

Strengthening Special Educator Preparation through Global Partnerships

AUTHORS

Andrew I. Hashey
Lauren L. Foxworth
Eileen B. Heddy
Jerry G. Petroff
Gabriel Walubita
Sitwe Benson Mkandawire
Mwansa Mukalula-Kalumbi

Journal of Special
Education Preparation
5(2), 62-71
© 2025 Hashey et al.
Licensed with CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0
License
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33043/fypnfv2t8y>

ABSTRACT

Global partnerships offer a unique opportunity to strengthen special educator preparation by transforming perspectives of teacher candidates and building skilled teacher scholars who are knowledgeable global citizens. This article spotlights two models of international collaboration designed to enhance special education teacher preparation: (a) faculty-led short-term study abroad and (b) global student teaching. Both models foster the development of skills critical to special educators' success, including flexibility, leadership, intercultural competencies, as well as high-leverage practice use. Stakeholder efforts, benefits, and potential barriers in implementing international collaboration within special education teacher preparation are highlighted. By drawing attention to challenges and insights from teacher candidates, faculty, and staff, we aim to provide practical and replicable strategies for teacher educators seeking to internationalize aspects of their special education teacher preparation programs.

KEYWORDS

Collaboration, Ghana, global partnerships, international experience, study abroad, Zambia

Global partnerships in special education teacher preparation programs offer a unique opportunity to transform perspectives and practice for pre-service teachers and higher education faculty. Collaborations across borders enable an enriched understanding of many high-leverage practices (HLPs) in special education, including and especially the utilization of culturally inclusive pedagogies and practices (Council for Exceptional Children, 2025; Smolcic & Katunich, 2017). For example, cultural immersion experiences have the potential to enhance special education teacher candidates' ability to design flexible learning experiences informed by students' culture, fostering the ability to design more inclusive, accessible curricula (de Hei et al., 2020). Furthermore, placement opportunities in multilingual environments may encourage special educators to better utilize translanguaging strategies that blend languages to support engagement and expression, thereby cultivating skills for building accessible environments that value inclusive communication (Cioè-Peña, 2022). Such qualities are important aspects of preparing high-quality special education teachers, as evidenced by Council for Exceptional Children's HLPs 7 and 13, which focus on establishing responsive learning environments and adapting curriculum tasks and materials. Equally important for developing strong special educators are the HLPs focused on high-quality collaboration. Skills required by teacher candidates for collaborating across novel systems and cultures may be developed and practiced abroad, strengthening capacity for genuine, culturally responsive collaboration with professionals and families.

In addition to strengthening teaching practice, international collaborations involving special education teachers can help inform and broaden participants' *perspectives* about education as a global priority as affirmed by the United

Nations' (2015) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) – an urgent and collective call to action consisting of 17 sustainable development goals which identify critical priorities for advancing global peace and prosperity. Specifically, SDG 4, *Quality Education*, aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (United Nations, 2015, The 17 Goals section). Teacher preparation programs that facilitate international learning opportunities can help globalize future educators' perspectives and experiences, advancing more just and equitable societies across the globe through the power of quality education. Such partnerships reveal beliefs, practices, and systems that are universal as well as those that differ based on one's location on the globe.

Global collaborations in special education teacher preparation programs should offer reciprocal value for home-site and international program partners. Home-site and international faculty may benefit from exposure to innovative teaching perspectives and strategies, which can later be integrated into course content and can inform international professional development opportunities (Khan et al., 2019). Moreover, international connections may foster global research collaborations thereby increasing quality, cross-cultural perspective, and international visibility of research and dissemination of evidence-based practices (Collins et al., 2017). These partnerships are strongest when they are mutually beneficial and provide *windows* and *mirrors* through which participants can better understand education across global contexts.

Brandon et al. (2022) previously emphasized the importance of international collaborations for special education teacher candidates in supporting global literacy and

culturally responsive practice. The authors described three examples of collaborations across borders related to special education teacher preparation: (a) an online course offering in special education from Australia with a student-initiated option for graduate students in the collaborating program to visit, give guest lectures, and/or observe K-12 schooling in Australia; (b) a series of four virtual professional development sessions delivered by U.S. faculty to build special education teacher capacity in Belize; and (c) a cross-border visit by Southern California teacher candidates to assist with teacher trainings in Tijuana, Mexico. While each of the three examples highlighted the myriad benefits of international collaborations in special education, none of the examples documented sustained, reciprocal partnerships that included cultural immersion experiences designed to strengthen future special education teacher perspectives and practices. In this article, we extend the work of Brandon et al. (2022) by spotlighting two models of sustained, in-person international collaboration designed to enhance special education teacher preparation and practice: (a) faculty-led short-term study abroad and (b) global student teaching. Although originating from different institutions, these collaborative models share features that distinguish them from examples presented in extant research: sustained programming over time, faculty-led partnerships, scaffolded preparatory and follow-up experiences, and the advancement of special education knowledge and practice. These features enable special education program faculty to crystallize HLP knowledge and skills for future special education teachers through well-designed cultural immersion experiences and embedded, consistent program elements

before and after experiences abroad.

Model 1: Faculty-led Short-term Study Abroad

Example 1: International Professional Development Schools, Buffalo State

Buffalo State's International Professional Development Schools (IPDS) Consortium is a model that offers teacher candidates short-term, education-focused study-away trips of approximately 3 weeks during summer and winter sessions. With programs in 10 countries across four continents, IPDS aims to prepare world-smart teachers and spotlights issues of equity, intercultural competency, inclusion, and multilingualism to help teachers meet the complexities of today's dynamic and diverse classrooms (Hill et al., 2018).

Program Design. Teacher candidates who participate in IPDS enroll in a credit-bearing pre-travel course to build understanding of education policy and practice from a global perspective and deepen their cultural curiosity. Once in a host country, participants embed in partnering local schools and universities where they observe and practice teaching. While each partnership is built upon faculty members' expertise and aligns with the host country context, Table 1 summarizes key elements of initiating and sustaining global partnerships to advance teacher preparation through ongoing collaboration. Common elements across all IPDS programs include pre-travel activities (e.g., relationship building, goal setting, recruitment), preparing for and implementing successful in-country educational and cultural experiences, and post-travel activities such as reflection, dissemination, and program evolution.

Critical Partnerships. Collaboration is the keystone of successful global education programs. The IPDS Zambia program is led by faculty members with expertise in special education and main-

TABLE 1: Sample Elements for Sustaining Global Partnerships in Educator Preparation

Phase	Element	Goals	Examples
Pre-Travel	Partnership building	Identify potential partners, establish trust, set collaborative goals, identify school sites, establish program parameters	Leveraging personal and professional connections; email discussions; series of virtual meetings
Pre-Travel	Recruitment & application	Attract a pool of engaging and high-quality applicants; review & select candidates	Fliers; tabling in student union; information sessions with presentation and Q&A
Pre-Travel	Credit-bearing prep course	Team building; cultural, logistical, and academic preparations	Course readings & assignments; discussions; global education office
In-Country	School placements	Observation; practice teaching; cultural immersion	Classroom visits; mentor teacher demonstrations; lesson delivery
In-Country	Higher ed partnerships	Knowledge sharing; expand professional network	Joint campus events; professional development sessions, social gatherings
In-Country	Cultural opportunities	Learn and immerse in host country	National parks; museums; arts & entertainment activities
Post-Travel	Reflection & dissemination	Process lessons learned; extend and share insights with professional network	Student & faculty conference presentations; on-campus panel presentations
Post-Travel	Partnership maintenance & program growth	Sustain and deepen relationships; program revisions and evolution; research & practice	Joint faculty research projects; periodic virtual meetings; continuation of prof. dev. initiatives

tains a focus on both general and special education practice in schools around the capital region of Lusaka. It is anchored by a partnership with the University of Zambia's (UNZA) School of Education and with partner elementary and secondary schools. Year-round conversations between Buffalo State University and UNZA faculty drive decisions about how to structure the program to maximize impact for all stakeholders. The goal of the IPDS Zambia program is to build participants' understanding of inclusive practices, disability advocacy, and special education policy from a global perspective. Before arrival in Zambia, IPDS participants research and learn about the educational context, history, and culture of Zambia through

a credit-bearing pre-travel course. Upon arrival in Lusaka, UNZA faculty augment teacher candidates' knowledge of these topics through research presentations, tours, and campus-based activities, allowing participants to appreciate cross-cultural differences and similarities in how both countries support students with disabilities. In the process, teacher candidates from both Buffalo State University and UNZA interact and build professional relationships and friendships through campus collaborations.

UNZA's Special Needs Educational Resource Center, a campus-based school serving students with complex support needs, is a host school where participants observe local special education practices; it also serves as a hub for local

professional development activities. In their pre-travel course, IPDS candidates learn about HLPs and other pedagogical practices prioritized in Zambian general and special education settings. To facilitate knowledge sharing among partners, UNZA faculty solicit input from local special education teachers about desirable professional development topics. In response, Buffalo State University faculty lead workshops; a recent one of which involved 38 Zambian special education teachers and focused on picture-based communication systems, task analysis, and visual schedules. IPDS students prepared communication boards and other teaching materials for use in the workshop and collected an array of educational materials to be donated to partner

schools. Virtual workshops coordinated by UNZA and Buffalo State University faculty allow for this work to be ongoing and enable expertise from both countries to be leveraged to meet the needs and interests of Zambian special education teachers. With this structure, IPDS students are afforded many opportunities to help disseminate essential pedagogy, a hallmark of HLP 1, “Collaborate with professionals to increase student success,” and a vital component of improving outcomes for students with disabilities across the globe.

During visits to other local public schools, IPDS students gain information about local pedagogies and educational approaches by attaching to a mentor teacher, where it is common for 60 or more students to be taught in a single classroom. The pedagogical practices implemented by the Zambian teachers in these classrooms are a primary focus for student observations and written reflections, and Zambian teachers’ expertise in delivering multilingual instruction to very large classes is quickly revealed. For IPDS participants, overwhelmingly monolingual, this can provide an opportunity to shift their view of multilingualism from obstacle to strength. Even though HLPs are not explicitly taught in Zambian teacher preparation programs, many HLPs for students with disabilities are regularly incorporated into Zambian teachers’ instructional repertoires, as they must de facto establish consistent, organized, and responsive learning environments (HLP 7) and incorporate active student engagement (HLP 18). IPDS students are eventually afforded the opportunity to practice teaching under their mentor’s guidance. Throughout the program experience, participants and faculty analyze similarities and differences in pedagogy, curricula, educational resources, etc., revealing the complexity of our global quest to lift all students. These diverse field experiences shine a

light on how countries that share similar educational policy goals for high-quality education for all students may approach the goal differently because of (a) available financial or material resources, (b) historic cultural attitudes towards, and understandings of, disability, and (c) educator or systems-wide capacity.

Reciprocal Site Visits. Although not always feasible, whenever possible, short-term study abroad programs can strive to enact reciprocal site visits, enabling the program leaders to serve both as hosts and guests. UNZA faculty members visiting Buffalo State on a recent exchange participated in a similar slate of school-based, campus-based, and cultural excursions as is typical in the IPDS program in Zambia. At a Buffalo State conference, for example, Zambian faculty presented on educational history across the African continent and shared the successes and challenges of strengthening special education practice across Zambia. The reciprocal trips also help leaders forge strong personal and institutional connections, facilitate shared research endeavors, and have the potential to equip program leaders with a greater understanding of the partner context and thus, of their own context—a concept central to the philosophy of *Umunthu* (e.g., *Ubuntu*), that asserts that we exist as individuals through our interconnectedness with others, an African concept with particular relevance to this work (Mugumbate et al., 2024). Mbiti (1990) explained *Ubuntu* philosophy as “What happens to the individual happens to the whole group. The people and country are intricately related. The individual can only say: ‘I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am’” (p. 106).

Affirming Mbiti’s (1990) perspective, the reciprocal visits between UNZA and Buffalo State University have facilitated meaningful knowledge transfer and resource sharing among professionals

and institutions, including topics such as evidence-based approaches to autism assessment and intervention, classroom management, inclusive pedagogical strategies, and picture-based communication strategies. The partnership has facilitated the exchange of practical resources, including sensory manipulatives, educational planning tools, and specialized communication aids for students with disabilities. As a result of this collaboration, Buffalo State faculty presented at Zambia’s first Autism Conference, which helped build local professionals’ skills in supporting students with autism spectrum disorder across both clinical and school environments. This institutional partnership has not only strengthened academic ties but has also created platforms for mutual professional development in inclusive and special education to be sustained by the program stakeholders.

Example 2: Faculty-Led Special Education Teacher Preparation Experience in the Global South, The College of New Jersey

To effectively develop culturally responsive teachers, pre-service experiences must introduce innovative approaches that deepen understanding of disciplinary knowledge and teaching practices (Sharma, 2020). In response to this need, Faculty-Led Special Education Teacher Preparation Experience in the Global South was designed and implemented. This program invites special education teacher candidates at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) to participate in a 3-week intensive faculty-guided learning journey to the West African nation of Ghana. The objective is to provide an intensive field experience that will assist the teacher candidates in moving beyond conventional notions of identity, multiculturalism, and static conceptions of “ways of knowing” that are shaped by their dominant cultur-

al perspectives. Through this faculty-led, 3-week program, teacher candidates can deliver and study specialized instruction for students with complex disabilities in Ghana.

According to the World Health Organization, between 7% and 10% of Ghana's population has a disability. In Ghana—as in many countries in the Global South—individuals with disabilities often experience poverty, marginalization, and limited access to education, public health services, and other essential support systems. Despite government policies promoting inclusive education, many children with complex disabilities, such as autism, remain excluded from formal schooling (Ghana Education Service, 2007).

Program Design. TCNJ teacher candidates earn course credit for participating in this faculty-led international special education training experience. The experience aims to cultivate a heightened awareness and deeper understanding of cultural diversity and its impact on the lives of children with disabilities. Through a balanced schedule of lectures, demonstrations, and classroom-based experiences abroad, students develop knowledge and skills in current, high-leverage, and research-supported practices addressing the needs of individuals with low-incidence disabilities (e.g., autism, intellectual disabilities). Throughout the course and the associated field experience working with children, candidates examine effective strategies in assessment, curriculum design, instructional methods, positive behavioral supports, and home-school collaboration.

Critical Partnerships. In collaboration with Haven International (Non-Governmental Organization) and the recognition of Ghana Education Service (Ministry of Education), teacher candidates develop knowledge and skills in the education of students with

significant disabilities within a cross-cultural context and become infused with the culture of this West African country. As with the IPDS programs, during a 3-week winter or summer term, a cohort of eight to 10 undergraduate and graduate students accompanies faculty to Ghana to participate in this intensive, culturally immersive learning experience. Teacher candidates receive instruction in evidence-based practices designed to meet the needs of students with complex disabilities within the Ghanaian cultural context. The course combines lectures with an intensive classroom-based practicum and field experience in which candidates work directly with children and youth within the country at Haven International's Learning Resource Center.

Haven International's Learning Resource Center hosts approximately 20-25 students ages 2 to 26 years with complex disabilities. Teacher candidates are placed within classrooms to work alongside the teachers and staff of this school. The teacher candidates attend daily morning briefing sessions to chart the day's objectives and plans. The daily, collaborative debriefing sessions are designed to reflect on the ongoing development of new cultural paradigms and to deconstruct the powerful cultural influences on the development and education of children with disabilities within Ghana. Upon arrival at the school site, students are deployed to specific classrooms to first observe and then provide instruction using their assigned teachers' plans. After a few days, the teacher candidates are given the opportunity to develop and implement their own instructional experiences. Each candidate is also provided with two profiles of students within their assigned classroom and is responsible for assessing and generating an impressions and recommendations report for their assigned students, key practices related

to HLP 6 (Use assessment data...). Haven International provides guidance and support to ensure participating candidates are provided with a comprehensive and rich cultural experience. In addition, teacher candidates have the opportunity to provide trainings, with the accompanying faculty, to Ghanaian teachers, parents, and/or family members.

Augmenting Cultural Learning Opportunities. It is essential to recognize that the experience of teaching in and collaborating with a West African school serving students with disabilities, while invaluable, is insufficient on its own to cultivate a comprehensive understanding of the region's complex cultural landscape. Accordingly, the teacher candidates engage in a curated series of cultural experiences designed to deepen their contextual knowledge. These experiences emphasize Ghana's historical role in the transatlantic slave trade, the Pan-African movement, and the nation's rich artistic and musical traditions. Organized day trips beyond the metropolitan areas of Accra, led by experienced Ghanaian cultural guides, provide further opportunities for immersion. Through these structured excursions, candidates develop a nuanced understanding of Ghana's diverse cultural heritage, the enduring legacies of colonialism, and the continuing significance of religion and traditional worldviews.

One measure of the impact of the faculty-led, short-term study abroad collaborative model is revealed through the number of student participants who continue to pursue additional global programming. Across both institutions' examples described above, many participants participate in multiple such experiences, while some go on to pursue longer stints abroad, such as completing their student teaching in another country. Still others seek positions as teachers abroad after graduating. Taken together, these trajectories reveal how short-term

global educational experiences and partnerships can serve as a catalyst for participants' continued engagement in global education.

Model 2: International Student Teaching

Example: Global Student Teaching Program, TCNJ

Collaboration with international partners can extend beyond short-term study away programs and involve school partnerships that have longer-term overseas field experiences, as well. The Global Student Teaching (GST) program at TCNJ was established in 1982 in response to an increased emphasis on internationalizing teacher preparation. While many educator preparation programs developed similar initiatives at the time, most have since been discontinued due to increasingly stringent state regulations and certification requirements (Embry-Jenlink et al., 2020). This trend persists despite ongoing research that highlights the significant benefits of international experiences in enhancing teacher candidates' cultural and global competencies (Akpovo et al., 2020; King et al., 2022).

Program Design. The GST program allows teacher candidates to complete the first half of their full-time student teaching semester abroad and then return to complete the remainder domestically. The partnership sites include a range of international schools across 12 countries on four continents, all of which use English as the language of instruction with curricula that closely reflect typical U.S. classrooms. This opportunity is available to all teacher candidates at TCNJ. Roughly 10%-15% of the college's education majors enroll in the program, and of those participants, 35%-50% are special education majors.

To prepare for the GST opportunity, candidates work with an assigned supervisor prior to departure to learn

about the expectations. Once abroad, candidates, who are placed in small cohorts of two to four per site, submit weekly lesson plans and reflections, meet with the supervisor virtually, and are observed via video, and eventually, in person.

Critical Partnerships. The partner schools abroad tend to have excellent resources, robust professional development initiatives, and diverse student populations. They also focus heavily on social-emotional development, global citizenship, and diversity. International schools can vary widely in their approaches and resources, but these partner schools have been selected to ensure they reflect the inclusive pedagogical practices and values of the college. While 20 years ago, most international schools offered little support for students with learning differences, that has shifted dramatically in the past 10 years, often spurred by schools' commitment to inclusion, diversity, and a whole child approach (Agustian, 2021; Underwood et al., 2025). Maintaining strong partnerships with the schools requires intentional effort and allocation of resources.

The GST program relies heavily on partner schools to not only provide the professional experience necessary to prepare teacher candidates for their own classrooms, but also to support them while they are abroad. At each site, a school administrator arranges placements and serves as the main contact and support person while the candidates are abroad. Mentor teachers and site coordinators help candidates find housing, locate English-speaking doctors if necessary, and address other issues as they arise. In appreciation for this role, mentors and coordinators receive an honorarium from the college.

To maintain the integrity of the program and meet state regulations, TCNJ education faculty supervisors visit

each school about halfway through the placement. They spend several days at the school, not only observing the teacher candidates but also developing an understanding of the school context and maintaining strong relationships with the administrators and teachers. While these trips are costly for the college, they are crucial for an international program (Major, 2020). Several partner schools will not accept student teachers from other universities because the supervisors do not visit the school, develop relationships, and understand the school community.

These faculty visits prove essential to developing mutually beneficial relationships with partner schools. They provide an opportunity to gather feedback on the program and how the college can better prepare candidates, in general, and specifically for GST. It is also a chance to ensure that the mentor teachers are benefiting from hosting the student teachers, as mentoring a teacher candidate can be a powerful professional development opportunity, challenging teachers to define, express, and reflect upon their practice (Amorim & Ribeiro-Silva, 2024). These visits have resulted in several opportunities for further collaboration between the faculty and partner schools; for example, after visiting a school several times for observations, a partner school invited a home-site faculty member to lead a year-long professional development initiative. The professor held sessions at the school in August and then led a follow up session several months later while also visiting to observe teacher candidates. Other examples include college faculty and teachers working across borders on action research projects and publications.

Impact on Perspectives and HLP. *“Global student teaching strengthened my ability to adapt constantly - not*

TABLE 2: Sample Activities for Maximizing Effects of Global Experiences in Special Education

Before	During	After
Infuse opportunities to learn and practice culturally responsive pedagogy in early special education field experiences at home site	Incorporate reflective summary journals to document full experience (e.g., via blogs, video journals, podcasts); include prompts linked to high-leverage special education teaching practices	Assign reflective journals with prompts crafted to highlight knowledge and perspectives gained about special education policy, practice, and advocacy in the host country
Identify activities where UDL and translanguaging may be practiced in tandem during inclusive lesson planning coursework (i.e., TrUDL; Cioè-Peña, 2022)	Ensure special education faculty are available to mentor during the experience and special education faculty are partners in the host country	Schedule post-trip meetings to facilitate guided seminar discussions with home-site faculty and others who traveled
Prep meetings/courses with special education faculty before departure to: a) build knowledge of destination country, culture, and education system, b) acquire and practice intercultural competencies and intercultural humility, and c) strengthen collaborative skill set amongst the team of travelers	Ask questions to bolster reflective teaching practice (e.g., what went well, what did not go well, what can you do differently next time, what high-leverage resources can you integrate?) and address intercultural considerations (e.g., identify a cultural difference and what you did to address it)	Identify or create opportunities to share insights from the experience with members of the local community (e.g., classmates, faculty, fellow professionals) through panel discussions, conference presentations, or poster sessions
Integrate opportunities to learn about differences in special education policy and practice across the globe; should be infused early in the preparation program	Develop observation protocols for students to use that help them focus on high-leverage practices for inclusive classrooms; consider pairing this with a formal study exploring special education practice in the host country	Encourage student membership in global special education organizations (e.g., International Academy for Research in Learning Disabilities, Division of International Special Education & Services)

only to new languages, but also to different educational norms, classroom dynamics, and cultural perspectives. My experience allowed me the opportunity to grow as both an educator and a student in that I navigated working with diverse learners through culturally responsive and empathic teaching practices.” -Michelle Bombace, M.A.T. Special Education, Fall 2024 Global Student Teacher, TCNJ

Heddy (2022) documented the impact of GST in a recent study of past participants, highlighting a range of personal and professional benefits, including enhanced cultural competence, greater instructional adaptability, and a stronger commitment to inclusive practices. The data revealed that participating in GST significantly enhanced teachers’ ability to engage in several HLPs. Specifically, participants reported significantly stronger family engagement practices,

a deeper understanding of students’ backgrounds, and increased cultural responsiveness, leading to more inclusive and adaptive instruction (HLPs 3, 4, & 13). Moreover, every respondent believed GST strengthened their ability to establish positive home-school relationships, with one noting, “learning how to... build a relationship with families and students based on an appreciation of their background and their culture definitely played into the way I view diversity now as something that’s exciting” (Heddy, 2022, pg. 68). Another key impact reported by participants was using students’ interests, strengths, and experiences in their instruction, key facets of HLP 4. Many reported greater empathy, particularly with multilingual learners, and a commitment to equity-focused practices. Several noted that GST inspired long-term professional goals, including obtaining ESL cer-

tification and teaching in high-needs settings (Heddy, 2022).

DISCUSSION

Common Themes Across Models

For teachers of students with disabilities, global opportunities are all the more essential as their roles in schools position them to advance inclusive learning by (a) enacting pedagogical practices that meet the needs of *all* learners in their classrooms, (b) assuming leadership roles that expand the instructional and assessment capacity of their colleagues, and (c) and advancing inclusive systems at the school and district level. The examples above acknowledge the importance of reciprocity in sustained collaborations with international partners. Each is also carefully crafted to deepen teachers’ perspectives of the field and teaching skill sets necessary for success. Below,

we discuss recommendations for situating global experiences within special education preparation programs and discuss potential challenges in sustaining such partnerships.

Preparing for and Reflecting on Special Education Teaching Experiences Abroad

Global partnerships and teaching experiences should not occur in isolation from the special education teacher preparation program. In addition to the work of the faculty members who are direct collaborators with partner schools, strong implementation of either model described above requires efforts on the part of the entire program faculty; curriculum, experiences, and activities should be carefully developed and embedded into the program to support teacher candidates before and following global experiences. While Table 1 identified core elements of sustained global partnerships in teacher preparation, Table 2 offers examples of experiences that may be helpful for maximizing the impact of global experiences within special education teacher preparation programs. In each of the examples presented above, these activities are neither isolated from the program itself nor do they occur haphazardly; rather, they are strategically situated within each program before, during, and after global experiences.

Possible Challenges and Facilitative Strategies

Despite the shared benefits of international partnerships, challenges may inhibit or prevent implementation. Brandon et al. (2022) previously classified challenges of international partnerships in special education programs into four major categories: (a) provision of service, (b) language, (c) technology, and (d) contextual barriers and offered possible solutions to each of these barriers. We agree with this analysis and identify

three additional barrier categories based on the short-term and GST models outlined herein. These additional potential barriers include: (e) financing, (f) state requirements for certification, and (g) evaluative rubrics.

Financing to support participation in global education can indeed pose a challenge for teacher candidates and can be a barrier to broader participation in such opportunities. Facilitative strategies include enabling students to carry costs on their student accounts when the program involves coursework during the academic year. Other strategies include external group fundraising by cohorts prior to travel and institutional support from departments, deans, and global affairs offices. Virtual exchanges can also be developed to promote international collaboration (e.g., <https://www.stevensinitiative.org/> and <https://coil.suny.edu/about-suny-coil/>) in ways that do not require travel but result in international communication and collaboration among universities and schools. In our experiences, these approaches have proven effective at decreasing overall student costs and increasing access to global education for a wider array of students.

State requirements for certification for special education teachers can pose another barrier for GST, specifically, as state requirements often dictate that mentor teachers for special education student teachers hold a special education certification or master's degree. This credential is not always present or equivalent across global contexts. As a workaround, student teachers can complete their special education placement in their local community and complete the general education component within the context of a global classroom during the other half of the semester. Alternatively, short-term cultural immersion experiences before student teaching, like those described in Model 1, offer the opportu-

nity to enhance perspectives and practice without impacting special education teaching certification requirements.

A final barrier we identify is the potential misuse of rubrics used in U.S. classrooms for evaluating student teaching performance in global settings. Teacher candidate evaluation rubrics developed and validated to evaluate teaching proficiency in Western schools may not be a reliable or valid fit for use in another context. To circumvent this barrier, we advocate for field supervision evaluations to be conducted by or in collaboration with faculty members with an understanding of the host country and its education system (i.e., a program leader/coordinator) who can apply their nuanced perspectives to arrive at reasonable evaluation scores using the standard rubric that take into account the novel classroom context and the expectations for teaching in those spaces. We affirm that barriers such as those mentioned above will always be present for any endeavor; however, we encourage institutions to embrace the overwhelming value in global educational experiences and, therefore, remain undeterred by such barriers and pursue facilitative strategies and workarounds to expand these opportunities for future special education teachers.

Cultural Variables Related to Educating Students with Disabilities

Legal/policy variations relating to students with disabilities and educational access and rights across borders must be anticipated (Jordan & Ramaswamy, 2014). Similarly, differences in implementation of special education services exist across global contexts, and thus, "evidence-based practices" are not universally recognized, validated, and practiced across the globe: practices and values are always influenced by local contexts (Collins et al., 2017). Cultural differences that have been observed in

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Andrew I. Hashey, Ph.D.

Associate Professor & Chair, Exceptional Education Department, SUNY Buffalo State University

Lauren L. Foxworth, Ph.D.

Associate Professor & Co-Director of the Literacy Advancement Project, Department of Special Education, Language, and Literacy, The College of New Jersey

Eileen B. Heddy, Ph.D.

Executive Director of the Office of Support for Teacher Education Programs and Global Student Teaching, The College of New Jersey

Jerry G. Petroff, Ph.D.

Professor and Executive Director of the Center for Sensory & Complex Disabilities, The College of New Jersey

Gabriel Walubita, , Ph.D.

Senior Lecturer and Researcher in Neuropsychology, Literacy and Applied Psychology, University of Zambia

Sitwe Benson Mkwandawire, Ph.D.

Senior Lecturer, Department of Language and Social Sciences Education, University of Zambia

Mwansa Mukalula-Kalumbi, Ph.D.

Lecturer, Department of Educational Administration and Policy Studies, University of Zambia

the education of students with disabilities during global education programs involve differences in disability awareness. In some cases, these lead to participants noting stigma or discrimination towards individuals in the communities they visit, while in other global programs, participants may note relative advances in inclusive or special education practice as compared with their own local educational system. Context is paramount in observing and interpreting the nature of disability awareness and special education policy and practice in each community. As a result of the near-constant possibility of encountering cultural mismatches whilst abroad (e.g., a transgression in one country may be a common practice in another), a priority for program leaders is to foster cultural curiosity and humility while also relying on collaboration with the international partners to gain insight into and prepare for these mismatches. Developing this skill set is indeed an ongoing process, and one not well conveyed through a few lessons delivered prior to international travel. Effective program leaders consistently model cultural curiosity and humility, build students' knowledge in this area, and weave related activities and discussions throughout the program, as suggested in Table 2. In so doing, they will best position students for success in developing a set of invaluable intercultural skills, which they will leverage throughout their careers as special educators in every conceivable educational

setting.

Although directing a global colleague to a trusted website featuring effective teaching practices from one's own country is one way to share knowledge, it is also limited by the potential for cultural misalignment. On-site training allows stakeholders to better mediate cultural differences and adapt practices to fit local contexts. In the professional knowledge exchange that typifies many global partnerships, partners must prioritize intercultural competencies to navigate cultural differences, expand practices that research shows to be effective in reaching students with disabilities, and thus advance the United Nations' SDG 4, a high-quality education for all. Thus, the cultural variables related to teaching students with disabilities can perhaps best be seen as an opportunity to better inform educators' understanding of what works best, for whom, when, and where. In becoming familiar with other countries' vision, resources, and strategies for delivering a high-quality education to students with disabilities, our collective capacity to reach all learners grows, both as individual professionals and as a field.

CONCLUSION

Today's classrooms are increasingly dynamic and diverse, requiring teachers to be culturally responsive practitioners who view differences as an asset to be explored and used to positive effect. As a result, it is essential for teacher

preparation programs to incorporate authentic methods that help future educators internalize their training and develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to work effectively with students from diverse backgrounds. It is not possible to achieve this unless there is purposeful and mutually beneficial collaboration with international partners. The literature on teacher education recognizes study abroad and experiences outside the dominant culture as core pedagogical strategies and best practices for preparing K-12 teachers for diverse classrooms (Sharma, 2020). When thoughtfully and collaboratively designed, implemented, and integrated into the program, these opportunities can have a profound impact on instructors, teacher candidates, and their global partners.

REFERENCES

- Agustian, H. Y. (2021). Investigating inclusive practice in international schooling: A case study of two schools. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 20(3), 226–241. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14752409211059274>
- Akpovo, S. M., Thapa, S., & Halladay, M. (2020). Learning to see teaching as a cultural activity: U.S. preservice teachers' significant experiences with Nepali mentor teachers during an international field experience. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 34(1), 59–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2019.1692107>
- Amorim, C., & Ribeiro-Silva, E. (2024). Cooperating teachers' perceptions and contributions to preservice teachers' professional identities. *Education Sciences*, 14(10), Article 167. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14020167>
- Brandon, R. R., Marsh, R. J., & Cumming, T. M. (2022). International collaboration in special education teacher preparation. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 58(1), 59–63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10534512211047590>
- Cioè-Peña, M. (2022). TrUDL, a path to full inclusion: The intersectional possibilities of translanguaging and universal design for learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 56(2), 799–812. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3074>
- Collins, B. C., Olçay-Gül, S., & Tekin-Iftar, E. (2017). International collaboration and its contributions: Disseminating knowledge and supporting evidence-based practices across countries. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 52(3), 227–239.
- Council for Exceptional Children. (2025). *High leverage practices*. <https://highleveragepractices.org/>
- de Hei, M., Tabacaru, C., Sjoer, E., Rippe, R., & Walenkamp, J. (2020). Developing intercultural competence through collaborative learning in international higher education. *Journal of Studies in International Higher Education*, 24(2), 190–211. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315319826226>
- Embry-Jenlink, K., Paese, P., & Parmigiani, D. (2020, February 17). *Illuminating the past as a pathway to the future* [Conference presentation]. Association of Teacher Educators Annual Conference, Atlantic City, NJ.
- Ghana Education Service. (2007). *Report on the 2007 administration of National Education Assessment: Primary 3 and Primary 6 – English and Mathematics*. Accra: Ghana Education Service.
- Heddy, E. B. (2022). *The impact of a global student teaching experience on preservice teachers' global competence and commitment to culturally responsive pedagogy* (Publication No. 29396520) [Doctoral dissertation, University of South Carolina]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Hill, P. D. P., McMillen, S., Paterson, W., Sepulveda, T. I. A., Suriel, P. T., Ross, S. L., Kupper, M., Zuniga Ayala, K. A., Hichs, R., & Kaleba, M. (2018). Preparing teachers for a global world: The SUNY Buffalo State International Professional Development Schools Consortium. *School University Partnerships*, 11(2), 10–16. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1199824.pdf>
- Jordan, K. A., & Ramaswamy, S. (2014). Global perspectives on inclusion. *Global Education Review*, 1(1), 10–13.
- Khan, R., Grijalva, R., & EnriquezGates, A. (2019). Teachers as change agents: Promoting meaningful professional development using action research to support international educational reform. *FIRE: Forum for International Research in Education*, 5(2), 214–225.
- King, K. M., Dixon, K. V., González-Carriedo, R., & Dixon-Krauss, L. (2022). Transformation and cross-cultural adaptation of teacher candidates in an international student teaching program. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 20(2), 138–158. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15413446211028564>
- Major, J. (2020). Beyond transformation, aid and gratitude: Developing a mutually beneficial international teaching experience. *Theory into Practice*, 59(3), 249–258. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2020.1739955>
- Mbiti, J. (1990). *African religions and philosophy* (2nd ed.). Heinemann.
- Mugumbate, J. R., Mupedziswa, R., Twikirize, J. M., Mthethwa, E., Desta, A. A., & Oyindola, O. (2024). Understanding Ubuntu and its contribution to social work education in Africa and other regions of the world. *Social Work Education*, 43(4), 1123–1139.
- Sharma, B. (2020). International education as a human resource strategy: “A citizen model” for Canadian immigration policy. *In International Education as Public Policy in Canada*, 69.
- Smolcic, E., & Katunich, J. (2017). Teachers crossing borders: A review of the research into cultural immersion field experience for teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 62, 47–59. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.11.002>
- Underwood, C., Sullivan, D., & Ware, J. (2025). An exploration of the factors that influence admission, inclusion and support for learners with special educational needs in international schools. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 24(1), 3–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14752409251331193>
- United Nations. (2015). Universal sustainable development goals. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>