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# Visual and Personal Narratives: Telling the Story of Holistic Global Perspective Development Through Short-Term Study Abroad in a Group Cohort

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## Abstract

This study contributes to existing research on study abroad programming by exploring how short-term study abroad experiences develop college students' global citizenship skills. Offering a unique qualitative approach focused on holistic global perspective development through students' visual and personal narratives, this study investigates how college students' lived experiences shape their global perspective, using a three-tiered, semi-structured interview approach. The research question asked is how the lived experience of college students participating in a short-term international education experience shape their global perspective development from a holistic perspective. The framework of cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal perspectives guided the analysis of participant narratives, which included interviews, journals, and photography. Findings from this phenomenological study highlight the benefits of cohort-building, showing how group dynamics and shared experiences enhance global perspective. Additionally, the study emphasizes the importance of pre-departure preparation and critical components like reflection and dialogue during the experience. These elements collectively foster holistic global perspective.

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## **Abstract in Spanish**

Este estudio contribuye a la investigación existente sobre la programación de estudios en el extranjero al explorar cómo las experiencias de viaje seminario desarrollan las habilidades de ciudadanía global de los estudiantes universitarios. Ofreciendo un enfoque cualitativo único centrado en el desarrollo de una perspectiva global holística a través de las narrativas visuales y personales de los estudiantes, este estudio investiga cómo las experiencias vividas de los estudiantes universitarios influyen a sus perspectivas globales, utilizando un enfoque de entrevista semiestructurada de tres niveles. La pregunta de investigación preguntó cómo la experiencia vivida de los estudiantes universitarios que participan en una experiencia de viaje seminario influye al desarrollo de sus perspectivas globales desde una perspectiva holística. El marco de las perspectivas cognitiva, intrapersonal e interpersonal guió el análisis de las narrativas de los participantes, que incluyeron entrevistas, diarios y fotografías. Los resultados de este estudio fenomenológico enfatizan los beneficios de la formación de cohortes, mostrando cómo la dinámica del grupo y las experiencias compartidas mejoran la perspectiva global. Además, el estudio enfatiza la importancia de la preparación antes de partir y componentes críticos como la reflexión y el diálogo durante la experiencia. Estos elementos promueven colectivamente la perspectiva global holística.

## **Abstract in French**

Cette étude contribue aux recherches existantes sur les programmes d'études à l'étranger en explorant comment les expériences de voyage de courte durée développent les compétences mondiales des étudiants. Proposant une approche qualitative unique axée sur le développement d'une perspective globale holistique à travers les récits visuels et personnels des étudiants, cette étude examine comment les expériences vécues des étudiants façonnent leur perspective globale, à l'aide d'une approche d'entretiens semi-structurés en trois niveaux. La question de recherche posée est de savoir comment l'expérience vécue des étudiants participant à un voyage de courte durée façonne le développement de leur perspective globale d'un point de vue holistique. L'analyse des récits des participants, incluant des entretiens, des journaux intimes et des photographies, s'est appuyée sur les perspectives cognitives, intrapersonnelles et interpersonnelles. Les résultats de cette étude phénoménologique soulignent les avantages de la constitution de cohortes, montrant comment la dynamique de groupe et les expériences partagées enrichissent la perspective globale. De plus, l'étude souligne l'importance de la préparation avant le départ et des éléments essentiels comme la réflexion et le dialogue pendant l'expérience. Ces éléments favorisent collectivement une perspective globale holistique.

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## **Keywords**

Faculty-led cohort model; global perspective; holistic student development; short-term study abroad; visual narratives

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## **1. Introduction**

“It is within our differences that we are both most powerful and most vulnerable, and some of the most difficult tasks of our lives are the claiming of differences and learning to use those differences for bridges rather than as barriers between us.” Lorde (2020, p. 173)

Multiple factors have led to a world of cultural diversity requiring individuals to identify, accept, and interact with difference. Technological advancements have made the world, with all its diversity, more accessible. In turn, globalization has made the world increasingly interdependent. This accessibility and interdependence have created increased and varied interactions with culturally different others. Braskamp (2007) noted the inescapability of encountering others with very different cultural backgrounds, perspectives, and customs. Unfortunately, discrimination, prejudice, and hate crimes are increasingly prevalent worldwide, as societies grow more polarized and extreme ideologies deepen divisions among people (Barrett et al., 2013; Kellerman, 2012). These realities highlight the importance of individuals possessing the ability to understand and accept difference.

## **2. Student Global Learning and Development**

Deardorff (2006) identified that awareness, valuing, and understanding of cultural differences, experiencing other cultures, and awareness of one’s own culture were the top three common elements necessary for developing cultural awareness. Possessing cultural awareness means not only recognizing that multiple perspectives exist but equally valuing these perspectives. Bhawuk and Brislin (1992) formulated that “to be effective in another culture, people must be interested in other cultures, be sensitive enough to notice cultural differences, and then also be willing to modify their behavior as an indication of respect for the people of other cultures” (p. 416). In addition to awareness related to culture, individuals also need to possess cultural sensitivity related to others or develop a more complex worldview. Consequently, how one develops these skills is necessary for recognizing and accepting difference.

In the field of higher education, student learning outcomes centering around the development of cultural awareness and creating global citizens has moved from a “should do” to a “must do” (Stoner et al., 2014). National and international organizations have recommended that preparing future college graduates for the challenges of a global society is an imperative for institutions of higher education. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) highlighted education as the tool for global citizenship development. UNESCO (2015) outlined this initiative through Global Citizenship Education (GCED), serving to frame the development of important competencies such as critical thinking, empathy, and respect. These skills aim to enable learners to proactively face global challenges, practice tolerance and inclusivity, as well as to create a more secure world (UNESCO, 2015). The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU), a leading national association focused on the vitality and quality of undergraduate education, stated that colleges and universities must identify “ways to provide students with meaningful understanding, engagement, and experience with global issues” (Nair & Henning, 2017, p. V). Students must equally have the knowledge and skills to contribute to a global workplace. Employers are seeking employees who not only exhibit cultural awareness but show that they have exposure to different cultures and different attitudes while also demonstrating a willingness to work in different ways (Jones, 2013; Stoner et al., 2014).

Pappamihiel (2004) stressed that coursework alone is insufficient in developing the global perspective necessary to succeed in this global environment. Global perspective embraces a holistic student development reflecting how a student thinks, how they see themselves, and how they relate to others (Braskamp et al., 2009). Colleges and universities have incorporated study abroad initiatives into curriculum to achieve the learning outcome of global perspective development. With support for study abroad as a means of advancing a more global perspective, students studying abroad for a full year had a significant impact on global perspective development (Dwyer, 2004; Kehl & Morris, 2007). The Institute for International Education’s (IES) Open Doors tracks students who study abroad by term lengths and based on the Open Doors data, Dwyer (2004) summarized that the duration of study abroad programming by American students has been steadily declining. Short-term study abroad programs—those lasting less than a semester—have become increasingly popular since the early 2000s, representing the fastest-growing segment of study abroad options (Wynveen et al., 2012). In 2000/2001 academic year, 7.4% of U.S. students studying abroad participated in programs lasting fewer than eight

weeks (NCES, 2021). By the 2020/2021 academic year this number grew exponentially to 15.8% (IIE, 2023). This calls into question whether a shorter international experience can provide students with a positive impact on their global perspective development.

Stoner et al. (2014) defined study abroad as an educational experience where active engagement and cultural immersion are central, emphasizing that students develop a global perspective when immersed in the host culture. In such programs, students typically have basic language proficiency, many faculty members are from the host country, most coursework occurs in the local language, and students live in culturally integrative housing. The research presented in this study focuses on short-term programs under 30 days, which do not require proficiency in the host country's language. Equally, in programs of this length, students typically do not engage in coursework necessitating foreign language skills, nor are they navigating the host environment independent of their travel companions or faculty leader. Faculty from the home campus accompany students, and housing is generally shared with other students from the home country in hotels or dormitories, rather than immersed within the local culture.

The role of faculty, group dynamics within the cohort, and housing arrangements are pivotal yet debated aspects of fostering a global perspective in short-term study abroad programs. Whatley et al. (2021) highlighted that faculty interaction is crucial to student learning and development, providing guidance, context, and academic structure; however, it can also limit students' engagement with the host culture, as students may rely on their instructors instead of exploring independently. Whatley et al. (2021) further observed that larger program sizes often negatively affect students' global perspective development. This may be attributed to students "cocooning"—engaging in social activities primarily within their cohort, which restricts authentic, immersive experiences in the host environment. Conversely, Whatley et al. (2021) found that students living with host families exhibited significantly greater growth in global perspective, likely because this arrangement provides direct daily interaction with the host culture and fosters a deeper understanding of cultural nuances. In contrast, staying in housing with fellow students from the home country may reinforce social isolation from the local community, limiting opportunities for cultural immersion and personal growth. Thus, housing choices and faculty involvement present complex factors that can either enhance or hinder the development of students' global perspectives during short-term study abroad experiences and merit further research.

Thoughtful preparation prior to departure and carefully designed components of the short-term study abroad experiences are critical for fostering students' global perspective. Reuter and Moak (2022) found that integrating key elements—such as building relationships with the host community, engaging in experiential learning, and providing comprehensive pre-departure preparation—can significantly enhance students' ability to expand their global perspectives. Pre-departure preparation allows students to set expectations, gain cultural awareness, and develop practical skills that enable them to navigate new environments confidently. Chang (2019), along with Gray et al. (2018) and Reuter and Moak (2022), stressed that reflection opportunities are essential within these programs, as they allow students to revisit and critically assess previously held beliefs and knowledge. Reflection and dialogue, both during and after the experience, promotes a deeper understanding of cultural differences and encourages students to retain and internalize new insights. Additionally, effective program design should incorporate meaningful intercultural interactions and structured activities that challenge students to step out of their comfort zones. Engle and Engle (2003) outlined the importance of contact with the host culture, coupled with mentoring, to guide and inform the learning process. By thoughtfully combining these elements, short-term international academic programs can create a rich learning environment that supports the development of well-rounded global perspective.

Scholars have argued that a more holistic approach to student development and educational research is necessary to ensure that students develop the skill set needed to tackle the intricacies created by the realities of a global environment (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). There are limited studies focused on the holistic and global learning development experienced as students study abroad (Braskamp et al., 2009; Engberg, 2013; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005; Steinberg, 2002). Braskamp et al. (2014) stated that an individual's cognitive (mind), intrapersonal (sense of self), and interpersonal (relationships with others) development are fostered holistically rather than departmentally. These three domains are illustrated as interconnecting circles, emphasizing that development of mind, sense of self, and relationships with others do not occur in isolation (Research Institute for Studies in Education, 2017).

The Institute of International Education (IIE) report, *Gaining an Employment Edge* illustrated the positive impact of study abroad on career prospects in the United States (Farrugia & Sanger, 2017). The report from IIE identified fifteen 21st-century workforce skills and clustered these skills into the

three domains of global perspective. Workforce skills such as curiosity, problem solving, and confidence align with the domain of cognitive. Workforce skills associated with the domain of intrapersonal competencies include self-awareness, adaptability, and tolerance for ambiguity. With the domain of interpersonal competencies, communication and teamwork match as workforce skills (Farrugia & Sanger, 2017). These clusters are identified in the table below.

**TABLE (1)**  
21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SKILLS ALIGNED BY DOMAINS OF GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Domain	21st Century Skill
Intrapersonal Competencies	Intercultural Skills Flexibility/Adaptability Self-Awareness Tolerance of Ambiguity Work Ethic
Cognitive Competencies	Curiosity Confidence Problem Solving Language Skills Course/Major Knowledge Technical/Software Skills
Interpersonal Competencies	Interpersonal Skills Communication Teamwork Skills Leadership Skills

This study uses the three competencies of global perspective development to analyze participants' memories and narratives, examining whether students who engaged in meaning-making activities during a short-term international academic experience demonstrated growth in their global perspective.

### 3. Research Design and Sample

This phenomenological study explored the development of global perspective experienced by undergraduate college students participating in a faculty-led, group cohort model, short-term study abroad program. The overarching research question explored in this study was: How does the lived experience of college students participating in a short-term international education experience shape their global perspective from a holistic development standpoint? A phenomenological study looks at engagement with a phenomenon and attempts to derive meaning from that encounter (Crotty,

1998). The phenomenon under consideration for this research was a faculty-led, group cohort model, short-term study abroad experience. We collected data from individuals who experienced the phenomenon of these types of short-term study abroad experiences and who could identify the essence of the experience. As researchers, our aim was not to impose our own interpretations on the participants' lived experiences. Instead, we strived to describe the meaning and understanding that participants attributed to the experience (Flood, 2010; Tuohy et al., 2013). By centering the perspectives and voices of the participants, we ensured that the findings reflected the essence of their lived realities, as they understood and articulated them.

All participants in the study attended a private, four-year, liberal arts university in the Midwest and participated in an international education experience over the month of January (J-term). Faculty members from the institution led these international education experiences. For each international education experience, students received credits and a letter grade. The university identified 208 undergraduate students participating in 10 unique international destinations over the specified J-term. Prior to reaching out to the participant pool, we secured support from the faculty leaders escorting the undergraduate students. We sent an email to the faculty leader for all 10 destinations seeking cooperation and requesting access to syllabi and j-term itinerary information. We then sent a direct solicitation to the 208 students via email. The email to students described the purpose of the study, the interview parameters, and personal contact information for a follow up conversation. Once we established contact, we arranged a personal meeting to review the informed consent document, answer questions, share information, and verify that the participant was willing to engage in the study. From these activities, 11 students chose to participate in the study. Demographic information about the participants and their chosen j-term experiences are identified in Table (2). The six international education experiences pursued are identified in Table (3).

**TABLE (2)**  
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Pseudonym	J-Term Experience	Class Standing	Age	Gender	Hometown Population	Previous International Travel	GPA
Alexandra	Western Europe	Senior	21	Female	Suburban	Yes	3.28
Ben	South America	Junior	21	Male	Rural	Yes	3.02

Daniella	Northern Africa	Junior	20	Female	Rural	Yes	3.55
Elizabeth	Eastern Europe	Sophomore	19	Female	Rural	Yes	4.00
Gloria	Southern Africa	Sophomore	20	Female	Rural	Yes	3.86
James	The Caribbean	Sophomore	20	Male	Rural	Yes	3.12
Julia	South America	Junior	19	Female	Urban	Yes	3.76
Lindsey	South America	Senior	21	Female	Suburban	Yes	3.77
Paul	South America	Junior	20	Male	Suburban	Yes	2.97
Ruth	Eastern Europe	Senior	20	Female	Urban	Yes	3.70
Zoey	South America	Senior	26	Female	Urban	No	3.11

**TABLE (3)**

J-TERM SEMINAR DESTINATIONS AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Destination	Trip Length (days)	Number of Participants	Living Accommodations	Female to Male Ratio
Eastern Europe	15	19	Residence Hall	13:6
Northern Africa	15	13	Hotels	7:6
South America	19	20	Host Families	14:6
Southern Africa	17	13	Hotels	11:2
The Caribbean	13	20	Hotels	12:8
Western Europe	16	14	Hotels	6:8

Following Seidman's (2013) recommendation, a three-tiered, semi-structured interview process was employed to integrate the three dimensions of global perspective—cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal—into the interview format. To place the participants' study abroad experiences in the context of their life histories (Seidman, 2013), the first interview explored the participants' backgrounds, establishing a foundation for cognitive development. The second interview examined each participant's J-term experience, focusing on how this experience shaped intrapersonal and interpersonal growth. For the third interview, we asked participants in the study to bring 3-5 photographs that captured the essence of the j-term experience for them. These visual documents served as tools to prompt reflection on significant aspects of their journey and to facilitate the discussion and verification of previously collected details.

Participants described the details of each photo and explained why the selected image encapsulated their international education experience. Kortegast et al. (2019) surmised, participant-generated visual methods, such as those used in this study, enhance qualitative research by adding depth and richness to the data. Visual documents, along with the discussions they inspired, were analyzed for identifiable themes. We collected additional data sources including journals, j-term itineraries, and syllabi from each participant in this study. Participants' journals added clarity of itineraries and syllabi, while also providing support of developed themes.

## **4. Data Analysis**

Considering the research question and conceptual framework, we read, reviewed, and coded all the transcripts, journals, visual documents, syllabi, and j-term itineraries. As we analyzed the syllabi, we noted that faculty had built reflection and dialogue into each of the international education experiences. Students on each of the j-term experiences engaged in reflective practices that required them to describe, examine, and articulate their learning experiences. Guided questions prompted students to critically examine their experiences, encouraging them to apply flexibility, embrace ambiguity, nurture curiosity, and uncover new personal strengths and challenges. Organized group meetings facilitated dialogue about the encounters, activities, and events of the trip. These meetings, scheduled or impromptu depending on the j-term itinerary and group dynamics, provided opportunities for students to express their expectations of the new culture, articulate and appreciate cultural differences, and share any frustrations they encountered.

The three-interview approach proved highly effective in exploring not only what the short-term study abroad experience meant to each participant but also in revealing their global perspectives. Throughout the interviews, participants shared insights that reflected their personalities, insecurities, and sources of pride. Discussions often expanded on developmental themes participants had recorded in their reflection journals, offering deeper context and reflection. The international education experience clearly had a meaningful impact, which participants were able to process and articulate through this structured interview process.

Participants maintained journal entries throughout the short-term study abroad experience, with prompts designed to encourage reflection on their observations, emotions, and learning. These prompts guided students to

document their expectations, cultural encounters, and personal challenges, emphasizing their thoughts and reactions to new experiences. While the terms 'global perspective development,' 'critical thinking,' and 'emotional intelligence' were not explicitly defined in the instructions, the prompts encouraged reflective practices aligned with these concepts, such as analyzing cultural differences, considering alternative perspectives, and identifying personal growth. After conducting three interviews with each of the 11 participants, we noted variability in journal content. Some participants focused primarily on recounting itineraries, while others demonstrated deeper critical thinking and emotional intelligence through their reflections. This disparity reflects the diverse levels of global perspective development participants brought into the experience. Additionally, most participants had prior international travel experience, though its nature and extent varied widely. Almost all the participants had traveled internationally before, most with their families, though a couple of participants traveled through a school-sponsored trip and a few through previous j-term seminar experiences. At least one participant had never been on an airplane. A few of the participants had studied a foreign language, but there was consensus that their language skills did not prove effective when tested. This diversity in backgrounds further influenced how they approached and articulated their study abroad experiences in their journals.

We used NVivo 11 Plus software (QSR, 2015) to organize and code all data collected. We coded all data elements applying the three domains of the conceptual framework – cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development. Once initial coding was complete, we further reviewed and refined the codes into preliminary themes representing a common idea as suggested by Creswell (2013). As stated, the global perspective of each participant in this study was unique. Provided here are exemplary statements from select participants to demonstrate each theme. Once we identified the themes, the process of interpretation began where we compared and contrasted themes with the current research literature on the topic to make sense of the data (Creswell, 2013). As this is a phenomenological study, the focus of this part of the data analysis process was to get to the essence of study abroad experience for each participant.

## **5. Trustworthiness**

A limitation of this study was that all 11 participants in this study were Caucasian. NCES (2021) reported that 68.3% of students that study abroad are

White. Statistically, approximately a third of students studying abroad are students of color. This study was not able to capture the lived experience of any students of color.

We made every attempt to ensure that this research study respected the validation guidelines for a qualitative study established by Lincoln and Guba (1985). To ensure credibility, we used triangulation and member checking. Identified themes that emerged in this study utilized data from multiple sources, including interviews, journal entries, visual documents, syllabi, and j-term itineraries. Additional credibility came from member checking, as we reviewed collected data with participants in the final interview and shared all final transcripts with participants to ensure accuracy. Confirmability shows that results can be corroborated by other researchers and are not shaped by researcher bias. Bracketing works to eliminate the judgement of the researcher, allowing open mindedness to reveal the hidden truths (Crotty, 1998; Flood, 2010; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The use of bracketing in this research study allowed data collection and analysis to truly reflect the essence of the participants' global perspective development through a short-term study abroad experience and minimized researcher bias.

## 6. Results

Through data analysis, we identified four overarching themes with supporting sub-themes that addressed the research question. Three themes emerged as a representation of each of the three domains of the conceptual framework. One additional theme highlighted how the group experience impacted global perspective development. All the themes with supporting sub-themes are outlined in Table (4) and elaborated in the next four subsections.

**TABLE (4)**

THEMES AND SUB-THEMES ANSWERING THE OVERARCHING RESEARCH QUESTION

<b>Themes and Sub-Themes Specific to a Domain of the Conceptual Framework</b>
<b>Theme 1: Demonstrated Cognitive Development</b>
Recognition of the existence of different cultural perspectives
Critical analysis of home culture
Appreciation of the global stage
<b>Theme 2: Intrapersonal Development Exemplified</b>
Learning who I am and what I want to be
Heightened Emotional intelligence

**Theme 3: Interpersonal Development Obtained**

Identifiable impediments to engagement with the host culture

Feeling invested in the new culture

**Theme 4: Traveling with a Group Aids Global Perspective Development**

Learning from peers

Learning to navigate the group experience

The value of friendship

**6.1. Demonstrated Cognitive Development**

Participants in this study showed a progression of cognitive development toward improved global understanding and awareness. Development in this domain first presented itself as students recognized that different cultural perspectives exist. With this awareness, students began to see connections between history, culture, and identity. As participants considered these connections, they became more curious and began to examine their own history, culture, and identity. This development allowed students to take different perspectives into account when drawing conclusions about the world. As they recognized these perspectives and could think critically about global issues, students could appreciate that different cultures have different approaches to situations, and no one approach is better. This development led students to desire more active participation in the global community.

**6.1.1. Recognition of the Existence of Different Cultural Perspectives**

The international education experience allowed participants to recognize that cultural differences exist. Zoey, who had no previous international travel experience, articulated her understanding of cultural difference, “I think I have a deeper appreciation for other people’s cultures and how we’re different.” Alexandra, a first-generation immigrant, noted traveling to her mother’s home country, as well as, traveling internationally with her father who “really wanted to go on trips.” Alexandra felt that her world expanded with this experience. She stated:

I was living in a cornfield, very isolated, and then came to this large place and realized that there’s so much out there that I forgot about. You just forget that other people don’t have the exact same mindset, but when you are engulfed in it, you see a new perspective.

How students developed this appreciation differed, but several students cited learning the history of the country they visited as a means to this development.

Alexandra was very impressed with the history of the culture she visited and how this history shaped the culture. She noted, “[Western European country] had such a deeper rooted history that still applies to them.” Despite traveling internationally with her family, Daniella saw this j-term experience as her first real international travel experience. Through activities on her J-term, Daniella identified the role that history and tradition play in shaping a culture, stating, “Sometimes that’s religion, sometimes it’s dance, sometimes it’s architecture, but there always seems to be a very obvious presence of some sort of history or tradition.” Daniella highlighted this history and tradition with her photograph shown in Figure (1).

**FIGURE (1)**

DANIELLA’S PHOTO OF HISTORY AND TRADITION



Ruth, who in addition to traveling internationally with her family, had studied on one previous J-term experience, also spent time considering cultural identity, imparting her thoughts, “We think of ourselves, our identity. I think of

myself as a young person, a woman, my family is Christian, and I list these things about my identity.” Ruth thought about how she saw herself in contrast to the country that she visited and how individuals in that culture identify, observing, “Their ethnicity, nationality, religion is very different than I think how we would order things.” Recognizing these differences allowed her to expand her understanding of cultural differences and she was able to accept these differences more readily.

### 6.1.2. Critical Analysis of Home Culture

Throughout their study abroad experience, students gained an understanding of the culture they visited. Students could detail history-shaping events and could equally define how those events shaped cultural identity. From this vantage point, students began to look more critically at their own culture. In detailing a historical fact of the Western European country to which she traveled, Alexandra contrasted this with her own culture. She observed, “We have traditions, but it’s not the same. There’s a bigger arch that unites everyone [here].” She expanded on this contrast in her journal, “due to the lack of history (and creativity), the United States does not have a multitude of traditions that would influence our culture.” Elizabeth, who traveled internationally on a ten-day high school graduation trip with her mother, remarked of her own culture, “We really take so much for granted.” James, who traveled internationally on vacation twice with his family but also spent a month traveling internationally with People to People, reiterated a similar sentiment, “I feel like people aren’t really grateful for what they have in the United States, and I feel like everybody’s grateful for what they have in [the Caribbean].” Through the predeparture meetings, James gained valuable insights into the host culture, which helped him engage in critical reflection on his own cultural assumptions. As he interacted with the host culture during his trip, these lessons were reinforced, allowing him to recognize that the sense of gratitude he experienced was a defining characteristic of the country he visited. This understanding enabled him to contrast this cultural trait with his own, deepening his awareness of both cultures.

Interacting with the culture on their international travel experiences helped students probe more deeply into their own culture. Students wondered about the history of their country and began to think about their own cultural identity. A few students reached this stage after experiencing an element of vulnerability by being the individual who was different. Elizabeth identified this feeling of being uniquely identified in a different culture. In her journal she

noted, “I experienced a definite feeling of otherness which isn’t something I’m used to feeling.” Having this reference allowed her to be more perceptive of what this might mean to others whose existence is shaped by this reality. She expanded in her journal:

This experience of being the “other” in the room for once, although it of course doesn’t compare to those who are othered by society in nearly all rooms, allowed me to reflect on perhaps what those people might be feeling who experience this on a more regular basis. It allowed me to think about what it might mean to be the target of stares more often and how I’ve been able to escape them for most of my life.

These experiences of feeling othered show the cognitive development as the participants processed the differences and began to analyze the characteristics of not only the host culture, but of their own culture as well.

### 6.1.3. Appreciation of Global Stage

Having another cultural perspective as a guide, students began to process that differences based on culture were more nuanced than previously suspected. Once participants could take different perspectives into account, recognizing culturally relative solutions began to take shape. Ben had extensive international travel experience having traveled internationally on vacation with family, taken an international high school trip, and spent three weeks overseas with a foreign exchange student who he befriended. Additionally, Ben traveled internationally on a previous J-term. Ben recognized differences between how things worked at home and rather than assume that they should work the same way in the culture he was visiting, he showed the ability to add cultural context to his discovery. Ben revealed:

Not everything we say works and how it should be done is [not] necessarily the case. There are things that we do that work for us because that’s how our whole nation is designed around. It’s hard to force something on another nation even though it seems right.

Exposure to another culture allowed for this cognitive development, but it did not stop there. Now that students recognized the nuances of a global society, they expressed a need to be a part of it. Participants expressed an interest in being more globally minded and being more attentive to global activities. Other students identified the desire to further develop foreign language skills. Daniella expressed a desire to pay more attention to global politics after this J-term experience when a local made her realize how little she

knew. She shared, "It definitely stuck with me, understanding how those countries interact with each other because I had no idea." She elaborated in her journal, "I think that I will make a much larger effort to stay connected and knowledgeable of global news and events as a result of this trip." Lindsey traveled internationally on a previous J-term experience, as well as "resort, beach" family vacations to international locations. Lindsey equally recognized the narrow view of the world that she had going into the trip stating, "There's a lot of people in [South America] that know what's going on politically, economically, socially in the United States, and I didn't know anything about [this country] before I went." This recognition, in turn, stirred a desire to be more globally minded as she went on to share, "I want to try and be an aware global citizen."

## 6.2. Intrapersonal Development Exemplified

The J-term seminar experiences provided many students with the opportunity to become more acquainted with themselves. Students recognized their strengths and weaknesses, and this opened them up to experiences and opportunities that they had not previously considered. Students became more aware of who they were as individuals. As this awareness emerged and students became more confident in who they were, they could better process the world around them, take in the cultural differences, and be curious about those differences. Emotional intelligence is the development of self-awareness, the ability to understand and manage emotions, and the aptitude for recognizing the feelings and perspectives of others (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009). Participants expanded their emotional intelligence, which enhanced their ability to interact with the host culture they encountered.

### 6.2.1. Learning Who I Am and What I Want to Be

Participants with more travel experience prior to their J-term seminar tended to focus on doing more independent travel in the future. These students showed a newfound confidence in their ability to travel independently. Daniella exemplified this, noting that her study abroad experience was a positive influence on her personal development. She noted, "Overall, I think it definitely strengthened and made me a little bit more sure...I know that I could go somewhere by myself." Lindsey similarly felt more comfortable with the possibility of future travel stating "I can travel now, maybe I could do a trip with a couple friends or by myself. I think it opened my eyes in that way." Students with less international travel experience, or students who never had a desire to travel, recognized that international travel might have something to offer them.

Paul, who identified traveling internationally one time with his family, recognized the scope of the world, “I never really saw myself as a travel person...I realized how close-minded I was about it and it’s cool in the Midwest, but there’s a lot of other things out there.” Ben learned a great deal about himself through his study abroad experience. He realized, “I feel like I’m able to be thrown into a culture, for lack of a better term, and being able to figure it out, I feel like I can do that better now.”

### 6.2.2. Heightened Emotional Intelligence

Participants expanded their emotional intelligence as they processed who they were as individuals. Once participants felt more secure of themselves, they were able to process encounters more effectively with the host culture. Much of this development came from the structure of the J-term experiences utilizing journaling and reflection as components of transformative learning. The opportunity to journal and reflect provided students with an avenue to strengthen their processing of the culture and activities. When asked what he valued most about the trip, James indicated, “probably just all the lessons that I learned and most of those came from reflecting on them.” Students were able to ask probing questions that further aided in gaining a deeper understanding and connection to the culture. Gloria, who had taken two international trips with family, talked through her process of taking in other people’s perspective:

It’s like meaning-making. I’m always, why do you think the world operates in this way? I don’t know if it’s a negative thing, but it’s definitely something I do, I prod people into why they think the way they think. And on this trip, people were like, oh, why don’t you think what I think?

Gloria learned a lot about herself while recognizing the existence of altering perspectives. She went on to explain, “It’s just so hard to take yourself out of the shoes of your own background. You want to normalize it to the point that you can understand and relate to it.” This study abroad experience really challenged her views, and, in the end, she really valued what it taught her.

Ruth also exemplified her emotional intelligence, and she identified what she needed to learn, sharing, “I get really uncomfortable in situations in which people aren’t being critical. I need conversations in which I can dissect what’s happening to me and what’s going on in the world around us.” Ruth identified the importance of dialogue as part of her learning process, “I didn’t

feel like I had a full grasp on the reality of what was happening if I wasn't actively engaged in conversation about it immediately after."

Daniella identified the impact of group discussion brought to her experience. "I found it incredibly interesting in our debriefing sessions to hear how the other students had been experiencing the same trip." In addition to developing skills while interacting with her fellow travelers, Daniella also found that interactions with the host culture augmented her learning. Daniella observed, "I think the most meaningful for me were any conversations I had with someone where it was just one-on-one, where I really learned something about the culture and how they experience it."

### 6.3. Interpersonal Development Obtained

Several obstacles curtailed growth in this area. Most obviously, the language barrier between participants and individuals from the host culture deterred students from communicating with the host culture. Culture norms in certain locations minimized the ability of female participants to interact effectively. Participants in this study also recognized that being American came with accommodations meant to make them feel more comfortable, but which prevented them from truly experiencing the culture. Despite these barriers, students were able to adapt and develop using other methods of communicating. As students interacted with the culture, they developed an interest in the activities and problems confronting their host country. Participants in this study showed a desire to stay connected to the host culture in a variety of ways. In other cases, the international education experience allowed students to define future activities and interests that focused on giving back to society. This attention and interest to a more global purpose demonstrates interpersonal development.

#### 6.3.1. Identifiable Impediments to Engagement with Host Culture

The language barrier created obstacles for students to engage with the host culture on a meaningful basis. A few students noted the lack of language skills as a concern prior to departure. This was true for Zoey who indicated, "I don't speak hardly any Spanish. So that was a big barrier that I had to get over." Julia, who previously traveled internationally on a cruise with her family, framed the struggle inherent in not speaking the host country's language, "It was hard to communicate with them but nothing bad happened." Paul also noted frustration with the language barrier, "It was just a little overwhelming, especially because I could not speak any Spanish. It was sometimes hard to

communicate... it wasn't by any means awful; it was just sometimes inconvenient."

Language was not the only deterrent to effective communication with the host culture. Cultural differences also impeded engagement as Daniella noted, "I found it very difficult to communicate and most of that is due to the gender, because I'm a woman." She expanded on this in her journal, writing:

I often have a hard time adjusting to the male-centered culture that exists outside my space [at home]. I expected this difficulty and I often end up feeling as though because it is not my culture, I don't have the right to judge or criticize.

The role of privilege also masked students' ability to engage with the culture. The idea of global citizenship took shape for Daniella who recognized that the host country she visited was more prepared:

I had no idea how global they are, their efforts to become global citizens. I didn't know that it was as much as it is. Most citizens [in Northern Africa] speak at least three or four languages and English is one of those. They oftentimes speak very understandable English. I didn't know that.

Daniella also noted the multilingual nature of the culture in her journal stating, "I was surprised by the number of languages many of the students and people know." Coming from a predominantly English-speaking background, this experience left a mark on her. She realized that, as an American, there was no assumption that she would need to speak their language. It was unsettling, this unspoken privilege, the way it allowed her to remain untouched by the expectations others often faced.

Participants in this study also cited a need to overcome the American stereotype in order to truly engage with the culture. When coming back into the United States following her j-term seminar, Daniella noted that she felt "a weird mix of pride but also embarrassed because there's a lot of privilege with having a U.S. Passport or speaking very fluent English, or anything that to me, is very representative of U.S. culture." Elizabeth noted that in interactions with the host culture, she felt a little greedy. She elaborated:

We were getting so much from them, emotionally, but also, they were giving us gifts and I felt like I haven't done anything for you...it says something about American culture and that we can do really great things.

But with that power that we have, we can also do really exploitative things.

### 6.3.2. Feeling Invested in the New Culture

As a result of these international education experiences, students developed a sense of being invested in the culture to which they had been exposed. Elizabeth felt her world grow because of her international experience. She stated:

I think that I focus a lot on the small-scale – my hometown, the town where I go to school, this state, because that’s what you see firsthand. But going to this foreign country, it made me realize that we have so many other stakes in the game.

She recognized how these countries interacted and depended on each other. After exploring the country and developing a relationship with individuals from this host culture, Elizabeth felt a level of concern for the culture moving forward. Elizabeth shared, “I was invested in something that I would never have been invested in before...I will still check the news to see how [this country] is doing. In a few months and year, I think I will.” This interaction with another culture sticks with her to this day, “I find myself comparing things that happen today to things that happen there.” Her journal echoed this when she identified that conversations “made me feel newly invested in issues.”

Developing social concerns for others was an outcome of this trip for Gloria. She realized:

I think I learned that in my career, I need to do something that involves helping people who have fallen on hard times, or not so much that as not having the same privileges that I’ve had, and I kind of always thought that, but I think this trip really solidified that.

### 6.4. Traveling with a Group Aids Global Perspective Development

The group experience played a pivotal role in enhancing global perspective development across all three domains. Traveling with peers provided participants with opportunities to cultivate cognitive skills such as curiosity, as they engaged in shared activities and discussions, and confidence, as they supported each other in navigating unfamiliar environments. Students developed intrapersonal awareness as they traveled. Students developed greater self-awareness by reflecting on their individual responses to navigating the challenges of traveling with a group and demonstrated flexibility in

adapting to the group dynamics. The interpersonal domain was equally enriched, as students enhanced their communication skills by articulating their thoughts and experiences within the group and fostered teamwork by collaboratively addressing the complexities of travel logistics and cultural immersion. Without the group experience, participants noted that their ability to deeply process and connect with the host culture would have been significantly diminished. Ultimately, the shared journey transformed individual learning into a collective growth process.

#### 6.4.1. Learning from Peers

Participants noted that the opportunity to meet and spend time with a group of individuals who they did not normally engage with or encounter at the university allowed discovery of perspectives to which they would not have otherwise been exposed. Students came to the group from a variety of academic majors. Given their differing areas of study, students in the group provided unique viewpoints. Participants noted that the varying perspectives provided within the group experience was equally as enriching as engaging with the cultures they visited. From a cognitive development standpoint, the group experience solidified growth through conversation that would not have been a factor if students had studied abroad alone. Gloria stated about the role her group played in her development, “We ended up having some deep discussions on our own about things we were learning, which is just really cool...we’d talk about the deeper implications of the [experience].”

The group experience allowed Daniella to augment her learning about the culture she was visiting. Daniella wrote in her journal that she learned a great deal from the other students on her trip:

One of the things I learned is to lean into the support and familiarity of your peers. They are most likely experiencing the trip in either the same way, or pretty similar to, you do not need to be afraid to talk to each other about it.

Being able to hear the vantage point from other individuals was valuable to Daniella. She stated, “Seeing how other people interpreted the same thing that I experienced...it was interesting hearing what they had to say, what stood out to other people compared to me is always kind of interesting I think.” Her journal expanded on this concept, stating, “They helped me gain a broader, more inclusive view of the countries and their cultures.” Elizabeth also indicated learning from her fellow travelers on the trip. When referring to another

student's viewpoint of something experienced on the trip, Elizabeth stated, "it was kind of a critique, but at the same time, it was a whole other perspective that I never would have gotten." When sharing a photograph from the trip of her friends, Ruth noted that she learned from the friends she made in the group:

[He] always came from his education and history background, [She's] always talking about sociology, [She] gives us a global context, I was talking about political institutions and then [He] could talk about rhetoric and media all day. So, we had a good, diverse perspective in that friend group.

#### 6.4.2. Learning to Navigate the Group Experience

Several participants indicated not knowing anyone in the group with whom they traveled. This lack of familiarity provided anxiety for a few participants going into the trip, but through living and learning with this group, they developed a greater understanding of themselves. Angst over the group experience presented itself prior to departure for a number of participants in this study. Alexandra admitted that prior to departure, she worried about "the people on the trip. That I wouldn't get along with them or feeling alienated." Daniella had a similar concern, "I don't know these students that are going on this, and I've always had a difficult time making close friendships...so I was afraid that I was going to feel very alone on the trip." Elizabeth also expressed unease, "I was really concerned with finding people to spend time with, that was the main concern going in and just finding out who my roommate is going to be, and if I don't click with anyone."

Elizabeth indicated that prior to the study abroad experience, she was very worried about traveling with the group and being able to make friends. She shared, "I felt like I did better socially than I thought I would." Elizabeth provided a photograph of her friends made on the trip that exemplifies Elizabeth's interpersonal development:

These are the two girls that I spent the most time with...I was kind of concerned about meeting people to spend time with both of them were SO nice and we clicked really well, and I just think this picture is funny and I think that it exemplified how much fun we had with each other, and it was really nice to have those girls.

Participants recognized that when a group of students travel together for an extended period, they will likely encounter conflict. They were forced to resolve this conflict largely on their own. Elizabeth recognized the shortcomings

of traveling with a group and encountering personality differences, “We’re college students, so we would be a little snotty...really gossipy. I mean, I’m not proud of it.” Alexandra also pointed out conflict in her group and expressed discomfort with the way the group responded but also indicated that she was equally displeased with her own reaction. She shared, “My negative was how other people responded to it and that I also didn’t really do anything about it. I was a bystander and kind of watched it happen.”

Daniella also learned more about herself and how she interacted in a group setting. She developed a sense of tolerance and accommodation, stating “I learned just how much more amenable to the group I can be without thinking about it.” Ben developed empathy for other students as they experienced new challenges on the South American J-term. In speaking of a fellow student overcoming obstacles on the trip, Ben mentioned, “I’m proud of her for going out of her comfort zone.” Students were also able to celebrate each other’s successes. Paul stated, “There were some people that were pretty scared of doing that part. Just seeing them do it too was pretty cool.”

#### 6.4.3. The Value of Friendship

Participants in this study noted that interpersonal relationships developed within the group were one of the more enriching components of the experience. Ruth highlighted, “my tightest, most personal group of friends now are girls that I met on my J-term last year and we came back from that trip and now we are best friends.” Daniella also noted, “everyone was amazing. I think a lot of us will, if not the whole group, will remain in contact.” Lindsey recognized developing valuable relationships on the trip, “I made some really good friends on the trip.” Lindsey shared a video that showcased these relationships.

Reviewing photographs with the participants that highlighted their most valued components of the study abroad experience, revealed that all the participants interviewed, shared at least one photograph that featured the entire j-term seminar group. When presenting her group photo, Alexandra stated, “we’re all relatively new to each other. But we were bonding already by this point. It’s fun to look back at that and see how far we’ve come.” Ben’s group image featured:

Just another time where we went out and had fun. I just took a picture of it. Just kind of signifies to me...going out, having fun with the group, not doing something that’s planned, just kind of a spontaneous thing.

Elizabeth selected a group photo because “that night was also a time when all of us bonded.” Paul chose a group photo because “it was really funny. I guess it kind of sums up the trip pretty well, just being pretty light-hearted with these people.”

## **7. Discussion and Implications**

Few studies exist probing into the how and why students see their holistic global perspective development in the way that they do. (Braskamp et al., 2009; Engberg, 2013; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005; Steinberg, 2002). Explaining the process that students undertake to accomplish the learning outcomes associated with an international education experience provides valuable insight into the benefits and challenges of global learning programs. Understanding these benefits and challenges leads to a better alignment of university goals for global perspective development and study abroad outcomes. Holistic student development emphasizes three domains of development: development of the mind, sense of self, and relationships with others. Development in one domain does not happen in isolation (RISE, 2017). In IIE’s report, developing skills through study abroad were presented in terms of cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal competencies. Findings in the IIE report made a strong connection between holistic global perspective development through study abroad and employability (Farrugia & Sanger, 2017). The 11 participants in this study provided personal narratives to support the holistic global perspective development possible through a short-term study abroad experience.

Given the importance of students developing the skills needed to effectively navigate an expanding global environment, it is essential to understand and enhance those learning experiences to provide a global perspective. This study amplifies the voices of students engaged in short-term study abroad experiences, showcasing the comprehensive global perspective development that can result from thoughtfully prepared programs. This study reiterates the need for short-term study abroad programs to have carefully designed elements—including pre-departure preparation, structured reflection, and meaningful dialogue—to ensure global perspective development.

Incorporating synthesis opportunities like reflection and dialogue into study abroad programs is essential to help students process their experiences and foster global perspective (Baumgartner, 2001; Calleja, 2014; Mezirow, 2000; Whatley et al., 2021). Journaling is a particularly effective tool for this purpose.

Participants in this study engaged in journaling throughout their study abroad experience, allowing them to process and reflect on their experiences as they unfolded. Guided questions encouraged students to thoughtfully reflect on their experiences, fostering adaptability, openness to uncertainty, intellectual curiosity, and self-discovery. Panvini (2020) introduced the concept of guided journaling to encourage deeper thinking among study-abroad participants. A guided journal can include various prompts that engage cognitive processing and connect to the program's learning objectives. Additionally, guided journaling promotes reflection and allows students to address personal concerns, thus supporting intrapersonal development.

Photo elucidation can be a powerful tool in short-term study abroad programs to enhance global perspective. Participants in this study used photographs from their j-term seminar to deepen their personal narratives, adding another layer of understanding to their experiences. Gray et al. (2018) highlights that photography offers a unique way to capture authentic student voices, allowing others to see the world through their eyes. Reuter and Moak (2022) further emphasizes that photographs capture the essence of a moment, and discussing these images helps students make sense of unfamiliar experiences. By incorporating photography into short-term study abroad programs and providing structured opportunities for critical discussion, students can reflect on how these images relate to program learning objectives and their personal growth. This process not only strengthens intrapersonal competencies but also supports the development of comprehensive global perspective.

Finally, this study underscores the value of cohort-based programs, highlighting how shared experiences within a group can further enhance students' global perspective by providing a collaborative and supportive learning environment. The group experience can significantly enhance global perspective in short-term study abroad programs by fostering cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal growth. Farrugia and Sanger (2017) found that teamwork and leadership skills were often underdeveloped in study abroad participants and emphasized the need for more structured program elements to address this gap. Incorporating well-designed group experiences is one effective approach to develop these skills. Participants in this study demonstrated how the group experience supported global perspective development, as Iskhakova et al. (2022) noted that students with high global perspective levels may not significantly increase their own perspective during study abroad but serve as role models and cultural integrators, positively influencing others' development.

Johnson (2018) advocated for activities that challenge students, encouraging them to step out of their comfort zones in empowering ways. Having a supportive cohort encourages students to engage in experiences they might not pursue independently, while discussions among group members provide additional context and perspective. Lomicka and Ducate (2021) highlighted that engaging with diverse viewpoints—particularly those of peers on the trip—facilitates knowledge application, allowing students to validate ideas, embrace new perspectives, and consider alternative viewpoints. By encouraging shared reflection and dialogue, the group experience not only broadens understanding but also nurtures self-awareness and relationship-building skills essential for global perspective.

## **8. Conclusion**

Based on the themes that emerged in this study, we make the following recommendations for study abroad programming to support the holistic global perspective development of students. Outlined here are recommendations to support cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development. Additionally, the group experience is identified as augmenting the development of holistic global perspective development.

Study abroad organizers or faculty members creating curriculum should provide historic and cultural knowledge base to maximize cognitive development. Participants in this study, who identified learning a great deal about the culture and history of their international destination, were curious about the host culture which inspired reflection on their own culture as discussed in the first theme related to demonstrated cognitive development. These actions led to a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of nations and cultures. Building this cognitive development into the curriculum of the international education experience allows students to experience the culture more profoundly and creates a more complex view of culture.

Integrating reflection, dialogue, and photo elucidation into the curriculum of the study abroad experience enhances the intrapersonal and interpersonal development as exemplified by the second and third themes outlined in this study. A factor contributing to this achievement was the utilization of guided journaling and group discussions that allowed participants the space to reflect, process, and grow as they considered what they were experiencing. Integrating these components into the curriculum of the international education experience, enables global perspective development.

As part of the third theme, participants identified that interaction with another culture created an increased level of social responsibility. Any opportunity to create student collaboration and engagement with the host culture would enhance a short-term study abroad experience. Designing a short-term study abroad experience that utilizes faculty and student housing from the host culture creates a more immersive experience. Given the brevity in country, maximizing immersion in the host culture is important. Incorporating additional or more in-depth engagement with the host culture enriches the experience for students and promotes global perspective development.

The final theme revealed the impact of the group experience on global perspective development. Understanding the role that group dynamics plays on the international education experience allows faculty members to embrace it and build it into the curriculum. Creating activities that develop unity within the group and ensure a trusting environment so students can engage with their travel companions in a safe and secure environment, allows for global perspective to unfold.

Holistic global perspective development is possible from a short-term international education experience. Short-term study abroad experiences that include critical reflection as well as a group of travelers can further enable students to advance their global perspective. Students traveling with a group develop global perspective as they navigate the group dynamic with strangers, develop relationships with travel companions, and benefit from the insight and learning of travel companions. In the end, these students found more that united them than divided them.

## **Ethical Approval**

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Drake University Institutional Review Board (IRB Proposal ref. 2018-19036).

## **Declaration of Competing Interest**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## **Data Availability Statement**

Due to restrictions from our Institutional Review Board, the data that support the findings of this study are not publicly available due to their containing information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

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