

## **Global Experiential Practicum: Perceptions from Teacher and Leadership Participants**

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### **Abstract**

The ever-increasing interconnectedness of the world and the diversity in demographics call for the training of global awareness and cultural competence among leaders and educators. This study, using qualitative methods, examined how 19 participants and their mentors from a United States university perceived a six-week long immersive global experiential practicum in China, and what impact the global experiential practicum had on the development of their global awareness and cultural competence. Data generated from the open-ended questionnaires, participant reflections and observations were analyzed and interpreted. The results indicated that the participants perceived the practicum as an eye-opening and life-changing experience with implications for their future careers, and also realized some existing challenges in the practicum. The practicum with cultural engagement, teaching practicum and leadership externship in the host country, supported the growth in professional identities and development of global awareness and cultural competence for the participants on multiple levels.

### **Introduction**

Today's world is more interconnected than ever—a reality that can create both challenges and opportunities. Lack of familiarity of cultural diversity around the world can lead to ethnocentric ideologies and increase the likelihood of cross-cultural conflict. What is more, classrooms in K–12 settings and higher education institutions in the U.S. are becoming increasingly diverse racially, linguistically, and culturally. For instance, postsecondary enrollment included 46.7% racially/ethnically diverse students and 4.4% international students (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). The National Center for Education Statistics (Irwin et al., 2022) reported diverse groups accounted for 54% of students while White students counted for 46% in U.S. public elementary and secondary schools. The continued influx of diverse groups of students into the public-school system in the U.S. may very well exacerbate the existing educational disparities. Widening achievement gaps exist in K–12 schools between culturally and linguistically diverse learners and other groups of students (McKinsey & Company, 2021). It is apparent, therefore, that the teaching profession faces great challenges not the least of which is the need for “globally competent teachers who are able to design engaging curriculum and prepare students to participate fully in a global society” (Kopish et al. 2018, p. 3.). Learning about and working collaboratively with diverse individuals are necessary traits for this day and age.

The goal of the global experiential practicum (GEP) is through student teaching practicum and externship abroad to develop global awareness and cultural competence. These programs contribute to the preparation of the future leaders and teachers to adequately equip them for today's complex, diverse, digital, and global society. Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) asserts that learning happens when individuals interact with the world around them (Kolb, 1984, 2015). Guided by Kolb's model, we created a GEP that immersed the participants in the host country's educational system and culture with multiple levels of engagement. This study is based on experiences encompassing three phases of the GEP.

The purposes of the current study are to explore the participants' perceptions of the GEP, and their learning and growth through the GEP. The specific research questions that guided the study are:

- RQ 1. What are the participants' perceptions about their GEP?
- RQ 2. What is the impact of the GEP on participants' global awareness and cultural competence, and their behavior intentions?

Using qualitative research methods, data were collected through a qualitative questionnaire with open-ended questions, participatory observations, reflective journals, and photo journals. The study has implications for integrating GEP guided by ELT (Kolb, 2015) into teacher preparation and leadership programs, and future study abroad programs that improve students' global and cultural competence for workplaces.

### **Literature Review**

A growing body of studies on study abroad has documented its needs, significance, various models and benefits for students, while studies on global experiential learning demonstrated its theoretical underpinning, roles, formats, challenges and benefits for students and the global society.

#### **Study Abroad: Significance and Benefits**

Previous research indicated that the demand for interculturally competent graduates has prompted higher education to create opportunities to develop students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to work and communicate with others from diverse backgrounds (Paige & Goode, 2009). Intentional study-abroad experiences are essential to start moving from ethnocentrism to an understanding of diversity. Study abroad practices can be integrated into a curriculum and take many forms depending on institutional priorities, student characteristics, and contexts, such as international experiences through internship, experiential practicums, or taking a course while abroad. Kuh (2008, 2009) identified and described study abroad as a high-impact practice (HIP), an activity that enhances student engagement and success. Kuh (2008) argued HIPs have significant implications for student engagement and retention because they demand time and effort from the student, encourage interaction with faculty and people of diverse backgrounds, and support learning outside the classroom.

Literature reviewed on study abroad reveals a myriad of benefits including a positive impact on the development of students' intercultural skills and global competence (Deardorff, 2009; Engle & Engle, 2003; Parker & Altman Dautoff, 2007). Global awareness, as a framework, is articulated to include the following domains: a) the ability to investigate the world, b) the ability to recognize others' perspectives vs. one's own, c) the ability to communicate ideas with diverse groups, and

d) the ability to take action to improve conditions (Mansilla & Jackson, 2011). Such domains contribute to the understanding of others and to the development of intercultural skills necessary for success in today's world as well as align very closely with study abroad experiences.

Studies have also indicated an improved sense of self-confidence, self-awareness, and a deeper appreciation of cultural diversity as a by-product of studying abroad (Jaoko, 2010). Experiencing different cultures through study abroad activities provide candidates with the opportunities to learn to meet the needs of changing culture. These opportunities increase the potential of candidates to develop the interpersonal and intercultural competencies necessary to succeed in a changing global society (Farrugia & Sanger, 2017; Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013). Additionally, research has shown that students realized studying abroad had an impact on their educational experiences and helped them identify and understand their own cultural biases and values (Alston et al., 2009; Hodge & Lear, 2011, Witkowsky & Mendez, 2018).

Researchers argue that studying abroad can prepare students to be global citizens when the principles of experiential learning are incorporated (Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002). In particular, a focus should be placed on action-oriented experiences that encourage reflection, critical analysis, and synthesis of activities. McLaughlin and Johnson (2006) drew similar conclusions when the experiences expand knowledge learning to application and synthesis. Throughout study abroad literature, there is strong evidence that integrating experiential learning is the key to promoting higher-order learning (Montrose, 2002; Pagano & Roselle, 2009).

### **Global Experiential Practicum: Significance and Impact**

Multiple studies have illustrated that global practicums may have lifelong impact on students, in particular, an increase in cross-cultural sensitivity, cultural self-awareness, and social and global awareness (Association for Experiential Education, n.d.; Bartle, 2015; Gay, 2018; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; McDowell et al., 2012; Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013). Experiential learning provides opportunities outside of the traditional pedagogy for real-life educational experiences (Chan, 2012; Enos, 2015; Hoy et al., 2012). Further, cultural competency focuses on each individual's experience to construct personal meaning and knowledge through participation and reflection (Bettez & Hytten, 2013; Durie & Wyatt, 2013). Experiential learning combines education within and beyond the classroom to design learning experiences and involve learners in reconstructing and reflecting on those experiences (Bailey et al., 2004; Dewey, 1964; Freire, 1994; Jacoby, 2015; Kolb, 1984; Moore, 2010). Kolb (1984) indicated experiential learning provides opportunities for students to reflect and act, thereby constructing knowledge in and out of the classroom (Lennon-Dearing et al., 2008; Moore, 2010).

Researchers have touted experiential learning as opportunities for students to apply their knowledge, skills, and feelings in immediate and relevant settings usually sponsored by training programs or field study programs (Brookfield, 1984). Bartle (2015) stated that experiential learning has been adopted and applied in several social science fields and is frequently used to help students make deeper connections with the subject matter. Experiential methods have been increasingly used to support cultural competence development due to the impact on identifying self-awareness, enhancing cultural awareness, and developing cultural empathy (Bettez & Hytten, 2013; Durie & Wyatt, 2013; Moore, 2010). Experiential learning, therefore, has shown important implications for understanding cultural teaching and learning. Howard (2003) noted that cultural competence challenged teachers to address how biases about diverse populations permeate traditional practices.

The global experiential learning framework with its various models have been used in many fields to benefit and impact students from social work (Boateng, et al. 2013), psychology (Earnest et al., 2016), biological sciences (McLaughlin & Johnson, 2006), and pre-service English Language teachers (Mahon & Cushner, 2002; Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2006; Lee, 2009; Kim, 2017). Studies on pre-service teachers reported experiences of Hong Kong teachers on a six-week placement in Australia (Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2006), the U.S. pre-service teachers undertaking a month-long internship program in the U.K. (Brindley, et al., 2009), English as a Second Language (ESL) students from Hong Kong on a six-week immersion program in New Zealand (Lee, 2009) and how TESOL pre-service teachers in the U.S. underwent teacher identity transformation and intercultural awareness development during a short-term internship program held in Korea (Kim, 2017). These studies “highlight the growing importance of enabling pre-service teachers to undertake an intercultural experience as part of their teacher education courses” (Lang, et al., 2016. p. 1–2). Many of the studies are about language teachers’ experiences and their professional, linguistic, and intercultural learning (Çiftçi & Karaman, 2019).

Current studies lack focus on global internships, externships or student teaching practicum framed by the Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 2015) which actively engage teacher education and leadership students with host country students in classrooms or in administrative posts. The current study examines the participants’ global experience of teaching and externship through an intensive and immersive short-term practicum. This study contributes to the current literature on GEP with a qualitative design, a curriculum built around Kolb’s experiential model, and immersion of pre-service teachers from various subjects and future leaders in education, business and other areas. These participants are engaged in teaching and externships within the host country’s culture including tradition, history, education, social and political systems. This GEP provides a model and lessons from a GEP to others who would conduct similar programs.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The current study of the GEP is guided by the cultural competence concept (Cross et al. 1989) and Kolb’s (1984, 2015) Experiential Learning Theory (ELT). First, with developing the global and cultural competence of our students as a goal, the GEP is guided by the cultural competence concept. Culture is described as “...values, traditions, worldview, and social and political relationships created, shared, and transformed by a group of people bound together by a common history, geographic location, language, social class, religion or other identities” (Nieto & Bode, 2008, p. 63). Cultural competency is a term used to define a set of competencies that form “congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency or amongst professionals and enables that system, agency or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situation” (Cross et al., 1989, p. 7). Cultural competence requires the development of personal and interpersonal awareness and sensitivities, cultural knowledge, and skills that produce productive cross-cultural communication, collaboration, and empowerment (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2014). Cultural competency offers educators a process for developing the knowledge, skills, and abilities to enhance their effectiveness as school leaders. Culturally competent and effective educational leaders can serve as a catalyst for creating inclusive schools (Spencer, 2009).

Embracing the cultural competence concepts, and to nurture the growth of participants’ global and cultural competence, the GEP actively immersed participants with the host community, their students, and local history, culture and customs. Specifically, one group of participants taught English as a foreign language at the college level for two weeks, and the leadership group’s

externship took them to local government, community and learning centers. Both groups were exposed to various cultural events and activities for a week.

Second, the current GEP was guided by Kolb's ELT (1984, 2015), defined as the progression of learning by experience. Grounded in constructivism, ELT holds that ideas are not fixed and interactions with the world around individuals produce learning. ELT takes on various formats including internships, service-learning, community-based learning, and study abroad. Kolb (2015) asserted internships and work/study programs in education through an experiential design would result in continued success in academia and the world.

The four constructs or central tenets of the ELT consist of concrete experience (engaging the senses), abstract conceptualization (decision-making), reflective observation (using specific resource material), and active experimentation (testing the resources) (Kolb, 1984, 2015). According to Kolb (2015), the stages are sequential; however, the learning cycle can be entered at any point. Learning is conceptualized as a spiral of actions. These constructs, as shown in the list below, frame the current study. Figure 1 Summarizes how the GEP is built with the four constructs of ELT (Kolb, 2015) through its curricula, activities, and assignment cycles.

**Concrete experience (CE)** is the foundation for the learning process. It is active physical engagement to acquire knowledge using our senses without bias (Kolb, 2015).

The GEP immersed teachers and leadership participants in host country with teaching in college classrooms, and externships for future leaders in community and learning centers, and other leadership situations.

**Reflective observation (RO)** proposes a way to internalize the concrete experience and abstract conceptualization to learn from their experiences (Kolb, 2015).

The GEP encouraged teaching and leadership participants to reflect daily which provided the opportunity to test their assumptions, beliefs, behavior, decisions, and actions, and then weigh those considerations for future applications.

**Abstract conceptualization (AC)** requires logic and ideas to create concepts that integrate observations into theories (i.e., making decisions; Kolb, 1984, 2015).

The GEP used debriefing sessions for teacher and leadership participants to vocalize and describe their teaching, learning, and cultural experiences. Sharing of ideas on how to overcome barriers, planning for differentiated strategies based on the experiences, and creating new materials were the focus of the debriefing sessions.

**Active experimentation (AE)** is the practical iterative application of modified concepts giving rise to experimentation and reapply their ideas back in their immediate environment (Kolb, 2015).

The GEP provided daily hands-on teaching experiences to apply the concepts and strategies learned and discussed in the debriefing sessions. The practicum participants tested various strategies while teaching Chinese university students.

The selection of ELT as a framework is intentional as it also provided a clear direction to support the research in presenting and analyzing the results of the study (Roberts, 2010). Kolb (2015) explained that learning encompasses interrelated experiences in which knowledge is gained or modified over a period of time. Teacher and leadership participants encountered daily

opportunities to learn and have hands-on teaching and learning experiences through immersion in a new culture. ELT (Kolb (2015), an appropriate framework, supports the design of this global practicum, the goals of the study, and the interpretation of the data.



Figure 1. Experiential Learning Theory—Constructs in the Global Experiential Practicum

## Methodology

The study is about a six-week-long GEP involving students from a university located in the southeast region of the United States. The purpose is to better understand students' global experiential learning from the teaching practicum and externship in leadership through educational, cultural, and linguistic immersion. Additionally, the purpose is to explore the effects of the program on the development of global awareness and cultural competence and behavior intention of U.S. students. The study seeks responses to two research questions (See Introduction).

Qualitative methods were selected to understand the how and what of the questions. The systematic focus on the participants' experiences and perspectives provided rich context and a deep understanding of global learning offered through the immersive experiential practicum.

The GEP, with externship for leadership students and student-teaching for pre-service teachers, included a series of cultural and social activities. This was intended to develop students' global awareness and cultural competence as promising future leaders and educators through the six-week-long experiential program. In collaboration with a university in north-central China, two summer courses were designed. A total of 19 students enrolled in the *Global Experience for*

*Education and Business Leaders* (n=9) and in the *Global Experience: Teaching English as a Foreign Language* (n=10) (see Table 1) programs. Five faculty members were involved in the program as instructors and mentors. The GEP was offered to seniors in the undergraduate and graduate programs. The students were selected on the basis of their GPA, credit hours, passing licensure tests, and commitment to global learning. A majority of students had prior experience of working in local school districts with high GPA and on-track to complete their respective programs.

Table 1

*Demographic Information of the Participants*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Undergraduate</b>	<b>Graduate</b>	<b>Gender (m= male; f= female)</b>	<b>Ethnic Minority</b>	<b>Previous Experience</b>
Leadership	0	9	4 m & 5 f	1	
English Teachers	8	2	2 m & 8 f	4	1
Total =	8	11	6 m & 13 f	5	1

Phase I, the first two weeks of the global practicum were conducted online at the home university in the U.S. This prepared the students with the cultural background of the host country, and the historical, social, economic, and political contexts before leaving for China.

Phase II, students were immersed for three weeks in the Chinese system for externships and teaching practicum. Major events included leadership externship activities at administrative offices and centers and teaching a college-level English as a foreign language course. Participants were also engaged in various enriching activities such as: 1) observing in PK–12 schools, 2) meeting with corporation leadership and university officials, 3) visiting cultural and historical sites and museums, and 4) and watching folk art and shows. As each of the pre-service teachers taught a class of 20 students, a total of 200 Chinese students enrolled in the classes.

Phase III, upon their return, students spent the final week of the study debriefing their experience at the home institution.

## **Participants**

A total of 19 students voluntarily participated in the survey with five university instructors and mentors serving as participatory observers and researchers for the study. The demographics of the participants were noted in Table 1. The study relied on purposive sampling, to identify and select information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas, et al., 2015). In this case, the selection criterion is practicum participants and their mentors. These students and mentors were made aware of the proposed study (IRB approved) with informed consent during orientation and were enrolled as volunteers and participants. All 19 students agreed to participate in the surveys (pre-post questionnaires), reflections through journals, and shared photo journals. The five faculty members recorded daily observations for the 19 students as part of their mentoring.

## Data Instruments, Collection, and Analysis

To understand the impact of the GEP on global and cultural competence, qualitative data were collected using pre-and post-questionnaires, field notes from observations by instructors, and participants' reflective journals, and photo journals. The various data sources served the purpose of triangulation of results for the study (see Table 2).

Table 2

### *Phases of Study and Data Collection Process*

Phases: Practicum	Data Collection Tool	Nos. of Data
I	Glocal Competence Assessment Scale Survey – Pre	19
II	Reflection: Leadership Externship (9 x10 days)	90
II	Reflection: Teaching Practicum (10 x 7 times)	70
II	Observations (5 mentors x 14 days)	70
III	Photo Journals	19
III	Glocal Competence Assessment Scale Survey – Post	14

The qualitative *questionnaire* measures the efficacy of glocal (global and local) competence in study abroad programs on U.S. students (Jean-Francois, n.d.). It is referred to as the Glocal Competence Assessment Scale (GCAS), and identifies levels of attitude, knowledge, skills mastery, and comprehension that are discerning through behavioral choices made by individuals in given scenarios. Further, the questionnaire incorporates Behavior Intention with “Glocal” competence into Professional Practices instrument. This instrument assesses the intention of university students to incorporate Glocal competence into their professional practices. It is important to note that the validation process of GCAS is ongoing (Jean-Francisco et al. in progress). The current study contributes to the validation process of the instrument with a trial use and feedback to the creator with the expert review and minor adjustments.

GCAS, with 29 items, was uploaded on Qualtrics to collect in-depth qualitative data on the perceptions of the participants. Participation was anonymous and voluntary. Information on the prior experiences in global practicum of individual participants was collected. The questionnaires also included general demographics items (e.g., age, ethnicity-optional, and level of education) and open-ended questions. Each questionnaire takes about 30 minutes to complete. During Phase I, the participants were encouraged to take the questionnaire before leaving for China. Students were asked about their attitude, knowledge, skills, or comprehension about both global and local issues and challenges. Students were encouraged to participate in the same questionnaire after their return to the United States. Here are examples of the open-ended questions from the GCAS survey (Jean-Francisco et al. in progress):

Q1 Can you imagine some of the future situations when it might be useful or beneficial for you to use your attitude, knowledge, skills, or comprehension of the link between global and local issues/challenges as part of your professional activities?



Q2 Perceived behavior control: How easy or difficult do you anticipate that it will be for you to use your attitude, knowledge, skills, or comprehension of the link between global and local issues/challenges as part of your professional activities?

**Observations.** Students and faculty members actively engaged in observations during the study. The faculty members sought observations from the students about their activities during the global practicum. Each mentor took notes daily for 14 days. The students shared their observations orally with their peers and wrote them down as part of the class reflection journal.

**Reflective journals.** Students participated in sharing their observations through insightful reflective journals and interacting with peers and instructors. The journals were part of the class assignment and recorded the daily experiences in teaching, externship, and activities.

**Photo journals.** Students took photos of their activities as part of their study abroad experience. The students were instructed to be culturally respectful and avoided documenting any unacceptable activity. These photo journals were shared and collected after returning to the United States. The photo journals reflected the global learning experience of the participants and played an important role in sharing their experiences with future students and curricular programming.

**Data Analysis.** Qualitative data collection captures a thick description of the situation under study and the analysis process provides insights into the data as well as drawing conclusions (Manfra, 2021). Embracing an interpretive perspective, we used an open-ended inductive approach to analyze the data. As Merriam (2009) suggests, “making sense out of data involves consolidating, reducing and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read” (pp. 175–176).

The process of analysis involves: Reading/reviewing data through the lens of the research objectives; identifying key concepts, ideas, and themes in the data; defining the codifying important ideas and themes in the coding sheet; each set of data was coded by at least two independent coders, summarizing coded data by looking for patterns and relationships among themes; and using quotes to emphasize the findings (Namey & Trotter, 2015). The inductive approach to data analysis was applied to all qualitative data including the GCAS survey data.

To achieve triangulation of data, the observation notes became critical to the analysis of the data from reflective notes and photo journals. For example, students’ reflections of successful teaching sessions were triangulated with the survey data and observations from faculty mentors’ notes. Similarly, the cultural immersion activities were amply reflected in photo journals where students shared many selfies while experiencing an event and informally shared their views.

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the study, we trained the researchers in qualitative data analysis to achieve an acceptable inter-rater reliability. Two coders first cleaned the sets of data and created their own codes independently and later compared their reports. They then worked together to define the codes and recode the data for consensus. The coders, using an open ended and iterative process, coded the data and created themes based on three or more similar codes from all the data sources. These themes were further modified to illustrate the richness of the data. Lastly, we engaged some of the participants in guiding our analysis and interpretation through member checking. At each stage, we shared preliminary findings with the participants and made sure their voices are represented accurately.

Table 3

*Data Tools Applied for Research Questions and Emerging Themes*

Research Questions	Data Collection Methodology	Themes
RQ 1. What are the participants' perceptions about their GEP?	Reflective Journals GCAS Survey Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Life-changing experience</li> <li>• Build professional identity</li> <li>• Challenges and lessons</li> </ul>
RQ 2. What is the impact of the GEP on participants' global awareness and cultural competence, and their behavior intentions?	Reflective Journals GCAS Survey Observations Photo Journals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global awareness and cultural competence</li> <li>• Built teaching skills and confidence</li> <li>• Leadership and work ethic</li> <li>• Future careers (behavior intention)</li> </ul>

### Positionality of Researchers

The researchers firmly believe in the significance of global experiential learning, cultural diversity, and the benefits of global and cultural training for teachers and leaders. Two researchers were international students themselves at one time, and all five have participated in or led study abroad or GEP. The researchers played participant observer roles in this study while bringing insider-views to the understanding of the findings and the data collected on the GEP. The researchers' participation is important for contextualizing the various layers of data interpretation of participants' perceptions and understanding of the practicum. To avoid potential researcher biases, the team used various strategies such as constant self-reflection and checking on personal feelings, inter-rater reliability as described in the data analysis section and member checking of emerging themes with the participants.

### Findings

Seeking understanding for Research Questions: 1) the participants' perceptions of the GEP, and 2) the impact of the experiential practicum on the global awareness and cultural competence development and the behavior intentions of the participants, the researchers analyzed qualitative data from the GCAS (Jean-Francois, n.d.), the reflection journals, observations notes, and photo journals that captured participants' learning and the impact of the experiential practicum on them. The various qualitative data sources supported the results of the GCAS open-ended questionnaires which added to the triangulation process.

### Findings for RQ 1: Perceptions of Participants on the GEP

Themes from the data analysis for RQ1 indicate that the GEP was a *beneficial, eye-opening, and life-changing experience*. The GEP built participants' professional identities, confidence as English language teachers and as leaders in education and other fields. The participants indicated that the GEP impacted their career path, confirmed their educational philosophies, and prepared them as future globally competent teachers and leaders. The analysis also revealed challenges and realizations about planning for the unexpected complexity in conducting a meaningful GEP. The following words from participants and mentors support these themes.

## A. Life-changing Experience

Participants perceived the practicum as a life changing experience from which they gained skills and confidence in teaching and leadership and developed global awareness and cultural competence. Following statements from the participants are powerful.

“This experience was life-changing. The students had so much passion and respect for education. It was nice to learn about how their school system works. It was also a great experience to be fully immersed in a different culture.”

“I discovered you can read a thousand books, articles, and watch documentaries but nothing compares to actually being immersed in a culture for almost two weeks.”

“It was a very eye-opening experience that I will never forget. These students have impacted me in ways I never thought they would. I cannot wait to bring what I have learned into my own future classroom.”

“I can totally tell that I am gaining my confidence in teaching my students.”

## B. Challenges and Complexity of the Global Practicum

Participants and mentors encountered unexpected challenges and realized the complexity of GEP and the need for careful planning and dedicated collaborative community.

- 1) The need for better prior knowledge about the host country situation, learners and participants.

Both participants and mentors of the practicum reflected that “we wish we had more accurate information about the English learners’ proficiency level in all four language skills” to select appropriate learning materials. A practicum teacher commented, “the Socratic/Debate method went well. The TED Talks for the most part was a disaster! The students didn’t understand because it was too fast in English.”

Mentors discovered that “getting to know participants prior to the trip would be very helpful,” and “developing group norms would prevent some of the social or interpersonal group dynamics.” Mentors and participants did not have the time to build rapport prior to the departure. This factor limited the mentors’ understanding of participants’ personalities and how that could play out in group dynamics.

- 2) The need to plan early for the practicum and better prepare participants based on their prior knowledge and skills in teaching.

Participants acknowledged Phase I of the practicum was to refresh their knowledge of English language teaching and prepare them for the teaching and leadership practicum. However, participants with various levels of experience in teaching, facing classrooms of 20 college students with unknown levels of proficiency, some participants experienced new-teacher anxiety, some struggled with culture-shock, and most of the participants and mentors realized that longer time for preparation would be beneficial.

One mentor wrote, “We need to build the program as part of the curriculum in order to better prepare students and mentors.”

“Getting into the classroom was fun but nerve wracking.”

“I also feel like the online (Phase 1 preparation) class should be extended to four weeks. All of the students agreed that two weeks simply wasn’t enough time for the prep,” one participant spoke for his group.

- 3) Dedicated collaborative and supportive community and preparation of mentors for unexpected situations.

Complex situations might arise due to global travel anxiety, unfamiliar systems and culture, homesickness, individual personalities and social behaviors, and group dynamics. Here are some scenarios:

A mentor jokingly reflected, “Overall, we did a good job keeping everyone safe, healthy, and did not lose any passports or anyone.”

“Imagine nearly 25 people, illiterate in Chinese, were running to find the correct platform and train right before it was taking off. I almost had a heart attack when I caught several students going to the wrong platform.”

When one of the participants’ flights was canceled and a new booking was scheduled for the next day, a decision was made for one of the mentors to stay behind to ensure the safe return of that participant. “Luckily, we have two Chinese speaking mentors,” one mentor observed.

## **Findings for RQ 2: Impact on Global Awareness and Cultural Competence and Participant Behavior Intention**

Participants expressed compelling statements about the value of their global experiential experiences, which lead to *their development of global awareness and cultural competence, growth in professional identity in teaching and leadership, and intentions of applying what they learned from the experience to their future careers.* The following powerful themes emerged.

### **A. Growth in Global Awareness and Cultural Competence**

- 1) A major theme centered around developing *global awareness and cultural competence* of the host country’s people, history, culture, and traditions. Examples from the qualitative data gathered can be seen below:

“We were able to journey through the city as if we were living it and discovered so much about the city, the core values of Chinese culture, and the honor of Shanxi people,” a participant reflected.

“Learning about the history and experiencing the beauty of the different temples made me realize that just because our rituals for worship might be different it is important to have acceptance over those differences,” an externship participant commented.

Another externship participant reflected, “The political climate between the United States and China is certainly rocky right now. But getting to hear the parents at the kindergarten and my Great Wall tour guide all talk about how it doesn’t have to be that way, really made me think.”

- 2) Additional specific cultural themes were identified relating to awareness of education philosophy, parental involvement, value of education, how Chinese traditions are

celebrated in schools, and how traditional education has benefited and limited the country. Here is some evidence that support these themes:

An externship participant commented after a session with parents at a school, “First is the amount of dedication both student and family put into education. The sheer number of hours spent on school or school related activities is staggering. It is very apparent that for most Chinese families a child’s education comes first.”

“I hear, and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand still rings true today in schools across China,” a practicum participant reflected on Confucian educational philosophy after visiting the Temple of Confucius in Beijing (built in 1302).

Externship participants pointed out the value that Chinese place on education and compared it with the U.S. situation, “It is now very obvious to me why the students we have observed are as focused as they are. The school day is very long and they even spend most of their non-school hours studying for school. Students at home would not be able to handle the workload that these kids are undertaking. They see their education as a way of changing their lives for the better.”

On the other hand, some practicum participants also become cognizant of the *limitation* of following traditions, “The respect for tradition has limited the school, business, and communities in some ways. The Chinese have been hesitant to do things differently, even if it would be an improvement. Schools don’t encourage students to ask questions, out of respect for the traditional relationship between student and teacher. Businessmen are hesitant to approach their bosses with new ideas.”

Participants also realized that “the [memorization] drills were reflective of the structure of the entire educational system.”

- 3) In-depth experience about the similarities and differences among our cultures, values, beliefs, and ideas was a way to promote the idea of diversity. Examples for both similarities and differences are included below:

“Everyday people are so similar, no matter where they live. It was so fulfilling getting to interact with so many different people in China, whether they were professionals, college students, high school, primary, or kindergarten students,” both participants and mentors agreed on this one.

After a cultural tour one participant commented, “When we went into the Confucius Temple, I saw a few people pray in front of the altar and it was just as uplifting as seeing people at home pray.”

Standing at the site of the Imperial Examination (a civil-service examination system in ancient China), mentors marveled at the origin of standardized examination, “Here is the beginning of all the standardized exams in the world!”

“I can honestly say the moment one of the parents spoke about ‘wanting peace and hoping we can remain friends no matter what’ really hit my heart hard and pulled at the strings,” a leadership participant added.

- 4) Traditions such as generosity and hospitality play an integral part in Chinese culture and are woven through the educational process. Being immersed in Chinese culture had such

an impact on participants' views about traditions. The statements from the participants below are evidence.

“The graciousness these parents, teachers, and leaders showed us as they welcomed us into their schools and showed us the day in the lives of their children really touched me at my core. There is something to be said about the humble, gracious, and giving attitudes the people we crossed paths with have.”

## **B. Growth in Professional Identity: Teaching and Leadership**

- 1) Apart from the above-mentioned major take-aways on global and cultural awareness, the participants in the English language teaching practicum came to some unique realizations specific to global teaching competence building.

First, participants found having a supportive and loving community with mentors and host university helped them overcome new teacher anxiety, culture-shock and homesickness in the beginning.

One practicum participant reflected, “The first day was a mixture of excitement and fear of failing the students. The love from the helpers (volunteers) and Dr. Bo (host) has been so heartwarming.”

Second, following the ELT model (Kolb, 2015) during the daily after-teaching debrief, participants reflected on the cultural differences and congruities as well as the implications for teaching. Here are some representative observations.

“The students are hyper-competitive. If I use this competitiveness within some of my activities the students generally forget about their embarrassment and shyness.” Another added, “Students stand up to talk in class.”

- 2) Participants noticed their growth in teaching strategies and confidence as English language teachers during the practicum. Collaborative teaching, focusing on communication, strength-based model, relatability, flexibility and accommodation, are major growth areas.

“I found they are not as proficient as we had been led to believe. Had to switch gears a bit, slowing my speech. Accommodate for my accent, as they were not used to hearing a native speaker.” A participant added, “I love co-teaching...we bounce off ideas from one another very well so I feel that was great for the students and us.”

“I learned that the biggest asset a teacher has is their relatability. If you can relate to the students and create this rapport where honesty and ideas can flow freely everything else will fall into place no matter the teaching style.” Participant added about their learning, “Taking care not to ever interrupt their tangent or answer, talking is talking. Prioritizing good conversation and student engagement over following the lesson plan.”

- 3) Another important theme for leadership externship is the understanding of work ethic of the people in the host country. “This attitude of persistent hard work was apparent throughout the country. I saw the same effort in classrooms with students working hard to the employees within the shops and stores I visited.”

### **C. Behavior Intentions Shows Impact of the Practicum**

Participants expressed decisions to bring their learning to their future careers (behavior intention), and the growth impacts their future teaching. See their own words from data collected.

A practicum teacher shared, “This made me decide that one of the very first things I will do is spread cultural awareness and appreciation in my classroom by featuring a mathematician or scientist from another country each month. It may be small, but it is a start!”

“...This experience will shape every opportunity I have moving forward specifically as an educational leader.” A mentor was so excited to share that, “(name)...has found a job teaching English as a foreign language in Korea.”

## **Discussion**

### **Limitations of the Study**

This collaborative GEP practicum between a U.S. university and its Chinese counterpart, emphasized the importance and benefits of global experiences for all participants. The study, however, has a few limitations. The relatively short time to prepare for the GEP program restricted planning for the study. The nuances of participants’ background, prior experience, training, cultural background, and personal skills were not captured in the qualitative data collection and analysis. These factors may have contributed to their individual successes and struggles. Although we were able to reach important themes based on the entire group, individual learning was not part of the study and we did not capture this aspect in the data collection process. The second limitation is with the pre-post questionnaires. All the participants engaged in completing the pre-travel questionnaires with almost all questions answered. However, only 14 participants completed the post-questionnaires with limited inputs for questions. Some survey questions were left incomplete. This factor limited the amount of quality data for comparison purposes between the two surveys and to account for individual growth based on demographics. We need to better motivate and prepare the students during the long data collection process next time. The range of data gathered from multiple sources, however, did support current findings and results.

### **Discussion of Results**

This study sought to discover the perceptions of participants on the GEP (RQ1) and its impact on global awareness and cultural competence and participants’ behavior intentions (RQ2). Findings revealed several themes centered around how the GEP was a powerful, eye-opening and life-changing program for the participants on multiple levels, as well as some challenges and lessons learned (RQ1). The experience became a cultural “window and a mirror” for the participants as they were exposed to a new culture and engaged in classroom teaching and externship while reflecting on and comparing the culture with their own. The findings illustrate participants’ growth in professional identity and in global awareness and cultural competence through the practicum and decisions to carry the learning to their future career (RQ2).

RQ1 participants’ perception of the practicum as a life-changing experience for RQ1 is very much in-line with previous studies that recognize global practicum’s benefits, lifelong impact on students (Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013) and their cross-cultural sensitivity, cultural self-awareness, and social and global awareness (McDowell et al., 2012). In our case, the practicum has changed some participants’ career path and affected their leadership styles as the experience

“...may productively disturb some of these existing beliefs and attitudes” (Chan & Parr, 2012). This study expands the literature on ELT global practicum to future leaders from education, business and other areas, and pre-service teachers from multiple subject areas.

As impressive as participants’ perceptions on the practicum, the GEP had its problematic sides and challenges (RQ1). The challenges that the participants and mentors reflected echoed the complexities, cultural issues, and ethical dilemmas reported by previous studies (Chan & Parr, 2012; Lang, 2016). While our participants also encountered inexperience for classroom teaching and challenges of “teaching-out-of-field” (Lang, 2016) as well as social and transitional challenges (Lang, 2016). Such culture-shock, homesickness, jet-lag, interpersonal group dynamics are similar to previous literature, however, we did not have any collective health and safety issues. We attribute the problem-solving of the teaching practicum issues to the ELT model (Kolb, 2015) and the community of practice (CoP) (Wenger, 1998). CoP centers on interactions between novices and experts, and the process by which newcomers create a professional identity. Built-in the ELT model (Kolb, 2015), the concrete classroom teaching supported by peer co-teaching, mentoring for new teachers and group planning and reflection, and experimentation of new ideas helped the teachers and leaders to grow. The advice we have for keeping the group safe and healthy is to build “the community of practice” with dedicated caring mentors, supportive peers, helpful and friendly host volunteers, and quality/safe food supplies provided by the host institution. The CoP contributed to the safety and health of the participants.

The group prepared content suitable for advanced English speakers based on the information provided by the host university. Upon the initiation of the global practicum the university mentors realized that there was a mismatch between the standards of proficiency that the two universities used. The lessons proved to be linguistically advanced and unsuitable for our students. However, following the ELT model (Kolb, 2015) mentors organized group planning, collaborative teaching and advised practicum teachers to be flexible and reflective, trying appropriate materials from social media, such as songs in English which Chinese students loved.

The results of RQ2 centered around three areas: *development of global awareness and cultural competence, growth in professional identity in teaching and leadership, and intentions of applying what they learned from the experience to their future careers*. The participants’ perceptions of personal and professional changes have shown in their in-depth understanding and appreciation of the host culture and history, traditional values, beliefs, educational philosophies and characteristics. Participants developed global awareness and cultural competence as they realized that humans, regardless of their different cultures, races, or religions share many similarities; and learned to view and appreciate others’ perceptions. Participants’ reflections described the long history of Chinese culture, Confucius education philosophy, the connection they made in the Imperial Exam Hall (built more than 2000 years ago), and evolution of educational systems.

For the participants, connections were made for the need to strengthen communities and build relationships, understand each other, and how these can impact not only the classroom but the world. Their experiences and explorations enhanced their understanding of diversity, themselves as educators and leaders, and enhanced critical thinking on a global scale. The powerful reflections from participants indicated personal and professional transformation and the impact of the experience on their future work.

The findings of RQ2 are also very much in-line with previous studies (Kim, 2017; Lee, 2009) which recognize the values, transformation, and growth in professional identity and global and cultural competence gained from global practicum. The impact on participants’ future career is due “...partly to productively disturb students ingrained understandings of culture and teaching



and partly in an attempt to connect them to international perspectives on teaching, education and culture (Lee, 2009; Stachowski, 1992, as cited in Chan & Parr, 2012, p. 2).

Through first-hand experience, reflection and daily interactions with colleagues, families, and students who are culturally, linguistically and racially diverse, participants were able to put theories into practice. This impacted their cultural competence, global awareness, communication competence, leadership capacities, and teaching confidence and skills. Participants felt better prepared to work in the global and diverse society, and to make an impact on schools and work. The result of culture-specific learning was noted to be a powerful change agent which allowed participants to become knowledgeable about the aspects of cultural similarities and differences, and their own strengths and weaknesses both personally and professionally. Participants indicated intention to apply the knowledge and skills they gained from the global experience to their future work. Participants stated that the GEP trip to China reflected the Confucian philosophy of *I hear, and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand* and this aligns with the ELT model (Kolb, 2015).

These findings, echoing the benefits and high-impact practices of global practicum (Kuh, 2008; Deardorff, 2009; Engle & Engle, 2003; Parker & Altman Dautoff, 2007), bring value and understanding to the importance of the GEP for teacher education and leadership programs. Further, GEP presents the potential to make educators and leaders more effective in working with diverse populations in schools and workplaces. This global practicum has shown to increase students' awareness and appreciation for intercultural diversity and broad intercultural competence (Clarke et al., 2009; Thirolf, 2014; Young et al., 2015). Previous studies (Gay, 2002, Ladson-Billings, 2014) found that teachers with cultural competence and teaching in a culturally relevant way improve student learning outcomes and close learning gaps. The current program could serve as an ELT model to prepare culturally competent teachers and leaders.

We applied the lens of impact and changes in behavioral intentions for RQ2. The data suggest the GEP was an unparalleled opportunity to experience biases, build interpersonal relationships, develop a sense of global awareness, process their own cultural filters, and see different perspectives. Participants cited fostering a school community through parental involvement and building relationships as concepts of behavioral intentions that will impact decisions as educators and leaders. Leadership participants learned that China provides students with a diverse school system from public schools for all ages, specialized schools, private schools, as well as vocational schools. Unlike in the U.S., the Chinese students are required to complete nine years of education and can then opt to enter various other educational settings after year nine. Participants were able to see that the Chinese truly embrace education as a way to a better life and students are dedicated to long hours in the classroom. Additionally, it was noted that Chinese families place a high value on learning and are dedicated to providing their children with an exceptional education.

The English language teaching team reflected daily on what went well in class and what needed improvement. Tremendous learning and growth as new teachers took place in this collaborative work and reflections, which will benefit them for the rest of their career. Participants also encouraged each other to conduct on the spot reflection and immediate modification in class. There was a noticeable growth in English language teachers' knowledge, skills and disposition over such a short period of time abroad. This can be attributed to learning from their students, mentor teachers, co-instructions and collaborative planning for classes. The participants reflected on understanding their students and acknowledging that students are not empty vessels. Teachers see the strength-based perspective of language learners in action. The growth in professional teacher and leader identity is supported by other studies on English language teachers (Kim, 2017).

A major contribution of the study is to expand global practicum built around Kolb's ELT model (2015) to future teachers as well as leaders. With ELT's (Kolb, 2015) four constructs, the global practicum exposed participants to authentic, concrete culturally rich environments, engaged them in reflective practices, and offered opportunities of decision-making and putting theories into practices. The study validated that individuals could reach their full potential in society and academia by acquiring new knowledge, skills, and abilities through their learned experiences (Kolb, 1984, 2015).

As the study is on one cohort of 19 participants and five mentors, continued study with future cohorts with more participants, adjusted practice on the lessons we learned from this round would strengthen the results. We would continue to involve students from other fields of study into the practicum designed with ELT (Kolb, 2015). Our future studies will connect participants' individual background, prior experience, training, cultural background and personal skills with their perceptions and learning.

### **Conclusion**

This study reports on the experiences of 19 U.S. participants and their five mentors from a teacher education and leadership programs in a GEP where they taught English and conducted externship in China. This global practicum program guided by the Kolb's model (2015), has shown to be an important way to develop and expand learners' worldview, global awareness and cultural competence, and professional identities. The GEP provided opportunities of seeing others' perspectives, shifting paradigms, challenging assumptions and beliefs, and examining cultural biases.

Examination of the data collected from participants and mentors indicates a long-lasting impact on their experiences. These experiences broadened their understanding of cultures, enhanced their confidence in their ability to engage with others. Further, the need to adapt their approach to communication and teaching based on changing situations are all strong evidence of the effectiveness of this GEP. It could be argued, therefore, that global practicum should become a critical component in teacher education and leadership programs and universities should promote such efforts and make these experiences more accessible to students (Fritz et al., 2002).

With this study, the researchers hope to make up for the distinct discrepancy in preparing teachers and leaders to respond to the increasingly diverse schools and workplaces through authentic global experiential learning. This is of grave importance particularly in areas of the U.S. that are not as diverse as others, therefore, limiting students' experiences working with diverse individuals within their prospective areas of studies. The challenge of creating a culturally competent faculty and workforce falls to higher education leaders and educators. Global experiential learning can make a difference in the communities where educators and leadership individuals serve as change-agents (Martinez, 2011).

The study could serve as an inspiration and model for university faculty in teacher education and leadership programs to integrate similar GEP into their coursework. We suggest taking our lessons and success stories, design programs with the ELT (Kolb, 2015) model, build GEP into the curriculum, plan ahead of time, develop recruitment criteria to select globally-minded students and mentors, build a committed and caring CoP team (Wenger, 1998) including supportive host institutions, and get to know your participants and host country well before you engage in a global experiential program.

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