

Impact Of Short Study Abroad Programs On Students' Diversity Attitude

Jia Wang*, Ali Peyvandi** and J. M. Moghaddam***

This study empirically examines the impact of short study abroad programs on students' diversity attitude. Overall, the study found significant positive changes in students' diversity attitude as result of a two-week overseas experience. The results suggest that a short study abroad program is an excellent vehicle by which students learn and develop their intercultural mindset. This paper also discusses the implications and limitations of the study.

Field of Research: Short Study Abroad programs, Diversity, Business Education

1. Introduction

Globalization is here to stay. Multinational companies across the world are looking for employees with a global mindset and experiences. Therefore, it is imperative for colleges and universities to prepare students to function and succeed in today's dynamic, complex, global environment. In responding to this challenge, many colleges and universities have developed some form of study abroad programs to enable students to gain international experiences (Gardner & Witherell, 2003). OECD reported that there were 2.7 million students studying in colleges and universities abroad in 2004 and UNESCO forecasted that this number would triple by 2025 (Jackson, 2008). McMurtrie (2007) recently reported that the number of U.S. students traveling abroad to study continues to climb and trips of eight weeks or less are becoming more and more popular. AACSB International, the leading accrediting body for the school of business, states in its latest set of standards that "diversity on a global basis is a complex, culturally embedded concept. . . . The school must show that within this context its business programs include diverse viewpoints among participants and prepare graduates for careers in the global context."(2008: 9). This paper seeks to identify whether or not short study abroad programs affects students' diversity attitude. In the following sections, we will review the related literature, discuss the methodology, report the empirical results, and explore the study implications and limitations.

*Dr. Jia Wang, Craig School of Business, California State University, Fresno email: jjaw@csufresno.edu

**Dr. Ali Peyvandi, Craig School of Business, California State University, Fresno email: alip@csufresno.edu

***Dr. J. M. Moghaddam, Craig School of Business, California State University, Fresno email: johnm@csufresno.edu

2. Literature Review

Two streams of research, the experiential learning theory (ELT) and the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (DMIS), provide the theoretical basis of this study. ELT defines learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984: 41). ELT posits that “learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world and results from synergistic transactions between the person and the environment” (Kolb & Kolb, 2005: 194). DMIS was developed to explain the observed and reported experiences of individuals in intercultural encounters (Bennett, 1993). Bennett (1993) argues that: 1) intercultural understanding is learned, 2) people and culture are highly differentiated, and 3) a person develops his/her intercultural mindset by moving from ethnocentric stages (Denial, Defense, and Minimization) where one’s own culture is experienced to ethnorelative stages (Acceptance, Adaptation, and Integration) where different culture is experienced.

ELT and DMIS studies have been very extensive and interdisciplinary, addressing learning, knowledge creation, and education in many fields (Kayes, 2002). The July 2005 update of ELT bibliography shows 1876 entries (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Likewise, DMIS has served as the theoretical basis for many intercultural sensitivity studies, including diversity research (Jackson, 2008). Several assessment approaches exist in the literature. Pascarella et al. (1994), for example, developed an 8-item instrument to measure the changes in students’ openness to diversity. Since its development, this 8-item instrument has been used by several researchers to investigate the changes of students’ diversity attitude (Ismail, Morgan, and Hayes, 2006; Pascarella et al., 1996; and Wortman 2002). In the study conducted by Wortman (2002), Pascarella, et al.’s 8-item instrument was used to measure the changes in openness to diversity that occurred as a result of semester-long study abroad programs. The sample consisted of 100 U.S. students visiting both native English-speaking and non-native English-speaking countries. While this study shows the usefulness of semester-long study abroad programs on improving students’ openness to diversity, the impact of such programs on students’ openness to diversity is not conclusive. Using a similar approach, Ismail, et al. (2006) investigated the changes of student openness to diversity of 23 Purdue University students participating in a 3-week study tour in China. They did report significant changes in several diversity measures as a result of this tour. Moreover, their findings seem to imply that short study abroad may have similar effects as semester long programs in terms of the impact on students’ openness to diversity.

As indicated above, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the impact of short study abroad programs on students’ diversity attitude. There are three reasons why this study is important and different from previous studies. First, although there are many published articles using ELT, few papers linked ELT to short study abroad programs, especially in business education. Second, most short study abroad articles were published in education related journals. There is very little research to be found related to papers in the field of management. Specifically, when searching the key word “short study abroad” in the archives of the Academy of Management, no results are found.

Wang, Peyvandi & Moghaddam

Finally, previous studies (Carlson and Widaman, 1988; Ismail, Morgan, and Hayes, 2006; Pascarella, et al., 1996; and Wortman 2002) failed to address the important question of whether or not the sampled students had participated in similar short study abroad programs or had had international experiences. It is conceivable that students who have no exposure to such programs or have never traveled to other countries will have different diversity attitude changes than those who have had such experiences. Thus, if this variable is not controlled, the results could be misleading or questionable. This study seeks to address this methodological issue by focusing only on the students who have not participated in the similar short study abroad programs and have not traveled to abroad in order to ensure the homogeneity of the sample.

Short study abroad is a type of experiential learning, which is a form of learning that takes place from or through experience (Hopkins, 1999 and Keily, 2004). Short study abroad is also an effective vehicle by which students develop their intercultural sensitivity (DeLoach, et al., 2003). For instance, U.S. business students traveling abroad (e.g., China and France in our study) will deepen their understanding about the rationales behind globalizations. These students will have a better appreciation of the significance and differences between global strategy and transnational strategy by visiting the McDonald's restaurants in Hong Kong and Paris. Through this interaction with the Chinese or French natives along with studying, living, and acting as locals, students will see the similarities and differences in terms of people and culture; thus, become more sensitive to those differences. Accordingly, adhering to the ELT and DMIS perspectives/reasoning, the following is hypothesized:

Hypothesis: Short study abroad programs will have a positive impact on student diversity attitude.

3. Methodology and Research Design

This research was conducted at the Craig School of Business, California State University, Fresno. In the summer of 2008, seven short study abroad courses were offered in three different locations: Dijon, Paris, and Hong Kong. There were five undergraduate courses and two graduate courses. For this endeavor, the Craig School of Business had three partners: Burgundy School of Business in Dijon, Ecole Supérieure du Commerce Extérieur in Paris, and Hong Kong Baptist University in Hong Kong. Each course had six-week duration. Students spent the first four weeks in Fresno and the last two weeks abroad. A total of 121 students (twenty graduate students and 101 undergraduate students) participated in this program. In order to measure the students diversity attitude changes as a result of short study abroad, two web-based surveys were administered, one at the start of the program and the other at the conclusion of the overseas trip. Employing the web-based approach in conducting these surveys was significantly cost effective. This approach also simplified survey administration at multiple locations and time frames and facilitated efficient/accurate data collection and analysis. A total of 92 (76%) students completed both web-based research questionnaires. As we discussed above, in order to ensure the homogeneity of the sample, this paper focuses only on those students who had not participated in

Wang, Peyvandi & Moghaddam

similar short study abroad before and had not traveled to other countries. Using this criterion, our sample size was reduced to 35 students.

The dependent variables were the diversity measures. The eight-item instrument developed by Pascarella et al. (1996) was used to measure diversity. Table 1 presents these diversity measures. Scoring the items was performed using the Likert scale with 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree. A pre-test and post-test were conducted at the start of the program and at the conclusion of the overseas trip. Although there were a number studies (e.g., Ismail, Morgan, and Hayes, 2006; Pascarella, et al., 1996, and Wortman 2002) that used this eight-item instrument, previous researchers did not perform any validity test to determine if these items measured the same diversity

Table 1 - Items used to measure diversity ^a

| Item Number | Statement |
|-------------|---|
| 1 | I enjoy having discussions with people whose ideas and values are different from my own. |
| 2 | The real value of a college education lies in being introduced to different values. |
| 3 | I enjoy talking to people who have values different from mine because it helps me understand myself and my values. |
| 4 | Learning about people from different cultures is a very important part of my college education. |
| 5 | I enjoy taking courses that challenge my beliefs and values. |
| 6 | The courses I enjoyed the most are those that make think about things from a different perspective. |
| 7 | Contact with individuals whose background (for example, race, national origin, and sexual orientation) is different from my own is an essential part of my college education. |
| 8 | I enjoy courses that are intellectually challenging. |

^a Used as developed by Pascarella et al. (1996) without modification.

construct. To address this issue, we performed two factor analyses on the eight items, one for the pre-test and the other for the post test. In both cases, there was only one component or factor extracted using the principal component analysis, which explained 55.18% and 64.06% of the variance respectively. The results seem to indicate that these items do indeed measure the same diversity construct. Thus, the factor analysis results provided justification for the use of these eight items and, more importantly, the use of aggregated scores. Hence, we created two aggregated variables, one from the pre-test and the other from the post test, for our hypothesis test. Moreover, a reliability analysis was performed on all 18 variables (8 from the pre-test, 8 from the post-test, and two aggregated variable). The Cronbach's Alpha was 0.87, which was similar to the 0.85 reported by Pascarella et al. (1996).

4. Discussion of Findings

The sample of our study consisted of thirty five students. There were 16 male and 19 female. The average age was 23 years. Of those who indicated their ethnicity (34), there were seventeen White/Caucasians, nine Hispanic/Latinos, five Asian Americans, and three African Americans. Table 2 reports the descriptive statistics of the pre-test and post-test measures of the dependent variables. The last variable (All 8 items) is the aggregate score. As expected, the means of the post-test were generally higher than the means of the pre-test on all the independent variables with the exception of item 6.

Table 2-Paired samples statistics

| Items ^a | | Mean ^b | N | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------------------|-----------|-------------------|----|----------------|-----------------|
| Pair 1 | Pre-test | 5.74 | 35 | .852 | .144 |
| | Post-test | 6.11 | 35 | .758 | .128 |
| Pair 2 | Pre-test | 5.60 | 35 | 1.193 | .202 |
| | Post-test | 5.97 | 35 | .785 | .133 |
| Pair 3 | Pre-test | 5.94 | 35 | .838 | .142 |
| | Post-test | 6.00 | 35 | .804 | .136 |
| Pair 4 | Pre-test | 5.89 | 35 | 1.105 | .187 |
| | Post-test | 6.09 | 35 | .981 | .166 |
| Pair 5 | Pre-test | 5.34 | 35 | 1.187 | .201 |
| | Post-test | 5.63 | 35 | 1.060 | .179 |
| Pair 6 | Pre-test | 5.89 | 35 | 1.022 | .173 |
| | Post-test | 5.69 | 35 | .963 | .163 |
| Pair 7 | Pre-test | 5.51 | 35 | 1.121 | .190 |
| | Post-test | 5.83 | 35 | .954 | .161 |
| Pair 8 | Pre-test | 5.83 | 35 | .923 | .156 |
| | Post-test | 6.06 | 35 | .725 | .123 |
| All 8 Items | Pre-test | 45.74 | 35 | 6.065 | 1.025 |
| | Post-test | 47.37 | 35 | 5.652 | .955 |

^a Refer to Table 1 for items.

^b Each item was ranked by participants from a Likert scale of 1 to 7, where 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=slightly disagree, 4=neutral, 5=slightly agree, 6=agree, and 7=strongly agree.

In order to test the impact of short study abroad on students' diversity attitude, the Paired-Samples T Test was utilized. Table 3 presents the results of these tests. Overall, the result of the test on the aggregate variable (All 8 items) was statistically significant ($p=.051$). Since this variable was believed to measure the diversity construct as we reported in our factors analysis above, our hypothesis was confirmed. This finding strongly suggested that students experienced positive changes on their diversity attitude as a result of short study abroad. It confirmed our belief that short study abroad

Wang, Peyvandi & Moghaddam

is an excellent vehicle by which students develop their intercultural sensitivity. Theoretically speaking, this result supports the central argument of ELT, which maintains that “learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world and results from synergistic transactions between the person and the environment” (Kolb & Kolb, 2005: 194).

Table 3-Paired samples test

| Pre-test and Post-test Item Pairs | | Paired Differences | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|-------|-----------------|---|-------|--------|----|-----------------|
| | | Mean | SD | Std. Error Mean | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| | | | | | Lower | Upper | | | |
| Pair 1 | Pre-test - Post-test | -.371 | .690 | .117 | -.608 | -.135 | -3.186 | 34 | .003** |
| Pair 2 | Pre-test - Post-test | -.371 | 1.215 | .205 | -.789 | .046 | -1.809 | 34 | .079 |
| Pair 3 | Pre-test - Post-test | -.057 | .765 | .129 | -.320 | .206 | -.442 | 34 | .661 |
| Pair 4 | Pre-test - Post-test | -.200 | .833 | .141 | -.486 | .086 | -1.420 | 34 | .165 |
| Pair 5 | Pre-test - Post-test | -.286 | 1.073 | .181 | -.654 | .083 | -1.575 | 34 | .124 |
| Pair 6 | Pre-test - Post-test | .200 | 1.023 | .173 | -.152 | .552 | 1.156 | 34 | .256 |
| Pair 7 | Pre-test - Post-test | -.314 | .932 | .158 | -.634 | .006 | -1.995 | 34 | .054 * |
| Pair 8 | Pre-test - Post-test | -.229 | .646 | .109 | -.450 | -.007 | -2.095 | 34 | .044* |
| All 8 Items | Pre-test - Post-test | -1.629 | 4.759 | .804 | -3.263 | .006 | -2.024 | 34 | .051* |

* p< .05

** p< .01

Furthermore, the finding was consistent with the theme of DMIS that people change their intercultural understanding and develop their intercultural mindset as a result of experiencing different people and culture (Bennett, 1993). Our result was also consistent with the findings of Ismail et al. (2006) and Wortman (2002), both of which found significant positive changes on this aggregate variable. Another interesting implication of this finding is the length of the short study abroad. It is apparent that our two-week study abroad program achieved similar significant results as reported by the three-week program (Ismail et al., 2006) and semester-long programs (Wortman, 2002). This is very important because, based on our experience, business students generally prefer cost-effective, short-term programs.

Wang, Peyvandi & Moghaddam

As reported in Table 3, Item 1 showed the largest and most significant ($p=.003$) mean changes between pre-test and post-test among all eight items. This result is not surprising because students having discussions with people who have different ideas and values is one of the main objectives of the short study abroad. The result clearly supported the DMIS argument that individuals develop intercultural sensitivity by interacting with different people. Along the same line, item 2 was moderately significant ($p=.079$). Students seemed to agree that being introduced to different values by participating in short study abroad is the real value of a college education. Item 7 also showed large and significant mean changes ($p=.054$). Short study abroad provided students the opportunity to interact with different people (e.g., race, national origin, and sexual orientation). As a consequence, students felt the trip was rewarding and beneficial from the perspective of education. This result was supported by the findings of Pike (2002), who reported that having contact with different people significantly increased students openness to diversity. Contrary to the findings of Ismail et al., (2006) and Pascarella et al. (1996), we found a significant difference ($p=.044$) in Item 8's post and pre tests. Students really enjoyed this short study abroad program because they felt the trip was intellectually challenging and rewarding. The significant results for items 1, 2, and 7 should also lead to such a conclusion.

Contrary to our expectation, we did not find any significant mean changes of students' diversity attitude on items 3, 4, 5, and 6, with item 3 exhibiting the least changes. The results seemed to imply that although students enjoyed discussing with different people (Item 1), experiencing different values (Item 2), interacting with different individuals (Item 7), and being intellectually challenged (Item 8), they did not feel that their own beliefs, values, and perspectives were better understood, altered, or challenged (items 3, 5, and 6). It could be that these internal values were difficult to change. It is also possible that students were interested in learning about different people and cultures and not interested in changing their own. The length of our program might have been too short for students to experience significant changes in these areas. Finally, the relatively small sample size might have limited our ability to detect these changes especially in the case of Item 4, which is very similar to items 1 and 2, where mean differences were significant.

5. Conclusion

Using the experiential learning theory and the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity, this paper empirically investigated the impact of short study abroad programs on students' diversity attitude. Overall, we found significant positive changes in students' diversity attitude as a result of a two-week overseas experience. Our hypothesis was confirmed. The results supported our belief that short study abroad is an excellent vehicle by which students learn and develop their intercultural mindset. Moreover, it seems that two-week overseas trips would have similar effects as three-week and semester-long programs in terms of the impact on students' diversity attitude. Given the growing importance of short study abroad programs, more research needs to be done in this area. For example, would the same significant results be obtained if

Wang, Peyvandi & Moghaddam

students travel to English speaking countries such as UK or Canada? Also, the relatively small sample size and mixed test results of the eight variables may limit the generalization of the findings and call for cautious interpretation. However, the interesting and significant findings should provide impetus for future research.

References

- AACSB International 2008. "Eligibility procedures and accreditation standards for business accreditation". Retrieved April 3, 2008 from [www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/process/documents/AACSB STANDARDS Revised Jan08.pdf](http://www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/process/documents/AACSB_STANDARDS_Revised_Jan08.pdf).
- Bennett, M. 1993. "Towards ethnorelativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity". In Paige, R. M. (Ed.), *Education for the intercultural experience*, pp. 21-71, International Press, Yarmouth, Main.
- Carlson, J. & Widaman, K. 1988. "The effects of study abroad during college on attitudes toward other cultures", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 12, pp.1-17.
- DeLoach, S., Saliba, L., Smith, V., and Tiemann, T. 2003. "Developing a global mindset through short-term study abroad: A group discussion approach", *Journal of Teaching in International Business*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 37-60.
- Gardner, D. & Witherell, S. 2003. *Open doors 2003: American students studying abroad*, Institute on International Education, New York.
- Hopkins, J. 1999. "Studying abroad as a form of experiential learning", *Liberal Education*, Vol. 85, No. 3, pp. 36-41.
- Ismail, B., Morgan, M., and Hayes, K. 2006. "Effect of short study abroad course on student openness to diversity", *Journal of Food Science Education*, Vol. 1, pp. 15-18.
- Jackson, J. 2008. "Globalization, internationalization, and short-term stays abroad", *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 32, pp.349-358.
- Kayes, D. 2002. "Experiential learning and its critics: Preserving the role of experience in management education", *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 137-149.
- Keily, R. 2004. "A chameleon with a complex: Searching for transformation in international service-learning", *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 5-20.
- Kolb, D. 1984. Experience as the source of learning and development, Prentice-Hall, New Jersey.
- Kolb, A. and Kolb, D. 2005. "Learning styles and learning spaces: Enhancing experiential learning in higher education", *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp.193-212.
- McMurtrie, B. 2007. "Study-Abroad numbers continue to climb, trips are shorter, Report says", *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Vol. 54, No. 12, A36.
- Pascarella, E., Ernest, T., Bohr, L., Nora, A. 1994. "Impacts of 2-year and 4-year Colleges on learning orientations: A preliminary study", *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, Vol. 18, pp. 577-589.

Wang, Peyvandi & Moghaddam

- Pascarella, E., Edison, M., Nora, A., Hagedorn, L., and Terenzini, P. 1996. "Influences on students' openness to diversity and challenge in the first year of college", *The Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 67, pp.174-195.
- Pike, G. 2002. "The differential effects of on- and off-campus living arrangement on students' openness to diversity", *NASPA Journal*, Vol. 39, No. 4, pp. 283-299.
- Wortman T. 2002 "Psychosocial effects of studying abroad: Openness to diversity", *Dissertation Abstract International*, Vol. 63, No. 7, pp. 2479-2572.