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Reflective Perspectives of Host and Guest Participants of an International Professional Development Experience


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Reflective Perspectives of Host and Guest Participants of an International Professional Development Experience

Abstract

Global competence is a skill set that has become a necessity in every discipline in the agricultural sciences. With an increasingly diverse student population in our school systems coupled with an increasingly complex global agrisystem, now more than ever we need globally competent educators and learners to develop a globally competent workforce and society. A common intervention in cultivating global competency is the study abroad immersive experience for the traveling participants, but little is known about the global competency gains in hosting individuals. The immersive study abroad experience provided the opportunity for school-based agricultural educators (both candidates and practicing educators) to engage in a four-week experience with their Malaysian counterparts exploring the interconnected nature of culture, agriculture, and education. Throughout the experience the participants engaged in daily structured reflection sessions using the TIPS method. Journal entries were coded and analyzed for both Malaysia and United States participants. Participants from both countries respectively became more globally competent educators and learners.

Keywords

Immersive study abroad experience, guest participants, host participants

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Abstract

Global competence is a skill set that has become a necessity in every discipline in the agricultural sciences. With an increasingly diverse student population in our school systems coupled with an increasingly complex global agrisystem, now more than ever we need globally competent educators and learners to develop a globally competent workforce and society. A common intervention in cultivating global competency is the study abroad immersive experience for the traveling participants, but little is known about the global competency gains in hosting individuals. The immersive study abroad experience provided the opportunity for school-based agricultural educators (both candidates and practicing educators) to engage in a four-week experience with their Malaysian counterparts exploring the interconnected nature of culture, agriculture, and education. Throughout the experience the participants engaged in daily structured reflection sessions using the TIPS method. Journal entries were coded and analyzed for both Malaysia and United States participants. Participants from both countries respectively became more globally competent educators and learners.

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Introduction

Twenty-first century students live in an interconnected, diverse, and rapidly changing world. Emerging economic, digital, cultural, demographic, and environmental forces are shaping young people's lives around the planet and increasing their intercultural encounters daily. Global competencies comprise the knowledge and skills individuals need to be successful in today's interconnected world and to fully engage in and act on issues of global significance. Developing a global and intercultural outlook is a process – a lifelong process – that education can shape (Barrett et al., 2014). As the globalization of agriculture and food systems expands, globally competent workers are and will continue to be in high demand. Severe and urgent issues such as food security and malnutrition (Asia Society, 2018) will require the ability to think critically and creatively to solve complex problems, the skills and disposition to engage globally, well-honed communication skills, and advanced mathematics, science, and technical skills. Globally competent agricultural educators may be one of the solutions to solve this issue (The Council, 2019).

One strategy to develop globally competent agricultural educators includes study abroad immersive experiences. Education abroad is acknowledged to play a key role in the development of global-ready graduates and remains a significant method of internationalization in higher education (de Wit & Altbach, 2021). Multiple studies confirm the learning opportunities that study abroad programs provide for a student that is not available in a traditional classroom experience (Gore, 2005; Institute of International Education, 2010). These competencies include growth in the proficiency of another language (Opper et al., 1990; Ryan & Twibell, 2000; Tarp, 2006; Vande Berg et al., 2009), increase in cultural knowledge about the host country (Kauffmann et al., 1992; Jackson, 2006), increase in cultural competence (Penington & Wildermuth, 2005), increase in cultural sensitivity (Anderson & Lawton, 2011), and improved knowledge of cultural relativism and global independence (Sutton & Rubin, 2004).

There is substantial research conducted surrounding the impact of study abroad students and their host communities and host families. Scholars have highlighted the importance of examining the perspectives of community members in contact with visiting university students participating in community-engaged education abroad programs (Caldwell & Purtzer, 2015). Schroeder et al. (2009) focused their research on several important and pointed questions about the ways that U.S. students could be impacting the communities that host them abroad, of which asserted that students inevitably have environmental, economic, cultural and social impacts on those they encounter abroad. Habashy's (2019) qualitative comparative research study was conducted to understand the infrequently observed perspective of local community members who interact with visiting foreign students. Habashy (2019) also asserts listening to the perspectives of local

community residents, developing relationships with reciprocal benefits, and identifying community members' priorities are significant for field-based education abroad programs. In the study conducted by Knight and Schmidt-Rinehart (2002), the researchers examined the effectiveness of international homestay by conducting an interview with the guest (U.S. students studying abroad) and gathering the hosts' perspectives. The hosts benefited from a mentor, counselor, or teacher since they often helped the student adjust to a new home and culture. The students communicated and adjusted to the host's rules, but the study also found that the hosts also displayed adjustments by accommodating the students through various means. However, little to no studies exist exploring the perspectives of the college students from the hosting country of study abroad programs. As study abroad programs continue to increase in popularity and importance, the need to understand the impacts on host students becomes even more important.

To gain a better understanding of global competency gains of pre-service teachers in both travelers and hosts of study abroad experiences, this descriptive research study collected, compared, and contrasted the impacts of a specific immersion program from the perspective of both the host and travelers. Focusing on a one-month group experience taking place in Malaysia, traveling students from U.S. universities were joined by students from the host university in Malaysia. All students went through the experience side-by-side, participating in all tours, events, meals, and other organized activities together. The research team examined the learnings of the U.S. and Malaysian groups and found evidence of both groups reflecting on similar themes, including self-reflections of global competency development. The research study, approved by the Penn State University Institutional Review Board, aligns with the purpose of the *Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education* of enhancing the research and knowledge base of agricultural education, specifically teacher development, from an international perspective.

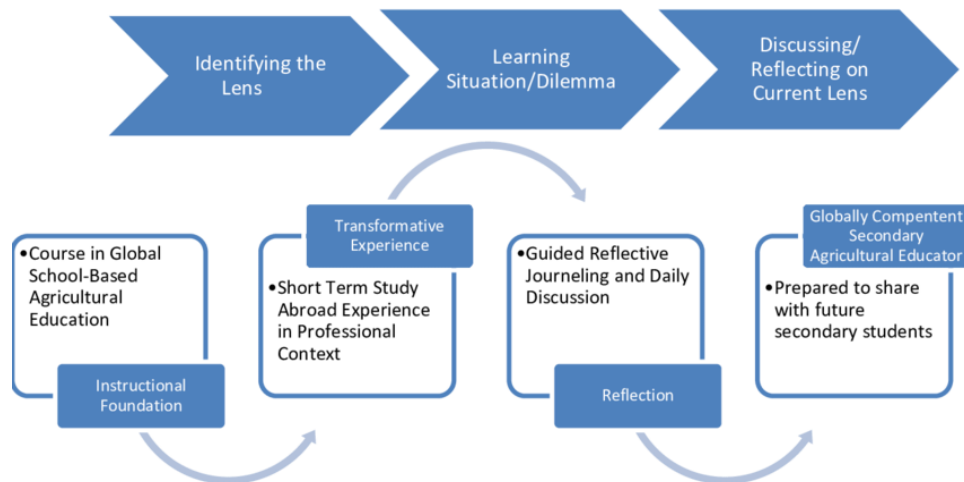
Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study was Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (2003). Grounded in constructivist epistemology, transformative learning is a process of examining, questioning, and revising learner perspectives. Transformative learning is learning that transforms problematic frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, and emotional able to change. Learning occurs when an individual encounters an alternative perspective that calls to question previous assumptions. Dirkx (2000) described that while transformative learning can be catalyzed by a dramatic event as epochal, the process is also more incremental that occurs on a daily basis. Mezirow (1997) found that perspective transformation leads to changes in the

frame of reference, which includes changes in ways of thinking and opinions. A number of authors find that first-hand knowledge of other cultures is fundamental for perspective transformation that may lead to global awareness and intercultural sensitivity. This is likely to be obtained by experiences of ‘otherness’ and ‘culture shock’ (Abdallah-Preteille, 2006; Cushner, 2007; Mahon & Cushner, 2002; Stachowski & Sparks, 2007). The experience of daily life and routines in a different environment than one's home tests one's perceptions of oneself and others, and of the home culture, and is thus essential for transformative learning (Walters et al., 2009, p. 153). Figure 1 provides a visual of the application of Transformative Learning Theory in this study.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of Study Grounded in Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory



Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this descriptive study was to compare the perceptions of learning impacts utilizing the TIPS Framework between U.S. and Malaysian pre-service educators. The objective that guided the study was to describe and compare structured reflection responses between U.S. and Malaysian participants during a 4-week professional development experience.

Methods

The research followed the steps proposed by Ary et al. (2010) to create a base for data collection and analysis. There was a total of 14 participants participated in the study, and they were part of an immersion experience that took place in Malaysia over a thirty-day period. The participants consisted of six pre-service agricultural educators from the U.S. and eight pre-service life skills education teachers from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia in Johor Bahru, Malaysia. During the immersion experience, the U.S. pre-service agricultural educators were partnered with pre-service Malaysian life skills education teachers. All of the participants participated in the same activities throughout the entirety of the experience.

Data Collection: TIPS Framework

The participants were required to write a daily reflective journal called TIPS journal. Reflective journaling is a widely accepted approach in qualitative studies that provides clear proof of an individual's experience (Harrison et al., 2001). The TIPS reflective journal is a self-reflective journal developed by Anu Taranath (University of Washington, 2014) with the purpose of guiding the immersive experience participants to reflect "on how moving from one context to another invites questions about identity, society, and the meaning of travel itself" (p. 3). TIPS is an acronym that stands for *Things, Ideas, People, and Self* (Taranath, 2014). Each participant was asked to reflect and write one entry per day in each of the four categories. For the first three categories, participants were prompted to reflect and identify the most impactful things, ideas, and people that they learned or interacted with that day. Participants also reflected on *Self*, or what they learned about themselves that day. A total of 2,060 entries were collected and recorded that span across 26 days.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was used to categorize, code, and analyze the participants' journal entries. Content analysis is a method utilized to analyze an observable medium by categorizing and coding the data to determine trends and patterns (Mayring, 2000). Because content analysis is a method that categorizes and examines the trends and frequencies, content analysis utilizes both qualitative and quantitative research methods (Terry College of Business, n.d.) which helps analyze the data collected in the immersive study abroad experience and compare the U.S. and Malaysian participant's data. Data was collected from individual participants throughout their 26 days in Malaysia. A total of 2,060 entries were

recorded with around 515 entries per construct. Three members of the research team coded the data collected for the research. Used a four-step process to establish 90% intercoder reliability.

After the themes and categories were established, Pearson's chi-square test is utilized to see significant differences among the categories between the host and the guest participants. First, Pearson's chi-square test was conducted on participants and themes. If there was a significant correlation between the two categorical variables, the U.S. pre-service educators and Malaysia pre-service educators were compared using post hoc z-test with Bonferroni-adjusted p-values to determine if there was a difference between the participant groups (Warner et al., 2020).

Trustworthiness. With the data being a direct account of the participants, it confirms a real experience that the participants partook in throughout the immersive experience.

Third, inter-coder reliability was utilized to make sure the data was interpreted and analyzed with a shared and collective understanding. Through inter-coder reliability individual bias was reduced when analyzing the data. The following steps were taken to ensure inter-coder reliability.

Step 1: One researcher read through all the entries in each category (*Things, Ideas, People, and Self*) and identified themes for each category separately. A codebook was created with a definition of each theme and rules for coding the themes.

Step 2: Researchers randomly selected 10% of the entries per category and coded the themes of the entries separately guided by the codebook.

Step 3: Researchers compared the coding to the established themes of the randomly selected entries and discussed any discrepancies or concerns discovered during the coding process.

Step 4: Researchers checked the reliability of the themes after coding each category with a goal of 90% or higher agreement. There is no standard percentage of agreement for qualitative research, but according to Saldana (2016), an 80-90% agreement range has often been the minimal standard.

For this study, when inter-coder reliability was not met with at least 90% agreement, another 30 entries (10%) for the specific category were randomly selected and steps 2 through step 4 were repeated to meet at least 90% agreement by all researchers.

Table 1
TIPS Entry Examples

Category	Theme	U.S. participant entry example	Malaysian participant entry example
<i>Things</i>	Agriculture (AG)	“Over 3,000 species of herbs grown on the herb farm, but only 8 are commercially cultivated.”	“Machinery to produce tea. Variety of tea grades.”
	Environment and Conservation (EC)	“Mangroves play a large role in coast preservation.”	“The importance of mangrove trees”
	Education (ED)	“When students are passionate they can do amazing things. The students were impressive as they demonstrated skills to us.”	“Get more knowledge and experience in teaching and learning at school. Awesome design the SMK Pulau Perdana.”
<i>Ideas</i>	Teach Ag Best Practice (TA)	“Would be interesting to see if we could grow pineapple as an agriscience project. Or measure a social systems Ag fair project of if people would still buy pineapple without the crowns.”	“I would like to improve our technique and method during teaching special need students.”
	Community and Culture (CC)	“I now understand a little bit more what people that don't speak English feel like in the US.”	“I should learn more about the ethnic that we have in Malaysia.”
	Agriculture (AG)	“Interesting to learn that the United States consumer is impacting the palm oil industry 9,000 miles away in Malaysia.”	“I want to explore more about palm oil and rubber.”
<i>People</i>	Malaysian Life Skills Student (UTM)	“<name> commanded the classroom when necessary and really connected with students.”	“<name>, accompany me to the Sabah museum and have a lunch together.”
	UTM Personnel (UT)	“<name> invited us to join prayer in the morning if we'd like. I admire she is willing to share that part of her life with us.”	“<name>, the instructor of gamelan class who is very energetic in teaching us.”

Category	Theme	U.S. participant entry example	Malaysian participant entry example
	U.S. In-Service Agricultural Educator (UP)	"<name> for being well prepared for the reflection and being proactive."	"<name> - because she is so confident and ask a lot of questions during presentation."
	Total U.S. Participants (TU)	"<names> Such a great group to explore Melaka with! Positive, upbeat, and accommodating to everyone in the group."	"<names> - treat me well, try to explain and understand me in everything that I don't understand well."
<i>Self</i>	Global Competency (GC)	"How can I be more open minded towards other religions back at home?"	"I feel that I learn a lot especially how to communicate with my US friends."
	Educational Aspects (EA)	"Need to really focus that all lessons are student centered and they're engaged."	"Today's program opened my eyes to be more confident to face students at school."
	Other (OT)	"I was very happy that I got the chance to improve my cooking skills and contribute to our meal."	"Although it was my first time going to the museum with my friends but from that I can get an experience on how to become more independent and how to react with more people."
	Agricultural Aspects (AA)	"Talking about halal practices and kosher was very interesting. I need to learn more about these practices."	"Very excited to introduce local fruits to my US friends."

Results

Things

Construct *Things* in the TIPS model refers to a physical item or interaction with a physical item or concept. Each participant in the immersive experience reflected on a thing that they encountered or that impacted them each day. Fourteen codes were developed after examining and analyzing each *Things* entry. The top five most frequently occurring themes from the U.S. participants were a)

agriculture, b) environment and conservation, c) education, d) food and beverage, and e) recreation and relaxation. The top five most frequently occurring themes from the Malaysian participants were a) agriculture, b) environment and conservation, c) food and beverage, d) infrastructure and transportation, and e) education. Agriculture, environment and conservation, education, and food and beverage were in both U.S. and Malaysian participants' most occurring themes. After conducting a Pearson's chi-square test, there was a significant relationship between participants and all of the themes, $\chi^2(df=13, N=515)=34, p<.05$. The post hoc result showed that US participants were more likely to reflect on "Religion" (RE) and "Hygiene and Health" (HH) than Malaysian participants, while Malaysian participants tended to reflect more on Infrastructure and Transportation (IT) than US participants. *Things* themes and frequency are shown in the table below (see Table 2).

Table 2
Things coding all participants

Theme	U.S. participant		Malaysian participant	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Agriculture (AG)	79	25.57%	59	28.64%
Environment and Conservation (EC)	36	11.65%	28	13.59%
Education (ED)	31	10.03%	22	10.68%
Food and Beverage (FB)	23	7.44%	18	8.74%
Recreation and Relaxation (RR)	22	7.12%	8	3.88%
Religion (RE)	18	5.83%	1	0.49%
Infrastructure and Transportation (IT)	17	5.50%	22	10.68%
Hospitality and Human Behavior (HO)	15	4.85%	5	2.43%
Music and Arts (MA)	14	4.53%	15	7.28%
Experience Design (EX)	14	4.53%	8	3.88%
Clothing (CL)	14	4.53%	4	1.94%

Theme	U.S. participant		Malaysian participant	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Hygiene and Health (HH)	11	3.56%	0	0.00%
Geography (GE)	8	2.59%	5	2.43%
Unknown (UK)	7	2.27%	11	5.34%
Total	309	100.00%	206	100.00%

Ideas

Construct *Ideas* is an action item, “aha” moment, or thought. Each participant in the immersive study abroad experience reflected on an idea or a thought that impacted them. Nine codes were developed after examining and analyzing each *Ideas* entry. The top five most frequently occurring themes from the U.S. participants were a) teach ag best practices, b) community and culture, c) agriculture, d) education-related, and e) host and hospitality. The top five most frequently occurring themes from the Malaysian participants were a) teach ag best practices, b) community and culture, c) agriculture, d) health, and e) host and hospitality. Teach ag best practices, community culture, agriculture, and host and hospitality were in both U.S. and Malaysian participants’ most occurring themes. After conducting a Pearson’s chi-square test, there was a significant relationship between participants and the themes, $\chi^2(df=8, N=515)=29.76, p<.05$. The post hoc result showed that US participants were more likely to have an “aha” moment, or thoughts on Education Related (ED) and Religion (RE) than Malaysian participants, while Malaysian participants tended to reflect more on Health (HE) than US participants. *Ideas* themes and frequency are shown in the table below (see Table 3).

Table 3
Ideas coding all participants

Theme	U.S. participant		Malaysian participant	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Teach Ag Best Practices (TA)	134	43.37%	91	44.17%
Community and Culture (CC)	67	21.68%	59	28.64%
Agriculture (AG)	35	11.33%	26	12.62%
Education Related (ED)	27	8.74%	2	0.97%

Theme	U.S. participant		Malaysian participant	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Host and Hospitality (HO)	19	6.15%	7	3.40%
Religion (RE)	12	3.88%	2	0.97%
Unknown (UK)	7	2.27%	5	2.43%
Food and Beverage (FB)	6	1.94%	5	2.43%
Health (HE)	2	0.65%	9	4.37%
Total	309	100.00%	206	100.00%

People

People refers to individuals or groups of people who have been encountered or that made an impact. Each participant of immersive study abroad experience reflected on a person who they encountered or who impacted them. Fifteen codes were developed after examining and analyzing each *People* entry. “U.S. In-service Agricultural Educators” is a theme in the *People* category which refers to the in-service educators who were part of the immersive experience, but not part of the participants of this study. The top five most frequently occurring themes from the U.S. participants were a) Malaysian life skills student, b) UTM personnel, c) agricultural personnel, d) host families, and e) auxiliary actors. The top five most frequently occurring themes from the Malaysian participants were a) U.S. in-service agricultural educator, b) total U.S. participants, c) participant group, d) agricultural personnel, and e) U.S. pre-service agricultural educators. Agricultural personnel was the only theme that was in both U.S. and Malaysian participants’ most occurring themes. After conducting a Pearson’s chi-square test, there was a significant relationship between participants and all of the themes developed for *Ideas*, $\chi^2(df=14, N=515)=136.22, p<.05$. The post hoc result showed that US pre-service participants were more likely to have impact or impression from Malaysian Life Skills Student (UTM), UTM Personnel (UT), and Malaysian Education (ME) than Malaysian participants, while Malaysian participants were more likely to reflect on Participant Group (PG), US Pre-service Agricultural Educators (UP), and Total US Participants (TU) than US pre-service participants. *People* themes and frequency are shown in the table below (see Table 4).

Table 4
People coding all participants

Theme	U.S. participant		Malaysian participant	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Malaysian Life Skills Student (UTM)	75	24.27%	6	2.91%
UTM Personnel (UT)	43	13.92%	11	5.34%
Agricultural Personnel (AG)	29	9.39%	21	10.19%
Host Families (HF)	25	8.09%	10	4.85%
Auxiliary Actors (AA)	24	7.77%	11	5.34%
Malaysian Student (Non-Life Skills) (MS)	18	5.83%	8	3.88%
Participant Group (PG)	15	4.85%	32	15.53%
Malaysian Education (ME)	13	4.21%	5	2.43%
U.S. Pre-service Agricultural Educator (UP)	13	4.21%	14	6.80%
Unknown (UK)	14	4.53%	5	2.43%
U.S. In-service Agricultural Educator (UI)*	12	3.88%	38	18.45%
Religious Figure (RE)	11	3.56%	0	0.00%
Total U.S. Participants (TU)	8	2.59%	36	17.48%
U.S. Leads (UL)	6	1.94%	4	1.94%
Total Malaysian Participants (TM)	3	0.97%	5	2.43%
Total	309	100.00%	206	100.00%

Self

Self is an explicit or implied “I” statement that reflects on the learning experience. Each participant of immersive study abroad experience reflected on themselves. Unlike other constructs, there was a process of determining whether the entry was self-reflection or not. After the initial screening process, four codes were developed. The four frequently occurring themes from both the U.S. and Malaysian participants were a) global competency, b) educational aspect, c) other, and d) agricultural aspects. After conducting a Pearson’s chi-square test, there

was a significant relationship between participants and all of the themes, $\chi^2(df=3, N=478)=66.81, p<.05$. The post hoc result showed that US participants were more likely to self-reflect from Global Competency (GC) and Educational Aspects (EA) than Malaysian participants, while Malaysian participants were more likely to reflect on Agricultural Aspects (AA) than US participants. *Self* themes and frequency are shown in the table below (see Table 5).

Table 5
Self-coding all participants

Theme	U.S. participant		Malaysian participant	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Global Competency (GC)	152	52.41%	64	34.04%
Educational Aspects (EA)	69	23.79%	52	27.66%
Other (OT)	56	19.31%	28	14.89%
Agricultural Aspects (AA)	13	4.48%	44	23.40%
Total	290	100.00%	188	100.00%

Each construct had a different number of themes. There was a total of 14 themes that emerged for *Things* which include agriculture, environment and conservation, and education. There was a total of nine themes that emerged from *Ideas* which include teaching agricultural best practices, community and culture, and education related. A total of 15 themes emerged for *People* category and the themes include Malaysian life skills student, agricultural personnel, and U.S. pre-service agricultural educators. Lastly, for *Self*, a total of four themes emerged which are global competency, educational aspects, agricultural aspects, and other.

Many of the themes that most frequently emerged for *Things*, *Ideas*, and *Self* categories were similar. For example, the top three most frequent themes for *Ideas* for both U.S. and Malaysian participants were “Teaching Agricultural Best Practices” (TA), “Community and Culture” (CC), and “Agriculture” (AG). The number of significantly different themes for *Things*, *Ideas*, and *Self* categories were also similar. However, *People* category had a distinct difference in themes that most frequently emerged for U.S. and Malaysian participants. The top three most frequently emerged themes for U.S. participants were “Malaysian life skills students” (UTM), “UTM Personnel” (UT), and “Agricultural Personnel” (AG), while the most frequently emerged themes for Malaysian participants were “U.S. in-service agricultural educators” (UI), “Total U.S. Participants” (TU), and “Participant Group” (PG). Also, compared to *Things*, *Ideas*, and *Self* categories,

People category had the greatest number of significantly different themes at six when comparing U.S. and Malaysian participants.

Conclusions, Discussion, and Implications

The immersion experience included participants from the U.S. and Malaysia with the experience taking place in Malaysia meaning that some participants were guests and others hosts. This study specifically explores the experience from both the participant and host perspectives. Results of this study suggest that both groups were impacted by similar themes as a result of the experience. U.S. participants were able to immerse in a new environment and new culture, while Malaysian participants were able to share aspects of their country and culture while engaging with the guests.

Even with the difference in nationality and culture, both parties reflected on similar learning themes throughout the experience in the *Things* and *Ideas* categories. The three most frequently occurring themes in the *Things* category were "Agriculture", "Environment and Conservation", and "Education", which aligned with the program objectives and the focus of many program activities. The importance of these findings is that the learning themes were aligned with the program objectives and that both the international and domestic participants experienced these learnings side by side. They evidence the intentionality of the program design through the alignment of the program objectives, program activities, and participant learning.

The themes that showed a significant difference in the *Things* category were "Religion", "Hygiene and Health", and "Infrastructure and Transportation". In the case of religion, this is evidence that the U.S. participants were exploring a new context in which the majority of their interactions were with individuals practicing a different religion than their own, which had an impact on the schedule, food and beverage choices, and many other aspects of the program. The Malaysian participants were familiar with the religious context and did not reflect upon religion with the same frequency as the U.S. participants. The situation with "Hygiene and Health" was similar: the U.S. participants reflected on differences in bathroom facilities, food storage and preservation, and many other contextual factors that were commonplace to the Malaysian participants. However, "Infrastructure and Transportation" can be due to a number of reasons, one of which is that the Malaysian participants did not have other things that they found interesting during the trip than the attractions, such as famous buildings and structures. These findings demonstrate the limitations to global learning experienced by Malaysian participants. Familiarity with the context did not prompt the same level of observation and learning, even though the topics came up frequently in program activities and in group reflections.

In the *Ideas* category “Teach Ag Best Practices”, “Community and Culture”, and “Agriculture” were in both U.S. and Malaysian participants’ most occurring themes. Again, the findings within this category aligned with the program objectives which focused on the intersection of agriculture, education, and culture. One of the themes that showed a significant difference was “Education Related”. The U.S. participants were exposed to the Malaysian educational system including visiting schools, meeting with teachers and administrators, and interacting with students. They reflected on the similarities and differences between the U.S. and Malaysian systems, which was different for the Malaysian participants, who all had experienced the Malaysian educational system first-hand. This is a demonstration of the limitations of this program to expand knowledge and awareness along this program objective for Malaysian participants.

U.S. participants and Malaysian participants had predictable differences in the most frequently occurring themes within the *People* category. While all members of the group were exposed to a wide range of individuals throughout the experience, U.S. participants noted they were most impacted by Malaysian participants and UTM faculty, while Malaysian participants indicated they were most affected by U.S. participants. This finding provides support for the importance of facilitating close connections between traveling and hosting individuals. This is a very important finding for designers of future immersion activities. Instead of the U.S., participants visiting a country and traveling with their own group, the Malaysian participants and faculty were invited to be active participants and facilitators in the entire experience. The Malaysian participants rode the bus, participated in all activities, attended reflection sessions, wrote blogs, shared housing arrangements, and ate meals alongside the U.S. participants. Additionally, the groups were engaged in shared tasks including co-teaching episodes in local secondary schools, prompting working and trusting relationships to develop. The UTM faculty had an active facilitation role alongside the U.S. faculty, and co-coordinated workshops, activities, school visits, and reflection sessions. With this level of interaction between the U.S. and Malaysian delegations, it is easy to understand the meaningful connections that were made between the two groups. Recommendations for future immersions include facilitating meaningful connections between visiting and hosting individuals, including engaging participants in shared tasks relevant to the program objectives.

In the *Ideas* category, both U.S. and Malaysian participants had the highest rate of reflection on the theme of global competency. This finding is expected for the U.S. participants who had the opportunity to immerse themselves in a new country and culture in Malaysia. What is interesting about the frequency of this theme in the host group is that it supports the idea that the experience

provided host participants ample opportunity to examine and reflect upon their global competence within the geographic context of their own country. Study findings indicate that meaningful global learning can take place in a purposefully designed experience in domestic contexts that includes significant and relevant interactions with international visitors. Future studies should further investigate the specific global competency gains between visiting and hosting individuals.

In many institutions of higher education in Western countries, there is a focus on sending students on education abroad activities. Studying abroad can provide many benefits to those students who engage in such activities. However, not all students can study abroad due to a variety of barriers including finances, family obligations, health concerns, and document status. Educators need to have a variety of tools to engage students in global learning, and one of the options to engage students in global learning in domestic contexts is through hosting international scholars and groups. This study provides support for the notion that there are benefits to students who closely engage with international individuals through hosting activities. While there is incredible value in traveling abroad and immersing students in other countries, there is also impact and value in hosting international students for non-mobile students' development of global competence. Jones (2013) calls for 'further exploration of the domestic intercultural context as a vehicle for the kind of transformational learning evidenced through international mobility' (Jones 2013, p. 8), and argues the need for additional studies which confirm its value. Global learning practitioners in all higher education contexts should consider how domestic students can be involved in the hosting experience. Often, these functions are in separate siloes at higher education institutions, but integration of global learning and hosting of international scholars and groups could provide valuable learning to both visitors and hosts, as this study suggests.

Education abroad is thought to provide a unique space for student transformation. As such, the literature on education abroad is replete with studies focusing on the traveling student and their learnings. While education abroad continues to proliferate, new models of education abroad need to be identified and studied in order to develop new strategies that benefit both the traveling and host populations. Developing transformative learning experiences is critical for educators to evaluate their past ideas and understanding of global issues and shift their very worldview as they obtain new information and through critical reflection. It goes beyond simply acquiring knowledge, and dives into the way that learners find meaning in their lives and understanding. Global study abroad immersion experiences involve a fundamental change in perceptions—learners start to question all the things they knew or thought before and examine things from new perspectives in order to make room for new insights and information.

This transformation of thought can lead to changes in instructional design and practice while addressing global issues by taking action at a local level.

The immersion study abroad experience was a one-time experience that took place over 26 days in Malaysia. Because it is only a study investigating one experience, the study result cannot be generalized for all immersion experiences. Also, the experience in Malaysia was a specific experience that was organized, structured, and planned. Not all immersion experiences are as organized, structured, or planned, so the programmatic element could be a significant component that yielded the result of the study. Further research into individual global competency gains in relationship to specific interventions and activities is called for to help determine a better understanding of the return on investment of educational dollars by both the institution and the individual.

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