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Student Attitudes Before and After an Eco-tour

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While it is possible to speculate what benefits might accrue from student participation in an environmental study tour, the benefits as perceived by participants may not in fact match those predictions. This paper aims to determine the effects of participation on such a tour from a student perspective with regards to three aspects of the tour program: attitudes towards environmental issues, interaction in English with local participants or team leaders and outlook or plans for the future. Through the use of pre- and post-tour questionnaires, changes in attitudes and opinions resulting from participation in the

tour are noted and evaluated in terms of the overall benefit of this type of student activity. Attention is paid to the students' attitudes towards communication in English before, during and after the program.

環境問題をベースにした海外スタディーツアーの参加から学生はどんなメリットを体得できるのか、われわれ教員が推測することはもちろん可能だが、実際、それが参加学生自身の学んだメリットと合致しないこともあり得る。そこでこのペーパーの目的は、参加した学生たち自身の視点から、つぎのツアープログラムに関わる三点についてかれらの意識がどのように変化したか、その効果を確定することにある。①環境問題に対する意識、②現地参加学生もしくはチームリーダーとの英語によるコミュニケーション、③かれらが将来進む方向性、の三点である。ツアー前後で行ったアンケート結果から、ツアー参加後に変化したかれらの意識や考え方を、現地で行った活動の総合的な経験という面に関連させて評価を行った。特に、ツアーの参加前、参加中、参加後における学生の英語コミュニケーションに対する意欲の変化に重点を置いた。

The English program offered to students within the Department of Environmental Policy at Azabu University has 3 basic goals:

1. To provide English skills, which will enable students to access information from a range of English media applicable to their course of studies.
2. To enable students to achieve desired scores on TOEIC, TOEFL or other standard proficiency tests.
3. To increase the students' overall level of communicative competence in English.

Students within the department are offered a relatively large number of English courses for a non-language business-related major. Given that the department has only recently been established, the onus has been on the Office of International Communication to provide opportunities outside of lesson time for students to use the English skills they have acquired in a setting appropriate to their field of study.

The third year seminar provides one such opportunity. It is an elective course of study, meeting once a week for 2 hours. Students are free to choose from any of the themes offered by the faculty. Furthermore, as the department does not have an established overseas study program, the seminar may be used as a platform for a course based around an overseas study tour.

The purpose of this paper is to describe the tours that have been completed thus far and report on preliminary findings with regards to how participation in these tours may affect students' attitudes to both environmental issues and language learning. Whilst positive benefits might be expected to accrue from participation, a process of investigation may also establish what benefits are perceived from the participants' point of view. Positive results may provide data of value in promoting study tours within the department and university as a whole, with the aim of increasing the number of participants and securing funding within the university budget. Negative findings on the other hand may indicate a need to re-evaluate and improve the programs.

Eco-tours

There is some debate as to what the terms “eco-tour” or “eco-tourism” may actually mean. The International Ecotourism Society has proposed one definition that has gained widespread

recognition. This defines eco-tourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people” (Bien, 2003). Clearly this can encompass a variety of tours, from bird watching to scientific research, provided they meet the definition criteria.

The tours that have been organized at Azabu University aim to provide students with the opportunity to study a particular ecosystem in detail in cooperation with local people. There is also a focus on the environmental health of the ecosystem and the threats it may face. Using English is a greater priority than learning English, with emphasis placed on students overcoming affective factors such as shyness or lack of confidence that may hinder successful communication.

Tasmania, Sumatra (Akira Harada)

These tours have been developed as a result of my interest in Japan Tropical Forest Action Network, a citizens' group campaigning on behalf of tropical forest conservation. As the largest tropical timber importer in the world, Japan has responsibility for the destruction of tropical forests (Carrere and Lohmann, 1996). In addition, Japan is reputed as a rapacious consumer and destroyer of old-growth forests in Australia, where clear cutting its valuable natural forests has been producing huge amounts of woodchip annually. Most of the woodchip is exported to Shizuoka, Japan, for domestic paper consumption.

After participating in a JATAN inspection tour to Australia in 2001, I realized that a similar trip would provide an extremely educational experience for students of the Department of Environmental Policy at Azabu University. In September 2001, with help from members of the Native Forests Network (a coalition

of forest activists and non-governmental organizations), I was able to organize the first study tour to Tasmania for my 3rd Year seminar students. During the tour, the students had many rewarding experiences, including observing pristine natural ecosystems, documenting logging operations, meeting local NGO members and Green politicians, and visiting the government forestry office as well as a logging company. Perhaps the most crucial feature of the tour was students' chance to communicate with tour coordinators and the local people regarding their assigned themes.

Another valuable aspect of the tour was that it provided the basis for a full year's worth of in-depth study into the issues of deforestation and the timber and woodchip trade. For the first semester our pre-tour activities covered reading some basic documents on related topics, such as *Vital Signs* by the Worldwatch Institute (Brown et al., 1998) and the Lonely Planet *Tasmania* (Smitz, 2002), surfing the local eNGOs web pages and the state government ones, and exchanging emails with their tour coordinators for local information. Post-tour activities included exhibiting posters, pictures and messages at the Azabu School festival, and working on a translation of Tasmanian Senator Bob Brown's book, *The Valley of the Giants* (Brown, 2001).

By organizing this study-tour-based seminar I believe I have gained some insight into how to provide real motivation for students to learn English. I also hope that they have realized that language is the primary tool across the globe for dissemination and retrieval of environmental information and that a thorough grasp of English will provide the key to a world of knowledge beyond national borders. A tangible example of the success of the program has been that one student, who had initially felt difficulty in even exchanging basic greetings with native English speakers, has subsequently registered at a Tasmanian state vocational school to attend the eco-tourism administration program.

Komodo, Palawan, Sulawesi (Jonathan Lynch)

I have been able to organize and participate in three environment-based study tours with 2nd and 3rd Year students from the Department of Environmental Policy at Azabu University, in cooperation with Stefan Ottomanski of the Japanese Wildlife Research Centre. The main feature of these tours has been to include both Japanese and local participants in the program in equal numbers. Having made a bi-national team, students must then work cooperatively to undertake the tour activities and complete the various assigned tasks. As neither party speaks the other's language, English is used to establish successful communication.

The trips to Komodo and Sulawesi, Indonesia focused on a study of the local coral reef ecosystem, the environmental threats and challenges facing this ecosystem and the extent to which the livelihoods of local residents depend on the health of the coral reefs. The trip to the Philippines was a forest-based program, again studying the ecology of this particular environment and investigating the connection between the environmental pressures on the forest and the needs of the local residents.

One example of a follow-up activity to the tour was a participant who subsequently undertook an internship with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Japan. Her experience of observing TNC's coral reef conservation program in Komodo enabled her to create a poster presentation on behalf of TNC and exhibit this at the International Cooperation Festival 2003, organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Japan International Cooperation Agency.

The questionnaire

The questionnaire was divided into two sections, general questions and tour specific questions (see Appendix A and B respectively). The questions in the general section require students to express the degree to which they are concerned about environmental issues and give an indication of their attitudes towards environmental problems in general terms using a Likert scale from 1 to 5 to specify opinions (Alreck, 1994). The tour specific questions on the other hand focus on the students' use of English as a tool of communication during the tour, reasons for participation and attitudes towards factors that may have hindered successful communication with local tour participants or instructors.

Japanese participants completed pre- and post-tour questionnaires with the same or very similar questions, and the comparison of these two sets of data forms the basis for this research. 18 students who participated in tours during August and September 2003 completed both questionnaires.

Results and discussion

The data is presented in table format (see Table 1). Changes in opinion amongst participants' pre- and post-tour scores are recorded for each relevant survey question. Due to the small data set available, a full statistical analysis has not been implemented at this stage. However, as it is intended that the questionnaires be administered for all future tours, a significant data set should be collected within 2 or 3 years and subsequently investigated for statistically appropriate information. As part of a preliminary investigation, a t-test for paired samples (Moore and McCabe, 2002) was calculated for the student responses to Question 1 of the questionnaire.

The chart depicts changes in student opinions. The areas on the right hand side of each chart show the changes of opinion for each question. Thus for Question 1 in Section 1, eight students have changed their opinion from pre-tour to post-tour by +1 on the Likert scale.

These tables are useful to the extent that they provide an immediate visual representation of which questions, if any, demonstrate a change of opinion amongst students as a result of participation in the tours. The initial indication is that the tours have produced quantifiable changes in student opinions. As noted above, Question 1 indicates that a total of 10 students have apparently become more concerned about the environment. This data is presented in more detail below:

Table 1. The questionnaire

Section 1: General Questions. Pre-tour/Post-tour Changes in Opinion.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
Q1. How concerned are you about the environment?			1		7	8	2		
Q2. Do you undertake environmental-related activities in your free time?				3	4	8	3		
Q3. How much do you know about environmental issues?			1	4	6	6	1		
Q4. Are you interested in finding out more information about environmental issues?				1	13	3	1		
Q5. Which do you tend to be more interested in, local environmental problems or global ones?				3	4	5	5	1	
Q6. Do you think local people have any power to help overcome the environmental problems they face?				1	9	4	4		
Q7. How optimistic are you about the environmental future of the earth?			1	5	7	3	2		
Q8. Do you think environmental problems are more serious in developing countries or developed ones?					10	5	2		
Q9. How important do you think it is for governments to solve environmental problems?				2	10	6			
Q10. Are you satisfied with the state of the environment in your country?			2	7	8	1			
Q11. Would you be willing to join an organization such as an NGO to participate in environmental activities?				1	8	6	3		
Q12. Who do you think has most responsibility to protect the environment, local people or the government?			1	1	15		1		
Section 2: Tour-specific Questions. Pre-tour/Post-tour Changes in Opinion.	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4
Q2. How do you rate your level of English?				2	7	7	2		
Q3. Do you expect that this tour will help to improve your English communication skills?			1	2	4	8	3		
Q4. Do you think that participating in this tour will increase your confidence in using English?			1	2	4	9	2		
Q5. Do you think that you will learn a lot about the environment during this tour?				2	11	4	1		
Q6. Do you expect that this tour will change your way of thinking?			1		11	4	2		
Q7. Do you feel nervous about participating in this tour?		1	1	4	6	4		1	1
Q8. Do you think that participating in this tour will help the environment?	1		2	2	6	6	1		

Question 1

How concerned are you about the environment?

not concerned					very concerned
1	2	3	4	5	

Table 2. Question 1 response

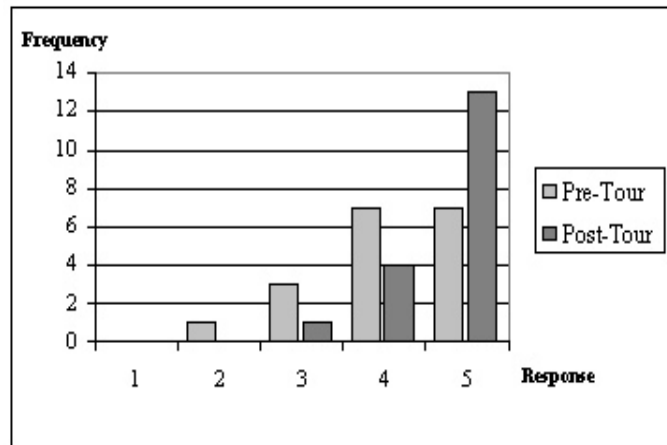
	Pre-Tour	Post-Tour	Change
Mean	4.11	4.67	0.56

Table 3. Frequency distribution

Answer	Pre-tour	Post-tour
1	0	0
2	1	0
3	3	1
4	7	4
5	7	13

T-test = 0.02

Figure 1. Question 1 frequency distribution



The graph shows that the responses do not exhibit a normal distribution probability. In fact this is exactly what we would expect for Environmental Policy students, who theoretically have a high interest in environmental issues. However, the t-test (<0.05) appears to give some indication that a probable change in attitude has resulted from tour participation, with students experiencing a heightened level of concern post-tour. However, given the non-normal frequency distribution this result must be treated with caution (Mendenhall et al., 1995). Other questions in the survey must be examined to find out if this apparent change in attitude might be confirmed.

Responses to Question 2 and Question 11 from Section 1 give some support for the attitude shift. Positive changes observed for both questions would evidently suggest heightened concern

for environmental issues and this is what is observed, especially for Question 2 with 11 respondents apparently engaging in environmental activities more often post-tour. A greater increase might have been expected or at least desired in responses for Question 11, given the extensive involvement of NGOs in arranging and accompanying the tours but nevertheless nine students appear more willing to join an environmentally-related organization such as an NGO. Whether they actually do so or not could be evaluated in the months following the tour and this suggests a useful post-tour follow-up activity. Students could be required to research an NGO or organization operating within Japan that is working or campaigning in a field related to the tour and give presentations to other tour participants about it. As mentioned previously, the fact that one student subsequently undertook an internship at TNC Japan demonstrates that students are prepared to use their tour experience in positive ways and on their own initiative.

One more notable set of responses from Section 1 of the questionnaire was that for Question 5, the tour seems to have produced a notable swing towards interest in global issues, with 6 students apparently changing their opinion towards a more global outlook by 2 points or more. The phrasing of the question is open to criticism in that respondents may interpret “local environmental problems” as problems at a local level, whether in their own country or abroad, and global ones as problems on a global scale. The question should be re-phrased or split into two questions, one seeking information about domestic versus international interest and one seeking information on local versus global scale interest.

Reliability

Questionnaire reliability can be assessed using the Cronbach Alpha coefficient. This calculation measures the degree to which items (i.e., questions) measure the same construct (Dornyei, 2003). As the questionnaire did not focus on measuring one construct, but rather sought to gather data on student attitudes to a variety of issues, the coefficient has been calculated for those questions in the general section which related to an increase or decrease in interest in environmental issues. These questions were:

- Q1. How concerned are you about the environment?
- Q2. Do you undertake environmental-related activities in your free time?
- Q3. How much do you know about environmental issues?
- Q4. Are you interested in finding out more information about environmental issues?
- Q11. Would you be willing to join an organization such as an NGO to participate in environmental activities?

The responses for the 18 students for these 5 items give the following values for :

Pre-tour Questionnaire: 0.48

Post-tour Questionnaire: 0.57

The two numbers are not significantly different as would be expected for two sets of the same questions. However, these values do not approach 0.80, which is generally accepted as providing a reliable internal consistency for a data set, even though only the questions relating to interest in environmental issues have been selected.

These results suggest that the reliability of the questionnaires should be improved. If the construct to be investigated is “interest in environmental issues,” then a greater number of more specific items could be incorporated.

English as a communication tool

One main goal of the tours has been to encourage the use of English as a tool for communication rather than simply as a learning objective, and in the process enable students to increase their confidence and motivation in the language. Section 2 of the questionnaire contained a number of questions relating to this aspect of the tours and on the whole the results appear to suggest that beneficial effects have resulted. The self-rated level of English increased for 9 students, Question 2, and the majority of students (11 in each case) reported that the tour had exceeded their expectations in improving their English communication skills (Question 3) and increasing their confidence in using English (Question 4). As these results are based on the students’ self-perception, further tests could be devised to evaluate their validity. One such procedure might be to implement pre/post-tour oral interviews with appropriately designed rating scales and independent interviewer/raters. It was somewhat discouraging to note that the most common self-rating for English level represented a change from *very poor* to *poor* on the Likert scale for this question, but evidence suggests a tendency for Japanese students to give themselves excessively *harsh self-ratings for language ability* (O’Donnell, 2003).

Conclusion

This preliminary investigation has provided some qualitative evidence that changes in attitudes of students may occur as a result of participation in an environment-based study tour to a foreign country, both in terms of attitudes towards environmental issues and with respect to English ability. Participants may expect to return to their home country with increased interest and motivation to become involved in environmentally related activities, improved English ability and heightened confidence in communicating in English. A preliminary statistical analysis of the data revealed that a probable change in attitudes might occur, although it was noted that caution should be exercised when using statistical measurements such as the t-test on responses to a Likert scale question. Improvements may be made to the phrasing of some of the questions in the questionnaire and the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient revealed the need for a greater number of more specific questions to deliver a more reliable internal consistency.

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Appendix A

Pre-tour questionnaire

I. General questions

- Q1. How concerned are you about the environment?
not concerned very concerned
- Q2. Do you undertake environmentally-related activities in your free time?
No, never yes, often
- Q3. How much do you know about environmental issues?
very little a lot
- Q4. Are you interested in finding out more information about environmental issues?
not interested very interested
- Q5. Which do you tend to be more interested in, local environmental problems or global ones?
local global
- Q6. Do you think local people have any power to help overcome the environmental problems they face?
no yes
- Q7. How optimistic are you about the environmental future of the earth?
pessimistic optimistic
- Q8. Do you think environmental problems are more serious in developing countries or developed ones?
developing equal developed

Q9. How important do you think it is for governments to solve environmental problems?
not important essential

Q10. Are you satisfied with the state of the environment in your country?
no yes

Q11. Would you be willing to join an organization such as an NGO to participate in environmental activities?
no yes

Q12. Who do you think has most responsibility to protect the environment, local people or the government?
local people both government

II. Tour specific questions

Q1. Why did you participate in this tour (please check as many answers as you like)?
to have a good time
to try cross-cultural communication
because my friends were going
to explore a foreign country
to meet foreign people
to get a good suntan
to travel abroad
to learn about the environment
to have fun
to see wildlife
to help the environment
to improve my English
to make new friends
to see the beautiful natural environment

Q2. How do you rate your level of English?
very poor very good

Q3. Do you expect that this tour will help to improve your English communication skills?
no yes

Q4. Do you think that participating in this tour will increase your confidence in using English?
no yes

Q5. Do you think that you will learn a lot about the environment during this tour?
no yes

Q6. Do you expect that this tour will change your way of thinking?
no yes

Q7. Do you feel nervous about participating in this tour?
no yes

Q8. Do you think that participating in this tour will help the environment?
no yes

Q9. How will you mainly prefer to learn things on this tour?
be taught things by the staff
learn things from other students
discover things for myself

Q10. How do you feel about interacting with foreign people during this trip?

- Q11. What will be the most valuable thing for you on this trip, do you think?
- Q12. Do you anticipate any problems during this trip? If yes, please explain.

Appendix B

Post-tour questionnaire

I. General questions

- Q1. How concerned are you about the environment?
not concerned very concerned
- Q2. Do you undertake environmentally-related activities in your free time?
No, never yes, often
- Q3. How much do you know about environmental issues?
very little a lot
- Q4. Are you interested in finding out more information about environmental issues?
not interested very interested
- Q5. Which do you tend to be more interested in, local environmental problems or global ones?
local global
- Q6. Do you think local people have any power to help overcome the environmental problems they face?
no yes

- Q7. How optimistic are you about the environmental future of the earth?
pessimistic optimistic
- Q8. Do you think environmental problems are more serious in developing countries or developed ones?
developing equal/developed
- Q9. How important do you think it is for governments to solve environmental problems?
not important essential
- Q10. Are you satisfied with the state of the environment in your country?
no yes
- Q11. Would you be willing to join an organization such as an NGO to participate in environmental activities?
no yes
- Q12. Who do you think has most responsibility to protect the environment, local people or the government?
local people both government

II. Tour specific questions

- Q1. Why did you participate in this tour (please check as many answers as you like)?
to have a good time
to try cross-cultural communication
because my friends were going
to explore a foreign country
to meet foreign people

to get a good suntan
to travel abroad
to learn about the environment
to have fun
to see wildlife
to help the environment
to improve my English
to make new friends
to see the beautiful natural environment

Q2. How do you rate your level of English?
very poor very good

Q3. Did this tour help you to improve your English
communication skills?
no yes

Q4. Did participating in this tour help increase your
confidence in using English?
no yes

Q5. Did you learn a lot about the environment during
this tour?
no yes

Q6. Did this tour change your way of thinking?
no yes

Q7. Did you feel nervous participating in activities
during this tour?
no yes

Q8. Do you think that by participating in this tour you
have helped the environment?
no yes

Q9. How did you mainly prefer to learn things on this tour?
be taught things by the staff
learn things from other students
discover things for myself

Q10. How did you feel about interacting with foreign
people during this trip?

Q11. What was the most valuable thing for you on this
trip, do you think?

Q12. Did you have any problems during this trip? If yes,
please explain.