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Recentering Host Siblings, Reimagining Partnerships: A Case Study on Reciprocity and Equity in Study Abroad Programs

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Abstract

This article places young people at the center of knowledge production in study abroad programs. We employ a combination of relational learning and nested community of practice to demonstrate the significant roles that local young people play in cultural exchange, despite the usual marginalization by their parents and other local figures of authority. Using St. Lawrence University-Kenya Semester Program (SLU-KSP) as a case study, we interrogate the disconnects between program design and actual practice in study abroad. The data used in the paper were collected using a combination of methods from more than forty rural host siblings aged between 18-30 years. They were from two different ethnic communities in rural Kenya that have hosted our American undergraduate cultural exchange students for more than ten years. We argue that study abroad practitioners should embrace a cyclical model of cultural exchange and recognize the multilayered nature of local host communities. This would maximize the synergies present, manage expectations, and achieve desired reciprocity towards sustainable partnerships. Our paper therefore contributes to the existing theories on host communities by looking at the host family as a nested community of practice with partly interdependent social categories. Each of these categories, however, has its own agency, domain of knowledge and practices.

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Abstract in Swahili

Makala haya yanawaweka vijana kwenye kiini cha uzalishaji wa maarifa katika programu za kusoma ughaibuni. Tunatumia mseto wa ujifunzaji wa kihusiano na jamii iliyojengeka katika shughuli ili kuonyesha majukumu muhimu ambayo vijana wa eneo hilo hutekeleza katika mabadilishano na maingiliano ya kitamaduni, licha ya kutengwa kwa kawaida na wazazi wao na viongozi wengine wa eneo husika. Kwa kutumia Programu ya Muhula wa Kenya ya Chuo Kikuu cha St. Lawrence (SLU-KSP) kama mradi wa kutafitiwa, tunahoji mitengano kati ya muundo wa programu na mambo halisi yanayofanyika katika programu za kusoma ughaibuni. Data zilizotumika kwenye makala haya zilikusanywa kwa kutumia mchanganyiko wa mbinu kutoka kwa ndugu wenyeji zaidi ya arobaini wa vijijini wenye umri wa kati ya miaka 18-30. Walitoka katika jamii mbili tofauti katika maeneo ya mashambani nchini Kenya ambao wamekuwa wenyeji wa wanafunzi wetu wanaosomea shahada ya kwanza kutoka Marekani wa mabadilishano ya kitamaduni kwa zaidi ya miaka kumi. Tunajadili kuwa wataalamu wa masomo ya ughaibuni wanapaswa kukumbatia mtindo wa mduara wa mabadilishano ya kitamaduni na kutambua matabaka mengi ya jamii za wenyeji. Hii ingeongeza mashirikiano yaliyopo, kudhibiti matarajio, na kufanikisha usawa unaotarajiwa kuelekea ubia endelevu. Kwa hivyo makala yetu inachangia nadharia zilizopo kuhusu jamii wenyeji kwa kuiona familia mwenyeji kama jamii iliyojengeka katika shughuli iliyo na kategoria za kijamii zinazotegemeana kwa kiasi fulani. Kila moja ya kategoria hizi, hata hivyo, ina wakala wake, uwanda wa maarifa na shughuli.

Keywords

Culture brokers; homestay; host siblings; nested community of practice; reciprocity; study abroad

1. Introduction

Nyinyi Mjienjoy Tu, Lakini Mkumbuke ni Kizungu Yetu!
"You Guys Have Fun But Remember It's Because of Our English!"
(NFHS1, Nyeri Homestay Survey, 2021)[1]

In the summer of 2021, the St. Lawrence University-Kenya Semester Program's (SLU-KSP) staff organized a weekend-long meeting for parents from two ethnically different rural communities in Kenya, Africa who have hosted our American students to exchange their hosting experience. As the two groups

[1] We have used pseudocodes in place of actual names throughout the paper for confidentiality.

staged their cultural differences and toured new places, some host parents shared photos and videos of exciting memories from the trip with their children on WhatsApp. Little did they know that these exchanges would provoke our "silent" program partners: the host siblings. One of these siblings sent the quote at the beginning of this paper to her mom, teasing her that the parents on the trip were getting a special treat from the program while it is the siblings who do the "hard" job of hosting during homestay. That is, host siblings serve as culture brokers and mediate communication between the visiting American students and the various categories of people within the local host community by speaking decipherable varieties of English.

Upon reading that message in context, we realized that it was a host siblings' protest about marginalization by the program, despite their significant social and cultural capital and the key roles that they played during hosting. Precisely, the parents and program administrators needed to recognize the value of the host siblings in cultural exchange, and as equal partners of our study abroad program. This protest prompted us to organize a separate trip for host siblings from the two host communities in the summer of 2022. We aimed at immersing them in a similar intercultural space as we do with our students. The trip was part of a bigger research project that examined the following main issues, all of which influence local people's interpretations of their encounters with Westerners.

First, we sought host siblings' understanding of study abroad in relation to the popular interpretations by the local people. This question was important given that visiting white foreigners are commonly associated with research, humanitarian projects, and Christian missionary work. These three categories of visitors often have one-sided interactions with local people either when extracting local cultural knowledge or when promoting their religious beliefs. Moreover, white visitors are often treated with fascination or exoticism; they may be seen as celebrities or outsiders with unique perspectives, leading to different reactions from the local communities.

Our second question was about the roles of host siblings during homestay and their views about our study abroad program. The two questions were relevant given the power differentials entrenched in patriarchal structures within rural communities, which inherently favor older individuals over the youth. At the same time, focusing on siblings' views about our program was an important strategy for getting feedback about the design of our rural

homestay component regarding performing equity and reciprocity with the various constituencies of our local host families.

Lastly, we interrogated the place of English language during rural homestay. Even though requiring local hosts to speak English in their homes is colonial, the question helped us to establish whether there were generational forms of knowledge and experiences exchanged. This kind of cultural capital was richly embedded in the protest quote at the beginning of this paper where a sibling laid claim on the English spoken during homestay.

As we, program staff, interacted with these siblings and reminisced about the weekend spent together as a community, we started reflecting on our program's engagement with local partners. While we had all along thought that the program did its best to engage our host families through the parents, we were surprised to learn that host siblings desired to be more visible. This realization illuminated the multilayered nature of our host communities, and the program's need to manage expectations in its pursuit of reciprocity and equity with local partners.

Broadly speaking, the ongoing discourse in the U.S. on study abroad focuses on building sustainable relationships with local host communities. It calls upon practitioners to rethink community engagement as a cyclical process, and to center reciprocity and equity in the various stages of their program development (Erbstein et al., 2022; Hartman, 2015; Heidebrecht & Balzer, 2020; Long et al., 2022; Wairungu et al., 2022). Building upon our previous research on homestays and community engagement, we argue that it is necessary to recognize the multilayered nature of the host family. Each of its constituent units like children and parents have agency as co-producers of knowledge and experience during homestay. By doing this, we recognize the relational nature of learning, and the synergies produced when the various social categories work together (Britanny et al., 2020; Erbstein et al., 2022; Long et al., 2022).

Of particular interest to us are the host siblings and the crucial roles that they play in cultural exchange. In many study abroad programs, local young people are socially constructed as marginal participants. For instance, the host parents and other adults in our program usually assign their children and other local youth supportive roles during hosting. These adult partners often question young peoples' ability to teach "authentic" culture. The adults also question young peoples' judgments on "safe" places to take the visiting American students. Interestingly, many of our American students often report that they

enjoyed the homestay when there were younger local siblings close to their age. We recorded similar sentiments from local host siblings, which are discussed in section 5. It is therefore important to interrogate the disconnect between program design and actual practice.

Our paper flips the script by recognizing the active roles that local young people play in producing meaningful cultural exchange, especially in contexts where generational differences are significant factors in social interactions. We argue that it is necessary to accord host siblings similar scaffolding as we do to our parents and the visiting American students. This paradigm shift will equip the local young hosts with the necessary know-how for hosting a privileged racial outsider in "safe" and culturally appropriate ways. In the following section, we situate local partnerships in the existing literature on study abroad to contextualize young people as key program partners and co-producers of knowledge.

2. Review of Relevant Literature

2.1. Children and Youth in Study Abroad

The existing literature on study abroad indicates that cultural exchange programs tend to promote student mobility from institutions in the West to non-Western countries (Erbstein et al., 2022; Ficarra, 2019; Heidebrecht & Balzer, 2020; Long et al., 2022; Wairungu et al., 2022). Consequently, Western students are usually more privileged participants and beneficiaries than non-Western host communities. These young people from the West travel long distances not only to learn and experience new cultures but also to connect with young counterparts in their host communities for many reasons. However, the various scholars of study abroad have called upon practitioners to redefine partnerships with the goal of reciprocity at the center. They observe that student-centered approaches have contributed to cultural hegemony and power imbalances between the visiting students from the West and local partners in the non-Western countries. While the need for reciprocity has been acknowledged by many other scholars (e.g., Ficarra, 2019; Hartman, 2015; Schroeder et al., 2009; Schumake and Wendler, 2017), the existing research work has focused more on adults than children and youth.

The lack of scholarly attention on local young people, despite the significant roles that they play in cultural exchange, invites study abroad practitioners to rethink their conceptualization(s) of reciprocity. According to

Long et al., (2022), previous research on study abroad looked at reciprocity as a product to be achieved rather than a commitment to be made. Instead, they argue that reciprocity is a continuous commitment to local partnerships that must be configured and reconfigured over time. Further, they argue that reciprocity is a contextual process that should be co-constructed by the various players involved. Drawing from Dostilio et al.'s (2012) conceptualization of reciprocity as a generative process, Long et al., (2022) emphasizes the collaborative and cyclical nature of reciprocity. Long et al.'s conceptualization recognizes "the interrelatedness of people, the world around them, and the potential synergies that emerge from the relationships" (p. 37).

Generative reciprocity fits well in our paper as it centers young people's voices, their interdependence with other host family members, and the synergies produced in their relationships. To achieve the various aspects of generative reciprocity, Long et al., (2022) propose a four-step iterative and cyclical model that involves, first: creating an inventory of partners and building trust with them. The second stage is listening to local partners to leverage their knowledge and skills and address power issues. The third step is institutional guidance. It involves assessing how institutional policies like international travel advisories, security alerts, and pandemic-related measures impact study abroad and local partners. The fourth and final step is program preparation and integration. This helps in assessing culturally acceptable and equitable ways of compensating local partners for their time and input.

Other recent scholars of study abroad like Erbstein et al., (2022) have made similar observations about integrating equity and reciprocity into all elements of the study abroad program. Specifically, they argue that "the process of re-centering and reimagining local voices must occur throughout all dimensions of the program, including the structure, pedagogy, distribution of resources, community partner engagement, the constitution of student cohorts, and the dynamics of the teaching-team" (p. 78). These scholars' approach to study abroad helps confront traditional hierarchies of knowledge between collaborating instructors and students from the West and non-Western countries. Such an approach will not only help in "decolonizing study abroad pedagogy but can also yield transformative outcomes for everyone involved and further enhance mutual respect, progressive and sustainable community development" (Erbstein et al., 2022, p. 74).

We apply a similar approach to our paper as it helps contend the traditional hierarchies of knowledge within local host communities such as

between youth and the older generations. In this regard, our paper takes a distinct perspective by recognizing the active roles that host siblings, and other local youths play in producing meaningful cultural exchange, especially in contexts where generational differences matter. Including other local youths as co-participants in cultural exchange during homestay is inspired by Ficarra's (2019) work on host communities where she differentiates between intentional and unintentional hosts, both of whom play distinct roles in shaping the experiences of both the visiting American students and local host community.

2.2. Children and Youth in "Post-Colonial" Africa

Broadly speaking, youth in the African continent are the majority of their countries' population and are at the center of societal interactions and transformations (Abbink, 2005; Christiansen et al., 2006; Honwana & Deboeck, 2005; Mains, 2012; Sommers, 2012). However, these scholars observe that youth are always marginalized, a situation that not only renders them invisible, but also vulnerable. In response to this contradiction, scholars of youth like Durnham (2000) argue that youth are an important subject of study since "to pay attention to youth is to pay close attention to the social landscape—to power and agency; public, national and domestic spaces and identities, and their articulation and disjuncture; memory, history, and a sense of change; globalization and governance; gender and class…. among other aspects of our societies" (p. 113).

In many cases, however, youths are portrayed in highly dichotomous ways, e.g., as either perpetrators or victims of social and political movements (Honwana & Deboeck, 2005). While dichotomization is geared towards understanding the youth, scholars of youth in Africa caution against such simplistic approaches as they deny the autonomy, fluidity, and agency of the youth. For instance, Honwana and Deboeck (2005, p. 3) argue:

> Disregarding this multiplicity in the positions of young people, children and youth have been routinely portrayed as innocent and vulnerable, in need of adult protection.…Children and youth are often perceived through opposition to adulthood and as 'people in the process of becoming rather than being'…Here children and adults appear as pre-social and passive recipients of experience.

Other scholars (e.g., Thomas, 2000), echo Honwana and Deboeck in that children and youth occupy multiple positions at the same time making it hard to craft an all-encompassing definition. Consequently, young people who do not

fit well in the dichotomized definitions are considered problematic and a potential risk to society. These perceptions often cause generational conflicts, especially between youth and adult figures of authority. These authorities often seek to contain the youth by "boxing" them into static categories mainly defined by age and other socially ascribed parameters of adulthood like marriage and having a family (Sommers, 2012). While age is a crucial factor in understanding youth and in marking generations, it does not capture the diversity and complexity of youth as a social category. Instead, we adopt Durnham's conceptualization of youth not as a specific age group, but as a historically constructed social shifter. That is:

> Through this lens, relations and constructions of power are refracted, recombined, and reproduced, as people make claims on each other based on age—claims that are reciprocal but asymmetrical. The symbolic dimensions of personhood and agency take on particular saliency as the nature and roles of youth are debated in domestic situations, villages, or in relationship to national society. (Durnham, 2000, p. 114)

2.2. Agency of Children and Youth as Social Shifters

Going by Durnham's definition above, young people are not passive members of their host communities. Instead, they have agencies and are constantly seeking distinct identities and opportunities to shape the society in which they live. Agency in this case refers to, "the act, exercised by people through the various and contradictory discourses through which they are constituted, to 'author' a positioned self or person at particular moments of encounters" (Davies, 1991, as quoted in Durnham, 2000, p. 117). In the case of our research, the domain of knowledge is a prominent site of power struggle between the host siblings, their parents, and other figures of authority. For instance, while host siblings possess valuable knowledge about global popular culture and local places for fun and recreation, parents always assign them supportive roles during homestay. This generational struggle on knowledge, however, is not peculiar to Kenya. In a recent study on Youth, and the Politics of Knowledge in Botswana, Burke (2000, cited in Durnham, 2000, p. 118), "sees forms of knowledge at the heart of distinctions and conflicts between young and old. Youth claim extensive knowledge that may or may not be part of seniors' repertoire—school-based knowledge, knowledge of bureaucracy, scientific agriculture, and the means to 'progress'."

Burke (2000) further elaborates that the historical construction of youth as a social category in Africa is also influenced by broader societal changes, such as urbanization, globalization particularly with the advent of the internet and other technological innovations, and rapid modernization occasioned by economic progress. These processes have transformed the experiences and roles of young people, shaped their identities, aspirations and posed new challenges. Further, these transformative experiences may have inadvertently widened the knowledge gap between the generations.

From the foregoing, practitioners of study abroad need to center the youth as a window or lens through which we can better understand and engage host communities in the non-Western countries. However, the centering of the youth should not mean detaching them from other generational categories that make up their families and the wider host community. Instead, we should acknowledge the relationality, interdependency, and reciprocity aspects of the socio-historical relationships that link the youth with other generational categories (Mannheim, 1952). The concept of reciprocity is important in understanding generational relations in the transmission of knowledge during study abroad. First, the concept "involves the transmission of (material and immaterial) resources and it is imbued with assumptions about morality" (Reynolds et al., 2008, p. 6). The said morality may be about expectations in social behavior and obedience to parents. In return, parents would provide material support to their children.

Second, moral contract is sometimes constrained when children seek and exercise independence over their parents' wishes, leading to generational conflict. During this conflict, older people, on the one hand "express their frustration over this lack of control and complain about the immorality and disrespect of today's younger generation" (Reynolds et al., 2008, p. 8). The youth, on the other hand, lament that their parents are too "traditional" -- meaning they are not moving with time. That is, the parents are culturally conservative and socially rigid to understand young people's interests and life struggles. This generational tension is exacerbated by youths' migration to the city, which is locally perceived as a space of cultural chaos (Sommers, 2012). In addition, youth are seen as culturally lost and people in need of more guidance from adults because of their enthusiastic embrace of foreign cultures like technology, languages, worldviews, clothing, and fluid presentations of their bodies. In this context, the systemic ambivalence of their roles and cultural position in their

host communities either excludes them from key societal functions or co-opts them as passive actors whose actions are dependent on adults' ways of life.

Our paper flips this perception and problematizes the said ambivalence by acknowledging that youth is a relational concept that is shaped by social relationships, interactions, and contexts, particularly the intergenerational one. While they sometimes seek to dissociate from the society they live in, they remain an integral and active social actor in that society. This ambivalence illuminates the complex interplay between their individuality and commonality.

2.3. Children and Youth: Culture Brokers in a Nested Community of Practice

Reflecting on the opening quote where a host sibling laid claim on the English that was spoken during the hosting week, we argue that the various roles of host siblings within the wider community would best be understood through the notion of culture broker. According to Brown (1992; also see Press, 1969), culture brokers are marginal individuals, who serve as bridges, mediators, and innovators and are found in all cross-cultural interactions. They may be from either of the two cultures or even from a third one. They usually straddle these group boundaries making their roles sometimes ambiguous (Jezewski & Sotnik, 2001; Páez & McCarty, 1997; Press, 1969). In her research on the role of beach boys in cross-cultural interactions at the Bakau coast in Gambia, Brown (1992) observes that beach boys functioned as cultural mediators between tourists, the resident population, and the host community. They not only provided translations between English and local language but also guided tourists to places of interest like hotels and "authentic" food places (pp. 361-362). In other cases, they advised tourists on how to act street-smart as a strategy to navigate challenging situations during their stay in Bakau. Our research on rural host siblings established that they play such crucial roles, which significantly contribute to the success of the homestay. In this regard, we argue that it is important to re-center and reimagine these host siblings as valued partners of our study abroad program.

However, for the host siblings' marginal roles to be appreciated and be recentered, study abroad practitioners need to recognize the heterogeneity and multilayered nature of local host communities. We utilize the concept of the Community of Practice (COP) as it recognizes the dynamic and fluid nature of young individuals like host siblings. The concept also recognizes the multilayered nature of a host community and the contradictions that its

constituent persons or groups embody (Davis & Coryell, 2020; Wenger, 1998, 2015). According to Wenger (2015, p. 1), a COP is a "group(s) of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do better as they interact regularly." He adds that the COP has three main defining characteristics, namely: the domain, the community, and practice. While the domain refers to a shared identity of a group, the community refers to the collective relationships that members perform through joint activities, discussions, and sharing ideas and knowledge—all that allow them to learn from each other. Third, the practice is the shared set of ideas or activities that bring people together and have a shared identity.

Concisely, Wenger argues that "it is the combination of these three elements, domain, community, and practice, which constitute a community of practice. And it is by developing these three elements in parallel that one cultivates such a community" (2015, p. 2). Further, an individual can belong to multiple communities of practice simultaneously or from time to time. Thus, the practice of a community is dynamic and fluid, involving learning on the part of everyone and in a collaborative environment. The learners invent new practices, create new knowledge, define new territory, and develop a collective and strategic voice. They often participate in various social, economic, and political activities, ranging from education and employment to activism and social movements. In our research, we employ Wenger's notion of COP but emphasize that it ought to be a nested COP to recognize the multilayered nature of the rural host community and the underlying hierarchies of respect and generational differences. Such a theorization of rural host community is important since it helps us recognize the value of host siblings as co-producers of knowledge during homestay without threatening the internal power-relations that they have with their parents and other figures of authority in the wider community.

In summary, our paper contributes to the emerging research work on foregrounding local voices in study abroad. We examine the roles of host siblings in cultural exchange as co-producers of knowledge and culture brokers for the visiting students, adult members of their families, and the wider host community. Through the framework of relational learning and nested community of practice, we make young people more visible by recognizing that they have domains of knowledge that differentiate them from the older generations. In addition, "they are important actors in community building, by redefining and restructuring existing models of kinship and moral matrices of reciprocity and solidarity. More than anyone else, they are the ones who

undergo, express, and provide answers to the crisis of communitarian models, structures of authority, gerontocracy, and gender relations" (Honwana & Deboeck, 2005, p. 2).

Having established the integral roles that young people play in our societies, we now describe the SLU-KSP, followed by the rural homestay design. We aim to shed more light on the multilayered nature of host communities and how the design of a study abroad program could be improved to recognize the value of every constituent category, maximize on the synergies present, enhance reciprocity and equity towards sustainable partnerships.

3. Historical Background and Program Description

The SLU-KSP is an experiential and culturally immersive study abroad program that has operated in Kenya for slightly more than 50 years. It started as a 2-4 week' (January Term) program in 1972 and later became a sustained semester program in 1974. It initially operated from a rented apartment in the Westlands neighborhood of Nairobi, then moved to a rented five-acre plot of land in Karen. The university later acquired the compound in the mid-1980's and became the program's permanent base. From there on, the structure of the program has evolved from a small program aimed at exposing the students to life in Nairobi and its environs, to many more cultural communities in wider East Africa.

For many years, the program's philosophy has been cultural immersion through experiential learning under the theme of "Culture, Environment, and Development." The program exposes participants to the East African peoples and their diversity particularly ethnic, religious, political, economic, and cultural. In the process, they learn how to adjust to different concepts of time, responsibilities, personal and shared space, gender roles, social hierarchy, and other local norms. From these lessons, they develop modest cultural competence that could help them understand and navigate diverse cultures effectively. Further, they experience local ways of life firsthand, including family dynamics, household routines, etc., during which they build new relationships. This holistic learning is pursued through a combination of several classroom-based courses like Swahili, gender studies, conservation, and biodiversity. The field components include urban and rural homestays and a month-long internship in a local community-based organization.

Over the years, the program has run the regular Spring and Fall semesters and sometimes short-term, faculty-led summer programs. Consequently, it has built a strong alumni base of more than 2,300 students drawn from SLU-KSP, and 30 other partner universities from the West (for a more detailed historical assessment of our program, see Ntarangwi, 2000; Robinson & Brown, 1994; Wairungu et al., 2022).

While appreciating the program's vast web of the alumni network, we also take this moment to reflect on our local partnerships and the impact we have had on them. The program boasts of a variety of sustained commitments to reciprocity and investment in local communities. It employs a pool of 17 Kenyan staff and several adjunct faculties drawn from local universities. Also, it regularly utilizes the services of local service providers like plumbers, electricians, guest lecturers, tour companies, and taxi drivers who ferry our students to different destinations for program-related operations. In addition, the program provides modest stipends to homestay families in both urban and rural areas, and homestay coordinators in the rural areas. Overall, the program runs on a budget of more than $800,000, which is largely spent locally (Wairungu et al., 2022).

Even with the above "generous" financial commitment, the authors of this paper do acknowledge that there is a lot more the program could do to achieve a higher degree of reciprocity and equity for its local partners. This would especially be achieved if we foreground local voices in our program reviews. This task, however, would only be realized if we rethink the current structure of our program components like the rural homestay. This will allow us to appreciate the multilayered nature of these partner communities, and the underlying power dynamics that render some key members like host siblings either invisible or marginal participants.

In the next section, we outline the design of the homestay component right from the identification of families, setting up of the hosting framework to the actual hosting, and review of the hosting experience. We argue that the long-standing structure of the program had privileged parents over host siblings. However, the program has in the last few years been involving host siblings more and tapping into other categories of young experts from the wider community. This approach has positively changed the local perceptions of the program. Figuratively, one of the long-serving coordinators commented during the overnight stay in Naivasha that "the program has moved from analog to digital" (KRHC, Casual Conversation, 2022). He interpreted this to mean that the

program has become more rigorous and enjoyable as we had introduced youthful activities like hiking and camping for local host communities.

3.1. Rural Homestay Design

According to Wairungu et al., (2022, p. 150), the SLU-KSP's rural homestay component "is strategically designed as students' initiation into a semester-long study in East Africa." It is usually 7-10 days long and occurs only a few days after students' arrival in Kenya. Each student is matched with an individual family and is expected to participate in their day-to-day activities while forming social relationships that would allow them to fit in as their sons or daughters. The component focuses on the livelihoods of the rural agricultural communities in Kenya and has historically moved between different host communities after every 3-5 years. For the last ten years, the program has been to Nyeri, Kericho, and Bomet counties, and recently moved to Kakamega county.

This regular switch to different communities was initially aimed at exposing our students and staff to Kenya's cultural diversity and preventing hosting fatigue in the community (Wairungu et al., 2022, p. 151). However, we recently realized that hosting fatigue is no longer a concern. Instead, it is the risk of host parents becoming too familiar with the program and start violating program rules and expectations. We argue that the new challenge could be addressed by recentering the host siblings into the homestay component as they have more energy, are dynamic and adaptable and more curious about hosting cultural outsiders close to their age.

The setting up of a successful hosting framework starts with the program director in charge of the homestays (in collaboration with other program staff) identifying a Kenyan community that practices sedentary agriculture as their main socio-economic activity. The director's team then devises a risk mitigation plan. First, they identify a well-known and trusted contact in that community using the program's many years of local partnerships. The person then becomes the paid coordinator of the program and the main link between the program, the host community, and local authorities (Wairungu et al., 2022, p. 151). In this role, he advises on the safety and security conditions of that host community. He starts by visiting the local administration offices to inform them verbally and in writing that certain carefully selected families within the identified community will be hosting a group of American students and program staff for one week.

Second, the coordinator identifies a given number of host families using the snow-ball method and following a vetting criterion provided by the program. The snowball method helps to net families that share core values and cultivate trust among them. The coordinator then visits each of these families to brief them about the program, hosting expectations, and to ascertain that they meet the said criteria. He also takes note of any observable concerns like extreme religious beliefs. At the end of the visit, he asks each family to fill in a profile form and later shares them with the program director together with a confidential list of red flags noted in each family. The director then reviews these documents to gain familiarity with the new families before visiting them for final approval. The ideal families are often middle-class by rural standards. These are usually families practicing agriculture and with a sustainable monthly income from business or formal employment, etc. The family is also expected to have an extra room to accommodate a visitor and at least one member who speaks English (Wairungu et al., 2022, p. 151).

While the English-speaking requirement discussed in this paper is colonial, it has multiple implications relevant to the roles and place of youth during homestay. Firstly, the older generations, such as grandparents, do not speak English, making it challenging to communicate with visiting American students. Host siblings therefore play crucial roles as translators and interpreters, thus bridging the communication gap. Secondly, while the host parents can speak English, they often struggle to understand the varieties spoken by the American students. In these situations, host siblings facilitate communication by requesting the students to speak slowly or explain meanings to both sides. Thirdly, host siblings, being close in age to the visiting students, can relate and interact with them as peers. Their proficiency in different varieties of English acquired through cross-cultural platforms like formal education, Western mainstream and social media enables them to have fluent conversations and switch topics freely. However, the significant role of host siblings as cultural intermediaries during the homestay is often obscured by the program's emphasis on parents as the primary local partners. To maximize the benefits of cultural exchange, it is necessary to address this challenge and recognize the vital role of host siblings in the rural hosting framework.

Once the required number of host families is realized, the coordinator invites parents for an induction meeting during which the director elaborates the hosting expectations. The director also sensitizes them about their multiple roles as program partners and teachers of their own culture. Usually, the

program conducts at least two such induction meetings before students arrive at the homestay. The director also maintains constant communication with the families through the coordinator to ensure that they are well prepared and to answer any emerging questions regarding hosting.

At the beginning of the homestay week, the program provides each host family with a modest stipend to facilitate their household expenses and to compensate for their time and effort hosting our students (Wairungu et al., 2022). While these scholars observe that the stipend is not enough to make income generation the main motivation for participating in the cultural exchange, we argue that there is a need to provide similar incentives to the host siblings to defray traveling costs and in organizing sightseeing during the homestay.

During the hosting week, the coordinator and the director's team live within the host community and regularly check in with the parents about their experiences and reassure them. They also exchange ideas on addressing the challenges encountered and share insights on making their interactions with the students more participatory and enjoyable. At the end of the homestay, and after the students have traveled back to Nairobi, the coordinator and director's team usually organize a stock-taking meeting with the host parents to evaluate their hosting experience. However, host siblings never get such opportunities.

Considering the foregoing, the program intends to engage host families as equal partners in cultural exchange. However, we argue that the notion of the host family is problematic as it privileges the parents over the host siblings. To realize its full potential, there is a need to separate the host parents from the host siblings and recognize the distinct roles that they play during the rural homestay. In this regard, the host siblings would also need to be accorded similar scaffolding as we do with the host parents and visiting American students (Wairungu et al., 2022). According to one of the male host siblings from Nyeri, whose family hosted SLU-KSP's students more than ten times, the program initially required the host families to restrict students' movement within their homes to do farm work and household chores. In this context, he finds his host community's understanding of the homestay problematic as host families perceived it as a privilege for having been "chosen" to host a *mzungu* "Caucasian," rather than an opportunity for cultural exchange. (NMHS1**,** Nyeri Host Siblings' Survey, June 2022).

To counter the parents' perception of hosting as a means for social mobility, program administrators have consistently explained hosting

expectations and cultivated realistic understandings of what could be achieved from cultural exchange. This clarity has led to better outcomes and positive relationships within the host community. These changes have also made the roles of host siblings more visible as summarized by the above sibling from Nyeri below:

> In the last five years, specifically, the program has also seen a big shift, and visiting students are now more encouraged to not only explore their placed homestead, but also the surrounding neighborhoods. This has had a role in bringing host siblings to the fore, like helping in the exploration of the neighborhood through organizing site seeing, excursions, etc. (NMHS1**,** Nyeri Host Siblings' Survey, June 2022)

To fully involve host siblings in cultural exchange, it is essential to create a community of practice for them. This includes conducting separate induction meetings and post-hosting debriefs where siblings from different families can come together, share their hosting experiences, and exchange ideas. These sessions would also provide an opportunity for program administrators to gather siblings' feedback on areas for improvement, as well as additional roles for siblings as valuable program partners. Our interviews and follow-up conversations with siblings in Kericho and Nyeri revealed such sentiments.

Preparing the host siblings thoroughly in study abroad programs is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it is necessary to sensitize them about the safety and security considerations when hosting a privileged outsider in their community. Many social challenges that students face in public places often occur when they are with their host siblings. For example, the host siblings' friends may request photos with the American students or ask for their contact details without having established a close relationship. To ensure the well-being of the students and manage hosting expectations among siblings, it is essential for the program to conduct regular induction and reflection meetings before and after the homestay like the ones involving hosting parents.

Second, there is a need to sensitize host siblings that cultural exchange is a two-way traffic and neither of the cultures involved is better or superior to the other. In this context, each participant should respect each other's individualities and cultures to avoid miscommunication, cultural impositions, and a "savior" mentality complex (Ficarra, 2019).

Third, the interests and topics of the local youth in Kenya often differ from those of the older generations, who are considered the authority figures,

custodians of culture and role models in the socialization of children into adults. The youth on the other hand may be interested in topics like Western popular culture, slang, drug and alcohol use, fluidity in gender and sexuality, and expressive fashion. The perceptual difference toward such topics often causes intergenerational conflict, which pits traditional African values against Western counterculture that is observable in music, movies, fashion and even art. To ensure a respectful and culturally appropriate engagement with these topics during the homestay, interactive information sessions should be conducted with the host siblings. Failure to conduct such preparation would limit the participation of host siblings in sharing their cultural knowledge, resulting in students only learning about the ways of the older generations.

Fourth, many rural host siblings are university students or young graduates living in urban areas. When they return home during the hosting week, they are sometimes seen as socially and culturally displaced by adults in rural areas who view the city as culturally "chaotic." They cannot be trusted in teaching the "authentic" culture of the host community to the visitors. There is a need then to have conversations with these siblings to sensitize them about the dynamic nature of culture and how it varies across social divides such as age, gender, and rural-urban differences. They should be confident in teaching their own language and culture as practiced in the city, while also being open to learning aspects of the local culture from older generations and the visiting students. This reconceptualization of host siblings as active co-producers of knowledge would best be achieved if program administrators recognized them as integral members of a nested community of practice that includes their parents and the wider host community. In the next section, we focus on the research design and data collection methods.

4. Research Design and Methodology

The data used in this paper were drawn from a research study conducted between May and August 2022. The study focused on the following key issues: host siblings' understanding of study abroad and how it affected their participation during homestay, their perceptions about our program and its impacts to their families, and generational differences in production of knowledge following the English language requirement. The participants were aged between 18 and 30 and were recruited from rural families within two ethnically different communities, Kikuyu and Kipsigis, who have hosted our students for many years. We started with informal conversations about the

rural homestay with Interviewer 2. He is a program staff member with more than thirty years of experience interacting with our students. He has also been actively involved in the setting up and running of the rural homestay component. In addition, Interviewer 2 was a research associate in our previous study and a co-author of our paper on African homestays and community engagement (Wairungu et al., 2022). In the current research, we offered him a more significant role as an entry point into re-centering and reimagining local voices in education abroad (Erbstein et al., 2022; Wairungu et al., 2022). His practical experience and vast knowledge of our program blended very well with the first author's (Interviewer 1) training as an anthropologist and a scholar of youth cultures in "post-colonial" Africa.

Second, we reviewed our former students' anonymous evaluations on the rural homestay to find out their thoughts about interactions with the host siblings. We also sought to know whether these interactions differed in any meaningful way from those of adult members of the host families like parents. Our former students were predominantly American and white undergraduates aged between 18 to 24 years. They were comparatively in the same age brackets as the local host siblings discussed in this paper. After reviewing the evaluations, we recruited a group of slightly more than 40 host siblings from both Nyeri and Kericho who had hosted repeatedly. We focused on repeat host siblings since they had substantial knowledge and experience to comment on their involvement during homestay and our program's engagement with their families over time.

Third, we administered written surveys on these siblings seeking their conceptualization of study abroad, the roles they played during hosting, and their interpretations of those roles. We then carefully reviewed completed surveys and narrowed down to 25 siblings for follow-up oral interviews on their intriguing responses to our survey questions.

Fourth, we conducted oral interviews in small groups to build confidence among host siblings as group dynamics helped validate each other's knowledge and experience. We also audio-recorded these interviews to minimize distractions in our verbal exchanges and for later analysis.

Lastly, we invited all the 25 interviewees for a weekend-long trip to Lake Oloiden Camp in Naivasha. We also included three host parents who serve as rural coordinators for our homestay program to minimize administrative liability. The trip subjected the siblings to a similar intercultural and bonding

space that our students experience after their rural homestay. Specifically, the trip started with siblings from both communities traveling together on hired buses to a central meeting point in Nakuru town. We then combined the two groups and traveled together on a bus to L. Nakuru National Park for a game drive. This was followed by a group lunch in a seemingly "touristy" resort at the margins of the park. After lunch, we drove to L. Oloiden Campsite in Naivasha for an overnight stay.

At the camp, we had more group meals and interactive cultural exchange activities. The host siblings staged their cultural differences through song and dance. Some of these were contemporary songs and dances associated with youth, while others were associated with the older generations. These performances were followed by demonstrations by individual siblings. Some female siblings showcased how to prepare and "correctly" use gendered items like the Kikuyu *kiondo* 'basket' and the Kipsigis *Kisyet* (a small woven pot for serving Ugali 'corn meal' to the man of the house). Moreover, some male peers captivatingly showcased the "correct" technique for consuming traditional Kikuyu 'Muratina' (beer) using a cow horn.

On the second day, we started with a day-long hike at Mt. Longonot, followed by a group lunch at the base of the mountain as we reflected on the hiking experience. In the evening, we did group boat rides at L. Oloiden and a debrief on the main takeaways from the trip. All these activities helped with group bonding and prompted participants to reimagine themselves as a community of practice, as "local" tourists, valued partners of our program, and as active producers of cross-cultural knowledge during homestay.

Upon reflecting on the trip, we argue that it helped the program to perform some kind of generative reciprocity (Dostilio et al., 2012; Long et al., 2022), as we were able to bring the host siblings into a cultural space like what we provide for our students. At the same time, the trip was a gesture of appreciation to these particularly important local partners who have always operated from the margins. Further, the trip demonstrated our program's intentionality in leveraging local partners' knowledge and skills by seeking siblings' feedback. The siblings told us that they felt more "valued" and would like to develop more in-depth relationships with our program. Some asked whether the program could facilitate them to visit our main campus in New York for them to experience the lives and spaces of their cultural "Others." In response, our program administrators proposed an all-expense paid trip to the U.S. for a few host siblings to attend our university's alumni reunion weekend

in the summer, 2024 (we elaborate the details of this trip and intended impacts in section 5.4).

Owing to our positionalities as adults, program administrators, and contextual cultural outsiders, we acknowledge that there were underlying power dynamics that could have affected host siblings' interactions with us, and their willingness to freely share their feedback about the program. For example, some siblings could fear confiding to some of their interactions with students owing to our close relationships with their host parents. Others may be guarded for fear of being judged and losing an opportunity to host in future. We addressed these challenges through a variety of efforts; first, we verbally assured the trip participants that their feedback was sorely for the improvement of our homestay program and could not be used against them whatsoever. Second, we tried speaking in their language "Sheng," for solidarity. Sheng is a mixed-language variety that is very popular among Kenyan youth; third, we allowed them to operate in small groups to see each other as peers; fourth, we allowed them to spearhead cultural performances and discussions while we stayed in the margins as active listeners; lastly, we consulted them about the programming of the various interactive activities, e.g., the order of activities, time for each activity and who was to play certain roles. Our intentionality in addressing the underlying power dynamics promoted a sense of ownership for the trip among the host siblings. It also made them feel more appreciated as bearers and teachers of their own culture. This deliberate re-centering of the young people, however, is missing in the current structure of our program's rural homestay.

In the following section, we discuss and analyze host siblings' views of study abroad and the roles they usually play in actual practice. In addition, we demonstrate that re-centering them into the hosting community of practice would help identify other additional roles that they could play in other aspects of our program like pre-rural orientation. Such additional opportunities could help them interact more with the students and forge long-lasting relationships. Due to the limited scope of our current paper, we shall limit our discussion and analysis to the data drawn from the group interviews. We shall only reference other sources whenever there is need to contextualize the data from interviews.

5. Host Siblings' Views on Study Abroad and their Roles during the Rural Homestay

5.1. The Language and Social Categories Used in Study Abroad

One of our main research findings is that study abroad programs need to rethink and spell out the language, and the social categories that they use when forging local partnerships. This will help to manage expectations and achieve the desired reciprocity. According to Gee (2004, as quoted in Long et al., 2022, p. 39), a language carries situated meaning. In this regard, practitioners of study abroad need to be aware of the meaning that a language expresses in one context, and the power that it carries forward into a different context. Such linguistic consciousness would prevent the reproduction of unequal power dynamics between academic institutions in the West, and their host communities in non-Western countries. For instance, when we first asked our respondents about their understanding of study abroad in the written surveys, many described it as a process in which people from African countries migrate to the West to pursue terminal degree programs like Bachelor's or Master's. They added that these studies are often funded through foreign scholarship programs.

The above description of study abroad was probably informed by the informants' immediate experience, seeing their relatives and friends traveling to the United States and European countries to pursue "better" educational opportunities. We argue that such conceptualization of study abroad is unidirectional and embodies some inequality. Typically, it is rare for students from the West to enroll in educational institutions in the non-Western countries to pursue higher education. In this regard, young white people visiting local rural areas are often confused with church missionaries, humanitarian workers, or researchers. These misperceptions often shape local people's interactions with these kinds of visitors and could perpetuate white savior mentality. A good example is when host families who have not been inducted properly into hosting request for help to emigrate to the West, to finance education for their children locally or educational scholarships abroad.

During the oral interviews, we had more time and opportunities to probe further. We gathered that some informants' descriptions of study abroad changed to students from the West "*Wazungu*" (Caucasian in plural) coming to Africa to research local cultures while living with host families. While this description recognizes that local communities play the role of a host in the

learning process, it is still problematic since it promotes extractive learning, which is characteristic of the cross-cultural encounters between the West and the non-Western countries. The siblings' reference to the visiting students as *wazungu* is also problematic as it promotes the monolithic understanding of Westerners and whiteness (Wairungu et al., 2022). At the same time, the reference perpetuates the common social construction of study abroad as an enterprise for young people from Caucasian families, which erases non-white study abroad participants (Simon & Ainsworth, 2012). To promote an equitable understanding of study abroad programs, there is a need to deconstruct such social categories and associated stereotypes.

In some other interviews, the siblings who had hosted numerous times described study abroad as a mutual form of cultural exchange where visiting students live with local host families to exchange knowledge and experiences about their cultures and home countries. While this description recognizes the value of local partners as active participants and co-producers of knowledge, we argue that it still embodies some inequality. This is because local partners rarely get a chance to visit the academic institutions in the West. Neither do they get hosted by foreign students in their homes for a similar cultural exchange. While the SLU-KSP offers two fully funded scholarships to the wider Kenyan society per year, we argue that there is a need to explore additional ways of promoting generative reciprocity, especially to the host siblings. Such commitment to reciprocity and long-term investment in place (Wairungu et al., 2022) would not only help local partners understand the situated language of study abroad but also reimagine themselves as valued partners. As mentioned earlier, our research project prompted our program to organize an all-expense paid trip for a few host siblings to visit our mother campus in New York and participate in a variety of culturally immersive activities. In the next section, we discuss the impacts of our homestay program on the siblings and their families.

5.2. The Impacts of Our Homestay Program

Some of the main positive impacts of our homestay program are developing a more nuanced understanding of cultural exchange and deconstructing cultural "Others." For instance, the host siblings reported that their week-long interactions with our students challenged the many stereotypes and anxieties that they had about *wazungu*. Before hosting, some siblings wondered whether these white visitors would fit in their homes or even appreciate them and their cultures. In many cases, we found out that the stereotypes were informed by the monolithic perceptions of white people as

wealthy, racially biased, fastidious, and homogenous among other generalizations promoted in global media outlets (Wairungu et al., 2022). The siblings were, however, surprised to learn that these were false assumptions.

In addition, the anxieties these families had when they were first informed that they will be hosting an American student faded away as the hosting week progressed. In one interview, KFHS1, a female respondent from Kericho said,

> … taking the case of my family… first of all when it comes to meals it might not be as easy for someone that has not been eating *Ugali* (local version of American corn meal) every day to come and introduce them to it. Of course, there is an issue of how will they react to this meal? What if they get hurt when we are trying to teach them in the farm? When it comes to some food poisonings, how are they being treated at home?….things like that…Can they use firewood for example when they are cooking? ….My mum was sometimes wondering now if they talk complicated English, how will I respond? And things like that. So, yes that was mainly the issue, maybe the food, the environment, the people they were going to interact with… yes! (Kericho Oral Interviews, 2022)

The above sibling's reference to her parents speaking English confidently and without worrying about its "correctness" is two-fold. First, it is a desirable outcome of the cultural exchange that happens during the rural homestay. That is, while SLU-KSP's students are expected to practice speaking Swahili and learn local languages, the program also hopes that the interactions would help the hosts to hone their spoken English.

Second, KFHS1's mother's concern about how she would respond to her host student if s/he spoke complicated English amplifies the roles and place of host siblings as culture brokers during the homestay. Although Kenya is a multilingual country, with many citizens being trilingual, there exists a colonial linguistic hierarchy that elevates English over other language varieties (Mazrui & Mazrui, 1996; Ogechi, 2003; Wairungu, 2014). For instance, in educational settings, though English and Standard Swahili are the officially sanctioned languages, competence in English is rewarded more than Swahili. It is also equated to being intelligent. Consequently, many Kenyans suffer from linguistic insecurity (Labov, 1966). Whenever they are required to converse in English or Swahili, they worry more about making mistakes in English as some listeners could judge them harshly and even question their intelligence.

It is this kind of linguistic insecurity that parents and other adults often experience during hosting week for fear of being misunderstood. The insecurity limits their conversations with the host student to basic linguistic exchanges. This situation may get even worse during students' interactions with the neighbors as they haven't undergone any kind of hosting induction. In such contexts, the value of host siblings during homestay comes in handy because of their ability to switch between multiple languages and straddle cultural boundaries. In an interview with a female sibling from Nyeri, she told us that it was very necessary to have host siblings at home during hosting as they can engage the students "better" than their parents. She attributed this to their closeness in age and shared interests and life struggles. In addition, siblings are more competent in English than local adults, hence they can mediate communication between the visitors and immediate neighbors (NFHS2, Nyeri Oral Interviews, 2022).

The role of the host siblings as culture brokers, however, goes beyond mediating linguistic communication. In some cases, they act like cultural teaching assistants or support partners to their parents. In this role, they would receive instructions from parents on the daily activities to be done when the parents are away. While we appreciate the siblings' supportive roles to their parents, we are critical of the power dynamics between the two social categories. This is especially so in situations where that power restricts the siblings from imparting the knowledge and experiences associated with youth. According to our informants, they appreciated it when their parents delegated, but also accorded them some space and freedom to interact with our students as peers. When that happened, the siblings claimed that the hosting became "better." Some siblings attributed this to the host children having more energy and free time to spend with the students, unlike the parents who had many other responsibilities at home and in the wider community. In addition, the siblings claimed to be more adventurous and knew more fun activities that would excite American students like hiking and nature walks. As peers, they would be able to discover new places for "fun" together (NFHS 3&4, Nyeri Oral Interviews, 2022).

Another set of siblings told us that they were able to engage the students in culturally sensitive topics like dating, love, and sex, which their parents regarded as taboo. These are well captured in the interview excerpt below:

> NFHS1: I think growing up, these are conversations, like having even as teenagers, having conversations about boys, about sex, about different topics that the parents may probably regard them as taboo in such a way

> that, you need to talk to your peer about…don't talk to us [parents], we can't talk to you about these. You learn these things at school. So, a lot is left to the teachers and parents are like, we've paid school fees, teach them everything. So, like interacting with our parents in a level that touches on those things, touches on them as teenagers, as how they met, how they got, how they got married maybe at a young age it's something that is left to either teachers or peers. Like getting to know how our parents met, it is not a topic that initially would have just been discussed after supper. Yeah.
>
> Interviewer 2: So, so with the Americans, it looked like they're very open with parents and all that? They can ask anything…
>
> NFHS1: Yeah. Yeah, I think it's because of the environment, yeah. The environment is a bit different. Because of the culture, it is obviously different. And yeah, I blame it on culture and just differences in culture and environment, yeah. (Nyeri Oral Interviews, 2022)

A critical look at the exchange above reveals that the siblings' ability to engage in culturally sensitive topics when interacting with our students helped them to connect as peers. It also allowed them to express resistance and freedom from the local culture that comes with being youth. In addition, spending time away from their parents to talk about issues that affect young people was a performative social differentiation from their parents whom they perceived as conservative. Concisely, the host siblings demystified the homestay from emphasizing cultural differences to appreciating similarities in young people's lives, hence the reason they were able to connect more with students as peers. Their unique exchanges collaborate with our earlier argument that generational differences between the host parents and their children play a significant role in the production of knowledge and experience during homestay.

Besides generational differentiation, many of our respondents reported that their physical presence at home and participation in cultural exchange impacted them in several other ways. First, it helped them get socially closer to their parents. In Kericho, for example, a female sibling reported how family members started greeting each other when they woke up in the morning. They would hug and use the language of endearment. This was a big contrast to the kind of patronizing and impersonal check-ins that siblings used to get from their parents before they started hosting.

The social distance above was further interrupted during homestay as children and parents engaged in more interactive activities like playing games for fun. One of them, KFHS3, described the new social environment as follows:

> Okay. I think one of the things these students influenced us to do was be more close to our parents. Because, actually, I don't remember a time playing with our parents honestly. But when they came, they came with a ball and during the afternoons we could play together. Honestly, that was so much fun because it had never happened. (Kericho Oral Interviews, 2022)

In another context, some siblings reported that interacting with the Americans taught them about socially appropriate ways of using technology like smartphones or TV when together as a family. Such discipline re-socialized them to having regular conversations and doing farm work together as opposed to being glued to their screens most of the time.

Besides the addictive consumption of technology, we attribute the social distance between children and parents to religion and the patriarchal ethos characteristic of rural cultures. These ideals prescribe how different people should relate and carry their bodies based on social factors like age and gender. In addition, we attribute the social distance to the displacement caused by attending boarding schools and siblings' relocation to the city in search of greener pastures. For example, from our check-in visits with host families during homestay week, it was clear that many host siblings were equally learning about their homes and farms just like the visiting American students. Perhaps some siblings had taken several things for granted while growing up, until the coming of these foreigners. Other host siblings had just returned home for that week to be with the students and would return to college or the city at the end of the homestay.

As the family members got close to each other, many siblings learned new things about their parents. These include their parents' dating lives and other things they did when they were young. The siblings believed that they could never have learned such things due to socio-cultural restrictions. As NFHS1, a host sibling from Nyeri, said,

> … probably I would want to, maybe, add on to something NFHS2 said, it was regarding the conversations we've eventually come to have with our parents, because initially our parents would never talk about how they met. It was actually a *mzungu* who came and started that conversation,

> and it actually allowed us to, to really get into like having like those difficult conversations. Now, we can have them on a, on a, on a lighter way because initially this *mzungu* just came and asked. So how did you guys meet? And my parents were shocked, and they were like, oh, who are you? But eventually, eventually, now that's a conversation that we can talk, about boys. We can talk about; we can joke about things. We can joke about different things and conversations that initially we wouldn't have. Now we can really have them all. It's easier now. (Nyeri Oral Interviews, 2022)

Outside familial relationships, some siblings reported that interacting with the visiting American students sensitized the local hosts about their relationships with farm animals like dogs. However, they were ambivalent about this issue as there were some practices they liked but not others. On the positive side, some siblings wished they treated their dogs in a better and more human way, citing that Africans are unfamiliar with the practice of keeping pets indoors or following a regular feeding schedule. However, when American students visit, host families gradually adjust and provide proper care while also ensuring pets' safety and well-being (Nyeri Oral Interviews, 2022).

On the other side, some siblings reported that they did not like the way American students fed dogs from the same plates they used to serve their food. They also did not like the idea of dogs getting into the house and some sleeping in people's beds for hygiene and health reasons. Upon further probing, we realized that local people's beliefs about hygiene and healthy interactions with farm animals were contradictory. The same families who could not allow dogs to eat from their utensils served food and water to cows and pigs from the pots they used to make *Ugali*. This contradiction is a perfect example of cultural relativity (Brown, 2008), which is a useful tool of analysis that study abroad programs should utilize when engaging local partners.

The conversations between host siblings and students were not limited to local and practical issues. Instead, they sometimes involved global and abstract discourses that host parents could not engage in such as global warming and conscious living. Siblings highlighted lessons on conscious living that they learnt from the students like environmental care and appropriate trash disposal. Therefore, the siblings' engagement with such discourses flips the typical understanding of a rural homestay from a place for mere experiential learning to a space for intellectual engagement.

Even though our informants interpreted some impacts positively like being able to hug parents and engage them in perceived taboo topics like dating and love life, we argue that such practices should not be interpreted at face value. Instead, we regard them as cultural impositions since they violate the local norms of performing respect towards adults and local figures of authority. At the same time, we are critical of some siblings' interpretations of their interactions with our students and the new knowledge shared as they could perpetuate a savior mentality complex. Additionally, we argue that some social practices like hugging and using the language of endearment could be mere performances to impress a cultural outsider. According to some siblings, their families stopped these practices as soon as the students left the homestay. Probably, they stopped because such practices are not locally considered "African" and would therefore betray the existing generational gap between parents and their children.

5.3. Self-Reflection Through the Cultural "Other"

In a reciprocal cultural exchange, participants not only learn about others but also reflect upon themselves (Ficarra, 2019). In our rural homestay context, some siblings observed that hosting became more enjoyable when the program started involving them in group activities on the day students first meet their host families (NMHS2, Nyeri Oral Interviews, 2022). During this meeting, we usually invite a local cultural expert or a group of young "modern" dancers. These cultural specialists engage both students and their host families in interactive performances to enhance group bonding and reduce the anxiety of meeting cultural "Others." In addition, they prompt local young people to reflect on their knowledge about local culture. The newly acquired knowledge becomes cultural capital upon which siblings build their conversations with the visiting students during homestay. The various benefits are well articulated by a male host sibling from Nyeri below:

> NMHS 2: Yeah, sincerely, Kikuyu culture myself, I never knew so much until St. Lawrence came, especially that orientation day, there are these people that you called.
>
> Interviewer 1: The *Wamugumo* cultural dancers?
>
> NMHS 2: Yeah! They made me learn more about the Kikuyu culture. And also, in the village when we would go to visit our grandmothers with the visiting students. People around would tell us, we Kikuyus, we do this, and this, and this, coz they're trying to show this white guy what Kikuyu

> culture is all about. But for me, at some point, I just see it as a normal thing, yeah. (NMHS 2, Nyeri Oral Interviews, 2022)

In another related context, some siblings reported that their parents disseminated cultural knowledge like cooking to the visiting American students in more structured, engaging, and interesting ways than they did with their own children. NFHS 2, a female sibling from Nyeri explains that difference below:

> If I can add on what NFHS1 has said, I learned, like cooking is something that I do all the time and it's something I have been brought up knowing how to do. But there are so many things that are not explained in detail, but then when they (American students) come and are doing it together, your mom will mention something like tunawekanga hii kwa sababu ya hii (we add this because of this), and then you learn, you realize that it is a detail I have missed all my life. (NFHS 2, Nyeri Oral Interviews, 2022)

While it is true that local cultural knowledge in many African societies is disseminated through participatory learning, what is important in the homestay context is that our program usually prepares host parents on how to teach their own cultures to foreigners. Some of the pedagogical skills involve explaining cultural practices in bits and providing the logic behind them. These preparations happen during induction meetings before the arrival of the students and during debriefs at the end of the homestays. Drawing from this experience, we reiterate the need to accord similar preparation to the host siblings given their key roles as culture brokers.

5.4. Further Involvement of the Youth Constituency in Cultural Exchange

When we asked the host siblings to reflect on the trip, they first appreciated the treat but later critiqued the program design saying that it usually leaves them with a hosting "hangover." They interpreted the hangover as an untimely disjuncture that made them feel abandoned at the peak of hosting just when they had started enjoying cultural exchange and forming strong bonds with the visiting American students. Consequently, the host siblings expressed interest in additional involvement in our program. According to NFHS 2, a female host sibling from Nyeri:

> … As host siblings, we have really shown that we help, and we are impactful to the program. So how can we be more engaged into the program so that we just don't waste; we just don't wait for our host

> siblings to come home? We host them, and then after that, that's it. We go back to being at the back bench. Yeah. (Nyeri Oral Interviews, 2022)

The above sentiments point to the transactional nature of cultural exchange characteristic of many study abroad programs. To address this, we argue that there is a need to conduct cultural exchange continuously and cyclically so that the local partners do not feel used and abandoned until the next hosting cycle. The various categories of siblings suggested additional involvement as follows; first, some have special talents and skills like video production and photography. They could help in preparing pedagogical resources like short documentaries of the places and cultures that students visit while in Kenya.

Second, some siblings said that they would be interested in helping with pre-rural orientation. They could either meet with the students virtually or in person to answer questions and clear anxieties about life in the rural areas.

Third, another group expressed interest in maintaining relationships with the students that they hosted. They perceived these students as their brothers and sisters, hence a great joy when they communicated with them. Maintaining these relationships is very important to avoid perpetuating transactional community engagement and extractive learning that characterize many study abroad programs. The siblings said they would be in a better position than their parents to play this role as they are active users of social media like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Tik-Tok. At the same time, it is more rewarding for siblings to have global connections because they yield symbolic value in their social circles.

Lastly, there were siblings who asked whether the program could facilitate a trip for them to the U.S. for a similar kind of cultural exchange. Given that it was not possible to accord each sibling an opportunity to travel to the U.S., the question invited us, program administrators, to think about possible incentives as follows: A month after the weekend-long trip, we engaged the siblings in an essay-writing contest that attracted cash awards. We published the best essays on the program's blog page to be read by a wider audience and further celebrate the winners. Currently, our university in New York, through our study abroad program in Kenya, has organized an all-expense paid trip for a few host siblings to attend the summer, 2024 alumni reunion weekend. They will later be hosted by program alumni families for one week to experience life in an American family setting. Upon return to Kenya, the trip participants will

be involved in welcoming and orienting a group of 50 alumni who will be visiting the Kenya Semester Program after many years. It is our hope that the siblings' weekend-long trip in Naivasha, the essay contest and the trip to the U.S. will demonstrate our commitment to reciprocity and sustainable relationships with our local community partners. Further, the U.S. trip will help us address the hosting hangover as we shall have achieved the proposed cyclical model of cultural exchange for study abroad programs.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

This paper examined the roles and place of host siblings during rural homestay as part of a broader study project on foregrounding local voices in study abroad programs. Using SLU-KSP as a case study, we argued that host siblings are social shifters who are actively seeking distinct identities and opportunities to shape the society they live in (Durnham, 2000). In this context, we employed a combination of Community of Practice (COP) (Wenger 1998, 2015), and relational learning theories, to elucidate the need for study abroad practitioners to recenter local partners in all components of their programs. This would help promote reciprocity and equity and to realize local partners' full potential as co-producers of knowledge (Dostilio et al., 2012; Erbstein et al., 2022; Hartman, 2015; Heidebrecht & Balzer, 2020; Long et al., 2022; Wairungu et al., 2022). For the host siblings in our rural homestay program, we established that they play key roles as culture brokers despite operating from the margins (Brown 1992; Press, 1969). At the same time, they contribute generational forms of knowledge like local places of fun and global popular culture. It is therefore important for program administrators to conceptualize a host family as a heterogeneous local partner as opposed to the homogenous view that privileges parents over the host siblings. The proposed heterogeneous view is more appropriate as it acknowledges the established internal hierarchies between the various constituencies within the host community but emphasizes collaboration rather than competition when sharing knowledge and experience.

Our paper therefore contributes to the existing theories on host communities (Ficarra, 2019; Wenger, 1998, 2015) by looking at the host family as a nested community of practice with partly interdependent social categories. We emphasize the nested nature of COP to both recognize the said categories and the underlying hierarchies of respect and generational differences. Each of these categories has its own agency, domain of knowledge and practices (Davies,

1991; Durnham, 2000, Wenger, 1998, 2015). The interdependence aspect further points to the relationships that emerge between parents and host siblings as co-producers of knowledge and co-learners of the visiting students' cultures. Considering this relationality, the program administrators should rethink the structural design of their study abroad programs. They should accord host siblings similar scaffolding as provided to the visiting American students and host parents. They should also be seeking regular feedback from the siblings about their experience and engagement with the program (Ficarra, 2019; Wairungu et al., 2022). In this regard, our paper examined host siblings' feedback on the following main questions.

First, host siblings' understandings of study abroad. Some findings indicated that local perceptions of Westerners and their motivations to visit local communities are imbued with white savior mentality. This often happens when local host families who have not been inducted properly confuse the cultural exchange students with other categories of white visitors such as humanitarian workers. Consequently, such host families often solicit financial help from the students to support their children's education locally or for educational scholarships abroad. Other misperceptions often depict cross-cultural encounters with Westerners as transactional and extractive, e.g., when cultural exchange students are confused with academic researchers. It is therefore important for study abroad programs to rethink the linguistic and social categories that they use when forging partnerships with local communities since language has power and carries contextually situated meanings (Gee, 2004; Long et al., 2022). Such linguistic consciousness would foster a more equitable understanding of study abroad programs, help to manage expectations among local partners and achieve the desired reciprocity. Broadly speaking, the said consciousness would prevent the reproduction of unequal power dynamics between academic institutions in the West, and their host communities in non-Western countries (Ficarra, 2019; Hartman, 2015; Schroeder et al., 2009; Schumake and Wendler, 2017; Wairungu et al., 2022).

The second question was on the place of English during homestay. Despite its coloniality, the emphasis on speaking English at the homestay illuminated host siblings' invaluable roles as communication intermediaries and culture brokers during homestay (Brown, 1992; Jezewski & Sotnik, 2001; Páez & McCarty, 1997; Press, 1969). It is in this context that the host siblings protested our program giving a special treat to the parents while it is the siblings who do the hard job of hosting the visiting American students. In this context,

practitioners should explore more incentives for these young people such as a visit to the study abroad's home institutions to enhance reciprocity and equity in cultural exchange. In the case of our research, the siblings' weekend-long trip helped us appreciate the siblings and reflect on the structural design of our homestay program. We also organized a siblings' essay writing competition where the best essays attracted cash awards. These essays were then published on the university website to reach a wider audience. This exercise helped us celebrate the siblings and leverage their knowledge and experience in our program design (Long et al. 2022; Wairungu et al., 2022).

Lastly, our paper examined the program's impact on the host siblings and their families. All siblings reported that they enjoyed the homestay, and it impacted them in various significant ways. These include: the siblings were able to develop a more nuanced understanding of cultural exchange and deconstructing cultural "Others"; they also overcame the anxieties they had before hosting and challenged prevailing stereotypes they had about Westerners and whiteness; their role as linguistic intermediaries helped them to reflect on their own culture and further help their parents to hone their English speaking skills; they were able to engage the students in culturally sensitive topics like dating, love, and sex, which their parents regarded as taboo; engaging in sensitive topics allowed them to express their individualities and generational resistance towards local cultural framework; Host siblings' physical presence at home helped them get socially closer to their parents as they would hug and play interactive fun games. The reduced social distance helped the siblings learn new things about their parents like their dating lives and things they did when they were young. However, while some of the impacts like hugging parents became host siblings' cultural and social capital during hosting, we interpret them as program's unintended social imposition (Wairungu et al., 2022). Such practices are not locally considered "African" and would therefore betray the existing generational gap between parents and their children.

Despite the host siblings enjoying the homestay and acknowledging the various impacts on their lives, they still expressed some disconnect (hosting hangover) in their relationship with our program. They then sought additional involvement to maximize on their synergies and develop a deeper understanding on what happens to the students they hosted upon return to the U.S. We argued that such a disconnect could be addressed by making cultural exchange a cyclical process. Building upon this understanding, our program has

organized a host siblings' trip to our New York campus to reconnect with the program alumni and experience American cultures firsthand. In a nutshell, we hope that the U.S. trip will help recenter host siblings as valued local partners, complete the cycle of cultural exchange, and demonstrate our program's commitment to sustainable relationships with local partners. Upon return to Kenya, we shall conduct a follow-up research study seeking host siblings' views about their interactions with program alumni, American families, and the perceived impacts of these long-term relationships.

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Ethical Approval

Our research project was approved by the Kenya's National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation under the license number NACOSTI-P-22-17766.

Declaration of Competing Interest

We, Michael Wairungu and Njau Kibochi, declare that we do not have any competing financial or personal interests that might have influenced our engagement with the research and production of this manuscript whatsoever.

Data Availability Statement

The research data used to write this manuscript is stored in a flash drive and kept under key and lock by the principal researcher. Any part of it could be made available on request and would be anonymized for confidentiality.

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