

Free research paper on studying abroad: a literature review

[Profession](#), [Student](#)



Abstract

This study aims to present a discussion on the benefits that students can gain from studying abroad, as well as to showcase some of the challenges they may encounter, recommendations on how to maximize the benefits and effective strategies to overcome these obstacles. Due to the increasing global society, studying abroad has taken a significant role for colleges and universities in their objective to produce graduates who are competent to function in the global economy. This study will present the need to develop the different types of intercultural skills to compete internationally. Towards the conclusion of this study, the result of studying abroad will be discussed in detail as well as the factors that may influence the outcome including the participant characteristics, program characteristics and the personal experiences of the students in the host culture.

Keywords: benefits, study program, global, multicultural skills, language and culture.

There has been a lot of research done on the topic of studying abroad, particularly for students who are learning cross-cultural disciplines like language, politics, business, and so on and so forth. Traditional wisdom shows that there are a variety of benefits to studying abroad. However, researchers have examined the different elements of study abroad programs to best weigh them. Examining how students behave in foreign environments is important to maximizing the positive impacts of any study abroad program.

However, despite the positive view of studying abroad, there are still concerns that have to be addressed such as the study abroad population

carries homogeneous outcomes that may be influenced by student participant, rather than the program activities that are being implemented. There are two primary questions that have to be discussed thoroughly for this study: First is who studies abroad and why decide to study abroad?; and Second, what are the benefits and effects of studying abroad?

Studying abroad has received a positive attention to majority of students currently enrolled in various colleges and universities all over the world. In the U. S., studying abroad continues to remain an activity wherein a small percentage of American undergraduate students have participated. One distinguishing factor is that majority of female white students who took up humanities and social science majors. Although there continues to be a slight showing of a portion of male students and students of color who have participated in studying abroad who took up STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) majors. However, it is noteworthy to mention that there has been a participation of graduates of business majors who have been encouraged to study abroad. The factors that hinder studying aboard are: gender, race, ethnicity, major and the perceived cost of the study.

Literature Review

This study will be supported by various articles, peer-reviewed journals, books and other references that will be able to discuss in detail the benefits of studying abroad and factors that influence a student to study abroad. In her paper Multicultural Students in Study Abroad: Their Interests, Their Issues, and Their Constraints, Brux (2010) discusses the potential benefits to

students who are studying abroad in various capacities. First, she notes that the world is increasingly globalized, and having global, multicultural skills is a boon in business and life in general. Also, Brux notes that educators are trying to diversify programs; one of the best ways to diversify educational programs is to engage foreign students in programs like study abroad programs-- and to send their own students outside the program to participate in study abroad opportunities.

Brux notes that students that participate in study abroad programs outside of their majority cultural group experience unique issues that their peers that are not studying abroad do not face. She states, " The results of the study indicate that institutional factors (academic scheduling difficulties, absence of relevant programs, lack of information, etc.), as well as other factors that can be moderated by institutional effort (providing encouragement, addressing financial issues, discussing family concerns, etc.), prevent students of color from participating in study abroad programs" (Brux, 2010). Finally, she suggests that different programs be implemented to encourage students who have multicultural backgrounds to participate in study abroad programs.

Like Brux, Mapp (2007) participated in a similar study, titled: Effect of short-term study abroad programs on students' cultural adaptability. The Mapp study was to study about how studying abroad helped students. Mapp suggests that there are costs to studying abroad, but the benefits that a student gets are much larger; today's business world requires students to have the ability to participate in cross-cultural and multicultural discourse. Like Brux (2010), she found that the positive effects of study abroad

programs significantly changed the participant students (Rose and Bylander, 2007). Because Mapp (2007) is focused on the effect of studying abroad on students, particularly the effect of short-term study-abroad opportunities, Mapp (2007) created an inventory known as the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory as a way of quantifying emotional resilience, flexibility, perceptual acuity, and autonomy before and after study abroad trips of short length. The study discovered that students who studied abroad had significant changes in every category, with particularly large changes in emotional resilience, flexibility/openness, perceptual acuity and personal autonomy. Rose and Bylander (2007), on the other hand, were more concerned with creating programs that encourage diversity; their programs focused on students of color who had an opportunity to study abroad in different locations including Cameroon. It was only four-week diversity program, in which they experienced educational opportunities in a variety of different locations (Rose and Bylander, 2007). The program was designed to help the students participate in cross-cultural activities outside their comfort zones. The program was limited in time, but had great success (Rose and Bylander, 2007).

Jackson (2005) examines the different constraints study-abroad students face. In addition to potentially falling behind in their course of study if it is particularly rigorous, students who are abroad for long periods of time may find themselves experiencing a variety of different cultural phenomena. This was an excellent study because it looked at the potential downfalls of studying abroad and the emotional impact that studying abroad can have on the individual.

Research Methodology

Two interviews were conducted to research the topic “ Studying Abroad”. The questionnaires for the participants were sent through email, while Mahdi was interviewed using Skype. These two international students answered all the 23 questions dutifully. They were asked the two of most important questions which are: What is your motivation to study abroad; and What do you think are the benefits of studying abroad. Interviewing will give more detailed insights to be able to explain the perceptions of the students who want to study abroad. The answers of Mahdi were more in depth compared to the interview that was conducted on Nagati.

Research Findings

The first student is Mahdi, 28 years old, male and originated from Bangladesh. He has 7 other siblings. His motivation to study abroad is to pursue his dream on becoming a good doctor since there is scarcity of doctors in her country. Her decision to study Medicine abroad was a personal decision. However, he consulted his plan and sought the advice of his parents. Mahdi used to study medicine in Ukraine. However, he believed that the preparation he made to study abroad was relatively easy. The only difficult part was the obtaining the visa process and the thought of being away from the family for the first time. Being alone in a new country and facing a new culture is a big challenge to get out from Mahdi’s comfort zone. However, it was the realization that made him realize that he was on the right track the decision he made. Being away from the family exposed Mahdi to greater responsibilities and a good training ground towards mature by

learning to stand on his own. It appears that he had only a few challenges because he was determined to fulfill his dream and mission for his country. Being in a different culture has made him realize that he has to adapt to a new culture, but should see to it that it does not compromise the values that his parents taught him as a child. Being an international student allowed him to encounter new experiences every day. He believes that the money spent for studying abroad was worth it because it enriches one's knowledge, not just what students learn from books, but the experience of being exposed to a diversity of culture. The advantages gained for being exposed to other cultures is by gaining different perspectives, knowledge, dealing with alienation and expanding one's understanding of daily life experiences. It is by learning completely new things and learning new languages which by itself can be considered as mind expanding process. Some of the common obstacles faced by international students face are language barrier, dealing with the everyday issue and financial problems. The best way to overcome challenges faced by international students are by becoming more passive, less emotional and stick with your objective and come back home. It is the assurance that a student will need studying abroad will bring new and good ideas to the community and her own family. Although many of his fellowmen in his country want to go abroad to study, only a few people can afford it. Mahdi explains that learning a new language is a window to a new different world. Going and learning abroad is a very good life experience to help a student make a solid and good decision.

The second student who was interviewed was Nagati, 20 years of age, male and from Egypt. He has 2 other siblings and he is the eldest. The primary

motivation why he studied abroad is to learn and see new things. Compared to Mahdi, Nagati appeared to be more relaxed and trouble-free when he arrived at the decision to study abroad. The only difficulty he encountered just like Mahdi is the processing of his visa application. Nagati had no apprehensions when he decided to study abroad. In fact, he was excited to experience diverse cultures and meet new people. However, when he reached his host country, it was different from what he expected. Although it was difficult to adjust to a new environment, he tried his best to manage the everyday challenges. Nagati considers language barrier as the most difficult obstacle because it was not easy for him to keep up with the demands of the university. He also expressed his interest to focus on business later on. Since he is having a hard time due to language barriers, he spends most of the time with Egyptian friends. He considered studying abroad as a way to learn more about life, new culture, people, and new languages. Nagati believes that studying abroad will open new doors for him, in terms of prospects which can improve his financial capacity later on in life. He dreams of living a comfortable life and take advantage of his lifetime opportunity because not all students all over the world can afford to pay for college education abroad.

Discussion

Essentially, the literature suggests that there is a large, quantifiable impact on the individual from study abroad programs, and that these programs do indeed have a diversifying effect. Studying abroad, for both the long and short term, has a diversifying effect on students and a positive impact on their futures as a whole. Students who I interviewed suggested that their

study abroad experiences were mostly beneficial, although they did experience some obstacles.

In the current study, I intend to present more benefits that students can gain from studying abroad as well as showcase some obstacles that students may encounter, providing with that some suggestions on how to maximize the benefits and how to possibly overcome these challenges. Policymakers and educators have high hopes and expectations for study abroad because of its positive benefits of improved retention, enhanced academic performance and to develop a variety of multi-cultural competencies.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, a student who has the opportunity to study abroad will have an extensive option of courses and institutions of higher education to choose from. Some countries with local universities have limited courses and programs to offer, so many students do not have the vast opportunity to pursue tertiary education in their homeland. Given the ability to pay for college education abroad, the overseas student should be prepared to leave the comfort zone and explore other options offered abroad. An international student will have a broader outlook in like compared to local students from their homeland. An international or overseas student will be able to improve his or her social skills through interaction with students from all over the world. Experiencing life in a foreign land, learning new language cultures is one of the competitive edge over international students in terms of employment opportunities. The reason behind this is the fact that multinational corporations prefer graduates who have been

exposed to diverse cultures.

Finally, being able to successfully graduate from the chosen course in a foreign university can be influenced by factors such as the programs offered by the chosen university and the willingness of the international student to strive and reach for his or dreams despite the difficulties and challenges encountered along the way.

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