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Survey Findings on Preparedness, Self-Confidence and Attitude Before, During and After a Study Abroad Programme

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海外留学プログラム期間前、期間中および期間後における心構え、自信および姿勢についての調査結果

Survey Findings on Preparedness, Self-Confidence and Attitude Before,
During and After a Study Abroad Programme

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{Introduction}

Study Abroad Programmes (SAP hereafter) are an essential part of most modern language courses. They contribute to the students' personal development in three ways: honing their language skills, fostering personal growth, and developing increased intercultural awareness (Fenech et al., 2013). Typically students spend a semester or a whole year in the country where their target language is spoken, either enrolling in regular classes at a university, special classes for language learners or taking part in special programmes of cultural activities or other trips to expose the students to the language in a native context. With constant access to their L2 a SAP can greatly aid their language acquisition (Segalowitz & Freed, 2004). They also take place during a key time during a young person's life. For many it may be their first time abroad or their first time to travel independently from their family or school, and also most likely, it is the longest period that they will have spent away from home and country in their lives so far. Thus SAP can have a huge impact in terms of maturity, independence and emotional development. Furthermore, in as homogeneous a country as Japan, SAP may be the first time students have to speak with native speakers who are not their teachers. They may have to talk to host families, school staff, and locals while out and about off campus. They will also have to use English as a lingua franca to interact, socialise and work together with other visiting students. They have to live in an almost completely alien environment, with different foods, weather, customs, homes and social norms. They may suffer from culture shock, homesickness and isolation and loneliness, but should they persevere they will come out the other side with a greater intercultural awareness and a greater understanding of their own and other

cultures. (Ohashi 2007) Thus, these are invaluable experiences for students, not only in terms of language practice, but also motivation, maturity, confidence-building and internationalization.

How are our students changed by the experience of a SAP? Are they mentally, linguistically and emotionally prepared to go? Does the programme live up to their expectations? And how can our pre-departure training be improved to better suit the needs of our students? These are the questions to be answered by this study.

{Background}

This area attracts a lot of study and interest, including at this university. McDonough (1994) and Ohashi (2007) both analysed the effect of a SAP on one group of students. These longitudinal studies allow for a tightly controlled cause and effect analysis. One group with similar age, culture, ethnic, educational and socio-economic background all participate in the same programme at the same time and can easily be gathered for interview both before and after. Effects of the SAP can be seen clearly and the effects of influencing factors are negated by holding them constant for the group.

{Previous studies and this paper}

Studies at Baika. McDonough (1994) interviewed the same set of 56 female students before and after the same 20-day programme at the same university in Canada. His focus was on beliefs about linguistic and cultural understanding, topical fluency and survival English and future goals and students' further study. His tightly designed study allows the effect of the programme on the participants to be accurately ascertained. He aptly notes that self-assessment questionnaires present two key benefits - 'a raised level of awareness' and 'improved goal orientation'. He highlights the advantages of 'foster[ing] evaluative attitudes in the learner' in order to transform subject learning in the classroom into lifelong autonomous learning supported by the ability to reflect on one's learning and to define language goals. In line with these ideas, our survey was designed around self-reflective questions, designed to make the subjects reflect on areas of competency and practical application of the language that might not have arisen in a classroom setting.

McDonough found that despite the short length of the programme students' experiences positively influenced their self-beliefs in items concerning "survival English". For example, he found that

before the trip, 50% of the students did not believe they would be able to take public transport in Canada, but after the trip 76.8% now believed they had the ability to do so. Similarly, before, 42.9% of students did not think they had sufficient English for shopping but after the trip 75% of students now felt confident to use English in a shop. While he found a clear increase in functional confidence in basic survival skills over a short trip, would a longer trip have more profound effects over a wider variety of linguistic tasks?

Ohashi's 2007 study was quite different. Firstly, he expanded the length of the data collection, interviewing one set of 74 students in 2004 and then interviewing 64 of them again in 2006 after the completion of a variety of programmes in a variety of countries for various lengths of time. His study focused on students' views of Japanese culture as compared to their host country's as well as their perception of their English skill development.

Key differences with this study. Firstly, the present study is cross-sectional rather than longitudinal. Students were gathered over a period of July 2019 to November 2019, and directed to complete one of three separate questionnaires. The questionnaire is a snapshot of their experiences and opinions. Secondly, our participants are far more diverse. Ages range from 15 to 53. While the majority were Japanese, 37 participants (29%) came from other countries. Not only that, their programmes were far more diverse. Lengths ranged from 2 weeks to 1 year. Participants surveyed went to 7 different countries, 26 cities, and studied in a far wider variety of institutions, from regular universities to summer schools. Their accommodation styles also varied from homestay to dorm or private apartment.

Motivation changed by SAP. This paper wants to examine how going on a SAP changes a student's feelings towards the L2 and their behaviour, both in terms of study and extracurricular experiences. Thus the researchers have investigated a number of different aspects on these points.

Overall feelings. Although it is easy to assume that a SAP presents itself as an exciting opportunity for our students, it is an expensive experience that takes students away from their regular studies, club activities and part-time jobs. It also often takes place at a time when our students' peers beginning the job-hunting process. It is, therefore, important to gauge the students' feelings pre-, during and post-SAP to understand their mindset and anticipate their ability to make the most of

their opportunities and ensure that the experience is worth the time and money. Results can also inform classroom practice and pre-departure briefings. So while this might seem like a simple question, it is a worthwhile one.

Study habits before and during SAP. To assess if SAP affects class participation the survey asked about study habits before their foreign study: attending or skipping class, and doing their homework.

L2 Media consumption. L2 Media consumption could be seen as a proxy for overall interest in and willing exposure to the L2. Students who regularly watch, listen to or read L2 media not only have more exposure to natural spoken L2, but also to L2 pop-culture and L2 interpersonal communication. Chik and Breidbach's 2011 study found that the highly motivated students were all "invested heavily in different aspects of popular cultural practices" (pg 157).

How SAP influence students' confidence and motivation to study motivation.

Interaction skills. Often for the pre-departure language student the L2 is a 'theoretical subject' that they have had very little or no opportunity to put into practice, and thus they are likely to be nervous, hesitant and unfluent. Spending time in the L2 environment, interacting in the language gives the student the practical experience and practice to build competencies in key social interaction skills. Studies have found that students who spend time abroad experience "significant gains in and increased confidence in oral and listening skills" (Allan 2002)

CEFR or the Common European Framework of Reference defines language levels with a series of "Can do statements" (CEFR Companion Volume 2018). McDonough (1994) found changes in students' confidence levels for basic survival English, in shop and restaurant interactions. But this study will expand the question and ask about higher CEFR level skills.

A1 level - standard social interactions. These skills require the memorization of a simple set of controlled phrases and should be taught early in any language course. The skills in this area are; In the restaurant, In the shop Buying tickets in a bus/train station, Reading maps and street signs and Dealing with small medical problems.

B1/B2 level 1 - socializing skills. These skills require extended conversations where the speakers must speak, respond and negotiate meaning. Moreover, they must be interesting, show interest and make socially appropriate conversation decisions. While chatting and simple conversations are taught early in English classes, doing this well is not often mastered until the end of B2 level.

The skills in this area are; Talking to the teachers in my school (register), Talking to my classmates from around the world (negotiating unfamiliar accents), Going out and having a good time (being interesting and speaking in large groups) and Making friends (building longer relationships, making plans and arrangements).

B1 level 2 - exploring a foreign country. While this skill may be covered by a lower CEFR level it would take more certainty in your own skills to travel independently in the L2 environment or other countries using L2 or even places where the L2 is not widely spoken. The skills in this area are; Travelling around the country and Visiting other countries

B2/C1 High level skills . These skills require high levels of grammatical accuracy and range as well as a well-developed vocabulary and abilities to perform under stress and express your opinion on a wide range of abstract topics. Skills in this area are; Writing reports and essays in English, Giving presentations in English, Understanding my classes and Dealing with big medical problems

Using English outside the classroom - for fun. Outside of classroom interaction is one of the key goals of a SAP. Firstly, it expands the scope of interactions and the amounts and kinds of people the students must speak to - thus increasing the opportunity for practice, negotiation and input. Secondly, fun during the trip gives students the reasons and the motivations to keep studying and improving their skills. DuFon and Churchill (2006) found interaction with local L2 speakers greatly improved spoken communication and Rivers (1998) found that students who spend time with their international roommates also experience a boost in speaking ability.

Items. A list of items came from King and Huff (1985) and the researchers' own experiences. They can be roughly divided into 5 categories based on their potential for use of L2. The first category is "Interactive", fun things that would allow students to practice the English with their classmates or locals. The second covers "Explore" activities, where students would travel outside their school town, relying on the L2 to navigate to new cities or countries. The third category comprised "Extend" activities that might lead to students staying longer or possibly settling in their host country. The fourth category is "Solo", fun things that while probably done with friends may not necessitate L2. The final category is "L1", these items do not need L2 and may be detrimental to the goals of the SAP. They were hidden in this section to see how much students may self-sabotage their learning

goals by remaining in their comfortable L1 environment. (DuFon & Churchill 2006) What motivates students may well be quite different and unexpected, but those students who are excited to explore and confident enough to socialize and interact with locals and other students will experience the greatest changes and boost to skill and motivation.

{Preparedness - Problems during study abroad}

Students are often anxious about participating in a SAP. They worry about “expensive costs and uncomfortable new environments” (Matsumoto, 2012). A list of common SAP problems was compiled from *Host family survival kit* (King & Huff 1985) and the researchers’ own experiences living abroad. While other studies have focused on linguistic anxiety, this study aimed to assess what kind of issues students are worried about and which problems they actually ended up having. This obviously has implications for pre-departure training, SAP councillors and the students themselves.

Group 1 was asked to identify problems they were worried about experiencing. Group 2 was asked about problems they were having and group 3 which problems they had experienced during their whole SAP.

The items can be divided into five main areas of problems; Language. Problems caused by the students’ lack of communication ability; not liking the classes or being unable to make friends. Social. Personality clashes with host families, classmates, eating, partying or studying too much. Culture Shock. Problems arising from dealing with the new environment and culture. Particularly an issue for the majority of the Japanese participants who may never have been abroad before. These problems included homesickness, shyness, disliking the food. Etc. Money. SAP programmes can be very expensive themselves and the UK, US and AUS are high cost of living countries. Moreover, as young inexperienced students alone for the first time, many may not have the budgeting skills required for a long term SAP. Safety. Coming from safe, secure countries many students worry about their personal safety abroad and the

safety of their possessions. So these problems asked about crime, getting lost and serious medical issues.

| Nationality | Group 1 | Group 2 | Group 3 |
|-------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Japan | 40 | 6 | 30 |
| Not Japan | 0 | 30 | 1 |

{Methodology}**{Participants}**

Nationality. The study gathered 107 respondents, 70 of which originated from Japan and the remaining 37 from a range of countries around the world. The Japanese group is mainly comprised of students from UNIVERSITY A and B, whereas the international students are individuals from all ages and backgrounds enrolled in a language school in the UK

Age. The wide majority of the respondents are young adults between the age of 17 and 30, with only 7 participants under the age of 17 and 6 participants over the age of 30, and the oldest respondent being 56.

Institutions. The participants were selected using convenience sampling based on institutions and classes the researchers had access to. All participants were informed that the survey was voluntary and anonymous. A total of 107

| Age in Years | Pre | During | After | Overall participants |
|--------------|-------|--------|-------|----------------------|
| AVERAGE Age | 19.68 | 24.06 | 20.26 | 21.32 |
| STDEV of Age | 1.05 | 8.42 | 3.23 | 5.54 |
| MAX Age | 22 | 56 | 29 | 56 |
| MIN Age | 15 | 16 | 15 | 15 |

participants were surveyed before, during or after a study abroad program. The majority of the participants came from three separate institutions: small private UNIVERSITY A, small private UNIVERSITY B (both in Japan) and INSTITUTION C (a specialist English Language School in the UK).

INSTITUTION C provided the majority of the DURING phases whereas UNIVERSITY B contributed mostly to the PRE phases and UNIVERSITY A contributed participants to all phases. Due to the way that administrative procedures are run at INSTITUTION C before enrollment in the language course and after completion, the researchers were unable to disseminate the PRE and AFTER surveys.

A limitation of this study is that while UNIVERSITY A and B were almost entirely homogeneous in nationality, L1, age, L2 level and socio-economic status, INSTITUTION C drew diverse participants in all factors. This should be borne in mind when making comparisons between the 3 phases.

{Procedure}

The English version of the survey was completed in June 2019. Given the large number of expected Japanese participants, a Japanese translation of the survey was commissioned and completed by a qualified English-to-Japanese translator. The survey was transferred to Google Forms and optimised for mobile layout. For ease of link transfer QR codes of the address were created, printed and shown to participants. For email and Line group invites short urls were created. These two methods allowed participants to receive the survey link in a low-key, non-pressured way, and to complete the survey in their own time, but at the same time making it possible for the link to be disseminated quickly and widely. Survey results could be collected in real-time from participants around the world and collated in a shared drive. From mid-June the survey was conducted at all institutions with particular emphasis paid to students in SAP preparatory classes. Over the summer INSTITUTION C ran intensive summer courses in the UK and participants were recruited. At the beginning of semester 2, further participants were gathered at both universities.

{Research Instrument}

A 40 item survey consisting of 7 parts was written and edited by both researchers. A few pilot participants were recruited to identify any confusingly worded questions and give opinions on the layout, order and length of sections. This survey was then modified, each question's tenses changed to fit either before, after or during a SAP. For example:

PRE Which of these activities do you think you will do during your SAP?

DURING Which of these activities are you doing or plan to do soon?

AFTER Which of these activities did you do during your SAP?

For the most part the surveys were identical apart from these simple grammatical changes. The AFTER survey contained an additional question about the length of time since return. This was done to ensure direct compatibility between the three phases. One section examining the importance of various motivations for choosing to do a SAP was removed from the AFTER survey as the pilot participants found it confusing and irrelevant.

Tone and anonymity. The survey asked several sensitive questions about ‘*undesirable social behaviour*’ such as “During your SAP did you always do your homework?” and “Did you go to lots of parties?”. Whilst getting honest answers for such questions is a noted problem in this kind of research (Dörnyei 2010) the researchers followed his advice of best practices on how to best word and order such questions.

Thus the survey can be divided into 9 sections, ranging from purely factual to the qualitative experiential. To prevent affirmative bias positive and negative adjectives were randomly assigned left or right positions.

{Results}

Overall feelings about

SAP. One question in section 5 asked

| Group 1 | |
|-------------------|-----|
| very excited! | 40% |
| excited | 25% |
| a bit excited | 13% |
| a bit worried | 18% |
| very nervous | 3% |
| extremely anxious | 3% |

| Group 2 | |
|-------------|-----|
| very happy | 64% |
| happy | 28% |
| a bit happy | 8% |
| a bit bad | |
| bad | |
| very bad | |

| Group 3 | |
|-----------------|-----|
| very satisfied | 52% |
| satisfied | 39% |
| a bit satisfied | 3% |
| a bit bad | 6% |
| bad | |
| very bad | |

participants about their overall feeling surrounding their SAP experience. For group 1 it asked how excited or worried they were and for groups 2 and 3 how happy or satisfied they were with their trip. The results were generally positive. While just under a quarter of group 1 are nervous about their trip, group 2 are having completely positive experiences and only 2 people from group 3 had an overall negative experience.

Opinion on Price. There is another way to gauge the value students feel the programme has - price. As can be seen the vast majority (70%) of group 1 think the SAP is very or far too expensive. But by the time they are on the programme, opinions have changed and only 50% think it is still too expensive and 44% believe it is a little expensive or just right. Having returned from the SAP 83% of group 3 now think it was a little expensive or just right and only 16% think they did not get value for money.

{Class participation before SAP and during}

Sections 5 and 7 asked about study habits. 5 covered before their trip abroad, dealing with class attendance, homework and English media. Participation while abroad was dealt with in section 7

asking again about attendance and homework and this time, additional study outside of the standard university curriculum. The results are summarised below.

Some observations. Group 1 who are currently attending classes claim the highest rate of attendance with 88% attending all or most classes compared to 80% for groups 2 and 3. Although these results

| Class attendance | Group 1 | Group 2 | Group 3 |
|------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Skip most | | 2.8% | |
| Skip some | 2.5% | 2.8% | |
| 50-50 | 10.0% | 13.9% | 20.0% |
| Go to most | 27.5% | 27.8% | 16.7% |
| Go to all | 60.0% | 52.8% | 63.3% |

| SAP Class attendance | Group 1 | Group 2 | Group 3 |
|----------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Skip most | | | 16.0% |
| Skip some | 8.0% | | |
| Go to most | 30.0% | 19.0% | 32.0% |
| Go to all | 55.0% | 81.0% | 52.0% |

are generally consistent, things change slightly when looking at class attendance during SAP. While the vast majority of group 1 thought they would attend all or most classes, a not insignificant proportion of group 3, 16%, confessed to skipping the majority of their classes. Group 2 has a very high attendance rate, although it must be admitted that as the students were gathered during class, students that did not attend those days would naturally not be measured in the survey.

Changes in behaviour. Japanese students generally become less diligent during SAP. Group 3 suffered a marked decrease in attendance during SAP and group 1 thought they would attend classes less during SAP.

{Media Consumption and interest}

This study asked about English media in 2 different questions: firstly in section 2, which asked about their current feelings surrounding English, and secondly in section 4, which asked about how they studied before the trip. The first asked them to choose a number between 1 and 5 representing how much they loved or hated English media (films, books, TV, etc) and the second asked them how often they consumed it. The results are in the table.

| English Media | Group 1 | Group 2 | Group 3 |
|---------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Hate 5 | 0% | 3% | 0% |
| 4 | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| 3 | 20% | 22% | 13% |
| 2 | 23% | 19% | 23% |
| Love 1 | 58% | 56% | 65% |

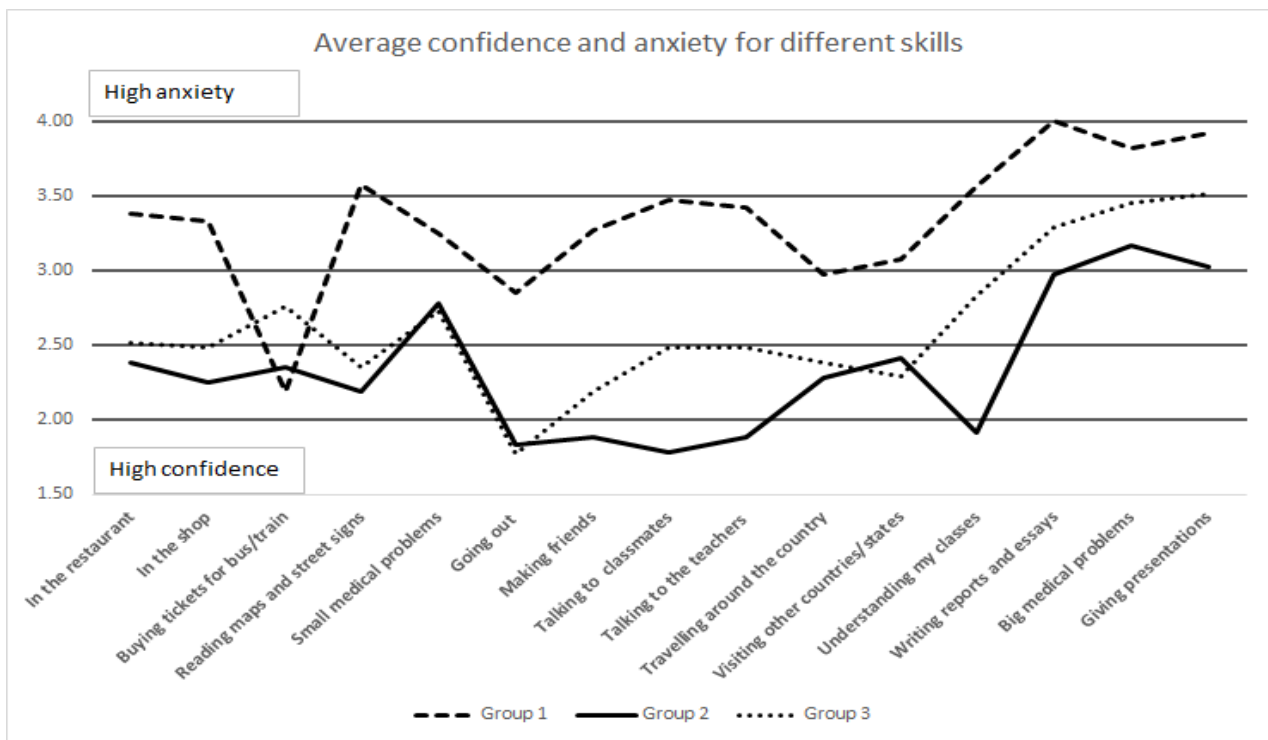
| Media Consumption | Group 1 | Group 2 | Group 3 |
|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| No English Media | 10% | 3% | 0% |
| A little | 10% | 14% | 19% |
| Some | 40% | 31% | 16% |
| A lot | 30% | 11% | 39% |
| Everyday | 10% | 42% | 26% |

As can be seen, when asked about their like or dislike of L2 media, all three groups are pretty similar, with group 3 perhaps loving English media more than the other two. But when it comes to the actual frequency of consumption of English media there are some distinctions. Group 1 shows the least engagement with English Media, although in all three groups around 20% of people have little to no

interest in English media. When considering those who report either a lot of English Media, or viewing it every day there is a clear difference, 40%, 53% and 65% for groups 1, 2 and 3 respectively. As this is a clear driver of motivation and a cause of language improvement (Chik and Breidbach, 2011), perhaps more should be done to encourage learners to develop a self-directed interest in L2 media.

{Language Confidence and SAP}

How did spending up to a year studying in a country where L2 is widely spoken affect the participants? This section will examine how and to what extent the students' self-described levels of confidence are different for those who have not studied abroad, those that are currently studying abroad, and those who have done in the past.



For this question 13 items covering various interaction skills were rated by students from 1 - 'Very confident' to 5 - 'Very worried'. The graph shows the average level of anxiety surrounding different communication activities. 5 represented the theoretical maximum of feeling completely unable to do the task and 1 meant complete confidence at it. The skills are roughly arranged right to left in ascending CEFR level. As can be seen, group 1, the dashed line, is far less confident in every skill, except curiously buying tickets from a train or bus station where they are much more confident than either group 2 or 3 - presumably they think all countries' ticket vending machines will be as good as Japanese ones.

Apart from this naivete they have far less confidence in their abilities than those who have experienced a SAP. In the table the arrows indicate the relative sizes of numbers, and grey shading splits up the task types.

| Confidence in interaction skills | Group 1 | Group 2 | Group 3 | Overall |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| In the restaurant | ↗ 3.38 | ↘ 2.39 | ↘ 2.52 | ⇒ 2.79 |
| In the shop | ↗ 3.33 | ↘ 2.25 | ↘ 2.48 | ⇒ 2.72 |
| Buying tickets in a train/bus station | ↓ 2.19 | ↘ 2.35 | ⇒ 2.76 | ⇒ 2.76 |
| Reading maps and street signs | ↑ 3.58 | ↓ 2.19 | ↘ 2.35 | ⇒ 2.76 |
| Dealing with small medical problems | ↗ 3.25 | ⇒ 2.78 | ⇒ 2.73 | ⇒ 2.94 |
| Going out and having a good time | ⇒ 2.85 | ↓ 1.83 | ↓ 1.77 | ↓ 2.20 |
| Making friends | ↗ 3.28 | ↓ 1.89 | ↓ 2.19 | ↘ 2.50 |
| Talking to my classmates from around the world | ↗ 3.48 | ↓ 1.78 | ↘ 2.48 | ↘ 2.62 |
| Talking to the teachers in my school | ↗ 3.43 | ↓ 1.89 | ↘ 2.48 | ↘ 2.64 |
| Travelling around the country | ⇒ 2.98 | ↘ 2.28 | ↘ 2.39 | ↘ 2.57 |
| Visiting other countries/states | ⇒ 3.08 | ↘ 2.42 | ↘ 2.29 | ↘ 2.63 |
| Writing reports and essays in English | ↑ 4.00 | ⇒ 2.97 | ↗ 3.29 | ↗ 3.45 |
| Dealing with big medical problems | ↑ 3.82 | ↗ 3.17 | ↗ 3.45 | ↗ 3.49 |
| Giving presentations in English | ↑ 3.93 | ⇒ 3.03 | ↗ 3.52 | ↗ 3.50 |
| Understanding my classes | ↑ 3.56 | ↓ 1.92 | ⇒ 2.83 | ⇒ 2.79 |

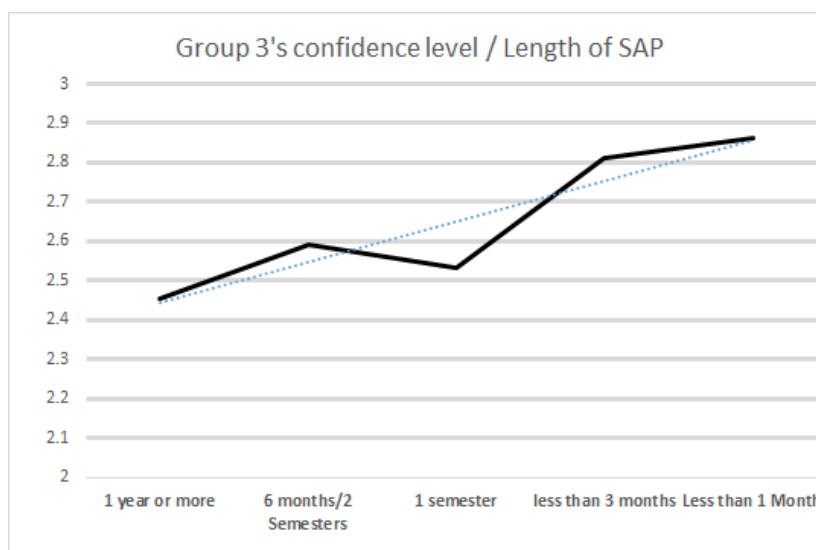
Group 2 and 3 have similar levels of confidence in their abilities, although 2 is often more confident than 3. Is this because of their present evidence of their abilities,

or the fact they are an international group? Unfortunately there is not enough data to say either way here.

{Confidence and length of stay}

If a SAP experience raises students' confidence and competence then we might expect the longer the programme the greater the effect.

In the following graph the average confidence level for all skills for



group 3 people with same programme length was plotted on a graph. There is an interesting trend in the data; while generally the longer the programme the more confident the students become, 1-semester students seem to be more confident than 2-semester students. Due to the low number of individuals and uneven distribution, this effect is for now a curiosity that must be explored in another, more detailed survey.

{Using English outside the classroom - for fun}

This section looked at how students have fun during SAP and how they worried about and experienced problems. Both of these areas have implications for pre-departure preparation, motivation and engagement.

Fun during a SAP. There were two questions in the survey that addressed leisure time and fun outside of the classroom. While classroom study is important for improving language knowledge, it is often outside the classroom that these skills are put into practice. Students gain more confidence in the abilities to communicate and the motivation to study further when they see what they can achieve.

SAP fun priorities. The first questions asked of the participants to grade some key goals of a SAP in levels of personal importance to them.

| Priorities During SAP | Very Important | I want to | I don't mind | I don't want to | I won't do this |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|-----------|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| I want to speak very well | ↑ 62 | ↓ 12 | ↓ 0 | ↓ 1 | ↓ 0 |
| I need English for my future | ↑ 58 | ↓ 17 | ↓ 1 | ↓ 0 | ↓ 0 |
| Have fun with English | ↑ 42 | ⇒ 28 | ↓ 5 | ↓ 0 | ↓ 0 |
| Make foreign friends | ⇒ 38 | ⇒ 30 | ↓ 7 | ↓ 0 | ↓ 0 |
| Pass an exam | ⇒ 35 | ⇒ 25 | ↓ 9 | ↓ 3 | ↓ 3 |
| Study very hard | ⇒ 34 | ⇒ 29 | ↓ 10 | ↓ 2 | ↓ 0 |
| Just have fun this summer | ⇒ 23 | ⇒ 29 | ↓ 14 | ↓ 6 | ↓ 0 |
| Go sightseeing | ⇒ 22 | ⇒ 38 | ↓ 10 | ↓ 2 | ↓ 0 |
| Get a foreign boy friend/girlfriend | ↓ 10 | ↓ 14 | ⇒ 38 | ↓ 5 | ↓ 5 |

This question was only on the Pre and During survey. They could rank each of the 9 goal statements, from ‘very important’ to ‘I won’t do this’. In the table the arrows indicate large, medium or small numbers.

As can be seen the participants’ highest priorities were, perhaps unsurprisingly, improving their English. However “Study very hard” was ranked towards the bottom of the list. Towards the bottom of the list was “Just have fun” and “Go sightseeing”, although most students choose either “I want to”, or “I don't mind for these”, so it can be seen that these are just not priorities for the participants. The only one that was actively chosen against was “Get a foreign boyfriend/girlfriend”, with the majority not minding this and 10 not wanting it at all.

{Fun things - Desire and actuality}

As with problems experienced during SAP students were asked to choose from a list what fun things they wanted to do, what they were currently doing and what they had actually done, based on the group and time span. The results are shown below. The numbers indicate the percentage of participants who selected each item in each group. The arrows indicate whether it was a majority or minority choice.

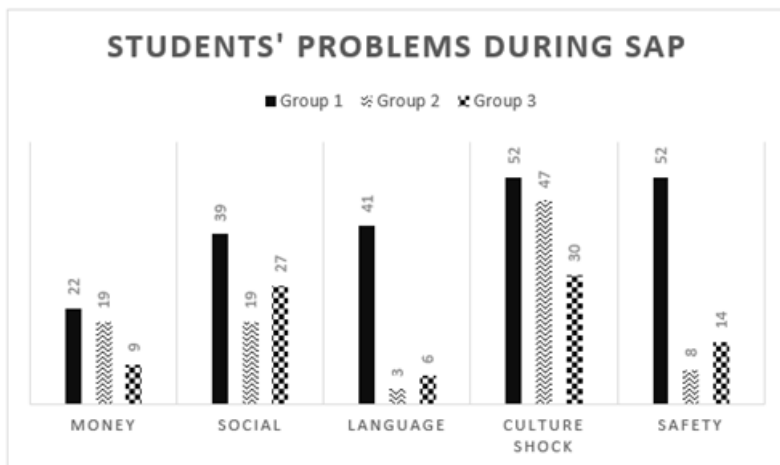
| Fun things | Group 1 | Group 2 | Group 3 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|
| Interactive | | | |
| Go out with my foreign friends several nights a week | ↗ 53% | ⇒ 36% | ↗ 55% |
| Try to make a foreign boyfriend/girlfriend | ↘ 18% | ↓ 11% | ↓ 13% |
| Drink and party! | ↘ 20% | ↘ 31% | ↓ 3% |
| Try to get a part time job | ↘ 18% | ↓ 8% | ↓ 6% |
| Only speak English (Not my language) | ↗ 53% | ⇒ 44% | ↓ 3% |
| Try to make local friends | ↑ 78% | ↗ 56% | ↓ 3% |
| Extend | | | |
| Look for a future job | ⇒ 35% | ↘ 28% | ↓ 10% |
| Look for future universities | ↓ 8% | ↓ 11% | ↓ 0% |
| Solo | | | |
| Go shopping | ↗ 65% | ↘ 28% | ↑ 74% |
| Eat lots of delicious local food | ↑ 83% | ↗ 56% | ↗ 65% |

Some interesting findings are:

- Despite 78% of ‘pre’ and 56% of ‘during’ participants wanting to and trying to make local friends, only 3%, 1 person of the ‘after’ group actually managed to. Perhaps they found it easier to make friends with other foreign students as 55% said they went out with other language students several nights a week.
- Study abroad students also failed in their desire to only speak English during their SAP, with 55% of pre-students wanting to do this and only 3% of after-students managing this.
- Generally pre-departure students are very ambitious, but group 3 do not seem to actually do many of the fun things listed. The highest rated fun things actually enjoyed were; Going shopping (74%), Eating delicious local food (65%), Going out with other language students (55%), Doing sports (42%) and Visiting other countries (42%)

| Fun things | Group 1 | Group 2 | Group 3 |
|--|---------|---------|---------|
| Explore | | | |
| Go to the beach/skiing etc | 33% | 56% | 23% |
| Visit historic places | 35% | 44% | 6% |
| Visit art museums | 30% | 22% | 29% |
| Go to music events (concerts, gigs, festivals) | 28% | 42% | 13% |
| Do sports | 50% | 36% | 42% |
| Visit other countries | 40% | 36% | 42% |
| Visit friends or relatives | 13% | 31% | 29% |
| L1 | | | |
| Spend lots of time with people from my country or school | 40% | 33% | 26% |
| Phone my parents /boyfriend /girlfriend etc everyday | 3% | 39% | 0% |

{Problems}



Student answers were collated and the numbers summed to find the area of most worry. Then for comparison purposes each number divided by the total number of students and multiplied by 40 to get an idealized amount of problems for 40 students per group.

The 5 areas of problems are Money, Social, Language, Culture Shock and Safety. The adjusted numbers are displayed in the graph below.

The black bars represent group 1’s worries about their future SAP, and it can be clearly seen that they are overcautious about their SAP as their worries far outstrip the actual experienced problems by either groups 2 or 3.

The biggest difference between worries and actuality is with safety and language related problems. Only 6 students reported crime related problems, and 9 said that they had problems due to language

issue. So despite a lot of worries about safety and language issues, in actuality students do not experience these problems during SAP. It is in fact culture shock and social issues that cause the most problems for students, although not as many as they worry about.

| Culture Shock | Group 1 | Group 2 | Group 3 |
|--------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| I will get Homesick | 18 | 9 | 6 |
| I'm very shy | 13 | 7 | 7 |
| My family might miss me | 3 | 13 | 3 |
| I won't like the food | 9 | 8 | 5 |
| I will want to come home early | 9 | 5 | 2 |
| Total | 52 | 42 | 23 |

The one area where they were close to their estimation was in money. The two items tested were “Spending money too quickly” and “Not having enough”. It was the latter that is causing the most problems for group 2, with 12 of them reporting this. As the majority of them are studying in the notoriously high-cost-of-living UK, this is perhaps unsurprising. Perhaps budgeting is a topic that should be covered more in pre-departure training.

Discussion

Thoughts on motivation and value. Our survey findings suggest that the students generally had a good time. While a significant amount, just under a quarter, were worried, about 94% of those surveyed after their return were very satisfied with the experience. This is in line with McDonough (1994)'s results. Moreover, post-SAP students appear to feel they had good value for money from the trip with under half thinking it a little expensive and 35% satisfied with the price.

Class Participation. Class participation results illustrate the divergence between predicted and actual behaviour on a SAP. While students start out with high ambitions of attendance, figures demonstrate that it does not necessarily translate into practice. Ingraham and Peterson (2004) recognise ‘the conflict some students feel between the social opportunities and the academic obligations presented on a study abroad program’ but report the faculty programme leaders’ satisfaction that the SAP participants gained ‘a significant amount of academic knowledge and some intellectual maturity’ as a result of their experience abroad. It can be hypothesised that the cohorts of the present study drew a similar benefit from the programme but it cannot be asserted with certainty without summative assessment.

Class Participation and fun. It was also shown that group 3 students did not partake in as many fun activities as group 1 wished to. This may be detrimental, as Rivers (1998) and Fenech et al.

(2013) showed, it is often interacting outside the classroom setting that students gain the most in terms of fluency and confidence. So our students are not going to class as much as they should, nor are they having the interactive, cross-cultural experiences that will make them a better L2 user. Was money, time or location the issue? Or did they not feel confident enough to interact in L2? (Matsumoto, 2012).

Confidence. Groups 2 and 3 display significant gains in confidence. Interestingly, the most striking discrepancy between the pre-departure group and the other two pertains to the B1-B2 socialising skills. The largest gap on the graph is between group 1 and 2, possibly because participants are required to socialise and use the language daily, both at school and outside. The figures reveal a marked improvement in confidence for the subsets Navigating a Foreign Country and Higher Level Skills, which require more formal language, advanced vocabulary and mastery of registers. Dealing with serious medical problems in English is the only skill that does not show substantial signs of improvement, but this may well be linked to the daunting nature of the situation: perhaps students can only gain confidence in this skill in the case of an actual medical intervention, which is not desirable in the first place. Across all categories, it is evident that while group 3 demonstrate a slight regression after returning to their country, their higher average is testament to the lasting benefits of a SAP for the development of linguistic self-confidence.

The correlation between levels of confidence and length of stay yields surprising results. 6-month to 2-semester students displayed slightly lower levels of confidence than their counterparts who completed 1 semester or a whole year. This goes against commonly held beliefs and against some studies that drew data from a large number of respondents, such as Dwyer's (2004) study on 14,800 alumni that 'More is Better' for 'academic, cultural development and personal growth benefits'. A further study should be conducted to confirm or disprove this finding.

Fun - desire and actuality. Although making foreign friends ranked quite high in the table discussed previously, this section highlights that making local friends was not achieved by a long way. Perhaps the wording of the questions was ambiguous; 'local' is foreign to the SAP students and 'foreign' is not necessarily local. 'Local' might also have been interpreted as 'friends on site'. Group 3 students might have ended up making a number of friends among other visiting students but few among local people.

This may be due to socialising events usually being organised for foreign students, and once the students have developed a good relationship with a social group they rarely decide to step out of their comfort zone yet again and seek new friends among locals whose language is harder to understand and who do not share the same lifestyle.

Despite stating in the previous section that English was important for their future, only a limited number of students took the opportunity to extend and look for a future job or university. The importance of English in the above section might have been envisaged as long-term, whereas the SAP, university studies and 'first job' may have appeared as short-term. Perhaps the circumstances were so unsettling that the students did not want to imagine a future abroad just yet.

Overall, while some participants indeed took advantage of being abroad to widen their cultural horizons, it appears that the most common activities are the ones they would do back home.

Anticipated problems and worries. Group 1 students generally seemed very worried about social issues, language, and above all culture shock and safety. However, the figures for Language and Safety issues show a pronounced disparity between pre-departure anticipations and during/after respondents, who have first-hand experience. The perceived issues in Safety may derive from a lack of experience abroad and knowledge of foreign countries. Worries about Language may understandably stem from insufficient use of exposure to natural language.

Actual problems. Salient areas of concern among Groups 2 and 3 pertain to social issues, namely getting homesick, being very shy, eating too much and getting fat. Money did not cause as much worry, but expectations actually matched reality, especially for group 2, who were studying in an affluent area of the UK. Group 3 does not report having had significant issues with money. The contrast between Group 2 and 3 in this regard may be due to the country of origin; Japanese students will predictably have had more purchase power than students from Southern Europe. Still, finance may be a topic worth discussing in pre-departure briefings or gamifying budgeting as a TBL activity.

Summary. Results show that general *attitude* among the SAP returnees is very positive, and in spite of some concerns over finances they feel the experience was generally good value for money. Attendance does not match pre-departure aspirations, yet it is not so low as to raise concerns. It is

hoped that absences from class translate into out-of-class activities, which are also crucial opportunities for learning and personal growth. Media consumption and interest reflect *attitude, self-confidence, and preparedness*: it betokens engagement, proactivity, curiosity (all to do with *attitude*), the ability to navigate ambiguity in the face of unknown language (*self-confidence*), and cultural awareness, including pop culture (*preparedness*). Stronger pre-departure *preparedness* would maximise the students' ability to use English outside the classroom for fun, which would in turn result in more significant gains in *self-confidence* and a positive feedback loop. Finally, problems and worries can be palliated through better *preparedness*. This could take the form of seminars, but the researchers also recommend task-based lessons based on the most common issues. The students would thus gain cultural awareness and hone their language, critical thinking and problem-solving skills at the same time - and they are all key competences on a SAP.

Limitations

Validity of comparisons between groups. Groups 1 and 3 are mostly women from the same university or region of Japan and group 2 is completely international. Habits and cultural norms can be expected to vary greatly with these groups. However, any differences in results between the three groups may highlight interesting tendencies.

Cross Sectional study Vs Longitudinal. In dynamic processes, such as changing learner skill or motivation, there is no doubt that longitudinal studies give better, more accurate, results. As Dörnyei (2007) writes, "in many cases a longitudinal design would be more suitable for an investigation". However, they require a great luxury of time and dedicated participants. Ohashi (2007) for example required two years to complete his study and suffered a 13% attrition rate of his participants. McDonough (1994) did much better (only 7%) but the SAP studied lasted only three weeks.

Thus this study hinges greatly on the assumption that Japanese university students remain reasonably consistent and that current first and second years are a decent approximation of how the current thirds years were two years ago.

Another major limitation is the *social desirability bias*. Few students want to admit to never doing their homework or their less than stellar attendance record. Or perhaps it is Self-Deception Bias and they truly believe they are exemplary students and excellent English Speakers (Dörnyei 2010).

Either way, the data shows a much higher self-reported lesson participation and skill level than the researchers know to be true. It is well known that study participants will over-report desirable attributes to please researchers, or for their own social self-image (Dörnyei 2007).

Or perhaps some of the terms used in the survey were subjective. One item under the category of Fun Things was “I will Drink and Party”. But what defines a party? Is a small social gathering at a restaurant a party? Or is music and a DJ required? Indeed it seems that the respondents of Group 2 misinterpreted “Go to music events (concerts, gigs, festivals)”. The surprisingly high 42% does not correspond to the INSTITUTION C researcher’s own experience of speaking to the students about their out-of-class activities, whereby no student has ever reported going to a concert or music festival. Conversely, Muslim students are generally very sociable but they would predictably not choose “I will drink and party” because of social desirability bias and abstaining from alcohol, even though in practice a lot of them do go clubbing without consuming alcohol.

An anonymous survey was chosen to mitigate as much as possible the effects of this social desirability bias. However as mentioned, it would appear that its influences can still be seen in the data.

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