


# Assessing student expectations and perceptions of a short-term international service-learning experience

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## Abstract

**Objectives:** Despite nursing students' need for cultural education, few studies have measured what students expect from international service-learning experiences and how their perceptions of the actual experience compare to these expectations. To increase understanding of global nursing experiences, the purpose of this study was to examine the similarities and differences between nursing students' anticipated (pre-travel) personal and professional developmental expectations and reported (posttravel) personal and developmental outcomes.

**Design:** This study employed a mixed descriptive research design. Quantitative data was secured through survey methodology. Written responses to open-ended questions provided qualitative data for analysis.

**Sample:** Between 2012 and 2017, 43 undergraduate and graduate nursing students at a Midwestern university completed surveys and narratives about their participation in an international service-learning course in Kenya.

**Results:** Students' anticipated learning was achieved through their international experiences. Participants also experienced personal growth, professional development, cultural competency enhancement, and transformation from the educational experience. They also described how their experiences would change their personal and professional lives.

**Conclusion:** The depth and breadth of the growth and learning described by students is consistent with the expectations of high-impact educational practices.

## KEYWORDS

international nursing, nursing education, outcomes, service learning

## 1 | BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The United States is a multiracial, multilingual, and multicultural society. In response, it is imperative that educators act on students'

need for global and cultural education. Such education should support expanding knowledge, skills, and values that are consistent with the American Association of Colleges of Nursing's (AACN's) *Essentials* guides to undergraduate and graduate education (AACN, 2000, 2006, 2011), the American Nurses Association's (ANA) *Code*

of *Ethics for Nurses* (ANA, 2015) and *Nursing Social Policy Statement* (ANA, 2010).

Over the last several years, universities have recognized the importance of global learning. University faculty have endeavored to give nursing students a unique learning and practice experience by forming global community partnerships. To expand nursing students' foundational knowledge, the school of nursing at a public university in the Midwest offers international service-learning courses that are implemented as faculty-led, short-term immersion experiences. An international service-learning course in Kenya was initiated 12 years ago in partnership with a Kenyan faith-based health care system. Leffers' and Mitchell's (2011) conceptual model for partnership and sustainability in global health as well as the work of Brown, White, and Leibrandt (2006) provided guidance for the ongoing strengthening and growth of the partnership. Students participating in the course receive elective credit and/or clinical hours toward course/degree requirements. In addition to pre- and posttravel coursework, nursing students spend over 2 weeks working collaboratively with the Kenyan health care providers and educators in settings where the resources, languages, culture, perspectives, and practices are different from their own. Traveling to a lower-resourced country and participating in hospital-, clinic-, and community-based health care services and health education to impoverished urban and rural communities—whose residents live in significant to extreme poverty with limited access to secure water, food, shelter, and health care—gives students deeply enriching learning opportunities.

Service-learning as well as global learning/study abroad have been identified as high-impact educational practices promoting deep learning, personal, and professional development (Kuh, O'Donnell, & Reed, 2013). Following an integrative review of nursing literature, Juniarti, Zannettino, Fuller, and Grant (2016, p. 208) described service-learning in nursing education: "Service learning is a structured form of intra-curricular experiential learning that engages students in service and learning in real-life experiences using reflection and reciprocity as tools to achieve the specified outcomes and benefits for all stakeholders." Hartman and Kiely (2014) defined international service-learning as "a community-driven service experience that employs structured, critically reflective practice to better understand common human dignity; self; culture; positionality; socio-economic, political, and environmental issues; power relations; and social responsibility, all in global contexts" (as cited in Niehaus & Garcia, 2017, p.100).

Research on service-learning in disciplines outside of nursing includes explorations of pedagogical strategies (Van Cleave, 2013) as well as analyses of student outcomes such as personal growth and recognizing the importance of helping others (Currie-Mueller & Littlefield, 2018; Niehaus & Garcia, 2017). Research on service-learning has noted several positive outcomes such as providing opportunities to make a difference in the lives of others while increasing concept retention in the classroom setting (Cooke & Kemeny, 2014; Currie-Mueller & Littlefield, 2018). Other service-learning researchers stressed the importance of reflection as an activity critical to promoting personal growth, self-efficacy, and community self-efficacy

or "perceiving an impact on the community" (Sanders, Van Oss, & McGeary, 2016, p. 75). Daniel and Mishra (2017) concluded that international service-learning has a more powerful impact on student learning than do domestic service-learning experiences. Findings such as these mimic the growing idea in education that global learning, through its "powerful pedagogy... and high-impact practices," helps the student "become adept at interacting, cooperating, and engaging with individuals from diverse backgrounds" (Whitehead, 2015, p. 6).

Within nursing, international service-learning's impact on students' cultural competency has been documented in the literature over the past decade (Amerson, 2009, 2010; Carpenter & Garcia, 2012; Green, Comer, Elliott, & Neubrandt, 2011; Kohlbry, 2016; Puri, Kaddoura, & Dominick, 2013; Smit & Tremethick, 2013). Campinha-Bacote (2002) described cultural competence as "the integration of cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural skill, and cultural desire" (as cited in McKinnon & Fealy, 2011, p. 96). Amerson (2012) also noted an increase in students' cognitive, practical, and affective knowledge after service-learning activities when compared to classroom experiences. Main, Garrett-Wright, and Kerby (2013) identified eight themes related to the lived experiences of undergraduate and graduate nursing students participating in an international service-learning course. These themes included expectations and emotions about the trip; developing reciprocal relationships with a community; valuing interdisciplinary collaboration; acquiring knowledge that impacts future nursing practice; personal growth; planning for future service-learning; recognizing the self as part of a larger social network and sharing responsibility for social problems; and buying into interdisciplinary change projects. Likewise, Puri et al. (2013) explored the perceptions of health-profession students participating in an international service-learning experience. Several themes emerged from this study including internal motivation to help underserved countries, helping to bridge the theory-practice gap, interprofessional collaboration and learning, and professional growth as a health care provider (Puri et al., 2013). In contrast, Foronda and Belknap (2012) studied Associate Degree Nursing (ADN) students' perspectives following a short-term study abroad and found that there were impediments to a transformative learning experience. Three themes emerged from this study including egocentrism/emotional disconnect, perceived powerlessness/being overwhelmed, and a vacation mind-set.

In summary, the majority of literature on student learning outcomes indicates that international service-learning gives students opportunities to gain cultural understanding and competencies, expand communication and critical thinking skills, grow personally and professionally, and become engaged citizens within a multicultural society. However, a gap was identified in understanding what students expect from their international service-learning experiences and how their perceptions of the actual experience compare to their expectations.

The aim of this study was to expand the understanding of similarities and differences between nursing students anticipated (pretravel/pre-entry) personal and professional developmental

expectations for a faculty-led short-term international service-learning experience and reported (posttravel/postentry) personal and developmental outcomes. The following inquiries were posited for these students:

- What are the nursing students' anticipated (prior to the experience) personal and professional expectations?
- What personal and professional outcomes are reported by the nursing students following the experience?
- What are the similarities and differences between the anticipated personal and professional expectations and reported outcomes?

## 2 | METHODS

This study employed a mixed descriptive research design. Quantitative data were secured through survey methodology. Written responses to open-ended questions provided qualitative data for analysis.

### 2.1 | Setting

A public Midwestern university offering undergraduate and graduate nursing programs initiated partnerships in select health, education, and social programs in Kenya in 2007 with a 10-day visit by two faculty members. The following year (2008), a Kenyan nurse educator spent 1 month at the U.S. University. This was important to the building of the partnership, establishment of mutual goals, and plans for future interactions. Beginning in 2009, nursing faculty, students, and alumni have made yearly visits to Kenya. The study abroad experience is a short-term (17–18 days), faculty-led service-learning course. Use of the Theory of Culture Care Diversity and Universality (Culture Care Theory) as a guiding framework for the course is described by Knecht and Sabatine (2015). Student selection for participation includes a written application addressing motivation to participate, and perceptions of their strengths, talents, challenges, and apprehensions regarding the international experience; an interview with the lead faculty; and two academic and/or professional references. Student scholarships are available through the university to help offset the cost of the trip.

The course includes preparation, assignments, and orientation prior to the trip. While in Kenya, students engage in an array of acute-care and community-based clinical activities in urban, rural, and remote settings designed and determined in partnership with Kenyan health care and social service providers, nursing students, and educators. Examples of clinical activities include but are not limited to bedside nursing, outpatient clinics, rural health clinics, and health screening, education, and interactions at schools, orphanages, and community settings. Student reflection and debriefing activities are an important aspect of the course accomplished through individual and group journaling, meetings with faculty, and interactions with host partners. Nonclinical cultural activities are

integrated throughout the trip. Upon return, the students have a variety of posttravel assignments and participate in a debriefing dinner meeting.

Kenyan host partners provide feedback regarding student interactions and care services along with plans for future visits. The U.S. faculty and Kenyan host partners are in communication with each other throughout the year and have jointly presented a poster at an international conference regarding outcomes for their respective organizations.

### 2.2 | Sample

Forty-three undergraduate and graduate nursing students at the university comprised the study's purposive convenience sample. The sample represented 87.8% of the total student participants. All took part in a 17- to 18-day faculty-led international study abroad course to Kenya between 2012 and 2017. Alumni participants were excluded from the study.

The participants were primarily undergraduate nursing students (93%), of which half were prelicensure students, and half were registered nurse to baccalaureate of science in nursing student. Graduate nursing students in advanced practice nurse practitioner programs comprised 7% of the sample. Eighty-eight percent of the participants were female and 12% were male. Participant age ranged from 21 to 59 years, with a mean age of 32.8. Participants were 77% White, 7% Black/African American, 5% Hispanic/Latino, 5% multiracial, and 6% not identified.

### 2.3 | Measures/Data collection

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected for this mixed-method study. Quantitative data were collected pre- and posttravel. Pre- and posttravel surveys were developed by one of the authors of this study and a faculty colleague based on the literature (Bentley & Ellison, 2007; Casey and Murphy, (2008); ; ; Gelmon, Holland, Driscoll, Spring, & Kerrigan, 2001; Ryan, Twibell, Brigham, & Bennett, 2000). The survey questions were also consistent with course and program objectives related to nursing practice, communication, and cultural competencies. Tippen (2016) described the use and findings of the surveys related to international service-learning courses in Cambodia. The pretravel survey included nine Likert-style questions about students' perspectives of the importance of various learning aspects of an international service-learning course. Responses were recorded on a 1–5 scale, with the higher number reflecting the more desirable response. Similarly, the posttravel survey included nine Likert-style questions reflecting students' perspectives of how often they were provided with various learning opportunities through the course. Responses were recorded on a 1–5 scale with the higher number reflecting the more desirable response. Cronbach's alpha for the 9-item survey was 0.83. The surveys were posted in a Blackboard organization open to student participants for orientation during the semester prior to travel through the posttravel period. The pretravel survey was completed anytime

during the orientation period, 1–3 months prior to travel. The posttravel survey was completed within 6 weeks of completing the international travel.

Qualitative data were also collected pre- and posttravel. Prior to travel, students completed a narrative application and survey that included open-ended questions about their reasons for applying to the study abroad opportunity and what they anticipated learning. The posttravel survey included open-ended questions about their international experiences and learning outcomes.

## 2.4 | Analysis

Quantitative data from the pre- and posttravel questionnaires were analyzed using basic descriptive analysis and measures of central tendency. Differences between pre- and posttravel mean scores on the nine Likert-scaled items were determined and analyzed using one-sample *t* tests. Effect sizes were estimated using Omega-squared analysis to further understand the impact of the international experience among the students.

Through qualitative analysis of students' written responses to the survey's open-ended questions, the researchers sought to understand the students' expectations and experiences as shared in their narratives. The students' answers were read repeatedly to gain a sense of the whole as well as to identify and describe emerging themes. Key words and phrases were highlighted, coded, grouped, and interpreted using concepts reported in the literature. These concepts included reciprocal learning with a community; acquiring knowledge for future nursing practice; personal growth; professional growth; internal motivation to serve underserved populations/communities; cultural competencies (encounters, awareness, appreciation of diversity and universality, culturally congruent care, cultural humility); altruism; perspective transformation; obtaining knowledge of another health care system; bridging theory to practice (critical thinking); enhancing communication skills; and increased understanding of the ethics of care. Initially, four researchers coded a sample of student narratives to achieve consensus. The qualitative data then were divided and researchers worked in pairs to complete the coding. Two researchers independently coded their assigned half of the data and compared their coding. When differences occurred, they came to a consensus or sought input from the other two faculty members. Once all the pre- and posttravel qualitative data were coded, the four researchers worked together to group and interpret the findings, and identify emerging themes.

## 2.5 | Ethical considerations

This study was approved by the university's institutional review board. Completion of the pre- and posttravel surveys was voluntary. Forty-three of 49 students enrolled in the study abroad service-learning course to Kenya between 2012 and 2017 chose to participate. Participants were given the option but not required to add a four-digit identifier to their surveys. All identifying information was removed from the narratives and surveys prior to analysis. Paper

copies of the data were kept in a locked office. Electronic copies of the data and coding were secured in password-protected university computers.

## 3 | RESULTS

### 3.1 | Quantitative results

Pretravel survey results provided insight into the students' perspectives of the importance of various learning aspects of an international service-learning course. The students ranked all nine items high in importance. Mean scores on a 1–5 point scale ranged from 4.10 (a deeper understanding of concepts I have already learned about in nursing classes) to 4.82 (appreciating different cultures). Although the mean scores were relatively compressed, the items with scores of 4.5 and below generally related to developing and applying skills. Items with mean scores above 4.5 generally related to broader perspectives of learning about cultures, self, and world issues.

Posttravel survey results provided students' perspectives of how often they experienced various learning opportunities during the international service-learning course. Mean scores on a 1–5 point scale ranged from 4.52 (developing clinical skills) to 5.0 (seeing world-life problems in a real-life situation). The high mean scores across all items indicated the students' positive perceptions of the experience.

The differences between pre- and posttravel scores were examined to uncover gaps in student learning expectations. Table 1 provides an overview of the pre- and posttravel scores and the differences between the means. A one-sample *t* test was used to identify significant differences between the Time-1 (pretravel) and Time-2 (posttravel) assessments. Due to an oversight in data collection (students did not consistently use an identifier), the Time-1 and Time-2 data could not be matched in a pre- post-test design. As a consequence, the preferred analysis using a paired-sample *t* test could not be performed. An alternative, one-sample *t* test was used and did not violate the assumption of independence of samples (as required in the two-sample *t* test). The Time-1 mean for each variable was used as the comparison mean in assessing the difference between Time-1 and Time-2 assessments.

All the differences were in a positive direction, indicating that students perceived that the international course provided learning opportunities that were important to them. As the table shows, the majority of items as well as the composite mean showed "growth" or change between the pretravel and posttravel testing interval which was statistically significant.

An Omega-squared analysis was used to assess the variance in change from pre- to posttravel which was explained by the international service-learning experience. The Omega-squared analysis values for the nine items were: V1 = 0.743; V2 = 0.193; V3 = 0.232; V4 = 0.614; V5 = 0.594; V6 = NS; V7 = 0.233; V8 = NS; V9 = NS; Composite Variable = 0.566. Three items as well as the overall composite had more than 50% of the variance in change explained by the international experience. These included having a "deeper

**TABLE 1** Pre-/posttravel survey results

Variable	Pretravel survey		Post travel survey		t value	Sig. (2-tail)	Mean Diff.	95% CI		Variable
	Mean	STD	Mean	STD				Lower	Upper	
V1	4.10	0.82	4.81	0.40	8.051	<b>0.000</b>	0.706	0.520	0.890	Deeper understanding of concepts I have already learned about in nursing classes
V2	4.46	0.85	4.71	0.46	2.502	<b>0.021</b>	0.253	0.042	0.464	Applying skills I have already learned in nursing classes to real-life problems
V3	4.64	0.63	4.86	0.36	2.762	<b>0.012</b>	0.316	0.053	0.379	Understanding how complex the problems are with the people I will be servicing
V4	4.67	0.58	4.95	0.22	6.000	<b>0.000</b>	0.286	0.186	0.385	Understanding myself better/personal growth
V5	4.26	0.72	4.86	0.48	5.758	<b>0.000</b>	0.601	0.383	0.818	How to work with others effectively
V6	4.50	0.69	4.52	0.68	0.161	0.874	0.024	-0.286	0.333	Developing clinical skills
V7	4.82	0.39	4.95	0.22	2.769	<b>0.012</b>	0.132	0.033	0.231	Appreciating different cultures
V8	4.72	0.56	4.86	0.36	1.779	0.090	0.139	-0.024	0.302	Increasing my comfort level in working with different cultures
V9	4.79	0.52	5.00	0.00	<sup>a</sup>					Seeing world health problems in a real life situation
CompVar <sup>b</sup>	4.55	0.42	4.84	0.24	5.452	<b>0.000</b>	0.285	0.176	0.395	The average of the nine items

Note: Emboldened significance values indicate  $p < .05$ .

<sup>a</sup>The t-statistic could not be calculated because there was no variance in the posttest measure. All subjects responded to the item with "5."

<sup>b</sup>This represents a composite variable averaging the nine items. Cronbach's alpha = 0.833.

understanding of concepts learned in class" (74%); "understanding myself better/personal growth" (61%); learning "how to work with others effectively" (59%); and overall (57%). The Omega-squared analysis suggests that the international service-learning experience had a significant effect on changing students' attitudes positively. It appears that overall the experience was impactful on the students.

### 3.2 | Qualitative results

Similar themes emerged from students' pre- and posttravel narratives, indicating that they realized their anticipated learning through the experience. The four emergent themes were learning and advancement related to *personal development*, *professional development*, *enhancement of cultural competencies* (encounters, awareness, appreciation of diversity and universality, culturally congruent care, cultural humility), and *transformation from the educational experience*. While each of these themes was evident within the pre- and posttravel narratives, the researchers perceived that the responses' depth and breadth were greater posttravel. Following are the four themes with supporting participant quotes.

#### 3.2.1 | Personal growth

In their narratives, participants described experiencing personal growth both generally (growing as a human being, having personal discoveries, developing character, and shaping inner spirit) and specifically (increasing self-awareness, becoming more adaptable, being creative, building confidence, focusing on people rather than things, and becoming nonjudgmental).

##### Anticipated

- "I am usually looking for ways to stretch and expand my life in positive ways."
- "I value personal growth as a top priority in my life and realize this trip will expose me to new things I will never acquire from the accelerated nursing program alone. I'm hoping to make personal discoveries about myself during the experience that will positively impact my future career in healthcare."
- "[I hope to gain an] increased ability to keep an upbeat, positive, constructive attitude while gaining greater insight into the realities of the world."

##### Reported

- "I gained a new sense of confidence, not only in myself, but in the caring, friendly, knowledgeable professionals participating in this course."
- "I have been humbled and astounded by human resilience and capability."
- "It challenged my sense of personal space and my ability to get along with others who have different attitudes and beliefs."

### 3.2.2 | Professional development

Students described specific areas of growth in nursing practice such as providing care with less technology and waste; increasing assessment skills; learning more about the ways of caring; gaining leadership, teamwork, and critical thinking skills; and learning resourcefulness. They also described learning about various health systems, how to practice in different settings, the determinants of health, and various disease etiologies. Students noted that the international experience provided opportunities to explore different career paths including practicing in international nursing, humanitarian work, and underserved settings in the U.S. and abroad.

#### *Anticipated*

- “I believe that these experiences are essential for me because I am a new nurse and I am developing my nursing philosophy.”
- “I am seeking a challenging way to wrap up this leg of my education and I think this program will provide aspects to nursing that I have not been exposed to yet.”
- “This experience is a growth opportunity that will help to make me an even more caring and effective nurse.”
- “I have grown to become accustomed to having unlimited resources when caring for patients, and have to learn to provide care with limited resources.”

#### *Reported*

- “It [allowed] me to understand poverty and the ability of health-care providers to assist in access, understanding, and utilizing healthcare in the most basic way.”
- “I feel like this experience gave me the courage to try new things and explore new areas of nursing.”
- “I learned from this clinical experience to slow down and listen to the patient's story and point of view.”
- “[It] provided me an opportunity to explore a potential career in international nursing.”

### 3.2.3 | Enhancement of cultural competencies

Student narratives reflected the importance of the experience in the ongoing development of cultural competencies. Students' expected and reported outcomes included self-examination as well as growth in values and skills. Students reported recognizing and addressing their own biases, experiencing and recognizing cultural pain, breaking through ethnocentric perspectives, and valuing the importance of providing culturally congruent care. They also reported a broadened worldview that increased their sensitivity to differences, expanded their ways of viewing the world, and helped them recognize oneness and similarities among people. Students also improved their ability to assess, understand, and advocate for patients' care preferences; refined their communication skills to address language barriers including working with translators; learned the culture's various

health care and folk practices; and applied knowledge from the university's transcultural health care courses.

#### *Anticipated*

- “I am interested in new cultures, and I love to explore how other countries view the world.”
- “The world of transcultural nursing is still growing, but I want to be part of the Community Health Nursing experience in Kenya so that my quality of care may become more culturally congruent and competent.”
- “I expect from this experience to appreciate even further the human condition by going beyond cultural aspects of people and learn from the Kenyan people.”

#### *Reported*

- “This trip provided me with feeling more comfortable taking care of people from other cultures and showed me that we have more in common than not.”
- “I definitely have a deeper appreciation for the diversity of cultures and beliefs compared to beforehand. You can read and study about culture, but it will never compare to immersing yourself with it.”
- “I will no longer have tolerance for bigotry or culturally intolerant providers and will continue to provide equal care to all people.”

### 3.2.4 | Transformation from the educational experience

Students' pretravel narratives indicated that they anticipated that the experience would be a significant educational opportunity. They used phrases such as once in a lifetime, will open my eyes, will broaden my horizons, and help me gain new perspectives. The students' expectations were realized as evidenced by their descriptions of the experience as being forever life changing, life altering, helping them see the bigger picture, and transformative.

#### *Anticipated*

- “I know that caring for people in Kenya will be a life-changing experience for me and also change the way that I care for people when I become a nurse.”
- “I hope to bring a change in my perspective and priorities in life by participating in the international nursing experience in Kenya.”

#### *Reported*

- “It was very hard to return to my previous life. It took me a few weeks to adjust, and I don't really feel it will ever be like before.”
- “This course improved my personal growth by teaching me firsthand about appreciation and being grateful for what I have. My

time spent in Kenya allowed me to see the importance of taking time to slow down and live in the moment. These are life lessons that are extremely valuable to me, and I don't think I would have been able to learn to this extent otherwise."

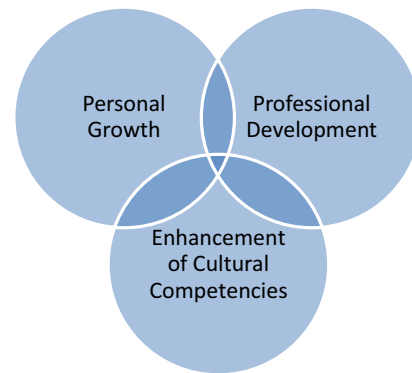
- "This trip has changed my heart 100%. In order for me to say this trip has changed my life, it must show in my actions based on what I do with the knowledge I have gained."
- "Understanding the importance of a patient's background created an everlasting drive to ask as many questions as possible and to always be understanding, patient, and kind."
- "The experience has changed my entire outlook and perspective of everything I do."
- "More than my career, it has changed my life and therefore the way I practice."

In the process of labeling, coding, and grouping the data, it became evident that the concepts and themes were not discrete and often overlapped. Using communication as an example, some students noted how their improved communication skills enhanced their personal development, while others wrote how better communication skills changed their nursing practice. Additionally, some students described communication within the context of culture, while others wrote about the growth of communication skills in general. This pattern of students' reports of anticipated or actual learning crossing multiple areas occurred with several concepts such as caring, critical thinking, adaptability, and resourcefulness. Figure 1, was created by the authors, after analyzing the data, and represents the overarching theme of a transformative educational experience consisting of the concentric, overlapping elements of personal growth, professional development, and enhancement of cultural competencies.

## 4 | DISCUSSION

### 4.1 | Implications

As noted in the literature review, there have been many research activities centered on student outcomes within service-learning experiences. Findings from the literature (Cooke & Kemeny, 2014; Currie-Mueller & Littlefield, 2018) show that service-learning helps students gain a deeper understanding of and connection to classroom learning and this study's results help to close the gap between theory and practice. Closing the gap requires maintaining proper balance between theoretical knowledge and practice in the field of nursing (Ajani & Moez, 2011). Specifically, students gained a deeper understanding of concepts they had already learned about in nursing classes, with a difference of + 0.71 and *SD* of 0.42 (pre), 0.81 (post) when pre- and posttravel survey results were compared. In addition, students noted a stronger awareness of effective ways to work with others, with a difference of + 0.56 and *SD* of 0.58 (pre), 0.70 (post). Both of these components support positive outcomes in the classroom and on national exams. These areas also meet the expectations included in three foundational nursing documents: AACN's *Essentials* guides to undergraduate and graduate education (AACN,



**FIGURE 1** Transformative educational experience elements [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

2000, 2006, 2011) and the ANA's *Code of Ethics for Nurses* (ANA, 2015) and *Nursing Social Policy Statement* (ANA, 2010).

The strategies of connecting theory to practice and improving the ways nurses work in interprofessional teams both help support key transformative events such as developing a keen awareness that caring is affected by more than just the nurse–client interaction and involves environmental, social, political, and economic considerations. Ultimately, these findings support using experiential learning that gives students a rich global and cultural understanding and develops their personal and professional identities, both of which can influence what they can offer the community as citizens and nurses.

The themes that Foronda and Belknap (2012) described in students following a short-term study abroad experience of egocentrism/emotional disconnect, perceived powerlessness/being overwhelmed, and a vacation mind-set were not identified in students in this study. While the reasons are not known, the authors speculate that the processes employed in selection, orientation, and debriefing along with a strong emphasis on collaborative relationships with the hosts may be influencing factors. Findings in this study regarding personal growth, professional development, and enhancement of cultural competencies were consistent with findings of other studies (Amerson, 2012; Main et al., 2013; Puri et al., 2013; Smit & Tremethick, 2013).

Whitehead (2015) described the ability of global learning to be a powerful pedagogy. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has identified global learning and service-learning as high-impact educational practices for over a decade. (Kuh, O'Donnell, & Schneider, 2017). According to Sterling (2001), the concept of sustainability is an imperative consideration in education and critical to the survival of this planet. Sterling proposes that education is most sustainable when it includes transformative learning or third-order learning. This type of learning transcends reflective and critical learning (second-order learning) by creating a different vision of the world. Third-order learning can be achieved through the acts of international service-learning since the student is imbedded within difference and alternate ideas of being in this world. Through service-learning, the subject is exposed to difference in the form of perceptions, languages, and behaviors. Ultimately, this

new awareness can help the student to encourage collaboration, generate new solutions, and elicit change by challenging views that do not support sustainability.

The authors of this study used the term transformative educational experience to reflect the depth and breadth of change that students reported. While the short-term international service-learning experience was not described as life changing by all students, it was a common theme with many students anticipating that it would be so prior to their travel. Faculty working with host partners have opportunities to design and implement educational experiences to promote deep learning and growth. In keeping with the definition of service-learning in nursing education as proposed by Juniarti et al. (2016, p. 208) it is imperative that experiences are designed, implemented, and evaluated such that there is evidence that outcomes benefit all stakeholders.

#### 4.2 | Limitations

This study has a number of limitations. It was not designed as a comprehensive evaluation of the service-learning course including outcomes related to the Kenyan host partners, faculty, and other components of the partnership. It was narrowly focused on student expectations regarding learning and outcomes pre- and posttravel. It was conducted with a relatively small sample at a single urban USA Midwest school of nursing with students traveling to one country. Student participants were predominantly White (77%). The pre- and posttravel surveys were not standardized instruments. Surveys were posted within a Blackboard organization to be completed at the students' convenience. Therefore, both the pretravel and posttravel surveys were completed over a two-month period of time. It is not known whether completing the survey at different points of time prior to the trip may have affected student perspectives. Due to the voluntary nature of the study, students were not required to add an identifier to their pre- and posttravel surveys. Many chose not to use an identifier or did so on one but not both of the surveys. As a result, quantitative data from the pre- and posttravel surveys could not be matched. Therefore, a one-sample *t* test rather than the preferred analysis of a paired-sample *t* test was utilized.

#### 4.3 | Recommendations for future research

Further research on service-learning should focus on hidden assumptions that positively or negatively affect students' perceptions and behaviors. For example, the researchers noted that some students held the assumption that they were superior to people living in cultures that lack resources and technology. These ingrained assumptions of superiority create disconnection when one party views itself as the rescuer of another (Prakash & Esteva, 1998; Rasmussen, 2005). In addition, an exploration of faculty perceptions could reveal pedagogical practices that support increased global awareness and citizenship among faculty and students (Van Cleave, 2013). Such findings could help educators gain access to pedagogical practices that support learning through the application of new and old

perceptions, values, and beliefs that lead to personal and professional transformation (Kolb, 2015; Van Cleave, 2013). Juniarti et al.'s (2016, p. 208) description of service-learning in nursing education addresses the importance of benefits for all stakeholders. Further research is needed focusing on the perspectives and outcomes of host partners including costs, benefits, and factors associated with various outcomes.

#### 4.4 | Conclusion

Through this study, researchers sought to understand the U.S. students' expectations of participating in an international service-learning course and whether their expectations were consistent with their reported outcomes. Understanding students' expectations can help faculty address potential issues in pretravel orientation sessions and support learning activities during the experience. Data analysis indicated that this experience met or exceeded student expectations, with no students expressing disappointment or negativity about the international course. Rather, students were articulate in describing how their experiences would positively affect and transform both their personal and professional lives. The depth and breadth of the described growth and learning are consistent with the expectations of high-impact educational practices.

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**How to cite this article:** Knecht LD, Wilson KJ, Linton ME, Koonmen JM, Johns EF. Assessing student expectations and perceptions of a short-term international service-learning experience. *Public Health Nurs*. 2020;37:121–129. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phn.12669>