


BOOK REVIEW:

Critical perspectives on equity and social mobility in study abroad: Interrogating issues of unequal access and outcomes

Gemma Garcia-Parellada |  <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9759-8110>
University of Maryland, U.S.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70830/iejcp.2302.18111>

BOOK REVIEW: C. Glass & P. Gesing (Eds.). (2021). *Critical perspectives on equity and social mobility in study abroad: Interrogating issues of unequal access and outcomes*. Routledge. ISBN:978 036 770 3509. 196 pages.

International student mobility has often been conceived as an avenue for upward social mobility and, if paired with appropriate training, developing intercultural competence and other skills to professionally succeed in the global village. However, multiple contextual factors may stratify access to student mobility or hinder its potential. *Critical perspectives on equity and social mobility in study abroad: Interrogating issues of unequal access and outcomes* interrogates aspects related to cultural and socioeconomic dynamics that affect students' access, outcomes and experiences. This edited volume (11 contributions by 23 authors) calls for bringing equity and wider accessibility to international education and offers suggestions for addressing inequalities and promoting social justice within the field.

In the introduction, the editors historically contextualise international student travel to the U.S. from the 1950s up to post-COVID-19, offering political and economic factors that affect cross-border student mobility. They then outline the future of student mobility against the backdrop of the fading hegemony of the U.S. as an international study destination and the pandemic's impact on low-income and minority students' study abroad experiences.

Part I (Chapters 2–4) addresses the challenges faced by students from different countries and backgrounds regarding accessibility, such as economic and language barriers, strenuous visa application processes, or lack of institutional support. Chapter 2 presents the case of two partner higher education institutions in the UK and Thailand to discuss power imbalances in bilateral exchange programs concerning the development of the agreement, language of instruction and funding. It suggests strategies for more equal and meaningful internationalisation partnerships between institutions, particularly Western and Global South institutions. Chapter 3, on Muslim international students, draws on the experiences of Iraqi and Ugandan Muslim international students in Western countries, revealing that despite challenges, this group of students remains positive about studying abroad being an opportunity to get better jobs or escape politically unstable environments.

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Chapter 4 identifies key factors influencing the sustainability of study abroad programs in rural community colleges. These include: study abroad directors' leadership skills and their ability to forge relationships with students, families and other stakeholders; and institutional support (e.g., funding and public encouragement). The chapter underscores the need to overcome barriers to participation and access and advocates for the need to bring about structural changes that enhance opportunities for rural community college students.

Part II (Chapters 5–8) focuses on variances in the outcomes of study abroad programs in the careers of international students. Chapter 5 discusses inter- and intra-regional differences between employers' perceptions of the value of studying abroad and makes a case for how study abroad programs contribute to or subvert labour market inequalities. Based on a comparative case study between three different geographical areas (East Asia, Europe and North America), the chapter foregrounds that its value 'varies depending on industry, characteristics of programs, professional position, applicants' background, the home country of the employer as organization, and the country and region in which they are located' (p. 67). For instance, while most employers in East Asia (except Japan) view study abroad as a prospective candidate's valuable asset, mainly because it likely indicates higher foreign language skills, many North American employers do not place such value in these experiences *per se*. Chapter 6 describes the push and pull factors (Altbach, 2004) that intervene in the decision-making process of international students to stay in the host country (in this case, the U.S.) upon completion of their study abroad program. The chapter outlines a complex interplay of political (e.g., visa policies or general attitudes towards women), economic (e.g., career and job opportunities) and social factors (e.g., cultural challenges throughout the adaptation process and racial discrimination) in the host and home country that affect students' decisions. The authors also advocate for the implementation of policies that redress these factors. Chapter 7 addresses a research gap in the field of employability for international students by offering an account of the experiences of Chinese international doctoral students and their views on study abroad experiences, employability and career-related opportunities. The authors recommend strategies to assist international students in their job searches. Chapter 8 discusses the impact of study abroad experiences on students' careers after graduation. Based on a survey of graduates who majored in social sciences and humanities at a Japanese university, the authors suggest that study abroad experiences allow for the acquisition of subject-specific and intercultural competencies, which lead to the formation of human capital and, subsequently, to career development.

Part III (Chapters 9–11) covers other strategies to expand opportunities for different groups to participate in study abroad programs. Chapter 9 critically examines the role of language, particularly English-centrism, in creating and perpetuating inequities and stratification in U.S. study-abroad programs. The authors draw attention to how students of colour and non-English language minorities have often been sidelined in international higher education research and suggest some strategies that may promote equity and inclusion in studying abroad. With the same commitment to advancing social justice, Chapter 10 devises the framework Global Citizenship 1-2-3 (Putman & Byker, 2020) as a conceptual basis for study abroad programs and foregrounds its importance as an action-oriented model. Based on a three-step approach (learn, think, act), this model aims to develop learners' global competencies by combining (1) acquiring culturally responsive

knowledge, (2) developing intercultural awareness, and (3) engaging in experiential opportunities (p. 154). The authors examine three case studies of international programs for teacher candidates grounded on this approach. They also advocate for designing study abroad programs that apply the Global Citizenship 1-2-3 model in all the facets of student mobility. Chapter 11 offers a compendium of classroom activities for undergraduate students to provide intercultural exchange and diversity awareness opportunities for students from non-diverse backgrounds studying in ethnically homogeneous contexts.

This edited volume is a timely and necessary contribution to the fields of higher education, internationalisation and intercultural communication. It critically examines internationalisation strategies and study-abroad initiatives in universities and community colleges. While a significant body of scholarly work foregrounds the benefits of study abroad initiatives—such as the development of communicative competence in foreign languages (Kinginger, 2008), intercultural sensitivity (Anderson et al., 2006) and functional knowledge (Sutton & Rubin, 2004), as well as improved career opportunities and wages (Kratz & Netz, 2016)—other scholars have problematised these initiatives and pointed out the limitations of their outcomes (e.g., Dessoiff, 2006; Knight, 2009; Penn & Tanner, 2009; Salisbury et al., 2013). In line with this previous critical body of work, the authors of this volume explore issues related to access and offer a nuanced overview of the impacts of these initiatives. Furthermore, they make a case for how social justice and equity issues ought to be central to international educational efforts and successfully outline strategies to this end.

With a cross-national approach and a holistic perspective that brings together first-hand accounts of international students, case studies of study abroad programs in different countries, critical literature reviews and educators' experiences, this edited volume adds to the literature on study abroad by focusing on inequities that are at play throughout and after study-abroad programs as well as career-related outcomes, such as employability and employers' perceptions. Perhaps additional reflections on the outcomes of study abroad for secondary school students or the dynamics of study abroad programs between universities in the Global South could be added to future editions of the book. Furthermore, despite being briefly commented on in the introduction, the scope of the volume could also benefit from a chapter devoted to discussing past and ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on study-abroad programs.

Overall, *Critical perspectives on equity and social mobility in study abroad* pushes the field of the internationalisation of education forward. It is a valuable read for administrators, study abroad leaders, faculty, students, DEI officers and intercultural trainers. Additionally, this book could serve as a reliable guide to policymakers since contributors also provide many possible strategies to address inequities and power imbalances and offer opportunities to students to think critically about issues related to interculturality and diversity in a domestic setting. While acknowledging the numerous positive outcomes of study abroad experiences, this edited volume advocates for structural changes that address uneven access and power dynamics in the field, aiming to create more socially just societies.

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