

MORE TO THE WORLD: AN ANALYSIS OF STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

It is widely agreed on that studying abroad greatly benefits students in their academics, personal life, and future careers; I argue that which country you visit also plays an important role. In this thesis, I review Texas State study abroad programs to analyze the cultural distances between host countries in relation to United States culture and how students will benefit more greatly by studying in countries with a greater cultural distance. To test this hypothesis, I interviewed Texas State students who've participated in Texas State faculty led study abroad programs to examine if their experiences which include: personal growth, language acquisition, cross-cultural competencies obtainment, academic commitment, and career growth positively differed by country of study. To conduct my research, I used multiple cultural frameworks, including monochronic vs. polychronic time, high vs. low context, power distance, masculinity vs. femininity, and individualism vs. collectivism. My findings were that country location does affect personal growth, academic commitment, and cross-cultural obtainment. While majority of students regardless of country location had the same takeaways which include: wanting to pursue traveling and working abroad and finding out that people are the same regardless of location.

Introduction

Studying abroad is the act of a student pursuing education in a foreign country at a foreign university while receiving academic credits at your home university. It's no secret that studying abroad positively affects students in a variety of ways. Coursework on cultural diversity is being taught in school curriculum but learning in a classroom has its limits. Therefore, receiving firsthand experience in a foreign country has received well deserved attention as a method to help students develop their intercultural knowledge and adaptability. NAFSA: Association of International Educators reported that, “. . .the number of U.S. students studying abroad for credit during the 2015-2016 academic year grew 3.8 percent from 313,415 students to 325,339 students” (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, n.d.). This represents just over 1.6% of all U.S. students enrolled at institutions of higher education in the United States (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, n.d.). The number of students participating in short term programs has grown rapidly and now represents 56% of the study abroad population, whereas only 4% are in the traditional year-long program (Mapp, 2013). Students chose these short-term programs because they appeal to students limited flexibility in their finances or academics. Research on studying abroad has documented its beneficial outcomes which include personal growth, cross-cultural awareness and interest, functional knowledge, increase intercultural communication, openness to diversity, and the reduced to ethnocentrism (Mapp, 2013).

When roughly 95% of the world lives outside the United States its hard to dismiss this essential aspect of higher education. With an ever-growing globalized world, students can miss out on international business opportunities due to their lack of

international competency. The table below shows the percentage of U.S. study abroad students by host region.

Host Region	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Africa	4.5%	4.6%	4.4%	3.4%	3.9%
Asia	12.4%	12.4%	11.9%	11.4%	11.1%
Europe	53.3%	53.3%	53.3%	54.5%	54.4%
Latin America	15.8%	15.7%	16.2%	16.0%	16.3%
Middle East	2.5%	2.2%	2.1%	2.2%	1.9%
North America	0.6%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%	0.5%
Oceania	4.5%	4.0%	3.9%	4.0%	4.2%
Multiple Regions	6.4%	7.3%	7.7%	7.9%	7.6%

*Data from the Institute of International Education's *Open Doors* Report and the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics.

An overwhelming number of U.S. students studied abroad in Europe from 2011 to 2016 and according to NAFSA 40% studied in just five countries: The United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, France, and Germany. According to psychologists, “. . . exposure to diverse normative views in groups or work teams consisting of culturally diverse members is positively related to the development of creative potential” (Leung and Chiu, 2010). This leads me to the proposal that students can gain more from their international experience if they study in countries not in Europe particularly Western Europe due to its limited cultural distance

To compare and contrast other countries to the United States I will be using several cultural frameworks and literature review which include Geert Hofstede 6D model of national culture, Edward and Mildred Hall “Understanding Cultural Differences”, and Leon Festinger “A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance”.

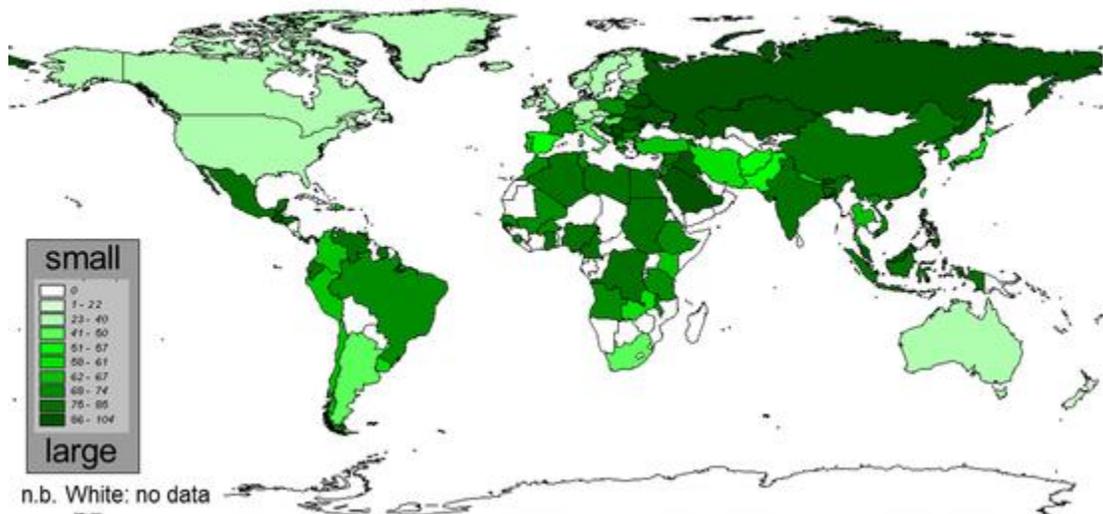
Literature review & conceptual framework

6D Model of National Culture

Geert Hofstede is a Dutch social psychologist and is known for pioneering research on cross-cultural groups and workplace organizations. The six dimensions of national culture are based on research done by Professor Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, Michael Minkov and their research teams (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). The dimensions of a countries' culture are relative and isn't accurate for every individual in said country. The six dimensions of national culture are: power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation vs. short term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint.

Power Distance

Power Distance World map



Hofstede, G. (n.d.). Power Distance World map photograph. Licensed under Geerthofstede.com

Power distance is the, “. . . degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede Insights, n.d.).

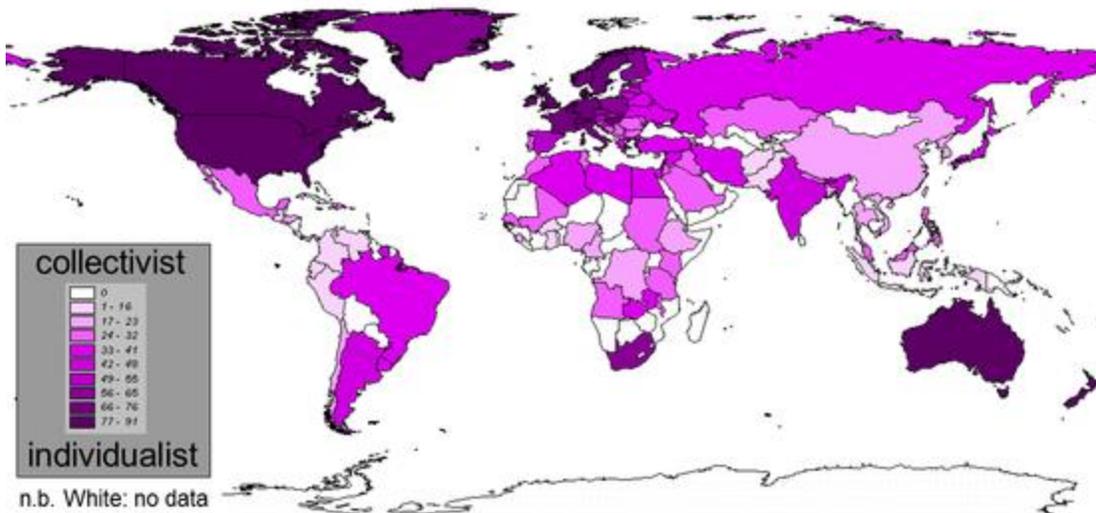
Countries with a high to medium power distance index include: Russia, Eastern Europe, Kazakhstan, Southeast Asia, East Asia, India, Mexico, Central America, Venezuela, Brazil, Ecuador and majority of Central Asia and Africa. The people in these countries accept that there is a hierarchical order, which could be order in the family or workplace, allowing everyone to have their place in society. Power and authority is an important part of life; people are not equal which is an accepted thought. This can be seen by these societies vertical arrangements where leaders are expected to make difficult decisions for the whole team while facing no opposition from subordinates. Subordinates simply do the job dictated to them.

Low power distance countries include: Canada, the United States, the Nordic countries, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, Australia, and New Zealand. These low power distance countries strive to, “. . .equalize the distribution of power and demand justification for inequalities of power” (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). These countries strive for equality in all sectors but does not mean they are equal. For example, the United States which has a low power distance displays a more unequal distribution of wealth when compared to Germany also a low power distance country. The low power distance is most noticeable in the workplace where employees are considered equal to the boss. Employees (subordinate wouldn't be used in the workplace since it refers to inferiority) would be more readily and encouraged to approach and contradict their bosses. Leaders encourage independent thought and creative contributions to the team. Organizations (families, schools, workplaces) are looser and hierarchies are decentralized.

Individualism vs. Collectivism

Individualism is defined as a, “. . .loosely-knit social framework in which individuals are expected to take care of only themselves and their immediate families” (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). Countries with high individualist views include: the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Ireland, the Nordic countries, South Africa and Central Europe. These countries have societies where the

Collectivism – Individualism World map



Hofstede, G. (n.d.) Collectivism-Individualism World map photograph. Licensed under Geerthofstede.com

people pride themselves on being unique. People make decisions based on themselves and everyone is responsible for their own actions and whatever the outcome is affects only them. People do see themselves a part of groups but its usually small groups like the immediate family, peers, clubs, and co-workers. Each can act on their own private motivations/values and can judge other people on who they are and not on their status to form relationships. People tend to have an independent view of themselves which isn't based on their family or job title.

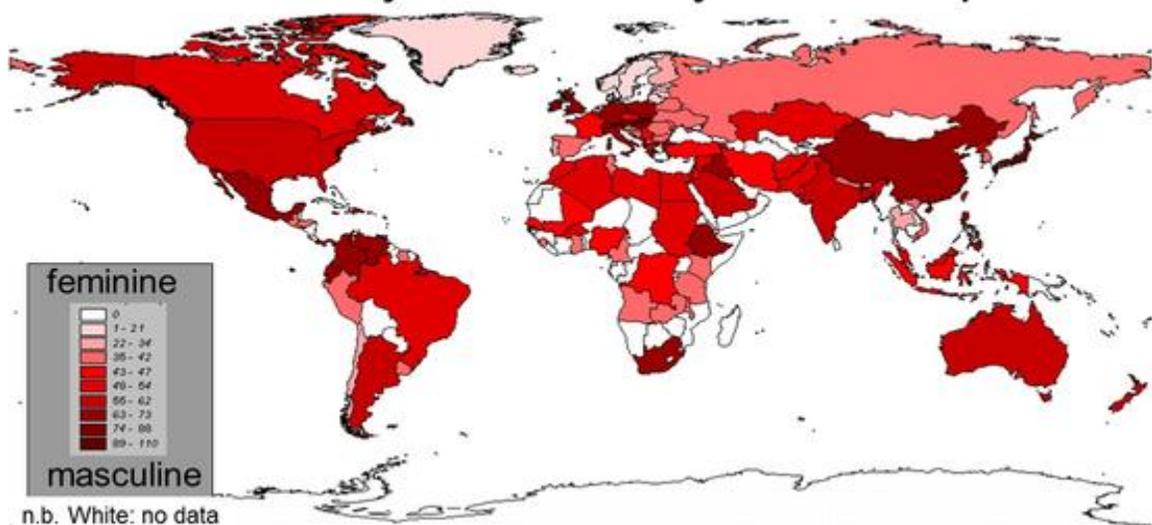
The rest of the world would be considered collectivist societies. Collectivism is a belief that an individuals life belongs to the group they are a part of. The individual must

sacrifice their wants for the groups greater good. Some countries that rated higher on the collectivist scale include: Indonesia, Pakistan, Afghanistan Chile, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, East Asia, Vietnam, parts of Africa, etc. The group could be the family, society, race, nation, job, or economic class. A good comparison to collectivism would be the beehive. Individuals are honeybees working for the greater good of the beehive.

Masculinity vs. Femininity

Masculinity vs. femininity is not to be mistaken for aggressive (men) vs. submissive (women) or anything of the sort. In this case masculinity in the society represents the preference for, “. . . achievement, heroism, assertiveness, and material rewards for success. Society at large is more competitive” (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). While femininity stands for a societal preference of, “. . .cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life. Society at large is more consensus-oriented” (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). Another way to view masculinity vs. femininity is tough vs. tender. On the

Femininity - Masculinity World map



Hofstede, G. (n.d.) Femininity-Masculinity World map photograph. Licensed under Geerthofstede.com

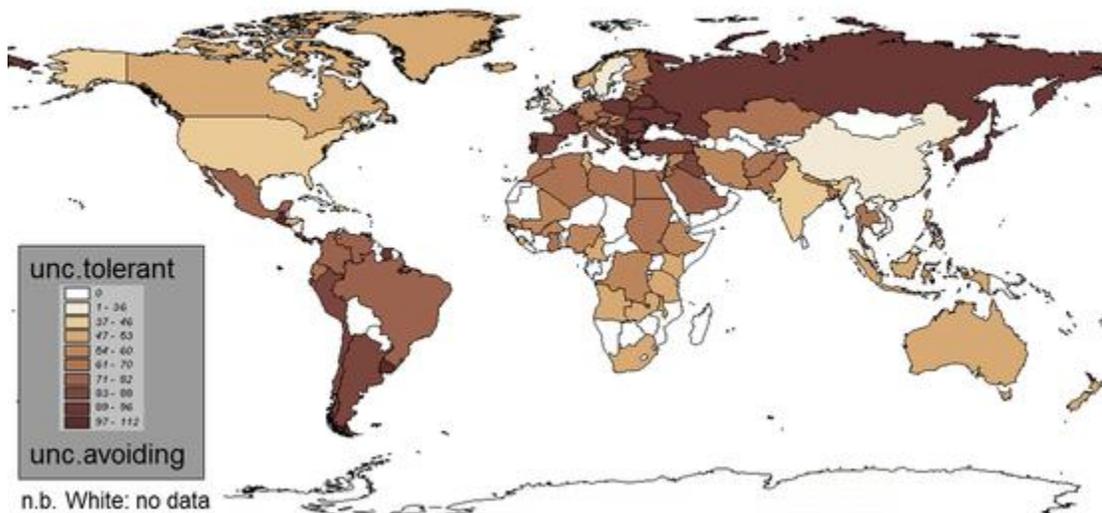
world map Hofstede provides, only a few countries are considered feminine, they are the Nordic countries, Chile, the Netherlands, and Thailand; in these countries gender roles overlap. According to Hofstede both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life (Hofstede, 2001). The society values relationships, the gender wage gap is smaller, there's flexible family structures, and they rather reach consensus before being decisive. There is very low competition in these societies and people tend to live in harmony with each other and work against dissimilarities between the genders.

Majority of the world's countries are masculine with a few standout countries including: Japan, Central Europe, Venezuela, Mexico, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and China. These societies have clear and strict gender roles meaning the man is strong and assertive while the women are obedient and gentle. Status is very important, so people work hard to earn a title to be placed higher on the hierarchy and earn material wealth. Competition is good and is considered as fair play and this is encouraged from a young age.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty Avoidance Index expresses the degree to which, “. . .the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity” (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). It's how the society deals with the fact that the future can never be known. People are either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations. Countries that avoid uncertainty include: Russia, Eastern Europe, Spain, France, Portugal, Japan, South Korea, majority of Central and South America. These countries try to minimize the possibility of

Uncertainty Avoidance World map



Hofstede, G. (n.d.) Uncertainty Avoidance World map photograph. Licensed under Geerthofstede.com

uncertainty by having formalized policies, strict laws and strict informal laws, such as having to act a certain way at dinner, but of course not everyone follows these rules.

Society tends to place importance on using formality when interacting with others.

People avoid the unfamiliar, rather than take risks they prefer the already known.

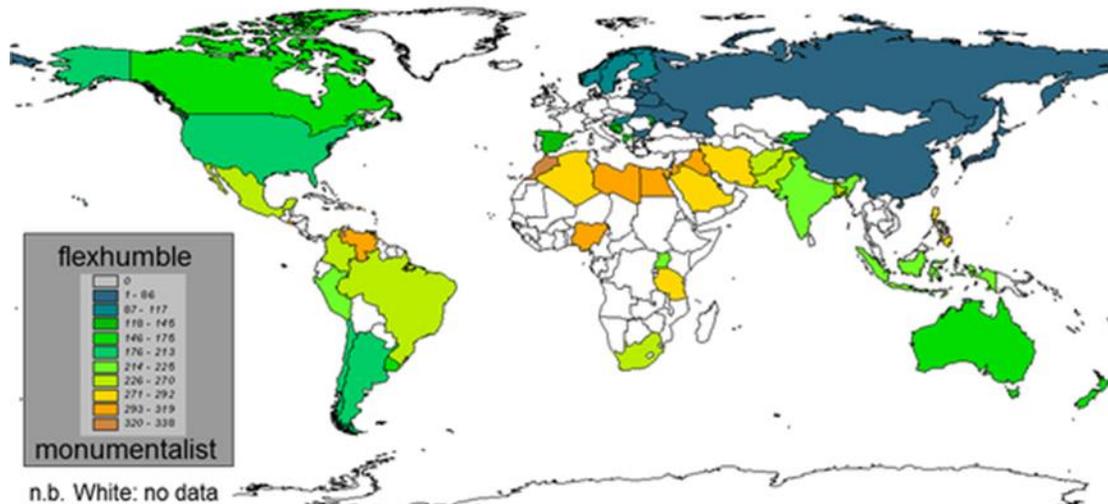
Predictability is the key word when discussing these countries.

Countries with low uncertainty avoidance include: Singapore, Malaysia, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Ireland, China, India, and the United States. These countries maintain a more relaxed attitude, have informal norms and informal interactions, and are less calculated when taking risk. This can be seen when comparing the United States, a low scoring country to Belgium, a high scoring country. The United States is riddled with credit crisis's, ranging from personal debt to nationwide (government) debt while Belgium has extremely low risk (almost zero) when getting a mortgage.

Long Term Orientation vs. Short Term Normative Orientation

Long Term Orientation vs. Short Term Orientation is when societies prioritize the past/present or the future. It's based on the study of Michael Bond who noted that Hofstede's previous cultural dimensions did not sufficiently reflect Asian perspectives on culture. A country that's scores low making them long term orientation prefer to maintain time-honored traditions and norms while being wary of societal change. While a country that scores high makes them short term orientation, they encourage, "... thrift and efforts in modern education as a way to prepare for the future" (Hofstede Insights, n.d.).

Short-term orientation (Monumentalism) – Long-term orientation (Flexhumility) World map (based on WVS)



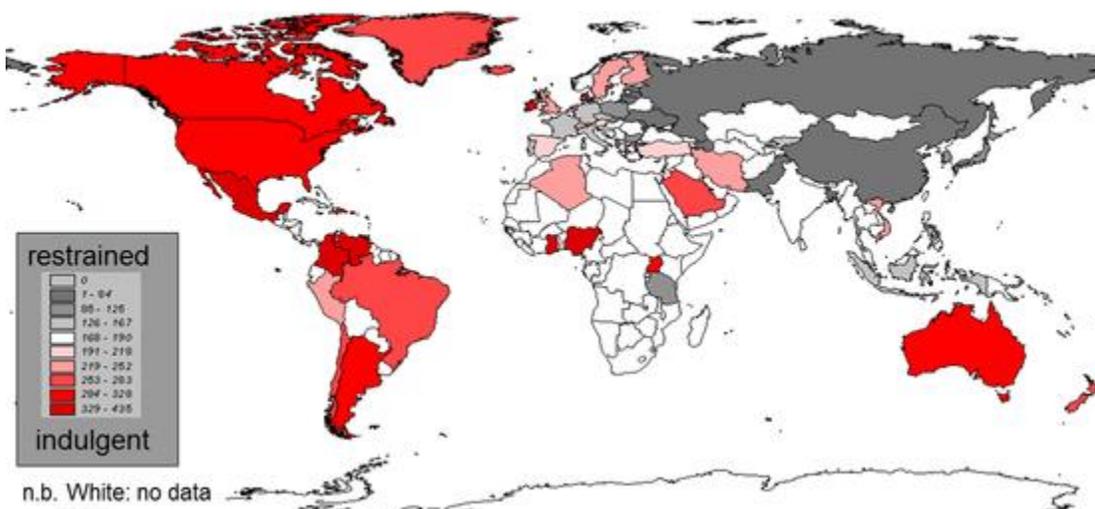
Hofstede, G. (n.d.) Short-term-orientation- long-term orientation World map photograph. Licensed under Geerthofstede.com

Countries that are long term orientation include: Russia, East Asia, Eastern Europe, and Scandinavian countries. These countries order relationships by status, they place emphasis on persistence, are save more in comparison to other countries. Countries that are short term oriented include: North Africa, Nigeria, Tanzania, Central Asia, Venezuela, and the Philippines. These countries value stability, emphasize quick results, leisure time and the protection of one's face is important.

Indulgence vs. Restraint

Indulgence is the act of indulging. Countries that indulge more than others have a society that, “. . . allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun” (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). A country that restrains itself, “. . . stands for a society that suppresses gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms” (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). The map on indulgence vs. restraint is not very shocking. The Americas, Australia, Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, Saudi Arabia, Ireland, and Denmark are indulgent countries. These countries

Indulgence - Restraint World map (based on WVS)



Hofstede, G. (n.d.) Indulgence- Restraint World map photograph. Licensed under Geerthofstede.com

focus more on individual happiness and leisure time while there is greater freedom on personal control. The rest of the world is restrained especially Asian countries, Eastern/Central Europe, and Russia. Freedom and leisure are not given the same importance as indulgent countries and positive emotions like happiness are not expressed freely.

Edward T. Hall & Mildred Reed Hall: Understanding Cultural Differences

Edward Hall was an anthropologist and cross-cultural researcher. He is recognized for founding the scholarly field of intercultural communication (Roger, 2002). He introduced several new concepts including high and low context culture, polychronic and monochronic time and proxemics. Halls states that, “Culture is communication and communication is culture” (Hall, 1959). Edward and Mildred Reed Hall write “Understanding Cultural Differences” to explain the cultural context in which corporations in Germany, France, and the United States operate and how this contributes to the misunderstandings between business personnel from each country.

Monochronic and Polychronic Time

There are several time systems in the world but monochronic and polychronic are the most important when it comes to international business. Monochronic time means focusing on one thing at a time. It was created during the Industrial Revolution when factory life was scheduled by the second. When time became equal to money the factories made sure to get the most out of their workers with the limited time they had. Monochronic cultures run on schedules and time is perceived as being tangible. If a person doesn't complete a task on the schedule or something unexpected comes up taking time away from the designated task, then their time is viewed as being wasted. Relationships can be intensified in monochronic cultures. Since time is a valuable tangible entity a person may “choose” to spend their time with someone while excluding others. The United States, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, Norway, and Sweden are some of the countries that use monochronic time. A few characteristics of these countries

include: emphasizing promptness, concentrating on one job, adhering to plans, taking time commitments seriously, concerned about not disturbing others and showing respect for private property.

Polychronic time is the antithesis of monochronic time. Polychronic time means being involved with many things at once. People tend to do several things at once with lots of involvement with people. The emphasis is not sticking to a schedule but human transactions. An example in the text states, “. . .two polychronic Latins conversing on a street corner would likely opt to be late for their next appointment rather than abruptly terminate on the conversation before its natural conclusion” (Hall and Hall, 1990). Polychronic time is not tangible like monochronic, it is more of an experience. Unlike monochronic business cultures where offices are soundproof and private, polychronic culture feel that private spaces disrupt the natural flow of information by shutting people off from one another. Latin, Mediterranean, and some Arab countries to name a few runs on polychronic time. Hierarchy comes into play in polychronic cultures. For instance, if someone more important like a family member, close friend or a senior in a company shows up unexpectedly appointments would be shifted around last minute to accommodate them. This would not be rude since appointments mean very little.

High and Low Context

Context is the information that surrounds an event, statement, or idea; it is bounded with the meaning of that event. Edward Hall defines a high context communication or message as, “. . .one in which *most* of the information is already in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message” (Hall

and Hall, 1990). An extreme example of this would be twins who don't have to verbally communicate with each other since they have such a close relationship. Japanese, Arabs, and Mediterranean peoples are high context since they have extensive networks with their families, friends, and colleagues. Most of their communications do not require much in-depth background information since they are already informed about the lives of the people they are dealing with. The form of communication is based on everyone knowing the same information. In organizations everyone gathers, processes, and circulates information together, there are no barriers so everyone can stay informed and everyone knows who is most informed.

Low context communication is when the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code. Low context people include Americans, Germans, Scandinavians, Swiss, and other northern Europeans. Their interactions need to have some detailed background information embedded in it. The need for background information stems from the fact that their networks are limited, and they don't have extensive deep connections with everyone, that's limited to family, friends, and sometimes a few close colleagues. High context people can feel at a loss when receiving not enough information, they need to know exactly what will be expected of them and what the context of the situation is before they commit to anything. In the business world information is shared with a select few.

Leon Festinger: A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance

Leon Festinger was a 20th century psychologist who developed the theories of social comparison and cognitive dissonance. The theory of cognitive dissonance is the

discomfort a person feels when they hold two conflicting beliefs. Although study abroad has many great benefits it can also be stressful and difficult. “Culture shock, a common phenomenon in students abroad, is the “realization that expected behaviors and perceived values of the new environment are disturbingly dissimilar from those of home” (Zeitlin, 1996). There is evidence that students abroad have more trouble in more specific domains, “Students’ success in forming cross-cultural friendships often depends on how different the host culture is from the students’ home culture” (Angula, 2008). A study done by Redmond and Bunyi found that, “. . . among international students at a midwestern university, British, European, and South American students were best at interacting with U.S. students, while Korean, Taiwanese, and Southeast Asian students had more trouble” (Angula, 2008). The releasing of previous beliefs or the acceptance of the country of study way of life will free the person from culture shock. Students who do overcome culture shock and adjust to the new culture feel, “excitement, fascination, confidence, euphoria, acceptance, self-assurance, and satisfaction” (Angula, 2008).

Cognitive dissonance stems from humans wanting consistency in their lives. Any deviation from that will bring internal turmoil. A person can change their behavior or mindset to eliminate the dissonance. Festinger states that, “. . .the dissonance can, of course, be eliminated by changing the behavioral cognitive element in such a way that is consonant with the environmental element” (Festinger, 1957). This is the most apparent method to getting over culture shock, the more information we obtain abroad the more it allows us to adhere to the new environment. Sometimes the distance can be too great, the countries’ beliefs or actions conflicts with a person, or someone could have a strong sense of nationalism and think their way/belief is correct and everything else is wrong or

unnatural. Just because a culture is similar doesn't mean a person won't go through culture shock. There will always be an adjustment period whether the culture is "distant" or "similar" (Festinger, 1957).

Cultural distance

Cultural distance is measuring the extent to which different cultures are similar or different. This is a term commonly used in international business as it directly relates to foreign investment expansion. Cultural distance has taken intangible and complex culture and has offered a standardized way to measure cultural differences. The more the cultures contrast according to Hofstede's 6D model of national culture the larger the distance. For example, the United States and Canada although border each other still have different cultures but the cultural distance between the two is very small. It would be relatively easy for an American to emigrate to Canada than to India. It has been said that with the increased globalization and interaction across cultures the cultural distance between many cultures will soon began to close. The bigger the cultural distance the bigger the chance that students can showcase cultural adaptability. Cultural adaptability is, "The ability of individuals to adapt to other cultures with common yet different feelings, perceptions, and experiences. Cultural adaptability facilitates intercultural effectiveness and the ability to develop synergy among individuals in new and different environments" (Welkey, 2009). This is an essential skill for students to have due to our ever growing globalized world.

Method

This study consists of 14 current Texas State University students who participated in one or more summer Texas State faculty-led trips in 2016 and 2017. Students studied in Japan, Spain, Peru, Ireland, England, Italy, and Ghana. Each program was a month long except for the Ghana program which was 3 weeks. Participants were contacted via e-mail from the Study Abroad Office. Two emails were sent out a week apart, all surveys were administered online using Qualtrics survey software.

Survey Questions

1. Have you been abroad before? (Not including TXST study abroad) Where?
2. Where did you study abroad for Texas State?
3. What semester and year did you study abroad with Texas State?
4. What course(s) did you take while abroad?
5. Why did you study abroad?
6. How did your time studying abroad while at TXST prepare you for your career/endeavors after graduation? If your TXST study abroad experience didn't help you prepare, which country do you think would have and why?
7. How did the country location aide you in your academics while abroad?
8. In what ways was the country(s) you went to culturally different from the U.S.?
9. What were the difficulties (if any) you went through while abroad? Please be specific (e.g. language barriers, cultural barriers, etc.)

10. How did your study abroad experience change you personally? (e.g. you matured, changed your major, decided to pursue working abroad, obtained a bigger view of the world, etc.)
11. Do you feel like a different region/ country would provide you with more opportunities to be independent? If yes, which one?
12. What cultural events did you participate in/observe? Be specific.
13. If you did partake or observe a cultural event what impact/impression did it have on you?
14. What changes would you make to the program? (e.g. Add a homestay, different city, more involvement with the local students, etc.)
15. Would you recommend other students to partake in the same TXST study abroad program?

*All questions are open-ended

Results

The results below consist of quotes from students.

Research question 7: How did the country location aide you in your academics while abroad?

- Student- England- General Studies
“Honestly, I’m not sure”.
- Student- England- Magic, Ritual, and Religion
“I don't feel like my study abroad gave me career skills”.

- Student- Peru/Spain- Government/politics in Latin America and economics in Latin America

“Both have taught me more about how their governments and economies have developed”.

Research question 8: In what ways was the country(s) you went to culturally different from the U.S.?

- Student- Japan

“Japan is completely different in every way compared to the U.S. The common term used is "culture shock," which I experienced throughout the whole time” and “It is the cultural opposite of the U.S.”.

- Student- Italy

“So many but the most important I think is how they live more humble lifestyle. They don’t have huge houses and cars and all the stuff Americans feel like they need...”.

- Student- Italy

“It was also too similar to America. I think going somewhere with more differences like eastern Europe or Africa would have been beneficial”.

- Student- Ireland

“In Ireland, I knew the language and felt totally at home. It was not much different than the U.S.”.

Research question 9: What were the difficulties (if any) you went through while abroad?

Students who studied abroad in Peru, Spain, Japan, Ghana, and Italy all stated that their difficulties were language and cultural barriers. Students who studied in England

difficulties were: “Learning to navigate on your own without internet connection’, not having a phone, and public transport. Two students who studied in Ireland and England stated that there were no difficulties.

Research question 10: How did your study abroad experience change you personally?

- Student- Japan

“It gave me the opportunity to experience being part of an extreme minority. Additionally, I wasn't able to communicate my thoughts in their language which sometimes made them assume I was ignorant on a subject. I was able to take this experience and apply it to foreigners in the States and I became more patient with their language barrier struggles”.

- Student- Japan

“I have become much more socially aware of how to tailor my communication with people from other cultural backgrounds”.

- Student- Ghana

“The major impact it had was putting into a more tangible perspective my position of privilege in the world”.

Research question 11: Do you feel like a different region/ country would provide you with more opportunities to be independent?

Three students who studied in Italy and England answered yes.

Research question 14: What changes would you make to the program?

- Student- Japan

“Changing how intense the courses were. I feel as though I didn’t get to experience as much as I could”.

- Student- England

“More involved with local students would have been interesting”.

- Student- Italy

“I wouldn't locate us in the middle of a big tourist city because we did not get the full experience in a tourism spot”.

- Student- Ireland

“Have more in-city excursions with the professors”.

Analysis

My findings are summarized and explained in the context of each research question.

Research question 7: How did the country location aide you in your academics while abroad?

The results show that courses that don’t directly correspond with country location prevents students from fully utilizing their time abroad. The students who studied Japanese in Japan, Irish literature in Ireland, Italian in Italy, and Latin American government in Peru/Spain were able to fully utilize their location to aid in their studies.

Research question 8: In what ways was the country(s) you went to culturally different from the U.S.?

The results supported my hypothesis that countries in Western Europe are too culturally similar to the United States. None of the students who studied in Europe (exempting Italy) stated language or cultural differences.

Research question 9: What were the difficulties (if any) you went through while abroad?

The students who studied in Latin America, Asia, and Africa reported language and cultural difficulties. While the difficulties the students who went to England and Ireland range from no internet connection to lack of cell phones. While studying abroad shouldn't be an overwhelming challenge for students it's important for students to grow through unpredictable situations/culture shock so they can learn to adapt and use the skills that they learn back home.

Research question 10: How did your study abroad experience change you personally?

The results showcase students' cultural adaptability attainment. It proves that when students interact with host country members they learn to shift their verbal and nonverbal to match those of the host country and other cultures. This is especially true for the two students who studied in Japan because the program had a host family component and plenty of opportunities to communicate with the Japanese students at school.

Research question 11: Do you feel like a different region/ country would provide you with more opportunities to be independent?

Three students who studied in Europe answered yes to this question. A student who studied in Italy stated that, "I think a different study abroad in Italy could have given me more". This student's program location was in Florence, Italy a very popular tourist

destination. If students weren't placed in such popular destinations, they could have the chance to feel less like a tourist and more like a local student.

Research question 14: What changes would you make to the program?

Majority of students stated that they want less time in the classroom and more time exploring the city. Students are in a foreign country for a limited amount of time and they want to see it! Students wanted more interactions with local students and the people. Conversation partners would be a great opportunity for students to make friends with the local students. They also wanted more in-city excursions. Speaking from experience this is the highlight of the week. Students are in class all week and really look forward to exploring the country they're in.

Discussion

Considering all the theories on counties culture, cultural distance, and student interviews. I believe that county location does positively dictate personal growth, language acquisition, cross-cultural competencies, academic commitment, and career growth. Students who studied in Latin America, Asia, and Africa came back with a better view of themselves, the country that they were in, and their home county. They utilized their time abroad to help further their academics, they challenged their prior beliefs about the country they were in, and they were forced to accept and adapt to the countries culture and norms. While students who studied in Europe particularly Western Europe (England and Ireland) did not use their country of study to grow in a foreign language, the cultural distances were too small so they did not gain as much cross-cultural

competencies, their academics were not affected by the country of study, and there was limited opportunities to become independent.

During the collection of this data majority of students realized that people are the same no matter what country you're in. A student who studied in England stated, "I think it allowed me to see how similar humans are, despite how completely different our government, cultures, ways of life, languages, and experiences". No matter what country you go to this rings true. This is a great takeaway students get by going abroad and they can apply this concept as they enter the workforce or further their education. A student who studied in Japan stated, "No matter what our different perspectives are, we are all the same underneath". Students realized that people generally all have the same worries; they think about school, getting to work on time, they like the same music we do, they think about relationships, and popular culture. Every country has city people and rural people, the affluent and less fortunate, the good, the bad, the hard working, and lazy.

Most students decided that they wanted to further pursue travelling the world. Regardless of which continent they studied in students wanted to go abroad again. A student who studied in England stated, "I'm now more interested in pursuing careers in other parts of the country and world which before I had never considered for myself". This experience changed these students lives and showed them that there is more the world so why not explore it. Another student who studied in Spain also stated that, "I am in fact positive that I want to move abroad and start a business, I wanted to before, but the experience sealed the deal". These trips are giving students the confidence to purpose work and life outside of the U.S.

Conclusion

Some limitations to this study are the small sample size and the fact that students participated in programs with other Texas State students. If I interviewed all Texas State study abroad programs and other affiliated programs results would be more conclusive. Due to Texas States limited study abroad programs in continents of Asia and Africa there was not much diversity in the sample pool. There will also be difference between students who spent longer periods of time abroad regardless of country location. I believe that students who spend full/yearlong semesters abroad will report very different results.

I recommend that Texas State relocates programs to other countries/continents with the courses aren't directly associated that said country. For example, if a student is learning communication or biology, Texas State should try to have the program in a county in Africa or Asia not England. Program directors should try to include more in-city excursions and cultural events. If possible students should try to spend less time in the classroom and more time exploring the city they're in. If school time cannot be sacrificed, having students meet with the local students is a great alternative. Conversation partners is a great way for students to make friends and get a local perspective. A homestay component can replace living in a dorm with other Texas State students. There is no better way to immerse yourself in a culture than living with the people of that culture. Texas State should avoid having programs located in popular tourist destinations. Instead of having a program in Tokyo, Japan they can chose a smaller but still well-known city in Japan. This gives the students a non-tourist view of the country and makes them feel like their local students living their daily lives and not tourists.

In closing, no matter where students go abroad they make the best of the opportunity and they come back with new friends, perspectives, and the courage to pursue something they never thought possible. Study abroad is a great and sometimes once in a lifetime opportunity for students, no matter what country they go to the outcome could change the course of their lives.

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