



Qualitative and Quantitative Cultural Gains from Short-Term Study Abroad

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Resumen

La participación en estudios a corto plazo en el extranjero se ha incrementado exponencialmente en los Estados Unidos, eclipsando el semestre tradicional o año académico en el extranjero que se programaba en décadas anteriores. Aunque criticado y rechazado por muchos profesores de idiomas y proveedores de estudios en el extranjero, está apareciendo un creciente corpus de investigación en defensa de los programas a corto plazo. El presente estudio de caso examina las ganancias cuantitativas en las orientaciones culturales, buscando determinar el mejor momento para evaluar las ganancias a su regreso al país de origen. Estos resultados, a su vez, aportarán información en el futuro para la planificación de los estudios a corto plazo en el extranjero.

Palabras clave: estudiar en el extranjero, estudio a corto plazo en el exterior, orientación cultural, fluidez del lenguaje

Resum

La participació en estudis a curt termini en l'estranger s'ha incrementat exponencialment als Estats Units, eclipsant el semestre tradicional o any acadèmic en l'estranger que es programava en dècades anteriors. Encara que criticat i rebutjat per molts professors d'idiomes i proveïdors d'estudis en l'estranger, està apareixent un creixent corpus d'investigació en defensa dels programes a curt termini. El present estudi de cas examina els guanys quantitatius en les orientacions culturals, buscant determinar el millor moment per a avaluar els guanys al seu retorn al país d'origen. Estos resultats, al seu torn, aportaran informació en el futur per a la planificació dels estudis a curt termini en l'estranger.

Paraules clau: iestudiar en l'estranger, estudi a curt termini en l'exterior, orientació cultural, fluïdesa del llenguatge

Abstract

Participation in short-term study abroad has increased dramatically in the United States, overshadowing the traditional semester or academic year abroad programming of decades past. While maligned and shunned by many language instructors and study abroad providers, a growing body of research is emerging in defense of short-term programs. The present case study examines quantitative gains in cultural orientations, looking to determine the best timing for assessing gains upon return to the home country. Those results in turn will inform future short-term study abroad planning.

Key words: study abroad, short-term study abroad, cultural orientation, language fluency



1. Introduction

The 2001 Institute of International Education's (IIE) Open Doors report on study abroad in the United States drew specific attention to a very marked shift towards shorter sojourns abroad, of eight weeks or less. This trend has remained constant over the intervening decade, with short-term program participants representing 58% of all study abroad from the United States in 2010-11. Traditional study abroad programs look to send students away for a semester or an academic year, but the student of the 21st century is instead choosing shorter programs abroad. In response to this new reality, researchers must look to document both language and cultural gains, adapting pedagogies and practices to maximize learning in these shorter time frames.

2. Literature review

Foreign language professors have expressed much consternation and puzzlement regarding the dramatic increase in short-term study abroad. This lack of understanding may be attributable to the fact that many of these same professors participated in semester or academic years abroad as part of their own undergraduate education (Kinging, 2008). The move to programs of shorter duration may be in response to societal shifts afforded by technological advances that provide the ability to remain connected to social networks, regardless of one's physical location (College Parents of America, 2006; Pempek, Yermolayeva and Calvert, 2009; Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter and Espinoza, 2008). Donnelly-Smith (2009) enumerates other reasons why these programs might be more appealing to students, including their affordability, and the flexibility they offer to students with more structured degree programs and/or who are unable to absent themselves for a full semester or year.

Can short-term study abroad programs be effective? The Study Abroad for Global Engagement (SAGE) research project (Paige, et al 2009) concludes that the duration of stay is insignificant when considering the degree to which students remain globally engaged after a study abroad experience. This longitudinal study is striking in that it reviews over fifty years of participation in study abroad, gathering data from more than 6,000 former students. The results, however, are validated in other recent studies that are similar in focus, but much smaller in scope (Rowan-Kenyon, Niehaus, 2011; Perry, Stoner and Tarrant, 2012; Llanes, Muñoz, 2009; Lumkes, Hallett and Vallade, 2012).

What is becoming apparent in the research on study abroad is that mentorship in-country is critical to a student's success both in language gains and in cultural fluency. The Georgetown Consortium Project (VandeBerg, Connor-Linton and Paige, 2009) points to cultural components in pre-departure orientations, as well as interventions by faculty members and study abroad providers as the strongest indicators of student success. The theory on faculty or mentor intervention is further developed by VandeBerg (2009), as well as the suggestion that faculty and study abroad providers move beyond the *master narrative for study abroad* that was in place previously, in its stead discovering the emerging narrative, which calls for strategic interventions in student learning and development while abroad. The crucial role of mentor appears throughout the growing body of research that defends the value of short-term study

abroad (Nam, 2011; Willis Allen, 2010; Martinsen, 2011; Perry, Stoner and Tarrant, 2012; Llanes, Muñoz 2009).

Accurate quantitative measurements of growth from short-term study abroad will necessarily be measured differently. While the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), or its modified Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI) have traditionally been called into service to measure language gains, in a shorter-term program those gains will be more difficult to measure. Martinsen (2011) and Llanes, Muñoz (2009) employ complex analyses of language gains. Rodrigo (2011) finds linguistic gains in a five-week summer study abroad program to be the equivalent of similar student language growth in a traditional semester-long language course on the home campus. In this study, Rodrigo documents enhanced student *sensitivity* or *intuition* when identifying grammatically correct and incorrect structures. Equally telling is the practice of collecting qualitative information from the students themselves. Student reflections in journals maintained throughout the study abroad experience report increased confidence and risk taking with language, as well as increased motivation to attain a higher level once they have realized they can understand and be understood (Ziamandanis, 2006).

Gains in cultural awareness and sensitivity are perhaps the most useful element for students studying abroad, transferring into marketable skills in most any career. The Intercultural Development Inventory® (IDI®)¹ measures cultural development on a continuum, beginning with a monocultural mindset, followed by a transitional stage, and then finally the target stages belonging to an ethnocultural mindset. The IDI has been statistically validated (Hammer, 2009, 2009, 2011; Hammer, Bennett and Wiseman 2003), and has been used in numerous studies to measure cultural gains from study abroad (Nam, 2011; VandeBerg, Connor-Linton and Paige, 2009; Jackson, 2008). While there are other instruments available to gauge cultural development, the IDI is the only one to have undergone extensive validity testing, and therefore was selected for this study.

3. The study

The present case study looked to determine the ideal time to administer the IDI after the abroad experience. A baseline IDI was administered prior to departure, immediately after travel, and then again one semester after travel. The same instrument was used in all three administrations.

3.1 The stages of the Intercultural Development Inventory

The Intercultural Development Inventory is a series of 50 statements to which respondents indicate their level of agreement or disagreement based on a 5-point Likert scale. The result of those responses will generate a position on the cultural continuum. At its early stages of development, the continuum is monocultural in nature, beginning with Denial, followed by Polarization which can manifest as Defense or Reversal. The next stage of Minimization is seen as transitional in nature, with the respondent moving from a monocultural mindset to one more ethnocultural. The final stages are Acceptance and Adaptation.

Overall IDI scores range from 55-145. Denial and Polarization orientations generate IDI scores below 85. A De-

¹ The Intercultural Development Inventory, IDI and IDI Guided Development are registered trademarks of IDI, LLC in the United States and other countries.

nial orientation is characterized by an individual generally unwilling to recognize cultural differences beyond a superficial level. This person may withdraw when faced with more nuanced cultural differences. Individuals in the Polarization orientation create an *us vs. them* vantage point regarding cultural difference. This vantage point may view *us* as superior (Defense), or *them* as superior (Reversal). An orientation in Minimization will produce an IDI score in the range 85-114.99. An individual in Minimization may recognize cultural nuances, but emphasizes the common and universal nature in humanity, masking or not fully recognizing nuanced difference. Acceptance and Adaptation orientations generate IDI scores in the range 115-145. Individuals in Acceptance recognize and value deeper forms of cultural difference, while those in Adaptation have the additional ability to switch cultural frames of reference adeptly, recognizing that a *one size fits all* solution will seldom be appropriate in situations of cultural difference.

The IDI report generated will indicate both the respondent's Developmental Orientation, as well as his/her Perceived Orientation. The Perceived Orientation indicates where the individual places him/herself on the cultural continuum of Defense, Polarization, Minimization, Acceptance and Adaptation. In contrast, the Developmental Orientation is where the IDI results place the individual on the same continuum, and indicates the perspective the individual will most likely assume when faced with situations of cultural difference. The IDI validation process has indicated that a difference of seven points or more between the Perceived Orientation and the Developmental Orientation is statistically significant, pointing out an important overestimation or underestimation of one's cultural competence.

3.2 Method

3.2.1 Participants

Eleven students registered for the course SPA 370 Experiential Spanish. The course consisted of a two-week language and cultural immersion experience in Costa Rica, scheduled between the fall and spring semesters. All students participating in the course were required to have completed a minimum of Intermediate Spanish 2 at the home campus, the equivalent of four college semesters of language study. One student repeatedly ignored requests to complete the IDI, leaving the total number of respondents at ten. All students were female, with traditional age ranges for undergraduate and young graduate students, 19-25 years old. Three of the students had previous study abroad experience, all studying in Spain, one for a summer and two for a full semester. The sole graduate student was making up undergraduate deficiencies for her graduate degree requirements.

3.2.2 Procedure

The IDI was administered prior to the scheduled pre-departure orientation. A group profile was generated, and its results were used to plan exercises (Stringer and Cassiday, 2009) in the pre-departure orientation session that would

Student	Pre-travel	Post-travel 1	Post-travel 2	Difference pre-post 1	Difference pre-post 2
13	71.8	82.31	75.53	10.51	3.73
6	72.48	86.63	84.37	14.15	11.89
8	81.18	74.28	83.81	-6.9	2.63
5	89.01	93.4	85.88	4.39	-3.13
10	93.08	74.28	69.88	-18.8	-23.2
3	94.27	80.15	96.19	-14.12	1.92
11	97.77	95.8	105.05	-1.97	7.28
9	103.5	83.46	87.89	-20.04	-15.61
12	111.79	100.91	99.9	-10.88	-11.89
7	115.22	111.52	113.4	-3.7	-1.82

Figure 1. Comparison of Developmental Orientation, pre-travel to post-travel 1, pre-travel to post-travel 2.

prompt students to begin to look at cultural artifacts and practices differently. The group results were also used to provide the faculty member traveling with the students with in-country activities (Stringer and Cassiday, 2009) appropriate to the students' levels of cultural development. A second IDI was administered immediately upon return home. Students then completed independent research projects throughout the spring semester, after having developed those topics in consultation with their professor while in-country. All students participated in the spring Undergraduate Research Symposium, presenting their research in poster format. Interviews were conducted at the symposium. Finally, the IDI was administered one last time near the end of the spring semester.

3.3 Results

When looking at students' Developmental Orientations (DO), it becomes clear that students benefit from having a period of time to better process the abroad experience. This group in particular experienced more movement backwards on the cultural continuum than forwards, indicating regression and not growth. That regression, however, was somewhat lessened after being allowed time to process the experience, as shown in the raw data in Figure 1. Total movement forward lessened from post administration 1 to

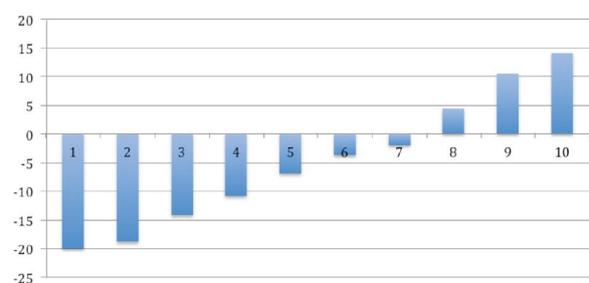


Figure 2. Student movement on cultural continuum of IDI, pre-travel to post-travel 1. Horizontal numbers indicate difference in IDI scores pre and post travel 1. Vertical bars reflect individual results. Negative scores indicate movement backwards on the cultural continuum. In this graph, only three students demonstrated positive movement forward on the cultural continuum.

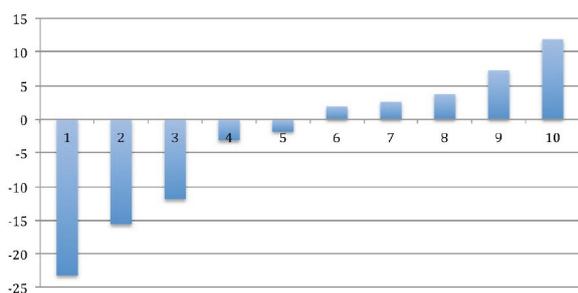


Figure 3. Student movement on cultural continuum of IDI, pre-travel to post-travel 2. Horizontal numbers indicate difference in IDI scores pre and post travel 2. Vertical bars reflect individual results. Negative scores indicate movement backwards on the cultural continuum. In this graph, five students demonstrated positive movement forward on the cultural continuum, as well as lessened negative results for all but one student.

2, from 29.05 to 27.45, while total movement backwards lessened significantly, from 76.41 to 55.65.

This data is more striking when viewed in graph format, as demonstrated in Figures 2 and 3. In this form, it is clearer that a delay in post-travel administration of the IDI produces more positive results, allowing students to reflect on the experiences abroad and convert those reflections into positive cultural gains.

When looking at the actual stages of cultural development, once again the additional time to reflect on the experience has positive results, as demonstrated in Figure 4. In looking at stages of development, only one student (13) saw a negative result from delaying administration of the post-travel IDI, three students (8, 3, 9) demonstrate positive results from the additional time to process the experience, and five students

(6, 5, 10, 11, 12) remained in the same stages in both administrations.

In contrast to the Developmental Orientation, when looking at the Perceived Orientation (PO), the students did not reap any overall benefit from additional time to process the abroad experience. The IDI records the Orientation Gap, or the difference between one's Perceived Orientation and Developmental Orientation, noting that an Orientation Gap over seven is significant. In the second post-travel administration of the IDI, only four students (9, 3, 11, 8) benefited from this additional time, decreasing

Student	Pre-travel	Post-travel 1	Post-travel 2	Movement post-travel 1	Movement post-travel 2
6	Polarization	Minimization	Cusp of Minimization	Forward	Forward
8	Polarization	Polarization	Cusp of Minimization	None	Forward
13	Polarization	Cusp of Minimization	Polarization	Forward	Backward
3	Minimization	Polarization	Minimization	Backward	Forward
5	Minimization	Minimization	Minimization	None	None
9	Minimization	Cusp of Minimization	Minimization	Backward	None
10	Minimization	Polarization	Cusp of Polarization	Backward	Backward
11	Minimization	Minimization	Minimization	None	None
12	Cusp of Acceptance	Minimization	Minimization	Backward	Backward
7	Acceptance	Cusp of Acceptance	Cusp of Acceptance	Backward	Backward

Figure 4. Stages of Developmental Orientation, pre-travel to post-travel 1, pre-travel to post-travel 2.

Student	Pre-travel	Post-travel 1	Post-travel 2	Difference pre-post 1	Difference pre-post 2
12	14.54	19.89	20	5.35	5.46
7	15.38	18.17	18.75	2.79	3.37
9	23.33	35.13	33.22	11.8	9.89
3	25.09	33.96	23.7	8.87	-1.39
11	26.81	25.75	21.58	-1.06	-5.23
10	27.77	39.78	44.32	12.01	16.55
5	30.07	28.94	33.88	-1.13	3.81
8	34.36	41.32	36.19	6.96	1.83
13	39.89	34.84	38.72	-5.05	-1.17
6	41.03	33.52	34.91	-7.51	-6.12

Figure 5. Orientation Gaps, pre-travel to post-travel 1, pre-travel to post-travel 2. An increase in Orientation Gap would indicate an increased overestimation of one's cultural competence, while a decrease would signal a more realistic perception of one's placement on the cultural continuum.

Student	Pre-travel	Post-travel 1	Post-travel 2	Difference pre-post 1	Difference pre-post 2
10	93.08	74.28	69.88	-18.8	-23.2
9	103.5	83.46	87.89	-20.4	-15.61
7	115.22	111.52	113.4	-3.7	-1.82

Figure 6. Developmental Orientation of students with previous study abroad experience, pre-travel to post-travel 1, pre-travel to post-travel 2.

ing their Orientation Gaps. Conversely, six students (12, 7, 10, 5, 13, 6) saw their Orientation Gaps increase over time, demonstrating an inflated sense of where they stood on the cultural continuum. Overall the group would be classified as highly unrealistic about their levels of cultural fluency, as reflected in Figure 5.

Surprisingly, previous study abroad experience does not appear to predict forward movement on the cultural continuum. In fact, all three students with previous study abroad experience experienced a regression on the first post-travel IDI, with less negative results on the later-administered IDI, as reflected on Figure 6. Two of the students (10, 9) with previous study abroad experience actually experienced the highest level of regression on the cultural continuum in comparison with the entire cohort.

4. Discussion

4.1 Potential design flaws

The faculty member who designed the two-week immersion program in Costa Rica chose to focus the course around the theme of ecotourism and its positive and negative effects on the country. Prior to travel, the researcher and the faculty member identified potential design flaws in the planned travel program, arising due to the thematic concentration. First, the group would need to move around the country often, never spending more than three nights in one place. While this would allow them to visit and research different forms of ecotourism, the students' ability to establish relationships with locals would be significantly hampered. Secondly, the frequent movement would require the program rely on a sole tour provider in-country. Using one tour provider can set students up to view realities through the windows of a tour bus, instead of experiencing them firsthand. Additional activities were planned by the researcher and the faculty member in an attempt to counter any possible negative effects from these potential design issues.

4.2 Qualitative results

Qualitative data was gathered through individual interviews conducted at the spring Undergraduate Research Symposium. These interviews were recorded, and consisted of the same four questions: 1) Discuss your research project, as well as the poster representing that work; 2) Talk about several Costa Ricans that helped you better understand some of the cultural differences you experienced in Costa Rica; 3) Discuss one or two pivotal moments in-country; 4) What does the term *chicas fresas* mean?

Through the individual interviews, it quickly became clear that the design concerns outlined above did, in fact, produce significant negative results among the students, confirming the overall undesirable results as recorded in the post-travel IDIs. The activities co-designed by the researcher and the faculty member were referred to on posters, in journals and in oral interviews as being work assigned by the researcher, with the implication that these in-country activities were viewed as an additional and unwelcome burden, quite possibly incongruent with the existing course objectives.

The constant movement from one locale to another also appears to have forced students to develop a disproportionate reliance on the tour guide for information and for clarification and details on what they were experiencing. When talking about their experience in Costa Rica, all students mentioned the tour guide and his assistance in providing information. It should be noted that all but one student pronounced the tour guide's name, Esteban, incorrectly, shifting the stress to the antepenultimate syllable as would be more consistent with the English variant of that name. This *filtering* effect by the tour guide prevented students from discovering information on their own, using linguistic and cultural strategies to gain the information they sought.

During the in-person interviews, students were also asked to talk about a pivotal moment in their travels. There had been a significant and potentially traumatic incident during the trip, and the researcher was concerned that the students might have internalized those concerns, thus impeding forward cultural development. Surprisingly, not one student mentioned that incident. Instead, over one half of the students indicated that the life-changing moment for them included zip lining through the forest canopy, further

indication that the cultural experience remained at superficial levels for many of the students.

Finally, the students were asked at the interview to define the term *chicas fresas* that the tour guide had used to refer to the group. The term, in fact, is derogatory in nature. Not one student had asked for a definition. They all chose instead to assume that it was a *term of endearment*. Perhaps the tour guide's use of this term was used to balance the nickname the students *affectionately* assigned to the bus driver, *Bigotes*, the equivalent of *moustaches*, due to his handlebar moustache.

5. Implications

While the distressing qualitative results gathered would suggest future program modification, the additional quantitative results from the administration of the IDI reinforce the need to revisit the primary program objectives. In the short-term program reviewed in this case study, the thematic focus of ecotourism was added to the primary goals of enhanced language and cultural proficiency. All students completed excellent research projects regarding the themed focus, but it appears that this was at the expense of cultural gains. Future program planning will need to address this concern.

Regarding optimal time to administer the post-travel IDI, this case study clearly indicates that students benefited from some amount of additional time to process their abroad experience. Just as one unpacks a suitcase after travel, students benefited from several months unpacking mentally and emotionally the experience in Costa Rica. It should be noted that larger studies such as The Georgetown Consortium Project (VandeBerg, Connor-Linton and Paige, 2009) administer the post-travel IDI *before* students return to their home country. This is more an administrative strategy, since it becomes increasingly difficult to locate students after they depart their study abroad programs, and also require completion of the assessment instrument. While the sample size for this case study is small, it did allow the flexibility in conceding additional reflective time to students. The researcher then sought them out, and through multiple email requests was able to secure 100% completion of the third and last IDI administration. Some amount of student *fatigue* was registered at the time of the last IDI administration. Students indicated a certain level of tedium at facing the same instrument for a third time. For that reason, this researcher is reluctant to look for additional confirmation of these results through future studies. The home institution instead will administer the post-travel IDI after several months have passed, taking into consideration that 100% completion may become a less realistic goal.

A new feature of the IDI is the provision of an Intercultural Development Plan (IDP) for individual respondents who receive feedback sessions. This IDP provides focused reflections and activities based on the Developmental Orientation of the person surveyed. The IDP may prove to be a valuable component in mentoring students in short-term study abroad programs.

Forthcoming research by VandeBerg (2012) will also document the importance of *training the trainer*, calling for the administration of the IDI on faculty members who mentor students in study abroad experiences. Those findings indicate that a faculty member in Polarization may well inhibit students from progression beyond that level, whereas working with faculty mentors to bring them into the phases of Acceptance/Adaptation will greatly enhance the student experience.

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