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FORMING A GLOBAL CITIZEN: PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH STUDY
ABROAD

by
Anna L. Reiter

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the
University Honors Program

Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics
The University of South Dakota
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ABSTRACT

Forming a Global Citizen: Personal Development through Study Abroad

Anna L. Reiter

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This literature review examines key benefits of studying abroad, while investigating which elements most contribute to students' overall success. Current literature suggests that benefits of studying abroad include, but are not limited to, second language acquisition (SLA), identity formation, and intercultural competence. The degree of which each is improved depends on a multitude of variables. SLA improvement is explored via consideration of students' baseline proficiency level, degree of receptivity of the host country, and length of the study abroad program. Students' identity formation is explained through the three bases of identity: person, role, and group/social. Finally, intercultural competence in study abroad is explored, in addition to characteristics that contribute to its growth. This thesis attempts to compile advice for students on a successful study abroad, in addition to the promotion of global citizenship.

KEYWORDS: Study Abroad, Second Language Acquisition, Identity, Intercultural Competence

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	v
1. Introduction.....	1
2. How to Improve the Acquisition of a Second Language during Study Abroad.....	2
3. Identity Formation.....	6
4. (A Newfound) Intercultural Competence: Bridging the Gap between Cultures.....	12
5. How to Improve the Chance of Having the Most Beneficial Study Abroad Experience (Key Takeaways).....	18
6. Conclusion.....	20
Appendix A.....	22
References.....	24

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“Global, or world, citizens, are broadly defined as individuals traversing international borders who make connections with those of differing backgrounds and worldviews (Adams & Carfagna, 2006) who then think of their relationships to self, others, and the world in a new way (Karlberg, 2008)” (Young et al., 2014, p. 176).

(Introduction to) Study Abroad, a High Impact Practice

Certain experiences in undergraduate studies help to define a student and further their future career. Whether excursions, volunteering, research, or collaborative projects, these opportunities offer a chance for growth of the student’s character and overall knowledge. These experiences are known as high-impact practices, a term popularized by Professor George D. Kuh, author of *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter* (2008). High-impact practices open the door to deeper learning for students in higher education. Universities and researchers recognize the importance of study abroad programs in student learning:

Study abroad [is] one of these “high-impact activities,” identified as affecting such areas as academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives, knowledge of human cultures and the physical/natural world, intellectual and practical skills, personal and social responsibility, deep/integrative learning, and post college performance (Gonyea, Kinzie, Kuh, & Nelson Laird, 2008). (Miller-Perrin and Thompson, 2014, p. 80)

Study abroad (SA) contributes to the creation of well-rounded students, and the development of valued skills. As stated by Coleman (2015), study abroad students return from the academic

opportunity “taller, more confident, more flexible, more open to new experiences, as well as more linguistically proficient” (p. 38). Time and time again, students report the importance of their study abroad experience (Miller-Perrin and Thompson, 2014) and recognize how it has contributed to development in their second language, personal identity formation, and intercultural competence— ultimately fomenting the student’s global citizenship. This thesis will highlight the primary personal developments derived from study abroad— second language acquisition, formation of personal identity, and intercultural competence— while explaining key factors that determine the progress of these personal developments. Key takeaways from the literature review will be coupled with advice for future study abroad students and program educators.

How to Improve the Acquisition of a Second Language during Study Abroad

Whether students travel abroad with the intention of second language acquisition or not, it is likely that students will experience linguistic development. Linguistic progress comes as a result of study abroad for any student studying in an area where their native language is not the dominant tongue. It is natural for students of any academic discipline to attain second language skills when living in a non-native language speaking country. This progress in fluency, grammatical competence, vocabulary growth, communicative strategies, or pragmatics (Kinging, 2008, p. 3) is common in most study abroad programs. However, students consciously working towards improving their second language while studying abroad, tend to progress more rapidly in second language acquisition (SLA). Studies pertaining to students abroad examine not only the progression of language skills, but also the factors that contribute to

that progression. After consulting numerous studies focused on study abroad, one must ask: which factors truly determine the growth of a student's second language during study abroad?

To answer this question, the factors that determine the progress of a student's second language need to be considered separately. These factors are (1) the length of the study abroad program, (2) the student's initial level of language proficiency upon arriving in the host country, and (3) the student's degree of socialization over the course of studies. In "Study Abroad and Outcomes Measurements: The Case of Russian", Davidson states that students' linguistic progress relies on two factors discussed (previously): the length of the study abroad program (1) and the initial level of language upon arriving at the study abroad location (2). The 25-year longitudinal study states that students at any learning stage must study abroad for 9-12 months to gain "high-level proficiency growth and acquisition" (Davidson, 2007, p. 279). Köylü's research on exchange students during a semester abroad reveals similar findings, stating "time spent in the sojourn context, regardless of whether it was traditional SA or ELFSA [English-as-a-lingua-franca study abroad], was[is] found to positively impact [language] proficiency" (2021, p. 58). These findings point to long-term study abroad programs as the most beneficial to second language acquisition. However, more research is needed to determine the benefit of short-term programs. Borràs and Llanes point out that most SA studies focusing on the improvement of second language proficiency are performed on long-term study abroad programs, and that there is a lack of studies on effectiveness of short-term programs (2019). Nevertheless, the authors state that "the available evidence suggests that short SA experiences can be beneficial although longer stays tend to benefit learners more (Juan-Garau 2015)" (Borràs and Llanes, 2019, p. 9).

The second key factor in a student's linguistic progress is the level of proficiency upon arrival. In Davidson's study, the average length of Russian learning is "2.66 years at the college

level” (p. 277) as a baseline before studying abroad, with about 28% of students having high school Russian studies under their belt. This intermediate-level proficiency affects the degree to which students can improve their second language. According to the study, 85% of students entered a year-long study abroad “in the intermediate range or lower” and 58% ended up completing “the program in the advanced range or higher” (Davidson, 2007, p. 278). This, of course, depends on the length of the study abroad program, as the students in this study studied for an academic year in Russia. Additionally, students entering a program with lower proficiency may not have as solid of a grammatical base, and therefore language skills will not grow as rapidly. Köylü found similar results, stating “the upper-intermediate group outperformed lower-level learners showing greater subordination gains over time” but calls for further research on the degree of which pre-departure proficiency affects SLA (2021, p. 57).

The third key factor in a student’s linguistic progress is the degree of socialization of the student. Prieto-Arranz et al. (2021) suggest linguistic progress stems from the socialization patterns of students and host receptivity. In ““Open Your Mind, Sharpen Your Wits’: A Narrative Approach to the Benefits of Study Abroad as Perceived by Erasmus+ Students”, the author(s) argue that second language acquisition is linked to successful socialization. Students who are social tend to be more outgoing and extroverted, allowing them to talk to a variety of different people and practice their second language. Consequently, students who are less social (or in a less social environment) tend to gravitate towards those with the same nationality or language. This less social environment, or degree of receptivity of the host university/city/country, can determine the progress of the student’s language improvement. In the study, researchers found that some cities are more likely to encourage socialization than others. For example, Palma de Mallorca, Spain, and Galway, Republic of Ireland, were found to host more sociable

environments than Venice, Italy (Prieto-Arranz et al., 2021, p. 13). Therefore, students studying in Venice may have more difficulty improving their second language than students in Palma or Galway due to the social environment. Kinginger (2009) states similar findings; “the value of study abroad as a language-learning environment depends quite crucially on how these students are received in the host communities” (p. 202), and Jackson et al. (2020) finds the degree of host receptivity to be a key “external factor” affecting language learning abroad (p. 95). Additionally, in an essay from Coleman (2015), “Social circles during residence abroad: What students do, and who with”, the author considers the impact of social networks on study abroad students’ improvement in second language acquisition. Coleman states that different social networks have been tied to linguistic development, specifically depending on the “extent of new contacts” (2015, p. 42). Coleman further explains, “How deeply the student gets to know new friends has implications for input, output, feedback, and the range of language functions practiced, hence pragmatic competence” (2015, p. 42). The current literature suggests that socialization contributes to and improves second language acquisition.

It is important to note that, depending on the study abroad location, it is possible that gender and race reduce the number of opportunities presented to students; “Some of these studies have explored how variables of social identity such as gender, race, motivation, and personality may, in fact, impede a student’s interaction with the target language community and result in less language awareness and therefore less acquisition” (Stewart, 2010, p. 140). Stewart states that, while abroad in Russia, “females gained less in their listening and speaking skills than males, positing that the opportunities for males in the SA context may have been more conducive to extended interaction than for females” (2010, p. 140). See appendix A for resources on gender and racial barriers to SA.

It is also important to note that “consistent results have really only been provided for oral skills (and more specifically on speech rate) and vocabulary, while areas such as reading or listening still remain under-researched, and others like writing still show contradictory results” (Borràs and Llanes, 2019, p. 12). This means that previously mentioned studies, while pertaining to oral production, written fluency, etc. (Köylü, 2021), find consistent improvement solely amongst students’ oral production. Less consistent results in areas such as written fluency and listening comprehension could be explained by sojourners’ primary goals for their study abroad: “Kaypak and Ortaçtepe (2014) found[find] that sojourners came to prioritize fluency and effective communication” (Köylü, 2021, p. 50). It is possible that a student’s initial focus of study abroad leads to a lack of adequate research into other areas of student learning.

Identity Formation

Students returning from study abroad (SA) often remark on their broadened perspective and overall development in their character, and there is truth to that. Students subjected to weeks, months, or years of a different culture will return to their native country with a new outlook and, depending on the student, a better understanding of themselves. It is not that growth of identity from study abroad is always positive or consciously chosen, however, it is usually a major theme in study abroad experiences. This theme is commonly observed by researchers: “identity has evolved from an emergent theme to an explicit focus in SA research” (Tulloch, 2018, p. 263). The importance of study abroad in identity formation has branched into a variety of sub-topics, such as the relationship between identity and cross-cultural adaptation (Greischel et al., 2019); identity negotiation via self-image (Young et al., 2014); and how race, ethnicity, and class affect identity negotiation (Goldoni, 2017). Goldoni finds that microaggressions occurring abroad

significantly hinder Black students' "language and culture learning opportunities" (p. 338). See appendix A for more information. To better define identity, and how current literature measures its formation, an explanation of the concept of identity, and how it has been defined in study abroad literature is necessary.

Identity (although difficult to perfectly define) is defined by Davis, Love, and Fares as "identities are multifaceted and entail individual, interpersonal, and social processes embedded within social structures" (2019, p. 254). The authors further expand on this concept, and divide identity into three bases: person, role, and group/social. This means that people tend to develop characteristics specific to how they view themselves (person), the way they interact with others (group/social), and how they respond to situations in an occupational setting (role)— all of which contribute to the person's identity (p. 256). This concept applies to students who study abroad, as they face new contexts that affect their various bases of identity. However, it should also be noted that study abroad students' identity development is a little more complex, since variables like "new cultural and linguistic context" bring "identity-related challenges" (Tullock, 2018, p. 262). Therefore, linguistic, and cultural variables (such as baseline second language proficiency or host receptivity) may affect one's identity development. Additionally, identity development specific to study abroad students frequently derives from second language acquisition, as the implementation of the second language facilitates identity change. Identity formation has been found to overlap with other primary benefits of study abroad, second language acquisition, cultural outcomes, etc. (Tullock, 2018, p. 262). Nevertheless, I will largely focus on the primary three bases of identity.

The first base of identity affected by study abroad is the individual, or how the student views themselves "as a unique person" (Davis et al., 2019). Before traveling to their host

country, students may see themselves as smart, witty, etc. This is due to their developed personality (usually) formed in their native language. Upon arriving in their host country, students' sense of self may be challenged by their new environment and the change of primary language. For example, if a native-English speaking student translates English language-based idioms to Spanish, the idiom won't be received by the student's Spanish audience, causing the student to question their personality. This concept is explored by Tullock, "one type of conflict experienced by individuals is an inability to project desired identities through the L2" (second language) (2018). Students may want to show how they see themselves (their unique persona) but have difficulty due to a lack of proficiency in their second language. This challenge is explained by identity theory, which states that identity relevance relies on verification processes (brought about by social interactions) (Davis et al., 2019). If students are unable to communicate their perceived identity in social settings (due to underdeveloped second-language proficiency), their perceived identity cannot be validated by others, and therefore hinders the formation of base identity. It should be noted that a student's perceived individual identity depends on a multitude of variables, including baseline second-language proficiency, place of study, knowledge of culture, etc. Additionally, it is important to note that not all identity-related outcomes of studying abroad are negative (as seen in the previous example). Many students are able to not only reinforce their perceived sense of identity but add to it and form new branches of it. For example, Kinginger (2008) discusses the identity development of Alice, an older student studying in France. Instead of finding comfort in other American students, Alice forced herself to socialize with her French peers. She spent time with her French friends at local "watering holes" among other informal settings and discussed complex topics such as French politics. Exposing herself to completely new social circles, environments, and perspectives caused her to develop "a

whole new French-speaking identity” (Tulloch, 2018, p. 267). The case of Alice’s study abroad experience ended in positive identity growth mainly because of her past. Tulloch (2018) also references Alice from the Kinginger case study, stating that she had grown up in a working-class environment, and that she had already endured “a great deal of hardship in her life” (p. 267). Because she had experienced difficult circumstances in the past, Alice was able to overcome the initial struggles of studying abroad, allowing for the growth of her identity and French-speaking skills. Based on these findings, it is possible that students who develop meaningful relationships or hold meaningful conversations with locals will increase their chances of yielding positive identity outcomes.

The second base of identity affected by study abroad is the occupational or role identity— how someone responds to situations in an occupational setting. It “represents a complex structure of meanings in which the individual links his or her motivation and competencies with acceptable career roles” (Meijers, 1998, as quoted in Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011, p. 694). This base of identity is somewhat harder to define, as it sometimes overlaps with social identity. Nonetheless, role or occupational identity can develop during a sojourner’s study abroad. Before traveling abroad, students may identify with small groups such as clubs or organizations at their universities or places of higher education. These become less relevant once in the host country (Tulloch, 2018), since those smaller roles only exist in the student’s home country. At their foreign host university, students may find new roles that act similarly to their former roles. For example, an American student who participated in intramural basketball may now participate in intramural soccer at their Spanish host university. But how does this affect their occupational identity? During a student’s study abroad, they attend courses at their host university, which may utilize different teaching methods or student practices than their home

university. A study of Chinese students reveals that, after studying in the United Kingdom for 15 months, “almost all the interviewed returnees reported that their professional competencies had been enhanced by the pedagogies they experienced while studying at U.K. universities” (Gu, 2015, p. 74). The author also states that the students’ experiences in the classroom had lasting effects, such as a newfound sense of critical thinking and personal reflection (2015). These attributes significantly benefited them in their future careers; “these skills and qualities provided them with brighter prospects of working in or starting up international or joint Sino-foreign capital ventures, where such skills are in particularly high demand” (p. 74). The students’ occupational identities developed dramatically, as they incorporated new practices into their behavior and manner of thinking in the professional world.

The third base of identity affected by study abroad is social identity, or how someone interacts with others. While abroad, students create new friendships and relationships with people from all over the world. These social circles are (typically) drastically different from those at home. Students are surrounded by people of different cultures, races, socio-economic statuses, etc.— many of whom do not speak English as their first language. This immediate, highly diversified social circle directly affects the student’s social identity. Ellwood (2011) recognizes this concept in a study from the *Journal of Educational Philosophy and Theory*, and states that study abroad enables “a redefinition of the self ‘publicly, socially and personally’” (Pellegrino Aveni, 2005, as cited in Ellwood, 2011). Human behavior adapts quickly to new situations, and social groups are no exception. One study of social identity growth of American students in Mexico concludes: “In the process of developing a social identity as a Spanish-speaking American, Doug reported having conversations on topics ranging from daily activities to questions of values and beliefs, male-female relationships, and Mexican Catholicism

compared to his Protestant beliefs” (Stewart, 2010, p. 152). The students with the most social identity growth (and second language proficiency improvement) surrounded themselves with Mexican students who, as stated in the testimonials, had different cultural perspectives, beliefs, etc. The diversity of the American students’ social circles fostered the growth of their social behaviors. It should be noted that, as discussed previously, social and occupational identities tend to overlap. One could argue that this happens in the case of the American student in Mexico. However, it is possible that the degree to which the SA experience affects the different identity bases can vary. More research is needed on the topic of SA effects on the different bases of identity.

Students may not always succeed in forming a social circle. It is very possible for students to have a negative experience while meeting others, and/or their social needs may not be met. To achieve successful, positive social identity growth, Tullock (2018) recommends that study abroad programs should arrange “for students to participate in such local communities as clubs, teams, or organizations of which they will be valued members”. This will ensure the student’s social needs have an automatic starting point, and their social identity will have a higher likelihood of positive development.

As mentioned previously, students should note that identity formation may not look the same for all students abroad. It is possible that gender, race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status can limit students’ identity formation (Goldoni, 2017) (Madhavan and Dlamini, 2021). It should also be considered that there is a lack of research regarding people of color in study abroad settings. More research is needed. Information regarding barriers during study abroad can be found in appendix A.

(A Newfound) Intercultural Competence: Bridging the Gap between Cultures

While vacationing in a different country, American tourists may notice the difference in language, the choice of fashion, the unique architecture, or the adventurous array of street food. They may be offended at the bluntness of locals, or at (what they deem to be) risqué statues. These are all examples of surface-level observances of a different culture. What may escape tourists are the values of the locals, the reasoning for their mannerisms, and a shared understanding of the roles they play in their society. These are all examples of a deeper intercultural competence—a complex knowledge that takes much longer to develop. Intercultural competence is crucial to bridging the gap between people of different countries, races, ethnicities, religions, languages, etc. By learning the deeper values and behaviors of a culture, comprehension and respect can be formed. Study abroad provides the unique opportunity to fully immerse students in a foreign culture—for students to broaden their minds and see things from a different perspective, ultimately forming intercultural competencies.

A distinguishing skill obtained by students, intercultural competence remains arguably one of the most important and unique benefits of studying abroad. This skill is extremely attractive to the ever-expanding and technologically connected corporate world, being “one of the most desirable graduate capabilities” (Krajewski, 2011). Research finds that a knowledge of multicultural communication (basic cross-cultural skills) is not enough (Young et al., 2014). It is crucial that employees “are equipped to work with diverse cultures with varying values and belief systems”, meaning that employees must develop “a comprehension of cultural differences and similarities evoking a deeper sense of self-awareness and cultural awareness” (p. 176). This is reinforced by Gasta (2008):

Recruiters point out that the more international experience(s) students have—especially if those experiences include language and culture training—the more likely they are to get the top jobs. Hence, industry leaders believe that US students must become much more internationally literate and knowledgeable about other cultures, including such areas as intercultural management, international project team management, knowledge of business practices and etiquette, and the cultural “do’s and don’ts” of the international marketplace. (p. 30)

Studies show that diversity in the workplace creates a more financially successful company: “Those (companies) in the top quartile for ethnic and cultural diversity outperformed those in the fourth quartile by 33 percent for margin” (Stackowiak, 2019, p. 41), therefore, knowledge of intercultural communication is crucial. Companies and universities recognize that study abroad students can surpass the surface-level competencies of multiculturalism and learn the deeper concepts of intercultural competence.

During a study abroad experience, not only are those who study abroad surrounded by locals of the area, but students from all over the world, introducing a vast array of different cultures and norms. They must navigate intercultural communication (conversing with people from different cultures)— a complex practice that may be underdeveloped for students with little to no intercultural communication experience. Thus, study abroad provides an opportunity for growth.

The European Commission defines intercultural competence as “combining skills, knowledge, abilities and attitudes that enable people to face, act and intervene effectively and appropriately in a variety of contexts, where cultural, socio-economic, ethnic and other lines intersect and can lead to situations that damage social cohesion” (Comisión Europea, 2007). As

stated by Krajewski (2011), “developing intercultural competence is not a linear, orderly process but one that is influenced by various personal as well as circumstantial factors”. Therefore, there is no perfect equation, model, or method that will produce exponential intercultural competence growth for every student. Similarly to second language acquisition, studies with a focus on intercultural competence in study abroad students tend to vary. While there are standardized assessments utilized by companies and organizations, de Diego-Lázaro et al. finds that “there is no standard measure to assess [intercultural competence of study abroad students]” (2020). In addition, it is possible that assessments do not take into consideration the student’s race, gender, socio-economic status, or other factors that may affect analysis. Due to the lack of a standardized form of measurement, studies tend to utilize different quantitative and qualitative assessments of students. This creates difficulty when attempting to measure intercultural competence growth.

However, I will identify intercultural competence growth techniques listed by current and past literature in an attempt to provide some insight. In a doctoral research study, intercultural experts and administrators countrywide agreed that the key elements to measuring intercultural competence “involve communication and behavior in intercultural contexts” (Deardorff, 2006, p. 243). Deardorff expands on these elements in her pyramid model of intercultural competence. The model is as follows:

Figure 1

Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence

DESIRED EXTERNAL OUTCOME:

Behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately (based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes) to achieve one's goals to some degree

DESIRED INTERNAL OUTCOME:

Informed frame of reference/filter shift:

Adaptability (to different communication styles & behaviors; adjustment to new cultural environments);
Flexibility (selecting and using appropriate communication styles and behaviors; cognitive flexibility);
Ethnorelative view;
Empathy

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Knowledge & Comprehension:

Cultural self-awareness;
Deep understanding and knowledge of culture (including contexts, role and impact of culture & others' world views);
Culture-specific information;
Sociolinguistic awareness

Skills:

To listen, observe, and interpret
To analyze, evaluate, and relate

Requisite Attitudes:

Respect (valuing other cultures, cultural diversity)
Openness (to intercultural learning and to people from other cultures, withholding judgment)
Curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty)

- *Move from personal level (attitude) to interpersonal/interactive level (outcomes)*
- *Degree of intercultural competence depends on acquired degree of underlying elements*

Note. Adapted from “Assessing Intercultural Competence in Study Abroad Students” by Deardorff, D. K. (2006). In M. Byram & A. Feng (Eds.), *Living and Studying Abroad: Research and Practice* (p. 244).

Best interpreted from the base-up, the model provides levels (or a staircase) to intercultural competence. The base level being the most important, Deardorff states that the degree of intercultural competence depends greatly on the student’s attitude, which includes respect, openness, and curiosity (as seen above). Students have a greater chance of intercultural growth by advancing from one level to the next. This means that the requisite attitudes allow for the development of sociolinguistic awareness, which enables a filter shift, and so on. Deardorff also states that while this is the most effective way to interpret the model, the framework can be entered from any point (p. 244). The model breaks up intercultural competence growth into internal and external growth. Internal growth includes an “internal shift in frame of reference” (Deardorff, 2006, p. 245), while external growth includes observable, behavioral growth. Krajewski (2011) explains the internal frame of reference, stating: “a person is able to adapt to different communication styles and behaviours and to new cultural environments, is flexible in using appropriate communication styles and behaviours, and is able to see things from the perspective of the other (empathy)”. These are the desired internal outcomes of study abroad, which then influence external outcomes: “effective and appropriate communication and behaviour that is based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes to achieve one’s goals” (Krajewski, 2011, p.140). It is important to note that internal growth (is not required for, but) influences external growth. Notably, Deardorff ranks the trait “openness” at the base of her pyramid model of intercultural competence (the most important level), just as the 1996 American

Council on International Intercultural Education upon completion of their own model of global competence (pp. 245-246). Openness is also a trait linked to second language acquisition: “the individual’s openness to that community or other cultures in general (i.e., integrativeness) will influence his/ her motivation to learn the language” (Gardner, 2006, p. 248). Openness along with respect, curiosity, and discovery, are all “requisite attitudes” for higher-level intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006, p. 244).

In her case study on intercultural competence through experiential learning, Krajewski (2011) finds that not only attitude, but emotional intelligence, knowledge of the self and the other, and awareness of cultural difference are key elements to intercultural competence (p. 138). Awareness of cultural difference and self-efficacy, among other elements, were measured in de Diego Lázaro et al.’s study on students studying abroad in Nicaragua and Malawi, which found that “students showed significant increases in the three areas: cultural awareness, cultural competence, and self-efficacy” (2020). Additional studies from Goldstein (2022), Nguyen (2017), and Heinzmann et al. (2015) find similar positive results regarding intercultural competence and study abroad. It is likely that study abroad programs provide the optimal environment for the development of these skills, allowing students to progress to high levels of intercultural competence.

Pertaining to SLA, Krajewski states that “intercultural competence focuses on effective communication. Therefore, sociolinguistic awareness and successful verbal and non-verbal communication are key to intercultural competence” (2011, p. 140). In this sense, it is possible that intercultural competence connects to second language acquisition, as students with higher proficiency are better communicators, and therefore, have a better understanding of the culture.

How to Improve the Chance of Having the Most Beneficial Study Abroad Experience (Key Takeaways)

It is important to note that the three previous topics— second language acquisition, identity formation, and intercultural competence— all influence each other in some way. Therefore, they are all equally important to student success. As stated previously, there is no foolproof or perfect formula for study abroad programs to follow. Each student is different, therefore there are multitudes of variables (such as second language proficiency, personality type, race, age, attitude, gender, host receptivity, etc.) which affect a student’s study abroad experience. However, strategies exist to improve the chances of a student’s positive study abroad excursion. A few tips and insights of best practice have been compiled.

First, we discussed second language acquisition (SLA). While short-term study abroad programs have been found to be impactful (Dwyer, 2004), current studies show that students are more likely to be successful in SLA with a long-term study abroad program or excursion (Coleman, 2015) (Borràs and Llanes, 2019). This means that more time abroad will yield greater chances of second language improvement. Stated by Davidson, “Language acquisition at the highest levels of proficiency is generally not possible without a substantial immersion experience in the target culture” (2007, p. 277). In his study, he suggests 9 to 12 months abroad. It is also beneficial to keep in mind the degree of socialization of the host country. For example, cities like Palma de Mallorca, Spain, and Galway, Republic of Ireland, typically provide more social host communities, therefore allowing for more second language practice (Prieto-Arranz et al., 2021). Finally, as discussed previously, Davidson (2007) suggests students should enter their host city with (at least) an intermediate-level proficiency of their second language. If students enter the

program with a well-established grammatical base and proficiency-level, they are more likely to leave the program “in the advanced range or higher” (p. 278).

Second, we discussed identity formation. Study abroad programs can provide students with a starting point for their social identity to blossom. As discussed previously, Tullock (2018) recommends that study abroad programs arrange “for students to participate in such local communities as clubs, teams, or organizations of which they will be valued members”. By placing students in local clubs or communities of the host-country, students will feel a sense of belonging to the host-country microcultures. This sense of belonging is reinforced with routine events and activities, to which students’ relationships with (other club members/co-members/locals) have a better chance of flourishing. In contrast, students could be responsible for finding and joining local clubs or organizations— but positive social identity growth is more likely in the latter case. In addition, belonging to social groups can contribute to the development of individual identity and occupational identity. As discussed in Tullock’s (2018) article, new social groups provide new perspectives, which can help to develop all bases of identity. It is noted that “study abroad programs need to devote significant time to structured debriefings in all pedagogical activities” to “productively manage and even embrace the disruption of identity” (Madhavan and Dlamini, 2021). Program organizers or educators should provide students with sessions before and after their excursion to “unpack and contextualize specific events” (p. 132). This call for debriefing and reflection is mirrored in previously mentioned articles, specifically that of Goldoni (2017). The author states that the briefing process is especially important for minority students: “Issues of racial and linguistic discrimination and feelings of inequity should be addressed in the design of the SA program, and become part of the academic component

before, during, and after the journey” (Goldoni, 2017). As stated previously, every student is different, so their needs must be met with an individualistic, mindful, and genuine approach.

Finally, we discussed intercultural competence. Deardorff’s model (2006) advises students to be open-minded about their surroundings— which can be beneficial not only to intercultural competence, but also to SLA. Deardorff suggests that, to have the greatest chance of intercultural competency development, students begin their study abroad program with this sense of openness, which will allow for the development of other skills (empathy, adaptability, etc.) and eventually be reflected in the student’s behavior. Program organizers or educators should keep in mind that “[The post-study abroad students] need to process and continue their intercultural learning when they return... not another cross-cultural experience; rather, they need a different kind of course - one that is more focused on processing and extracting the learning from the experience they just had” (Anderson and Cunningham, 2009, as quoted in Peckenpaugh, 2018, p. 477). Just as Goldoni (2017) and Madhavan and Dlamini (2021) state, Anderson and Cunningham (2009) call for much needed development in study abroad programs and emphasize the importance of comprehensive briefing sessions before student departure, and required self-reflection upon student return. As stated by Montrose, “it is not the activity of leaving one’s homeland that creates learning, but the subsequent analysis of that activity where the real learning begins” (Montrose, 2002, as quoted in Peckenpaugh, 2018, p. 476).

Conclusion

Studying abroad is recognized amongst universities, businesses, and researchers as a high impact practice: an experience that greatly improves students’ intellectual skills and personal development, ultimately resulting in the enrichment of students’ lives. It provides the unique

opportunity for students to become global citizens— those who do not belong to a country, but rather to the world. Some of the notable benefits to studying abroad include second language acquisition (SLA), identity formation, and development of intercultural competence. Although controversy surrounds which factors contribute the most to a student’s experience abroad, key findings and recommendations have surfaced, such as belonging to social groups and practicing an intermediate to high level of proficiency prior to departure (listed previously). More research is required to better prepare students for their excursions abroad. Best stated by Borràs and Llanes (2019), “there is much more to be done in order to understand how learners can derive optimum benefits from study abroad”. A lack of research exists regarding the effectiveness of short-term study abroad programs, how SA impacts reading and listening skills in students’ second language, and the measurement of intercultural competence on students pre- and post-SA. While much more research is needed, it is evident that studying abroad contributes greatly to the acquisition of a second language, the formation of identity, and the development of intercultural competence. I hope to convince students to study abroad so they may develop these competencies and become global citizens, in which they build meaningful relationships that surpass country borders. These important relationships foster a more understanding, connected, and mindful world.

APPENDIX A

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