

Title	「海外研修は効果的か」
Author(s)	サベット, メヘラン
Citation	聖学院大学論叢,20(2) : 177-184
URL	http://serve.seigakuin-univ.ac.jp/reps/modules/xoonips/detail.php?item_id=40
Rights	

聖学院学術情報発信システム : SERVE

SEigakuin Repository for academic archiVE

Are Study Abroad Programs Effective?

Mehran Sabet

「海外研修は効果的か」

サベット・メヘラン

この研究論文は、1ヶ月の海外ホームステイ研修に参加した学生の総合的な英語能力の向上について調査することを目的とする。Freed (1995)によれば、海外留学とは外国もしくは目標言語を話し、教室言語及び／または専門分野の研究を組み合わせた地域に居住する期間である。1ヶ月の研修期間中に学ぶ英語の時間数は、大学生が1年間に学ぶオーラルコミュニケーションの時間に相当する。データは、ホームステイ・プログラムの効果と多くの日本の大学で提供している伝統的な散在したシラバスによる集中講座との比較情報を表したものである。

Key words: 集中学習, 海外研修, インプット, 向上, 文化

Every year thousands of Japanese students travel abroad to study English and the number seems to be on the rise. Some students make their own arrangements while others receive assistance from the institution they are attending.

Educational institutions offer different programs that primarily focus on two objectives: 1) improve most of students' language ability and 2) expose students to opportunities to gain cultural awareness. The length of each program differs depending on the nature and purpose of the program itself. They usually range from two to four weeks.

Programs offered abroad usually place the students in dorms, host families, or a combination of both. Staying in a dormitory gives students a sense of what university life in a foreign country is like while at the same time giving them a feeling of freedom and independence. Furthermore, most of the study abroad programs offer a wealth of benefits to their participants: Becoming open-minded and independent, developing tolerance for ambiguity and differences, gaining knowledge of other cultures and lifestyles, and participating in the world community are some examples that have been well documented (Carlson & Widaman, 1988; Laubscher, 1994). Students usually return from these programs with a positive attitude and are more motivated to study English. Brecht et al. (1997) state

that at their best, such programs give the students very rich, first-hand experience in living in the target culture and using their language skills with native speakers in circumstances with direct real-world consequences. In these circumstances, homestay programs are a powerful addition to more formal instruction or experiences that a student/students may undergo during an immersion program.

Purpose of the study

Although the benefits of study abroad programs are numerous, in order to justify the existence of such programs, educators should pay close attention to the measurable gains made in students' overall language skills. Positive feedback, higher motivation, and cultural awareness are some of the characteristics that can be attributed to the returning students. However, as to how much the overall level of students' English ability has improved, we should take a closer look at the available data and decide whether devoting our human and financial resources to such programs are worth the efforts. In response to this concern, this paper attempts to answer two questions about study abroad programs at Seigakuin University:

1. Did the students who participated in a four-week study abroad program make gains in their overall English ability?
2. How does this gain, if any, compare with the students who studied the same number of hours or more at a regular English program spread throughout the year?

Background

In general, there is not enough research or data available to indicate that study abroad programs improve students' language skills. However, at least one study shows that participants in such programs made significant improvement. In the study done by Allen and Herron (2003), they found that 25 university students who enrolled in a six-week study abroad program in the summer of 2001 in Paris made considerable gains in their oral and listening skills, had higher motivation, and lower anxiety in an environment where French was spoken. However, in another study conducted by Rivers (1998), students who participated in study abroad programs in Russia, showed more gains in their reading skill than in speaking. Krashen (1983, 1985) sees benefits in such programs since he believes that "real world input" is more valuable than language class input for advanced learners, and that natural, communicative situations best facilitate language acquisition.

Study abroad programs can be compared with intensive language programs where learners input

a lot of language in a short time through constant exposure to the target language on a daily basis. In a study reviewing evidence concerning the efficiency of intensive classes, Childs (2003) compares TOEIC scores as a measure of language learning, and concludes that intensive classes or “deep priming” produce greater learning per instructional hour than the usual schedule at conventional schools. For any school that promotes overseas study as a tool to increase language-learning opportunities, it is critical to establish some sound and fundamental research data to support the case of overseas study programs.

The Subjects

Every year, Seigakuin University sends students overseas on study abroad programs in the U.S, Australia, the U.K., and New Zealand (NB. It must be mentioned that since students who participate in the England program stay at a dormitory, they were not included in this research). Each program is about four weeks long and students follow a syllabus similar to the one designed by the representing language school in the given country. Participants attend English classes in the morning, usually from 9:00 to 12:00, and take part in a variety of activities organized by the school in the afternoon. These activities include field trips, local school visits, and volunteer work done at shelters or non-profit organizations. A sample of the students’ schedule is shown in Appendix One. Based on the schedule provided by the language institutions, participants spend about 60 hours studying English in the four-week programs. That compares with about 140 hours that Seigakuin University students study in one year. In the Seigakuin English Program (SEP), learners meet about thirty weeks a year. Each week, students meet twice for oral communication, once for reading, and once for listening classes. Each class is ninety-minutes long.

Generally, participants in the study abroad programs are placed with host families rather than having them stay in dormitories. There are two main reasons for this choice: first, since these programs are offered during school breaks in the host countries, very little interaction occurs between the visitors and students at dormitories. Second, in terms of safety and security, university administrators and parents feel relatively safer when students are cared for by host families in comparison to situations where they are left unsupervised and in the company of friends and other students in dormitories.

Most of the participants in study abroad programs are interested in the language as well as the culture of the country. Living with a host family, even for a few weeks, provides ample opportunities for students to interact and learn about various aspects of the host country and its people. Although

the experience of communicating with host family members can be burdensome at first, feedback received from a questionnaire administered to students indicates that the majority of participants return to Japan with a positive attitude toward their hosts. Furthermore, living in a foreign country and following certain routines forces the students to internalize the process of learning in a meaningful context. Getting up in the morning and preparing/eating breakfast, taking the bus to school, going shopping, participating in after-school activities, taking part in field trips, and returning home where English is spoken, immerses the students in English and exposes them to sociolinguistic speech acts through authentic exchanges that are rarely seen in the classroom or students' home country.

Method and Procedure

The participants in this research (53 students) took the Secondary Language English Proficiency (SLEP) test about one week before their departure and were given another version of the same test upon their return from overseas. The post-test was given within a couple of weeks of the students' return to Japan. This ensured that both pre- and post/ tests were taken under similar circumstances, and with not much time in between. The test takes about ninety minutes to administer and has two parts: listening and reading. It is developed by Educational Testing Service and the scores are convertible to the TOEFL test. The students who took part in this research participated in the summer and fall programs in America, Australia, and New Zealand.

Results

Under the Seigakuin English Program (SEP), all the incoming freshmen take the SLEP test in late March or early April. The results are used for student placement purposes. Students are given the same test again at the end of the school year, usually in February, to measure gains or losses made in their overall English ability during their first year of school. Seigakuin accepts about 800 freshmen every year. The SLEP test also acts as a norm-referenced test. Brown (1995) strongly recommends having a norm-referenced test and a criterion-referenced test in place when developing a language program.

The data gathered from the SLEP test scores in the past five years, from 2000 to 2004, indicate that on average, students' scores increased 31.9 TOEFL equivalency scores (See Table 1).

Are Study Abroad Programs Effective?

Table 1

Year	Pre-test	Post-test	Average gain
2000	296.4	328.1	31.7
2001	289.0	319.0	30.0
2002	291.9	326.7	34.8
2003	295.7	325.8	30.1
2004	295.6	328.8	33.2
5-year average	293.72	325.68	31.9

As mentioned earlier, this gain was made after about 140 hours of instruction during the freshman year. Comparatively, the fifty three students who participated in the study abroad programs showed an average gain of 27.4 TOEFL equivalency points and this gain was made after about 60 hours of classroom instruction (See Table 2).

Table 2: Average improvement in TOEFL equivalency scores for students participating in overseas study programs

Summer	Fall	Average
26.8	28.1	27.4

Although the two averages are very close, the number of study hours for university students in one year is more than twice the number of the study hours for the study-abroad groups. Does this mean that had the students stayed abroad longer; they would have made greater progress? How does this result translate into measurable data for present and future programs? The answer may not be easy to find, but there may be clues as to why concentrated learning is superior to conventional intermittent learning.

It should be noted that although the students' average SLEP/TOEFL scores have increased both after a year in the regular English program at Seigakuin University, and after participation in the study abroad programs, there is an anomaly- the scores of some students actually declined. One possible explanation for this is that there may be an inherent problem with multiple-choice tests. A student with very poor English ability may make entirely random choice, and the chances are that 25% of the answers will be correct (In the he SLEP test, there are four possible answers for each question). However, when a student begins to learn vocabulary and some basic English skills, the distractor answers may be more effective in "tricking" the students into choosing the wrong answer, and possibility of getting less than 25% correct arises. So the increase in the average scores is in spite of a significant number of students whose scores decline.

Discussion

Numerous factors have probably contributed to the healthy increase in the study abroad programs. There is no denying that the students who participated in the programs had more opportunities to hear, read, and speak English in the “real world” than the learners who attended regular university classes in Japan. While overseas, participants interacted with host family members, communicated with the local people, and took part in program-sponsored activities. In general, the students were surrounded with English. On the other hand, in a typical oral English classroom in Japan, learners have limited opportunity to practice and improve their speaking ability again due to a variety of factors: too many students in one class, lack of sufficient time devoted to this skill in general, shyness, a monolingual environment, and the inability to see how what has been learned in the classroom can be applied and used in authentic circumstances.

Students who participate in the Seigakuin University and similar study abroad programs experience firsthand how the learned materials can be used and applied once they step outside the classroom. As can be seen from Appendix One, the study abroad programs provide formal English instruction in the morning. Once outside the school however, learners are forced to use English for such things such as buying a shirt or asking for directions or ordering food in a restaurant. Furthermore, when they return home in the evening, they are forced to interact with their host family no matter how good or bad their English is. These situations provide many opportunities to use English in a more natural and meaningful way. In other words as Childs (2003) points out, the target language is “buzzing” in the students’ head for many hours every day. This prolonged exposure over many days suggests that intensive and concentrated courses are more effective than intermittent classes. The “attractor theory” described by Childs states that solid blocks of instruction tend to produce long-term mental states consistent with the target language. This theory describes how the brain learns and processes languages-not by applying rules but by large-scale neuronal connections whose central tendencies (i.e., attractors) result in the regularities that make languages understandable and speakable (Childs, 2003).

Conclusion

It should be noted that the data gathered for this research is representative of a small sample of students and it may not be possible to make a general statement in regards to all study abroad

Are Study Abroad Programs Effective?

programs. Nevertheless, the answer to the question “Did the students who participated in a four-week study abroad program make gains in their overall English ability?” is a definite yes. Also, the answer to the second question, “How does this gain, if any, compare with the students who studied the same number of hours at a regular English program spread throughout the year?” is that the gains made in study abroad programs are very significantly greater than in university programs.

Finally, it should be mentioned that linguistic gains made through study abroad or home stay experience are not the only reasons for promoting or expanding such programs. Cultural awareness, techniques for facilitating second language acquisition, acquiring sociolinguistic skills, and overcoming the psychological barrier that English is a very difficult language are some of the reasons that schools should push for establishment or expansion of such programs. Almost all the students who have taken part in the Seigakuin University study abroad programs have returned to Japan with a very positive attitude toward English and foreign cultures. This change of attitude cannot be measured with numbers or charts, but can play a key role in expanding students’ horizons and motivating them to reach for higher goals.

References

- Allen, H.W., Herron, C. (2003). A mixed-methodology investigation of the linguistic and affective outcomes of summer study abroad. *Foreign language Annals*. Vol. 36, No. 3
- Brecht, R., Frank, V., Keesling, J. W., O’ mara, F., & Walton, A.R. (1997). A guide for evaluating foreign language immersion training. Washington, DC: Defense Language Institute, Foreign Language Committee.
- Brown, J. D. (1995). *The elements of language curriculum*. Heinle & Heinle Publishers. Boston, U.S.A.
- Childs, M. (2003). Deep priming and language activation. Temple University Symposium, Japan.
- Krashen, S. (1983). *The natural approach: Language acquisition in the classroom*. Hayward, CA: Alemany Press.
- Krashen, S. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications*. Torrance, CA: Laredo Publishin Compnay, Inc.
- Rivers, P. W., (1998). Is being there enough? The effects of home stay placements on Language gains during study abroad. *Foreign language Annals*, 31, No. 4

Appendix One

A.C.E. @ SPU Daily Class Sample Schedule

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9:00-10:50am	Reading and Writing				
11:00-12:50pm	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	American Culture and Orientation (New Students)
1:00-1:50pm	Communication and Listening				

SEIGAKUIN-FLINDERS PROGRAM

Monday

9:00-10:00	Listening and Speaking in Situations
10:00-12:00	Australian Life and Social Welfare
12:00-1:00	Lunch
1:00-4:30	Royal Adelaide Show Excursion

Tuesday

9:00-10:00	Listening and Speaking in Situations
10:00-12:00	Australian Life and Social Welfare
12:00-8:30	Day Trip to Victor Harbor Almond Train/Lunch Scenic Drive Through McLaren Vale Watch the Surf on the Southern Coast Urimbirra Wildlife Park Visit Granite Island Penguin Tour

Wednesday

9:00-10:00	Listening and Speaking in Situations
10:00-12:00	Australian Life and Social Welfare
12:00-1:00	Lunch
1:00-4:00	Aboriginal Cultural Centre Field Trip
3:00-5:30	Social Welfare Field Experience Group Two : Visit to After-school Daycare Centre

Thursday

9:00-10:00	Listening and Speaking in Situations
10:00-12:00	Australian Life and Social Welfare
12:00-1:00	Lunch
1:00-3:00	Preparation for Primary School Visit
3:00-5:30	Social Welfare Field Experience Group Three : Visit to After-school Daycare Centre

Friday

9:00-10:00	Listening and Speaking in Situations
10:00-1:00	Visit Aged Care Facility
1:00- 2:00	Lunch
2:00-3:00	Preparation for Primary School Visit

Saturday and Sunday - Overnight Trip to Clare

(Depart at 10:00 AM Saturday, Return 5:00 PM Sunday)
Scenic Drive through Barossa Valley
Stop at the Whispering Wall
Farm Stay Activities at Bungaree Station