

# STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM DESTINATION PREFERENCES OF HOSPITALITY STUDENTS: AN ANALYSIS USING TYPOLOGIES

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper intends to examine the hospitality student choice of study abroad programs as a part of their curriculum. Tourist typology as the conceptual framework guided this research. Students (N= 40) were recruited by means of random sampling from a private university in the northeast. The data were collected via surveys and were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics. Results reflected students' preference for study abroad program destinations that promoted social involvement with the local people, were already established tourist regions, and had a different culture. This study is significant in facilitating understanding of international study abroad student preferences. It also has the potential to assist faculty to design and develop increasingly effective study abroad programs with respect to student engagement.*

**Keywords:** International education, study abroad programs, tourist typologies, global competence, hospitality management, curriculum

## INTRODUCTION

Study abroad has shown to enhance educational attainment, and influenced career direction and practices. Researchers after undertaking longitudinal studies on the effects of study abroad program (SAP) on students reported general attitudinal outcomes related to global perspective and personal growth. Study abroad is one of the most important experiences students' undergo during their college education experience (Paige et al., 2009). The Lincoln Commission's final report of 2005 titled "Global Competence and National Needs: One million Americans Studying Abroad" set a goal to send one million American students by the year 2017 to SAPs. The Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act allocated an additional \$80 million per year towards SAP scholarships (Salisbury et al., 2008). The US department of State expanded the Fulbright program and made available 2400 student scholarships towards SAPs (Paige et al., 2009). All these initiatives led to an average increase in participation in SAP however the aggregate involvement is less than 1.8% of all American students ever availing the SAPs (OECD, 2011).

### Statement of the Problem

The above facts show that educational institutions in the US invest heavily on study abroad as a key strategy to internationalize the campuses (Paige et al., 2009). The burgeoning effects of globalization have produced a new genre of economic, geopolitical, and environmental challenges. The calls for a greater focus on student international experience, has increased exponentially (Salisbury et al., 2008). American Council of Education, (2008) stated that though most of the student population expressed desire to study abroad only 5% of them did.

Extensive research has been conducted on the outcome assessment of SAPs (Pool & Davis, 2006; Tajés & Ortiz, 2010), benefits of SAPs (Paige et al., 2009), short term vs. long term SAPs (Mansson, 2004), and factors that influence students decisions to study abroad

(Salisbury et al., 2008). There is a lack of research, in student decision making with respect to choice of study abroad destinations. Little is known about the factors that influence hospitality students' decision making regarding study abroad destination selection (Salisbury et al., 2009). This study by examining the factors affecting student choice of SAP destination has the potential to design more effective programs for increased participation.

## PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this research is to examine the hospitality student choice of study abroad programs (SAP) destination as a part of their curriculum. This research was guided by the conceptual framework of tourism typologies as designed by Keng and Cheng. The World Tourism Organization defined tourism as "activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, and other purposes" (World Tourism Organization, 1995). Long term SAP are designed to run a course of a maximum of one year time period and hence study abroad can be classified as a form of tourism. Consequently employing tourism frameworks may be an insightful method of analyzing SAP destination choices made by students.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework of tourism typologies was developed by Keng and Cheng (1999) with the tourist as the focus. This study adapts the typology with the study abroad student as the focus. The five components of tourism typologies are: a) social Contact Dimension (SCD), b) tourist infrastructure dimension (TID), c) travel services dimension (TSD), d) culture similarity dimension (CSD), and e) pre-trip planning dimension (PPD). Social contact dimension is defined as the extent to which the study abroad student wanted to associate and interact with the locals of the tourist destination. Tourist infrastructure dimension is defined as the extent to which the student favored similar tourist infrastructure with respect to hotel chains and transportation systems to that of their home countries. Travel services dimension is defined as the extent to which the student wanted other organizations such as tour guides or travel agencies to manage their experience. Culture similarity dimension is defined as the extent to which study abroad students prefer cultures akin to their own. Pre-trip planning dimension is defined as the extent to which study abroad students want to have set pre planned programs and schedules when living in the study abroad destination (Keng & Cheng, 1999; Cardon et al., 2011).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions for this study were derived from Keng and Cheng (1999) conceptual framework of tourism typologies.

*Research question 1.0:* How do hospitality students choose study abroad programs (SAP) destination as a part of their curriculum?

*Research Question 1.1:* To what extent do students prefer to interact with the locals of the SAP destination?

*Research Question 1.2:* To what extent do students prefer similar tourist infrastructure to that of their home country in their SAP destination?

*Research Question 1.3:* To what extent do students want their SAP experiences to be managed by other organizations?

*Research Question 1.4:* To what extent do students want to have pre-planned itineraries for their SAP destinations?

*Research Question 1.5:* To what extent do students prefer cultures similar to their own for their SAP destinations?

*Research Question 2:* What are student perceptions about the advantages of SAPs?

**METHODOLOGY**

The 20 item survey instrument used was International Tourist Role (ITR) scale. It was guided by tourist typologies and was constructed by Mo et al. (Mo et al., 1993). The survey included three sections. The first section collected data about demographic variables, the second section gathered data about study abroad preferences with respect to destination of choice, and the third section collected data about perceived advantages and statements about SAP. The data was collected on a five point likert scale. University students (N= 40) pursuing hospitality major degrees in a private university campus in the north east were recruited through random sampling. The data collected from the surveys were quantitatively analyzed using descriptive statistics. The graphs were constructed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Means and standard deviations were computed using SPSS. Table 1 records the demographics of the participants. Table 2 gives a numerical representation of the SAP destination choice of students with respect to student typology. This was derived by calculating the average of every tourism typology dimension on the likert scale. This was computed by allocating values of 5 to frequently, 4 to often, 3 to sometimes, 2 to rarely and 1 to never. The total number of responses on each of the likert scale for every dimension was calculated and multiplied by the respective value. This total was again divided by the number of items or survey questions on each these dimensions to obtain a numerical value representing the study abroad destination choice of the students.

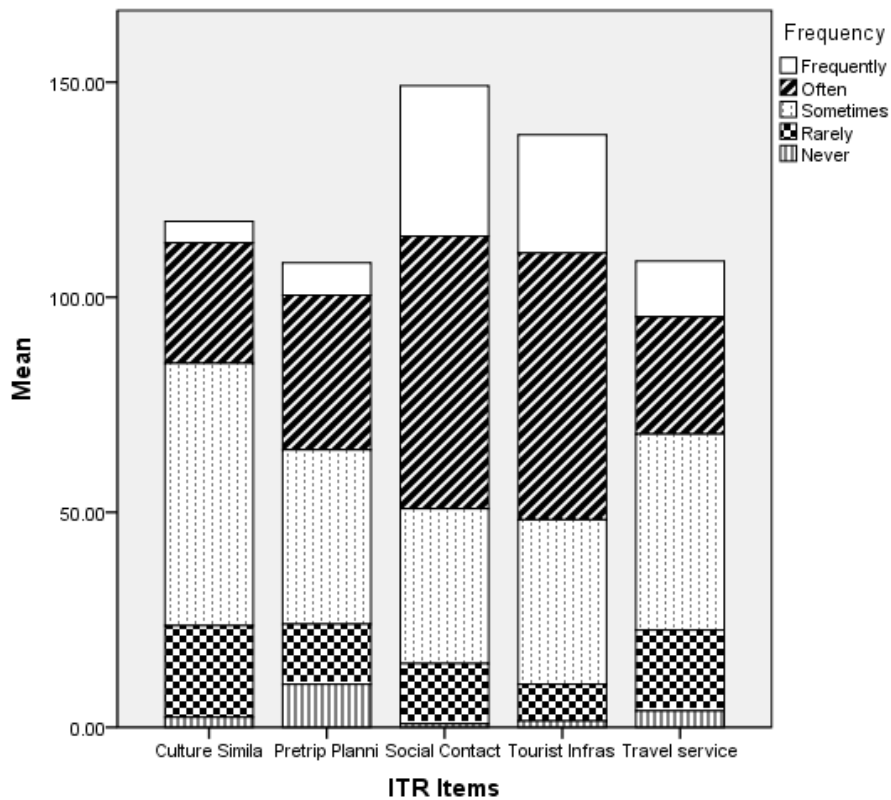


Figure 1. Study Abroad Program Preference Means with respect to Tourism Typologies

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants**

<i>Demographic Components</i>	<i>Quantity</i>
Male	18
Female	21
Freshman/Sophomore	10
Juniors	5
Seniors/Graduate	22
Low/Middle Income	20
Upper middle income	12
Higher Income	

**Table 2. SAP Destination Choice of Students with respect to Tourism Typology**

<i>ITR Items</i>	<i>Frequently</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
Social Contact Dimension (SCD)	35	63.33	36	14	0.83
Tourist Infrastructure Dimension (TID)	27.5	62	38.25	8.5	1.5
Travel Services Dimension (TSD)	13	27.2	45.6	18.8	3.8
Culture Similarity Dimension (CSD)	5	28	61	21.33	2.33
Pretrip Planning (PPD)	7.5	36	40.5	14	10

**Table 3. Perceived Advantages of Students about SAPs**

<i>Study Abroad Survey Item</i>	<i>Frequently</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
Studying Abroad will help me get a job	13	11	10	1	1	3.9	1.0
Studying Abroad will be helpful for my career	16	9	12	2	0	3.9	.9
I want study abroad while I am a university student	16	7	10	4	3	3.7	1.3
Studying abroad is too expensive for me	8	7	15	4	5	3.2	1.2
It is important for people in my (future) industry to be able to work with members of other cultures	23	8	7	0	0	4.4	.7
I would be nervous studying abroad in places where English is not the first language	6	10	15	5	4	3.2	1.1
I would prefer a study abroad program that is one semester or longer	8	14	12	2	3	3.5	1.1
I would prefer a study abroad program that is part of a group from my school	10	12	13	2	2	3.6	1.0

**Table 4. Mean and Std. Deviation of ITR Scale Items**

<i>ITR Scale Items</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
I prefer to associate with the local people when living in the country where I am pursuing my education?	3.6	.9
I prefer to live the way the people I visit do, by sharing their shelter, food, and customs during my stay when pursuing my education?	3.4	1.0
I prefer to seek excitement of complete novelty by engaging in direct contact with a wide variety of new and different people in the country where I am pursuing my education?	3.6	.7
If I find a place that particularly pleases me, I may stop there long enough for social involvement in the life of the place to occur.	3.4	1.0
I prefer to make friends with the local people when pursuing my education in a foreign country.	3.6	.9
I prefer to have as much contact with the local people as possible when pursuing my education in a foreign country.	3.5	.9
Social Contact Dimension	3.5	.9
I prefer to pursue my education in countries where there are international hotel chains.	3.5	.9
I prefer to pursue my education in countries where they have the same transportation system as in my country.	3.1	1.0
I prefer to pursue my education in countries that are popular tourist destinations.	3.5	1.0
I prefer to pursue my education in countries that have well-developed travel industries.	3.7	.7
Tourist Infrastructure Dimension	3.4	.9
I prefer to be on a guided tour when travelling in a foreign country.	3.1	1.0
I prefer to make all my major travel arrangements through travel agencies when travelling in a foreign country.	2.9	1.1
I prefer to have travel agencies take complete care of me, from beginning to end, when travelling in a foreign country.	2.8	.9
I prefer to travel to countries that have the same tourist infrastructure as in my country.	2.6	1.0
I prefer to travel to countries that have the same restaurant familiar to me.	2.8	.7
Travel Services Dimension	2.8	.9
I prefer to pursue my education in countries where the people are of the same ethnic group as mine.	2.7	.8
I prefer to pursue my education in countries where the culture is similar to mine.	2.7	.8
I put high priority on familiarity when thinking of pursuing my education in a foreign destination.	2.9	.8
Culture Similarity Dimension	2.7	.8
I prefer to start a trip with no preplanned or definite timetable when travelling in a foreign country.	2.6	1.1
I prefer to start a trip with no preplanned or definite routes when travelling in a foreign country.	2.7	1.1
Pre-trip Planning Dimension	2.6	1.1

## RESULTS

Social contact dimension scored the highest in terms of student preferences when choosing a study abroad program with a mean of 3.5 and variability of .9. This dimension reflects the students' proclivity towards associating with the local people and their aspiration for social involvement with them and their cultures. Tourist infrastructure dimension was rated second with a mean of 3.4 and variability of .9 which indicated that students were inclined towards choosing SAP destination that were already established tourist regions with an existing and thriving tourist infrastructure. Culture similarity dimension which reflected the student's preference to get introduced to and know cultures different to that of their own scored a mean of 2.7 at a very low variability of .8. Travel services dimension scored a mean of 2.7 with a .8 variability which mirrored students' disinterest in making use of travel agencies and guided tours. Pre-trip planning dimension scored a mean of 2.6 with a higher variability of 1.1. Students when choosing their study abroad destination were somewhat undecided with respect to having a set itinerary as "sometimes" scored at 40.5. This dimension involved elements of having a definite schedule and having pre planned definite routes when travelling in a foreign country.

This research also studied the benefits of SAP as perceived by the students. The maximum number of students felt that SAPs were helpful to their careers at a mean of 3.9 with a variability of .9. They perceived that SAPs were instrumental in getting them jobs at a mean of 3.9 and variability of 1. It is imperative to be able to work with an increasingly diverse workforce in the future scored the highest mean at 4.4 and a very low variability of .7. The students wanted to experience a SAP when they were studying in the university at 3.7 mean and variability of 1.3. Even though 50% of the students were from low or middle income families SAP being too expensive scored a mean of 3.2 with a variability of 1.2.

## CONCLUSIONS

Students reflected preference for SAP destinations which promoted social involvement with the local people and their cultures. They were more inclined to choosing SAP destinations that were already established tourist regions. Choosing a SAP destination that had a different culture was also seen as a priority. The Students considered SAPs important to their careers and be able to work with people from different cultural backgrounds in their industry.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study had a small sample of 40 students and they were from just one university. Future research can be conducted with SAP destination preference of students from other streams of study other than hospitality management and business students. Also study abroad instructor perceptions and preferences of study abroad destination choice using tourist typology can provide richer insight into academic engagement and the curriculum design of SAPs.

### Educational Implications

An understanding of international study abroad student preferences has the potential for SAP faculty to design and develop increasingly effective study abroad programs with respect to student engagement. This in turn carries possibilities of creating a more effective curriculum. It may also render the marketing of SAPs more effective (Cardon et al., 2011).

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