

The Effectiveness of Semester Abroad Programs

ジャクソン アラン

神戸松蔭女子学院大学英語学科

Author's E-mail Address: alanj@shoin.ac.jp

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JACKSON Alan

Department of English, Kobe Shoin Women's University

Abstract

本稿は4年にわたる期間に収集されたデータ分析に基づき、神戸松蔭女子学院大学の4～6か月の中期留学について考察したものである。同様の留学プログラムについての研究では、1か月につき10～15点のTOEFL PBTスコアが上昇しているという結果や（レベルが下の学生ほどよりスコアの上昇幅が大きい傾向がある）、自律学習力と自信が大いにいったことなどが報告されているが、この論文でも同様の結果が得られた。また、留学前に比べると留学後のTOEICスコア分布の標準偏差がかなり高くなったということも、本研究において明らかになった。これは留学中の学習機会を活用し、英語力上達をめざすには、学生の性格と心構えが重要な役割を果たしていることが示唆されているように思われる。

This paper presents an evaluation of the 4-6-month (English) Semester Abroad Program at Kobe Shoin Women's University based on an analysis of data from a four-year period. The results seem to confirm previous work on such programs showing proficiency gains of 10-15 TOEFL PBT points per month (with lower-level students tending to make greater gains) and significant improvements in self-efficacy and confidence. The evaluation also reveals a much greater standard deviation in the distribution of TOEIC scores after study abroad, which seems to underline the important role that personality and attitude play in the ability of students to take advantage of learning opportunities while abroad.

キーワード：英語教育、留学

Key Words: English Language Teaching, Study Abroad

1. Introduction

In a previous paper (Jackson 2007), the present author reviewed the literature on English language study abroad programs and attempted to identify what is known about the benefits of such programs and what elements appear to add value. The following tables summarize the main findings:

Research	Findings - Benefits
Ellis (1994)	Not only the quantity but the quality of informal contact during study abroad affects language acquisition.
Freed (1995) and Coleman (1997)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is generally little change in the accuracy and complexity of learner language production. 2. There can be significant gains in fluency and overall oral proficiency, with lesser gains on tests of grammar, vocabulary, listening and reading. 3. Gains in test scores tend to occur at the lower end of the proficiency scale. 4. Pre-/post-program variation in learner test scores exhibit a great deal of individual variation.
Geis and Fukushima (1997)	Programs do succeed in generating enduring benefits in terms of affective factors. Junior college students who participated in a 6-week course in the US came back to Japan with increased motivation and a greater willingness, and therefore ability, to speak freely in English class.
Tanaka and Ellis (2003)	Study abroad led to significant changes in students' beliefs about language learning; students completing a program found themselves able to speak English without getting nervous (= were more confident), felt it less necessary to worry about mistakes, and were satisfied they were making progress. Beliefs about the value of both experiential and analytical learning strengthened.
Swinton (1983)	A gain in TOEFL score of 10 to 15 points per month is achievable by students who have homestay and enrol in classes comprised of students with different language backgrounds.
Itou (2003)	Study participants reported both increased English proficiency and considerable attitudinal gains; participants became less concerned about spoken errors, no longer felt so puzzled when addressed in English, and generally gained in confidence.
Bodycott and Crew (2000)	Though it's hard to measure language proficiency gains from short-term overseas study programs, the gains are long-term and include enhanced personal skills and attitudes. Students who participated in study abroad programs claimed increased confidence, a change in attitude towards taking risks and a diminution in their tendency to worry excessively about making mistakes. Homestay appeared to be a very important element.
Jackson (2007)	There may be a proficiency level below which homestay programs lose their effectiveness. Failure to get something out of study abroad because of inability to communicate with the host family may be very dispiriting for participants.

Research	Findings – Elements that add value
Drake (1997), Blanche (2002) and Itou (2003)	<p>Elements that appear to enhance program value include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Integration of students into the L2 university community and/or multilingual class community to prevent participants retreating into isolated groups communicating largely in L1. 2. Involvement in real world language-use tasks such as interviews, telephone conversations, community-based project work etc. with native-speakers in the university or local area. 3. Formal classwork closely related to out-of-class activities. 4. Single homestay or, sometimes even better, homestay with student(s) of different nationalities, and preferably in a family setting rather than with a single person. 5. Alternatively, shared dorm room or student flats with native speakers and/or different nationality students. 6. Use of native-speaker conversation partners and residential assistants who organize activities with English speakers, or at least non-Japanese students, of the same age. 7. Study tour groups limited to no more than 17 to 20 participants, assigned to classes according to ability, and without “chaperones”, who tend to encourage dependence and Japanese-language use. 8. Thorough pre-course preparation before students go abroad. 9. Clear well-defined study focus and objectives, not a collection of unrelated activities.
Pilcher (2004)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It may be useful to introduce a mentoring scheme at the overseas university as teachers in Japan generally get to know their students individually and a good deal of emphasis is placed upon this relationship. Such a scheme would allow teachers to speak to students individually outside class to get to know them, and allow students to really express their ideas and opinions about classes and other aspects of the program. Alternatively, diaries or journals can be used to provide for such personal communication. 2. Roleplay and drama activities may be very useful in helping to improve confidence and overcome shyness in speaking English.
Itou (2003), Bodycott and Crew (2000) and Blanche (2002)	<p>Unproductive programme components include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students should not be overburdened with activities, excursions or homework as they need time both to relax and seek out opportunities for informal language use. 2. If possible, homestay should be provided throughout the program as switching from dormitory to homestay adds to the difficulty of socializing into one environment and thereby reaping the benefits from it.

The Semester Abroad Program, which has been running since 2007, has taken careful note of the literature on study abroad during its period of development and can now be said to conform very well with the advice summarized in the above tables. But what about the benefits? Have the gains promised

by study abroad actually been realized? In this paper, data from a four-year period of the program are analyzed and presented to show whether and to what extent the investment in study abroad has yielded positive results.

2. Semester Abroad Program

The program evaluated in this study comprises the following elements:

- a) Participants: Students, who go abroad in the 2nd semester of their 2nd year, either qualify through the university's entrance exam or through a combination of TOEFL score at the end of their first year and 1st-year grades. This produces a study-abroad group whose proficiency ranges from about 370 to 480 with no students below pre-intermediate level. It can thus be assumed that all participants have sufficient initial ability to cope with life in an English-speaking society and especially with homestay.
- b) Study Abroad: Students take part in their choice of English language programs offered by the Language Centers of 5 partner universities in English-speaking countries, and are placed by level in classes comprising students of mixed language backgrounds. There are no chaperones and students are encouraged to think of themselves as fully-enrolled students of the host institution while they are overseas. All participants are accommodated in homestay and further opportunities for English communication outside class in informal settings is provided by self-access study facilities, extracurricular activities, language partner programs and, in some cases, access to university circles and clubs.
- c) Preparation: All students take, and are obliged to pass, a 1st-year TOEFL and Study Abroad class that aims to raise TOEFL scores and provide information about the destination countries, cities and universities, and about daily life in the respective study abroad locations. A compulsory Study Skills class in the 1st semester of the 2nd year offers language preparation for homestay and campus life, additional information about life overseas, and discussion of what attitudes to adopt to maximize the value of study abroad.

3. Data Collection

The present study involved the collection and analysis of 5 types of program data as follows:

3.1 English proficiency of participants before and after the program

Use for this purpose was made of TOEIC tests administered to 93 students as part of the home institution regular curriculum in the period 2010 to 2013. The use of a special test to evaluate the study abroad program was avoided as the students were already intensively tested in their first two years at university. One disadvantage, of course, is that the TOEIC with its business English content and lack of productive skill sub-tests is less than perfectly suited to program evaluation. However, it was felt that it would give a reasonably accurate measurement of overall proficiency.

3.2 Attitudes and beliefs about language learning before and after the program

Changes in students' beliefs about language learning were measured using a Likert-scale questionnaire based on that used by Tanaka and Ellis (2003). The instrument grouped 15 statements about language learning into three categories – Analytic Learning, Experiential Learning, and Self-Efficacy & Confidence – which had been revealed as main factors by a factor analysis of responses in the 2003 study.

3.3 Student satisfaction with the program

This was measured using a simple 5-point Likert scale (as part of the university's standard semester abroad questionnaire) which enabled comparison with courses at the home institution.

3.4 Student self-evaluations of efforts made during the program

The extent to which students evaluated their efforts to raise English ability while overseas was measured with a 5-point Likert scale (again, as part of the university's standard semester abroad questionnaire).

3.5 Self-evaluations of aspects of proficiency

6-point Likert scales were used to investigate how students assessed various aspects of their English communication ability before and after the program.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1: TOEIC Scores Before and After Study Abroad

Before		After		Mean difference	t	p
Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
406.51	89.47	516.02	110.75	109.52	7.84	< 0.0001

Average gain = 109.52 = Listening 51.15 + Reading 58.37

- a) With the average subject studying abroad for 5 months, the gain per month of 22 TOEIC points (= approximately 11 TOEFL PBT points) is consistent with previous studies showing gains of 10 to 15 TOEFL points per month in similar programs (Swinton 1983).
- b) For comparison, the study carried out by Tanaka and Ellis (2003) reported a TOEFL score gain of only about 5 points per month among students whose study abroad program involved dormitory accommodation (not homestay) and classes made up entirely of Japanese students (not multilingual).
- c) In terms of points, the average gain in Listening was similar to that in Reading. In terms of percentage increase, on the other hand, the Reading gain was higher (L=20.1%, R=37.2%). However, it is difficult to interpret this result as it is not clear what the relationship between Listening and Reading scores in the TOEIC really means. Though the mean and distribution of L and R scores was intended to be about the same when the TOEIC was first created, with change over time, L scores have come to be considerably higher in just about all countries and with all types of students. Thus, the higher percentage gain in Reading scores in this study may simply reflect the fact that Reading

scores before study abroad were significantly lower than Listening scores.

- d) A striking feature of the Before-After TOEIC scores is the considerable increase in the Standard Deviation of scores from 89.47 to 110.75. It seems that, while all students are presented with the same classroom and homestay opportunities for English development, some of them, perhaps for reasons of personality, are able to take much better advantage of study abroad by getting more involved in communicative situations that offer opportunities for meaningful input and output.

Table 2.1: Mean Scores for Three Belief Factors Before and After Studying Abroad

Factors	Before		After		Mean difference	t	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Analytical Learning	3.91	1.44	4.05	1.55	0.14	Not significant	
Experiential Learning	5.10	1.11	5.22	0.87	0.12	Not significant	
Self-efficacy and Confidence	3.75	1.59	4.83	1.17	1.08	6.37	< 0.0001

- a) As with Tanaka and Ellis's 2003 study, gains in beliefs about Analytical Learning and Experiential Learning were relatively small while gains in Self-Efficacy and Confidence were considerable and highly significant. It seems that, overall, students do not change their beliefs about how they should go about learning a foreign language. On the other hand, they do come away from their study abroad with increased confidence in their ability to operate comfortably in an English-speaking environment.
- b) The fact that belief in Experiential Learning rose only marginally is difficult to interpret as it was already very high (5.10 on a 6-point scale) before study abroad and thus had little room for improvement.

Table 2.2: Belief Statements Showing Greatest Significant Change

Factors		Before		After		Mean diff.	t	p
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
12	I am satisfied with my progress in English so far.	2.47	1.08	4.24	1.16	1.77	5.94	< 0.0001
5	I would like my teacher to explain important things in my first language so I can understand everything.	3.59	1.60	2.00	1.00	-1.59	4.35	< 0.0001
13	It doesn't matter if I make mistakes when speaking with others in English.	3.59	1.48	5.00	0.91	1.41	4.17	< 0.0001
11	It's possible for me not to get nervous when speaking English.	3.28	1.14	4.28	1.43	1.00	2.93	< 0.005
15	If I go to live in an English speaking country, I think I can make myself understood well enough to live there.	4.09	1.73	4.96	1.02	0.87	2.22	< 0.03

2	I expect to be able to understand everything the teacher says.	4.41	1.27	5.16	0.75	0.75	2.63	< 0.01
1	I can learn well by following a textbook.	3.72	1.11	4.44	1.16	0.72	2.38	< 0.02
3	Rote memorization is a good way for me to learn English.	3.34	1.38	3.56	1.23	0.22	5.34	< 0.0001

- a) The four belief statements showing the greatest gains (12, 13, 11 and 15) all related to Self-efficacy and Confidence, and indicate that the group's encounters overseas have left them feeling that they both HAVE English ability and can APPLY it with confidence.
- b) The other three belief statements with significant changes all related to belief in Analytic Learning. The most significant change – a negative one – was in the need to rely on teacher explanation in their 1st language, which indicates a growing confidence among the group in handling lessons taught entirely in English.

Table 3: Correlations among Proficiency Before Study Abroad, Gains During the Program, Student Satisfaction, and Self-evaluations of Effort Made

	TOEIC Before	TOEIC Gain	Satisfaction	Effort
TOEIC Before	x	-0.17	0.08	-0.13
TOEIC Gain		x	0.19	0.36
Satisfaction			x	0.51
Effort				x

- a) The only correlations of any size involved the students' self-evaluations of the Effort they made during their study abroad programs. Those who felt they made an effort seem to have not only gained higher TOEIC scores but also come away from their programs feeling satisfied with their classroom and homestay experiences. Note, however, that it is not clear what the direction of causation is; was their experience positive because they made an effort, or did they make an effort because they were enjoying a positive experience?
- b) There seems to be a slight tendency for greater gains to be achieved by lower-proficiency students as predicted by Freed (1995) and Coleman (1997).
- c) The mean Program Satisfaction score was 4.05, which is very similar to the average class evaluation of 4.10 at the students' home institution.

Table 4: Self-evaluations of Proficiency Showing Greatest Significant Change

Factors		Before		After		Mean diff.	t	p
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
1	How do you evaluate your present English ability?	2.66	0.70	3.70	0.81	1.04	5.34	< 0.0001
3	If you are addressed in English by a foreigner in the street, do you feel puzzled?	3.91	1.53	2.82	1.25	-1.09	2.98	< 0.001
4	When you speak to a foreigner in English, do you feel you have confidence in your English?	2.06	0.98	3.11	1.13	1.05	3.82	< 0.0003

a) Significant changes occurred in replies to three questions about English proficiency, confirming the changes in beliefs about Self-efficacy and Confidence given in Tables 2.1 and 2.2 above. The students clearly finished their study abroad period with enhanced ability, greater confidence and reduced nervousness.

5. Conclusion

This study of a 4~6-month Semester Abroad Program seems to confirm previous work on such programs showing proficiency gains of 10-15 TOEFL PBT points per month and significant gains in Self-efficacy and Confidence. Moreover, these results are clearly reflected in the participants' appreciation of their own English proficiency.

Again, as predicted by previous writers, lower-level students tended to make greater gains in proficiency during the study abroad period. The concern that some lower-proficiency students may not cope very well with the demands of study abroad, and especially homestay, proved to be unfounded, though it should be emphasized that no student in the study group had a pre-departure proficiency level below the pre-intermediate level.

The significantly greater standard deviation in the distribution of TOEIC scores after study abroad seems to confirm previous findings and serves to underline the important role that personality and attitude play in the ability of students to take advantage of learning opportunities especially in informal situations such as homestay etc.

All in all, it seems that Semester Abroad Programs based on the findings outlined in the introduction to this paper are capable of delivering very significant positive results in terms of both language proficiency and student orientation towards English study. Perhaps the key task now is to find ways to leverage these gains into even greater benefits when the students' return to their home institutions by paying attention to the content of 3rd and 4th year curricula.

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Appendix

A. Questionnaire - Attitudes and beliefs about language learning before and after the program

Scoring on 6-point Likert scale:

思う 6 _____ 5 _____ 4 _____ 3 _____ 2 _____ 1 思わない

Analytic Learning 分析的学習

1. I can learn well by following a textbook.
私は教科書に沿うことによって良く学習することができる。
2. I expect to be able to understand everything the teacher says.
先生が言うことは全て理解できるようになると思う。
3. Rote memorization is a good way for me to learn English.
丸暗記は私が英語を学ぶには良い方法だ。
4. If the teacher allows me to make mistakes in English, it will be difficult for me to speak English later on.
もし先生が私の英語の間違いを直してくれなかったら、後になって英語を話すことが難しくなるだろう。
5. I would like my English teacher to explain important things in my first language so I can understand everything.
全ての事が理解できるように、英語の先生には大事なことは日本語で説明してもらいたい

Experiential Learning 経験的学習

6. I can improve my English by listening to the radio or watching TV.
ラジオやテレビを見ることで私は英語を上達させることができる。
7. I can learn English well by using English with others outside class.
教室外で他の人と英語を使うことによって私は英語を上達させることができる。
8. I can improve my English by having homestay.
ホームステイをすることで私は英語を上達させることができる。
9. I can learn English well by reading English magazines and newspapers.
英語の雑誌や新聞を読むことで私は英語を良く学習することができる。
10. It's OK to guess if I do not know a word in English.
英語の単語を知らないのならその意味を当て推量しても問題ない。

Self-efficacy and Confidence 自律学習と自信

11. It's possible for me not to get nervous when speaking English.
私は英語を話すときに緊張しないようにすることができる。
12. I am satisfied with my progress in English so far.
私のこれまでの英語の上達に満足している。

13. It doesn't matter if I make mistakes when speaking with others in English.
他の人たちと英語で話すときに私が間違いをしてもかまわない。
14. If I continue, I think it is possible for me to learn to speak English very well.
もし継続してやれば、私は英語を話すのがとても上手になることは可能だと思う。
15. If I go to live in an English speaking country, I think I can make myself understood well enough to live there.
もし私が英語圏の国に住むために行ったら、その国に住むのに十分くらい英語でコミュニケーションができると思う。

B. Student self-evaluations of efforts made during the study abroad program

Evaluation scale: 5. Very good 4. Good 3. Average 2. Not so good 1. Poor

- ☐ Effort made in class ☐ Effort to improve English
☐ Effort towards cross-cultural understanding

C. Student satisfaction with the study abroad program

Evaluation scale: 5. Very good 4. Good 3. Average 2. Not so good 1. Poor

- ☐ Classroom lessons ☐ Homestay

D. Self-evaluations of aspects of proficiency before and after the program

Scoring on 6-point Likert Scale

1) How do you evaluate your present English ability?

あなたは現在の自分の英語力をどのように評価していますか。

高 6 5 4 3 2 1 低

2) Do you feel concerned about making mistakes when you use English?

あなたは英語を使うときに自分の英語の間違いが気になりますか。

なる 6 5 4 3 2 1 ならない

3) If you are addressed in English by a foreigner in the street, do you feel puzzled?

あなたは町で外国人から英語で話しかけられたら、戸惑いを感じますか。

思う 6 5 4 3 2 1 思わない

4) When you speak to a foreigner in English, do you feel you have confidence in your English?

外国人と英語で話をする時に、自分の英語に自信を感じていますか。

感じる 6 5 4 3 2 1 感じない

