Chapter 4 - Program Components: (Re)considering the Role of Individual Areas of Programming in Education Abroad

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Highlights:

- Current research on education abroad in higher education has mostly analysed education abroad programs without isolating individual program components, making it difficult for scholars and practitioners to determine which specific aspects of a program are most effective in helping students achieve stated learning outcomes.
- Existing research has been disproportionally conducted by scholars in a handful of countries, including the U.S.
- This chapter explores five areas of programming often associated with education abroad: modes of instruction, housing, extra- and co-curricular activities, experiential learning, and support services.

1.0 Introduction and Chapter Overview

Over the past decades, a growing body of scholarship has sought to assess the extent to which education abroad programs deliver on intended outcomes for students. Scholars and practitioners share a common interest in moving beyond the assumption that education abroad is automatically and necessarily a transformational process, to find evidence of the ways that students may (or may not) develop as part of their time abroad (Gozik, 2014). While much has been examined regarding the success of *programs* in maximizing student learning (see e.g. chapter 3, this volume), this chapter explores an area in the research literature that has received far less attention, namely the role that *individual program components* have in contributing to student learning.

Reviewing the existing literature, this chapter explores five areas of programming often associated with education abroad: modes of instruction, housing, extra- and co-curricular activities, experiential learning, and support services. These align with the categorization of "meeting grounds" for intercultural learning, as developed by Ogden, Streitwieser, and Crawford (2014). "Academic programming" has been further split out into "modes of instruction" and "extra and co-curricular learning", given the great expansion of both areas.

Instead of viewing a particular element or a combination of practices as the "gold standard", it is argued that scholars and practitioners need to be aware of how all individual program components impact students (Strange & Gibson, 2017; Tarrant, Ruben & Stoner, 2014). A critical stance is essential to ensure the combination of components of any education abroad program is understood for their value in facilitating students' achievement of desired outcomes.

2.0 Key Questions to be Addressed

- What components of education abroad programs should practitioners consider when designing or evaluating programs?
- What research evidence is there for assumptions about the effectiveness of individual program components?
- What future research is needed to fill the gaps on what we know about the effectiveness of individual program components?

3.0 Synthesis of the Global Literature

The review of the global research literature here builds on a previous chapter by Ogden et al. (2014), one of the few scholarly works to consider a range of program components in education abroad. In addition to providing an updated review of the literature, this chapter covers areas that were not explored as extensively in the earlier publication, including the role of technology, the extent to which program components have been explored outside of U.S.-based programs, and the implications of current and future research findings for practitioners.

3.1 Modes of instruction

Before determining which sort of classroom environment will be most appropriate on a given program, it is necessary to identify what students are expected to learn. Is the goal for students to become more interculturally competent, adaptable to new situations, linguistically proficient, knowledgeable of disciplinary theories/practices, or something else? Based on the answer to this question, students may be given the choice of enrolling directly in courses offered by the host university alongside local students, taking classes designed by the host university for international students, taking classes offered through a program provider and/or onsite staff, or a combination of two or more of these options. Among the many models that exist, it has been difficult for practitioners to make informed choices because, as Ogden et al. (2014) argue, "research has yet to thoroughly and systematically examine variations in modes of academic delivery in education abroad" (p.238).

One study that sought to examine the relevance of particular courses of study and the composition of classes in education abroad programs is the consortium project led by Georgetown University (Vande Berg, Connor-Linton, and Paige, 2009), with a research sample of 1,297 students from four U.S. institutions and several providers. Surprisingly, the researchers found greater gains in terms of intercultural development among students taking classes alongside other U.S. students compared to those enrolled directly with local students (See also Norris and Dwyer, 2005). While this study relied primarily on student self-reporting, an inherent weakness, it nonetheless raises an important question of whether direct enrollment is necessarily more effective in allowing students to adapt to new educational systems or in gaining new, culturally-informed perspectives on their academic subjects. The results point further to the absence of meaningful interactions between local and international students required for the development of intercultural competency (Leask, 2009; Montgomery, 2010).

In responding to market demands, a growing number of courses offered for international students are delivered by teaching staff of the home university, such as within the context of short-term, faculty-led program. These offerings are designed to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse group of students, who may not be able to study abroad for longer periods of time (Redden, 2018). Institutions may too appreciate the ability to put more quality controls in place, with greater oversight over faculty hiring and curricular choices. Coleman notes that these courses can limit students' exposure to alternative teaching styles and approaches and may prevent students from developing cultural awareness and intercultural competency (2009, p. 192). Thus, extra measures are needed to overcome such shortcomings, e.g. opening up the courses to local students and/or incorporating other forms of immersion to complement the coursework.

While more evidence is needed, the above examples disrupt the long-held conviction that direct enrollment in a host institution is automatically the best means for helping students to achieve learning outcomes. They also show it is all that more necessary to monitor students' progress in various learning environments, leading to program changes based on what works in a given location and for a given set of students.

3.2 Student accommodation

If academic coursework is at the core of an education abroad experience, other factors like housing are instrumental in facilitating students' ability to attain learning outcomes. Studies have long

explored the role of a student's homestay experience on their language learning and to some extent cultural awareness development. Challenging the logic that living with a family inevitably promotes better language skills, scholars have observed that such gains are not always guaranteed (Frank, 1997; Rivers, 1998; Wilkinson, 2002; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; Schmidt-Rinehart & Knight, 2004; DuFon & Churchill, 2006). In comparing students living with Russian host families with those living in a residence hall, Rivers (1998) was one of the first to conclude that homestays may be at times a negative predictor for second language gains in speaking skills and have no effect on listening skills (see also Engle & Engle, 2012).

Helping to explain the findings of Rivers and others, scholars note that homestays are not pure immersive environments. In a study of homestay meal practices in Japan, Iino (2006) noticed for instance that Japanese families tended to be overly accommodating and nice, while using "foreigner talk" and speaking in a more stilted, formal Japanese with students. Some students reported that they were being treated as "pets" (see also Pelligrino 2005) or expected to play the part of a non-threatening and clownish *gaijin* (foreigner), making it difficult for them to be accepted as full members of the family. In another mealtime study in China, Lee, Wu, Di, and Kinginger (2017) observed that one student's table etiquette was viewed as so unfitting that the host mother separated his meals from the rest of the family.

To maximize a student's success in a homestay, it is recommended that program leaders set clear expectations for students so that they know what to anticipate once they reach a homestay (Schmidt-Rinehart & Knight 2004, p. 257; Castiglioni, 2014). It may help to provide knowledge about the various models of the education abroad adjustment process (Storti, 1990), as well as training in strategies for intercultural communication. Efforts can also be made to reach out to families, so that they too understand their role in facilitating students' learning (Lee et al., 2017).

While much has been written on homestays, little has been researched and written on other types of housing like residence halls and private apartments. A few notable exceptions include inquiries evaluating language learning in homestays versus residence halls (Rivers, 1998), friendship patterns among international and domestic students (Nesdale & Todd, 2000; Kudo, Volet, & Whitsed, 2018), overseas students' psychological and sociocultural adjustment (Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998), and students' social networks abroad (Van Mol & Michielsen, 2015). While the findings vary greatly, these studies as a whole highlight the complexity of social relationships, the fact that language proficiency does not necessarily increase with one form of housing or another, and that much comes down to an individual student's psychological disposition.

3.3 Extra- and co-curricular learning

Along with housing, activities that may be classified as 'co-curricular' – including visits to museums, historical and cultural sites; concerts and theatre performances; meals and food tastings; and visits to local organizations and companies – are expected to enhance the learning that takes place in a classroom. There is a sense that if program participants, "can see, taste, feel, hear, and touch the objects or items in the study tour environment, then learning will have a greater and deeper meaning for [them]" (Gomez-Lanier 2017, p. 140). Within co-curricular offerings, instructors may opt to combine teaching with an excursion, e.g. an art history lecture delivered at a museum, while in other cases extracurricular activities may be entirely outside of teaching, designed to introduce students to the culture and history of a location.

A handful of scholarly works note the merits of supplemental activities, particularly in programs that have a specific disciplinary or pre-professional focus. Bai, Larimer, and Riner, for instance, describe the usefulness of visits to hospitals for a social work program set in Beijing (2016, p. 77). Similarly, Duke points out the relevance of tours to companies for marketing students that highlight both good and bad marketing practices, connecting onsite observations to what students have learned in the classroom (2000, p. 159). Gomez-Lanier (2017) goes a step further in examining student development in two interior design study tours, one in New York City and the other in China, with the

finding that students learned in both places yet perceived their learning experiences as more meaningful and positive in China due to greater cultural differences (p. 140).

While progress has been made, few studies isolate activities from the rest of the program components in their research design or analysis, leading to questions of what students gain from participating. Admittedly, such isolation is challenging because it potentially takes away expected services from one group of students. Nonetheless, it is imperative to understand which curricular and extracurricular activities complement classroom learning, to ensure that all program components are meaningful and worthy of an investment.

3.4 Experiential learning

In addition to extra-and co-curricular activities, a number of programs offer service, internships, and research opportunities, which are intended to help students hone their academic and professional skills while also becoming more immersed in a local culture. There has been an increasing drive to offer options that are aligned to industry needs, incorporating practice-based learning and authentic types of assessment linked to professional fields (Marijuan and Sanz, 2018). While such opportunities may be offered on their own, as a stand-alone option, others are being woven into more traditional education abroad programs alongside coursework.

Service Learning: Service as a component of education abroad has been explored for its potential to contribute to students' learning and a host community's well-being and development (McBride & Mlyn, 2011). Numerous studies have found evidence that overseas service learning contributes to students' linguistic skills (Curtin, Martins, Schwartz-Barcott, DiMaria, & Ogando, 2013; Sherraden, Lough, & Bopp, 2013), as well as intercultural sensitivity and tolerance (Paige & Vande Berg, 2012). Spenader and Retka's (2015) investigation across different education abroad groups reveals, for example, that the students who made the greatest gains in intercultural competence were those who had completed a service activity as part of their education abroad program. The language environment and housing arrangements were also factors yet not predictors of significant growth.

In addition to what students gain, a few authors remind us of the importance of setting up service learning experiences that benefit those being served (Jacoby, 2015). Doing so involves carefully considering, "the complex intended and unintended consequences of our work with and in host communities" (Crabtree, 2013, p. 61), as in the drain on local community resources (Lough, McBride, Sherraden, & O'Hara, 2011). By not following recommendations from these and other related studies, there is a very real concern that service-learning activities might be reinforcing bad practices, doing more harm than good (Hartman, 2016).

Internships: An unprecedented range of opportunities now exists for students to engage in international internships as part of their university studies, both as a way of giving students additional international experiences, yet also in setting students on a path towards employment (Deakin, 2013). As with domestic pre-professional opportunities, students interning abroad have been found to display increased disciplinary knowledge, a deeper understanding of particular professional fields and prospects for future career pathways (He & Qin, 2017; Wu, 2017), a greater understanding of the importance of global issues for their academic trajectories and future careers (Gates, 2014), and a positive effect on students' language skills and intercultural development (Marijuan & Sanz, 2018).

Despite the apparent gains, Van Mol (2017) notes in a wide-ranging study of European employers that not all employers necessarily value study abroad or international internships in hiring process, with great variations by country and type of skills sought. This finding suggests that international educators need to do a better job of helping students articulate the skills that they gain while abroad for employers, as well as to ensure that internships are organized in ways that lead to maximum student outcomes. Moreover, success largely depends on the extent to which an international work experience is integrated within a student's academic degree and involves considerations of whether

and how academic credit is awarded, the level of home university support and mentoring, and the role in which university partners and internship supervisors play in student development (Gates, 2014; Bullock, Gould, Hejmadi, & Lock, 2009).

Research: With more institutions of higher education wanting to prepare students for post-graduate studies and in providing a pre-professional experience, overseas research opportunities have become increasingly popular. In addition to more general education abroad-related outcomes, students conducting research abroad are expected to gain disciplinary knowledge and diagnostic skills.

To test these expectations, a recent study set on a short-term, faculty-led program in China found that research activities did permit economics students to gain critical analytical and data collection expertise, along with closer connections with mentors and a greater awareness of international affairs (Shostya & Morreale, 2017). Barkin (2016) adds that a research component within an education abroad experience can improve program quality, by overcoming the limitations that come with reduced immersion on a faculty-led program. Other studies find that undergraduate research help students cultivate a notion of global citizenship, by developing learning tied to civic engagement (Streitwieser 2009), provided that they receive the needed support and oversight to conduct well designed and responsible research that goes through the proper regulatory channels. To this end, students should be encouraged to share results with locals, for feedback on their findings as well as to ensure that their work benefits the host society.

Further investigation needs to be undertaken to gauge which models are most effective, as with comparative studies examining the length of internship abroad, type of support, effectiveness of an associated academic component, and requirements around language for participants. Even in chapters that describe the positive aspects of in-country fieldwork activities (Oguro, 2016), additional testing will help to back up assumptions.

3.5 Student services

In addition to the other program components outlined above are the set of services designed not only to provide needed support, yet also to aid in the attainment of learning outcomes. These services begin before students leave their home country, with advising and pre-departure orientations, and continue through until students return home with reentry activities.

Threaded throughout these activities is a sense that students gain more through mentorship and a series of interventions than by completing a program on their own. As Vande Berg et al. (2009) argue, it cannot be presumed that students will become more interculturally competent by simply being transported to a new culture. While all students may benefit, Yao and Mwangi (2017) add that a support system is expressly critical for those who have traditionally been underrepresented in education abroad and may feel out of place overseas, including students of color and first-generation students (See also Barclay-Hamir & Gozik (2018) for an overview of diversity and inclusion efforts over the past several decades).

To maximize the learning afforded by education abroad programs, it has been contended that students need to be prepared adequately before departure and mentored both during the sojourn and after their return home. The extent to which this occurs varies extensively on the degree to which a given program is embedded within the student's course of study. While it has been raised in the literature focused on students' intercultural development outcomes (Bathurst & La Brack, 2012; Jackson & Oguro, 2018), existing research remains mostly in the form of case studies rather than large-scale comparisons between interventions types. Developments in online technologies have more recently opened up opportunities for further options for education abroad (Giovangeli, Oguro, & Harbon, 2018; Lee, 2018), however the field still needs to interrogate these interventions extensively to determine connections to specific student learning outcomes.

Much of the work on support services has focused on packaged programming targeted primarily at U.S. students, which includes coursework, housing, activities, and support services. In other countries, students have expected to be more independent, without the same level of assistance. That said, more research in this area is being undertaken in other regions, as in Europe with the recently completed Erasmus+ higher education impact study (European Commission, 2019), as well as the work of Perez-Encinas and Rodriguez-Pomeda (2018), both of which argue for improved student services. Less attention in these studies is paid to mentorship and interventions, and instead there is an interest in improving support around admissions, living costs, housing, technology, and banking matters. A few recent studies in European institutions (e.g. Ballo, Mathies, and Weimer, 2020; Nilsson, 2020), complement this work by examining international student intregration theory and practices.

4.0 Implications for Practice

This literature review illustrates how important it is for those developing education abroad programs to think intentionally about what students should be expected to gain from a given experience and, in turn, to determine which program components will most effectively aid students in achieving stated goals and learning outcomes, based on evidence from data collection and research.

4.1 Applying research to practice

To apply the existing research to practice, it may help to consider a typical decision-making point that will come up in the development of a new program. In selecting housing, for instance, it might be easy to assume that a homestay is a preferred housing choice, with more chances to speak to speak the host language, such as at the dinner table, as well as to observe cultural cues. As noted above, studies going back to the 1990's demonstrate in fact that a homestay does not always guarantee greater language growth (Frank, 1997; Rivers, 1998). Accordingly, one might decide not to place students with families or, if homestay are used, to consider interventions that enhance language learning, e.g. giving students a better indication of the challenges they will face and how they can direct their own learning; providing training sessions to host families, so that they become co-educators; and debriefing the homestay experience with students throughout the program, as through journaling.

Not all studies may be generalizable, and conditions will change over time. However, such examples remind us that we need to be more critical of the assumptions we take for granted. Most importantly, the application of findings requires practitioners to be open to evidence that may not support their own observations, derived from first-hand experience and expertise. While adapting programs based on lessons learned from research may feel like a leap of faith at first, the risk of not doing so is greater; there is a real chance that students may not attain expected outcomes and that limited resources will be squandered in the process.

4.2 Continuous evaluation and experimentation

In addition to research findings, it becomes incumbent upon practitioners to evaluate the success of program components through their own data collection and analysis. If intercultural competency is the goal, students' proficiency should be tested over time, using a mix of methods. Doing so might determine whether students enrolled in courses designed specifically for international students have greater gains than those who are directly enrolled with local students. If not, it is necessary to be open to the finding and understand what may cause the result. It takes time and ongoing experimentation to fine tune a program, and even then the outcomes should be continuously monitored, as programs and students do not exist in a vacuum; circumstances change and programs require continual modifications (Gozik, 2014).

5.0 Directions for Future Research

In addition to recommendations for practice offered above, this chapter offers a few observations on gaps that remain in the research, as well as other issues that must be taken into account in charting a path forward in the field of education abroad.

5.1 Technology

Within a few decades, access to media and the internet has expanded exponentially, permitting students abroad to stay in much closer touch with family and friends, without ever fully leaving home. This poses a challenge to immersion programs, with a recognition that it is impossible to limit access to the internet in most parts of the world, even if one wanted to try doing so. Given this reality, specific aspects of technology in education abroad are now being explored in the research literature, including the implications for language learning (Godwin-Jones, 2016) and intercultural mentoring (Jackson, 2018; Lee, 2018).

Some see strong advantages afforded by technology, noting for instance that online communication can be used for mentoring students, adding to (or substituting for) support provided by onsite staff (Hampton, 2015). At Boston College, for example, an online course entitled "Reflections on *Being* Abroad" helps students to be more intentional about their experiences overseas (Smith, 2016). Likewise, Godwin-Jones (2016) notes that, with video and audio recording capabilities, smartphones and tablets can permit students to gather data for fieldwork as part of course-based exercises. More research can and needs to be done to collect examples of how technology is being employed effectively within overseas programs.

5.2 Expanding the breadth of case studies

This chapter, moreover, has noted areas in which research has been conducted by those based outside of the U.S. Examples include studies of housing for Japanese students (Pryde, 2015; Crealock, Derwing, & Gibson, 1999; Tanaka, 2007) and reports conducted on student services within the ERASMUS program (European Commission, 2019). Nonetheless, this sort of work remains quite limited. An imbalance may be created in part by the sheer amount of scholarship coming out of the U.S., in all disciplines. It will be worth watching to see whether other countries that are increasing scholarly production will fill the gap. At the same time, the focus on education abroad in the U.S. likely derives from the tremendous amount of resources that have gone into developing and marketing programs; within this industry, institutions and providers have looked to data collection to demonstrate success in helping students achieve learning outcomes (Gozik, 2014).

The lack of examples from scholars in other countries is problematic in that U.S. models for education abroad are so unique. The packaged aspect of programs, expected to replicate what is available on U.S. campuses overseas, does not exist in other countries, where students are expected to operate more independently, with limited support. Perhaps scholars and practitioners in other countries might borrow some of the features of U.S. models, based on the findings that indicate where faculty and staff interventions can improve learning. Should this take place, it will be equally worth investigating how students trained in a different system, and one that may be more didactic, respond to such interventions. At the same time, through other systems U.S. colleagues have an opportunity to understand which program aspects are less necessary, and which may actually be serving as barriers for students in making progress in areas like immersion and language development. Collaborations between scholars across national borders, furthermore, are beneficial in refining terminology and in taking a critical perspective on the assumptions made about what constitutes an ideal program.

5.3 Bridging research and practice

Lastly, while recognizing the pressures for institutions of higher education to maintain healthy enrollments and budgets, it is difficult to find international educators who are not fully committed to helping students maximize their overseas experiences. Similarly, scholars contributing to the literature on education abroad hope that their research will aid practitioners in delivering more impactful programming. The snag can be in ensuring that program developers have access to and are able to find ways of implementing practical takeaways from the scholarship.

To ensure that scholarly findings are widely accessible, it is necessary to foster other avenues for distribution, including more frequent scholarly presentations at practitioner-oriented conferences, abridged versions of longer books, articles in trade publications, and more spaces in which scholars and practitioners can share perspectives. All of this already happens on some level, fostered by those who identify as "scholar-practitioners" (Streitweiser & Ogden, 2016), though more is needed. Otherwise, we risk maintaining our assumptions that certain components are the "gold standard" of education abroad, even when they are not supported by the research – something that will prevent us from maximizing limited resources to serve students best.

Further Reading

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