

## **Measuring More Than Miles: Assessing the Impact of Short-Term Study Abroad on Students' Global Citizenship Identity**

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### **Abstract**

Short-term study abroad (STSA) programs are often criticized as being too brief to produce meaningful or lasting transformation. This paper challenges that assumption by arguing that intentional learning design and rigorous assessment are more important than duration alone. The study examines a five-week place-based study abroad program in Hawai'i focused on climate change, sustainability, and resilience. Thirteen students from two Japanese universities participated in a scaffolded sequence of field-based learning, stakeholder engagement, research development, reciprocity-oriented project work, and final presentation. To assess change over time, the Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI) was administered before and after the program. Analysis focused on five dimensions aligned with global citizenship development: Basic Openness, Sociocultural Openness, Global Resonance, Ecological Resonance, and Self Awareness. The findings suggest notable gains in Sociocultural Openness, Global Resonance, Ecological Resonance, and Self Awareness, alongside a slight decrease in Basic Openness that is not necessarily negative, but may reflect emerging cognitive complexity. Subgroup patterns further suggest differentiated impact: broader gains in Global Resonance appeared among the wider cohort, while deeper gains in Ecological Resonance were concentrated among higher-scoring students. These findings suggest that even short-term programs can foster meaningful identity development when they are intentionally structured and thoughtfully assessed.

*Keywords:* short-term study abroad, global citizenship, BEVI, place-based learning, sustainability

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## Introduction

Short-term study abroad has long occupied an uneasy position in international education. Although such programs are valued for accessibility and flexibility, they are also frequently criticized as being too short to support meaningful or lasting transformation. This critique is often based on the assumption that longer program duration leads to stronger outcomes (Dwyer, 2004).

At the same time, research suggests that duration alone does not fully explain impact. Program design, depth of engagement, and the quality of intercultural interaction also play critical roles (Donnelly-Smith, 2009; Engle & Engle, 2004). Contact alone is not enough; students need structured opportunities to engage meaningfully with unfamiliar contexts and perspectives (Heinzmann et al., 2015).

This study builds on that perspective by examining a five-week short-term study abroad program in Hawai'i designed around place-based learning, systems thinking, stakeholder engagement, and reciprocity (Doi & Agullana, 2025). The central argument is straightforward: it is not how long students are abroad, but how their learning is designed and assessed that matters most.

## Conceptual Framework

The program is grounded in a place-based approach to intercultural learning (Doi & Agullana, 2025). Intercultural competence is understood as a developmental construct involving knowledge, skills, attitudes, and the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultural contexts (Deardorff, 2006).

In this Hawai'i-based course, students are not simply learning about another culture; they are engaging with interconnected ecological, cultural, and social systems. This includes relationships among land, water, food systems, and ocean environments, as well as the cultural and ethical frameworks that shape those relationships.

In other words, learning is not separated into categories such as “environmental” or “cultural.” Instead, students are asked to make sense of how these systems interact. This emphasis on systems thinking, cultural sustainability, environmental stewardship, and ethical engagement is central to the program’s design.

## Program Design

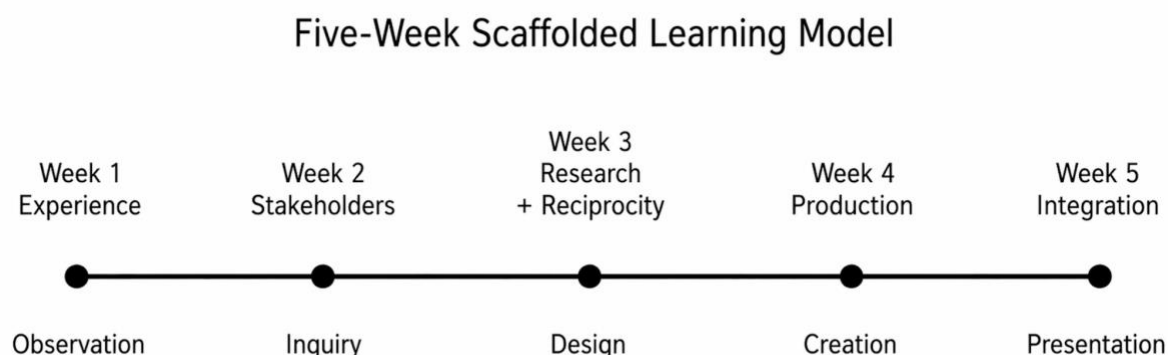
The five-week program was structured as a scaffolded learning sequence moving from experience to integration. Students engaged in field-based learning across sites including the Honolulu Board of Water Supply, Lyon Arboretum, Kanewai Lo'i, and Coconut Island.

The course moved from observation (Week 1), to inquiry (Week 2), to research design and ethical engagement (Week 3), to production (Week 4), and finally to integration and presentation (Week 5). Each stage built on the previous one, encouraging students to move beyond surface-level exposure toward deeper understanding and personal positioning. Additionally, the students were simultaneously enrolled in an intensive English program focusing on building oral fluency and cultural competence from Weeks 2 to 4.

Importantly, students were not only learning about these sites—they were also asked to contribute through reciprocity-based projects. This shift from observer to contributor is a key part of the learning design.

**Figure 1**

*Five-Week Scaffolded Learning Model*



### **Methodology**

To assess changes in students' worldview and identity, this study employed the Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI). BEVI is a validated, depth-based instrument that provides a theoretically grounded and empirically supported quantitative approach to assessing transformative learning, particularly in capturing changes in the self (Shealy, 2016; Wiley et al., 2021).

Unlike traditional assessment tools that focus on satisfaction or self-reported learning, BEVI examines underlying beliefs, values, and meaning-making processes. This makes it particularly suitable for evaluating global citizenship development in study abroad contexts.

The study involved 13 students from two Japanese universities. Analysis focused on five BEVI dimensions aligned with the program's goals: Basic Openness, Sociocultural Openness, Global Resonance, Ecological Resonance, and Self Awareness. Because of the small sample size, the analysis emphasizes descriptive pre–post patterns rather than broad statistical generalization.

### **Findings**

At the aggregate level, the results showed mixed but meaningful movement. Sociocultural Openness increased substantially, while Global Resonance, Ecological Resonance, and Self Awareness showed moderate gains. Basic Openness showed a slight decrease.

Results indicate measurable shifts in BEVI dimensions associated with aspects of transformative learning, particularly in worldview-related domains and constructs related to the self.

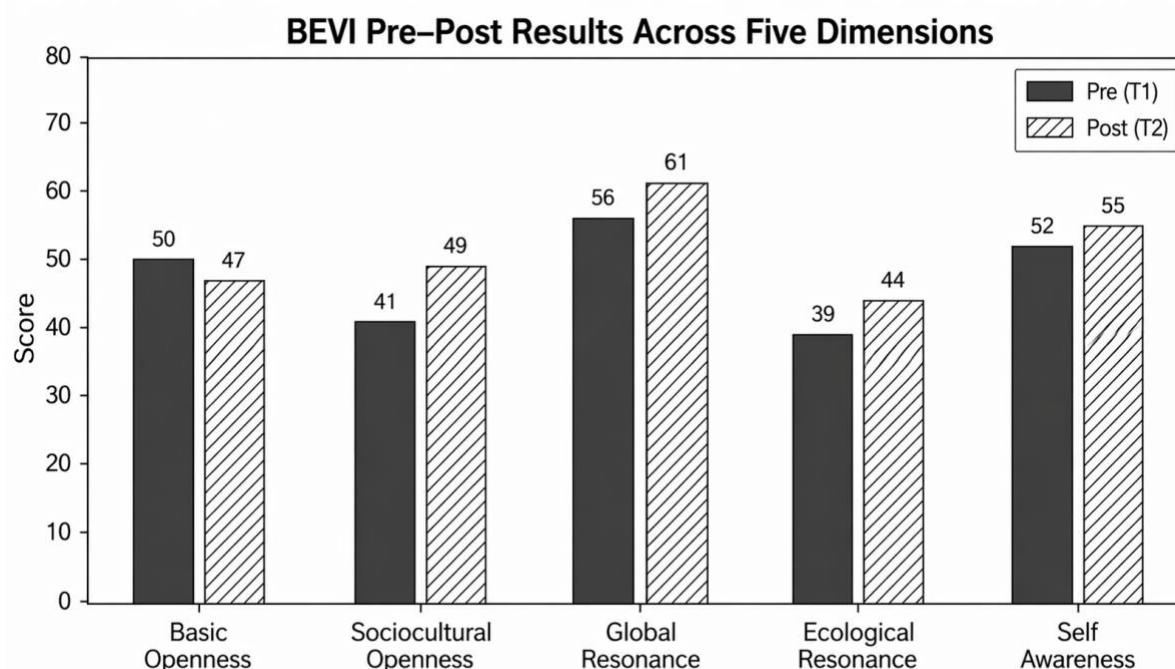
The increase in Sociocultural Openness suggests that students became more receptive to different cultural perspectives. Gains in Global and Ecological Resonance suggest a developing sense of connection to global and environmental issues, even though these changes were not statistically significant.

Self Awareness also increased, which is consistent with the program's emphasis on structured reflection. The decrease in Basic Openness is not necessarily negative. It may reflect increased cognitive complexity, as students become more aware of ambiguity and uncertainty when engaging with unfamiliar systems and perspectives. In other words, students may feel less certain, but are thinking more deeply.

Taken together, these results suggest measurable shifts in dimensions associated with transformative learning, particularly in relation to worldview and the self.

**Figure 2**

*BEVI Pre-Post Results Across Five Dimensions*



### Subgroup Patterns

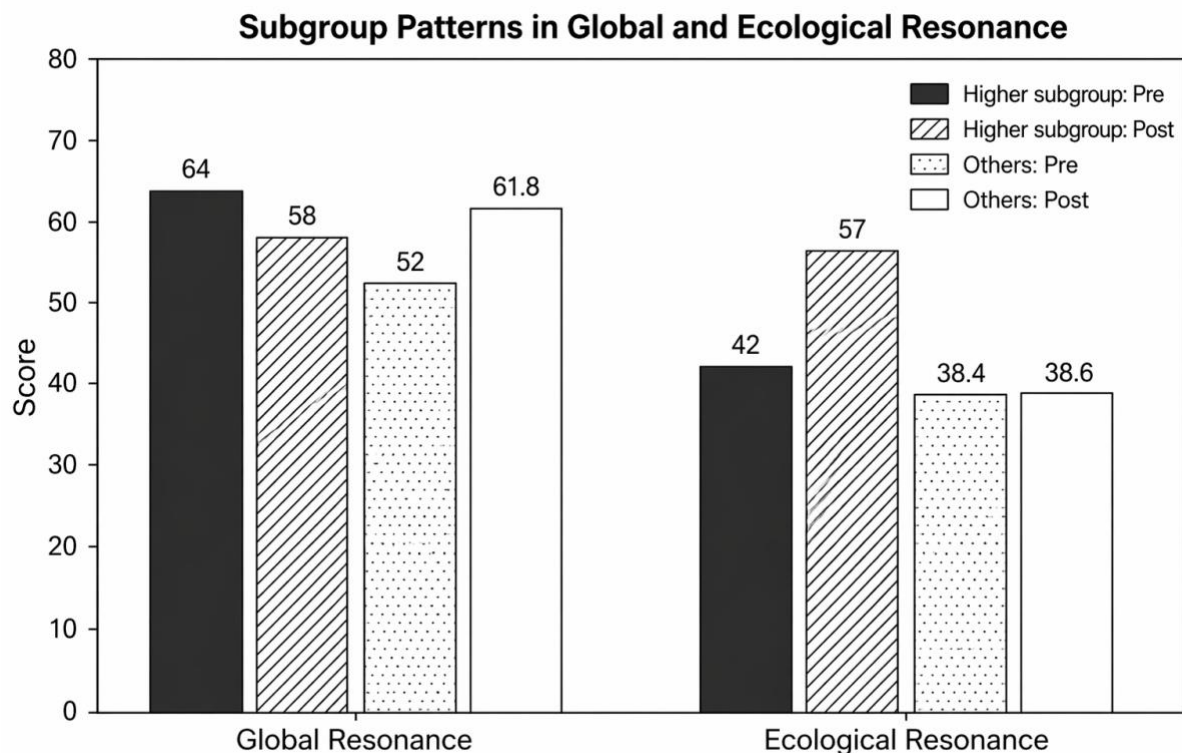
Subgroup analysis suggests that program impact was not uniform across participants. This distinction is important.

For Global Resonance, the strongest gains appeared among the broader group rather than the highest-scoring subgroup. This suggests that the program helped expand global awareness across the cohort, rather than simply increasing scores among those who were already highly engaged.

For Ecological Resonance, the pattern was different. Here, the strongest gains were concentrated among higher-scoring students, while the rest of the group showed little change. This suggests that deeper ecological engagement may have been taken up more fully by students who were more responsive or ready to engage at that level.

These subgroup patterns are based on BEVI distribution groupings and should be understood as approximate rather than exact comparisons. Even so, they point to an important idea: impact is not uniform, and different dimensions of learning may develop in different ways.

**Figure 3**  
*Subgroup Patterns in Global and Ecological Resonance*



*Note.* Subgroup comparisons are based on BEVI distribution groupings (low/middle/high) and represent approximate patterns rather than exact individual-level calculations.

## Discussion

These findings suggest that short-term study abroad should be understood through a design-based lens. Rather than asking whether short-term programs “work,” it may be more useful to ask how they are designed and for whom they are most effective.

The results align with prior research emphasizing the importance of program structure and engagement (Engle & Engle, 2004). While longer programs may offer extended exposure (Dwyer, 2004), this study suggests that shorter programs can also produce meaningful developmental shifts when they are intentionally designed.

At the same time, the subgroup patterns highlight that impact is not evenly distributed. Some outcomes appear across the cohort, while others are concentrated among more engaged or responsive students. This does not weaken the case for short-term study abroad. Instead, it provides a more realistic and useful way of understanding how transformation occurs. Collectively, these findings point to the importance of intentional design in shaping how and for whom transformative learning emerges within short-term contexts.

## Limitations

This study is limited by a small sample size ( $N = 13$ ) and a specific program context, which may limit generalizability. In addition, the study relies on a short-term pre–post design within a five-week program. As a result, it is not possible to determine whether the observed changes

were sustained over time. Longitudinal research would be needed to assess the durability of these shifts beyond the immediate program period.

Some of the observed changes, particularly in Global Resonance and Ecological Resonance, were not statistically significant at the aggregate level. Furthermore, subgroup analysis is exploratory and based on BEVI distribution groupings rather than exact individual-level subgroup calculations.

Taken together, these limitations suggest that the findings should be interpreted as indicative patterns rather than definitive conclusions.

### **Conclusions**

Building on these findings, this study challenges the assumption that short-term study abroad is inherently too brief to support meaningful transformation.

The findings suggest that intentional design and rigorous assessment—not duration alone—appear to be key factors in shaping global citizenship development in this context. Short-term programs can foster meaningful change, but that change is not uniform, and that distinction is important.

In other words, short-term study abroad is not inherently limited—it is often simply under-designed.

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