

**LONG-TERM STUDY ABROAD RESEARCH: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW
FROM 2003-2023**

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INTRODUCTION

Study Abroad (SA), is defined as all programs of higher education taking place outside the geographical frontiers of the student's country of origin (Holtbrugge & Engelhard, 2016). According to Almeida (2020), SA could be categorized into two groups based on academic purpose. The first one refers to the pursuit of an entire academic degree abroad. The second, which is the focus of this study, is the seeking of academic credits recognized by the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) of the student after he or she returns from his/her time overseas.

Programs vary considerably in terms of their length, structure, group size, location, purpose, faculty supervision level, nature of accommodation, cost, predeparture orientation, level of cultural immersion, type of hosting organization, level of post arrival engagement, language competence required, language of course-work or fieldwork, and academic standard.

Consequently, the field still lacks a single globally accepted classification of SA programs. So, for the purpose of this study, we adopted Varela's (2017, p.531) definition: "educational experiences that involve exposure to foreign countries while participating in instructional practices that provide credits for academic degrees at home".

Definition of long-term study abroad (LTSA) programs may vary as we have seen in the articles selected for this work, so in the scope of this research, we will consider semester length (8–15 weeks) and year-long academic experiences as long-term (Engle and Engle 2003).

Since its inception, SA has been diffused as a way of acquiring new knowledge and skills, enhancing personal growth and promoting professional development (Hoffa 2007). Due to the acceleration of globalization in recent decades, the world has become increasingly interdependent and culturally diverse. Recognizing the need to equip students to act effectively as citizens in an increasingly globalized world, many colleges and universities are seeking ways to leverage their study abroad programs to develop students' intellectual skills and intercultural competence, which are considered essential for living in the 21st century (Green et al. 2008; IIE 2013; Lincoln Commission, 2005).

To substantiate this assumption, a growing body of research on SA has emerged in the late 1990s (Luo et al., 2015). However, a discrepancy persists between the promises made by SA programs and the evidence produced by researchers (Streitwieser & Light, 2010, p. 4). Consequently, HEI are still in pursuit of more empirically-based arguments to substantiate the value of SA to prospective students and stakeholders (Dall'Alba & Sidhu, 2015). This prompts our research interest in understanding this understudied area of the literature, namely the outcomes of SA programs.

The decision to investigate LTSA was motivated by two key factors. The first factor is the relatively high costs associated with it, and the increasing scrutiny from universities and policymakers in the context of austerity measures. The second factor is the necessity for further research to substantiate the efficacy and superior outcomes of this segment in comparison to shorter study programs.

To the best of your knowledge, there is no existing systematic review of LTSA. However, over the past two decades, numerous review articles have been published about the STSA format. These include the following studies: Brown et al. (2016), Dwyer (2004), and Gumus et al. (2019); Iskhakova and Bradley (2022); Kelleher (2013); Khanal and Gaulee (2019); Nicolescu and Galalae (2013); Roy et al. (2019); and Safipour et al. (2017).

This study employs a systematic review of the recent corpus of literature on SA to analyze the outcomes of long-term study abroad (LTSA) programs. The research question that we seek to address in this study is as follows: “What are the outcomes of students who have participated in an exchange program at a higher education institution for a period of six months to one year?”

The significant scope and contribution of our work is that it provides a systematic review of the LTSA literature, with a particular focus to the outcomes for which we provide a thematic categorization.

Our review also identifies the implications of LTSA programs for management education and an agenda for future LTSA research. Our research is based on 40 studies published between 2003 and 2023 in international education, management, business, psychology, and social sciences journals.

We put forth a conceptual review model for LTSA research, which we posit as a guiding map for LTSA scholars. This model identifies the current state of LTSA research. Furthermore, our article offers a more comprehensive understanding of scope, key themes, methodology, and outcomes of LTSA research.

In the first section of this article, we provide an overview of the SA literature and explain why LTSA deserves to be studied separately. In the following section, we report our research method. In the findings section, the general findings and the outcomes are presented. Finally, we conclude with the academic and practical implications of this research, its limitation and the future agenda of studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on SA began to emerge in the 1950s, but it was not until the late 1970s that a substantial body of literature commenced to be published (Chao, 2001; Comp, 2005; Weaver, 1989). Over the course of this period, 189 research studies were published, with the number increasing to 675 in the 1990s. Over the past decade, the number of published studies has exceeded 1,000 (Comp et al., 2007; Berg et al., 2023). However, the field still exhibits significant gaps and lacks unifying theoretical paradigms, which impedes the advancement of the SA research field (Lokkesmoe et al., 2016; Ogden & Streitwieser, 2016).

SA research is primarily based on Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) (Kolb, 1984), which emphasizes the critical role that experience plays in the impact of learning and change. Kolb (1984) defines learning as a continuous process of adapting to the environment by acquiring new information, challenging the knowledge and relearning and integrating it into action. ELT outlines four basic stages that individuals go through during the experiential learning cycle: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

In recent years, HEIs have been increasingly called upon to provide evidence of student learning in the context of study abroad. However, there is still a lack of valid and reliable data. As Ogden and Streitwieser (2016, p. 6) observe, "rigorous research is still needed that interrogates widespread assumptions of the outcomes that result from education abroad participation."

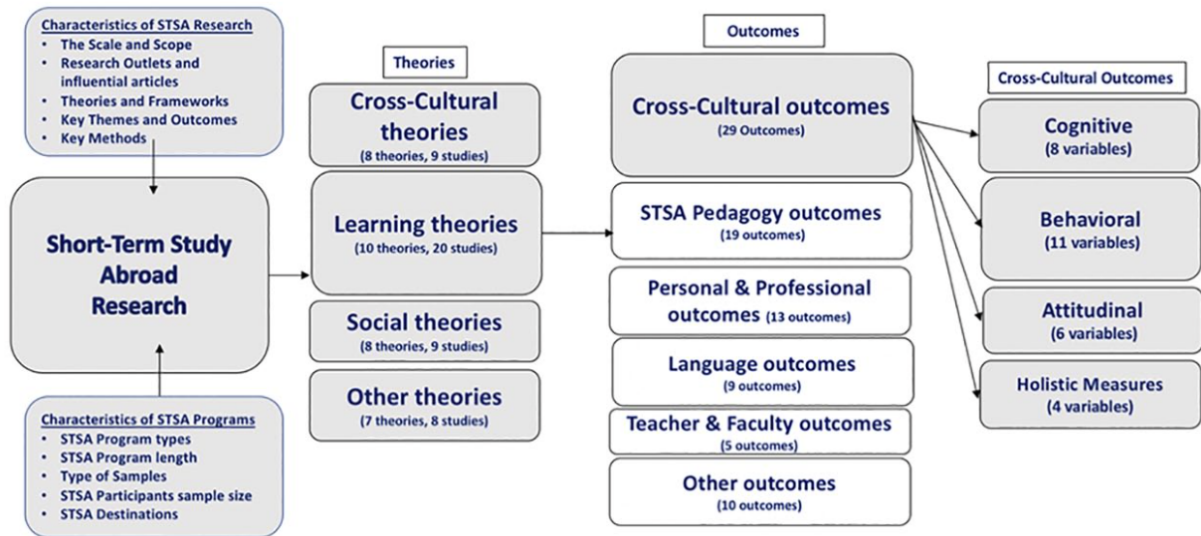
In response to the question of whether SA is worthwhile in developing students' intellectual skills and intercultural competence, which are considered essential for life in the twenty-first century (Green et al. 2008), a growing body of research on SA has emerged.

The recent study by Ishkakova and Bradley (2022) represents the inaugural systematic review of STSA outcomes. The study identified 85 thematic outcomes, with a particular focus on the cross-cultural ones due to their prevalence in the STSA literature. The work is noteworthy for

the conceptual model proposed by the authors as a framework for future studies (Figure 1).

In 2019, Gumus et al. published a study consisting of a bibliometric mapping of the existing knowledge base in international student mobility (ISM) research. This study covers both STSA and LTSA programs, using a sample of 2,064 articles to demonstrate the development of ISM research in the last three decades. It also shows that there has been a significant expansion since 2005. The study offers a macro perspective on the structure of ISM knowledge, including authors' country of origin, country collaborations, and the most influential scholars. However, it lacks a more in-depth investigation into the outcomes of SA programs.

Figure 1 - Short-term study abroad conceptual review model



Source: Iskhakova & Bradley (p. 391)

In their comprehensive review of the literature on ISM, Roy et al. (2018) analyzed 75 studies, which typically ranged in duration from 2 to 4 weeks. The authors classified the outcomes into three categories: cultural, personal, and employment/career outcomes. They recommended that future studies be conducted outside North America and Europe, citing the need for more data on the ability of students from other cultures to benefit from international mobility programs. They noted that such cultures are significantly different, making it challenging to ascertain whether students from diverse backgrounds can achieve similar outcomes.

Hass (2018) compiled and appraised published findings pertaining to the influence of SA in higher education on cultural awareness (CA). A total of 28 articles reporting empirical results (of STSA and LTSA) were collected, and effect sizes were calculated for statistical comparisons. This quantitative review provides empirical evidence to support the hypothesis that SA may improve CA. Nevertheless, the results were not reported for the duration of the program.

Among the areas of study of those who engage in SA, nursing and related healthcare professions stand out as a notable area of interest. In their integrative review, Kelleher (2013) analyzed 13 studies that explored the benefits of study abroad programs for undergraduate nursing students. In their systematic review, Brown et al. (2016) selected ten articles published between 2000 and 2015 to study all the factors that influence healthcare students in their decision to study abroad.

Some authors direct their attention toward the difficulties associated with adapting to the exchange process and the obstacles that stand in the way of learning. Khanal and Gaulee (2019) address the challenges faced by students during the pre-departure, post-departure, and post-

study periods. The review by Nicolescu and Galalae (2013), in the field of ISM, focuses on understanding the fundamental psychological processes and adaptation difficulties that international students encounter during their mobility time. The systematic review by Safipour et al. (2017) investigates the barriers to learning and teaching in the international classroom, from the perspectives of both teachers and students.

Varela's meta-analysis (2017) was the first attempt to resolve the controversial and conflicting outcomes of SA programs. The learning outcomes studied were second language development, disposition to interact in the intercultural environment, and behavioral adaptation to local customs. It used as moderators cultural distance, type of accommodation, program content and length of stay. The results indicate that international experiences promote learning in the dimensions studied, but two unanswered questions deserve urgent attention: the role of time in learning and how SA students respond to cultural gaps.

Length of residence abroad was reported in previous studies as an important influence on intercultural learning and adaptation (Ward & Kennedy, 1993). The work of Behrnd and Porzelt (2012) demonstrated that the duration of studies is a more significant factor than studying abroad itself. The authors conducted two studies. The first revealed that 10 months is the critical period for students to develop effective intercultural competence. The second study indicated that half a year is the optimal duration for the experience to positively impact problem-solving ability.

The most comprehensive and well-known study in this category is The Georgetown Consortium Project, conducted by Vande Berg, Connor-Litton, and Paige (2009). The study, which was based on data from 1,152 American students from 190 universities in the United States, aimed to document the oral language proficiency, intercultural competence, and disciplinary learning of the students who had enrolled in a range of study abroad programs. Furthermore, the study aimed to contrast the learning outcomes of the aforementioned students with those of a control group, comprising students who did not undertake a period of study abroad. The findings indicated that programs of longer duration were associated with greater enhancements in oral language proficiency. Moreover, students who participated in programs lasting between 13 and 18 weeks, which is approximately equivalent to one semester of study abroad, exhibited the most pronounced growth in their intercultural development.

A review of the literature reveals that studies comparing the educational gains of participants in LTSA with those in STSA tend to support the view that longer periods lead to more or better outcomes (Coker et al., 2018; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004). Conversely, other research indicates that a notable percentage of students in the STSA have achieved comparable outcomes to those in the LTSA (Dwyer, 2004). It is therefore essential to document the outcomes of LTSA and to compare them with those of STSA.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The following research questions will be addressed in this study: What are the outcomes achieved by students who have studied abroad at a higher education institution for a period of six months to one year? This section discusses the research strategy, the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the evaluation process.

In accordance with the reviews on SA conducted by Roy et al. (2019) and Gumus et al. (2019), the Clarivate Analytics Web of Science (WOS) database, which is the most comprehensive database in this field of study and is commonly used, was utilized. Additionally, the SCOPUS database was employed. The selection process was completed in February 2024.

The search strategy encompassed articles in Portuguese, English, and Spanish. No temporal

constraints were imposed, however, the earliest articles identified in the databases date back to 1993. Only peer-reviewed studies published in journals were considered. It was determined that books, book chapters, and proceedings would not be considered. The initial search terms were "study abroad" or "education tourism," which were combined with "outcomes," "performance," or "assessment." Table 1 provides an illustration of the search strategy employed.

Secondly, the parameters for the inclusion and exclusion of articles were defined. The **inclusion criteria** are as follows:

- a) Only reviewed studies published in peer-reviewed journals were considered.
- b) The articles must be accessible through online scientific databases and be possible to obtain in full.
- c) The studies must address in their text, even if only in a secondary way, the results achieved by students after SA program at a higher education institution, for a period of between six months and a year.
- d) The articles should consider the SA according to the premises advocated by Teichler and Steube (1991, p.325).
 - Study abroad programs are negotiated arrangements between two or more higher education institutions in two or more countries (rather than ad-hoc cooperation).
 - Study abroad programs regularly provide students of any institution the opportunity study at one or more partner institutions (not just occasional exchange).
 - Study abroad programs comprise an organizational and educational infrastructure aimed to ease mobility and to promote successful educational experiences abroad (not merely a regular provision of student exchange).
 - The study period abroad, at least in part, should comprise a component of the course or degree program in which each student was regularly enrolled at the home institution (i.e., a successful study abroad).
 - The study period abroad, at least in part, should comprise a component of the course or degree program in which each student was regularly enrolled at the home institution (successful study abroad is at least partially recognized as a substitute for study at the home institution)
- e) Papers found in the references of those initially considered and which contemplate the results of SA, in the period mentioned in item (c), were included in this SLR.

The following **exclusion criteria** were applied:

- a) Articles that are not fully available in the databases searched, or those whose access is not possible.
- b) Books, book chapters, and conference papers.
- c) Papers that do not include the results obtained by students after an international exchange program at a higher education institution for a period of between six months and one year.
- d) Studies addressing SA:
 - Differently from Teichler and Steube's (1991) definition.
 - Completed over a period of less than six months and more than a year;
 - In which the student completes their degree abroad;
 - Including high school, post-graduate, internship, work, and travel for research

- collaboration between students;
- Conducted by professors;
- Conducted exclusively for the purpose of language study;
- Focusing on the evaluation, development, and/or internationalization of programs;
- Conducted in a virtual mode or "internationalization at home."

Table 1- Literature Search Strategy

Database	Web of Science	Scopus
Keywords	(TS=((study* abroad") OR ("education* tourism"))) AND (TS=(("outcome*") OR ("performance") OR ("assessment*")))	(TITLE-ABS-KEY ("study* abroad") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("education* tourism") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("outcome*") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("performance") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("assessment*"))
Research Domains	ALL	(LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "soci") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "arts") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "busi") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "psyc") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "neur") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "mult"))
Content type	Peer review articles	
Content language	English, Spanish and Portuguese	
Time Frame	1990 - 2023	
Results	667	545
Total before removing duplicates	1212	
Total after removing duplicates	801	

Source: Authors' findings

A comprehensive search of the databases yielded a total sample of 1062 papers. They were transferred to an excel spreadsheet, where duplicate articles were excluded, resulting in 801 articles. Twenty-two papers were not publicly available. Consequently, a review of 779 titles and abstracts was conducted with the objective of identifying only those papers that were relevant to the study. Initially, articles were excluded if their titles or abstracts indicated that they exclusively addressed STSA. Then, articles that met the exclusion criteria (a), (b), (c) and (d) were excluded. This process resulted in the exclusion of 593 articles.

The remaining 186 articles were exported to ATLAS.ti, where a more detailed examination was conducted using the classification protocol. At this stage, 153 articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded.

All papers were identified through the WOS and SCOPUS database and according to the established protocol. However, it was noted that some important papers were not captured. So, based on the analysis of the references from the initially selected papers, six additional articles were incorporated into the study.

In the final step, the 40 papers were reviewed and individually coded using ATLAS.ti. A preliminary categorization was developed based on the objectives of this work and a review of the literature about SA. The pre-categorization was defined as follows: objective; method; host/home countries; undergraduate program undergraduate program (e.g. nursery, engineering, economics, law); theories employed; scales used; major; sample size; methods of data collection; findings; outcomes; suggestions for future research.

FINDINGS

This section presents a synthesis of the general findings, the outcomes of LTSA classified in four main areas: intercultural competence, academic, personal, and career outcomes.

General Findings

A comprehensive examination of the literature reveals that a significant number of studies do not provide a clear and consistent definition of the term "study abroad." It is not uncommon to observe studies that do not distinguish between STSA and LTSA programs or fail to specify the duration of the programs. These studies were excluded from the analysis.

In addition, many studies do not identify the country in which students undertake their exchange, even though this information is crucial for understanding the phenomenon under study (Varela, 2017). As Hass (2018) notes, the evidence presented in the articles is primarily based on self-reported data from relatively small samples.

Of the 40 articles, 13 did not indicate the specific undergraduate degrees of the students. Of those that did, there were 83 citations of courses, with 24% of these being Business Administration/Economics courses. In contrast with the findings of Ishkakova and Bradley (2022), the prevailing approach is quantitative, with 68% of the studies, followed by qualitative at 18% and studies employing mixed methods, which are the most recommended in the field, representing 15% of the studies identified in this review.

In the quantitative articles, the most common forms of data collection are: 1) data provided by universities, especially when the paper evaluates academic performance, and 2) scales that have already been validated, with Hammer's (2009, 2011) Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) being used in 33% of the papers. The IDI is a cross-culturally validated psychometric instrument consisting of 50 statements (Hammer, 2009a, 2009b, 2012).

Quantitative studies that use scales usually apply them before and after the sojourn, however, 16 (59%) do not use control groups, i.e. they seek to compare the same variables at different times only inside the same group. This fact, combined with the small number of respondents, the lack of basic figures such as socioeconomic data, country of destination or length of programs, leads to an abundance of contradictory or inconclusive results, as already pointed out by Varela (2017).

Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence is defined as "the capability to shift cultural perspective and appropriately adapt behavior to cultural difference and commonalities" (Hammer, 2013, p. 26). It was the dominant key theme, being present in 20 from the 40 papers. And also had the higher number of the related outcomes identified: 51.

Vande Berg, Connor-Litton, and Paige (2009) concluded that students who participated in programs lasting between 13 and 18 weeks, which is approximately equivalent to one semester of SA, exhibited the most pronounced growth in their intercultural development. Behrnd & Porzelt (2012) showed that students who had spent at least half a year abroad exhibited a higher score in strategic intercultural competence, conversely, this study suggests that STSAP and no intercultural education cannot be considered intercultural experts (Behrnd & Porzelt, 2012).

Hanada (2019) sought to identify the factors that facilitate the development of intercultural competence. The findings indicated that the act of studying abroad, in and of itself, sufficiently explain the impact on the development of intercultural competence. The primary findings indicate that program type, prior local language proficiency, and predeparture orientation are

significant predictors of intercultural competence. Among the eight explanatory variables, this study demonstrates that participation in predeparture orientations is the most significant factor in facilitating the development of intercultural

As evidenced by the divergent findings, the relationship between SA length and intercultural competence remains a topic of contention in the literature. Some studies (e.g., Czerwionka, Artamonova, & Barnosa, 2015; Gilin & Young, 2009; Lee & Negrelli, 2004) have concluded that even shorter periods can be effective, while others (e.g., Engle & Engle, 2004; Kehl & Morris, 2008; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004) have found the opposite. Therefore, this is still a topic that requires further investigation.

Academic Performance

Research shows conflicting results not only among the articles identified, but also in the literature that addresses academic performance, specifically grades. Cullinan et al (2022) find that SA has a significant overall impact on subsequent academic performance. Nwosu's research (2022) concludes that the post-SA grades of study-abroad participants (SAP) were lower than expected given their previous grades, and generally lower than those of non-SAP students.

Merva (2003) takes a different approach in her paper, which may explain some of the conflicting research. Her study found that students whose grades were averaged into a cumulative grade point average (GPA) had an estimated increase in average semester GPA of 0.36 points, or 11.4% above average. For SAP who take courses on a pass/fail basis, the results suggest that academic incentives are negatively affected by this grade-transfer policy.

The work of Granja & Visentin (2023) adds as variables: the period when students travel during their courses, the duration of the SA, the length of stay and the country of destination. They conclude that SA has a positive and significant effect on the grades of students who participate in programs that last between one semester and one year, with negative effects associated with shorter periods abroad. SA has a positive effect on the grades of students who travel to English-speaking countries. Students who travel towards the end of their studies benefit more from the SA experience, while negative effects are found for those who travel at the beginning of their studies.

In line with the findings of Merva (2003) and Granja & Visentin (2023), Vázquez et al. (2014) conclude that there are statistically significant differences in the grades of Chilean students before and after SA, and almost two-thirds were able to improve them upon their return. The average grades of SAP who received full credit (54.5%) were higher than those who received partial or no credit at the international institution, even though the grades of these two groups were not different before SA.

A review of the literature on academic performance and the factors influencing it reveals that the outcomes are contingent on several key variables. These include the duration of the sojourn, the nature of the academic activities pursued abroad, the method of course validation, the home and host countries, the host language proficiency of the students before and after their period of SA, the difficulties encountered by students on their academic and international journeys, their motivations for participating in such programs, and their decisions regarding their country of study and HEI of choice. Accordingly, most authors recommend that future research in this area should incorporate these variables and utilize larger sample sizes to allow a more comprehensive examination of their influence on academic performance.

Personal Outcomes

The analysis revealed that personal outcomes are addressed in approximately 40% of the articles

examined. All of the articles, with the exception of one, address the personal gains made by students as a result of SA. Only Hunley (2010) and Zhang & Li (2022) focuses his research on aspects of psychological distress, loneliness and functioning while abroad. This does not imply that the other articles, particularly those employing a qualitative approach, do not report some form of difficulty experienced by SAP, which can eventually result in negative personal impacts such as prejudice, separation from loved ones, demanding studies, difficulties understanding teachers or the teaching content, expressing ideas in classes, inability to cope with the local language, intercultural misunderstandings, settling in and accommodation, cultural adaptation difficulties, difficulty breaking into tight social circles, unsuccessful intercultural interactions, financial concerns, challenges of time management and balancing study and travel, and struggling to adjust to their own culture upon return. (Covert, 2014; Jackson, 2015; Jacobone & Moro, 2015; King & Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Ling & Khui-Ling, 2019; Lokkesmore et al, 2016; Mu et al, 2022; Nilsson & Stålnacke; Vázquez et al, 2014; Walsh & Walsh, 2015, Zhang & Li, 2022)

Despite these challenges, the experience points to personal gains such as: higher emotional resilience, open-mindedness, global interdependence awareness, flexibility, adaptability, personal autonomy, maturity, self-confidence, ability to evaluate strengths and weaknesses, empathy, frustration tolerance, stress resistance, pro-environmental attitudes, having a new life perspective or broadening his/her vision, overcoming fears and challenges, self-regulation, self-efficacy, strengthening of national/regional identity, willingness to learn, travel skills, organizational skills, being a good listener, money management, self-discovery, reading habit cultivation, less dependence of technology, critical thinking skills and realizing the importance of friendship, life satisfaction, happiness, satisfaction with somatic health (Amaki, 2018; Behrnd & Porzelt, 2012; Cheung et al, 2022; Clarke et al, 2009; Covert, 2014; DeLoach, 2021; Dolby, 2004; Dwyer, 2004; Ingraham, 2003; Jackson, 2015; Jacobone & Moro, 2015; Johnstone et al, 2018; King & Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Ling & Khui-Ling, 2019; Lokkesmore et al, 2016; Lu et al, 2015; Mills, 2014; Mu et al, 2022; Nilsson & Stålnacke, 2019; Pawlak & Soto, 2020; Rexeisen, & Al-Khatib, 2009, Streitwieser & Light, 2018; Vázquez et al, 2014; Walsh & Walsh, 2015; Williams, 2005; Yang et al, 2011)

Career Outcomes

Given the globalization and the diversification of the workforce the work activities require intercultural interactions, so students entering the workforce must be globally competent with a high level of cultural and emotional intelligence (Cheung et al, 2022).

The articles showed that SAP considered themselves better prepared for the global workplace (Jackson, 2015). They learned how to work in diverse teams (Behrnd & Porzelt, 2012; Vázquez et al, 2014; Yang et al, 2011), developed decision making and leadership skills (Amaki, 2018; Cheung et al, 2022; Yang et al, 2011), reinforced their knowledge and skills in their fields of career (Dwyer, 2004, Lokkesmore et al, 2016; Mills, 2014; Yang et al, 2011). They believe that the SA experience enhanced their resume (Yang et al, 2011), help them to reflect on their future career and setting higher goals (Dwyer, 2004; King & Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Vázquez et al, 2014),

Long-Term student abroad participants (LTSAP) build and keep a solid network of other students, scholars, professionals, and leaders in the field studied (Dwyer, 2004; Lokkesmore et al, 2016; Walsh & Walsh, 2015; Yang et al, 2011). They also embrace a nascent form of cosmopolitanism (Dolby, 2004), which makes them function bicultural or multiculturally (Clarke et al, 2009). They express a higher desire to work in a multicultural environment either at home or abroad (Jackson, 2015) and are more likely do it than STSAP (Dwyer, 2004).

DISCUSSIONS AND FINAL REMARKS

The outcomes identified in this work serve as further guidance for future research into LTSA, however, the significant gains in intercultural, academic, personal, and career terms should be interpreted with caution.

Despite the considerable growth in the number of publications on the topic of LTSA, particularly over the past two decades, some of the limitations highlighted by Dwyer (2004) persist in studies investigating LTSA outcomes: small samples, need for more empirical studies that correlated length of study with longitudinal outcome measures, reported inconsistent findings, lack of sustainability of results.

A substantial increase in ample sizes is necessary, given that a third of LTSA studies are based on samples of under 60 participants and 55% have less than one respondent per questionnaire or scale item, which is considered the minimum necessary for reliable analysis. Furthermore, the majority of data utilized by the authors in studies with larger samples are derived from databases provided by HEI or national and regional organizations that compile data on higher education. Regrettably, many of these databases lack the necessary information for a more comprehensive analysis, including data on gender, income, prior travel abroad, language proficiency before and after SA, parents' level of education, and SAP educational background.

It is recommended that scholars employ a more diverse range of methods in their research on LTSA. This would entail a greater emphasis on more innovative and comprehensive mixed methods, given that the phenomenon in question is inherently complex and cannot be fully grasped by a single approach. Furthermore, we advocate for a more expansive geographical scope in research endeavors. One of the practical outcomes of a more extensive geographical research approach is a more nuanced understanding of the value perceived by participants in diverse global contexts, extending beyond the boundaries of the United States (43% of LTSA home country). For instance, a more comprehensive geographical focus in research could facilitate a deeper comprehension of the value of LTSA programs for participants in developing countries. Such research could also illuminate which groups of students derive the greatest benefit from participating in an LTSA program. To date, these aspects have not been sufficiently explored.

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