

# ***Preparation Propositions for Short-Term Teaching Abroad: A Literature Review***

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**Abstract:** Both certified teachers and volunteers participate in short-term teaching experiences abroad, but the length of time is concerning in terms of teacher preparation. This paper reviews the body of research that has investigated the teaching methods and short-term program practices that prepare teachers for short-term experiences teaching abroad. The review suggests a program including professional development, deliberate reflection, and cultural and language immersion be offered for teachers before, during, and following their short-term experience. The review also offers direction for future research including the need for experimental and causal-comparative research on the effects of short-term international teachers on student achievement.

## **1. Introduction**

Teaching abroad could impact student instruction negatively in terms of student academic achievement from poor teacher preparation and teacher performance in short-term appointments. Teaching abroad is a popular option for both certified teachers and those that simply want to volunteer in international educational capacities. Teachers globally have sought opportunities for different experiences in education. They may also have a desire to volunteer and give back to other communities and combine this with travel [1]. Short-term teaching allows teachers to return to their 10-month teaching position following a short-term winter break, spring break, or summer teaching program [2] or travel around from one short-term assignment to another all school year long.

Pre-service teachers can teach abroad as a means of learning and practicing pedagogy in a short-term period that fits their academic schedule [3]. Volunteering in international contexts has the benefits of cultural immersion with locals, along with professional and personal networking with like-minded individuals [1]. Not only do teachers desire to affect student achievement, but also experience the language and life outside of the classroom [4]. Additionally, studies on international teaching experiences have suggested that teachers gain improvement in themselves psychologically, including an increase in assertiveness [5], and long-term overall change in attitude toward the value of material possessions and human beings [6].

However, teachers possess the potential low impact because of poor preparation and the lack of sustainability. Teachers can potentially reinforce their own strategies and habits without adapting or

developing new techniques if they do not take a learning perspective in teaching in foreign locations. Additionally, teachers who travel internationally to participate in short-term teaching opportunities are supporting potentially unsustainable practices in education that could be less impactful in international communities. Unsustainable practices are when volunteers or paid foreigners assume a job where local people are similarly skilled [7]. Unsustainable practices also include initiatives that prioritize the needs of the foreign worker rather than the needs of the host community. Furthermore, international sustainable practices should be community led rather than foreigner led. If teachers do not abide by these recommended standards for sustainability, they could ultimately be less supportive to their students and community than intended. Teachers would need to be culturally and pedagogically prepared to benefit both themselves and their students in their short-term communities.

The structure of this paper is as follows. In section 2, I review the consequences of short-term teaching and preparation abroad. In section 3, I present definitions for related vocabulary in short-term teaching abroad. In section 4, I introduce three constructs common in the review of literature for effective teacher preparation for teaching abroad, including teaching strategies, deliberate reflection, and language and cultural immersion respectively. Section 5 is the conclusions and recommendations for preparing teachers for short-term international programs.

## **2. Consequences of Short-Term Teaching and Preparation for Short-Term Teachers Abroad**

The effects of teachers in short-term teaching situations is unknown. The unknown effects include the impact of a short stay in an educational setting and teachers' approach to instruction. Other literature reviews examined the motivations to participate in volunteer tourism [8] but without a specific focus on motivations and consequences of volunteer teaching which is mostly short-term. Research on the effects and preparation of short-term teaching from foreign teachers in schools abroad needs to be more precisely investigated.

Some literature aimed at unspecified or long-term programs addressed effective preparation for teachers in international settings. A qualitative study examined expatriate Canadian teachers abroad in Azerbaijan, China, Singapore, and the Philippines who used the cultural self-study method over six months to enhance their cultural understanding of their respective countries [9]. These teachers demonstrated increased openness of others' accents and grasp of the English language; increased cultural sensitivity; bias recognition and the desire for culturally diverse experiences; and a sense of sameness with the different cultures in their adaptation process. The use of cultural self-study as a means for reflection as teachers become more interculturally aware and assimilated within their experience. However, the length of their international teaching program was unspecified. So, while opportunities for self-study and reflection seem to be effective, the examination of strategies like these need to be examined in the context of short-term experiences for international teachers.

There is no known literature review specifically targeting the preparation and effects of short-term teaching abroad. This review will focus on short-term teachers abroad and their preparation for their assignments. This literature review will take a focused approach to the existing research on the effects of short-term volunteer teaching in international contexts. Additionally, this review will examine ways to prepare teachers for more mindful teaching experiences, as well as potentially offer alternatives to short-term international teaching. Teachers will continue to want to participate in short-term education opportunities abroad, but the negative impact, such as perpetuating Euro-Western ideology and failing to sustain social change [10], could be reduced through eventual careful research of efficacy and alternative approaches to short-term teaching in vulnerable areas. The ultimate goal is to expand understanding of how teachers can culturally and mindfully prepare and affect learning gains in students during a short period of time.

This literature review examines the benefits and potential issues of short-term teaching abroad. First, how can we better prepare teachers to assimilate to the culture they are working with personally and professionally to support students? Second, what strategies or resources are there to change or better prepare the motivations of teachers who plan to teach short-term and internationally in the future?

### **3. Terms Related to International Short-Term Teaching Abroad**

There are several types of programs that allow international teachers to participate in short-term (equal to or less than 1 year) teaching abroad. This section defines terms used to define short-term teaching programs and preparation.

#### **3.1. Short-Term Teaching**

This is teaching conducted in one school year, which is traditionally ten months long, or less. While a teaching contract can be fulfilled within ten months, schools with non-returning teachers experience turnover known to be potentially harmful to student success.

#### **3.2. International Teachers, International Teaching and Abroad**

International teachers are anyone who teaches in a country that is not the same in which they study and typically teach in. These teachers teach abroad, in any country outside of the country in which they were trained and typically teach in, fulfilling the task of international teaching.

#### **3.3. Volunteer Teaching, Summer Teaching, and Teaching Fellowships**

Volunteer teaching is traditionally unpaid and short-term instructional support in the form of teaching assistance, co-teaching with a local teacher, or assignment as an independent teacher in the classroom. Volunteer teaching is inclusive of both certified and uncertified teachers. Summer teaching is oftentimes also on a volunteer basis for the designated term of summer, which is typically two months, or a briefer period within the summer months. Summer teaching programs attract pre-service or in-service teachers who are looking for teaching experience, professional development, or an opportunity to use their credentials for a travel opportunity abroad. Teaching fellowships attract certified or nearly certified teachers who are looking for programs rather than just jobs. A system of support needed for adequate teacher preparation and student growth is a characteristic of teaching fellowships. This is because fellowships tend to offer professional development, course training with a graduate school or other institution, and programmed opportunities for language and cultural immersion.

#### **3.4. International Teacher Preparation**

Training, reflections, and processes before, during, and after the short-term program is included in international teacher preparation. This may include pedagogical and strategic training, cultural and historical lessons, and local language learning through a variety of methods including online or in-person coursework or informal presentations, for example.

### **4. Characteristics of International Short-Term Teacher Preparation**

Three primary constructs for teacher preparation of short-term international teachers were found in the literature review. These constructs include preparation on teaching methods and strategies to use

in the international classroom, structured deliberate reflection within the experience, and opportunities for language and cultural immersion during the international experience.

#### **4.1. Teaching Methods and Strategies**

International teachers are more likely to adopt empirically supported teaching strategies rather than shallow teaching strategies during their short-term experience, which could encourage student achievement positively. The use of media and technology with simple software and interfaces are used in the international classroom when available to enhance learning potential [11]. This use of technology is aligned with best practices, using an adaptive technology to assist in linguistic and cultural communication between the foreign teacher and students. With novel environments arrives the need for teachers to use situation-informed practices based on their students' needs and learning preferences, which often results in more creative strategies [12]. Rather than focusing only on data, teachers use are responsive to students' needs in the international classroom. Within the international classroom, the intercultural experience encourages teachers and students to use observation strategies, modeling, and experimentation to navigate cultural differences [13], as well as acquire the content. Teachers use these strategies to observe their students' comfort and understanding, and model learning. Experimentation occurs through a form of teaching cause and effect with students through hands-on activities, as well as teachers experimenting with other interactive teaching methods to engage learners.

In their adaptation based on the environmental cues, teachers are more likely to adapt their teaching style to a more interactive, student-centered approach when teaching abroad [14]. Rather than relying on a more traditional teacher-centered approach and traditional practices, such as the assignment of homework, teachers abroad are more likely to place importance on communication with the classroom and active participation of students [12]. When teachers return to their home country, they are in return more likely to effectively use games in the classroom, as well. Rather than only serving as a source of knowledge, teachers begin to understand the role of facilitation in the international classroom by including culturally responsive materials and content, with more consideration of prior knowledge [15]. While short-term international teachers are more likely to use teaching strategies associated with best practices, there is no current support on whether these strategies or any methods from short-term international educators affect student achievement.

What the international teaching experience offers teachers is a chance to test modern, constructive strategies to teaching in an attempt to reach their cultural and linguistically different students. In a long-term teaching assignment, teachers may be constrained in their schools and district standards, which prevents innovative teaching methods. When teachers are in short-term assignments, there is an opportunity for teachers to check strategies and learn what is effective in engaging, teaching, and assessing their students in an international context. As a result, teachers resort to practices including interactive, student-centered, and metacognitive considerate activities in the classroom, all of which can increase student achievement.

#### **4.2. Deliberate Reflection**

Reflective opportunities for teachers abroad assist in preparing and assimilating teachers in the culture they are working with personally and professionally. A study on the experience of Norwegian teachers' three-month teaching abroad experience in Namibia highlighted the importance of critical reflection throughout and post-program [16]. While the teachers' experience before and during the program included "regional and contextual knowledge [16]" of Namibia, without opportunities for reflection, the concepts they acquired during their trip could not be united nor produce a sense of cultural immersion. Alternatively, a program including American teachers

traveling to China for four weeks included reflection in which the English teachers could document their progress in intercultural competency and beliefs before, during, and after the four-week stint in China [17]. Within their deliberate reflection, teachers documented their frustration with their own Chinese Mandarin language learning during the program. This reflection promoted empathy with their English language learners (ELLs), which prompted teachers to prescribe strategies to enhance their own Chinese language learning, as well as strategies to use with their ELLs.

Further studies with short-term student teachers abroad demonstrated that along with cultural mentoring, frequent opportunities for reflection and unpacking the experience is necessary [18-20]. Teaching abroad on its own is not enough because, without constructive opportunities for dissection and reflection, teacher's personal cultures and ideologies can overpower culturally responsive teaching methods. Deliberate reflection allows teachers to become accustomed to the culture they are working with, while also functioning as a strategy for self-checking teaching methods to better assist students within their short-term, international teaching trip.

### 4.3. Cultural and Language Immersion

Cultural and language immersion within a short-term teaching program helps assimilate teachers. Klein and Wikan demonstrated socio-cultural immersion opportunities are important within the structure of the 3-month program for the teachers so they can continue to develop with an understanding of local and global issues within their respective locations [16]. This helps prevent ethnocentric ideology, as well as the clutch on stereotypes of the culture which could prevent teachers from serving their students with the utmost professional approach. This helps shift teachers' thought processes towards the culture in which they teach rather than their own. A 10-day program in Peru combining a homestay experience with intensive four-hour daily Spanish language classes, in conjunction with their teaching experience and pedagogical coursework, allowed participants to feel more "globally connected" and empathize with language learners [21]. Homestays do not only provide an opportunity for teachers to connect with the local community [22], but also provides an avenue for empathizing with those who are "outsiders" in a community [19]. Without completely grasping the local language or having significant social experiences within the host family's home, a sense of discomfort arises within participants. Two studies both suggested both suggest this discomfort inspired reflection once again as a way to empathize with their foreign, language learning students, and also built self-confidence in the international classroom [23-24]. In conjunction with guided reflection, teachers were able to develop a more internationally-minded educational perspective even within the limited time, because opportunities for socio-cultural immersion help reduce the potential for otherness and promote connectedness.

Outside the homestay or other opportunities to live in the community in which they teach, international short-term teachers should engage in excursions and opportunities to speak with the community to further develop community integration. This helps teachers stay current in their international environment, incorporate what they experience into their teachings, and builds connections between the teachers and students, potentially reducing the divide between a foreign teacher and their students. Community teachers are those who are important figures in the classroom and the community, and gain insight about and from community members, which in turn informs the teaching content and practice [25-26]. In this process, teachers "build on the cultural capital that students bring to school [25]." Excursions and meetings with community members offer an immersion experience that better prepares teachers to teach the students without being native members of their community [27], which further assists in preparing culturally aware and responsive teachers in a short-term experience.

Experiences with local language learning opportunities promoted empathy among teachers, which promoted responsive methods of teaching. Changes included embracing the native language

(L1), or native language, and connecting the L1 to the second language to be learned, as well as having a better understanding of how to scaffold language learning for their students as a result of their own language learning process [28]. Opportunities for empathy created insight for teachers to adjust and appropriately plan their lessons conscious of students' language learning experience specific to their L1. This further corroborates that language immersion with deliberate reflection and interactive teaching methods can produce positive effects on student achievement.

The caveat specific to language immersion is that it needs to apply to the teachers either personally or professionally, otherwise opportunities for local language learning are moot. Integration of the local language may be simpler for language teachers and with elementary populations rather than with content area teachers and with secondary populations [17]. This could lead to a less culturally immersive experience for the teachers and therefore a lesser opportunity for their students to acquire the language or content taught by the foreign teacher.

## 5. Discussion

Teachers have strategies and methods in the international classroom to benefit the students in a culturally and strategically competent fashion should their preparation and short-term program offer and promote these tools. Best practices including interaction, student-centered approaches to instruction, the use of deliberate and guided reflection, and planned immersive cultural and language learning are all beneficial to international teachers before and during their short-term teaching experience. Programs and schools offering short-term teaching programs for international teachers should *require* professional development in best practices, cultural learning opportunities, and reflection into their program offerings. Students cannot succeed without qualified teachers so continuous training in each of the constructs is necessary in order to prepare teachers for international experiences [12].

International teacher preparation should occur before, during, and after the short-term teaching experience in an effort for teachers to check any biases teachers may have and sustain any mental transformations following their experience. The proposed methods are a framework to prepare teachers for a brief, but culturally immersive and potentially radically different personal and professional environment in which they do not have significant time to adjust. To expose and change any preconceptions teachers have before teaching, a program facilitator should provide structured opportunities for the learner to state and defend their pre-existing notions related to the teaching environment abroad and its education system. The willingness to participate, reflect, then accommodate the challenges of teaching in an international setting is required along with the ability to be open-minded, yet strategic in their approach to teaching and living in a community different from their own culture. Teachers should complete a survey and reflection on their existing thoughts on their perceived experience and qualifications as teachers, their perception of the school system in which they intend to participate in, and what they hope to receive from their participation in the short-term program both personally and professionally prior to traveling. This allows facilitators and administration within their program or school to appropriately manage the teachers' expectations and realistically prepare them for the experience.

Like with any skill, facilitators should then model how and when to use the teaching methods, deliberative reflection, as well as cultural and language immersion before teachers can perform this in their classroom. Before the short-term experience, facilitators should guide participants through simulations to model potential scenarios teachers may undergo in the classroom. This can be as simple as how to teach new vocabulary to as complex as how to manage adverse student behavior. Through this process, teachers can continue to reflect on how their handling would differ in the international classroom and what aspects they may need to modify in order to positively affect student achievement. This modeling is also useful during the short-term experience to continue to

develop and advance teachers' skills, and further immerse teachers in the culture and language in their location. In conjunction with deliberate reflection with guided questions through some form of documentation, teachers develop a tangible resource of how to handle situations in the foreign classroom. Even after the short-term experience, deliberate reflection can track the transfer and sustainment of the skill [29], and if the teachers continue to use the desired skill in their domestic classroom or otherwise professional setting. Teachers should see the transfer of what they learn and reflect on into their teaching practice and teach with culturally responsive and situation-considerate methods.

The implementation of these recommendations should be inseparable and ethnorelative to the specific setting. Application of only one of these recommendations is not enough to affect sustainable and positive learning gains in students; short-term international teacher preparation requires a concerted effort between the application of the best teaching practices, deliberate reflection, and cultural and language immersion to prepare teachers and positively affect student achievement [17]. To encourage assimilation, programs need to include frequent opportunities for interactions between participants and both professional and community members [30]. Programs that include only one or two of the constructs and do not make an attempt to actively reduce ethnocentric tendencies are unlikely to produce lasting positive effects on teachers and student achievement.

While the international teaching experience offers teachers a chance to use strategies and teaching methods correlated with increased student achievement, there is a gap in the research related to statistical evidence of short-term international educator effects on student achievement. Constructive and interactive approaches are commonly used with these educators, but the effects on students are unclear. Statistical evidence is needed to determine if short-term international teachers affect student achievement. Several things including the time constraint and research methods of short-term international teaching programs can explain the gap in the research. The short-term nature of programs does not allow for sufficient time to collect data on the effects of teachers on student achievement. It is also unlikely schools can measure the differences between students who learned from a native teacher and those who learned from an international, short-term educator. Additionally, the majority of literature on the topic included self-report measures, observations, and interviews of short-term educators that cannot appropriately measure student achievement like an experimental or causal-comparative study could.

There are several limitations of the literature review including the breadth of articles limited by language, the specific length of time, level of teacher experience, and methodology. Only articles in the English language were examined. Perhaps countries with a large number of international teachers in their schools have more current literature published in languages other than English, which could provide a gap in the review. Furthermore, only scholarly products covering short-term teaching assignments were included. This presents a shorter window of opportunity for data collection and analysis given the one-year teaching term maximum.

Teacher experience is also a limiting factor. While studies with experienced teachers were included, the majority of articles within this review were centered around the preparation and effectiveness of pre-service teachers. This is due to the time availability and general mobility of student teachers, and the need for experiential learning within education majors. Pre-service teachers may need different preparation for international teaching than more experienced in-service teachers; while the need for on-going international training remains. For example, in-service teachers may not require explicit training in best practices or guided reflection but can provide best practices and reflections on their own.

Finally, the methods presented in the articles with attention to surveys, qualitative research, and studies with singular measures present a minimal opportunity for cause and effect relationships

between the proposed methods of preparation and student achievement. While studies demonstrated increases in perceived global competence through cross-cultural coursework and interactions, self-report measures are unable to measure effects on student achievement [31]. Only mixed methods designs could measure the effectiveness of short-term international teacher preparation programs [17].

## 5.1. Recommendations

Recommendations for future research include the review of literature in other languages, and conducting comparative, longitudinal, and experimental studies. English speaking countries are not the only entities that send teachers abroad for short-term teaching experiences so future research should examine international teacher preparation in multiple languages. Furthermore, international teaching could be examined for any trends of effective teacher preparation for short-term programs between pre-service teachers versus in-service teachers; there is the potential for experience to affect the preparation needed for teachers which is undiscoverable without a comparative study of teacher preparation between inexperienced and experienced short-term international educators. While longitudinal studies were included on the cultural learning aspects within teacher preparation [19, 23], a longitudinal study focused on the effects on students could provide insight on the long-term effects of short-term teachers on student achievement after the short-term teaching assignment is complete. Additionally, experimental studies including international short-term teachers should be conducted to test the validity and effectiveness of the reviewed suggestions on student performance.

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