

## The Effects of Study Abroad on Teacher Competencies

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**Abstract:** Promoting harmony within diversity has become a goal of both global education and multicultural education. Schools need to help students to become more culturally aware today. Teachers who study abroad can enable diverse groups to live in harmony. Individuals need to promote respect and mutual understanding to function in modern diverse societies. Unless people develop better inter-community relations, a cohesive and tolerant society cannot be created. Study abroad experience helps teachers develop increased cultural awareness as they acquire more cultural knowledge and cultural sensitivity while studying abroad. It has been assumed that teachers who study abroad can work more effectively in an intercultural context. This article attempts to explain whether study abroad experience allows teachers to encourage students to recognize the diversity of cultures and values.

**Keywords:** Study Abroad, Global Education, Diversity, Culture, Mutual Understanding

### 1. Introduction

The outcomes of a study abroad experience for teachers have been widely sought (Shougee, 1999; Diamond, 1991; Bates, 1997). The relationship between study abroad and global awareness, intellectual and academic development, personal development and second language acquisition is well documented. Global knowledge development (Barrows, 1991), change in attitudes (Stephan & Stephan, 1992) and change in behaviors (Brown, 1998) are widely recognized outcomes of study abroad. Teachers who study abroad generally gain higher levels of cross-cultural interest (Teichler & Steube, 1990). Teachers who studied abroad integrate their experiences into their lessons and through multicultural curriculum they enable their students to become more culturally aware.

In global and multicultural education developing respect for others is a sine qua non condition to help students become culturally sensitive. International exposure is a great opportunity for personal and professional growth and study abroad has positive impacts on gaining international experiences. Casale-Ginnola (2000) argues that teachers develop both professionally and personally as a result of their international experiences. She goes on to say that while their professional development includes understanding of the students and enhanced sensitivity, personal development includes heightened confidence.

## 2. Literature Review

The interdependent world we live in necessitates us to live in harmony with other people. Global education has become increasingly significant to be aware of the need to promote harmony within diversity (Cole, 1984). The goals of global education are to recognize that the world is economically, socially and culturally interconnected and interdependent, to recognize that people have different cultural values, aspirations and priorities, and finally to encourage people to engage in international activities that will enable them to live in harmony with different people. Global education gives a focus to understanding of other people and their surroundings, cultural differences, personal preferences and human rights. Furthermore, study abroad helps teachers with second language acquisition, knowledge development and utilization, effective decision making, interaction skills, organization skills, ability to resolve conflicts, presentation skills, appreciate others' skills, adapt to different people and circumstances, and increase participation at events.

Global education aids teachers to develop the below mentioned skills (Casale-Ginnola, 2000):

- a) Active learning strategies employed by the teacher appeal to students
- b) Teachers take more responsibility for their teaching
- c) Teachers can integrate their international experiences into the curriculum
- d) Teachers learn foreign languages with greater ease
- e) Teachers are engaged in a variety of studies and projects to enable students to become more effective.

Carlson et al. (1991) conducted a study to analyze the impact of study abroad experience and they concluded that international experience help individuals develop their language proficiency more easily, they learn more about other cultures and other people and become aware of international issues, they will have a more constructive attitude towards their home country, and finally they will have clear career objectives.

The characteristics of teachers who studied abroad can be listed as:

- a) They can easily adapt to the society they live in and accept differences in people and culture. They can develop interpersonal connections which they can pass on to their students. Bridging international relations might be a reason for global, cultural, and humanistic awareness.
- b) They ease in communicating with others owing to their improved social interaction.
- c) They are more patient and have more empathy with their students.
- d) Study abroad can affect teachers' skills, perceptions and perspectives.

Individuals see study abroad as a positive experience because it helps them become more tolerant. Teachers who study abroad develop a global view that affects their pedagogy. They attempt to teach without any bias in the classroom. Cushner and Mahon (2002) argue that the world today demands teachers transmit international knowledge and experience. Study abroad can create a positive influence on teachers to increase their international knowledge and experience.

Sandgren et al. (1999) argues that international experience has the potential to globalize teachers' teaching. Their increased global awareness can allow them to change the content of lessons. Through providing references from their experiences they had while studying abroad, they can change their teaching methods. When students are exposed to globally diverse examples, their social awareness enhances and they experience different viewpoints.

Study abroad is a golden opportunity for teachers to expand their experiential awareness (Boyd, 2000). They can integrate their experiences into their lessons and motivate their students. Stories and pictures of their travel inspire their students and enable them to become more culturally aware individuals. Hultquist (2007) states that schools need to aid students to accept different perspectives; hence, teachers have vital role helping students become more culturally aware.

The role of international experience on the development of classroom teaching skills cannot be underestimated. Teachers teach students about other cultures and enhance their global awareness and they become more enthusiastic about teaching (Wilson, 1984).

### 3. Conclusion

Study abroad offers vast opportunities for professional and personal development. This experience allows teachers to embrace differences, understand complex global community and prepare their students to understand the diversity of the world. It should be clearly realized that we do not live in a homogeneous world anymore; therefore, teachers who studied abroad can address to the changing demographics of society through assisting the students in the understanding of others. It should be borne in mind that when individuals understand each other, they will start to understand global phenomena.

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