Study Abroad as a Route to Global Citizenship? Undergraduate Student Perspectives in the UK

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Abstract
Universities around the world invest significant resources in developing study abroad programmes, often with a diverse range of aims – including promoting individual student learning and development, as well as enhancing mobility and employability. While the experience of studying abroad is also frequently cited as a key route to helping undergraduate students to develop global perspectives and global citizenship, it remains unclear to what extent the learning which takes place actually supports that aim. There are also on-going debates about the relative value of different perspectives on what constitutes a 'global citizen', and particularly whether this revolves around mobility and employability or the development of criticality and a sense of care and social justice. The frequent mismatch between programme aims and students' own interests often further complicates this discussion. This chapter therefore explores the perspectives of students on their own experiences of study abroad and both its potential and challenges for developing a global perspective. It is based on a small-scale study of undergraduate students enrolled in the BASc Arts and Sciences degree at University College London (UK), all of whom studied abroad as part of their degree course. The research included a literature review, an anonymous online questionnaire and a series of interviews with students, and analysis of study abroad dissertations. The chapter explores the students' perspectives on (i) how the study abroad experience had an impact on their world outlook and their views of global citizenship, (ii) the extent to which it enabled them to develop new knowledge and skills, and (iii) how the experience may have influenced their plans for the future.

Keywords: study abroad, global citizenship, higher education

Introduction

The opportunity to study abroad is widely hailed as a key route for young people to develop a wide range of knowledge and skills, including intercultural understanding, interpersonal skills, and language learning, among many others. Universities around the world have invested significant resources in developing a variety of study abroad programmes, ranging from short- to long-term, and from guided to independent study. These programmes may have a number of aims, including to promote individual student learning and development, as well as to enhance student mobility and employability, particularly in the context of a rapid and changeable global employment market. The terms 'global citizen', 'global graduate', 'global skills' and 'global mindset' have all taken on increased significance within this context, along with accompanying debates about the relative merits of these as aims for higher education. Key questions remain, however, about the central meaning of terms such as 'global citizenship', and especially whether this is – or should be – more strongly linked to economic concerns (e.g. employment and mobility) or social ones (e.g. the development of skills such as critical thinking and a sense of social justice) (Hammond and Keating, 2017; Bourn, 2018).

At the root of these queries is the issue of what types of learning can or do take place during study abroad experiences, as well as the ways in which these can support students to develop particular knowledge, skills and understandings. A vast body of research over the last 30 years has explored a

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range of both short and long term impacts which study abroad programmes can have on the personal and professional development of participants (Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich, 2002; Paige *et al.*, 2009; Tarrant, 2010). However, there are still significant questions about how and when this learning and change takes place. Braskamp et al (2009), for instance, argue that study abroad can encourage development in three major domains: cognitive (epistemological, awareness, knowledge), intrapersonal (identity, attitudes, emotion), and interpersonal (behavioural, skills, social responsibility), although this will vary at the individual level. However, they also insert a note of caution about assuming which types of learning and development may actually occur: 'We often hear that students enjoy being abroad and that they learned so much, but the instruction still may be focused on what they learned rather than on how they think. Knowing that differences exist may not have been internalized enough so that it impacts the way students regard knowledge. Thinking critically may not be stressed in comparison to knowledge acquisition' (2009, p. 110).

So, while it is clear that a number of different kinds of learning *can* take place during study abroad – including gaining new knowledge about particular topics, issues and academic subjects, experiences of particular places, or exposure to new ideas and ways of life – it is also clear that the impacts of these learning experiences may not always be straightforward. In relation to global citizenship in particular, a number of authors suggest that international travel and study enables students to develop the capacity to engage in transformative experiences with cultural 'others' (Williams, 2005; Schattle, 2007; Killick, 2012). Others, however, have argued that there is not yet sufficient knowledge or understanding of how intercultural competence, growth and transformation occur as a result of mobility, and there is a need for more critical analysis of the relationships between mobility and global citizenship (Caruana, 2014) as well as the ways in which young people see themselves as located in complex webs of relationships (Reddy, 2018). As Lilley et al (2015, p. 229) note: 'The literature suggests that university and stakeholder groups identify the global citizen as an ethical and critical thinking disposition. Yet, despite the available evidence, there is limited knowledge of what the process of global citizen learning entails'. The study which is explored in this chapter therefore set out to explore how one group of undergraduate students understand their experiences of study abroad and the ways in which their learning informs their ideas about both global issues and global citizenship.

Study Abroad, Mobility and Global Citizenship
It is perhaps useful to begin by setting out the key concepts and themes which are relevant to this research – study abroad, mobility, and global citizenship – and the relationships between them. The literature on these areas is vast, so it is not possible to provide a comprehensive review here, but rather to highlight a few key points of discussion and debate.

Research has explored the range of drivers for young people's individual choices to study abroad as well as the wider factors which can both promote and inhibit mobility (Findlay *et al.*, 2006; Caruso and De Wit, 2013; Van Bouwel and Veugelers, 2013). On the individual level, this can include both economic and social drivers such as the desire for increased employability (see Boden and Nedeva, 2010 for a useful critique of this concept), to have an 'international experience', or to develop particular skills (e.g. language, intercultural communication).

Within higher education, an increasing emphasis on mobility through study abroad can be seen as part of a wider response to the demands of globalization and internationalisation, with students in a growing number of disciplines now being provided with opportunities for overseas study. At the university level, such initiatives may also be complemented by efforts to 'internationalise at home' and to 'internationalise the curriculum' (de Wit 2002 cited in Dvir and Yemini, 2017). Recent

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research has noted that opportunities to study abroad are increasingly valued as a kind of 'passport to new professional, social, cultural and above all personal experiences' (Pedro and Franco, 2016, p. 1630).

Similarly, the demands of globalisation and internationalisation have forged strong links between mobility, study abroad and the idea of global citizenship. While the term global citizenship is increasingly prominent in discourses of higher education, there continues to be substantial debate about its core meaning and aims. Scholars such as Caruana (2014), for instance, suggest a split between initiatives which tend to emphasise a more cosmopolitan or 'soft' approach to global citizenship (e.g. learning *about* global issues) and those that encourage development of more critical perspectives on global issues and concerns, with the first tending to be more common in practice. Although a few useful typologies have been proposed as a way of interrogating the concept more deeply (see Andreotti, 2006; Oxley and Morris, 2013), these have tended to be based on educational practice in schools and/ or informal education, with global citizenship continuing to be under-theorised within higher education.

One helpful exception to this is recent work by Stein (2015) which identifies three positions on global citizenship within contemporary higher education - entrepreneurial, liberal humanist, and anti-oppressive. While the entrepreneurial position focuses on the economic imperatives of preparing graduates with the skills needed to successfully engage in the global labour market, the liberal humanist position emphasises the need for young people to cultivate greater understanding and appreciation of difference, sometimes as a complement to entrepreneurialism. The anti-oppressive position critiques both of these as located solely within Western worldviews which are not sufficiently critical, politicized or historicized, and advocates instead 'for more equitable distribution of resources, cognitive justice, and more horizontal forms of governance, and aspires to radical transformation of existing structures, up to and including their dismantling' (Stein, 2015, p. 246).

UCL's own definition of global citizenship suggests an approach which incorporates elements of all three existing approaches in Stein's typology, although perhaps to varying degrees (see Box 1). This variation is also evident in practice within the university, with diverse initiatives and programmes adapting the concept to particular disciplines and student groups (Bentall, 2018).

Box 1: What is Global Citizenship? UCL's Definition:
Our world is now more connected than ever before. But it also faces challenges. Big ones. Like infectious diseases, rapid urbanisation, and sustainability. To solve these global challenges, we need global citizens. We need people who:

- Understand the complexity of our interconnected world
- Understand our biggest challenges
- Know their social, ethical and political responsibilities
- Display leadership and teamwork
- Solve problems through innovation and entrepreneurship

https://www.ucl.ac.uk/global-citizenship-programme/what-is-global-citizenship

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This attention to both economic and social concerns, as well as a sense of responsibility, can be seen as a strength of the UCL approach to global citizenship, in that it provides opportunities for a range of areas of exploration. However, its breadth may also be a source of confusion for students, who may need greater clarity and opportunities to discuss the concept, as will be clear from the discussion to follow.

UCL BASc Arts and Sciences Programme

The BASc Arts and Sciences programme was launched in 2012 with the aim of providing students with an opportunity for interdisciplinary undergraduate study[1]. Students are required to choose a major in one of four Pathways which make up 50% of their studies: Cultures, Health and Environment, Sciences and Engineering or Societies. In order to ensure a mix of arts and sciences courses across the degree, those who major in Cultures or Societies must take a minor in Health and Environment or Sciences and Engineering, and vice versa. The other 50% of courses is composed of compulsory interdisciplinary core modules and study of a modern language.

The programme runs over four years, with students required to study abroad during their third year. Students have a number of options for study abroad location, and may either choose to study in a context linked to their language studies (e.g. students studying French at UCL may choose a university in France or in Montreal) or in a new language context (e.g. a student studying German at UCL may choose to study abroad in Japan, but will be required to keep up their study of German while abroad). A clear rationale is provided for the role of study abroad within the programme:

> In addition to enhancing employability, studying abroad enables you to expand your world view, become a true global citizen, improve your confidence, immerse yourself in a different culture, meet new friends and create international networks.[2]

In parallel with their experiences abroad, for the last several years students have also been required to complete a Study Abroad dissertation (5,000 words) on the themes of globalization and global citizenship[3]. The author of this chapter has been a lead tutor on the dissertation for the last several years, and the tutoring team has noted that study abroad often has a profound impact on students in terms of the knowledge and skills they have developed, their world outlook and their sense of social and political engagement. This study was therefore designed to investigate these themes further, and to gather further evidence from the students themselves in order to better understand their perspectives on the learning they gained as a result of their experiences abroad.

Research Strategy

Given the discussions above, key questions for this study, therefore, were:
- What are students' perspectives on how the study abroad experience had an impact on their world outlook and their views of global citizenship?
- To what extent do students see their study abroad experience as enabling them to develop new knowledge and/ or skills?
- How and in what ways do students perceive that studying abroad has influenced their plans for the future?

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[1] See https://www.ucl.ac.uk/basc/

[2] https://www.ucl.ac.uk/basc/sites/basc/files/10_reasons_to_choose_the_basc.pdf

[3] The dissertation was unfortunately removed from the BASc programme requirements starting from 2018-2019 due to changes in UCL regulations about the work that students can be required to complete for UCL during their time overseas. The BASc team is now exploring alternate ways of embedding discussion of global citizenship within the programme.

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In order to do this, the research was framed around four key methods: a literature review, a questionnaire and interviews with study abroad students, and analysis of student dissertations. The initial literature review explored the themes of study abroad, student mobility and global citizenship, the key messages from which are presented above. Both the literature and the author's previous experience of research on related issues informed the creation of an anonymous online questionnaire, which was distributed by email to all BASc students who studied abroad between 2015 – 2017 (n=77). At the end of the questionnaire, participants were also asked for permission to analyse their study abroad dissertations and if they would be willing to take part in a follow-up interview.

In line with the exploratory and qualitative nature of the study, the data from the survey and interviews, as well as the text of participants' study abroad dissertations, was interrogated using coding (open and analytical) and content analysis in order to identify themes for discussion (Silverman, 2006; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). A number of key themes emerged from this process – a discussion of which is provided below.

The Participants
Perhaps due to the heavy workload commitments of the students, participation in the study was limited, with 11 students completing the anonymous online questionnaire and 3 completing a follow-up interview[4]. Nevertheless, both methods revealed a range of interesting perspectives and narratives of study abroad, learning, mobility and global citizenship which are worth exploring.

Of the students who participated in the study, 10 had studied abroad for a full academic year in one country and one split the year between two locations, so all had spent substantial time at a university overseas. The locations where they studied included Canada (3), China (1), Australia (1), France (1), Hong Kong (1), the Netherlands (1), USA (2) and Russia (1). All were aged between 20 and 24, and the majority were female (9). Students self-identified as UK (7), EU (3) or international (1) in terms of their student status at UCL.

Student Reflections on Study Abroad and Learning
In line with the existing literature, students taking the questionnaire identified three key motivations for studying abroad, including personal development, international experience, or learning a new language or area of study. Perhaps unsurprisingly, when this was further explored in the interviews, students often identified a mixture of these motivations as relevant to their experiences, often seeing them as complementary to one another:

> I definitely wanted to be studying in French, and so that left UDM or Paris. I thought, well Paris I can go to any time, and also I know that Paris is a lot more like London in the way it's a sort of fast paced, cosmopolitan city. So … and I've never left Europe before actually, so I was like 'I want to go as far away as possible' (laughs) (S3)

> I wanted to reinvent myself, I wanted to achieve academically…. I wanted to play sports, do debating… (S2)

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[4] Ethical approval for the project was granted by the UCL Research Ethics Committee prior to any data collection.

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A similarly complex view emerged when students were asked in the questionnaire to reflect on the things they felt they had *actually gained* from the experience (see Table 1 below):

Table 1: What do you feel you gained from studying abroad?

Greater understanding of myself and how I learn	11
Understanding of a new/ diverse culture	10
International experience	9
Greater understanding of global issues/ concerns	8
Knowledge of a new subject/ discipline	8
Knowledge of a new language	6
New relationships and connections	1

While most of the students identified learning around specific academic areas/ subjects (e.g. knowledge of a new subject/ discipline or a new language), quite a few also noted an increasing awareness of broader global issues such as an understanding of a new culture or of global issues and concerns. Perhaps most interestingly, all of the students responding to the questionnaire noted that they had a 'greater understanding of myself and how I learn' as a result of studying abroad. This suggests that the students were able to actively reflect on their experiences and its impacts on them.

Similarly, all of the interviewees also reflected that they had undergone significant personal changes through their experiences abroad:

> I'm actually probably more open now to going and working in other countries or studying in other countries, and it doesn't feel impossible, it doesn't feel like this huge ordeal, like you know, this huge challenge because 'Oh I've done it now'. (S3)

> … unfortunately, bad things usually comes from places with good intentions - that was me years ago…. because I want to save the world, I see myself as the saviour, right? Now thankfully since I'm in university and [have] resources to read about these things critically and see what other people say and how they conceptualise it, I've come to understand how possibly harmful these kinds of perceptions about myself are. (S2)

This student further noted that on reflection his expectations for the experience had been far too ambitious:

> I came to McGill thinking I'm going to reinvent myself as a person, which was an expectation that from inside sounds very bold. It means that in a course or just changing the environment I'm going to change how I behaved for 22 years, Having strongly felt that it was kind of okay, to into something completely different – I'm going to go to parties, and party and be outgoing and just like talk to people … and that didn't happen because I didn't feel comfortable in doing that. And I just actually realised that that radical change of personality doesn't come easy. (S2)

Despite such thoughtful reflections from a number of the individual student participants, several also expressed a strong desire for more opportunities to reflect on their learning after returning from study abroad. While all students are offered support for the transition by the BASc team, and many had taken this up, they also expressed a strong desire for more opportunities to reflect on their learning with their peers:

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> I do think there should be some more structure for meeting with other people and sharing experiences. Because you know we haven't seen each other for a year and we've all gone off and had like really different experiences, and we sort of want to talk about that… It would be really nice to hear other people's experiences. Because I think that would help you solidify and keep hold of some of what you've learnt out of it. (S3)

Finally, in contrast to much of the discourse around study abroad as an opportunity for career development, relatively few of the student participants noted that they expected these personal changes to result in any changes to their career plans. Only two individuals outlined any concrete changes in this respect:

> The experience of studying abroad had a significant impact on my BASc dissertation in final year, as well as on choice of further studies (a MSc in Law & Anthropology, where questions related global citizenship are often discussed and challenged). (Questionnaire respondent)

> I really thought I was just going to learn French, but actually I got a lot out of it academically. I did new subjects, so I did sociology, and actually my dissertation I'm now doing on Environmental Sociology which I'd never encountered till I'd been there. So that's pretty cool. But then also I took quite a lot of creative … studies in sort of creative art, so like I say video games and the cinema and comic books. And there's a huge industry, there's a huge games industry out there but also the arts is quite strong in Montreal. And it sort of convinced me that that was a legitimate career choice. I think before then I'd sort of seen that as … you know creative industries is kind of a pipe dream, or like you know it's something you do if you get lucky. But actually out there [in Canada] there are people writing scripts for video games or films or … and the fact that I could study it as an academic discipline made me realise like this is a legit thing … it's not just like this fanciful dream. So actually, I'm now hoping to go into radio. (S3)

Reflections on Global Citizenship and Study Abroad
Both the questionnaire and interviews indicated that participants were often thinking deeply about the world and their place in it, and saw clear relationships between their study abroad experiences and the idea of global citizenship. All of the group were familiar with the term through their studies at UCL (most often the study abroad dissertation), while three also noted that they had participated in the UCL Global Citizenship Programme, and two others that they had some previous experience of international volunteering:

> I really do think my sort of sense of history has changed and sense of international politics has changed, and also a sense of what an English person is had changed. (S3)

> Studying abroad was the first time I felt like I could call myself a global citizen. Before this, I had some awareness and interest in international issues, but had never left Europe and only travelled for brief periods of time. On returning, I found I had a reverse culture shock, and could relate better to international students studying in the UK. (Questionnaire respondent)

> I think for me it's a concept that resonates personally with my study abroad experience because like I'm kind of myself from a mixed cultural background. I was able to explore just how my personal identity worked in that kind of conception because I think that a lot of people who are in my position who come from a mixed background - and I think there are a

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> lot of BASc students who are like that - we do see ourselves a lot as people who are global citizens. We do see ourselves as part of like different areas in the world. (S1)

> Learning about colonialism and racism in the Netherlands taught me to reflect more on my own country's issues and ugly history. Thus, making me think more globally about the lives of individuals who have suffered as a result of colonialism. (Questionnaire respondent)

> Studying abroad gives you the opportunity to understand a different culture and way of life. In this way, it is one of the most effective ways to cultivate global citizenship. An understanding of other people's way of life is crucial to developing global citizenship, and this can only be done by spending a considerable amount of time in a foreign location. (Questionnaire respondent)

There was, however, also some strong critique of the idea of the concept of global citizenship:

> There might be some obvious connections - such as exposure to new cultures/societies that can help one be more empathetic to 'global' issues that influence some societies but not one's own. On the other hand, I do feel that any links between global citizenship and study abroad should be pointed out as they are not self-evident. This is especially the case if one travels to culture similar to one's own, or if one travels to high-income countries which might have the same blind spots as the UK when it comes to 'global' citizenship. (Questionnaire respondent)

There was also some critical commentary about UCL's approach to global citizenship, although it is not clear whether this related to the term as it is formally outlined in UCL's overarching definition or more generally in discourse around the university:

> [I have gained] a better idea of the diversity of cultures around the world, but also of the very limited scope of 'global citizenship', as a very 'UCL' idea. I have never heard of it anywhere except UCL, and struggled to write my year abroad dissertation about it because I felt it had no relevance to my study abroad. In my experience, it is not a concern in France, where being a good citizen it being a good citizen of France. I struggle with the idea that being a 'global citizen' is the 'right' way to be, because this is a concept, as far as I am aware, that was made up at UCL. (Questionnaire respondent)

Such discussion suggests that students would welcome more opportunities to explore the concept of global citizenship through their studies abroad as well as during their time at UCL.

Conclusions: Study Abroad as a Route to Global Citizenship?
While this study reports on the perspectives of a relatively small group of students, it nevertheless raises a number of issues which are echoed in the broader research on study abroad, mobility and global citizenship. It also further highlights the need for consideration of these issues in the design of study abroad programmes which aim to promote particular types of global citizenship.

Firstly, it is clear that the students in this study are very aware of the learning dimensions of study abroad and also able to actively reflect on their experiences. This is despite the fact that their initial motivations ranged from the largely practical (e.g. to learn a language) to the more existential (e.g. personal development or even self-transformation). Both the data from this study and the existing literature highlight a range of push and pull factors which influence young people's initial decisions

to study abroad, as well as a wide range of ways in which the experience encourages (or does not) reflection on global issues and on students' sense of themselves in the world. Some recent attempts in the literature to understand how different groups of young people are situated within the study abroad 'industry' (e.g. Choudaha, Orosz and Chang, 2012 discussion of students as 'strivers, strugglers, explorers and highfliers'; Caruso and De Wit, 2013) may provide a useful way forward in further exploring students' initial motivations and the kinds of learning they expect to gain through study abroad.

The students' perspectives also highlight the need for greater support for returning students to reflect on and integrate their learning, as this is a significant factor in encouraging long-term impacts (Rowan-Kenyon and Niehaus, 2011). This finding builds on the work of key theorists of transformative and experiential learning, such as Mezirow (1991) and Dewey (1997), who insist that deep learning and changes in perspective require reflection. This needs to be taken into account within study abroad programmes, particularly if they aim to help students develop a critical sense of global issues and of their own identities. As Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich note:

> 'While all study abroad programs hold the potential for experiential education, there is a continuum within study abroad from programs that simply transfer academic credits from one traditional discipline-based institution to another without intentionally utilizing the international experience as the basis for learning, to those that try to incorporate some aspects of experiential education such as the use of learning contracts to programs whose design is thoroughly grounded in the principles of experiential education' (Lutterman-Aguilar and Gingerich, 2002, p. 43)

Attention to the learning aims of study abroad programmes and the connections (or disconnections) to ideas of global citizenship, is perhaps particularly important in light of the highly diverse nature of contemporary student groups, and the complex ways in which they may be connected to local, national and international networks. As noted by several participants in this study, it is clear that students need more support to understand, and even critique, their experiences and learning both during and after studying abroad.

Acknowledgements

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