



International experience makes a difference: Effects of studying abroad on students' self-efficacy



Linn Petersdotter*, Esther Niehoff, Philipp Alexander Freund

Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Germany

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 6 September 2016

Received in revised form 16 November 2016

Accepted 17 November 2016

Available online 28 November 2016

Keywords:

Self-efficacy

International mobility

Personality development

Students

Social contacts

ABSTRACT

The present study examined whether students experience an increase in their general perceived self-efficacy through international academic mobility. Two hundred and twenty-one students at Leuphana University Lüneburg were enrolled in a test-retest study with two points of measurement including a time interval of approximately six months. Perceived self-efficacy was measured in a group of sojourners ($n = 93$), studying abroad for one semester, and nonsojourners ($n = 128$) who stayed at campus in Lüneburg. Sojourning was a significant predictor for participants' self-efficacy at the second measurement. In addition, the number of social contacts met with per week was discovered as a mediator for the development of higher self-efficacy abroad. Furthermore, high self-efficacy at the first point of measurement seems to prevent sojourners from perceiving a new culture as a threatening challenge. Lastly, selection effects of personality concerning participants' intention to study abroad were looked for, but not found. These findings help to understand the influence of studying abroad on students' perceived self-efficacy and provide further information about the possible causes of personality development.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In times of rising internationality, many students seek new experiences, advanced communication and cultural competencies as well as personal and academic development abroad (Heublein, Hutzsch, Schreiber, & Sommer, 2011). In 2015, almost 30% of students enrolled at German universities spent at least three months of their academic education on international campuses abroad (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, 2015).

Although study abroad programs consider formal academic settings to be a crucial part of the program, participants mostly report learning from social and cultural situations, personal challenges, and field experiences as a reason for sojourning (Heublein et al., 2011). It is recognised that major life events bear the potential for personality changes, developing through environmental factors (Specht, Egloff, & Schmukle, 2011). Studying abroad seems to be an important life event for young adults, affecting not only their academic career but also impacting their personality development and social lives in the long term (Gieser, 2015; Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013).

One of the first studies specifically dealing with the impact of sojourning on the personality of young adults was conducted by Ying (2002), who discovered an increase of internality and self-actualization among Taiwanese students sojourning to America. In the context of

international mobility extant research has mainly focused on the Big Five of personality: Several findings indicate a positive impact of abroad experiences on extraversion, openness and agreeableness, whereas neuroticism seems to decrease (Lüdtke, Roberts, Trautwein, & Nagy, 2011; Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013). Further on, it has been found that study abroad programs increase students' self-efficacy perception in the specific domains of communication, foreign language learning, and cultural adaptation self-efficacy (Covert, 2014; Cubillos & Ilvento, 2012; Milstein, 2005). Nevertheless, the field of academic international mobility is in need of further research concerning the impact of intercultural experience on students' personality development (Covert, 2014).

In the current study, we examine the effect of study abroad experience on general self-efficacy, which is one's belief in his or her performance abilities even under challenging demands (Schwarzer, Bäßler, Kwiatek, Schröder, & Zhang, 1997). As a universal construct of humans' personality it is strongly connected to other meaningful psychological constructs such as stress coping, health behaviours and satisfaction in life (Luszczynska, Scholz, & Schwarzer, 2005). By choosing general self-efficacy, we purposefully go beyond extant research conducted on domain-specific self-efficacy, thus broadening the scope and enriching the state of knowledge on self-efficacy.

1.1. Self-efficacy

The concept of self-efficacy was first introduced as a unidimensional construct by Albert Bandura and refers to people's perceptions of their

* Corresponding author at: Sierichstraße 148, 22299 Hamburg, Germany.
E-mail address: linn.petersdotter@gmail.com (L. Petersdotter).

own capabilities to manage a task successfully (Bandura, 1977). Perceived self-efficacy can be defined as the self-belief that one can perform a difficult task and cope with adversity – in various domains of life (Schwarzer et al., 1997). It is also labeled as the subjective expectation of competency and represents a basic ability to confront challenges with innovative ideas as well as with mental and physical endurance (Luszczynska et al., 2005; Schwarzer et al., 1997).

Self-efficacy includes the facilities of goal setting, effort investment, persistence in the face of barriers, and recovery from setbacks (Luszczynska et al., 2005). According to Bandura (1989), the main sources of self-efficacy are fourfold: (1) people's experiences of their past performances, (2) observation of others, (3) verbal encouragement, and (4) the interpretation of others' emotional reactions.

Research distinguishes between general and domain-specific self-efficacy as measurable concepts. General self-efficacy includes all areas of life and expresses the optimistic assessment of one's general skill to deal with life's challenges, the expectancy of positive outcomes, action control, and personal agency (Schwarzer, 2014; Schwarzer et al., 1997). Previous research suggests its positive effect on physiological and psychological well-being, general life satisfaction as well as to be conducive to competent handling of challenges and higher goal setting (Lightsey et al., 2013; Luszczynska et al., 2005).

Meanwhile, the concept of self-efficacy has also been successfully applied to many different fields of action, focusing on self-efficacy in area-specific contexts, for example in physical activity, nutrition, or smoking self-efficacy (Luszczynska et al., 2005; Schwarzer, 2014).

1.2. The present study

The present study aims to find out whether international experience increases students' perception of their general self-efficacy. Moreover, we explore a mediator enhancing this predicted effect as well as the correlation between self-efficacy and challenge perception. Finally, possible selection effects of students' intention to study abroad and their level of self-efficacy are examined.

1.2.1. Hypotheses

Regarding perceived self-efficacy, one's ability to overcome challenges and personal accomplishments are considered a good predictor for developing a higher sense of self-efficacy (Scholz, Gutiérrez, Sud, & Schwarzer, 2002). We assume that those personal challenges appear more frequently during international mobility than in students' familiar environments. Research suggests that abroad experiences support the enhancement of students' perceived personal agency and self-efficacy in specific areas (Covert, 2014; Cubillos & Ilvento, 2012; Milstein, 2005).

Hypothesis I. *Studying abroad increases the level of sojourners' perceived self-efficacy in comparison to non-sojourners' perceived level of general self-efficacy.*

Students report learning from personal challenges and social situations as the main reason for sojourning (Heublein et al., 2011). Beginning to live in another country, they are confronted with a variability of chances for building new networks and social activities (Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011). Based on Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1989), representative experiences provided by social role models as well as verbal encouragement and the interpretation of others' emotional reactions are an essential way to strengthen the belief in one's own self-efficacy. Recent research implies that especially the interaction with the local community abroad as well as feedback from an individual's social environment in general supports the increase of perceived self-efficacy (Cubillos & Ilvento, 2012; Siegle & McCoach, 2007). Further on, positive effects on students' general satisfaction and well-being in the host country were reported as a result of variable types of social connections and new friendships (Hendrickson et al., 2011). This leads to

Hypothesis II. *The proposed effect of studying abroad on perceived general self-efficacy is mediated by the average amount of social contacts met with per week. A higher amount of social contacts per week leads to a higher perceived self-efficacy.*

Studying abroad confronts sojourners usually with an unknown cultural background, leading to intellectual and emotional challenges caused by unfamiliarity and the need for adaption (Engle & Engle, 2003). Self-efficacious individuals tend to keep up in different intercultural situations because they believe in managing upcoming challenges successfully (Covert, 2014). Former research showed that students with a high perceived self-efficacy experience a laid-back perception of challenges in stressful situations (Scholz et al., 2002). It is conceivable that a higher level of self-efficacy thereby prevents sojourners from perceiving a new culture as overly challenging:

Hypothesis III. *The level of sojourners' general self-efficacy is a predictor for the perceived challenge of dealing with a new culture, in so far that a high level of self-efficacy predicts a smaller perceived challenge when dealing with a new culture.*

Finally, selection effects of the participants' personality are expected to occur between students without the future plan of studying abroad and sojourning students. A sense of higher self-efficacy leads people to aim for more ambitious goals than people who share a lower level of self-efficacy (Scholz et al., 2002). It also seems to work the other way around, since a high perceived self-efficacy stimulates motivation, leading people to aim for and stick to more ambitious goals (Schwarzer et al., 1997). Considering the plan of an academic stay abroad to be an ambitious goal, selection effects are expected for participants' initially measured self-efficacy and their intention to study abroad.

Hypothesis IV. *Students who plan a stay abroad show significantly higher levels of general self-efficacy than students who do not plan a study-related stay abroad.*

2. Methods & materials

2.1. Participants and procedure

Students from the Leuphana University Lüneburg were invited to enroll in this test-retest study before and after a time interval of approximately six months ($M = 6.4$ months, $SD = 3.6$ weeks) between July 2014 and February 2016. The study included two different groups of participants: Sojourners who planned to study at an international university abroad shortly after the first measurement¹ and non-sojourners who kept on studying in Lüneburg between T_1 and T_2 . Data was collected within three waves of measurement. For sojourners there was an average time interval of six months between T_1 and T_2 ($SD = 1.1$ months), for non-sojourners the time interval amounted approximately six and a half months ($SD = 0.6$ months). Whereas data collection of non-sojourners was completed within the first wave (fall term 2014/15), sojourning students were approached for three points of time (first wave fall term 2014/2015, second wave spring term 2015 and third wave fall term 2015/16).

The age in the group of sojourners ranged from 19 to 29 years ($M = 22.3$, $SD = 2.03$ years), and in the group of non-sojourners from 18 to 48 years ($M = 22.8$, $SD = 4.29$ years). Regarding the gender distribution, approximately 84% were female and 16% male in the group of non-sojourners. The group of sojourners consisted of 82% female and 18% male participants.

¹ Sojourners were approached via the International Office of the Leuphana University Lüneburg.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5036155>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5036155>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)