

Perceptions of International Fieldwork Experiences on Professional and Personal Development for OT Students

Cassidy Long¹, Sharon Swift¹, Kendall Lenz, Kelley Cutcliff, Rebekah Bauknight, Emma Ford

¹Augusta University, Augusta, Georgia, United States

DOI: 10.5014/ajot.2022.76S1-PO39

Date presented: March 31, 2022

Primary Author and Speaker: Cassidy Long, cassidyclong@gmail.com

PURPOSE: International fieldwork experiences (IFE) allow occupational therapy students to develop valuable skills that benefit them throughout their careers. Research supports beneficial outcomes surrounding the impact of IFEs for students in healthcare professions, demonstrating that IFEs provide opportunities beyond didactic learning that enhance professional and personal development of healthcare students (Gribble et al., 2014). Evidence also supports the impact of IFEs on developing cultural competence, mutual collaborative learning, and professional growth in students (Simonelis et al., 2011). Additionally, occupational therapy students that engaged in IFEs demonstrated more autonomy and lifelong learning traits than students in traditional placements (Mu, et al., 2010). Despite this evidence, the considerably limited research regarding the impact of IFEs in the field of occupational therapy requires further investigation. The Augusta University Occupational Therapy Program offers two Level I IFEs to Jamaica each year. Early Program Participants (EPPs) obtained 14 credit hours, and Late Program Participants (LPPs) obtained 32+ credit hours. The purpose of this study is to compare the perceptions of the Early Program Participants' and Late Program Participants' experiences in regard to personal and professional development following the international fieldwork experience.

DESIGN: This retrospective, observational study uses previously collected data from 2013 to 2019. Inclusion criteria included students who attended the IFE in Jamaica and completed the survey through the Augusta University Occupational Therapy Program. Forty-five student participants met the inclusion criteria, however, 125 students were excluded because they were domestic for their fieldwork experience. Twenty-two students were categorized as EPPs, while 23 were categorized as LPPs.

METHOD: Prior student researchers distributed surveys to students who attended international fieldwork during this time. Data from these self-report surveys was used in the analysis for this study. The surveys consisted of 21 Likert scale questions with responses ranging from 1-5 to gauge student perceptions. A statistical analysis was completed on 45 returned surveys. An Independent Samples T-Test was conducted to compare the early and late program participants' personal and professional development after fieldwork completion using SPSS.

RESULTS: The results suggested that there was no statistical difference between EPPs ($M = 44.261$, $SD = 1.48$) and LPPs ($M = 43.409$, $SD = 3.16$) in their perceived overall personal development ($t = 1.17$, $df = 43$, $p = .25$). Additionally, there was no statistical significance between EPPs ($M = 56.652$, $SD = 2.77$) and LPPs ($M = 56.045$, $SD = 5.07$) in the professional development domain ($t = .50$, $df = 43$, $p = .62$).

CONCLUSION: The findings of this analysis suggest that the amount of didactic coursework prior to departure on international fieldwork does not act as a contributing factor to the perceived personal and professional development of students. Furthermore, the limited difference in outcomes implies that the students' development is not affected by their amount of time in the curriculum, but instead suggests that the international fieldwork trip itself contributes to gains in perceived personal and professional development.

IMPACT: Although findings are not generalizable, our results support international fieldwork as beneficial for students' perceived personal and professional development. Occupational therapy education programs should consider the implementation of international fieldwork experiences for students.

References

- Gribble, N., Dender, A., Lawrence, E., Manning, K., & Falkmer, T. (2014). International WIL placements: Their influence on student professional development, personal growth and cultural competence. *Asia Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 15(2), 107-117. https://www.ijwil.org/files/APJCE_15_2_107_117.pdf
- Mu, K., Coppard, B. M., Bracciano, A., Doll, J., & Matthews, A. (2010). Fostering cultural competency, clinical reasoning, and leadership through international outreach. *Occupational Therapy in Health Care*, 24(1), 74-85. <https://doi.org/10.3109/07380570903329628>
- Simonelis, J., Njelesani, J., Novak, L., Kuzma, C., & Cameron, D. (2011). International fieldwork placements and occupational therapy: Lived experiences of the major stakeholders. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*, 58(5), 370-377. <http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1440-1630.2011.00942.x>