Systematic review of short-term study abroad outcomes and an agenda for future research

Andrew Bradly

RSM, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia, and

Marina Iskhakova

RSE, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to serve as a comprehensive review of short-term study abroad (STSA) outcomes to help guide future STSA and study abroad (SA) scholars and practitioners in the further development of the field.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper is the first comprehensive and systematic review of all outcomes of STSA programs within the SA body of research based on 156 papers.

Findings – The study provides the first comprehensive classification of all previously studied STSA outcomes (85) into six categories: cross-cultural outcomes, STSA pedagogy outcomes, personal and professional outcomes; language outcomes; teacher and faculty outcomes; and other outcomes. Distinct sub-categories are identified that provide insights on the current landscape of STSA and related research.

Research limitations/implications – This study makes a significant contribution to the theory and practice of SA, and among the key contributions are a systematic understanding of the scale and scope of STSA outcomes; insights on the most efficient design of future STSA programs; and an expanded understanding of the role and importance of STSA programs in international education. Furthermore, a comprehensive STSA outcomes map develops an extensive research agenda.

Social implications – While the COVID-19 pandemic currently limits the opportunities for STSA, given its previous popularity, the authors envisage a strong return in the coming years of this form of affordable and valuable global learning. STSA programs have become an important component of higher education and which require considerable resources from participants and educational institutions alike. Therefore, further research is needed to understand the impacts of STSA programs and to further improve program design. Such research will serve to better inform both academic understanding of the phenomenon and educational practice.

Originality/value – The study provides the first comprehensive classification of all studied STSA outcomes.

Keywords Short-term study abroad, Systematic review, International student mobility, Learning outcomes

Paper type Literature review

Introduction

Short-term study abroad

Short-term study abroad (STSA) is the fastest growing segment of experiential learning programs in management education, and the one of the least studied (Lokkesmoe *et al.*, 2016). Educators have recognized the importance of extending the classroom beyond a conventional campus setting to one that enables students to interact with people from different cultures (Roy *et al.*, 2019). STSA is an emerging research topic at the intersection of higher education internationalization and global mobility, with many important implications for international education, international management and intercultural

relations (Brown *et al.*, 2016; Gümüş *et al.*, 2020; Iskhakova *et al.*, 2021; Safipour *et al.*, 2017). STSA is broadly defined as all programs of higher education taking place outside the geographical boundaries of the student's country of origin. STSA programs are increasingly recognized as a key strategy in preparing students for future international professional engagement and increasing their cultural intelligence (Holtbrügge and Engelhard, 2016). While much research has focused on traditional long-term, year and semester-long study abroad (SA) programs (Clarke *et al.*, 2009), the STSA program format has become a distinct phenomenon in international and management education, and until the COVID-19 pandemic, was the fastest growing segment of experiential learning programs (Lokkesmoe *et al.*, 2016). There is some debate about the cut-off for what constitutes "short-term" in SA programs. The Institute of International Education (IIE) defines STSA as programs of up to eight weeks in length (Nguyen *et al.*, 2018), with this standard now widely accepted by both practitioners and scholars. In the USA, STSA programs of less than eight weeks' duration accounted for 54.6% of students that studied abroad in 2017/2018 (The Open Doors, 2019).

Short-term study abroad outcomes

While STSA is a part of SA, STSA programs have very specific characteristics that make them a distinct form of learning. Iskhakova and Bradly (2021) have classified STSA by its most distinct characteristics compared with other formats of SA. These are as follows:

- *STSA process*: pre-departure preparation, duration of up to eight weeks in length, and post-program engagement;
- *STSA nature*: group interaction, faculty supervision, intense cultural immersion; and
- *STSA structure*: structured activities, integrated assessments and integrated reflections.

Researchers have highlighted extensive and diverse benefits of undertaking STSA programs (Goldstein, 2022; Roy *et al.*, 2019; Drake *et al.*, 2015; Geyer *et al.*, 2017). Unfortunately, in spite of rapidly growing empirical STSA research to date, there have been no systematic reviews with a focus on the comprehensive outcomes of STSA only. We identified four of the most recent and relevant reviews; however, each has their own narrowly defined focus. The first is Varela's (2017) meta-analysis of learning outcomes based on 72 studies, which has all SA outcomes broadly classified as cognitive, affective and behavioral outcomes, but still only focuses on the broad SA phenomenon. The second study, by Roy *et al.* (2019), also provides a systematic review of the outcomes of international student mobility; however, the review suffers from a lack of agreement on what constitutes "short-term." The authors examined 75 studies, including all programs that range from one-week to semester-long programs, and under those inclusion factors the authors classified the outcomes as cultural, personal and employment and career outcomes. The third and most recent study of STSA by Goldstein (2022) focuses only on intercultural outcomes based on 68 studies. The final study by Iskhakova and Bradly (2021) provides a systematic review of all parameters of STSA research, including the scale, scope, key themes and STSA research methodology. It focuses on the analysis of 29 cross-cultural outcomes, but does not include the full systematic review of all STSA outcomes. Our study addresses this identified knowledge gap.

The paper is structured as follows: Next section presents our methodology for reviewing and classifying the STSA literature followed by a discussion of our findings and contribution to the literature. We then identify the practical implications of this research

followed by an agenda for future research. Finally, we identify the limitations of our research and conclusions about the STSA field and its future directions.

Methodology

The methodological approach used in this study was to conduct a systematic review rather than a meta-analysis due to a number of factors and limitations. First, the STSA research field is very fragmented and still poorly defined, which our study addresses by defining boundary conditions for the STSA field. Second, there is a very extensive list of diverse variables used in STSA studies to define all possible outcomes. Our study has identified 85 outcomes across 156 papers, with almost every second paper identifying new outcomes, making meaningful comparisons difficult. This explains why an analysis of data trends from other papers was beyond the scope of our study given the current stage of development of the STSA field. Goldstein (2022) also notes that given the methodological diversity of the studies reviewed, it was not possible to provide a weighted evaluation of STSA's effects, as would occur in a meta-analysis. However, a meta-analysis of STSA outcomes is a next natural step for future STSA research.

Our approach to conducting a systematic review of the STSA literature was to use the Clarivate Analytics Web of Science (WOS) database to identify relevant literature and the methods used were similar to those adopted by Iskhakova and Bradly (2021). The scope of the systematic review was limited to the following keywords: "Short-term study abroad," "STSA," "Short-term abroad program," "Short study abroad," "Short-term mobility program," "Short-term study tour," "International study tour," "Study tour abroad," "International study trip," "Short-term international experience," "Short-term study visit" and "Short-term international student mobility." This search identified 369 papers, which after removal of all conference proceedings, corrections, letters and different language articles, reduced the sample to 253 papers, including all papers published by 2020. Further analysis enabled us to remove papers that had a main focus on K-12 studies, adult private and individual/group tours/sojourns, leisure cultural tours, onshore study trips/in-country domestic study trips, resulting in a sample of 127 papers. We then added papers published in key a STSA-focused journal "*Frontiers: Study Abroad*," which were not listed in WOS, adding a further 28 papers and resulting in a total of 156 papers on which our review is based.

In the final step, we reviewed the 156 papers and coded each paper individually into an Excel file based on 12 different parameters, namely, STSA length, type of sample, sample location, STSA destination(s), sample size, empirical/conceptual, methods of data collection, cross-sectional/longitudinal, antecedents, outcomes, theory used and results. The above 12 parameters were identified based on the key research questions of our study, potential hypotheses we aimed to test and relevant data on the studied variables and outcomes. While more parameters could be identified, we believe 12 was sufficient to provide a depth and scope for analysis while still keeping the focus on our key research questions.

One author read all 156 papers and completed the coding of all articles using the identified parameters. For quality assurance, several steps were undertaken: both authors discussed and agreed on the parameters to code, then both authors worked with five selected papers to categorize the papers for unbiased coding consistent with the approaches of Silverman (2006) and Opengart (2018). This was followed by further quality control measures when the second author reviewed the coded results completed by the first author with a "blind" approach in line with Silverman (2006). The authors then reached a unified conclusion on the data from the selected papers and how they should be coded. Thus, the coded data yielded a coding matrix of 12 parameters and 156 items. This data, and the
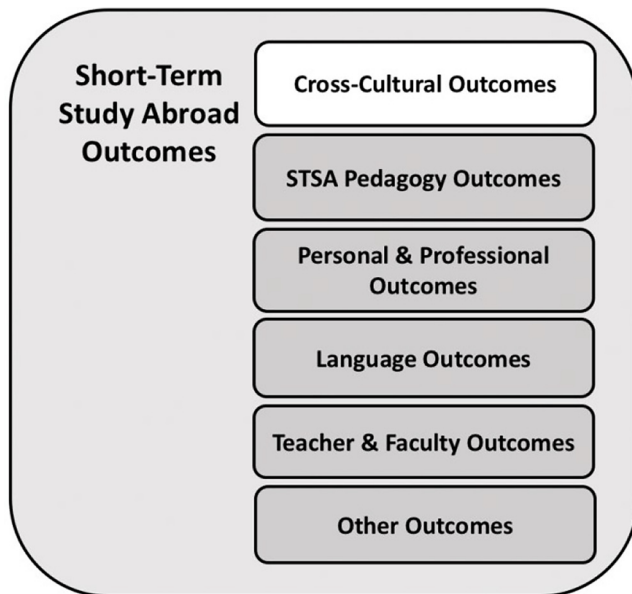
subsequent analysis and discussion are presented below. The precise parameters and the way they were coded were based on the following:

(1) STSA length (in weeks);

(2) type of sample (undergraduate/postgraduate/mixed students, teachers, host university students);

(3) sample location (country from);

(4) STSA destination (country of the STSA);

(5) sample size;

(6) empirical or conceptual;

(7) methods of data collection – survey, interview, live journal, mixed;

(8) cross-sectional or longitudinal;

(9) antecedents;

(10) precise outcomes studied;

(11) precise theory used; and

(12) results received.

Findings and originality

We investigated the intellectual development of the STSA literature by conducting a thematic analysis of the main dependent variables in each of the 135 empirical studies. The main dependent variable in the examined papers served as a proxy for a key focus/topic of the study, and we used the main studied variable/outcome in 21 conceptual papers. Hence, the main dependent variables (means various studied outcomes of STSA) of all studies from our sample were identified, recorded and then classified based on the key themes, which are presented below. We were able to identify 85 outcomes across our sample of 156 papers. These outcomes reveal that STSA research is extremely "experience driven" and overly focused on studying the results of experience during STSA programs, the impact of STSA programs or the outcomes of STSA participation, STSA influence and STSA roles. In other words, studying the STSA experience is a natural focus for SA scholars while typically overlooking analysis of the more complex and multiple variable relationships. Moreover, a complete picture of STSA program outcomes is still absent from the academic literature, with scholars tending to focus on studying very narrow and individual fragmented outcomes, while using a myriad of diverse non-unified measurements. As discussed earlier in the methodology section, the significant number of outcomes (85 outcomes) identified in STSA studies poses challenges for meaningful meta-analysis and analysis of data trends in the literature. To enable a more systematic evaluation of the STSA literature, we classified all 85 outcomes into six main categories (Figure 1):

(1) *cross-cultural outcomes* (59 studies, 29 outcomes);

(2) *STSA pedagogy outcomes* (68 studies, 19 outcomes);

(3) *personal/professional outcomes* (32 studies, 13 outcomes);

(4) *language outcomes* (23 studies, nine outcomes);

(5) *teacher/faculty outcomes* (six studies, five outcomes); and

(6) *other outcomes* (13 studies, ten outcomes).

Figure 1.
STSA outcomes
model

The data shows that the dominant number of outcomes were in the *cross-cultural, STSA
pedagogy and personal/professional outcomes* categories followed by *language, teacher/
faculty* and *other outcomes* to a lesser extent. The diversity and scale of outcomes evident in
STSA programs demonstrate the richness of this form of student learning and opportunity
for global mobility scholars. Next, we discuss the results of each category of the STSA
literature.

Cross-cultural outcomes
Cross-cultural outcomes was the most dominant category in the literature, with 29 different
outcomes identified, which we then classified into four key sub-categories:

(1) *cognitive* (eight outcomes) – that included knowledge-based variables;

(2) *behavioral* (11 outcomes) – that included skills, competencies, abilities, capacities,
capabilities and interaction variables;

(3) *attitudinal* (six outcomes) that included motivation and perception; and

(4) *holistic measures* (four outcomes) – that included abilities, skills and knowledge
under one combined measure.

Cultural awareness, cultural intelligence and *intercultural development inventory (IDI)* were
the most used frameworks or concepts in the literature when studying the cross-cultural
impact of STSA programs, with the *behavioral* outcomes being among the most studied
category. Three of our identified categories are consistent with Varela's (2017) reporting on
three learning areas: *cognitive* or language acquisition, affective or multicultural *attitudes*
and *behavioral* or intercultural adaptation based on 72 studies analysis. The most
comprehensive discussion of cross-cultural outcomes and underlying theoretical
conceptualization can be found in the recent study by Iskhakova and Bradly (2021).

Short-term study abroad pedagogy outcomes
STSA pedagogy is a category that was not well defined or analyzed holistically in previous STSA studies, despite resulting in 24 outcomes in 73 papers. We categorized the 24 outcomes of STSA pedagogy into four distinct themes based on the main topic and key focus of the papers. The four suggested groups are:

(1) STSA learning outcomes/impact;
(2) STSA programs parameters and design;
(3) comparison and classification of different SA programs; and
(4) student perceptions of STSA.

As Table 1 shows, the major attention given by scholars is to study diverse *STSA learning outcomes and impact*. The variety of studied outcomes is very high in this category and includes behavior, skills, attitudes and changes in competencies. These studies are a guide to STSA practitioners to design STSA in a way that incorporates these elements of learning. *STSA programs parameters and design* is the next critical category that occupies the attention of STSA scholars that focuses on the practical elements of STSA program design, including length, destination, student profiles and specialization (Le and Raven, 2015; Drake *et al.*, 2015; Fisher and Grettenberger, 2015). *Comparison and classification of different SA formats* is the next pedagogy category where scholars are studying SA formats, typologies, classifications and comparing the benefits and disadvantages of various STSA formats (Mills *et al.*, 2010; Sachau *et al.*, 2010; Molony, 2011). *Student perceptions of STSA* is another large sub-category, shedding light onto the importance of building a correct perception of STSA formats and parameters, i.e. understanding decisions about participation in STSA, decision regarding the choice of destination (Azmat *et al.*, 2013; Shiri, 2013; Janda, 2016; Interis *et al.*, 2018). Our review also shows that STSA studies seldom go beyond the analysis of the data from a single STSA program; hence, the results are often difficult to generalize to other contexts or formats.

Personal and professional outcomes
Personal outcomes in relation to STSA research in the existing literature cover areas of personal growth and development. STSA *professional outcomes* cover areas of career development, career aspirations and short- and long-term employment outcomes. Unfortunately, these two important outcomes of STSA have only been studied in a limited manner. One example is the study by Roy *et al.* (2019) that presents personal and professional outcomes as separate groups and with a much higher focus on personal outcomes, and without a specific focus on STSA research. Recently, researchers have begun to examine the influence of student participation in international mobility programs on employment and career-related outcomes, including professional development, perceived employability, career choices, transition into international careers and career success (Jinghui Liu, 2010; Roy *et al.*, 2019; Ruth *et al.*, 2019). Our study systematically presents *personal and professional outcomes* identified in 32 papers (Table 2). We classified 12 various personal outcomes into four sub-categories according to the theme of the main studied outcome:

(1) cognitive development;
(2) behavioral development;
(3) attitudinal development; and
(4) holistic development.

1. *STSA learning outcomes/STSA impact*
(11 groups/33 studies)

STSA learning outcomes	Le and Raven (2015), Drake *et al.* (2015), Fisher and Grettenberger (2015), Caldwell and Purtzer (2015), Brannstrom and Houser (2015), Landon *et al.* (2017), Coker *et al.* (2018), McLaughlin *et al.* (2018), Niehaus *et al.* (2018), McComb *et al.* (2019)
STSA impact and outcomes	DeDee and Stewart (2003), Harrison (2006), Charles *et al.* (2014), Aggarwal and Goodell (2015), Shively and Misco (2015), Mule *et al.* (2018), Dayton *et al.* (2018), McComb *et al.* (2019), Pennings *et al.* (2019)
Benefits and challenges of STSA programs (incl. perceived benefits and challenges)	Dixon (2015), Curtis and Ledgerwood (2018), James (2018), Normand-Marconnet *et al.* (2018)
Learning goals, study goals; alignment between goal and outcomes	Allen (2010), Jinghui Liu (2010), Gambino and Hashim (2016)
Academic performance and standards	Geyer *et al.* (2017)
Meaningful program experiences	Douglas *et al.* (2018)
Student engagement	Capps *et al.* (2018)
Learning behaviors	Fryer and Roger, 2018
Inter-professional collaborative practices, core competencies development	Dressler and Tweedie (2016)
Transformational learning themes	Bell *et al.* (2016)
Guatemala service learning outcomes	Cotten and Thompson (2017)

2. *Programs parameters and design*
(6 groups/20 studies)

Program parameters	Stanitski and Fuellhart (2003), Ingram (2005), Cheng (2014), Perry *et al.* (2015), Ramakrishna *et al.* (2016), Powell and Biederman (2017), Henthorne and Panko (2017), Rusnak *et al.* (2019)
Program design	Gorka and Niesenbaum (2001), Mapp (2012), Lightfoot and Lee (2015), West and Ramirez (2016), Meier and Smith (2016), Henthorne and Panko (2017), Hernández and Boero (2018)
STSA program outsourcing to providers	Barkin (2018)
Assessment evaluations	McLaughlin and Johnson (2006)
STSA model development	Hall *et al.* (2016)
Comparison of STSA teaching and learning activities	Duke (2000), McComb *et al.* (2019)

3. *Comparison and classification of different SA*
(3 groups/9 studies)

Program comparisons: STSA, LTSA, summer programs, study tour, service learning trip, etc.	Mills *et al.* (2010), Sachau *et al.* (2010), Molony (2011), Drake *et al.* (2015), Kruger *et al.* (2017), Childs-Kean *et al.* (2019)
Typology of global service learning (incl. classification by academic disciplines and service learning	Dixon (2015), Garcia and Longo (2017)
SA classifications	Engle and Engle (2003)

4. *Student perception of STSA*
(5 groups/10 studies)

Student preferences for STSA programs (incl. destinations)	Azmat *et al.* (2013), Shiri (2013), Janda (2016), Interis *et al.* (2018)
STSA: student perceptions of the effects; STSA perceived value	Rahikainen and Hakkarainen (2013), Cheng (2014)
Student motives and goals; student learning objectives	Hennings and Tanabe (2018), McComb *et al.* (2019)
STSA participation: future intentions to participate in LTSA; influential factors of participation	Amani and Kim (2018), Kato and Suzuki (2019)
Student post-STSA participation and processing	Kortegast and Boisfontaine (2015)

Table 1.
STSA pedagogy
outcomes studied in
our sample

As seen in Table 2, *cognitive development*, or knowledge-based category, is significantly over-studied compared to other categories. We acknowledge also that some cross-cultural holistic indexes like cultural intelligence (CQ) include measurement of cognitive components. The majority of studies measured the increase in general knowledge, so a potential focus could be on further measurement of how country-specific knowledge increases from participation in an STSA program. We conclude that in spite of the fact that personal outcomes are widely studied, *professional outcomes*, such as career and employment outcomes, including long-term career and employment outcomes, deserve

1. Personal outcomes (26 studies)	
1.1 Cognitive development (11 studies)	
Cognitive skills	Ferranto (2015), Geyer *et al.* (2017), Iqbal (2019)
Personal student learning, academic and civic learning	Gleeson and Tait (2012), Krishnan *et al.* (2016), Wu and Martin (2018)
Transformational learning	Walters *et al.* (2017), Dorsett *et al.* (2019)
Experiential learning	Malewski *et al.* (2012)
Critical thinking development	Cai and Sankaran (2015)
Media, literacy, research skills	Prokhorov and Therkelsen (2015)
1.2 Behavioral development (2 studies)	
Coping skills (positive and negative), resilience development	Dresen *et al.* (2019)
Self-efficacy	Nguyen *et al.*, (2018)
1.3 Attitudinal development (6 studies)	
Motivations; attitudes; aspirations; expectations	Azmat *et al.* (2013), Janda (2016), Curtis and Ledgerwood (2018), Fryer and Roger (2018)
Identity development, incl. of students with disabilities	Shames and Alden (2005)
Self-image change	Fryer and Roger (2018)
1.4 Holistic development (7 studies)	
Personal growth and personal development	Jackson (2006), Allen (2010), Lupi and Turner (2013), Lemmons (2015), Roy *et al.* (2019), Iqbal (2019), Ruth *et al.* (2019)
2. Professional outcomes (6 studies)	
Professional development; career development; career aspirations; career/employment outcomes; perceived employability	Jinghui Liu (2010), Roy *et al.* (2019), *Witkowsky and Mendez (2018), Hains-Wesson and Ji (2020),* Iqbal (2019), Ruth *et al.* (2019)

Table 2.
Personal and professional outcomes studied in our sample

further attention. Among *personal outcomes*, sub-categories of *behavioral*, *attitudinal* and *holistic development outcomes* are identified as an avenue for further attention by STSA scholars.

Language outcomes

Language outcomes were classified in our review into two main themes: *language development outcomes* and *Language attitude outcomes*. *Language development* was the dominant group that includes all key aspects of language development – oral, writing, listening, reading, comprehension, vocabulary and grammar. Language attitude outcomes are represented by outcomes such as L2 (where L2 is a second language) anxiety, L2 identity, language learning motivation, L2 willingness to communicate among the key studied outcomes. Studies of language outcomes comprised 23 papers across the sample (Table 3). Our findings are in line with Roy *et al.*'s (2019) study where the authors identified language skills as one of the key outcomes developed by SA but were grouped under cultural outcomes. Varela (2017) grouped language development under cognitive outcomes. No systematic studies have treated language outcomes as a distinct and separate category of learning outcomes. We also identified that the majority of studies focused only on language outcomes without studying linked relationships with other variables. Hence, scholars need to examine the more complex relationship between variables. For example, Martinsen (2010) found that STSA has a positive effect on students' oral language skills, particularly on those who already had a higher level of cultural sensitivity prior to going abroad.

1. Language development (18 studies)	
Language development (including oral, writing, listening, reading, vocabulary, grammar); L2 development	Jackson (2006), Allen (2010), Martinsen (2010), Menard-Warwick and Palmer (2012), Hassall (2013), Reynolds-Case (2013), Prokhorov and Therkelsen (2015), Czerwionka and Cuza (2017), Apgar (2018), Hernández (2018), Schenker (2018), Conroy (2018), Fryer and Roger (2018), Cubillos and Ilvento (2018), Apple and Aliponga (2018)
Perceived language gain	Gaugler and Matheus (2019)
Perceived successful L2 communications	Kimura and Hayashi (2019)
Linguistic affordance	Allen (2010)
2. Language attitude (4 studies)	
L2 Anxiety	Lee and Negrelli (2018)
L2 Willingness to communicate	Lee and Negrelli (2018)
Language learning motivation	Allen (2010)
L2 Identity	Kimura and Hayashi (2019)
Other	Shiri (2013)

Table 3.
Language outcomes
studied in our sample

Teacher/faculty outcomes

The teacher/faculty outcomes category is represented by five studied outcomes that have been used in six papers (Table 4). Outcomes were so diverse and the category was so small that we chose not to group them into sub-categories. These papers focused on pre-service and in-service teaching, and also to faculty leading STSA programs. The beliefs and practices of teaching staff were studied in two papers. Tam's (2015) findings suggest that the transformation of beliefs into practices plays a critical role in the actualization of possible learning outcomes, and Tam (2016) argue that assessment of STSA for teachers should include the impact on teaching beliefs. Other *teacher/faculty outcomes* such as faculty teaching goals; teaching improvements; teacher identity development and teacher perception of STSA effects comprised single studies (Collins and Geste, 2016; Ellinghaus *et al.*, 2019; Niehaus *et al.*, 2019; Rahikainen and Hakkarainen, 2013). Teacher/faculty outcomes are significantly understudied and warrant further attention in STSA research.

Other outcomes

The *other outcomes* group is the final group represented by eight studied outcomes (Table 5). We noted diverse insights, particularly in regard to the future directions of STSA research. A more common focus was on local engagement, meaning engagement with a local community, which was a distinct characteristic of this type of STSA program. Ogden and Streitwieser (2016) note that while engagement with host communities and STSA's impact on a host community is a popular topic in tourism and anthropology studies, the question has only recently been asked in relation to SA programs. Environmental citizenship and ecological

Teachers/faculty outcomes (6 studies)	
Teachers beliefs and practice	Tam (2015), He *et al.* (2017)
Faculty teaching goals	Niehaus *et al.* (2019)
Teaching improvements	Ellinghaus *et al.* (2019)
Teacher identity development	Collins and Geste (2016)
Teacher perceptions of the effects of STSA	Rahikainen and Hakkarainen (2013)

Table 4.
Teachers/faculty
outcomes studied in
our sample

paradigm scores are another example of a less studied format of STSA research. More attention by scholars is needed on these types of variables and outcomes.

Chronological development of the field
Figure 2 shows the chronological development of the field by the STSA outcomes that were examined in the literature. The figure shows how the themes and focus of STSA studies have evolved from learning activities such as Gorka and Niesenbaum's (2001) study of STSA program design, to a focus on cultural outcomes from Medina-López-Portillo's (2004) study of IDI. This was followed by the emergence of studies on personal–professional outcomes and language proficiency. Studies addressing teacher outcomes and other outcomes then began to emerge consistently from the start of 2009. Figure 2 also shows that 2018 was the peak of STSA literature across all five outcomes, except teacher/faculty outcomes. While the disruption to STSA programs from COVID-19 may be expected to reverse the 20-year growth trend in scholarly interest in STSA, this is likely to be temporary given that STSA programs had become an important feature of the internationalization of a curricula in higher education institutions prior to COVID-19.

Other outcomes (8 studies)	
Local engagement; engagement with the place; local community impact	Schroeder *et al.* (2009), Free and Ingram (2018), Pipitone (2018)
Environmental citizenship; ecological paradigm score	Tarrant and Lyons (2012), Wynveen *et al.* (2012)
Meta-travel framework development	Riggan *et al.* (2011)
Health information outcomes; medical kit preparation	Yamakawa *et al.* (2019)
The role of social capital	Castañeda and Zirger (2011)

Table 5.
Other outcomes

Figure 2.
Chronological development of the field
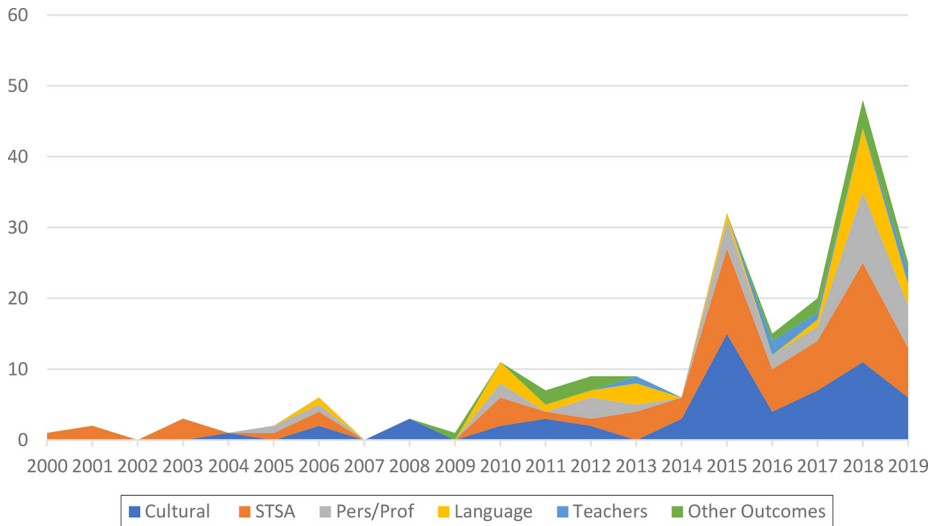
Practical implications for international education

Our systematic review of STSA outcomes addresses an existing gap and serves as a timely bridge to connect current STSA research with practice. This systematic review has identified four main implications for education practitioners and management.

First, this study shows that STSA is a rich field for multi-perspective research. With more than 85 outcomes identified across the sample, STSA programs satisfy multifaceted demands of student learning. There is significant potential for testing new ideas, formats, educational methods, educational strategies and outcomes when it comes to international education and administration. Our review has confirmed the significant impact and growing interest in STSA as a form of SA as a highly effective format of international education capable of developing a broad range of learning outcomes.

Second, the development of an STSA outcomes map will allow education management and SA practitioners to better use the full potential of overseas educational programs by addressing the challenges and interests of various stakeholders. If intuitively students are perceived as the main affected category, our study shows that the interests of other stakeholders, including teachers/faculty, local communities and host organizations, sending universities and STSA providers also need to be studied. Potential areas of STSA program design could include a program's broader effect on host country communities and the local environment. Other practical variables that could be incorporated into STSA program design are the effects of international exposure and world-view development of host country providers and the travel skills and ambitions of student participants.

Third, while the study of cross-cultural learning outcomes from STSA programs dominate the academic literature, our study also highlights the personal and professional outcomes, language development and language attitude as areas of critical interest in an intercultural context. Seeing the types of outcomes that are possible, STSA practitioners can design programs intended to develop students more broadly beyond the immediate learning outcomes of their field of study. For example, STSA programs can facilitate cross-cultural skills, language development and personal and professional development to prepare students for future professional life and leadership, with these broader outcomes incorporated into STSA program design.

Fourth, our next significant contribution lies in the systematization of all STSA learning outcomes. Our study has identified the pedagogical approaches of the STSA format that have been of primary interest to scholars. However, we highlight other parameters of importance to STSA program design. This includes student perceptions about STSA – e.g. student perceptions about the length and type of STSA program when deciding to participate in an STSA program. Furthermore, program practitioners could be better informed about how variables such as selection of participants, choice of STSA destinations and the nature of in-country activities, variables that are linked and likely to impact learning outcomes.

To summarize, the STSA format offers an affordable and unique opportunity for cultural development, language development, personal development and professional development for the student. There are almost no alternatives to the STSA format that are capable of the same multifaceted outcomes that are also practical and affordable in an academic setting. In line with Varela (2017), we conclude that STSA is a valuable learning practice, and efforts to further make it a common format of business education and to increase the number of participants seem advisable.

Agenda for future research

Based on our first systematic review of the outcomes identified in the STSA literature, we draw *five* main lessons and observations that underpin a future research agenda.

First, we can conclude that STSA programs serve as an excellent field for further research because of its diverse outcomes. We encourage future scholars to look for synergies in exploring outcomes, but also to go deeper beyond the three most studies themes: *cross-cultural outcomes; STSA pedagogy outcomes* and *personal/professional outcomes*. Professional outcomes are understudied in comparison with the first two areas and is a suggested direction for future research. Behavioral and attitudinal components of personal outcomes, as well as holistic measures of personal development are among the least studied variables that warrant the attention of STSA scholars. We call on scholars to particularly focus on understanding the long-term effects of competencies development after an STSA program, student CQ development and faculty–peers interaction for future personal and professional development.

Second, STSA scholars have to advance the outcomes and topics studied beyond the immediate descriptive parameters of STSA and move to more conceptual, abstract and theory-building levels. Scholars need to bring more dimensions to the study of STSA to contribute to a broader research conversation, not only for STSA practitioners and scholars. Examples of that could include the study of more holistic issues and parameters such as cognitive, professional, spiritual and emotional development of students or faculty. Relatively few areas in the international education field are as rich for such diverse study, highlighting again the significant research potential of STSA formats of SA across multiple disciplines and not just business education.

Third, more comparative studies are warranted that compare STSA with other types of global mobility opportunities. Such studies could focus on short-term executive business trips, short-term expatriate postings and short-term business leadership programs (Fey, 2020). Moreover, the adaptive and flexible nature of STSA formats for educational programs makes it an ideal form of SA in the post-COVID-19 era where travel plans may be easily disrupted.

Fourth, the majority of previous studies measured the increase in general knowledge, so a future focus could be on the measurement of country-specific knowledge development. At the same time, more country-specific research (such as a direct comparison of STSA outcomes in China and Japan) could bring more practical benefits to STSA practitioners and STSA participants to and lead to more informative decision-making about program design.

And, *fifth*, future STSA research could focus on the antecedents of STSA and provide a complex and systematic review of all antecedents and outcomes of STSA together. Hence, the next logical step could be undertaking a meta-analysis based on the outcomes of STSA identified in our study. Varela's (2017) study serves as the best practice of SA outcomes, and Goldstein's (2022) study further supports the idea that despite the methodological diversity of STSA studies, a meta-analysis of STSA outcomes is a next logical step for STSA researchers.

Limitations

Like all literature reviews, our study has a number of limitations. These include those related to the nature of the systematic literature review, which was limited by the papers that were identified and the selected key words in our search criteria. While common terminology of STSA was used, other relevant papers may have been omitted including those that were published in other languages. Next, our sample was restricted to papers that were published before 2020, and hence, there is the potential that other insightful research on STSA has been published since then. And finally, meta-analysis methodology would ideally have been used to study some STSA outcomes, but has been suggested as a future direction for STSA research.

Conclusion

Our study has presented a systematic review of STSA outcomes, including *cross-cultural outcomes, STSA pedagogy outcomes, personal/professional outcomes, language outcomes, teacher/faculty outcomes* and *other outcomes*. Our approach has been to categorize and explain the directions and focus of STSA research. While the COVID-19 pandemic currently limits the opportunities for STSA, given its previous popularity, we envisage a strong return in the coming years to this form of affordable and valuable global learning. STSA programs have become an important component of higher education, which require considerable resources from participants and educational institutions alike. Therefore, further research is needed to understand the impacts of STSA programs and to improve program design. Such research will serve to better inform both academic understanding of the phenomenon and educational practice. The aim of this paper is to serve as a comprehensive review to help guide future STSA and SA scholars, and practitioners, in the further development of the field and to encourage STSA as an important feature of international education.

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Corresponding author

Marina Iskhakova can be contacted at: marina.iskhakova@anu.edu.au