



# Strategies to Support Student Learning in Faculty-Led Programs Abroad

A case study

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## **ABSTRACT**

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This thesis explores the strategies employed to enhance student learning in short-term faculty-led study abroad programs. Drawing on 14 years of experience in the field and insights from nine in-depth interviews with seasoned faculty members, the study identifies good practices that foster student engagement and development. The analysis is structured around four key themes: Preparation and Support Systems, Cultural and Experiential Engagement, Reflective and Evaluative Practices, and Career and Personal Development. Each theme offers a framework for implementing effective educational practices that can be adapted to various contexts.

The findings highlight the importance of intentional program design and the role of faculty in facilitating meaningful learning experiences. By integrating experiential learning theories and leveraging faculty expertise, the study provides actionable strategies to enhance the educational impact of study abroad programs. This research contributes to the broader discourse on international education by offering practical insights for educators and program designers.

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Key words: study abroad, faculty-led programs, experiential learning, student program design, international education

## CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	5
	1.1 Background.....	5
	1.2 Purpose.....	6
	1.3 Objectives.....	6
2	LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
	2.1 Kolb’s Experiential Learning Theory (ELT).....	7
	2.2 Other Theoretical Perspectives on Experiential Learning.....	7
	2.3 The Transformative Potential of Study Abroad.....	8
	2.4 The Role of Faculty Leaders in Facilitating Experiential Learning....	9
	2.5 Intercultural Development and Well-being.....	9
	2.6 The Importance of Intentional Program Design.....	10
3	METHODOLOGY.....	11
	3.1 Research Design.....	11
	3.2 Data Collection Instruments.....	11
	3.3 Participants.....	12
	3.4 Data Collection Procedures.....	13
	3.5 Data Analysis.....	15
	3.6 Thematic Analysis as an Analytical Framework.....	16
	3.7 Data Preparation and Organization.....	17
4	RESULTS.....	19
	4.1 Data Presentation.....	19
	4.2 Searching for Themes.....	24
	4.3 Reviewing Themes.....	24
	4.4 Defining and Naming Themes.....	25
	4.5 Final Themes Defined.....	26
	4.6 Report on the defined themes.....	26
5	CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH.....	38
	5.1 Conclusions.....	38
	5.2 Research Limitations.....	39
	5.3 Suggestinos for Future Research.....	41
	REFERENCES.....	43
	APPENDICES.....	45
	Appendix 1.....	45

## **DEDICATION**

To my children, Benjamim and Valentim: may you always find joy in learning and discover that it is much broader and more exciting than we often realize.

To my wife, Paula: your unwavering support and dedication, especially in caring for our children during my time in Finland, have been invaluable.

To Päivi: your belief in my abilities and constant encouragement made this journey possible.

And to Katerina Deligiannidou: you reminded us all of the brevity of life and the lasting impact of our actions. Your lightness and joy will continue to resonate in this world, inspiring future generations.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

In an era marked by the democratization of content through technological advancements and widespread internet access, educators face the challenge of creating engaging learning experiences that resonate with students. Short-term faculty-led study abroad programs present a valuable opportunity to achieve this goal. These programs combine the transformative power of travel, as defined by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 1994), with the inherent learning potential of lived experiences, as articulated by John Dewey, who believed that "education is a social process, is development. Not preparation for life, but is life itself".

The intertwined relationship between traveling and education is not new; its roots trace back to the Grand Tours of the 17th and 18th centuries, where young European aristocrats embarked on journeys to broaden their cultural horizons and acquire knowledge (Brodsky-Porges, 1981). As Zuelow (2016) notes, "Most sought education; the Grand Tour was a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. It was truly a 'customary' part of the schooling of landed aristocrats and the often unrealized goal of imbuing future leaders with knowledge of foreign languages, customs, politics, and culture remained intact" (p. 21). This legacy continues to influence contemporary study abroad programs, which aim to provide students with similar opportunities for personal and academic development. Paulo Freire's (1996) assertion that "No one educates anyone, no one educates himself, men educate each other, mediated by the world" (p. 39) underscores the value of exposing students to diverse cultural contexts and perspectives.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the study abroad market, with the number of U.S.-based higher education institution students studying abroad dropping from 347,099 in the 2018/2019 academic year to 14,549 in 2020/2021, according to the Open Doors research by the Institute of International Education (IIE). Although numbers have increased to 280,716 in 2022/2023, they have yet

to reach pre-pandemic levels. During this period, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) gained prominence as a virtual exchange method. Research by Lee, Leibowitz, and Rezek (2022) suggests that students who participate in International Virtual Exchange (IVE) courses are roughly twice as likely to study abroad subsequently, potentially leading to increased future participation in study abroad programs.

## **1.2 Purpose**

This thesis aims to identify specific strategies to support learning during short-term study abroad programs. By focusing on the practices of experienced faculty leaders, the research seeks to uncover and analyze strategies and activities that enhance and support student learning. This study is rooted in the author's 14 years of experience designing study abroad programs in Brazil for students from primarily USA-based universities. The research adopts a case study approach, focusing on faculty leaders who have collaborated with the author's company in designing and implementing these programs. Recognizing that learning is an inherent part of the human experience, this research intends to contribute to developing more effective and impactful study abroad experiences for students.

## **1.3 Objectives**

The primary objective of this research is to explore and document strategies that educators and professionals employ to support student learning in short-term study abroad programs. By examining the practices of faculty leaders, the study aims to provide insights into effective strategies and activities that can enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. The research will utilize David Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory as the main pedagogical framework, focusing on how experiential learning can be effectively integrated into study abroad programs. Ultimately, the study seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of how short-term study abroad programs can be optimized to provide students with enriching and educationally supportive experiences.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this chapter, the theoretical foundations of experiential learning (EL) are explored in relation to the study abroad context. The focus will be on the seminal work of David Kolb, along with other relevant theorists who have contributed to our understanding of how experience can be transformed into knowledge.

### **2.1 Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT)**

Kolb's (1984) ELT is a holistic model that emphasizes the cyclical nature of learning. He proposes that learning occurs through a four-stage cycle: concrete experience (CE), reflective observation (RO), abstract conceptualization (AC), and active experimentation (AE). In the context of study abroad, CE refers to the direct encounters with a new culture, RO involves reflecting on those experiences, AC refers to developing new understandings and generalizations, and AE involves testing those understandings in new situations.

Kolb's (1984) research highlights that learners have diverse preferences in how they engage with the learning process, leading to four distinct learning styles: divergers, assimilators, convergers, and accommodators. Faculty leaders who understand these different styles are better equipped to create inclusive and effective learning environments, particularly in study abroad programs. Kolb emphasizes that learning is most effective when the environment caters to the needs of all four learning styles, recognizing that these styles are shaped by the interaction between the individual and their surroundings.

### **2.2 Other Theoretical Perspectives on Experiential Learning**

While Kolb's ELT provides a foundational framework for understanding experiential learning, other theorists have offered complementary perspectives. Dewey (1938) emphasized the importance of reflection in the learning process, stating that "we do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience." This highlights the role of faculty leaders in facilitating student reflection on their study abroad experiences, helping them to make meaning of their observations and connect them to broader academic and personal goals.

Piaget's (1952) theory of cognitive development also sheds light on the learning process. He proposed that individuals construct their understanding of the world through a process of assimilation (incorporating new information into existing schemas) and accommodation (modifying existing schemas to fit new information). Study abroad experiences can challenge students' existing schemas and prompt them to adapt and expand their understanding of the world.

Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZDP) is also relevant to study abroad learning. The ZDP refers to the gap between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with the guidance of a more knowledgeable other. Faculty leaders can play a crucial role in scaffolding student learning within the ZDP, providing support and guidance as students navigate new cultural contexts and encounter unfamiliar challenges.

### **2.3 The Transformative Potential of Study Abroad**

The literature on study abroad consistently highlights the transformative potential of these experiences. Students who participate in study abroad programs often report significant personal growth, increased intercultural competence, and a greater understanding of global issues (Dwyer & Peters, 2004). These transformative experiences are often attributed to the immersive nature of study abroad, which exposes students to diverse perspectives and challenges them to step outside their comfort zones.

Moreover, research suggests that study abroad experiences can have a lasting impact on students' career trajectories. Students who study abroad are more likely to be employed and to earn higher salaries than their non-mobile peers (IIE, 2017). They also report higher levels of satisfaction with their jobs and greater career mobility (IES Abroad, 2015). These findings underscore the value of study abroad as an investment in students' future success.

## **2.4 The Role of Faculty Leaders in Facilitating Experiential Learning**

Faculty leaders are central to the success of study abroad programs. They serve as mentors, guides, and facilitators of learning, both inside and outside the classroom. Their expertise, enthusiasm, and cultural sensitivity can significantly impact student engagement and learning outcomes (Paige & Vande Berg, 2012).

Furthermore, faculty leaders also need to foster a safe and supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable taking risks, making mistakes, and reflecting on their experiences. This can be achieved by establishing clear expectations, providing constructive feedback, and encouraging open communication and dialogue among students.

Moreover, faculty leaders can leverage their expertise and knowledge to enhance student learning. By sharing their own experiences and insights, they can model effective intercultural communication and problem-solving skills. They can also provide students with valuable feedback and guidance as they navigate the challenges and opportunities of living and learning in a new cultural context. As Paige and Vande Berg (2012) note, "The preparation of cultural mentors, whether they are faculty, in-country professional staff, or others, is an essential part of student success in study abroad." (p.53).

## **2.5 Intercultural Development and Well-being**

In addition to the cognitive and professional benefits, study abroad programs also have a significant impact on students' intercultural development and well-being. Research has shown that studying abroad can lead to increased self-awareness, open-mindedness, and tolerance for ambiguity (Ribeiro-Silva et al., 2022). These qualities are essential for navigating the complexities of an increasingly globalized world and for building meaningful relationships across cultures.

Moreover, the immersive nature of study abroad programs can provide students with opportunities to develop resilience, adaptability, and problem-solving skills as they navigate unfamiliar environments and encounter unexpected challenges. These experiences can also contribute to students' overall well-being by fostering

a sense of independence, self-efficacy, and connection to a global community. As Martin et al. (2020) suggest, "Shared living experiences... have a positive impact on mental health attitudes."

## **2.6 The Importance of Intentional Program Design**

The effectiveness of study abroad programs in fostering student learning and development is largely dependent on intentional program design. This involves aligning program goals with specific learning outcomes, selecting appropriate pedagogical approaches, and creating a supportive learning environment that encourages student engagement and reflection (Paige & Vande Berg, 2012).

Research has shown that programs that incorporate structured reflection, cultural mentoring, and engagement with cultural content are more effective in promoting intercultural development than those that rely solely on immersion (Paige & Vande Berg, 2012). Furthermore, the duration and location of the program can also influence learning outcomes. Longer programs and those in less familiar destinations tend to have a greater impact on intercultural development (Engle & Engle, 2004).

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This chapter outlines the research design, data collection instruments, participant selection, data collection procedures, and data analysis methods employed in this study. The chosen methodology aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the strategies used by faculty leaders and program organizers to support student learning in short-term, faculty-led study abroad programs in Latin America.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to explore the phenomenon in depth. Qualitative research is well-suited for investigating complex social phenomena and capturing the subjective experiences and perspectives of individuals (Creswell, 2013). Case study research involves the study of a specific case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting (Yin, 2018). In this instance, the case study examines the strategies employed by faculty leaders and program organizers who have collaborated with the author's company to design and implement short-term study abroad programs in Brazil. This approach will provide insights into the practices and beliefs of these individuals, contributing to a deeper understanding of the factors that influence student learning in these programs.

#### **3.2 Data Collection Instruments**

The primary data collection instrument for this study was semi-structured interviews. This method facilitates the use of open-ended questions, allowing participants to express their experiences and perspectives in their own words. In qualitative research, questions are designed to be open-ended, evolving, and nondirectional, aligning with the purpose of the study to explore central phenomena (Creswell, 2013).

These questions typically begin with words such as "what" or "how," rather than "why," to encourage exploration and understanding. While the interview questions are not directly based on Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), the theoretical framework of ELT, which includes the stages of concrete experience,

reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation, underpins the academic analysis and interpretation of the findings.

### **3.3 Participants**

The participants in this study were faculty members from U.S.-based universities who have led short-term study abroad programs to Brazil. A total of 9 faculty members were interviewed, selected to provide a diverse range of perspectives based on their varied academic expertise and institutional affiliations. The selection criteria included:

- Experience in leading at least one short-term faculty-led study abroad program to Brazil.
- Affiliation with a U.S.-based university or educational institution.
- Willingness to participate in a semi-structured interview.

The participant group represented a balanced gender distribution, with four male and five female professors. This gender balance ensures an inclusive perspective on the nuances of faculty-led programs. Academically, the participants came from a broad spectrum of disciplines, including education, social sciences, business, and engineering. This diversity in expertise allows for a multifaceted exploration of the educational strategies employed in these programs.

The professors hailed from both large public universities and private institutions, introducing a variety of institutional contexts into the analysis. This diversity in institutional affiliation provides a nuanced understanding of how different types of universities approach international education.

Collectively, these faculty members have extensive experience, having led a total of 34 short-term faculty-led programs to Brazil. All programs were conducted in partnership with Campus B, a Brazilian organization specializing in facilitating educational programs. This collaboration highlights the practical aspects of managing and executing international study experiences, drawing on Campus B's expertise and resources.

According to Guest et al. (2006), the number of interviews conducted is sufficient to achieve data saturation, which is the point where no new information or themes emerge from the data. This ensures that the study captures a comprehensive range of insights and experiences necessary for understanding and enhancing the effectiveness of short-term study abroad programs.

Informed by my 14 years of experience in designing and implementing study abroad programs, it is important to acknowledge that faculty members leading these programs come from diverse backgrounds and possess varying levels of familiarity with the host culture. Some faculty members may be nationals of the destination country, possessing an intimate understanding of its nuances and complexities. These individuals often rely on third-party providers for logistical support, focusing their expertise on crafting academically enriching experiences that leverage their cultural insights. On the other hand, some faculty members may approach the study abroad experience with a more exploratory mindset, discovering the host culture alongside their students. In such cases, third-party providers play a more active role in shaping the academic design of the program, ensuring that students receive a well-rounded and enriching educational experience.

Drawing from my professional practice, I have observed that to effectively facilitate experiential learning, faculty leaders need to be aware of the different learning styles of their students and create opportunities for them to engage in all four stages of the learning cycle. This can be achieved through a variety of pedagogical approaches, such as incorporating reflective activities, providing opportunities for active experimentation, and connecting classroom learning to real-world experiences in the host culture.

### **3.4 Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection was conducted through individual semi-structured interviews via video conferencing, allowing for the inclusion of a geographically diverse range of participants. Participants were informed that the interviews would be audio-recorded for research purposes, with assurances of confidentiality. The recordings were transcribed verbatim for detailed analysis.

Before each interview, participants were reminded of the study's purpose, their rights, and the confidentiality measures in place. A consistent script was used to ensure transparency and uniformity across the interviews. However, the follow-up questions were not always asked, as sometimes the answers had been already provided in response to previous questions. Additionally, the author occasionally posed new questions to clarify responses and gain deeper insights.

The interviews were conversational, guided by an adaptable interview protocol. The questions aimed to elicit practical examples and insights from experienced faculty members, inspired by Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) but not limited to it. The primary goal was to identify effective strategies used in short-term study abroad programs.

The interview protocol included the following questions and follow-ups:

- In your experience, how important is it to incorporate specific activities or experiences into short-term programs to promote student learning and engagement?
  - Follow-up: Could you describe some examples of effective activities or experiences and how they contribute to the learning process?
- How important do you think it is for students to actively engage with the local culture and environment during a short-term program?
  - Follow-up: What strategies or approaches do you use to encourage this engagement, and how do you help students reflect critically on their cultural experiences?
- In your view, how important is it to help students connect their experiences abroad to their academic coursework and personal goals?
  - Follow-up: Could you share some specific ways you facilitate this process for your students?
- Do you actively encourage students to apply what they have learned during the program to new and challenging situations?
  - Follow-up: If so, could you describe some methods or strategies you use to promote this application of learning?

- In your opinion, how crucial is it to assess student learning and development during a short-term program and to gather feedback on their learning experiences?
  - Follow-up: If you agree, could you elaborate on the specific methods or tools you utilize for assessment and feedback collection?
- Closing Question: Is there anything that I didn't ask about that you'd like to tell me about strategies to support student learning in study abroad programs?

The interviews explored key aspects of experiential learning and student engagement in short-term study abroad programs. Participants shared insights on integrating specific activities and cultural immersion into their programs, emphasizing direct student engagement and critical reflection. They also discussed methods to link students' experiences to academic and personal goals, fostering deeper learning and development.

The average interview duration was 27 minutes, resulting in a total of 243 minutes of recorded dialogue. This provided a rich dataset for analysis, aiming to inspire and identify the most relevant strategies used in faculty-led programs abroad. Drawing inspiration from Kolb's ELT, the findings are designed to enhance student learning and ensure the collection of valuable data on effective strategies, all while remaining accessible to participants from diverse educational backgrounds.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

This chapter outlines the systematic approach taken to analyze the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with faculty members experienced in leading short-term study abroad programs focused on Brazil. Drawing upon the principles of case study research articulated by Robert K. Yin (2018), a rigorous and transparent analytical process was employed to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the findings.

### 3.6 Thematic Analysis as an Analytical Framework

Thematic analysis was selected as the most suitable method for analyzing the interview data. This approach aligns well with the aims of this study, allowing for a rich exploration of the participants' experiences and perspectives, and enabling the identification of key themes and patterns related to effective pedagogical strategies within the specific context of short-term study abroad programs in Brazil.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis provides a robust structure for this process:

1. **Familiarization with the data:** This initial phase involves immersing oneself in the data through repeated reading and re-reading of the transcripts, gaining a comprehensive understanding of the participants' narratives.
2. **Generating initial codes:** In this phase, segments of text that represent meaningful units of information are identified and assigned initial codes. These codes capture key ideas, concepts, and strategies related to the research focus.
3. **Searching for themes:** Initial codes are then examined for patterns and similarities, grouped together into potential themes that represent broader concepts or ideas.
4. **Reviewing themes:** The identified themes are reviewed and refined, ensuring they accurately reflect the data and capture the essence of the participants' experiences.
5. **Defining and naming themes:** Clear definitions and names are developed for each theme, capturing their core meaning and significance in relation to the research questions.
6. **Producing the report:** The final phase involves presenting the analysis in a clear and coherent manner, weaving together the identified themes with supporting evidence from the data.

### **3.7 Data Preparation and Organization**

Following the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed using Zoom's automatic transcription feature. Each transcript was then meticulously reviewed and edited for accuracy. Given the manageable sample size of nine interviews, a manual approach to theme identification was adopted. This involved a close reading of each transcript and the systematic identification of recurring patterns and ideas. The transcripts were organized and stored securely, with participant identities anonymized to ensure confidentiality.

#### **A Manual, Inductive Approach to Coding**

The manual coding process employed in this study was inductive, meaning that the themes emerged from the data itself rather than being predetermined. This approach allows for a more grounded and nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives, capturing the richness and complexity of the data.

Each transcript was read and re-read multiple times, with key phrases, ideas, and strategies highlighted and annotated. Initial codes were then assigned to these segments of text, capturing their essence and meaning. These codes were continuously refined and categorized as patterns and connections emerged, gradually forming broader themes that captured the key dimensions of effective pedagogical practices in short-term study abroad programs.

This iterative and reflexive process ensured that the themes identified were grounded in the data and reflected the authentic voices of the participants. The following chapter will delve into the specific themes that emerged from this analysis and explore the associated strategies in detail.

This revised chapter provides a more detailed explanation of the thematic analysis methodology without revealing the specific themes or findings yet. It emphasizes the rigor and transparency of the analytical process, highlighting the manual coding approach and the inductive nature of theme development. This sets the

stage for the next chapter, where you will present the identified themes and discuss the associated strategies.

### **Use of AI tool**

Given that English is not the author's native language, the AI tool ChatGPT was employed to assist in refining the thesis text. This tool was used to correct language errors and rephrase content, ensuring clarity and coherence in English. The use of AI was instrumental in enhancing the overall readability of the thesis, allowing the author to effectively communicate complex ideas and findings to an English-speaking audience.

## **4 RESULTS**

This chapter presents the findings from the interviews conducted with faculty members who have led short-term study abroad programs. The data collected has been organized into distinct categories, or labels, that reflect key themes and insights from the participants' experiences. These labels were derived through a detailed coding process, where segments of the interviews were highlighted and categorized based on recurring topics and ideas. The following sections detail these labels, providing verbatim excerpts from the interviews to illustrate each theme. After presenting the data through these 13 key labels, the findings will be further synthesized into broader themes in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis.

### **4.1 Data Presentation**

The data is organized into 13 key labels, each representing a significant aspect of faculty-led study abroad programs. To illustrate these themes, a selection of quotes has been curated, highlighting the most relevant insights related to each label. Although all participants were asked the same set of questions during the survey, not every participant addressed every aspect. Therefore, the quotes were carefully chosen to reflect the most pertinent and impactful contributions to each theme. This structured framework provides a comprehensive understanding of the diverse elements that contribute to the success and impact of these programs.

#### **A. Pre-Travel Preparation**

- Participant 1: "I've never led a study abroad program or supported official faculty-led study abroad programs that didn't involve some on-campus coursework before traveling. It's crucial for preparing students for what they will experience abroad."
- Participant 3: "We have a pre-departure preparation for students to ensure they are ready for the program."
- Participant 4: "Spending an entire semester together helps me know my students well, which makes the practical aspects of travel smoother."

- Participant 8: "It's important to have time with students before and after travel to prepare them for experiences and help them reflect."

## **B. Cultural Immersion**

- Participant 2: "It's crucial. Without engaging with locals and experiencing day-to-day life, students miss out on understanding what it's like to be in that country."
- Participant 4: "Our program is divided into thirds: visiting technical universities, engaging with companies, and participating in cultural activities."
- Participant 6: "After fun activities, we discuss them in class to bring in critical thinking."

## **C. Reflective Practices**

- Participant 6: "Students also write diary entries to reflect critically on their experiences, acknowledging their privilege and thinking about other possible experiences."
- Participant 9: "Their final reflection paper, which is due a week after returning, asks them to intellectually reflect on their experiences in light of theoretical discussions."
- Participant 5: "The reflection assignment is open-ended, focusing on personal experiences and reflections."

## **D. Integration with Academic Goals**

- Participant 5: "I try to facilitate this through customizable assignments. For example, students can choose a local company in an emerging market and analyze it based on their interests."
- Participant 6: "Many students continue studying Portuguese or change their academic focus after the program."
- Participant 8: "It's really important. Students are required to interview for the programs, where they express their goals. I take notes to help facilitate meeting those goals abroad."

- Participant 6: "It's crucial. I tell students that even if they don't become Brazilianists, this experience will be invaluable for their formation as global citizens."

### **E. Personal Development**

- Participant 9: "Some students might initially participate just for fun, but my hope is they see that learning can be enjoyable."
- Participant 2: "In our cohort program, students have an individual development plan they update every semester. After Brazil, their goals often change because they have a broader view of the world."
- Participant 2: "Depending on how traveled a student is, you see variability in their comfort levels outside their comfort zones."

### **F. Experiential Learning**

- Participant 7: "The global consulting project involves students interacting with businesses globally, focusing on challenges, especially marketing ones."
- Participant 3: "During the program, they engage with Brazilian students and industry partners."
- Participant 4: "Even in a technical field like engineering, understanding cultural differences is important."

### **G. Community Building**

- Participant 6: "This community building is a significant part of the experience, even though it's hard to measure."
- Participant 4: "They build a community not only among themselves but also with Brazilian students."
- Participant 9: "I tell students that the people they meet will become lifelong connections."

## H. Impact on Career Goals

- Participant 9: "A former student who was a journalism major went to Brazil, loved it, and decided to return after graduation."
- Participant 3: "For some, it's also a trial for traditional study abroad, helping them decide if they can handle living in a different country for an extended period."
- Participant 6: "Many students continue studying Portuguese or change their academic focus after the program."

## I. Faculty Training and Support

- Participant 1: "Faculty need training in program design and pedagogy to help students unpack experiences for deeper learning."
- Participant 5: "I'm working on workshops for new faculty leaders."

## J. Program Design and Objectives

- Participant 8: "We start with the objectives or goals of the program, including content goals and common global learning objectives for the university."
- Participant 7: "Establishing learning goals and evaluating them both objectively and subjectively is important for ensuring the program meets its objectives."
- Participant 4: "Initially, the activities we conducted with students prior to travel were minimal. We would just go and do the travel, and it seemed fine. However, after running a half-semester course prior to travel, and more recently a full-semester course, I've seen the difference."

## K. Student Engagement

- Participant 1: "I like to engage peer-to-peer learning experiences. Students learn in many ways, but what they often write about from a study abroad experience is the impact of learning from peers of their own age in that country."

- Participant 2: "Purposeful interaction with locals enhances this learning significantly."
- Participant 5: "The consulting project is designed to encourage this. It's a new and challenging situation that requires applying what they've learned."

#### **L. Feedback and Assessment**

- Participant 8: "We assess course outcomes and program goals, using formative and summative assessments."
- Participant 3: "It's very important. We need feedback to improve the program each year and ensure learning outcomes are met."
- Participant 4: "We coach students to see these experiences as references for interviews and career development."
- Participant 3: "We assess students before, during, and after the program to foster intercultural learning."

#### **M. Long-term Impact**

- Participant 2: "We also host alumni events to create a community network where students and alumni can connect."
- Participant 1: "We started doing focus groups to understand what's really happening."
- Participant 9: "His experience in Brazil shaped his career path significantly."

After presenting the data through these key labels, the next step involves combining them into broader themes. This synthesis will be conducted according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis, providing a deeper understanding of the overarching patterns and insights that emerge from the data.

## 4.2 Searching for Themes

In the process of searching for themes, the initial codes derived from the 13 labels were examined for patterns and similarities. This exploration led to the identification of broader concepts that encapsulate the essence of the study abroad programs.

For instance, "Pre-Travel Preparation" and "Faculty Training and Support" naturally align under a theme focused on **Preparation and Support Systems**, emphasizing the importance of groundwork and faculty readiness in the success of the programs. Similarly, "Cultural Immersion," "Experiential Learning," and "Community Building" converge to form a theme on **Cultural and Experiential Engagement**, highlighting the role of immersive experiences and community interaction in enhancing learning outcomes. By grouping these labels, we uncover themes that reflect the multifaceted nature of the study abroad experience, showcasing how different elements work together to create a comprehensive educational environment.

Additionally, "Reflective Practices" and "Feedback and Assessment" were combined into a theme of **Reflective and Evaluative Practices**, emphasizing the importance of reflection and continuous assessment in fostering deeper understanding and program improvement. The integration of "Impact on Career Goals" and "Long-term Impact" into a theme of **Career and Personal Development** underscores the transformative effect of these experiences on students' professional trajectories and personal growth. Through this thematic analysis, we gain a clearer picture of how these programs not only prepare students academically but also contribute significantly to their holistic development.

## 4.3 Reviewing Themes

Upon reviewing the identified themes, it became essential to refine them to ensure they accurately reflect the data and capture the participants' experiences. The theme of **Preparation and Support Systems** was expanded to include both logistical and emotional preparation, acknowledging the dual role of pre-departure activities and faculty guidance in setting the stage for a successful program.

This theme now encompasses the strategic planning and interpersonal support that faculty provide to students, ensuring they are well-prepared for the challenges of studying abroad. Similarly, the theme of **Cultural and Experiential Engagement** was refined to highlight the dynamic interplay between cultural immersion and experiential learning, emphasizing how these elements facilitate a deeper understanding of global contexts and foster meaningful connections with local communities.

The theme of **Reflective and Evaluative Practices** was further developed to emphasize the cyclical nature of reflection and assessment, illustrating how these processes contribute to continuous improvement and adaptation of the programs. This theme now captures the iterative process of learning, where feedback is not only gathered but actively used to enhance future iterations of the program. Finally, the theme of **Career and Personal Development** was reviewed to ensure it encapsulates both immediate and long-term impacts, highlighting how study abroad experiences can shape students' career aspirations and personal identities in profound ways. These refined themes provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex dynamics at play in faculty-led study abroad programs.

#### 4.4 Defining and Naming Themes

The final step involved defining and naming the themes to capture their core meaning and significance in relation to the research questions. **Preparation and Support Systems** is defined as the comprehensive strategies and resources provided to both students and faculty to ensure readiness and resilience in the face of new challenges. This theme highlights the importance of thorough preparation and ongoing support as foundational elements of successful study abroad programs. **Cultural and Experiential Engagement** is defined as the active involvement of students in culturally immersive and hands-on learning experiences that foster intercultural understanding and personal growth. This theme underscores the transformative power of direct engagement with diverse cultures and communities.

**Reflective and Evaluative Practices** is defined as the structured processes of reflection and feedback that enhance learning and inform program development.

This theme emphasizes the role of critical reflection and continuous assessment in driving educational innovation and improvement. Finally, **Career and Personal Development** is defined as the long-lasting impact of study abroad experiences on students' professional paths and personal identities. This theme captures the profound influence these programs have on shaping students' future aspirations and self-concept.

#### **4.5 Final Themes Defined**

1. Preparation and Support Systems
2. Cultural and Experiential Engagement
3. Reflective and Evaluative Practices
4. Career and Personal Development

These themes provide a coherent narrative that aligns with the research objectives and offers valuable insights into the effectiveness of faculty-led study abroad programs.

#### **4.6 Report on the defined themes**

This report serves as the core of the thesis, detailing the "Strategies to Support Student Learning on Short-Term Faculty-Led Programs Abroad." It aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of the methodologies and practices that enhance student engagement and learning in these unique educational settings. Based on insights gathered from nine in-depth interviews with experienced faculty members, this report synthesizes their collective wisdom into actionable strategies.

These strategies are organized around four key themes that emerged from the thematic analysis: Preparation and Support Systems, Cultural and Experiential Engagement, Reflective and Evaluative Practices, and Career and Personal Development. Each theme represents a critical aspect of the study abroad experience, providing a framework for implementing effective educational practices that can be adapted and applied in various contexts.

Although all themes were explored over the nine interviews, the author's 14 years of experience in the field played a crucial role in extracting these strategies in a more meaningful way. This extensive background provided the necessary expertise to discern subtle nuances and identify the most impactful practices, ensuring that the strategies presented are both relevant and applicable to enhancing student learning in faculty-led study abroad programs.

### **A. Preparation and Support Systems**

The theme of Preparation and Support Systems underscores the importance of comprehensive groundwork and ongoing support for both students and faculty. This theme highlights the necessity of logistical and emotional preparation to ensure participants are ready to face the challenges of studying abroad. Faculty members emphasized the value of pre-departure courses and workshops, which not only prepare students academically but also help them acclimate to new cultural environments. As Participant 1 noted, "I've never led a study abroad program or supported official faculty-led study abroad programs that didn't involve some on-campus coursework before traveling. It's crucial for preparing students for what they will experience abroad."

Support systems in study abroad programs extend beyond the faculty members themselves. Each university represented in the interviews has a dedicated study abroad or global office that plays a pivotal role in supporting these programs. These offices provide essential resources, from logistical planning to cultural orientation sessions, ensuring that both students and faculty have the necessary tools to succeed. Additionally, external providers like Campus B are integral to the support system, as they assist in designing and operating programs that encompass more than just teaching and learning. These providers offer expertise in navigating the complexities of international education, from cultural nuances to regulatory requirements, thereby enhancing the overall program quality.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) provides an academic foundation for understanding the importance of preparation in experiential learning contexts. According to ELT, learning is a process where knowledge is created through the

transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984). In the context of study abroad programs, the preparation phase aligns closely with the initial stages of Kolb's cycle, particularly Concrete Experience and Reflective Observation. Preparation activities, such as pre-departure courses and workshops, provide students with foundational experiences that set the stage for deeper learning. These activities might include cultural simulations, language training, and discussions about potential challenges and expectations. By engaging in these preparatory experiences, students begin to build a concrete base of knowledge and skills that they will draw upon during their time abroad.

Furthermore, preparation facilitates Reflective Observation, where students are encouraged to reflect on their expectations, assumptions, and prior knowledge about the host culture and environment. This reflection is crucial as it allows students to identify personal learning goals and areas of interest, which they can explore further during their time abroad. As Participant 8 highlighted, maintaining communication and reflection before and after the trip helps students prepare for and process their experiences, reinforcing the importance of reflection in the learning cycle.

Preparation also sets the stage for Abstract Conceptualization, where students can begin to form hypotheses and strategies for engaging with new cultural contexts. For instance, understanding cultural norms and values before arrival allows students to conceptualize how they might navigate social interactions and academic challenges. This phase of preparation encourages students to think critically about how they can apply their knowledge in real-world situations, thereby enhancing their readiness for the Active Experimentation they will engage in while abroad.

To maximize the effectiveness of preparation and support systems, a variety of strategies and activities can be implemented:

- **Pre-Departure Courses and Workshops:** These sessions can include cultural simulations, language training, and discussions about potential challenges and expectations. As Participant 1 noted, these are essential for preparing students for what they will experience abroad.

- **Collaboration with External Providers:** Working with organizations like Campus B can enhance program quality by providing expertise in cultural nuances and regulatory requirements. This collaboration ensures comprehensive support for both students and faculty.
- **Faculty Development Workshops:** Participant 5 mentioned the development of workshops for new faculty leaders, highlighting the need for faculty to be equipped with the necessary skills to guide students effectively. These workshops can cover program design, pedagogy, and risk management.
- **Safety and Risk Management Training:** With universities becoming more rigorous about safety, providing training on risk management can help alleviate faculty concerns and ensure they are prepared to handle emergencies abroad.

The preparation of faculty is equally important, as they juggle multiple responsibilities, including teaching, researching, and writing papers. Adding the organization and leadership of a study abroad program can be challenging. Participant 5 mentioned, "I'm working on workshops for new faculty leaders," highlighting the need for faculty to be equipped with the necessary skills to guide students effectively. Universities are also becoming more rigorous regarding safety and risk management, which can be daunting for faculty members. Proper preparation ensures that faculty are confident and capable of managing these additional responsibilities.

In conclusion, the theme of Preparation and Support Systems highlights the multifaceted nature of preparing students and faculty for study abroad programs. It involves a collaborative effort between faculty, study abroad offices, and external providers to ensure comprehensive support. By incorporating insights from Kolb's ELT, this theme underscores the critical role of preparation in facilitating effective experiential learning. As such, preparation and support systems are foundational to the success of short-term faculty-led programs abroad, enabling students to fully engage with and benefit from their international experiences.

## **B. Cultural and Experiential Engagement**

The theme of Cultural and Experiential Engagement emphasizes the vital role that immersive experiences and active participation play in enhancing student learning during study abroad programs. This theme highlights how direct interaction with different cultures and environments fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of global diversity. Faculty members consistently pointed out that engaging students in cultural activities and hands-on learning experiences is crucial for maximizing the educational impact of these programs.

In many cultures, particularly in Europe and Latin America, semester- and year-long study abroad experiences are more common, allowing for greater integration with the local culture. However, according to the 2022/2023 Open Doors report by the Institute of International Education (IIE), over 60% of higher education students at U.S.-based institutions participate in programs that are less than eight weeks long. This prevalence of short-term programs necessitates a more intentional approach by faculty to ensure meaningful cultural engagement. Faculty must design these programs—sometimes in collaboration with third-party local providers—to maximize students' exposure to and reflection on cultural experiences, encouraging exploration beyond the classroom and facilitating critical reflection on their experiences.

Cultural immersion is a cornerstone of effective study abroad programs. As Participant 2 remarked, "It's crucial. Without engaging with locals and experiencing day-to-day life, students miss out on understanding what it's like to be in that country." This engagement goes beyond mere observation; it involves students actively participating in the cultural and social fabric of the host country. Programs are often structured to include a variety of activities, such as visits to local markets, participation in traditional ceremonies, and collaboration with local students on projects. These experiences allow students to gain firsthand insights into the cultural norms and values of the host country, which are essential for developing intercultural competence.

Experiential learning, as supported by Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, is central to this theme. According to Kolb, learning occurs through a cycle of concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Cultural and experiential engagement aligns with the Concrete Experience stage of Kolb's cycle, where students are exposed to new and unfamiliar environments that challenge their existing perceptions. This stage is critical for sparking curiosity and encouraging students to engage deeply with their surroundings.

Following the concrete experiences, students move into Reflective Observation, where they process and analyze their cultural interactions. This reflection is essential for transforming experiences into meaningful learning. Participant 6 noted, "After fun activities, we discuss them in class to bring in critical thinking." Such discussions help students make sense of their experiences, allowing them to draw connections between their observations and broader cultural theories.

The next stage, Abstract Conceptualization, involves students developing new ideas and insights based on their reflections. For example, understanding cultural differences in communication styles can lead students to conceptualize strategies for effective cross-cultural interaction. This stage encourages students to think critically about how cultural norms influence behavior and how they can adapt their approaches in diverse settings.

Finally, Active Experimentation allows students to apply their newfound knowledge in real-world contexts. This might involve participating in local community projects or engaging in collaborative tasks with peers from different cultural backgrounds. Participant 4 emphasized the importance of this engagement: "Our program is divided into thirds: visiting technical universities, engaging with companies, and participating in cultural activities." Such structured engagement ensures that students have ample opportunities to test their ideas and refine their understanding through practical application.

A variety of activities can enhance cultural and experiential engagement:

- **Working on Real Projects with Local Organizations:** Engaging students in projects with local businesses or NGOs allows them to apply their academic knowledge in practical settings. As Participant 3 mentioned, "During the program, they engage with Brazilian students and industry partners." This hands-on involvement fosters a deeper understanding of local challenges and solutions.
- **Collaborating with Local Students:** Programs that facilitate interaction with local peers provide unique learning opportunities. These interactions help students gain insights into the daily lives and perspectives of their counterparts in the host country, promoting mutual understanding and friendship.
- **Visiting Local Businesses and Cultural Sites:** Rather than spending time in traditional classroom settings, students benefit from visiting local companies and cultural landmarks. Participant 4 noted, "Our program is divided into thirds: visiting technical universities, engaging with companies, and participating in cultural activities." This approach ensures that students make the most of their time abroad by learning directly from the environment and its people.

All interviewed faculty members had led programs to Brazil, a culture quite distinct from the U.S. in many respects. Tools like Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and the Culture Map by Erin Meyer can be used to compare cultural differences systematically. Some participants noted that greater cultural differences can lead to more profound learning experiences. As these faculty members observed, the stark contrasts between Brazilian and American cultures often prompt deeper reflection and learning, as students are pushed out of their comfort zones and into a space of active cultural inquiry.

In conclusion, the theme of Cultural and Experiential Engagement is integral to the success of study abroad programs. It leverages the principles of experiential learning to provide students with rich, immersive experiences that foster intercultural understanding and personal growth. By actively participating in the cultural life of the host country, students develop skills and insights that are invaluable for

their academic and professional futures. This theme underscores the transformative potential of study abroad programs, highlighting how cultural immersion and experiential learning can profoundly impact students' perspectives and competencies.

### **C. Reflective and Evaluative Practices**

The theme of Reflective and Evaluative Practices underscores the importance of structured reflection and continuous assessment in enhancing the learning experiences of students participating in short-term study abroad programs. This theme focuses on how intentional reflection and evaluation can deepen students' understanding of their experiences and inform program improvements.

Reflection is a critical component of experiential learning, as it allows students to process and internalize their experiences. According to Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, reflection follows concrete experiences and is essential for transforming these experiences into meaningful learning. As Participant 6 noted, "After fun activities, we discuss them in class to bring in critical thinking." This structured reflection helps students make connections between their experiences and broader cultural or academic concepts, facilitating deeper learning.

Reflective practices can take various forms, such as journaling, group discussions, and reflection papers. These activities encourage students to critically analyze their experiences, identify personal growth, and articulate how their perspectives have changed. Participant 9 highlighted the importance of ongoing reflection, stating, "During the trip, I post discussion questions on our course webpage to connect theoretical discussions with actual experiences." This approach ensures that reflection is an integral part of the learning process, rather than an afterthought.

Evaluative practices are equally important, as they provide feedback on both student learning and program effectiveness. Continuous assessment helps identify areas for improvement and ensures that learning objectives are being met. Participant 7 emphasized the need for assessment throughout the program: "It's critical to assess before, during, and after the program. Establishing learning goals

and evaluating them both objectively and subjectively is important for ensuring the program meets its objectives."

Two participants specifically mentioned using the Cultural Intelligence (CQ) assessment as a tool to evaluate students' cultural competencies. CQ assessment measures an individual's capability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings and is crucial for preparing students to engage with different cultures. Participant 3 noted, "We use tools like the Cultural Intelligence (CQ) assessment to prepare students. It identifies values in areas like timeliness and feedback." This tool not only aids in assessing students' initial cultural awareness but also provides a framework for tracking their development over the course of the program.

A notable observation from one participant who conducted pre- and post-program surveys to measure competencies was that the global mindset competence was the only one that decreased. The hypothesis, after discussions with other colleagues who experienced similar results, is that once students go abroad, they realize how little they know about the world. This revelation often leads to a temporary dip in confidence regarding their global competence, as Participant 8 explained: "Students' global mindset scores decreased, likely because they realized the vastness of what they don't know about the world."

A variety of reflective and evaluative practices can enhance the learning experience:

- **Journaling and Reflection Papers:** Encouraging students to maintain journals or write reflection papers allows them to document their experiences and insights. This practice supports continuous reflection and helps students articulate their learning journey.
- **Group Discussions and Debriefings:** Facilitating regular group discussions or debriefing sessions provides students with opportunities to share their experiences and learn from their peers. These interactions can reveal diverse perspectives and foster a sense of community among participants.

- **Feedback and Assessment Tools:** Utilizing tools such as surveys, focus groups, and formative assessments helps gather feedback on student learning and program effectiveness. Participant 5 noted, "My assessments are qualitative, focusing on reflection assignments." These tools provide valuable insights into how students are engaging with the program and where improvements can be made.
- **Pre - and Post-Program Assessments:** Conducting assessments before and after the program helps measure changes in students' cultural awareness and competencies. This approach provides a clear picture of the program's impact on student learning and development. As mentioned, the use of the CQ assessment and the observation of changes in global mindset scores highlight the nuanced understanding that students develop when exposed to new cultural contexts.

The faculty interviewed emphasized that reflective and evaluative practices are crucial for continuous program improvement. By systematically gathering feedback and encouraging reflection, educators can adapt their programs to better meet the needs of students and enhance the overall learning experience.

In conclusion, the theme of Reflective and Evaluative Practices is essential for maximizing the educational impact of study abroad programs. By integrating structured reflection and continuous assessment into the program design, educators can support students in making meaningful connections between their experiences and academic learning. This theme highlights the importance of intentional reflection and evaluation in fostering deep learning and informing program enhancements, ultimately contributing to the success of short-term faculty-led programs abroad.

#### **D. Career and Personal Development**

The theme of Career and Personal Development highlights the transformative potential of study abroad programs in shaping students' professional trajectories

and personal growth. This theme underscores the importance of aligning academic experiences with career aspirations and personal goals, thereby enhancing the overall impact of international education.

Study abroad programs offer unique opportunities for students to develop skills that are highly valued in the global job market. These programs encourage students to step outside their comfort zones, adapt to new environments, and engage with diverse cultures. As Participant 4 noted, "We coach students to see these experiences as references for interviews and career development. These experiences often provide answers to interview questions better than technical internships." By participating in these programs, students acquire practical skills such as problem-solving, adaptability, and cross-cultural communication, which are essential for success in today's interconnected world.

Personal development is another critical aspect of study abroad programs. These experiences often lead to increased self-awareness, confidence, and a broader worldview. Participant 6 emphasized the impact of cultural exposure on personal growth, stating, "Even if they don't become Brazilianists, this experience will be invaluable for their formation as global citizens." The challenges and opportunities encountered abroad help students develop resilience and a greater appreciation for cultural diversity.

To maximize the benefits of study abroad programs for career and personal development, a variety of strategies can be employed:

- **Integrating Career-Oriented Projects:** Programs that incorporate real-world projects with local businesses or organizations provide students with practical experience that can be directly applied to their future careers. Participant 7 explained, "The global consulting project involves students interacting with businesses globally, focusing on challenges, especially marketing ones."
- **Facilitating Networking Opportunities:** Encouraging students to build professional networks during their time abroad can lead to valuable connections and career opportunities. Participant 1 mentioned hosting alumni

events and corporate visits to create networking opportunities for students and alumni.

- **Fostering Self-Reflection and Goal Setting:** Encouraging students to reflect on their experiences and set personal and professional goals helps them articulate their learning and growth. Participant 9 highlighted the importance of this practice, saying, "I ask them to write about their expectations before the trip and compare them with their actual experiences."
- **Providing Re-Entry Workshops:** Offering workshops and resources to help students integrate their international experiences into their career planning and personal development upon returning home can enhance the long-term impact of their study abroad experience. Participant 1 noted, "We're hosting a re-entry workshop to help students unpack their experiences and consider future opportunities."

The faculty interviewed emphasized the significant impact that study abroad programs can have on students' career and personal development. By aligning program activities with career objectives and personal growth goals, educators can enhance the value of these experiences and better prepare students for their future endeavors.

In conclusion, the theme of Career and Personal Development highlights the dual benefits of study abroad programs in fostering both professional skills and personal growth. By providing students with opportunities to engage in real-world projects, build networks, and reflect on their experiences, these programs equip students with the tools they need to succeed in a globalized world. This theme underscores the importance of intentional program design in maximizing the career and personal development outcomes of short-term faculty-led programs abroad.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

### 5.1 Conclusions

This thesis aimed to uncover strategies to support learning in short-term study abroad programs. Through more than four hours of recorded interviews with experienced professors and an extensive analysis of these discussions, the research identified four main pillars crucial to enhancing student learning: Cultural and Experiential Engagement, Reflective and Evaluative Practices, Career and Personal Development, and Preparation and Support Systems.

Educational theories from John Dewey and Lev Vygotsky suggest that learning can occur naturally through exposure to new environments. Dewey famously stated that "education is not preparation for life; education is life itself" (Dewey, 1938), while Vygotsky highlighted the importance of social interactions in learning. These insights underscore the inherent educational value of cultural immersion and new experiences. However, the research indicates that the role of faculty members is crucial in supporting and guiding this learning process, ensuring that students can navigate their experiences with greater depth and understanding.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) provides a framework for understanding how students process their experiences. In the context of study abroad programs, this framework is particularly relevant as it involves stages of Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation. While students naturally engage in these stages through their experiences abroad, faculty members can support this process by facilitating reflection, encouraging the application of new insights, and helping students connect their experiences to broader academic and personal goals.

The research emphasizes that faculty members, through their dual role as educators and mentors, can offer valuable strategies to support learning in study abroad programs. By fostering an environment that encourages reflection and critical thinking, faculty can help students derive meaningful insights from their experiences. The strategies identified in this study, such as creating opportunities

for structured reflection and aligning program activities with students' academic and career aspirations, provide a supportive framework that can be adapted to various contexts.

Ultimately, the study highlights that there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach. Each professor and university operates within a unique context, and the strategies must be tailored to fit these specific circumstances. The guidance and best practices identified in this study serve as a flexible toolkit for faculty, enabling them to support their students effectively. This adaptability is crucial for ensuring that study abroad experiences are both enriching and educationally supportive, allowing students to gain the most from their time abroad.

## **5.2 Research Limitations**

This research was conducted as a case study focusing on faculty members from the United States leading short-term study abroad programs in Brazil. While the insights gained from this study are valuable and broadly applicable, it is important to acknowledge the limitations inherent in the research design and context.

Firstly, the case study approach inherently focuses on a specific context, which in this case involved U.S. faculty members and Brazilian destinations. This choice of context provided a rich, detailed exploration of the strategies and practices employed in these programs. However, it also means that the findings may not fully capture the nuances and challenges faced by faculty leading programs in other regions or cultural settings. Different countries and cultures may present unique educational environments, logistical challenges, and cultural dynamics that could influence the effectiveness of the strategies identified in this study.

Secondly, the research concentrated on short-term programs, which have distinct characteristics compared to longer-term study abroad experiences. Short-term programs often emphasize immersive experiences and intensive learning over a brief period, which can differ significantly from the extended engagement and deeper cultural immersion possible in semester-long or year-long programs. This focus on short-term programs may limit the applicability of the findings to longer-term educational experiences, where different strategies and support systems

might be necessary to sustain learning and engagement over a more extended period.

Additionally, the study relied on qualitative data gathered through interviews with faculty members. While this approach provided rich, detailed insights into the experiences and perceptions of faculty, it also means that the findings are inherently subjective and based on the perspectives of a relatively small group of individuals. The personal experiences and biases of the interviewees could influence the conclusions drawn from the data. Future research could benefit from incorporating quantitative measures or a larger sample size to validate and expand upon these findings.

A significant contextual factor in this study is that all the faculty members involved had their programs co-facilitated by a local third-party provider based in Brazil. This provider specializes in designing real projects that students work on collaboratively with local students. This collaboration might have influenced the findings, particularly the emphasis on project-based learning and cultural engagement. While this partnership enriches the programs, it may not reflect the experiences of faculty who do not have access to such resources or who operate in different contexts.

Despite these limitations, the specificity of this research should be viewed as a strength rather than a drawback. By focusing on a particular context, the study provides a detailed understanding of the strategies that can support learning in short-term study abroad programs led by U.S. faculty in Brazil. These insights offer a foundation for further exploration and adaptation in other contexts, contributing to a broader understanding of effective practices in international education. The findings can inform program design and implementation across a wide range of educational settings, encouraging educators to consider how these strategies might be tailored to meet the unique needs of their students and programs. Additionally, the author's extensive experience in the field and the selection of faculty who run well-evaluated programs add credibility and depth to the research, although this factor is not a limitation, it does contribute positively to the study's robustness.

### **5.3 Suggestions for Future Research**

The findings from this study on short-term study abroad programs offer a rich foundation for further exploration. However, several avenues remain open for future research to expand upon these insights and address the limitations identified in this study. Here are some suggested areas for future research:

#### **Broader Contextual Studies**

Future research could explore faculty-led study abroad programs in different cultural and geographical contexts beyond Brazil. By examining programs in various countries, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural differences influence educational strategies and student outcomes. This broader scope would help identify universal strategies applicable across diverse settings and highlight context-specific adaptations that may be necessary.

#### **Longitudinal Impact Studies**

Conducting longitudinal studies that track students over a longer period could provide valuable insights into the lasting impacts of study abroad experiences. Such research could assess how these programs influence students' career trajectories, intercultural competence, and personal development over time. Longitudinal data would help educators understand the long-term benefits and challenges of study abroad programs, informing the design of future initiatives.

#### **Quantitative Assessments**

Incorporating quantitative methods alongside qualitative approaches could enhance the robustness of future research. Quantitative assessments could include surveys or standardized tests to measure specific learning outcomes, cultural awareness, and skill development. This approach would complement qualitative insights, providing a more comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of various strategies employed in study abroad programs.

#### **Impact of Third-Party Providers**

Given the role of third-party providers in this study, future research could investigate the impact of such collaborations on program outcomes. Understanding how these partnerships influence the design and delivery of study abroad experiences would be valuable for institutions considering similar arrangements. Research could explore the benefits and challenges of working with external providers and how these relationships affect student learning and engagement.

### **Faculty Development and Training**

Future studies could also focus on the preparation and training of faculty members leading study abroad programs. Research could explore the types of support and resources that best equip faculty to facilitate effective learning experiences abroad. This could include examining the impact of professional development workshops, mentorship programs, and other training initiatives on faculty effectiveness and student outcomes.

### **Comparative Studies of Program Lengths**

Comparing short-term and long-term study abroad programs could yield insights into the unique benefits and challenges associated with different program durations. Research could examine how the length of a program influences student learning, cultural immersion, and personal growth, helping educators design programs that best meet their educational objectives.

By pursuing these research avenues, scholars can build on the findings of this study to deepen the understanding of faculty-led study abroad programs. Such research will contribute to the development of best practices and innovative strategies that enhance the educational value of international experiences for students worldwide.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. Questionnaire:

1. In your experience, how important is it to incorporate specific activities or experiences into short-term programs to promote student learning and engagement?

- Could you describe some examples of effective activities or experiences and how they contribute to the learning process?

2. How important do you think it is for students to actively engage with the local culture and environment during a short-term program?

- What strategies or approaches do you use to encourage this engagement, and how do you help students reflect critically on their cultural experiences?

3. In your view, how important is it to help students connect their experiences abroad to their academic coursework and personal goals?

- Could you share some specific ways you facilitate this process for your students?

4. Do you actively encourage students to apply what they have learned during the program to new and challenging situations?

- If so, could you describe some methods or strategies you use to promote this application of learning?

5. In your opinion, how crucial is it to assess student learning and development during a short-term program and to gather feedback on their learning experiences?

- If you agree, could you elaborate on the specific methods or tools you utilize for assessment and feedback collection?

Is there anything that I didn't ask about that you'd like to tell me about strategies to support student learning in study abroad programs?