

Using Photo Journal Prompts to Help Increase Local Cultural Awareness in Study Abroad Participants.

Bryce Hamlin
2810 15th Street, Lubbock, TX 79409
432-213-4376; 806-834-6838
bhamlin@ttu.edu

Dr. David Lawver
2810 15th Street, Lubbock, TX 79409
806-834-8923
David.lawver@ttu.edu

Dr. Courtney Gibson
2810 15th Street, Lubbock, TX 79409
806-834-8766
Courtney.d.gibson@ttu.edu

Clarissa Darby
2810 15th Street, Lubbock, TX 79409
806-834-3286
cladarby@ttu.edu

Introduction

Studying abroad has become part of many high-impact learning university programs focused on experiential learning. According to Baker et al. (2012) and Roberts (2006), teachers need to understand the process of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) to help engage participants in cultural awareness. Practices within a study abroad are impactful (Wright et al., 2019). These programs can be as short as one or two weeks long or a full academic year. Educators and employers generally agree on the need for international experience to help with agricultural policy and issues (Bletscher et al., 2022). Bunch et al. (2018) recommended that short-term International Experience (IE, study abroad) program leaders include different learning goals to aid participants in achieving outcomes. While abroad internationally, participants were also exposed to experiential learning and could complete the experiential learning cycle created by Kolb (1984). This trip was named “*Cultural and AgriCULTURAL Tour of Greece,*” and after reading the photo journals, it was apparent the main impact Greece had on the participants was the culture.

Purpose

This study aimed to explore student perceptions of cultural awareness during study abroad trips by using photo journals and prompts for the pictures included in the journals. The research objective for this study was to *investigate the use of photo journal prompts to enhance local cultural awareness among participants.*

Methodology and Data Sources

This study was approached with a qualitative method, and a modified version of photovoice was used for data analysis. By using photovoice, participants can tell a story from their perspective (Rank & Smalley, 2017; Wang & Burris, 1997). During their international journey, participants were immersed in a setting that facilitated experiential learning, allowing them to navigate and complete the experiential learning cycle formulated by Kolb in 1984. This concrete experience formed the foundation for subsequent stages, encouraging participants to engage in reflective observation. While the participants were exposed to the same experiences, there were different pictures telling stories from their perspective instead of a group perspective. Through this qualitative study, we used phenomenology to identify different phenomena in the participant's journals; NVivo was used to sort through the data and find the major themes throughout the photo journals, which were gathered as part of the study abroad course requirement. The trip included 18 participants, and 13 consented to participate in this study.

Results and Conclusions

From the 13 journals, we extracted 78 and 81 thematic process codes from the data by individually going through the journals and extracting quotes. The research team then negotiated 20 secondary (i.e., focused) codes, which were then compressed into three main themes: *Cultural Growth and Awareness*, *Personal Growth*, and *Archaeological Impacts*.

Theme 1: Cultural Growth and Awareness

Throughout this category, participants discussed their interactions with the Greeks, their food, cultural differences, and the impact those interactions and objects had on them. When participants were asked to reflect on the cultural differences and similarities, one student responded, “The cultural differences are significant! The churches are of great importance to the Greek people” (7:25-26). Another student said, “It is the perfect culture to just sit back and relax!” (1:70). Participants could visit a farm on the island of Crete and reflect on those interactions and the culture they experienced. Participants mentioned the “kindness” (2:33) and the “hospitality” (2:33) that the native residents of the island showed. One of the final culture-

related topics asked participants to reflect on how their experiences throughout the trip had impacted them. One participant stated, “I am more well-rounded in culture” (4:125-126).

Theme 2: Personal Growth

The second theme that appeared was *Personal Growth*. Each participant had other commitments they could have been attending, but this trip was an opportunity to see how other people live and manage their agricultural practices. When asked to reflect on their experiences at the end of the trip, one participant said, “My view of the world has changed over the last several days” (12:94-95). Another participant noted that they have become more “globally aware” (8:136). The final prompt of the assignment asked participants to reflect on the trip and use one photo that painted that feeling. One participant said, “I love how Greece has shown me how a simple life is a good way of life” (7:97-99) and used a simple picture of the ocean. Another participant said, “I feel I learned a lot here, but it challenged me to be more open” (5:159-160) while using a picture of open doors toward the shops of Athens.

Theme 3: Archaeological Impacts

While traveling to Greece, participants had opportunities to visit archaeological sites. After visiting the sights, participants reflected on those visits and emerged as the study's third theme: *Archaeological Impacts*. These sites were “marvelous” and “breathtaking” (7:64-65) to be able to see in person. When reflecting on the sites participants had seen so far, one participant noted, “The history alone is astounding. To think about the civilizations that were around before the U.S. even existed is unfathomable to me” (13:103-105). Another participant stated, “I love seeing the respect everyone had for these locations” (10:152-153). Toward the end, participants visited Acropolis Hill, and one participant mentioned, “For me, it showed if you build something with good intent and a solid foundation, it will withstand the storms of life” (11:173-176). By examining the photos throughout this section, it was noticed that participants were very moved and in awe of the archaeology of ancient Greece.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In summary, the outcomes of this investigation highlight the considerable promise associated with integrating photo journal prompts to elevate local cultural awareness within the context of study abroad programs. The results distinctly emphasize the efficacy of this pedagogical method, revealing noteworthy advancements in the cultural understanding of participating individuals. Through the active involvement with carefully structured photo journal prompts, study abroad participants demonstrated a heightened capacity to delve into, contemplate, and internalize intricate cultural subtleties in a meaningful manner.

This study aligns with the prior recommendation by Bunch et al. (2018), emphasizing the incorporation of learning objectives in short-term International Education (IE) programs. Moreover, it extends this recommendation by proposing the inclusion of photos and prompts in participants' journals. This addition serves not only to enrich the journaling experience for program leaders but also to provide participants with a valuable tool for self-reflection upon concluding their study abroad experience. Incorporating photos and prompts is strategic, as it enhances the journal's impact, contributing to a more comprehensive and reflective learning cycle, as conceptualized by Kolb (1984). Therefore, this study encourages educators and program leaders to consider integrating visual elements and reflective prompts as a potent strategy for optimizing the cultural learning experiences of study abroad participants.

References

- Baker, M. A., Robinson, J. S., & Kolb, D. A. (2012). Aligning Kolb's experiential learning theory with a comprehensive agricultural education model. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 53(4), 1-16. doi:10.5032/jae.2012.04001
- Bletscher, C., Gould, M., & Qu, S. (2022) The Exploration of Undergraduate Attitudes and Knowledge about International Agricultural Issues and US Agricultural Policy. *Journal of International Agricultural and Extension Education*, 29(2), 7-23. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2831-5960.1010>
- Bunch, J., Rampold, S. D., Cater, M., & Blackburn, J. J. (2018). The Impact of a Short-Term International Experience on Undergraduate Students' Cultural Competency. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 59(4), 120–136. <https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2018.04120>
- Kolb, D. (1984) *Experiential Learning: Experience As The Source Of Learning And Development*.
- Rank, B. D., & Smalley, S. W. (2017). Students' Perceptions of School-Based Agricultural Education Through an Initial Early Field Experience. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 58(3), 310–322. <https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2017.03310>
- Roberts, T. G. (2006). A PHILOSOPHICAL EXAMINATION OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING THEORY FOR AGRICULTURAL EDUCATORS. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 47(1), 17–29. <https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2006.01017>
- Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education & Behavior*, 24(3) 369-387. doi:10.1177/109019819702400309
- Wright, K. M., Vincent, S. K., & Epps Rebekah B. (2019). International Agricultural Education from 1975 to Present: A Research Synthesis. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 60(2), 153–172. <https://doi.org/10.5032/jae.2019.02153>