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Does Study Abroad Impact Students’ Personality?

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Introduction:
- Study abroad is commonly viewed as an experience that fosters maturity and personal growth. Previous findings are contradictory.
- Findings supporting study abroad as a catalyst for growth find that:
  o Personal growth is a main motivation for studying abroad (Pope, Sánchez, Lehner, & Schmid, 2014).
  o Studying abroad promotes international political concern, cross-cultural interest, and self-confidence (Carlson & Widaman, 1988).
- Findings doubting the studying abroad effect on growth find that:
  o Studying abroad facilitates the creation of a third-culture, rather than promoting intercultural awareness and perspective-taking (Citron, 2002).

Method:
- Longitudinal design with data collection in 3 waves.
  o Only data from T1 and T3 analyzed for this thesis.
  o Studied students who were abroad and students who were studying on campus at UD in the summer of 2014.
- Data Collection:
  o Measured perspective-taking, empathic concern, non-prejudice through questionnaires.
    • Perspective-Taking and Empathic Concern Scale.
    • Universal Orientation Scale.
  o Measured narratives through coding for themes of growth independently. Had an interrater agreement of >90%.
- At T1: 26 P in study abroad group/40 P in study on campus group.
- At T3: 17 P in study abroad group/18 P in campus group.

Results:
- H1: The study abroad group did not show increased rates of these personality characteristics from T1 to T3, as compared to the study on campus group.
- H2: Levels of personal growth in narratives at T1 did not predict growth at T3.
- H3: The growth-orientation of participants at T1 found in narratives was not predictive of increases in the personality characteristics of interest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Growth Narratives at T1:</th>
<th>Non-Growth</th>
<th>Growth</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study Abroad Group</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study on Campus Group</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significance of Narratives:
- More growth mentioned in the narratives of students studying abroad than on campus, regardless of stability in personality from T1 to T3.
- Examples of narratives:
  T1: "I think it will be so exciting to get to experience a new culture. I want to broaden my horizons and become more well rounded in my knowledge of the world."
  T3: "I don’t sweat the small stuff as much as it is a result of this experience. I had to learn to go with the flow and be flexible and adapt to unexpected situations, and I believe that this has helped me to be a more adaptable person."

Conclusions and Implications:
- Has implications for better understanding the benefits of studying abroad.
- Further research should be performed to find how the studying abroad impacts individuals and their outlooks if these benefits do not lie in the promotion of personality development.
- Currently, we are creating a round 4 containing similar questionnaires and narrative prompts to find if study abroad has an impact over a longer span of time.

References