
Poster Presentation

Analysis of Study Abroad Summer Program

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The purpose of this research is to investigate the extent of improvement in English test scores after Japanese university students attended an English program overseas. Study-abroad programs are generally associated with gains in English abilities. These gains are due to the large number of English classes and amount of exposure to English in authentic situations. In a previous study, participants in a study-abroad program at a bilingual Japanese university showed more gains with statistical significance in listening in the lower and intermediate levels, and in structure in the higher level, than those who did not study overseas. In the current study, similar results were gained with statistical analyses. This time, a comparison was added between students who had graduated from a Japanese high school and those who had graduated from an international school or school overseas. Our hypothesis was that students who attended a Japanese high school would benefit from studying overseas during university more than the other students because of the extensive exposure to English and possible gains in motivation. This was rejected in terms of probability; however, its effect size was found to be small, thus necessitating further investigation into this issue.

The purpose of this study was to examine the improvement in English test scores of students who participated in a short-term study-abroad program at a bilingual university in Japan. A few features should be noted about this university and its programs in order to gain a better understanding of the context. First, before entering the university, many of the students lived overseas, often in English speaking countries. This results in a general trend of higher English proficiency amongst the new students. Additionally, during the first year of their studies, most new students participate in a semi-intensive English program emphasizing English for academic purposes. Finally, the university offers the Study English Abroad Program, or SEA Program. Students accepted for this program have

the opportunity to study abroad for six weeks during the summer. Some of the participating ESL programs are located in Australia, Canada, England, and the United States. Students who do not participate in the SEA Program must attend additional academic English courses. Considering this information, the difference between those who participated in the SEA Program and those who did not were measured in this study. Additionally, the impact of the SEA Program on those who graduated from a Japanese high school and those who graduated from an international school or school overseas was investigated.

Background

Short-term study abroad programs have been popular at universities in Japan as methods of increasing student intercultural communication competence. This is done through their direct overseas experience and increasing their foreign language skills and motivation to learn their target language. According to Kinginger (2009), study abroad is defined as “a temporary sojourn of pre-defined duration, undertaken for educational purposes” (p. 11). She holistically analyzed the effectiveness of study-abroad programs and claimed that studying abroad can improve learners’ language abilities in all aspects. In particular, the abilities related to social interaction are improved, though learners’ individual differences are huge and cannot be ignored (Kinger, 2013).

At the present research site, Watanabe (2000) studied the impact of the SEA Program by comparing the TOEFL ITP scores of the students who participated in this overseas program and those who did not. He compared three groups; advanced, intermediate, and intermediate low language proficiency students. He found that the SEA Program participants who were at intermediate and intermediate low levels gained higher TOEFL scores in the listening section. They also gained higher total TOEFL scores than those who did not take part in the SEA Program. He further found that the SEA Program participants who were at an advanced level gained higher TOEFL scores in the structure section than those who did not participate in the SEA Program. He did not, however, find a statistically significant difference between their total scores.

Considering these previous studies, it is possible to hypothesize that the

students who participate in the SEA Program can improve their English more than those who do not. A further hypothesis can be made that the students who went to a Japanese high school benefit more from the SEA Program than those who went to an international school or school overseas. This is because the latter group of students' English proficiency tends to be very high. Based on these hypotheses, the following research questions were addressed:

RQ1: Who made more improvements in English, those who participated in the SEA Program or those who did not participate?

RQ2: Who benefited more from the SEA Program, those who attended a Japanese high school, or those who attended an international high school or a high school overseas?

Placement of Students

The current study was conducted at a bilingual university in Japan. Along with test scores from a mandatory TOEFL ITP taken at the beginning of the school year, background information about the students was collected for placement purposes. This information included the type of high school they attended (Japanese, international, or overseas), and their language experience while living abroad. After placement, the students study English together in small sections of 20-22 students multiple times per week. The English program consists mainly of academic reading, writing, and skill building classes. The amount of required classes is dependent on their placement into the four different proficiency levels, and their acceptance into the SEA Program. Each academic year consists of three terms. Students placed in the highest proficiency level participate in the program for two terms. The next group studies for three terms. The third group participates in the program for four terms, and the lowest proficiency level for five terms. Students can apply for and attend the SEA Program during the summer of their first or second year. Those who do not participate in the SEA Program are required to take additional academic skills classes in English, such as Lectures and Critical Discussion, Grammar for Written Communication, Speaking and Listening, and Academic Debate. An optional IELTS is taken at the end of the English program.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data from the 333 first-year students who took both the TOEFL ITP and the IELTS were collected. To answer RQ1, the data were divided into two groups, students who participated in the SEA Program, $n = 142$, and those who did not, $n = 191$. A second division of the data from SEA Program participants was made for answering RQ2, students who attended a Japanese high school, $n = 132$, and students who attended either an international high school or one overseas, $n = 10$. Due to the small number of attendees in these two types of non-Japanese high schools and to facilitate a t -test during the data analysis, these students were combined into a single group.

Results and Discussions

RQ1 asks whether students in the SEA Program (and studied overseas) or non-participants showed improvement in English. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the two groups. Of the 142 SEA students, their mean score of the pre-program test (TOEFL) was 500.66, and that of the post-program test (IELTS) was 5.73. All the scores were converted to CEFR levels (Educational Testing Service, 2017; IELTS, 2017), and the mean improvement was 1.18. The mean score of the pre-program test for the students who did not attend the SEA Program was 528.55 for TOEFL, and that of the post-program test was 6.12 for IELTS. Their scores were also converted to CEFR levels, and showed that the non-SEA students improved by 1.07.

Additionally, to compare the two groups in terms of gains in English test scores, an independent t -test was conducted. There was a significant difference between

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of SEA and Non-SEA

Group	n	Pre		Post		CEFR	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
SEA	142	500.66	41.92	5.73	.52	1.18	.50
Non-SEA	191	528.25	50.00	6.12	.75	1.07	.52

the SEA and non-SEA participants; $t(331) = 2.02, p = .04$. The results show that those who participated in the SEA Program improved their English more than those who did not. However, the effect size, Cohen's d , was unremarkable. Effect size is "the degree to which the phenomenon is present in the population" (Cohen, 1988, p. 9), and Plonsky (2015) strongly suggests reporting effect sizes whenever applicable. In this study, the effect size was 0.22, which is considered less than small. The reason for statistically significant results but small effect size could be the large sample size, a factor that often affects statistical significance (Plonsky, 2015). Therefore, it could also be concluded that the extra academic skills classes taken by the non-SEA students are an adequate alternative to the SEA Program. This is beneficial information to the university for the promotion of the extra academic skills classes to those who could not attend the SEA Program.

To answer RQ2 (Who benefited more from the SEA Program, those who attended a Japanese high school, or those who attended an international high school or a high school overseas?), the SEA program students were further divided into two groups. These groups were those who attended a Japanese high school and those who attended an international school or a high school overseas. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of those two groups. Of the 142 participants in the SEA program, 132 students went to a Japanese high school, and the mean score of the pre-program test (TOEFL) was 498.82, and that of the post-program test (IELTS) was 5.69. The scores were converted to CEFR levels and the mean improvement was 1.19. The other 10 students went to a local school overseas ($n = 2$) or to an international school ($n = 8$), and the mean score of the pre-program test was 525.00, and that of the post-program test was 6.20.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of JPN and INT

Group	<i>n</i>	Pre		Post		CEFR	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
JPN	132	498.82	41.33	5.69	.51	1.19	.51
INT	10	525.00	44.15	6.20	.42	1.10	.32

Their scores were also converted to CEFR levels, and examination showed that these students improved by 1.10.

In order to compare the two groups in terms of gains in English test scores, another independent t -test was conducted. This time, no significant difference between the two groups was found; $t(140) = .82, p = .43$, with a less than small effect size, Cohen's $d = 0.22$. It is uncertain why the results were insignificant. Perhaps more significant results could be found if other unknown factors such as willingness to communicate or time spent on studying English were investigated in a more complex statistical model.

Conclusion

Two hypotheses were investigated in the current study. The first one was that SEA Program students would make more gains in English ability than those who did not participate. The second was there would be higher gains in English ability for students who had studied in a Japanese high school instead of an international high school or one overseas. After a statistical analysis of the participants' pre- and post-program test scores, the difference between SEA and non-SEA students was found to be statistically significant, but the effect size was small. As for the second hypothesis, the difference was insignificant, and the effect size was also small.

In order to explore further gains in English ability from short-term study-abroad programs, additional variables could be examined. These include, but are not limited to, types of accommodation while studying abroad, ESL class hours, and length of stay in an English-speaking country prior to university. Applying these analyses to other cohorts or contexts is also suggested.

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