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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**Experiential Learning in Study Abroad: Comparing Online and In-Person Experiences**

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**| ABSTRACT**

With advancements in digital technology, virtual educational platforms can affordably provide learners with engaging learning experience about global histories, cultural values and technologies, yet questions remain about how internet-based learning compares to direct cultural immersion in fostering comprehensive global perspectives. Thus, this study investigates how internet-based knowledge acquisition versus in-person experiences influence students' global perspectives, specifically examining a study abroad program to South Korea using Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory as the theoretical framework. A mixed-methods approach was employed with 13 STEM graduate students from a U.S. university participating in a short-term study abroad program to South Korea in summer 2024. Data collection included pre-trip and post-trip surveys measuring cultural knowledge, technological understanding, and learning satisfaction, complemented by qualitative analysis of student daily blog reflections documenting their experiences and cultural observations. Findings revealed statistically significant increases ( $p < 0.05$ ) in students' self-reported knowledge across multiple domains, which provide immersive and interactive interaction opportunities with local environments that online methods alone cannot replicate. This study also discusses how pre-trip preparation using virtual sources lays the groundwork for greater trip satisfaction during the on-the-ground experience. Students reported that while online resources provided foundational knowledge, in-person experience offered deeper, more nuanced cultural insights and transformative learning opportunities. Moreover, the role of faculty trip leaders emerged as crucial in this educational process, providing essential guidance and support that enhanced the overall learning experience. The study also discusses the limitations, including the small sample size and the focus on a single short-term program, suggesting the need for broader and longitudinal research. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on effective study abroad programs, advocating for a balanced integration of online preparation with in-person cultural immersion that maximizes educational value in study abroad programs. Results suggest that digital learning serves as an effective preparatory tool, but direct experiential learning remains essential for developing comprehensive global competencies and intercultural understanding to become a better global citizen in an increasingly interconnected world. These findings have implications for educators designing study abroad programs and policymakers supporting international education initiatives.

**| KEYWORDS**

Experiential Learning, Digital Preparation, Study Abroad, Global Perspectives, South Korea Short-term Programs Mixed-methods Research, Cultural Immersion, STEM Education.

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**1. Introduction**

In an increasingly interconnected world, the way individuals acquire knowledge and form perspectives about foreign cultures and countries is evolving. The advent of the internet has dramatically expanded access to information, allowing individuals to learn about distant lands without leaving their homes. Simultaneously, global travel remains a powerful means of experiencing

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different cultures firsthand. This dichotomy between virtual and physical experiences raises important questions about the comparative impact of these two modes of learning on global perspective.

The internet offers a vast array of resources, from news articles and blogs to multimedia content, providing a comprehensive yet often curated and filtered view of the world. On the other hand, in-person experiences offer unmediated, immersive encounters with different cultures, fostering direct interaction and personal engagement. Understanding how these different modes of learning shape individuals' perceptions is crucial, particularly in the context of an increasingly digitalized society.

This paper aims to explore the impact of internet-based knowledge versus in-person experiences on individuals' global perspectives, using South Korea as a case study. By examining travelers' motivations, their preparation for trips, and their pre-trip knowledge, this study seeks to uncover how these factors influence their perceptions and understanding of South Korea. The methodology of this study is inspired by experiential learning theory, particularly Kolb's Learning Cycle. By comparing pre-trip online learning with the in-person experiences of students who traveled to South Korea, this research aims to provide insights into how each mode of learning contributes to a comprehensive understanding of a foreign culture.

### **1.1 Research Questions**

The study aims to provide insights into how different modes of information acquisition shape understanding and attitudes towards foreign countries such as South Korea, thereby informing educational practices, travel planning, and cultural exchange programs. This study will try to answer the following questions:

- How well did students' pre-trip knowledge, expectations, and post-trip views fit with their perceived learning outcomes and attainment of study abroad goals?
- How does the integration of online learning with in-person travel experiences impact students' overall satisfaction and learning outcomes, particularly in the context of Kolb's experiential learning theory?
- What are the primary motivations of students to experience in-person travel to South Korea for study abroad program instead of online travel experiences?
- How can faculty trip leaders best prepare students for travel abroad to maximize both online and in-person learning experiences?

### **1.2 Background of the Study**

Study abroad programs have evolved significantly, with recent data from 2021/22 showing that 65% of students opt for short-term programs (8 weeks or less), 33% for mid-length terms, and only 3% for long-term programs (opendoorsdata.org, 2023). This study was based on 13 STEM students at same university in United States who participated in programs of study abroad to South Korea on Summer, 2024.

Study abroad experiences are associated with numerous benefits, including higher employability and starting salaries. Studying abroad doubles the likelihood of finding work within 12 months after graduation and increases beginning pay by 25% (Schmidt & Pardo, 2017).

### **1.3 Rationale of the Study**

With the increasing accessibility of virtual learning tools, it is essential to evaluate their effectiveness in fostering comprehensive cultural understanding compared to traditional study abroad programs (Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2019). This research is particularly relevant in the post-pandemic era, where travel restrictions and advancements in technology have made virtual learning more prevalent.

By focusing on a specific case study—students' experiences in South Korea—this research will provide concrete examples of how pre-trip online learning and in-person experiences contribute to shaping individuals' perceptions and understanding of a foreign culture. The findings from this study will inform educators and policymakers on how best to design and implement educational programs that effectively enhance students' global competencies.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study extends to multiple stakeholders, including educators, policymakers, and students. For educators, understanding the strengths and limitations of both internet-based and in-person learning will aid in developing more effective curricula that integrate the best aspects of both approaches. Policymakers can use the insights gained to support educational initiatives that promote global understanding and cultural competence.

For students, the findings will highlight the benefits and potential drawbacks of different modes of learning, helping them make more informed decisions about their educational journeys. Additionally, this study will contribute to the broader academic discourse on experiential learning and global education, providing valuable data and analysis that can be used in future research. In conclusion, this research aims to bridge the gap between virtual and physical learning experiences, offering a comprehensive analysis of how each mode of learning impacts individuals' global perspectives. By doing so, it seeks to enhance our understanding of effective educational practices in an increasingly interconnected world.

## **2. Literature Review**

Research related with study abroad evolved since 1923 when the University of Delaware launched America's first study abroad program (Long, 2018). This literature review explores some of these existing research papers and theoretical frameworks on the impact of online learning and in-person experiences on individuals' global perspectives.

### **2.1 Online versus In-Person Learning in the Era of Digital Transformation**

The acceleration of digital transformation following the COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally reshaped debates over educational modality and it is highly context dependent. Recent systematic reviews underscore three interlocking trends: (1) rapid campus digitization, (2) the proliferation of innovative teaching methods, and (3) the rise of personalized learning ecosystems.

Online learning offers flexibility, accessibility, and a wealth of resources, enabling students to prepare for their in-person experiences at their own pace (Schwartz et al, 2020). Virtually Studying abroad programs build essential skills and knowledge to tackle global challenges, including saving time, energy, and money on travel; but in-country study abroad experiences provide a competitive edge in the workforce (Davis & Knight, 2021). In contrast, in-person learning offers immersive, hands-on experiences that are difficult to replicate in an online environment. According to Marques et al (2020), physical presence in a new cultural setting allows for deeper engagement through sensory experiences, personal interactions, and direct participation in local customs. For example, complementary work in medical education found that 85.1% of students rated in-person active-learning groups higher on educational quality, yet 71.1% reported superior work-life balance in virtual formats (Tsai & Larson, 2025). While online learning provides a structured and accessible way to acquire knowledge, in-person experiences offer the opportunity for spontaneous, unstructured learning that arises from direct interaction with the environment and local people (Mule, Aloisio & Audley, 2018).

Mixed-methods surveys in U.S. universities likewise show an emerging equilibrium in student preferences: while face-to-face instruction is still perceived as superior for interaction and structured support, flexibility and cost advantages continue to drive demand for online and hybrid options (Alharbi & Alharbi, 2022). Collectively, the literature indicates that modality alone is a poor predictor of learning outcomes; rather, pedagogical design, student self-regulation, and institutional support determine success. Bente and Breuer (2010) suggest that virtual experiences serve as a preparatory stage, enriching subsequent in-person experiences by providing foundational knowledge and context. For study-abroad educators, this implies that pre-trip virtual orientation should not be viewed as a substitute for immersion but as a complementary phase that builds conceptual foundations and optimizes on-site experiential depth. Strategic integration of online and in-person elements can therefore maximize cultural, professional, and academic payoffs.

### **2.2 Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory: Contemporary Applications**

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) provides a robust framework for understanding how individuals learn through experience (Passarelli & Kolb, 2023). A 2021 systematic review confirmed that ELT interventions consistently boost intrinsic motivation and classroom engagement by embedding cycles of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation in authentic tasks. Each stage is essential for effective learning, as it allows individuals to immerse themselves in an experience, reflect on it, form concepts, and test these concepts in new situations (Kong, 2021). This iterative procedure enables students to completely interact with the content and apply their understanding in a variety of settings.

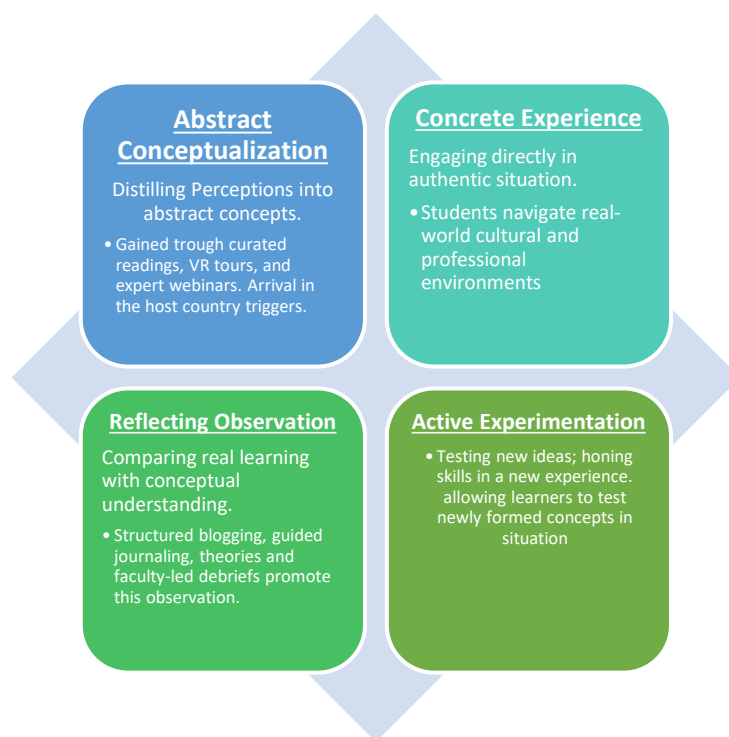


Figure 1 Kolb's Learning Theory  
Source: (Wijnen-Meijer et al., 2022).

Kolb's theory is particularly relevant to study abroad programs, as it emphasizes the role of direct experience in learning. Students can directly engage with the material they have studied online, applying theoretical knowledge in practical settings. Lee and Song (2019) applied ELT to study abroad programs and found that students who actively participated in cultural activities and engaged in reflective practices demonstrated higher levels of learning and personal development. Furthermore, blended ELT models that interlink live cases, simulations, and digital reflection platforms report stronger knowledge transfer and professional readiness among participants.

### **2.3 Motivations behind in-person travel to South Korea instead of online travel experiences**

South Korea offers a unique case study for examining the impact of online and in-person learning. The country is renowned for its technological advancements and rich cultural heritage, making it an attractive destination for educational travel. Studies have shown that travelers to South Korea often have preconceived notions shaped by media and online content, which are sometimes challenged or deepened by their in-person experiences (Kim, 2007). However, the motivations for students choosing in-person travel experiences over online alternatives in study abroad programs are multifaceted, often rooted in the desire for cultural immersion, personal growth, and practical engagement. According to Hoffa and DePaul (2010), students value the chance to experience a culture firsthand, as it allows for deeper understanding and appreciation of cultural nuances. Engaging with native speakers in everyday contexts helps students develop language proficiency more effectively than virtual interactions alone. Allen (2010) highlights that immersion in a linguistic environment accelerates the learning process and improves fluency, as students are continually challenged to use the language in real-time situations. Another significant motivation for choosing in-person experience is the potential for personal and professional development. As Potts (2018) note, studying abroad provides students with valuable skills such as adaptability, problem-solving, and cross-cultural communication. Finally, research indicates that students are drawn to the tangible and interactive aspects of studying abroad, which provide opportunities that cannot be replicated through virtual means. The experience of navigating a new environment, dealing with unexpected challenges, and interacting with people from diverse backgrounds fosters resilience and broadens students' worldviews. While online learning offers valuable preparatory insights, it is the in-person experience that often provides the profound and transformative learning opportunities students seek.

### **2.4 Role of Faculty Trip Leaders in Preparing Students for Study Abroad Programs**

Study abroad program leaders are instrumental in equipping students to make the most of their online and in-person educational experiences, setting them up for success in global learning environments. Effective preparation involves comprehensive pre-departure orientations, academic mentoring, and ongoing support throughout the program. Brown and

Rubin (2017) emphasize that well-prepared students are more likely to achieve their learning goals and have satisfying experiences.

Tiessen (2024) suggests that faculty leaders can enhance students' preparedness by integrating online learning tools such as virtual tours and cultural simulations into the pre-departure curriculum. These tools provide students with a preliminary understanding of the host culture, enabling them to navigate cultural differences more effectively upon arrival. Forbes (2018) further argue that reflective practices facilitated by faculty leaders are crucial for helping students process their experiences and draw meaningful connections between their observations and academic content.

## **2.5 Summary**

The literature review reveals that online learning offers flexibility and resources but lacks the immersive cultural experiences provided by in-person programs, which are essential for developing global competencies. This can be better understood by reflecting Kolb's experiential learning theory. Motivations for in-person travel, such as to South Korea, include cultural immersion and language proficiency, which online experiences cannot fully replicate. Finally, Faculty trip leaders are crucial in preparing students by combining online tools with reflective practices to maximize their learning.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Philosophy**

This research adopts a pragmatic research philosophy, which is particularly suitable for studies aiming to address practical problems through the integration of different methodologies (Yardley & Bishop, 2017). The focus is on finding solutions and understanding the impact of online and in-person learning experiences on global perspectives.

### **3.2 Research Approach**

In this study, qualitative and quantitative approaches are combined to form a mixed-methods strategy. This method is advantageous in that it facilitates a thorough examination of the data, thereby facilitating a more profound comprehension of the phenomena being investigated (Alase, 2017). The qualitative aspect involves analyzing the content from the students' blogs, while the quantitative aspect includes analyzing the pre-trip and post-trip survey data.

### **3.3 Research Design**

According to Berman (2017), the study paradigm is an exploratory sequential design, which means that quantitative data is collected and analyzed after qualitative data. This design helps to build a robust understanding of the students' experiences and perspectives. The qualitative findings from the blog analysis provide a foundation for interpreting the quantitative survey results, ensuring that the survey questions are contextually relevant and aligned with the experiential learning framework.

### **3.4 Data Collection**

#### **3.4.1 Qualitative Data Collection**

Qualitative data were collected from the 13 students' blogs, where they documented their experiences and reflections during their trip to South Korea for their study abroad program. The participants are STEM students at the same university and most of them are graduate level students. 63.6% of the total travelers were male and 36.4% of them were female. They wrote about their perceptions, insights and experiences on daily blogs. The blogs were coded to identify themes related to their learning experiences, cultural interactions, and technological observations. This narrative data provides rich, detailed insights into the students' personal experiences and perceptions.

#### **3.4.2 Quantitative Data Collection**

Quantitative data were collected from the same students through pre-trip and post-trip surveys. The pre-trip survey measured the students' knowledge and expectations regarding South Korean culture, technology, and other relevant aspects. The post-trip survey assessed their actual experiences, knowledge gained, and changes in perceptions after the trip. The survey questions were designed based on the themes identified in the qualitative analysis and covered areas such as cultural awareness, technological understanding, and overall satisfaction with the learning experience.

#### **3.5 Sample Size Justification & Data Saturation**

The sample size of 13 participants was determined based on several methodological considerations appropriate for this exploratory mixed-methods study. In qualitative research, smaller samples allow for intensive, in-depth analysis while maintaining data quality and researcher ability to exercise full control over potential confounders. Research demonstrates that qualitative studies can reach saturation at relatively small sample sizes, with studies showing that 9-17 interviews or focus groups can achieve adequate saturation (Lakens, 2022).

Data saturation in the qualitative component was achieved when no new themes emerged from analysis of the final participants' blog entries. The thematic analysis process followed Braun and Clarke's six-step framework: familiarization with data, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and report writing (Waheed & Waseem, 2023). This systematic approach ensured comprehensive pattern identification across all blog entries while maintaining analytical rigor.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

#### **3.6.1 Qualitative Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data from the blogs. This entailed the categorization of the data to identify recurring themes and patterns that were associated with the students' learning experiences (Xu Zammit, 2020). In accordance with Kolb's theory, the themes were further classified into more general groups, including hands-on experiences, introspective observations, theoretical frameworks, and practical application.

#### **3.6.2 Quantitative Data Analysis**

Statistical and graphical methods were employed to analyze the quantitative data from the surveys. The data was broken down using descriptive statistics, which provided a comprehensive overview of the students' pre-trip knowledge and post-trip experiences. Comparing two survey answers with paired t-tests revealed substantial improvements in students' knowledge and views.

### **3.7 Integrated Theoretical Framework & Mixed-Methods Design**

This study is grounded in Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, which provides a conceptual foundation for analyzing the students' learning experiences in South Korea. The learning process is understood through; Concrete Experience: Students engaged in direct, immersive experiences such as visiting cultural landmarks and interacting with local people. Reflective Observation: These experiences were revisited and examined through reflective blog entries and group discussions. Abstract Conceptualization: Students developed insights and understanding by connecting reflections with broader concepts or learning goals. Active Experimentation: New knowledge was applied to future actions, including sharing experiences with peers or incorporating lessons into academic and personal contexts.

To investigate this process, the study utilized a convergent mixed methods design with integrated triangulation strategies to enhance the robustness of findings. Integration occurred at three key levels:

- At the design level, quantitative survey data and qualitative blog reflections were collected and analyzed concurrently, enabling the comparison of different data forms.
- At the method level, triangulation protocols were used to align survey outcomes and thematic analysis of blog content with Kolb's learning model.
- At the interpretation level, results from both data streams were synthesized to generate a comprehensive understanding of how digital preparation and real-world experiences collectively shape students' global learning outcomes.

This unified framework ensures that both empirical evidence and experiential insights contribute to a deeper understanding of learning in international contexts.

### **3.8 Ethical Implications**

The privacy and impartiality of the participants are guaranteed by this research's adherence to ethical standards. Prior to participating in the investigation, each participant executed informed consent. In order to safeguard the privacy of the students, the data that was collected was anonymized and study objectives were clearly informed. The participants were guaranteed the right to disengage from the research at any time without incurring any adverse repercussions. Furthermore, the research had been approved by the appropriate institutional review board, guaranteeing that all rules of ethics were satisfied.

## **4. Results & Findings**

The findings are structured according to the themes identified in the literature review and research questions.

### **4.1 Comparison of Online and In-Person Learning**

#### **4.1.1 Qualitative Analysis**

The student blogs reveal that in-person experiences in South Korea offered unique learning opportunities that were difficult to replicate through online platforms. While online resources like YouTube provided a useful background, immersion in the local

environment offered a deeper and more nuanced understanding. For example, student 11 noted, "YouTube University Prepared Me for Seoul, South Korea. Before this trip, I watched several videos about location and food." And student 4 said, "Seeing the technological advancements firsthand and interacting with locals gave me a deeper understanding of South Korea's culture and innovation, something that online research could not fully capture." Student 2 reflected, "The hands-on experience of tasting authentic Korean food and navigating the public transport system was invaluable."

These reflections align with Cheng and Erben's (2012) assertion that physical presence allows for deeper engagement through sensory experiences and personal interactions. The students highlighted the richness of experiencing cultural customs and daily life in Korea, which enhanced their understanding and appreciation of the culture beyond what they could learn online.

#### 4.1.2 Quantitative Analysis

The pre-trip survey data indicated high expectations for learning about South Korean technology and culture. Most students reported spending considerable time (5-10 hours) preparing for the trip, focusing on understanding cultural customs and technological advancements.

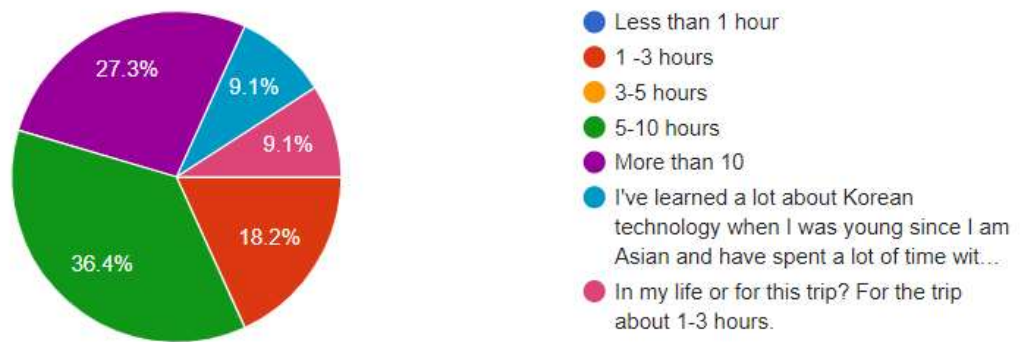


Figure 2 Pre trip Response of hour spent on Preparation.

The post-trip survey data revealed a significant increase in students' self-reported knowledge across various aspects, such as local laws, transportation, and technology innovations.

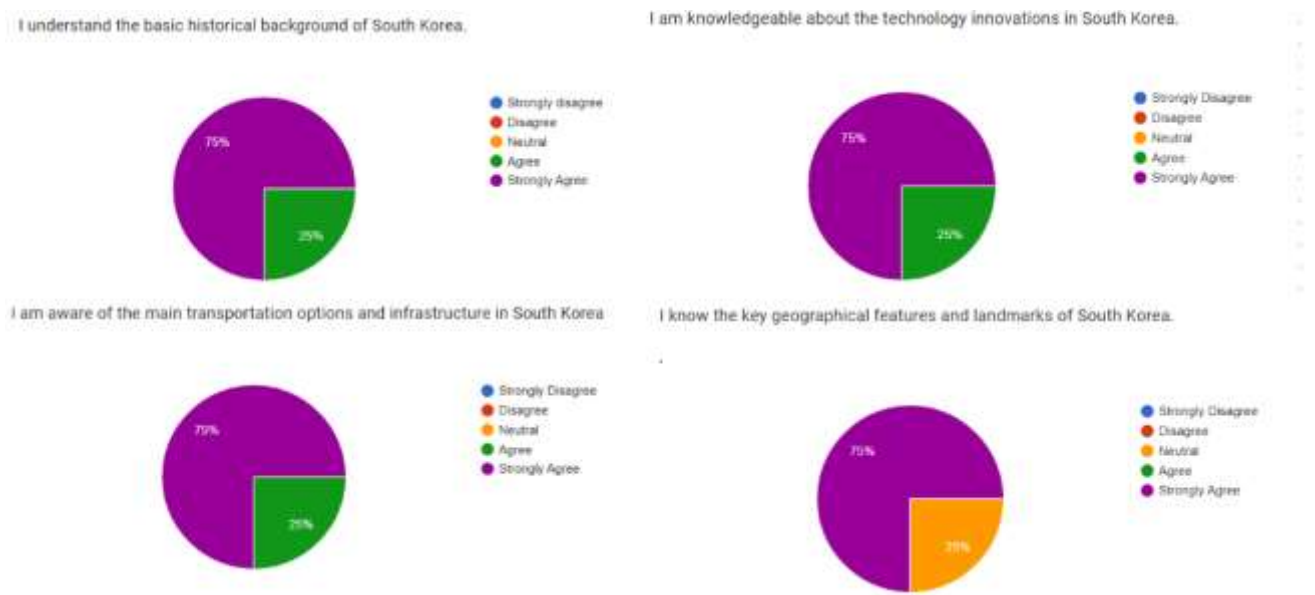


Figure 3 Post trip survey response.

A paired t-test comparing pre-trip and post-trip knowledge scores confirmed statistically significant increases ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the following areas:

- Awareness of main attractions and tourist destinations

- Understanding of cultural customs and etiquette
- Familiarity with typical cuisine and dining practices
- Knowledge of technological innovations

These findings suggest that in-person experiences significantly enhanced students' knowledge and understanding, supporting the view that combining online and in-person learning can provide a comprehensive educational experience.

## 4.2 Application of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory

### 4.2.1 Qualitative Analysis

Students' blog entries illustrated the application of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, particularly the stages of Concrete Experience and Reflective Observation. For instance, students described their Concrete Experiences, such as visiting tech companies and cultural sites. Student 11 wrote, "I began to reflect on the concepts I've learned from World, American, and African American History. I have an appreciation for Asian History and would like to learn more."

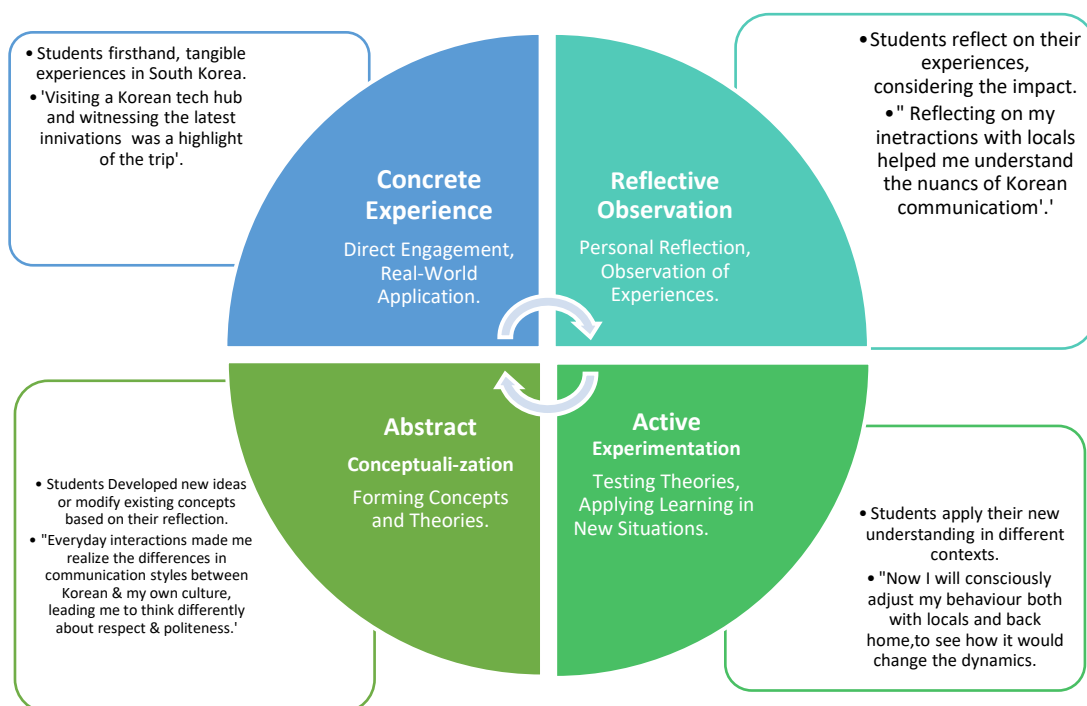


Figure 4 Experiential Learning Reflection on Kolb's Learning Theory.

Reflective Observation was evident in students' thoughtful reflections on their experiences. For example, after the trip student 7 noted, "Visiting Korea University was an exceptional experience. The vibrant academic environment, the beautiful campus, and the rich cultural heritage made it truly memorable. The food and culture are amazing while their technology and inventions are diverse and practical." These reflections indicate that students engaged in Reflective Observation, processing their experiences, and integrating them into their existing knowledge frameworks.

### 4.2.2 Quantitative Analysis

The post-trip survey results showed that students felt more confident in their understanding of South Korean culture and technology after the trip. The majority strongly agreed that their experiences had enriched their understanding of the subjects studied before the trip. This aligns with Kolb's theory, which emphasizes the importance of active experimentation and reflection in solidifying learning.

## 4.3 Motivations for In-Person Travel

### 4.3.1 Qualitative Analysis

The primary motivations for participating in the in-person trip, as reported in both the surveys and blogs, included a desire to experience the culture firsthand and learn about South Korean technology. One student emphasized, "I wanted to immerse myself in the culture, try the food, and see the technology that I've only read about."



Another student highlighted the professional benefits, stating, " All graduate students, Masters, and Doctoral students, should have experience understanding international business and how technology revolutionizes Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Technology is a basic necessity." These motivations align with the literature suggesting that students seek in-person experiences for cultural immersion, personal growth, and professional development (Hoffa & DePaul, 2010; Carroll, 2015).

Filtered Code (Motivations)	Theme	Sub-themes	Blog Statements
Cultural Immersion		Participants sought to experience South Korean culture directly.	- "It is a no-brainer that one of the best ways to learn about South Korean culture is to explore its cultural heritage" (Student 1).
Professional Development		Participants viewed the trip as an opportunity to gain professional insights and explore career interests.	- " The hub's cutting-edge infrastructure and concentration of leading tech companies showcased South Korea's commitment to innovation and technological advancement. The opportunity to explore this vibrant ecosystem and engage with industry leaders was truly enlightening, highlighting the Valley's pivotal role in shaping the future of technology" (Student 7). -"Interacting with passionate entrepreneurs and witnessing their cutting-edge solutions provided valuable insights into the future of various industries" (Student 7).
Technological Advancements		Participants visited smart cities and different tech companies in south Korea.	- "I have witnessed the appearance of smart homes, but South Korea just took it to the next level by using AI and other technology to turn cities into Smart Cities" (Student 13). -"I have never visited a Digital Forensics company, so this was a new experience for me. I am very interested in their endeavors to make digital forensics more attainable and easier, but it still slightly worries me on the privacy side as if all data is attainable and traceable, then it is no longer private" (Student 6).
Historical Insight		DMZ Experience which is not available online.	- "It was a somber yet incredibly impactful experience as we ventured into the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). The visit left us with a somber appreciation for all of our own privileges that are often overlook in our daily lives" (Student 4). -"We left the DMZ with a renewed commitment to understanding and bridging divides, both in our personal lives and in the global community" (Student 4).
Broadening Perspectives		Cultural and Cybersecurity Insights.	- "From exploring cutting-edge technology to immersing myself in the rich culture, Seoul has left an indelible

		<p>mark on me. This trip has not only broadened my understanding of cybersecurity but also deepened my appreciation for the interconnectedness of our world" (Student 4).</p> <p>-"Reflecting on our experiences, from exploring the vibrant tech hubs to delving into the rich history and culture, we prepared to depart Seoul and head home with new memories and perspectives" (Student 1).</p>
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Figure 5 Thematic Analysis of motivations for in-person travel to South Korea.

#### 4.3.2 Quantitative Analysis

The survey data showed that "learning about technology" and "experiencing the culture" were consistently ranked as the top motivations for the trip. Students' expectations regarding these aspects were met or exceeded, as evidenced by the high levels of satisfaction reported in the post-trip surveys.

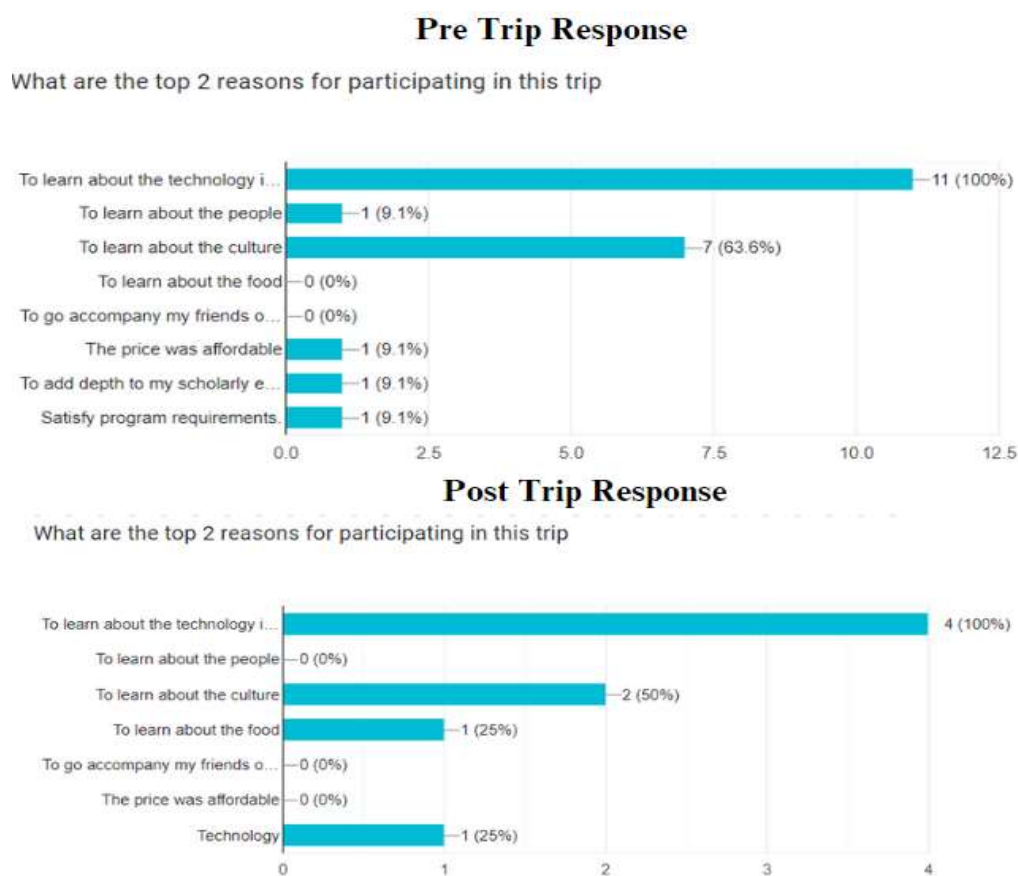


Figure 6 Tops Motivations for students to travel South Korea

#### 4.4 Role of Faculty Trip Leaders in Preparing Students

##### 4.4.1 Qualitative Analysis

The blog data and post-trip reflections indicated that faculty trip leaders played a crucial role in enhancing the students' learning experiences. One student (Student 2) noted, "The pre-trip seminars and guidance provided by our professors helped me feel prepared and confident when we arrived in Korea." The trip facilitator also thinks that that the global trips can be amazing tool for building community and making companions, she said that "The students demonstrated intellectual curiosity, enthusiasm and kindness to the people they met and each other. It was an amazing life-experience, and we have new appreciation of our friends in South Korea."

Students appreciated the structured preparation, including cultural briefings and language basics, which facilitated smoother integration into the new environment. The faculty's role in facilitating reflective practices, such as group discussions and blog writing, also helped students process their experiences and derive meaningful insights. One of the fellow travelers, student 11 who is also a teacher mentioned that this tour helped him to be a better teacher, and he stated that "Hopefully, I can plan a study abroad trip with my students and have them experience the life and cultural perspectives of Seoul, South Korea."

#### **4.4.2 Quantitative Analysis**

Post-trip survey results showed that students who attended all pre-trip seminars and engaged actively in preparatory activities reported higher levels of satisfaction and perceived learning outcomes. For example, after the trip students understand the south Korean technology better and perceived that there is distinct difference between USA and South Korean technological innovation and application.

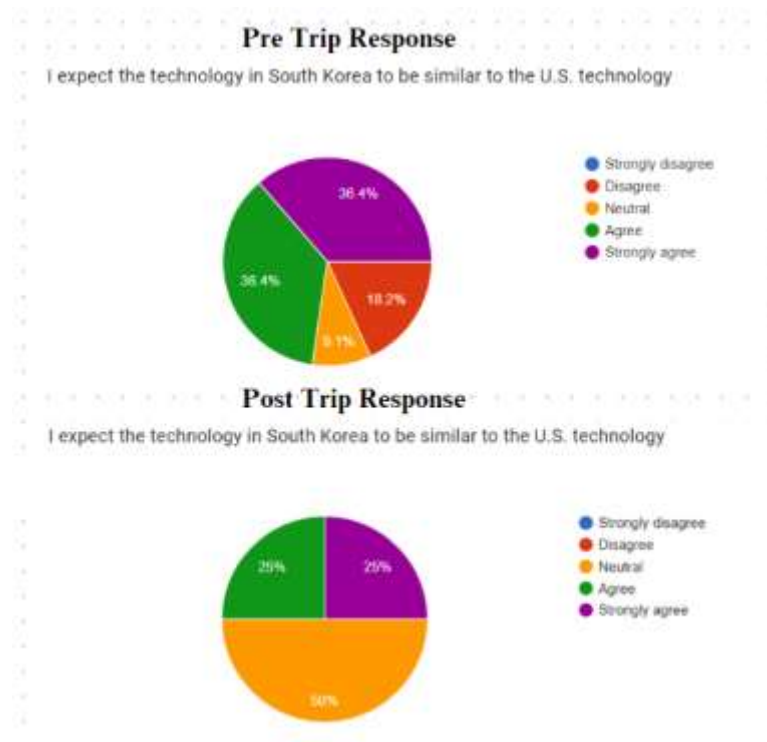


Figure 7 The percentage changes on the perception of two countries technology.

This finding underscores the importance of comprehensive pre-departure preparation and ongoing support from faculty, as highlighted by Sutton and Rubin (2010) and Raby, Rhodes & Biscarra, (2014).

#### **4.4.3 Summary**

The findings from this study confirm the significant benefits of in-person travel experiences over solely online learning for achieving comprehensive and enriched educational outcomes. The combination of qualitative and quantitative data reveals that while online learning provides a valuable foundation, in-person experiences offer deeper, more immersive learning opportunities. These experiences, when guided by knowledgeable faculty leaders and framed within an experiential learning framework, can significantly enhance students' global perspectives and professional competencies. The study emphasizes the importance of integrating both online and in-person learning elements to maximize the educational value of study abroad programs.

### **5. Conclusion**

#### **5.1 Conclusion**

In this research, students who studied abroad in South Korea were examined to see how online and in-person learning experiences affect their global viewpoints. Studying students' short-term study abroad experiences in South Korea yielded numerous noteworthy findings.

The first major finding is the enhanced cultural understanding and technological knowledge that students gained from their experiences. While online learning offered a solid foundation of knowledge about South Korean culture and technology, it was the in-person experiences that enriched this understanding. The direct engagement with local people, participation in cultural activities, and firsthand observation of technological advancements allowed students to gain a deeper and more nuanced appreciation of South Korea. This aligns with the literature suggesting that in-person learning provides unique, immersive opportunities that online methods struggle to replicate.

Another significant takeaway is the critical role of faculty trip leaders in bridging online and in-person learning. The preparation and support provided by these leaders were instrumental in helping students transition smoothly from virtual to real-world environments. This support not only enhanced students' readiness but also ensured that they could fully engage with and reflect on their experiences. The study demonstrates that effective trip leadership can amplify the benefits of study abroad programs by facilitating a more holistic and enriching educational journey.

In conclusion, this research reinforces the notion that both online and in-person learning are essential components of a comprehensive educational experience. While online learning is invaluable for providing preliminary knowledge and context, in-person experiences offer unparalleled opportunities for immersive, experiential learning. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the need for educational programs that combine these elements to prepare students for global challenges and opportunities becomes ever more critical. This study contributes to the ongoing dialogue on how best to design and implement study abroad programs that foster meaningful and transformative learning experiences.

### **5.2 Limitations of the Study**

Despite the insightful findings, this study faced several limitations. First of all, the study's sample size was relatively small and consisted of students from a specific academic institution & country. This limited the generalizability of the findings to a broader population of study abroad participants. It is possible that the findings do not adequately capture the numerous experiences, points of view, and contexts that are present within their trip experiences and personal blogs. Secondly, despite the researchers' utmost effort, the reliance on self-reported data from surveys and blogs may have introduced bias, as participants might have portrayed their experiences and knowledge in a favorable light. As this study concentrated on a short-term study abroad experience, it may not fully reveal the enduring influences on students' global mindsets and attitudes that can emerge over time.

### **5.3 Future Research Recommendations**

Future research might overcome the limitations described above and analyse the long-term effects of study abroad on students' global perceptions and professional development for more thorough insights. To determine the pros and cons of online-only, in-person-only, and hybrid study abroad programs, future research might compare student experiences. Finally, including more students and places would improve the generalization and help us understand the effects of study abroad programs.

### **5.4 Practical Implications**

Research like this has various real-world consequences for those who plan study abroad programs:

1. **Enhancing Pre-Trip Preparation:** Institutions should continue to integrate online learning resources as part of the pre-trip preparation process to equip students with foundational knowledge and context.
2. **Supporting Faculty Trip Leaders:** Providing additional training and resources for faculty trip leaders can enhance their effectiveness in preparing students and facilitating meaningful experiences abroad.
3. **Promoting Experiential Learning:** Educational institutions should emphasize the importance of experiential learning, encouraging students to engage in both online and in-person experiences to develop a well-rounded global perspective.

Furthermore, the study suggests that educational institutions should continue to invest in scholarships, training and supporting faculty trip leaders & interested students, as their role is pivotal in ensuring the success of such programs.

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