correspond to earlier stages on the intercultural development continuum, in which experiences in the target culture are perceived with less nuance compared to later stages.

When participants mentioned the specific ways in which homestay-related cultural resources contributed to their development as educators, many discussed the *development of dispositions such as empathy and cultural responsiveness*. They wrote about how their own experiences of being placed in unfamiliar situations had led them to feel greater empathy for their future students who might be new arrivals from other countries and going through similar experiences. For example, Owen wrote, “living with a family whose culture and language is so different from my own, helped me better understand what I will need to do for my students who come from diverse backgrounds.” This quote highlights how interactions with the host family fostered greater understanding of individuals with different lived experiences; a useful skill for teaching in diverse classrooms. Owen’s observation also reflected that of many other participants’ journal entries, which spoke to the benefits of this experience and how to put it into practice in their future classrooms. Evelyn wrote that she hoped the homestay experience would enable her to “be more responsive to students of different cultural backgrounds than my own and developing strategies and relevant curricular content to engage these students and more effectively teach them.” Participants also discussed how their host families’ own patience and enthusiasm for their culture highlighted the need to create a safe, inclusive space for linguistically and culturally diverse students in their future classrooms. Lisa elaborated on this point as follows:

Living with a homestay family put me outside of my comfort zone, and as a teacher we will have many students that may feel uncomfortable in school due to language, culture, race, etc. Now that I have been in this scenario, I will be able to relate to my future students and help them feel more comfortable in their own classroom when/if they feel out of place or uncomfortable.

6. Discussion

Participant perceptions of homestays as important resources for target language gains correlate with studies by [Diao et al. \(2011\)](#), [Jarvis and Mady \(2021\)](#), and [Nero \(2018, 2009\)](#), who found similarly positive perceptions among their participants. Somewhat contesting research by [Rivers \(2008\)](#), [Magnan and Back \(2007\)](#), and analysis by [Sanz and Morales-Front \(2018\)](#), these perceptions did seem to correlate with at least perceived, if not actual, growth in linguistic competence, as measured by the “Can Do” pre- and post-assessments. We note again that self-evaluation, though not an “objective” review of language competence, can be highly reliable when compared to standard language proficiency measures ([Brown et al., 2014](#); [Ma & Winke, 2019](#)), but recognize that a standard measure may have tracked these perceived gains more accurately. Nevertheless, the mixed-methods approach of this study did show significant growth in perceived Spanish abilities while also pointing to factors in the homestay that may have helped this growth. Participant themes of unavoidable communication, multi-generational interaction, and a comfortable space for language practice all highlight the importance of “asking the right questions” about homestays in study abroad research ([Kinginger & Carnine, 2019](#), p. 850). Additionally, these insights parallel the contexts of participants’ future interactions in Spanish, as well as the environments that they hope to create in their own classrooms. As primarily elementary school teachers, participants will mainly be interacting with young Spanish-speaking children; thus, conversations with their young host sisters and brothers were

invaluable for these future interactions. Additionally, creating a safe space where emergent multilingual students feel empowered to speak in any language is a primary goal of many of these participants, as exemplified by Penelope and Lisa's observations in the previous section.

Second, journal entries and IDI results pointed to a greater appreciation of cultural difference among the participants, echoing earlier findings summarized in Çiftçi and Karaman (2019). Participants wrote that their host families' abilities to help mediate initial culture shock, as well as how the homestay context offered frequent opportunities for cultural learning, were important factors in this development. Through these opportunities, participants reported further developing dispositions of empathy and cultural responsiveness, which were also apparent in the IDI results and parallel previous findings by Lindahl et al. (2020), He et al. (2017) and Pilonieta et al. (2017), although these studies did not mention homestays. However, some overgeneralizations of Peruvian culture were still present in the data, highlighting the need for a continued critical approach to study abroad, as discussed by Sharma (2020), Major (2020), and Klein and Wikan (2019). We should also note that most participants remained in the minimization stage of intercultural development post-study abroad. While this stage has been described as transitional in more recent analyses of the IDI, it is possible that a semester-long time frame, while comparatively long by study abroad standards, is still not sufficient for reaching later stages of intercultural development.

7. Implications

This study adds to the body of research on study abroad on the potential value of homestays for linguistic and intercultural development and fills a gap in this research by focusing on this value for preservice teachers. Given the ongoing need for internationalizing teacher education, our findings indicate that homestays for teachers who study abroad in a non-English speaking country can play a strong role in their development as linguistically and intercultural competent educators. However, both previous research and this study suggest that some homestays are better equipped to provide these resources than others. Host families who spent quality time with study abroad participants and engaged with them in a variety of interactions were perceived as essential. The fact that no participant spoke negatively about their homestay experience speaks both to the importance of programmatic vetting of host families to ensure that they are willing and able to provide this type of interaction, as well as the need to expand the breadth of this research to see whether other participants would have similar views.

As stated previously, there has been limited research pertaining to the experience of preservice teachers in homestays abroad and how the homestay experience may contribute to their development as educators. Through our journal data, we found that participants experienced an increased level of intercultural awareness and competence, which was consistent with their IDI score gains. Participants also directly pointed to the homestay experience as helping them to cultivate this awareness and competence. Upon reflection, our participants stated that they felt more comfortable navigating cultural differences in both educational and non-educational contexts, which is a skill that will carry over into their future careers as teachers. Therefore, findings from this study could help teachers, teacher candidates, and program developers appreciate the value of staying in a homestay while abroad and how it can impact teacher practice in terms of addressing and navigating diversity in their classrooms.

8. Limitations

Although we found several strong thematic patterns across our participants' journal entries, statistically significant increases in perceptions of language ability, and statistically significant increases in intercultural development, there are limitations to our study. One is the size of our participant pool; although we have accounted for this in the quantitative data by reporting correlations and effect sizes, we would ideally like to see if these findings are similar across a larger group and in different settings. For example, although all our participants perceived the homestay as positive, expanding the scope of a future study would allow for the possibility of neutral and even negative perceptions, which would in turn allow us to examine more closely what aspects of a homestay may lead to positive perceptions and contributions. The lack of a control group is another possible limitation of this study. Although we were able to find growth among the participants through pre- and post-assessments, these results might be stronger if we were able to compare this growth to a group of students who did not stay with families. This might further confirm that the homestay experience, rather than the overall study abroad experience, was responsible for linguistic and intercultural growth—although we reiterate that the journal entries did point to the importance of homestays in participant growth.

9. Conclusion

In this study we have examined the role of the homestay in intercultural competence and perceived target language capabilities among preservice teachers studying abroad for four months in Cusco, Peru. Through their homestays, participants experienced significant growth in intercultural competence, as reflected in their IDI scores and journal entries. We also found an increase in perceived Spanish capabilities according to participant journals and "Can Do" statements. The growth in both intercultural competence and perceived language competence carry great potential utility for participants' future teaching careers. Journal entries offered more direct links to the relationship between participants' homestays and their development as educators.

With the world reopening in response to a loosening of restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic, we hope and anticipate that more teachers and teacher candidates will be able to take advantage of the affordances of study abroad, including homestay experiences. As we acknowledge the ongoing barriers to these experiences and welcome the at-home and virtual alternatives enacted before and during the pandemic, we nevertheless will continue to advocate for critically evaluated, face-to-face intercultural experiences that further foster the development of global educators.

Appendix 1. Can-Do Self-Assessment Scale

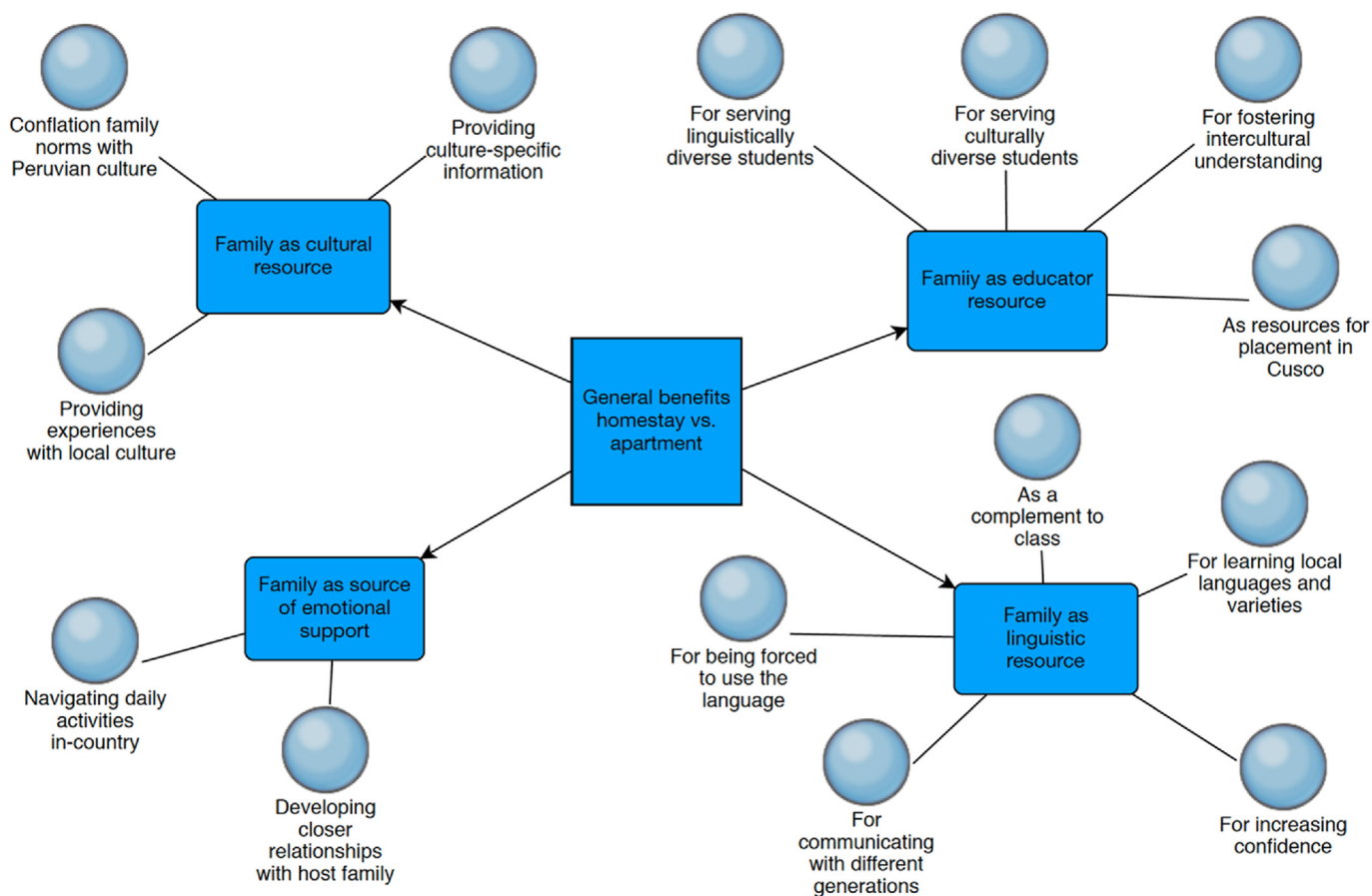
Write the appropriate number next to each statement.

- 0-I can do this in Spanish with great difficulty
- 1-I can do this in Spanish with some difficulty
- 2-I can do this in Spanish with no difficulty
- ___I can understand everyday signs and notices in public places, such as streets, restaurants, airports and classrooms.
- ___I can recognize significant points in newspaper articles on familiar subjects.
- ___I can understand articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular stances or viewpoints.
- ___I can give short, basic descriptions of events and activities.

- ___I can describe my family, living conditions, schooling, and most recent job.
- ___I can describe past activities and personal experiences.
- ___I can describe the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.
- ___I can usually write without consulting a dictionary.
- ___I can understand numbers, prices and times.
- ___I can generally understand clear, standard speech on familiar matters, although in a real-life situation I might have to ask for repetition or reformulation.
- ___I can handle simple business in shops, post offices or banks.
- ___I can identify the main point of TV news items reporting events, accidents, etc.
- ___I can keep up with an animated conversation between native speakers.

2. Reflect on your homestay experience in terms of language and language development. Please provide a few examples.
 - 2b. (For second and third journal prompts): Has anything changed since the last time you filled out this survey?
3. In what ways has your homestay experience served as a resource for you in your classroom placement if at all? Please provide a few examples.
4. (Added to final journal prompts): Do you think that you might use your homestay experience as a resource in the future culturally, linguistically, or as an educator? How?

Appendix 3. Concept map of codes from journal entries



(adapted from http://www.dialang.org/project/english/ProfInt/Icanall_EN.htm).

Appendix 2. Journal prompts (distributed three times via Google Forms)

1. Reflect on your homestay experience in terms of cultural experiences/learning. Please provide a few examples.

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