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Long-Term Effects of Studying Abroad: Building Global Citizenship Skills for a Contributive Way of Living

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Abstract

Amidst U.S. higher education institutions (HEIs), there is a prevailing notion that global citizenship education (GCE) is a driving force in furnishing students with aptitudes suited for the 21st century. As a result, study abroad programs have been used as a standard method to promote GCE and provide intercultural experiences for students. However, little research has been conducted to measure the long-term effects of GCE and such study-abroad programs and how these experiences can impact participants' characters. Employing a qualitative approach, this research delved into phenomenological interviews to reveal how study abroad has worked as GCE to foster global citizens. The subjects of this study experienced semester-abroad programs during their undergraduate program[1] at a U.S. university. The research outcomes showed a multitude of insights: (1) research participants developed comprehensive perspectives regarding the concepts of global citizenship and contributing to society, irrespective of their diverse backgrounds; (2) the enduring influence of GCE and study abroad became evident in the decision-making processes related to their career and academic trajectories post-graduation; and (3) study abroad experiences substantially nurtured interviewees' ability to navigate diverse cultures, to take purposeful action based on their established connections with others, and to perceive differences and interconnectedness. Furthermore, the research outcome showed that enduring skills and traits as global citizens could be acquired throughout the undergraduate program on a daily basis, and these skills include intercultural competence, dialogue, and understanding of interconnectedness. These results fill the existing research gap and reinforce the effectiveness of young people's character-building as global citizens through GCE and study abroad programs.

Keywords: contributive life, global citizens, global citizenship education, higher education institution, Soka University of America, study abroad

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[1] An undergraduate program in the U.S. usually refers to a higher education program, and that is pursued by students after their secondary education, such as high school.

1. Introduction

Global citizenship has been widely defined and discussed in order to address the need to foster globally minded citizens for humanistic and democratic purposes, and there-by confront global-scale issues (Goulah, 2020; Hansen, 2008; Lewin, 2009; Nussbaum, 1997; Reimers, 2006; Reimers et al., 2016; Twombly et al., 2012; UNESCO, 2015). Some of those issues are specifically articulated in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) while calling for immediate actions at local and global scales (Reimers et al., 2016). Higher education institutions (HEIs) in the world have responded to the call by implementing GCE (Brewer & Cunningham, 2010; Hansen, 2008; Jorgenson & Shultz, 2012; Lewin, 2009; Mayo, 2005; Nussbaum, 1997; Reimers, 2006; Saito, 2010; Wang et al., 2018; White & Openshaw, 2005). GCE is expected to cultivate intercultural competence, which is a set of skills that allow the possessor thereof to perceive the distinctly human connections that underly all human beings and collaborate regardless of differences in background, in a manner that retains respectful awareness of the local and global social needs and takes responsibility for what is socially just (Brewer & Cunningham, 2010; Hacker & Umpstead, 2020; Horn & Fry, 2013; Maharaja, 2018; Terzuolo, 2018; Twombly et al., 2012). Despite some political, economic, and safety-related challenges, studying abroad or international education programs have continued to be a common strategy to foster GCE among many HEIs (Brewer & Cunningham, 2010; Hacker & Umpstead, 2020; Horn & Fry, 2013; Maharaja, 2018; Terzuolo, 2018; Twombly et al., 2012).

However, not many studies have investigated the long-term effects of GCE and study-abroad experiences on individuals. Previous research that measured students' growth as global citizens was carried out in cross sectional studies through either interviews or surveys (Horn & Fry, 2013; Kishino & Takahashi, 2019; Streitwieser & Light, 2018). Nevertheless, the full benefit of GCE may not be fully realised within the scope of short-term research (Kishino & Takahashi, 2019). Moreover, scholarly works are scant in providing a clear connection between individual-level transformations and global-level societal changes due to GCE or study abroad programs. Hence, there has not been much research that explicates the particularities of how HEIs' effort to promote GCE really impacts the global society.

This research was developed in order to diminish such research gaps and direct the focus towards the long-term effects of providing GCE through study abroad at HEIs in the U.S. As a result, the following research questions were developed: (1) What was the significance of the study abroad experience in understanding or reconsidering the meaning of living a contributive life as a global citizen?; (2) How are they living a contributive life as global citizens after graduation?; and (3) How the definitions of "global citizenship" and "living a contributive life" are interpreted by the study participants?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Global Citizenship

There is an ongoing dispute regarding the definition of global citizenship (Davies et al., 2018; Hill, 2011; Pashby et al., 2020). Not only it is a contested term, but it has also been described as "cosmopolitanism," "world citizens," and "global village." Scholars often trace back the history of these words to the ancient Greek term *kosmopolitan* (the citizens of the world) or mention Immanuel Kant, who defined cosmopolitans as wanderers of the world or strangers to some foreign countries (Cavallar, 2012; Hansen, 2008; Saito, 2010; Schattle, 2009). Some

scholars argue that the term "global citizenship" infers political aspects because citizenship is often understood as a right granted to people of a certain geographical or national area (Marshall, 2019). Others also denote that both global citizenship and cosmopolitanism contain political, legal, economic, ethical, and moral dimensions (Cavallar, 2012; Hansen, 2008; Marshall, 2019; Pashby, et al., 2020; Saito, 2020; UNESCO, 2015). Previous research on the typologies of global citizenship confirmed that the term is often interpreted with three different approaches: liberal (e.g., aiming at the development of social awareness, ethics, morality, and compassion for others), neo-liberal (e.g., aiming at the reciprocal development of a nation and its economics), and critical (e.g., aiming at the improvement in social justice) (Pashby et al., 2020).

Unlike these previous examples of definitions, Ikeda (2010) introduced his unique view on global citizenship while highlighting the inner quality of human beings. In his 1996 lecture, Ikeda pointed out the following elements as essential qualities of global citizens:

- The wisdom to perceive the interconnectedness of all life and living.

- The courage not to fear or deny difference, but to respect and strive to understand people of different cultures, and to grow from encounters with them.

- The compassion to maintain an imaginative empathy that reaches beyond one's immediate surroundings and extends to those suffering in distant places. (Ikeda, 2010, p. 55)

Goulah (2020) analysed that Ikeda's definition of a cosmopolitan or global citizen is centred around humanism while highlighting the need to perceive the interconnectedness of all human beings, the value of each individual, and the importance of collaboration. Furthermore, Ikeda's focus on the importance of cultivating inner quality as global citizens has a strong implication for creating a peaceful world. According to Urbain (2010), Ikeda's view on the defining characteristics of global citizens is the key concept for human beings to pursue inner transformation. Urbain noted, "*I believe that in the context of Ikeda's philosophy of peace, courage, wisdom and compassion are the human virtues at the core of our capacity to actualize inner transformation effectively*" (Urbain, 2010, p. 94). Such transformation of oneself, according to Urbain (2010), allows humans to create a more peaceful world by turning negative tendencies into something positive and meaningful. Therefore, Urbain's (2010) study on Ikeda's peace philosophy explicated that Ikeda's definition and philosophical view on global citizenship are a catalyst to achieve a peaceful society.

2.2. Global Citizenship Education and Study Abroad Programs

Study abroad has been a common strategy to foster global citizenship among many HEIs across the globe (Brewer & Cunningham, 2010; Hacker & Umpstead, 2020; Horn & Fry, 2013; Maharaja, 2018; Terzuolo, 2018; Twombly et al., 2012). This is because such programs are expected to instil specific skills, such as intercultural competence in students, in addition to language acquisition (Maharaja, 2018; Terzuolo, 2018; Twombly et al., 2012). Twombly et al. (2012) especially accentuated the effectiveness of study abroad programs in cultivating higher awareness of other cultures and willingness to collaborate across diverse populations:

"Clearly, the cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal capacities necessary to exhibit intercultural competence—sensitivity to cultural differences, awareness of sociohistorical cultural contexts, adaptability and flexibility to view cultural differences and contextual circumstances through an informed ethnorelative lens, and the empathy to seek deeper

understanding while withholding judgment—are all attributes that could mitigate the presence of the unfavourable conditions...and thereby increase the likelihood of a positive cross-cultural outcome" (Twombly et al., 2012, p. 72).

Other research similarly demonstrated the impact of study abroad programs in cultivating intercultural competence. For instance, quantitative research demonstrated that an increase in students' volunteerism was observed among those who undertook service-learning in a developing country during their study abroad (Horn & Fry, 2013). A qualitative study showed that participation in a semester-long program can enhance students' personal development and acquisition of intercultural competence, such as awareness and understanding of differences between their own and others' cultures, global mindset, a better understanding of their identity, self-awareness, and confidence (Maharaja, 2018). Participants of such programs also developed critical and mindful views of their own countries (Twombly et al., 2012). Because of these expected outcomes, study abroad has been commonly utilized to promote GCE among HEIs.

However, study abroad programs in the U.S. have not been accessible to the diverse population. The typical population that participates in study abroad programs has been characterised as being White, single, young, female, having no disability and financially stable (Stallman et al., 2010). Some factors strongly influence students' decision to study abroad, so not only preparing a wide variety of programs is important but also understanding obstacles that interfere with students' intents is crucial:

"The choice to study abroad is influenced by various individual and contextual resources, such as socioeconomic status, availability of information about study abroad, previous travel abroad, perceived importance of study abroad, and language proficiency, as well as the home and school context. Generally, these factors can be organized under four broad categories: human capital (knowledge or skills that could be advantageously increased by studying abroad), economic capital (funds available to invest in study abroad), social capital (information or networks that increase one's ability to gain access to study abroad), and cultural capital (attitudes and values that contribute to increased social strata, prestige, and cultural refinement). In addition to directly influencing the decision to study abroad, factors within these categories can be mediated by structural variables such as graduation or degree requirements and institutional climate" (Twombly et al., 2012, p. 39).

Due to these obstacles, it is possible that the current research on the effects of study abroad programs has only focused on the limited population that has access to these experiences.

2.3. Long-term Effect of Study Abroad Programs

Although the amount of research is limited compared to that of short-term qualitative and quantitative research, several studies investigated the long-term impact of study abroad programs. Paige et al. (2009) conducted a mixed-method study which involved survey data collected from 6,391 U.S. study-abroad participants and 63 interviews. The result showed several findings:

1. Participation in study abroad programs can be considered one of the most significant experiences that students undertake during university.

2. Previous participants became more engaged with global activities.

3. Study abroad programs impacted "five dimensions of global engagement (civic engagement, knowledge production, philanthropy, social entrepreneurship and voluntary simplicity)" (Paige et al., 2009, p. 1).

4. Participants' experiences impacted career choices, including the selection of international jobs.

5. Many of the participants of the study continued their education at their graduation school.

Another mixed-method study revealed that based on the 34 previous participants of study abroad programs from U.S. HEIs, acquisition and mastery of intercultural competence requires long-term and continuous effort (Krishnan & Jin, 2022). However, another study found that, upon returning to college from abroad, American students demonstrated long-term personal growth, such as an increase in maturity, independence, and self-confidence (Hadis, 2005). There might be factors, such as lengths of stay (Dwyer, 2004), that contribute to students' growth and development of intercultural competence. However, not many investigations have provided how study abroad program as well as GCE can encourage the personal transformation of participants as global citizens and their contributive attitude after graduation.

3. The Study

3.1. Theoretical Framework

Social constructivism was used as this research's main theoretical framework. Creswell (2013) explains that an ontological belief of social constructivism is that individuals try to make sense of their lived experiences and develop their understandings (Andrews, 2012). These meanings or understandings are not something innate but are constructed through interactions with other people (Creswell, 2013). By applying this framework, the research aimed to approach each participant's testimonies as holistic products of what they have seen, experienced, and lived so far.

3.2. Design of the Study

This study utilized a qualitative research method by conducting in-depth phenomenological interviews. According to Creswell (2013), this approach allows researchers to focus on a group of individuals, who have experienced a phenomenon, and to collect in-depth data from the study subjects. The main goal of this approach is to understand and illustrate the lived experience of participants (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). The interview method is useful to deeply understand participants "in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them." (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). Thus, the phenomenological approach is useful to highlight a variety of descriptions of a phenomenon from a targeted research group (Åkerlind, 2005). For this study, the phenomenon is "living a contributive life as global citizens." Through this approach, it will be possible to understand how each participant is going through the phenomenon and compare each experience to elucidate differences and similarities. Interview questions focused on what aspects of their GCE and study abroad experiences impacted their growth as global citizens.

3.3. Research Questions

The present study focused on alumni of Soka University of America (SUA), a liberal arts college founded in 2001 in Aliso Viejo, California. In order to commit to its mission statement *"to foster a steady stream of global citizens committed to living a contributive life"*, the

university has offered GCE in multiple curricular and co-curricular educational forms, including a mandatory semester-long study abroad program. There are no other universities or colleges in the U.S. that require all students, both domestic and international students, to take foreign language courses and participate in a study abroad program for one semester. The main question asked in this research was: How did the university's semester-long study abroad program impact research participants to transform themselves into global citizens to live a contributive life? More specifically, this study aimed to explore the following research questions:

RQ1. What was the significance of the study abroad experience in understanding or reconsidering the meaning of living a contributive life as a global citizen?

RQ2. How are they living a contributive life as global citizens after graduation?

RQ3. How the definitions of "global citizenship" and "living a contributive life" are interpreted by the study participants?

Answers to these research questions were expected to elucidate both long-term effects and the value of cultivating global citizenship in students in a higher education setting to create positive changes in its students at the personal level as well as societal level by helping them become active agents of change.

3.4. Methodology

3.4.1. Participants

This study utilized criterion sampling to select participants for the interviews. This method was suitable to find participants that satisfy pre-established criteria (Creswell, 2013; Palinkas et al., 2015). The criteria used for this study were the interviewees' year of graduation and their status as domestic students when they were enrolled in an undergraduate program.

Participants of this research were alumni who graduated between the year 2007 and the year 2019. The two most recent graduate classes were not a part of this research as the ongoing uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic might have affected their career path and personal well-being. Additionally, this study focused only on alumni who grew up in the U.S. Such a population of students is called "domestic students" in comparison to "international students" who were born and/or raised outside of the U.S. Table 1 shows the summary of their demographic information.

TABLE 1 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Alumni (Class)	Gender (pronouns)	Racial/Ethnic Group	Study Abroad Location
A (2007)	Female (she/her)	White	Japan
B (2008)	Female (she/her)	Asian	Taiwan
C (2009)	Male (he/him)	Asian	Japan
D (2010)	Female (she/her)	Asian	Argentina
E (2011)	Female (she/her)	White	Ecuador
F (2013)	Male (he/him)	White	China
G (2015)	Male (he/him)	Two or more races (Asian and White)	Peru
H (2016)	Male	Hispanic	Taiwan
I (2017)	Female (she/they)	Asian	Taiwan
J (2018)	Female (she/they)	Two or more races (Asian and Black)	France
K (2019)	Male (he/him)	Two or more races (Asian and White)	Japan

Source: Own calculations.

Note: The Racial/Ethnic Group categories were created based on the racial categories used by the U.S. Census (White, Black or African-American, American-Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native-American or Other Pacific Islander) (NCES, 2022). The same census recognizes that people who identify themselves as Hispanic or Latino/a can be any of the racial groups (NCES, 2022).

3.4.2. Procedures for Data Collection

This study employed semi-structured one-on-one interviews in person and via Zoom, an online videotelephony software, to take advantage of the opportunities to ask open-ended questions on the spot and probe deeper into the participants' experiences (James & Busher, 2012). The forms of interview questions were mainly open-ended in order to highlight differences and similarities in the way participants describe and make sense of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The research employed individual interviews. Compared to multiple-person or group interviews, this data collection strategy allowed the researcher to conduct an in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences regarding the phenomena (Beitin, 2012).

Questions were developed to understand participants' detailed views on global citizenship and what might have caused them to have such perspectives. Thus, interviewees were asked about their upbringing and what made them enter SUA. Based on Creswell's (2013) guideline, participants were asked two general questions: *"What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?"* and "What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?" (Creswell, 2013, p. 81). In other words, interviewees were asked what they have experienced in terms of living a contributive life as global citizens after SUA and what kind of situations have impacted their experiences of living a contributive life as global citizens. Furthermore, interviewees were asked to elaborate on what aspects of education at SUA (e.g., studying abroad and living on campus with other students) impacted their mindset and behaviours. Due to the researcher's special interest and focus on the role of study abroad programs in the cultivation of global citizenship, interviewees were asked to share their experiences of studying abroad as well.

After conducting interviews with eleven alumni, collected data was organised based on relevance to the Research Questions (RQs). Most of their answers to interview questions were categorized as follows: RQ1: interview questions 2, 3, and 11; RQ2: interview question 9; and RQ3: interview questions 5, 6, and 7. Then, similarities and differences among responses were captured and highlighted. Whenever there were subthemes across interviewees' answers, they

were noted as well. For instance, RQ1 inquires how research participants define the ideas of global citizenship and living a contributive life. It turned out that their upbringing significantly impacted the way they learned about these concepts. Therefore, upbringing became a subtheme.

3.4.3. Data Analysis Procedure

Each interview was audio-recorded upon the participants' agreement for the purpose of data analysis. For this study, no one disagreed to be audio-recorded. Then, responses from the interviews were transcribed and stored using the upgraded functions of Zoom, which enabled the researcher to record transcripts from a meeting. The feature to automatically process recording transcripts contributed to the accuracy and efficiency of this research project. To protect interviewees' confidentiality throughout this process of data collection and analysis (Kaiser, 2012), each participant was associated with code names such as "Alumni A" and "Alumni B" (see Table 1).

Generally, the core purpose of conducting a phenomenological interview is to understand similarities and differences in the way a group of individuals describe and experience a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). To analyse interviewees' perspectives, the following three steps were taken. First, their transcribed answers were categorised based on the three research questions (RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3). Second, answers to each research question were compared and contrasted. For instance, for the first research question, descriptions of the definitions of global citizenship provided by participants were listed, and similarities and differences were highlighted. Lastly, the ideas of what may have caused them to provide similar or different explanations and experiences on the phenomenon were analysed. Literature reviews played a significant role in classifying their views and making sense of their experiences. Throughout the process, the researcher aimed to understand the entire picture of the interviewees' perspectives which led them to answer questions in their unique ways. Follow-up interviews were conducted when there were any difficulties understanding their points or descriptions.

4. Study Findings

4.1. RQ1: What was the significance of the study abroad experience in understanding or reconsidering the meaning of living a contributive life as a global citizen?

Interviewees identified different aspects of study abroad programs as factors that impacted the way they define global citizenship and the idea of living a contributive life. First, they highlighted that making friends or creating connections with people from different backgrounds positively influenced their experiences (Alumni A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, & K). For instance, Alumni G shared that he could learn about historical, political, and socioeconomic situations that local people have to face on a daily basis by living with a host family. Another alumna shared that throughout the experience, she experienced *"feeling connected with other people and living in a community"* (Alumni E). In terms of friendship, Alumni A mentioned that it's been more than fifteen years since she participated in study abroad, but she still maintains a close connection with the friends that she made. Interaction with local people and friends from other countries has also contributed to expanding alumni's perspectives during study abroad:

"All of these different things were really, really powerful because you get to learn the person's culture and where they are from...and how that culture shapes their own experiences and their own views on the world. And to do this all in Japanese...so many layers of multiculturalism." (Alumni C).

Furthermore, interviewees commented that "travelling with friends and making friends all over the country" were necessary to understand how and why people think differently (Alumni C & F). Therefore, study abroad experiences helped them to see "how important it is to connect to other people" (Alumni D). However, a few of them shared that it was difficult to make friends and overwhelming at first because of language barriers.

Second, interviewees indicated that being exposed to different cultures and new environment expanded their perspectives (Alumni C, D G, H, J, & K). Alumni D expressed *"I don't think I was a global citizen during study abroad, but it widened my perspective. Because everything was different, including the environment I lived in and being away from home, I had opportunities to reflect a lot"*. Particularly, a few alumni mentioned how the experience helped them look at their own country on a global scale. Similarly, a couple of them thought about their own identity and how that has been shaped. For Alumni K, the study abroad program helped his *"understanding that what I thought is normal is not normal". Overall, by being exposed to a new environment, many alumni reported that they became more aware of opinions that come from different angles and perceived the importance of putting themselves in others' shoes. Particularly, the experience of "being a foreigner"* was eye-opening and difficult at the same time:

"When you are abroad, everything is new, you are out of your comfort zone. You are on your toes a lot...You become a foreigner and adapt to their environment. In this foreign country, you are a foreigner, and you adapt to the food, people, and customs of all that stuff" (Alumni G).

Alumni A explained, *"I faced my arrogance. I had to see what it looks like to be a minority and be a foreigner"*. She also expressed that even though she experienced being a foreigner or minority, she encountered people who were supportive and understanding. That made her wish that she could be someone who can understand and embrace people from different backgrounds.

Finally, in terms of academics, most of the research participants mentioned their experiences of learning a new language or taking classes in a different language as a significant factor (Alumni B, C, F, G, H, I, J, & K). A few alumni talked about their struggle to speak a new language and communicate their needs. A couple of alumni, who took classes with local students, expressed that classes were tough and very challenging due to the language barrier. Some of them expressed that it was a very unique and exciting experience to be able to make friends from different countries while communicating in a new language.

4.2. RQ2. How are they living a contributive life as global citizens after graduation?

The purpose of the second research question was to figure out the impacts of study abroad and GCE experiences after graduation. Each research participant is working or studying in a different field, but participants of the study provided meaningful answers to express how they live a contributive life as global citizens. Interviewees mentioned that they tried to live a contributive life by choosing a meaningful career for themselves (Alumni A, C, F, G, H, I, & J). The majority of the research participants have worked for a specific population that they really care about or feel connections with. Some of them worked for NGOs or NPOs (Alumni B, G, H, J, & I). Quite a few of them have been dedicated to an educational field (Alumni A, B, C, E, G, I, J, & K). Two of them have worked for a marginalized population and learned to stand up for them (Alumni H & I).

Moreover, many participants of this study also decided to enrol in a master's program to figure out their career path and dig deeper into the significance of being global citizens. As a result, almost all the interviewees continued to study after graduation for a degree or language program (Alumni A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, & K).

4.3. RQ3. How the definitions of "global citizenship" and "living a contributive life" are interpreted by the study participants?

The purpose of the third research question was to understand how research participants define *"global citizenship"* and "*living a contributive life*". Interestingly, most of the interviewees indicated that they did not have any specific definition of these two concepts before being admitted to the university (Alumni A, B, D, E, G, H, I, & J). However, after experiencing the GCE and study abroad programs, interviewees shared they developed an understanding of global citizenships and the idea of living a contributive life.

First, research participants connected these definitions with certain personal traits and characteristics. The majority of participants emphasized the importance of perceiving interconnectedness with others and/or trying to embrace opinions that come from different viewpoints (Alumni A, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, & K). Similarly, interviewees highlighted the need to become someone who can positively impact local communities as well as people around them by being contributive (Alumni A, B, C, D, E, H, I, J, & K). Some participants responded that having empathy and/or compassion for others are definitive characteristics of global citizens (Alumni C, D, G, I, J & K). For them, "being able to see different perspectives and having empathy to others as much as you expect to have for you" are crucial traits of global citizens (Alumni I).

Second, in order to actualize these ideas, many of them recognized the importance of having a dialogue with others (Alumni C, D, & F):

"Regardless of the challenges, we need to be able to still have open ears and be able to have an open dialogue. So, I think global citizenship starts with being able to have an open heart but also just being able to have the courage to use that open heart to be able to reach out to another person. And from a compassionate and sincere standpoint, just really understanding the circumstances that maybe people are going through" (Alumni D).

Another alumnus indicated that being able to engage in dialogue was a learned skill during their undergraduate program, and it is a tool that helps people become collaborative and help each other. Similarly, another interviewee mentioned that being able to have a dialogue is not only a crucial quality of global citizens but also a crucial step to living a contributive life.

Third, throughout the interview, only a few participants of the study actually answered the interview questions by distinguishing the definition of a global citizen and the idea of living a contributive life (Alumni F, J, & K). For instance, Alumni F stated that the definition of living a contributive life means "*helping others and making the world a better place*". On the other hand, many of them combined or perceived living a contributive life as one of the characteristics of global citizens.

Finally, many interviewees indicated that their upbringing and personal experiences might have influenced how they perceived the ideas of global citizenship and living a contributive life. Particularly, how their surrounding situations had impacted the way they initially thought about

these ideas. For instance, multiple alumni mentioned that religious values contributed to forming their ideas on global citizenship (Alumni A, B, E, F, G, J, & K).

In addition, several interviewees highlighted how they explored their own identities while cultivating their understanding of global citizenship (Alumni A, B, C, D, G, I, J, & K). Even though research participants came from distinct backgrounds, it was interesting to observe some overlaps around their opinions.

5. Discussion

The targeted phenomenon of this study is "*living a contributive life as global citizens*" after going through GCE and a study abroad program during an undergraduate program in the U.S. The outcomes of the research questions revealed the long-term impact of study abroad experiences that nurtured global citizenship in students. Analysis of the interviews highlighted three different aspects of such experiences: (1) language and culture classes, (2) friendship and connection, and (3) exposure to a new environment. In fact, these sub-themes of study abroad programs have been considered as crucial aspects to create positive outcomes for students' acquisition of global citizenship or intercultural competence (Saito, 2010; Twombly et al., 2012). Thus, the study results suggested that participants of this study underwent experiences that are perceived as impactful by previous research, and they could foster their global citizenship mindset and demonstrate the long-term effect of such programs. Particularly, study abroad experiences enriched alumni's ability to navigate different cultures, to take action based on attachments they created throughout the program, and to perceive differences and interconnectedness.

Research Question 2 focused more on actions that participants of this study have taken as global citizens. Most of the alumni mentioned their career path to express how they have lived a contributive life (Alumni A, C, F, G, H, I, & J), and almost all the participants continued studying in a graduate school or in the language they took at SUA (Alumni A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, & K). Research that studied the long-term impact of study abroad programs revealed that such experiences can actually influence participants' career choices as well as their decision to continue studying (Paige et al., 2009). Similarly, another study demonstrated how students improved their global citizenship traits after they finished study abroad programs (Kishino & Takahashi, 2019). In other words, the impact of GCE could be grasped not only shortly after certain educational experiences during undergraduate school but also after students' graduation. Hence, based on this previous research, interviewees' decisions related to career and academic pursuit demonstrated that GCE and study abroad experiences could have lifelong effects on learners and impact how they live their lives as global citizens.

In terms of RQ3, the way participants of this study developed their definition of global citizenship and living a contributive life, results showed that university-level GCE helped learners gain perceptions toward these ideas that last for a long time. Many of them shared that they did not have clear ideas at first (Alumni A, B, D, E, G, H, I, & J). However, after their graduation, most of them could express what these terms mean to them. This phenomenon indicated that GCE contributed to the participants cultivating an understanding of global citizenship and the way global citizens live. Scholars and educational organizations articulated the importance and possibility of incorporating GCE in HEIs (Banks, 2004; Reimers, 2016; UNESCO, 2014, 2015). Globally, there has been a trend to incorporate such practices in educational settings (Ho, 2018; Kiwan, 2018; Pashby & Carla, 2018; Ross & Davies, 2018;

Sant & Valencia, 2018). Although the amount of longitudinal research is limited, this finding showed that GCE can be nurtured through educational experiences and that the practice of GCE at HEIs has a long-term effect. As the research finding shows, the majority of participants in this study mentioned personal qualities or attitudes as other important aspects of global citizenship (Alumni B, C, D, F, H, I, & J). Some of them especially indicated that empathy and/or compassion for others are definitive characteristics of global citizens (Alumni C, D, G, I, J, & K). These aspects of personal characteristics are considered important aspects of global citizens by Ikeda (2010). UNESCO (2014) also noted that learners should be able to acquire skills through GCE. Such skills include empathy, and willingness to connect and communicate with others.

In addition, this process of growing as global citizens made research participants self-reflect about their own identities. Most of the interviewees specifically mentioned their unique journey of exploring their own identity or looking at their identity from others' perspectives while cultivating their understanding of global citizenship (Alumni A, B, C, D, G, I, J, & K). Maharaja's (2018) study showed that education focused on global citizenship could cultivate learners' self-confidence and a better understanding of their own identity. Alumni's focus on the way they understand their identity might also be linked to their personal growth because many of them demonstrated positive perceptions toward who they are as a person. However, participants of this research shared how they initially struggled to understand their own identities or positions in society. Indeed, long-term personal growth, including learners' maturity, independence, and self-confidence, was found in a previous study that focused on U.S. students who participated in a study abroad program (Hadis, 2005). Therefore, the researcher argues that the experience of participating in GCE might have caused interviewees to explore their backgrounds and self-identity deeply and for a long time.

In terms of distinguishing the two terms, global citizenship and living a contributive life, most of them combined these two ideas when they defined them. In other words, being contributive is an inseparable quality of global citizens. Indeed, research indicated that the willingness to live contributively is an intercultural competence that can be learned and acquired through GCE (UNESCO, 2014). Participants' way of living a contributive life was further analysed in the section that focused on the findings from Research Question 2 and relevance to the Literature Reviews.

Furthermore, this phenomenon of acquiring an understanding of these terms implied that even though participants came from diverse backgrounds, the idea of global citizenship was nurtured throughout the educational experiences. This is significant because social constructivism points out that people make sense of their reality based on what they experienced in the past and who they interacted with (Andrews, 2012; Creswell, 2013). Clearly, participants of this study were from unique backgrounds in terms of multiple factors (e.g., coming from different states, religions, genders, sexualities, and socioeconomic backgrounds). These upbringings impacted the way they initially understood the ideas and how they interpreted those after graduation. However, regardless of these differences in their origin and experiences prior to higher education, interviewees understood what it could mean to be global citizens and live their lives contributively the way they are. In other words, upbringings had significant effects on learners in their understanding of global citizenship, yet GCE can impact further to help them perceive their past experiences from different angles and create a meaningful understanding of it.

6. Conclusion

This research was conducted to fill the existing research gap that has not addressed the long-term impact of GCE and a semester-long study abroad program at a U.S. college. As a few participants of this study described study abroad programs with positive phrases, such as "eye-opening" (Alumni C & I), study abroad is often illustrated as a valuable experience. Throughout the interviews, however, it was observed that some of them also experienced some challenges, but they decided to use these experiences to grow.

The outcomes of this research contributed to revealing several findings:

1. Participants of this study cultivated understandings of the ideas of global citizenship and contributive life regardless of their diverse backgrounds.

2. The long-lasting impact of GCE and studying abroad was demonstrated in research participants' decision-making process, particularly their career and academic path after graduation.

3. Study abroad experiences particularly nurtured interviewees' ability to navigate different cultures, to take action based on the attachment they created, and to perceive differences and interconnectedness.

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