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Why do student teachers go global

Frans H. Doppen^a, Jing An^{b,*}, Kristin Diki^a

^a Ohio University, Athens, OH, United States

^b University of South Dakota, Vermillion, SD, United States



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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study reports the findings on 15 preservice teachers' motivation for student teaching abroad. They made up about 5% of all student teachers at a major university in the Midwest. Who were these student teachers? What made them different from those who chose not to student teach abroad? In order to determine their characteristics and motives, each preservice teacher participated in a written survey and an oral in-depth interview. The findings suggest that these preservice teachers typically sought the opportunity to student teach abroad as a way to meet professional and personal goals while broadening their global-mindedness.

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"If I don't do this now, I'll never do it." (Chloe)

When you're young it's important to travel and kind of explore the world before you try and settle down and get older and pick a place to live. (Emma)

With the intensification of globalization, teacher education institutions have broadened their horizons to provide preservice teachers the opportunity to complete their student teaching abroad (Goodwin, 2010; Olmedo & Harbon, 2010). Numerous studies have looked into the impact of student teaching abroad on teacher candidates (Armstrong, 2008; Clement & Outlaw, 2002; Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Faulconer, 2003; Gilson & Martin, 2010; Lee, 2011; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Quezada, 2004; Sahin, 2008; Tang & Choi, 2004). Overall, these studies reveal that student teaching abroad promotes preservice teachers' personal growth, increases their professional growth, and enhances their global awareness (Doppen & An, 2014). However, there is scarce empirical research specifically dedicated to investigating the background of overseas student teachers and what motivates them to teach in a foreign country. To find answers, we interviewed 15 preservice teachers at a large Midwestern university who had applied to student teach in a foreign country. Our research questions were:

1. Who were these preservice teachers?
2. What motivated these preservice teachers to student teach abroad?
3. What supports did these preservice teachers have?

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: doppen@ohio.edu (F.H. Doppen), Jing.An@usd.edu (J. An), mk166895@ohio.edu (K. Diki).

Literature review

Demographic characteristics

We reviewed 16 empirical studies conducted during the past ten years (2004–2014) and examined the demographic characteristics of the participants in those studies. There was no consensus with regard to how to describe the participants. While some studies provided limited information about the participants' demographic background (Adewui, 2008; Doppen, 2010), others offered detailed descriptions (Moseley, Reeder, & Armstrong, 2008; Schipper & Yeager-Washington, 2012). Our review suggested eight demographic categories: gender, major, race, age, socioeconomic status (SES), academic rank, prior overseas experience, and prior teaching experience. The first four demographic categories are frequently mentioned by most studies (see Appendix A).

While the number of female preservice teachers typically far exceeded that of male preservice teachers, in some studies all participants were female (Jiang, Coffey, DeVillar, & Bryan, 2010; Schipper & Yeager-Washington, 2012). The typical student teacher was a non-Hispanic Caucasian (Batey & Lupi's, 2012; Doppen, 2010; Moseley et al., 2008; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Schipper & Yeager-Washington, 2012). Most participants were in their twenties, with a few in their thirties.

Motives

Few studies have explored what motivates preservice teachers to student teach abroad (Doppen & An, 2014; Schipper & Yeager-Washington, 2012). A recent survey by Doppen and An (2014) of 40 former Consortium for Overseas Student Teaching (COST) program participants found that most preservice teachers decided to student teach overseas because they considered it "a great opportunity to see another country and to learn about another culture" or "a 'lifetime opportunity' to teach while working towards their degree" (p. 66). A study by Schipper and Yeager-Washington (2012) found that preservice teachers who intended to seek a teaching position abroad after graduation did so because they either previously taught in another country or were motivated by perceived opportunities for future professional development.

Due to the limited research on the motives of student teachers who taught overseas, we also examined the motives of study abroad students and American Peace Corps volunteers. Research on study abroad programs in general suggests that American students are motivated to study abroad out of a desire for cross-cultural experiences (including learning about the host country, interacting with people from different countries, and acquiring a broader view of the world), personal motives (including escaping social boundaries, traveling for pleasure, and making new social connections), academic motives (including learning a foreign language, earning credits, and conducting research projects), and professional motives (including exploring future career opportunities) (Badstübner & Ecke, 2009; Massey & Burrow, 2012; Nyaupane, Paris, & Teye, 2011; Sánchez, Fornerino, & Zhang, 2006). These students may well be motivated by a cosmopolitan outlook on life which, according to Appiah (2006), supports the idea that we have obligations to others beyond our "kith and kind," that we value all human life, and that there is much to learn from our differences (p. 6).

There may be something to learn as well from why college students volunteer in the American Peace Corps. In a study based on interviews with 100 Kentucky volunteers since 1961, Wilson and Wilson (2011) found that they were motivated by the ideals of the Peace Corps, career opportunities, television commercials, prior international and community service experiences, as well as encounters with returned volunteers.

Methodology

Selection of a research methodology is determined by the research questions (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2002). Based on the three research questions, this study used a qualitative case study design, which is suitable when the goal is to understand a real-life situation in depth (Merriam, 2001; Yin, 2009).

Participants

We used a homogeneous sampling strategy and purposefully selected our participants. A homogeneous sampling strategy selects participants "based on membership in a subgroup or unit that has specific characteristics" (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 112). Our study included 15 participants who had decided to complete their student teaching abroad during summer semester 2012–2013, fall semester 2013–2014 or spring semester 2013–2014. All participants were enrolled in a COST preparation course during spring semester 2012–2013.

COST is a collaboration of 15 colleges and universities in the United States that provides opportunities for its students to have quality student teaching abroad experiences. Its goal is to promote global understanding, intercultural communication and to provide a meaningful educational experience (see: <http://www.gvsu.edu/cost/>).

All 15 participants were required to minimally complete a 12-week-long professional internship in a K-12 school in either an English-speaking country or non-English speaking country where they would be able to teach in the English language (Doppen & An, 2014).

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