



Study abroad and the development of college students' travel venturesomeness



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ABSTRACT

This research examines the impact of short-term study abroad on a travel-specific psychographic manifestation of intercultural competence, Plog's concept of venturesomeness. It also assesses the moderating effect of cultural distance on students' development of venturesomeness. Using a pre-post longitudinal design, research found that the intercultural and personal development benefits acquired during study abroad had a significant mediating effect on student venturesomeness; i.e., students became more likely to pursue travel that facilitates immersion in and reflection on the host culture's way of life. Consistent with social distance and expectancy value theory, this effect was found for students who traveled to culturally proximate countries and not for those who traveled to countries with a higher cultural distance from the U.S. Given that this was the first study abroad experience for a majority of the sample, we suggest the need for a phase-based program of study abroad experientiation to optimize study abroad effects and facilitate more holistic student development. The intricacies of study abroad as a specific form of facilitated travel have certain implications for study abroad program administrators and the travel and tourism industry.

1. Introduction

U.S. higher education institutions are increasingly looking to introduce an international dimension into their academic offerings. Globalization and the interdependence of national economies mean that a knowledge of the international system, intercultural skills, and the flexibility to function in diverse environments are considered essential for every undergraduate (Siaya, 2015). Consequently, a number of initiatives have been instituted over the years as part of the internationalization of the academic system; these range from campus-based initiatives such as enhancing the curriculum and international content, or the sponsorship of foreign students to study on campus, to more profit-motivated cross-border initiatives such as branch campuses and collaborative arrangements (Altbach & Knight, 2007). In this landscape of the internationalization of U.S. higher education, traditional study abroad programs continue to play an important role. The most recent Open Doors data indicates that a total of 304,467 U.S. students studied abroad for academic credit in 2013/14, an increase of 5% over the prior year. This translates into one in ten U.S. undergraduates who study abroad before graduating (“Open Doors 2015 - U.S. Study Abroad Data Highlights”, 2015).

Study abroad is seen to contribute to the “intercultural” dimension of the internationalization of higher education (Knight, 2003). It is believed that students who have the opportunity to study abroad are more likely to develop the emotional and cultural intelligence needed to sustain the U.S.'s global leadership aspirations in an increasingly interconnected environment (Holt, 2015). Thus, despite the lack of coherent internationalization policy in the U.S., there remains substantial on- and off-campus support for study abroad (De Wit, 2002). This support ranges from the financial and logistical resources of the U.S. Department of State and Department of Education to the initiatives of organizations like IES Abroad, a consortium of over 200 academic institutions that provides more than \$2.5 million in study abroad scholarships year after year “to support the next generation of diverse American leaders to gain the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in a globalizing world” (“Mission, & Vision”, n.d.; “USASStudyAbroad”, n.d.).

To fulfill this need to develop intercultural competence among a larger number of U.S. students, two trends have appeared in the field of study abroad. First, the design and delivery of a large number of programs has shifted decisively towards what has been called “subjective culture” learning, which results from focused, experiential, and

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reflective interactions with the host culture (Engle & Engle, 2003). Second, a larger number of short-term programs are being offered, allowing more students the opportunity to travel abroad and more universities the ability to demonstrate their internationalization efforts. In recognition of these trends, the present study examines the development of a specific dimension of intercultural competence: a travel-specific manifestation of students' immersion into the foreign environment in short-term, culture-oriented programs.

In the present study, we explore the concept that the international sojourn has the potential to transform sojourners into cultural mediators (Brown, 2009) through a process that develops them into more ethnorelative travelers. As a result, students develop a travel-specific manifestation of intercultural competence, in the form of Plog's (1974, 2001) concept of venturesomeness (previously allocentricity). Specifically, we propose that the intercultural and personal development benefits that students accrue via study abroad translate into a more venturesome traveler, a proposition that has import in the study abroad and developmental literatures. Moreover, building on the tenets of social distance theory and expectancy value theory, as well as the literature pertaining to the psychology of culture shock (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2005), we explore the moderating effect of cultural distance on students' development of venturesomeness.

In addition to its contribution to the study abroad agenda, the present study furthers the broader understanding of a seminal construct in tourism in a very specific but important context. As a group, students are in the formative stages of their travel careers (Pearce & Lee, 2005), and their early experiences with travel in the form of study abroad are foundational to the type of traveler into which they may evolve. We assert that enhanced venturesomeness will facilitate the kinds of patterns and preferences that enable students to develop greater intercultural competence through their travel careers. The study has practical relevance for study abroad administrators, program leaders, and university faculty and staff. It enables them to better advise students on how to incorporate study abroad into their curricula and development plans and to facilitate preparation and interventions that optimize study abroad impacts. In addition, the findings of the study have important implications for parties within the travel and tourism industry, including intermediaries and the destinations that serve as the context for study abroad. They emphasize the need for these industry constituents to leverage the study abroad experience and its resulting impacts in marketing to the next generation of travelers.

2. Literature review

Education and travel have been intertwined for centuries (Stone & Petrick, 2013). The earliest iteration of study abroad was evidenced in the "Grand Tour," the traditional excursion throughout Europe undertaken mainly by upper-class European young men to foster appreciation for music and art, borne from the view that travel was necessary to expand one's knowledge of the world (Sorabella, 2003). The phenomenon of education abroad has come a long way since the Grand Tour; universities now actually mandate students to take "global awareness" courses (Nyaupane, Teye, & Paris, 2008). The manifestation of these endeavors is evident in the different types of study abroad programs offered by American universities, varying from enclave programs where students stay in a hotel to cultural immersion programs with local host families (Nyaupane et al., 2008). While these programs can vary significantly in their design and implementation, some noteworthy trends have emerged over the more recent years.

2.1. Trends in study abroad participation and evaluation

Much research on study abroad programs has focused on the language acquisition process and on longer duration programs (Allen, 2010; Magnan & Black, 2007). Conventional wisdom in the field holds that more is better; that is, the longer students study abroad, the greater

the subsequent academic, cultural development, and personal growth benefits they obtain (Donnelly-Smith, 2009; Dwyer & Peters, 2004). These benefits are perceived to accrue due to the program's extended duration, which facilitates a reduced cultural distance between the native and target cultures. However, recent research suggests that short-term study abroad, when designed and implemented correctly, can have equally meaningful and transformative impacts as programs of longer duration on aspects such as global engagement (Walters, Charles, & Bingham, 2016). Thus, program duration, in and of itself, matters little; rather programs of different durations can be designed to facilitate specific outcomes (Fischer, 2009). This recognition, along with a variety of academic, social, college policy, and economic reasons (Dwyer & Peters, 2004), has resulted in a significant growth of the short-term offering. The most recent Open Doors data indicates that in 2014/15, 63% of U.S. students went abroad on short-term programs (summer or up to eight weeks), 6.5% higher than five years ago ("Duration of U.S. Study Abroad, 2004/05-2014/15", 2016). The increasing acceptance of short-term study abroad programs indicates that they are here to stay (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2009).

Another trend in study abroad programs is the departure from a focus on foreign language acquisition to include broader types of cultural learning. While classifying programs as either "culture based" or "knowledge transfer" based, Engle and Engle (2003) highlighted that the increasing experience of the vast majority of sojourners is culture-oriented. More recent studies examining the intercultural benefits of study abroad are testament to this trend. Watson, Siska, and Wolfel (2013) demonstrated that students experienced significant gains in cross-cultural competence and regional awareness during study abroad, indicating why it remains a critical part of the internationalization movement in college curricula. Similarly, Smith-Miller, Leak, Harlan, Dieckmann, and Sherwood (2010) found that a short-term global immersion experience enhanced student nurses' cultural competence, which subsequently transferred to their nursing practice when working with immigrant populations. Other studies have focused on a variety of benefits of study abroad programs, such as global understanding, world-mindedness, global engagement, and tolerance for ambiguity (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006; Lewin, 2009; Williams, 2005).

In an environment that pressures educational institutions to be more responsible for the resources they receive, evaluations that go beyond the emphasis on language acquisition are indispensable to countering claims of the ineffectiveness of study abroad programs, particularly those of shorter duration. Short-term programs have been criticized for a lack of academic rigor and are often seen as an extended vacation, with universities acting as expensive travel agents (Rooney, 2002). While there is a general consensus that short-term programs provide valuable intercultural and personal development benefits, particularly to first-time students, there is a need to expand the research agenda (Bloom & Miranda, 2015). McLeod and Wainwright (2009) have called "for rigorous scientific assessment of study abroad programs, with the focus being on how study abroad experiences affect psychological constructs, as opposed to looking solely at study abroad related outcomes" (p. 66). Thus, there is a need for more holistic assessment of study abroad programs (Watson et al., 2013). Simultaneously, there is a need to expand the literature on the effects of short-term, culture-based study abroad programs.

The fundamental proposition of the present study is that short-term study abroad programs allow students to develop a specific manifestation of intercultural competence in the form of Plog's (1974, 2001) concept of venturesomeness. Thus, we propose that the benefits accruing from these programs encourage more ethnorelative travel patterns and preferences (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003), whereby students are likely to actively seek out cultural differences and thus enhance their worldview. Our proposition is situated within the broader framework of a positive stance on the socio-cultural impacts of travel; its power to serve as an arbiter of intercultural understanding

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