

Impact of International Education Experiences on Education of Pre-Service Teachers

Literature Review

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Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is for background to a study to describe the long-term impact of study abroad experiences on students in teacher education programs, in particular the pre-service teacher education programs at Minnesota State University, Mankato, MN. The results of the study will help respond to the question, “Are teachers educated at the baccalaureate level prepared to provide education for students from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds?”

Study abroad by scholars and professionals dates back as early as 500 B.C., when thoughtful persons migrated to Athens. Later, intellectual centers grew in Alexandria, Rome, and East Persia. Fry (1984) observed that, throughout the years, scholarly migration seemed characteristic of most societies.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has said, “Perhaps more than ever, international understanding is essential to world peace... globalization, migration, economic integration, communication, and travel are bringing different races, cultures, and ethnicities into ever closer contact with each other... combining the familiar with the foreign can be a source of powerful knowledge and insight.” (Annan, 2001).

There have been so many social, technological, and economic developments in the past 25 years, that, according to Friedman (200%), once again, the world is flat. “What is unique about this era is that it is not built around countries or around companies. It is built around individuals... the dynamic agent is the individual and the small group’s ability to globalize.” Friedman maintains that, as the world goes flat, all the knowledge pools in the world will be connected together and people can go farther than ever, if they have the educational skills.

During the past decade, participation in study abroad programs by US students has doubled. In academic year 2003 – 2004, 191,231 American students studied abroad. This was an increase of 9.6% from the year before. Of these, 7,918 were majoring in education; an increase of 4.1% from the year before. (Institute of International Education, 2006).

International Education Programs for Pre-service Teachers

Teacher education programs require attention to the rapid changes in the world, in part because populations are becoming increasingly diverse. In one school district in southern Minnesota, for example, 19% of the students are from a home with a primary language other than English. Families in these homes represent 16 languages other than English. (Minnesota Department of Education, 2006). Furthermore, the growth of the internet has meant that global conferencing

and communication have become more commonplace for young children as well as for teachers. The world is coming to teachers and their classroom.

Changing classroom environments and increased interactions between culturally differing teachers and students prompts a need to examine possible intercultural communication issues in the classroom. Walton (2002) conducted an exploratory study to examine relationships among teacher's global-mindedness, their demographic characteristics, and their classroom communication competence. The study concluded that global-mindedness had a direct effect on teacher's classroom communication skills.

If global-mindedness has an effect on teacher's classroom communication skills (and by inference on student learning), and if international study has an effect on teacher's global-mindedness, then one connection is that international study can prepare teachers to have a more positive impact on student learning.

International education experiences have long been regarded as one means to prepare undergraduate students to participate in a world with increased ethnic and cultural diversity. Pre-service teachers have found it challenging find time to participate in international education, due to the time and attention it takes to fulfill the many teacher licensure requirements

Research to document the impact of international education programs may help to justify the use of increasingly scarce resources in providing and participating in such programs. Pre-service teachers' limited experience with cultural diversity cannot be remedied fully with literature, videotape, or lecture alone. Results from data will help analyze the contribution of international education to the multicultural training that enhances teacher preparation programs.

Impact of International Education Experiences

There are at least three primary areas in which international education is considered to have an impact (Kauffman, Martin, and Weaver, 1992): intellectual development, international perspectives, and personal development.

Research literature that evaluates the impact of international education experiences on US college students shows that participants experience positive changes, including:

- increased intellectual development, including gains in acquisition of a second language (Opper, Teichler, and Carlson, 1990; Freed, 1995; Whalen, 1996; Akande and Slawson, 2000; DeDee and Stewart, 2003)
- enhanced international perspectives, sometimes known as global-mindedness, such as increased understanding of cultural differences (Standeven, 1988; Opper, Teichler, and Carlson, 1990; Zorn, 1996; DeDee and Stewart, 2003; Dwyer and Peters, 2006)
- experience personal development and transformation such as increased self-confidence and maturity in decision-making (Standeven, 1988; Zorn, 1996; Akande and Slawson, 2000; DeDee and Stewart, 2003; Dwyer and Peters, 2006)

Other research has highlighted the impact of study abroad on the participants' economic and career benefits (Zorn, 1996; Oppen, Teichler, and Carlson, 1990; DeDee and Stewart, 2003; Daly and Barker, 2005; Dwyer and Peters, 2006)

Methodology for Measuring Impact

Studies reported above generally used post-experience surveys to collect self-report data from study abroad participants, without implementing an experimental design. Researchers must also contend with the normal life maturation of the students who participate in international education, resulting in the puzzle of what contributed to the students' perceived personal growth. Was it the international education experience or normal maturation? And did the participants represent a selective population, since by definition they sought out the international study experiences and may have been more inclined than others to report impact?

Hadis (2005) describes research to compensate for these deficiencies. Instead of a pre-test, he used retrospective questioning to evoke the respondents' state of mind at the time of their application to study abroad. Researchers postulated that this approach was suitable for situations that become pivotal in a person's life in ways that enable them to think of themselves before and after the event.

He developed a research design that collected control group data from students who had applied for but had not yet participated in international educational experiences. Researchers also matched respondents according to their ages, in order to control for the maturational factors.

Researchers concluded that the study's retrospective questions and their innovation in methodology are able to compensate for the lack of a pre-test and the absence of a control group. Although maturation certainly accounted for part of the changes, the results encouraged the researchers to infer that it was the experience of studying abroad that explained the positive changes, especially related to global-mindedness and personal development.

Faculty have determined that instruments must be short, clear, and easily administered for purposes of measuring impact of international education programs at Minnesota State University, Mankato. For these purposes, an adaptation of the International Education Survey from the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire School of Nursing is being considered.

Resources

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