

# The Benefits and Challenges of International Education: Maximizing Learning for Social Change

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## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

International scholarship programs are a longstanding approach to enhancing technical skills and leadership capacity in contexts with limited local higher education opportunities. In many ways, student mobility patterns between countries in the Global South and higher education institutions in the Global North continue to resemble those forged through colonial efforts to develop a local elite and cultivate support for their interests by sending students to study at leading institutions in Europe and the USA (Rizvi 2010).<sup>1</sup> In African contexts in particular, efforts by national governments and international funding organizations to support study at higher education institutions in the Global North through international scholarships have persisted throughout the decades following independence. At the same time, higher education institutions in both the Global North and the Global South have undergone significant changes. In light of these changes as well as existing research on the individual-, institutional-, and societal-level outcomes of international learning experiences, this chapter reviews the extant literature examining international scholarship programs and

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learning abroad outcomes and reflects on how the role of international university experiences might be re-envisioned to challenge problematic assumptions, enhance learning outcomes, and advance social change.

The chapter begins with an overview of the rationales that have long undergirded support for international scholarship programs, particularly in sub-Saharan African contexts, and introduces several changes in the global higher education landscape that raise important and timely questions regarding the role of international learning opportunities in advancing social change. It then reviews evidence from studies of international scholarship programs, which give limited attention to student experiences during their studies, and broader research examining the learning outcomes of international university experiences to illuminate both the benefits and limitations of international scholarship programs. In light of these findings, it considers whether to prioritize international immersion experiences or efforts to strengthen and expand access to local higher education institutions as pathways to social change in the Global South. The chapter concludes by discussing the implications of these findings for international scholarship program design and future research.

## 6.2 INTERNATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM RATIONALES

As demonstrated by the case studies included throughout this book, diverse understandings of the link between international study and social change have motivated a wide variety of actors to fund international scholarships. Despite considerable variation in program design and sponsor motivations, most international scholarship programs for students in the Global South share an overarching intent to create and sustain the intellectual capacity needed to support development (Pires et al. 1999). Even for programs such as Fulbright exchanges that emphasize the cultivation of cross-cultural relationships and understanding, contributing to the development of countries in the Global South remains a primary goal. While the specific emphasis of particular programs varies, this broad aim positions international scholarship recipients as a key link between international study and social change.

This chapter examines research that illuminates the individual-, institutional-, and societal-level impacts of learning abroad as it relates to three distinct yet interrelated objectives that are prominent in the international scholarship program literature: transferring technical skills, developing leadership, and strengthening commitments to civic engagement and public service. These three rationales are associated with scholarship program

models that emphasize the role of individuals in advancing social change. These scholarship program models are grounded in the theory of change—explicitly or implicitly—that empowering individuals with knowledge to implement change in the academic, industrial, and civic sectors will reap benefits for their organizations, communities, and countries (Mawer and Day 2015). For such programs, international study is understood to play a pivotal role in developing technical skills, leadership competencies, and capabilities for public service.

While the presence of these distinct yet overlapping rationales is largely consistent across international scholarship programs, applications vary and the focus on particular priorities has shifted over time (see Loerke, Chap. 10 for further discussion). For example, programs that emphasize the transfer of technical skills exemplify diverse approaches to achieving this objective. They range from doctoral-level scholarships that cultivate high-level academic skills and build disciplines that are crucial for understanding and addressing pressing societal challenges to more vocationally oriented undergraduate, master's level, and short-term training designed to address needs in sectors critical to social and economic development.

The AFGRAD/ATLAS program, USAID's flagship effort to address human resource development needs in Africa, provides a specific example of a particular program's focus changing over time as its emphasis shifted away from its initial focus on transferring technical skills when it began in 1963. Grounded in the notion that a lack of technical skills and human resources prevents African institutions from achieving growth in particular sectors, the program was initially oriented toward assisting newly independent African nations to acquire trained "manpower" in sectors related to national development (Aguirre International 2004). Graduates of the program often returned to replace expatriates in key institutions. Over time, AFGRAD expanded its focus and began to incorporate leadership into the design and name of the program, which changed to ATLAS—Advanced Training for Leadership and Skills—in 1991 (Aguirre International 2004). Leadership development was a core focus of the training by the time the program ended in 1996.

Leadership development is an increasingly widespread and explicit priority for many international scholarship programs (The Mastercard Foundation 2016; Dant 2010). Program approaches to achieving this objective range from offering the scholarship and encouraging students to independently seek out leadership development opportunities to designing specialized—and sometimes required—leadership development programming within

and across participating host institutions. USAID's ATLAS/AFGRAD program, which included no centralized effort to provide supplementary leadership development curriculum, is an example of the former, while the Mastercard Foundation's emphasis on transformative leadership provides an example of the latter (see Burciul and Kerr in this volume for additional details). As with programs focused on the development of technical skills, leadership-oriented international scholarship programs associate international study with a unique opportunity to gain leadership competencies through exposure to diverse people, perspectives and ideas at universities abroad that will equip program participants to address challenges in their home contexts.

Closely related to leadership development is the rationale of enhancing capabilities for and commitments to public service. Whereas leadership training often seeks to equip international scholarship program participants to lead change within their fields of study and the organizations in which they are employed, civic engagement focuses more explicitly on efforts to improve life in a community through political and non-political processes (Ehrlich 2000). Higher education—particularly in Western contexts—has long been associated with cultivating a sense of civic responsibility and equipping students with the knowledge and skills to effectively engage in civic life (Boyte 2015; Nussbaum 2012).<sup>2</sup> The Humphrey Program, one of the US Fulbright Program's international education exchange initiatives, is an example of a leadership-oriented program with a focus on equipping participants for public service and leadership in a global society through custom-designed leadership programming.

Despite considerable variation in the particular technical and leadership skills that international scholarship programs seek to cultivate, these rationales reveal widespread consensus that learning abroad continues to offer benefits to individual learners that cannot be acquired to the same extent locally. While there is general agreement that intercultural exchange contributes to international goodwill and mutual understanding, programs are increasingly expected to document their impact, as indicated by the recent proliferation of efforts to assess student learning outcomes (Sutton and Rubin 2010). The challenges of measuring returns on investment in international study along with changes in the global higher education landscape raise questions regarding the nature and depth of individual-level learning outcomes and their relationship to institutional and societal change. Phenomena such as the globalization of higher education, renewed support for universities in the Global South as key institutions in the global knowledge

economy, and new modes of education delivery made possible through technological innovation expand access to tertiary education and have significant implications for the future of scholarship program design.

### 6.3 A CHANGING GLOBAL HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

Organizations that fund international scholarship programs do so in a dynamic global higher education environment. It is within this changing landscape that challenging decisions regarding how best to target funding with an aim of maximizing contributions to social change are made. Although a comprehensive review of changes that have occurred in the global higher education landscape over the past decades is beyond the scope of this chapter and indeed this book, several changes in particular suggest the importance of reconsidering the role that scholarships for international study might play in advancing social change. One prominent change, as noted in the introductory chapter, is that international student mobility has expanded considerably over the past decades. In the USA alone, international student enrollment increased by 73% from 2005 to 2015 (Institute of International Education 2015). This suggests that international learning opportunities are more widely accessible. It is important to note, however, that this access is unevenly distributed and many countries and communities remain on the margins. While many of these internationally mobile students return to their countries of origin upon completion of their studies, it is increasingly common for alumni of international universities to remain abroad and pursue transnational opportunities to advance their careers (Marsh et al. 2016).

Another significant change has to do with the content of degree programs and university curricula. Across the higher education landscape, the value of liberal arts education in equipping citizens for their multiple roles in society is increasingly overshadowed by a growing emphasis on the importance of aligning university education with labor market demand. In the face of economic anxieties, vocationally oriented degree programs are gaining popularity at many institutions, while support for the humanities is dwindling (Nussbaum 2012). At the same time, there is also an expanded emphasis on the role of higher education in cultivating the capacity for innovative and entrepreneurial thinking at institutions around the globe. Universities increasingly encourage students to be job creators rather than

job seekers, and to identify innovative ways of addressing pressing social challenges and practicing social responsibility.

Changes in higher education demand, opportunities, and mobility patterns in the Global South—in contexts such as sub-Saharan Africa—are also apparent. While institutions in the Global North have long been viewed as making important contributions to the social good and serving as primary hubs of innovation and critical thought, the quality of higher education institutions in the developing world is undergoing significant change. Following decades of neglect throughout the 1980s and 1990s, higher education institutions in the Global South have experienced renewed financial support as the “knowledge economy” has reestablished higher education as a top development priority (Dassin 2009). At the same time, expanded access to education at the primary and secondary levels has contributed to a dramatic increase in demand for university education. While many challenges persist, impacts of this renewed support to African higher education are also apparent. For example, in response to the expansion of domestic higher education opportunities, within the sub-Saharan African region between 2003 and 2013, outbound student mobility dropped from 6% to 4% (UNESCO 2016).

Contributing to efforts to meet this growing demand for quality higher education opportunities in contexts throughout the Global South are new modes of delivery such as distance learning programs, branch campuses, and the proliferation of new university models, to mention just a few. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, initiatives such as the African Virtual University, a Pan African Intergovernmental Organization that uses e-learning to deliver degree programs and training, and the more recently established African Leadership University, which describes itself as a pioneer institution seeking to reimagine what higher education and leadership development might look like in the twenty-first century, are among the new forms of cross-border collaborations that are significantly expanding post-secondary offerings through innovative approaches and applications of information communication technologies (Sakamoto and Chapman 2011).

These changes both support the need for further transformation within the higher education sector and expand opportunities for students to develop technical and leadership skills much closer to home. Moreover, increased international student mobility within the African continent opens possibilities for disrupting traditional mobility patterns from contexts in the Global South to institutions in the Global North and re-envisioning the role of learning abroad in the twenty-first century. The implications of these

changes for the design of scholarship programs and future research are discussed below following a review of key findings from studies of international scholarship programs and learning abroad research.

#### 6.4 THE LIMITATIONS OF MEASURING LEARNING OUTCOMES

Trends toward increased accountability in both higher education and international development have contributed to an expansion of efforts to assess and document both the student learning outcomes and broader impacts of international study (Dant 2010; Sutton and Rubin 2010). While these efforts offer important insights, research in this domain is fraught with challenges. First, international education is a broad category that encompasses a wide variety of learning abroad programs and opportunities. While the outcomes of participation in particular kinds of international education programs such as study abroad have been the subject of increasingly rigorous study, this literature focuses largely on student populations from countries in the Global North and examines topics that have received little attention in international education research focused on other internationally mobile student populations. Much of the research on international scholarship programs, for example, has focused on quantifiable outputs, such as rates of completion, return, and employment rather than learning outcomes or societal contributions. While there is a growing body of research focusing on long-term impact such as the influence of scholarship alumni on changes in institutions and home communities, much of this work remains dependent on self-reported data (see Mawer, in this volume, for more discussion).

The empirical difficulty of measuring outcomes, limitations of standardized assessment measures, and the variety of levels at which outcomes might be examined also raise concerns. Levels of analysis include the individual, institutional, national/societal, and global/supranational, each of which poses its own methodological challenges (Hudzik 2014; Potts 2016). Many of these outcomes—particularly at the societal level—are long term and therefore logistically and methodologically difficult to assess. While research that extends over a longer period of time has the potential to examine impacts of international study on employment, further study, and other professional and community outcomes, it necessitates tracking down participants and accounting for an array of intervening factors in the analysis. Methodological challenges also include the difficulty of attributing changes to particular programmatic or contextual experiences and factors

given the wide variety of influences on learning during periods of international study and the university experience more broadly (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005). These challenges are further elaborated by Mirka Martel in this volume.

## 6.5 THE BENEFITS OF AN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Despite these challenges, several key findings from existing research offer important insights for considering the role that international learning opportunities might play in enhancing the contributions of scholarship program alumni to social change. The remainder of this section focuses first on key findings concerning what and how students learn through their experiences abroad, followed by a discussion of findings that challenge common assumptions and further illuminate the link between international learning and social change.

Intercultural competence, defined as “the ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behavior and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions,” is the most widely researched learning outcome associated with international education experiences (Deardorff 2006). Efforts to assess intercultural competence have proliferated since the mid-1990s, with over 80 instruments currently in existence (Bennett 2010; Fantini 2006). Studies employing these measures generally concur that learning abroad has a significant and positive effect on the development of intercultural competence (Vande Berg et al. 2012).

In addition to intercultural competence, global citizenship—a broader construct which can include intercultural competence, social responsibility, global awareness, and global civic engagement—has emerged more recently as an important area for measuring student-level impact (Potts 2016). These efforts to quantitatively assess the development of global citizenship are accompanied by qualitative studies that demonstrate how student identities are reshaped and expanded as they are exposed to diverse perspectives and make meaning of their experiences abroad (Dolby 2004; Rizvi 2009). Studies carried out in a variety of higher education contexts have also found that experiences with diversity contribute to the development of attributes associated with civic engagement, such as an appreciation for diversity within communities and cultures and the ability to work effectively in international and multi-cultural contexts (Denson and Zhang 2010; Marsh et al. 2016). As students deepen their sense of self- and global



awareness, they are better equipped to work toward change on a local and global scale.

These individual-level outcomes that equip alumni of international education programs to contribute to social change are linked to a variety of non-curricular and curricular experiences. Study abroad literature emphasizes that the development of intercultural competency is not an automatic product of traveling and learning abroad but requires intentional cultivation (Deardorff 2006; Vande Berg et al. 2012). Similarly, research confirms that exposure to diversity alone is often inadequate for deepening understanding and suggests that institutions have a critical role to play in fostering meaningful interactions among students (Denson and Zhang 2010). There is substantial evidence suggesting programs designed to facilitate not just cross-cultural encounters but engagement across difference and that provide space and skilled facilitators to process and make meaning from these experiences deepen intercultural learning (Deardorff 2015; Vande Berg et al. 2012). In particular, Vande Berg and colleagues point to the key role of regularly occurring reflection to facilitate intercultural learning by experienced and interculturally competent mentors.

Most students learn to learn effectively abroad only when an educator intervenes, strategically and intentionally. Educators who intervene in student learning and development in these ways need to be trained to do so effectively. (Vande Berg et al. 2012, p. 19)

This emphasis on the importance of programming designed to create space for reflection and facilitate student learning is also present in relation to cultivating civic engagement. Specific experiences and programmatic features associated with developing commitments to public engagement and capacities for civic leadership include exposure to “democratic” forms of governance, political processes, and philanthropy cultures as well as participation in activities such as non-violent protests, volunteerism, and service-learning, which refers to the pedagogical practice of integrating community service with instruction and reflection to enrich learning, foster civic responsibility, and strengthen communities (Eyler et al. 1997). The influence of such activities is reflected in several studies of international scholarship recipients that include qualitative interviews with program alumni. For example, alumni of the Humphrey Fellowship program highlight ways in which their observation and participation in highly developed civil society and grassroots citizen movements in the USA inspired them to

take additional leadership initiatives once back home (Dant 2010). Similarly, participants in the African Alumni Study describe the important role that social and political engagement with local and global causes during their period of study abroad through volunteer work and advocacy organizations contributed to their understandings of injustice and their social and civic engagement upon graduation. Some note how these experiences abroad strengthened commitments and values that were formed during childhood and primary and secondary education in their home contexts (Marsh et al. 2016).

These findings from international scholarship program research confirm the important role that experiential learning and particularly service-learning opportunities in which community service is accompanied with reflective practices can play in developing commitments to civic engagement. As Pascarella and Terenzini conclude:

The evidence is clear...service learning courses (those in which the service performed is integrally related to course content) have statistically significant and positive independent effects on students' commitment to social activism and to changing the political system, their perceptions of social and economic inequities, their inclinations to attribute those inequities to the system rather than to individuals, and their sense of social responsibility. (2005, p. 338)

More broadly, the high-impact nature of learning abroad is reinforced across a wide range of outcomes that cut across interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive development domains. This deep learning is associated with the significant dissonance that results from immersing oneself in a new living and learning environment. This dissonance serves as a powerful trigger for development, which occurs through the process of reconciling new experiences with prior understandings and knowledge structures (Baxter Magolda and King 2004). Major findings include gains in ability to understand complex moral and ethical issues and an increased capacity for integrative and reflective learning (Potts 2016).

In addition to the powerful learning that immersion in a new culture stimulates, exposure to new academic cultures and pedagogical practices is also influential. Within the classroom, alumni point to learner-centered and problem-based teaching methodologies that foster engaged learning and critical thinking, applied rather than purely theoretical learning, and state-of-the-art facilities that are not available at home as making an impactful contribution to their learning (Baxter 2014; Marsh et al. 2016).

Such pedagogical approaches are widespread at—although not limited to—higher education institutions in the Global North.

The relationship between international study and career and employment outcomes is of considerable interest in the realm of impact research, which seeks to examine the relationship between international study and subsequent life and career choices. While existing studies suggest that learning abroad is highly valued by employers and offers many benefits for obtaining a job upon graduation and advancing one's career, such findings must be considered in light of labor market conditions in the national or regional context and timeframe of the study (Potts 2016). It is unclear whether it is predominantly the prestige of the international credential or particular skills and experiences acquired that enable career mobility. Nevertheless, research generally supports the positive impact of learning abroad on career and employment outcomes (Marsh et al. 2016; Potts 2016).

While learning abroad outcomes such as intercultural competency, global citizenship, cognitive development, and employment advantages have been more extensively examined in the context of students from North America—and particularly the USA—several recent studies of international scholarship program alumni demonstrate that many of the benefits identified in studies involving mobile students from the Global North also pertain to students from the Global South. For example, alumni of the Ford Foundation's International Fellows Program, which ran from 2001 to 2013, 79% of alumni hold senior leadership roles in their organizations: a number that continues to increase as alumni advance in their careers. The authors note some variation across location, region, and gender: those who are male, return to their home country, and come from Africa or the Middle East are more likely to hold leadership positions than scholarship recipients who are female, remain abroad, and come from other geographic locations. Similarly, a recent study of African alumni of international universities from the 1960s through 2014 found that a high percentage of respondents (86%) have held leadership roles (Marsh et al. 2016).

Over 900 IFP alumni reported that they have started new social justice-oriented programs and organizations, speaking to the program's impact in empowering alumni to make creative and innovative contributions in their home communities (Martel and Bhandari 2016). Over 60% of participants in the African Alumni Study identified strategy development, determining policies, and establishing ethical values for their organizations as roles they play that contribute to social change. A smaller percentage noted their contributions to leading political change through coalition-building,

lobbying, and drafting laws (Marsh et al. 2016). The study of the AFGRAD/ATLAS program alumni also elaborates on the importance of international experiences in cultivating many of the “soft” skills they associate with their ability to lead change upon returning to their home contexts, such as critical thinking, intercultural communication, research techniques, changed attitudes toward work, and managerial skills.

In addition to technical and non-technical skills, alumni also highlighted the importance of relationships and networks formed through international study in achieving impact in their communities. Several participants in the African alumni study cite specific examples of leveraging their international networks to advance partnerships and initiatives with African institutions and provide a lifeline of support during challenging periods of economic downturn and political instability (Marsh et al. 2016). Further elaborating on the key role that social networks play in shaping career trajectories, Martel and Bhandari (2016) report that alumni who remain in communication with other IFP alumni are more aware of social and cultural diversity issues and report fewer problems in finding work. The expansion of social networks and their role in facilitating social change is an understudied contribution of international education that merits further attention.

## 6.6 THE CHALLENGES OF AN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

In addition to the ample evidence that students incur significant benefits through studying abroad, research also highlights numerous challenges. These challenges cluster around two sets of assumptions:

- *The skills-transfer assumption:* The first cluster of challenges problematizes the assumption that students sponsored to study abroad will return home with relevant skills that could not be acquired locally. In light of this assumption, it is important to consider the extent to which research suggests that skills gained abroad are locally relevant and useful as well as the options available for obtaining such skills at local institutions.
- *The guaranteed learning assumption:* The second cluster of challenges problematizes the assumption that students sponsored to study abroad will maximize the potential of this learning experience without intentional support to do so. It is important to explore what research suggests as effective practices for designing impactful learning environments and experiences.

Problematizing both of these assumptions opens possibilities for re-envisioning the design of international scholarship programs.

One of the most frequently referenced challenges in relation to international scholarship programs for students from contexts in the Global South is that of “brain drain.” This highlights the extent to which the success of scholarships designed for the purpose of skills-transfer hinges on the return decisions of program participants upon graduation and the relevance and transferability of skills acquired abroad (see Campbell, Chap. 9 on return decisions and Marsh and Oyelere, Chap. 11 on brain drain). Several studies of international scholarship program alumni confirm that many alumni do indeed choose to return home (Aguirre International 2004; Martel and Bhandari 2016; Marsh et al. 2016). They also suggest that many of those who remain abroad make significant contributions to their families and communities of origin that include but are not limited to remittances. Widespread expectations to return, however, can pose difficult dilemmas for scholarship recipients. This is particularly the case for those from contexts where conditions are not conducive to return and/or families who encourage them to pursue career opportunities abroad upon graduation, sometimes in sharp contrast with the expectations of program funders.

Scholarship recipients also face the significant challenges of navigating the high expectations that those in their home communities associate with international credentials and translating their skills gained abroad into drastically different contexts. For example, undergraduate students from Rwanda studying in the USA through an international scholarship program widely expressed concern with the discrepancy between the limited skills and resources acquired abroad and the exceedingly high expectations of employers and community members at home (Baxter 2014). Students emphasized that they would need further training or professional experience upon completing their bachelor’s degree before they would be adequately prepared to return home and contribute. Moreover, the home country context—with varying government, labor market, and societal conditions—also factors in to the ways international alumni may be able to contribute (Campbell 2016).

Along with the mismatch between skills and expectations, those pursuing degrees in more technically oriented fields such as engineering expressed the difficulty of translating the skills acquired abroad in state-of-the-art facilities to contexts with less advanced infrastructure and under-resourced laboratories. In a study of leadership perceptions and practices among alumni of the Humphrey Fellows program, Dant (2010) similarly found that students

struggled to apply their US-based leadership training upon returning to their home contexts. He points out a variety of problematic assumptions in predominant leadership theories and argues that leadership trainings must be informed by the diverse cultural and political spaces in which participants operate. Moreover, the challenge of applying leadership and other skills in home country “operating spaces” can be particularly challenging for women returning to contexts where gender inequality is prominent (Wild and Scheyvens 2012). Exposure to more horizontal social structures and egalitarian gender norms on university campuses, while enlightening, lack applicability back home within strongly hierarchical and patriarchal societies.

Although pursuing higher education closer to home might minimize such challenges, programs grounded in the skills-transfer model assume that the benefits of studying internationally outweigh those that might be incurred through study at a local institution. Yet it is important to consider the contributions—and even advantages—of study at national or regional institutions. While studying internationally may provide novel perspectives on one’s own institutions and political processes, it also may distance program participants and make it difficult for them to engage in systems and processes that in many cases change or grow less familiar while they are away. This is a particular concern for students at the undergraduate level who travel abroad with limited familiarity and experience engaging with these systems.

While alumni of international scholarship programs may attribute their civic engagement to aspects of their international education, several recent studies carried out by the Higher Education Research and Advocacy Network in Africa (HERANA) demonstrate how higher education institutions in Africa are also contributing to civic engagement and suggest that similar outcomes may be achieved or even enhanced through study at institutions within one’s home country or region. The HERANA Phase I studies, which examined civic engagement among alumni of four African flagship universities (Botswana, Cape Town, Dar es Salaam, and Nairobi), show that university-educated political leaders and citizens play key roles in the state and civil society institutions that characterize modern democracy in Africa (Mattes and Mozaffar 2011). They also reveal that students in African flagship universities practice high levels of political engagement and are highly critical of the quality of democracy in their countries (Luescher-Mamashela et al. 2015). These studies suggest that African universities are “political hothouses” with considerable potential to serve as effective training grounds for citizenship competencies.

The goal of the second phase of the HERANA studies was to examine the role of student engagement in equipping students for public service in order to enhance citizenship and equip the next generation of democratic leaders in Africa (Luescher-Mamashela et al. 2015). Student engagement surveys brought to light in the first phase of studies were used to further illuminate how students' experiences contribute to the development of citizenship competencies. Findings confirm many well-established relationships such as the importance of active and collaborative learning for student retention and success, as well as critical and creative thinking, experiences with diversity, and inclusive campus climates (Denson and Zhang 2010; Winchester-Seeto et al. 2012). The HERANA Citizenship Module, designed to study and improve the student experience related to citizenship in Africa, provides a useful tool for addressing questions regarding the advantages and disadvantages of cultivating civic capacities locally versus abroad.

The assumption that international study inevitably contributes to the competencies associated with leading social change is challenged by research on study abroad and service-learning. As previously discussed, maximizing the learning from study abroad typically requires skilled facilitators who intentionally create spaces for reflection, especially among undergraduates. Nevertheless, although the benefits are clear, *mandating* participation in both reflection and service activities has the potential to reduce the benefits. Research suggests that voluntary engagement in which students exercise their own agency to participate is associated with the greatest learning gains (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005). Studies also suggest that students in certain fields of study—particularly in the STEM fields common among international scholarship recipients—are less likely to engage in community service and civic engagement than others (Pascarella and Terenzini 2005). This finding has fueled efforts at many institutions to design targeted service-learning opportunities for students in fields such as engineering with traditionally lower levels of engagement.

Another challenge is sustaining the impact of learning experiences beyond program completion. Even when students benefit from the profound learning experiences that international study and service-learning can offer, they often struggle to maintain newfound commitments and practices upon returning to their familiar routines and home contexts. In a longitudinal case study of how US students participating in an international service-learning program in Nicaragua experienced “perspective transformation,” Kieley (2004) found that the long-term impact of these perspective

transformations on lifestyle habits and engagement in social action was ambiguous and problematic. Students reported difficulty with reintegrating, applying their emerging global consciousness, and communicating about their experiences when challenging dominant US cultural norms, beliefs, and practices such as consumerism. These struggles to translate critical awareness into meaningful action upon program completion points to a challenge that is similarly faced by international scholarship recipients as they return to contexts that hinder their capacity to work toward change.

Kieley suggests that social networks can play a role in helping program alumni sustain their social vision and avoid struggling in isolation. Research on social networks similarly suggests that maintaining connections with program alumni is an effective strategy for encouraging alumni to remain civically engaged (Farrow and Yuan 2011). Although social networks have not been an explicit focus of international scholarship program research to date, frequent references in existing scholarship program research to the important role of alumni networks indicate that this may be a particularly fruitful area for future research and program intervention.

## 6.7 IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM DESIGN

In summary, research on international scholarship programs and learning abroad affirm that international study is a powerful learning modality that contributes to the development of intercultural competency, global citizenship, and the ability to interact respectfully and productively across differences—outcomes that program alumni associate with their institutional and societal contributions. At the same time, it is clear that some of the core rationales and assumptions that undergird support for international scholarship programs are challenged by existing research findings as well as major recent changes in global higher education.

First and foremost, designing international scholarship programs to challenge the deficit view of universities in the Global South has the potential to enhance their contributions to social change. The outward mobility of students from the Global South continues to privilege institutions in the Global North and reinforce their position as centers of knowledge production and innovation in ways that are problematic. While higher education institutions in the Global South continue to face complex challenges and international education offers unique benefits, scholarship programs can be designed to strengthen capacity at local institutions and enhance their potential to equip students as agents of social change.



Instead of replicating traditional mobility patterns, international scholarship programs have the potential to transform them by incorporating the advantages of international study while also drawing on the strengths and enhancing the capacity of local higher education institutions. This approach is exemplified by programs such as the Ford International Fellows Program and the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program that have supported students to pursue international study not only at top institutions in the Global North but also at institutions that are emerging as centers of higher education excellence within the Global South.

Traditional mobility patterns are also challenged by university collaborations that draw on the strengths of both local and international institutions through innovative program designs. For example, the Mastercard Foundation recently funded two such collaborative initiatives through the second phase of their Scholars Program, currently the largest scholarship opportunity available to African students. The partnership between Arizona State University in the USA and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana is designed to lower barriers and expand access to graduate education by providing students who have completed their first 3 years of undergraduate study in their home country with an opportunity to pursue an accelerated master's degree abroad.<sup>3</sup> It also includes faculty exchange to foster mutual learning and supports students as they prepare to travel abroad and transition to opportunities in Ghana upon program completion. Similarly, the Commonwealth Scholarships include split-site initiatives that involve students studying for 3 years at their home institution plus an additional year in the United Kingdom (see Kirkland in this volume for further details). Both of these initiatives leverage and enhance the strengths of North American and African universities while expanding access to quality higher education opportunities.

An additional design imperative is for international—and domestic—scholarship programs to include signature programming that aligns with program objectives and provides the structure and support to ensure that student learning related to intercultural competency and global citizenship is maximized. While host universities offer a vast array of opportunities to develop intercultural and leadership skills, the benefits of structured learning are clear and it cannot be assumed that all scholarship recipients will acquire such benefits through a hands-off approach. Programs can be designed to realize the full potential of international immersion experiences and advance social change objectives by providing adequate support for advisors with relevant intercultural skills to maximize learning and reflection.

This is particularly important given that university curricula are increasingly oriented toward equipping students for the needs of local and global labor markets and less focused on civic education. It is also crucial to support educational opportunities at universities that maintain a strong commitment to contributing to the public good and preparing thoughtful, active citizens.

## 6.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Research also has a role to play in further illuminating the potential pathways to social change through international higher education. The challenges examined in this chapter highlight several themes that merit further research. These include the role of context in shaping how students from diverse backgrounds make meaning of their international learning experiences, the role of signature programming at both the program-wide and host-university levels in enhancing learning outcomes, and the role of social relationships and networks in supporting successful transitions, sustaining commitments, and working toward social change.

Existing research demonstrates that the context in which students study as well as where they come from and move to upon program completion influences what students learn and how they apply their knowledge upon program completion. Still, the role of intersecting identities and socioeconomic background of individual program participants in shaping how students interpret and make sense of their learning abroad experiences remains largely under-researched (Baxter 2014; Dolby 2004; Gargano 2009). Students' culturally conditioned ways of being and knowing have significant bearing on the things they learn abroad. In addition to the interaction with factors such as age, gender, prior intercultural experience, and language proficiency, cultural influences matter:

Each of us learns through transactions between ourselves and the environment; what we bring to the environment—that is, our genetic makeup, our cultural makeup, and the ways that these have equipped and conditioned us to learn and to know—is ultimately more important than the environment in determining how we will experience it, and what we will learn from it. (Vande Berg et al. 2012, p. 20)

The ways in which students' experiences are mediated through their cultural background and worldview merit further consideration. Future studies might explore how international scholarship recipients make

meaning from their encounters with difference and critical learning experiences abroad.

Evidence also suggests that the degree of disjuncture between one's home context and the context in which they study is related to the difficulty of a student's transition and learning experience abroad. In other words, drastic differences can make for difficult transitions as students begin and complete their studies. In light of the interest of many scholarship programs in targeting support to students from highly disadvantaged backgrounds, future research might examine the transition experiences of scholarship recipients from such backgrounds as compared with students experiencing less disjuncture. For example, a comparison of the experiences of Ghanaian students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds studying at public and private institutions in Ghana, in South Africa, and in the USA would illuminate the extent to which the challenges associated with cultural adjustment and applying technical, leadership, and civic engagement skills upon program completion vary across a range of university experiences. Similarly, comparative study of intercultural development across a variety of institutional contexts among domestic and international scholarship recipients would yield valuable insights.

It is clear that programming designed to facilitate reflection on cross-cultural interactions, observations, and engagement through service-learning has the potential to enhance what students learn through international education. Despite this evidence, research that illuminates the effectiveness of different learning activities and environments is particularly limited. The focus of international scholarship program and study abroad research on quantitative studies and program evaluations leaves a "black box" as to the details of how learning occurs. Further illumination is needed through the use of mixed and qualitative research methods (Dant 2010).

Opportunities for researchers include comparing distinct scholarship programs operating within a similar context and engaging in qualitative research to examine in greater depth how signature programming and different aspects of the international university experience facilitate learning. We need qualitative studies that elaborate on how students derive meaning from various aspects of their international learning experiences and how their understandings of concepts such as leadership, civic engagement, and innovation and associated competencies change over time and are shaped by their international study. As Dant's (2010) study demonstrates, grounded theory methodology can offer an effective means for getting a deeper contextual understanding of complex and dynamic situations. Its ability to

allow for flexibility, and to capture evolving contexts as they unfold, offers a high degree of interpretative power and an avenue for developing useful and predictive theoretical constructs concerning the role of program design and context.

A final domain for further research is on the role that international university experiences play in developing social networks and social capital as well as the ways in which this dimension of international education shapes alumni trajectories. Evidence reviewed in this chapter points to the profound ways in which relationships matter across all domains of learning and impact. In addition to the role of relationships with faculty members, mentors, and peers in influencing the student learning experience, social networks formed during the program and maintained post-graduation play an important role in helping alumni access career opportunities and pursue their goals upon program completion. These studies show that it is not only the acquisition of skills and credentials but also the development of personal relationships and social networks that is critical in opening doors for program alumni. In many cases, those who study abroad gain access to influential professional and social networks that confer social and occupational status (Dant 2010). Further exploration of how networks are formed and leveraged by international scholarship recipients would inform future efforts to support the creation and maintenance of strong alumni networks.

## 6.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that international education offers important benefits to enhance learning in key domains that contribute to social change, yet needs to be re-envisioned to challenge problematic assumptions, disrupt traditional mobility patterns, and maximize learning. It has demonstrated that immersion in an unfamiliar academic and social context holds great potential for impactful learning that can be maximized through structured reflection, while at the same time acknowledging that higher education institutions in the Global South are increasingly well poised to provide technical skills and leadership development opportunities that are contextually relevant and closer to home. The benefits and challenges of international study revealed by existing research, in conjunction with higher education changes in both the Global North and the Global South, call for innovative program designs on the part of both scholarship programs and host universities, and further research to enhance international immersion experiences as a pathway to social change. In an interconnected world

where misunderstanding and fear of difference have significant consequences, researching and designing transformative international learning experiences that are responsive to the needs of all learners remains a pressing priority.

## NOTES

1. Throughout this article, the terms Global North and Global South are used to distinguish between resource rich countries, the majority of which are located in the northern hemisphere, and low-income countries largely located in the southern hemisphere. This is done with recognition that these terms are problematic generalizations for which there is no suitable alternative. The terms are used with the intent of drawing attention to historic disparities of power, based largely on availability of resources, that continue to exist and perpetuate historical structures of inequality (Altbach 2007; Teferra 2008).
2. The Association of American Colleges and Universities defines civic engagement as “working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.” (excerpted from *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*, edited by Thomas Ehrlich, published by Oryx Press, 2000, Preface, page vi). They have developed a civic engagement value rubric to provide a framework for evaluating learning outcomes associated with civic engagement. These include diversity of communities and cultures, analysis of knowledge, civic identity and commitment, civic communication, civic action and reflection, and civic contexts/structures.
3. As Director of the MasterCard Foundation Scholars Program at Arizona State University, the author was directly involved in the design and ongoing implementation of the *Strengthening Institutional Linkages* initiative referenced here.

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Aryn's research examines the learning experiences and trajectories of internationally mobile students, focusing in particular on the convergence of expectations that students encounter and negotiate in transnational education spaces. Her current projects include a 3-year study of social networks, engagement with an online social networking and learning platform, and self-efficacy among scholarship recipients studying at African and North American universities. She received her doctorate in comparative and international development education from the University of Minnesota in the USA. Previously, she lived and worked in Rwanda as an international educator and conducted educational research and program evaluations throughout East Africa.