



Motivating learners through special activities in a study abroad program

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This paper examines how the implementation of an overseas study program served to raise the participants' level of motivation. First, this paper provides an overview of the short-term study-abroad program offered by Keisen University. Then it looks closely to see if there is a correlation between certain activities within the program and the increase in students' level of motivation to learn English. The results from the student questionnaire and post-interviews are also analyzed. They suggest that students' involvement in the host community increases learner motivation. Finally, implications for future programs and further studies are discussed.

海外研修プログラムを通じた学生の動機づけ本稿では、海外研修によって研修参加者らの英語学習に対する動機がどのように高められるかを検証する。まず、恵泉女学園大学においておこなわれている短期語学研修プログラムの概要を述べる。次に、プログラム参加者の英語学習に対する動機づけが、具体的にどういった要因でなされるかについて論じる。アンケートと聞き取り調査の結果、現地コミュニティとの関わりが彼女らの学習に対する動機づけに関連していることが示された。最後に今後のプログラムの改良と、将来の研究に向けた考察をおこなう。

Many educational institutions in Japan provide overseas study opportunities for students. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology reports that in 2002, 33,240 high school students participated in study abroad programs of less than three months. For programs lasting more than three months, the number of Japanese students enrolled abroad was 4,160 for the same year.

These days, most universities and colleges advertise a short and/or long-term study abroad program with partner institutions around the world. According to the *UNESCO Statistical Yearbook*, the number

of Japanese students who studied abroad at institutions of higher education was 75,586 in 2000. Of that number, about 80% of the students studied in European and American institutions. In 2001, the total number of students studying overseas increased to 78,151 (*Outline of the Student Exchange System in Japan*, 2005).

There are numerous objectives for participating in overseas study programs, such as the opportunity to gain experience and competence in a different cultural environment (Martin, 1989), to raise students' language competency in authentic situations (Brauer, 2005; Dewey, 2004; Geis & Fukushima, 1997; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003), to respect cultural differences (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006; Kitao, 1993), to increase one's motivation to study language (Kissau, 2006; Irie, 2003; Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002), while others seek to heighten one's own awareness and, consequently, appreciation for his/her own culture (Good & Campbell, 1997).

Previous studies

Learner participation and proficiency

Churchill and Dufon (2006) outline the importance of learner involvement in the study abroad program. Their review of previous studies suggests a direct correlation between the degree of participation with native speakers of English and gains in language proficiency. Tanaka and Ellis' (2003) research appears to support this finding. In their study, they reported that after 15 weeks abroad, Japanese learners of English experienced only moderate gains in proficiency. A possible reason for their modest gains, they infer, is that

students were situated in homogeneous settings without opportunities to integrate with students of other cultures and languages both in classes and living quarters, and therefore, English usage beyond the confines of the classroom was not necessary (2003, p.78). Their observation seems to suggest the potential benefits of students' stay in a host family environment and placement in integrated classes to enhance participants' English communication skills.

Extra-curricular activities within the study abroad structure

Extra-curricular activities is a common but integral feature of many study abroad programs, and there are a wide-range of them offered, some of which deal with cultural exposure, for example, field trips (Anderson et al., 2006), museum visits (Kitao, 1993), that have an academic focus, such as lectures (Anderson et al., 2006), and some may include student-organized activities such as promoting international cultural events (Kitao, 1993) while other programs (Hofman & Zak, in Sell, 1983) emphasize outdoor participation such as in camps, sports (Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002) or temporary employment (Salter & Teger, in Sell, 1983). In the Paris junior study abroad program, Cholakian (1992) incorporates excursions, which are set up as information-gathering activities, as part of the class curriculum.

Benefits of learner participation in extra-curricular activities

Toyokawa and Toyokawa (2002) investigated Japanese students' positive adjustment to overseas university life in

relation to their participation in extra-curricular activities. The participants were Japanese male and female students of varying English proficiency levels, most of whom completed their first year of university in Japan, on a 10-month study abroad program in the United States. Although housing accommodations were in campus residence halls, and not in homestays, students had many chances to interact with native and non-native speakers of English in classes and in out-of-class activities. These included volunteer opportunities in the community, cultural activities, student-led planning events, student board responsibilities, and extra-curricular events such as music, arts, and sports. The study found that students who were more actively involved in extra-curricular activities were more satisfied with overseas life.

Previous studies indicate a common objective, which is to help students become involved in a more experiential setting. Dewey (2004, pp.321-322) notes that the advantage of study abroad programs over domestic immersion programs may be that overseas settings allow students more opportunities to achieve their personal goals, whether it is learning about culture or interacting with both native and non-native friends through the participation of a variety of out-of-class activities. Equally important, through students' individual and unique experiential encounters, they will be more likely to gain additional skills for managing in unfamiliar situations. Freed (1993, 1995, 1998) and Coleman (in Tanaka & Ellis, 2003), found that learners' increased contact in natural settings contributed to higher gains in "fluency and naturalness of speech than to accuracy and speech complexity" (p. 67). Yashima's (1999) post departure interviews and reports with students recommend that future

participants engage in "rapport-building interactions with friends at school or host family members" (p. 80). Therefore, the incorporation of out-of-class curricula that places emphasis not only on learner involvement, but their active participation, should be strongly considered.

In summary, much research has been devoted to the impact of study abroad programs in terms of participants' linguistic progress, their adaptation to overseas environments, and attitudinal changes. Few recent studies, however, have explored and analyzed the relationship between Japanese students' motivation to study English and their participation in specific out-of-class activities. In past studies, Toyokawa and Toyokawa (2002) focused on students' adjustment from a multidimensional perspective, namely psychological health, attitudes, social support, and proficiency, and therefore the research did not scrutinize the nature of study abroad events in terms of effects on student motivation to study English. For this reason, the intent of this present study is to analyze the particular events within the study abroad program to account for the potential change or changes in participants' motivation. The research questions are:

1. How does the implementation of a study abroad program serve to raise participants' level of motivation?
2. What factors within a study abroad program structure seem to motivate student learners of English?

Program establishment

The study abroad program at Keisen University was officially approved and integrated into the English Communication (EC) department curriculum prior to the 2005 academic year. In 2003, a pilot project was initiated at an extension center located on the west coast of the United States with eight students enrolled in the summer study abroad program. Based on the students' positive evaluations, attributed mainly to class instruction, host family, and a safe environment, Keisen approved the overseas study program for 2004. Eighteen applicants of different years and departments all took part in the 2004 summer study program with very favorable assessments.

Keisen University study abroad program

The study abroad program “package” offers students a 4-week curriculum of 20 hours per week of classroom instruction, a host family arrangement, and a variety of afternoon and weekend activities.

The curriculum was designed by the Extension Center and revolves around communication and culture, that is, the class focus is on improving communication skills, listening and writing with an emphasis on grammar, vocabulary enrichment for cultural purposes, and engaging in independent study sessions at the media learning center. Instructors prepare out-of-class assignments, some of which require class members to visit various localities in town and obtain information which they report to the class the following day. In another assignment, students must brainstorm questions in preparation for an interview with

a native speaker. Information gathered by respondents is presented during class. The underlying emphasis is to encourage international students to develop as many contact opportunities with members of the host culture as possible.

Extra-curricular activities are planned and operated by the Extension Center. Students are encouraged to participate in free conversations with native speakers, movie discussions, ice cream socials, sporting activities, all offered after class on different days of the week and intended to develop and nurture relationships with both Japanese and non-Japanese friends.

The Extension Center partners with the host family placement service to arrange accommodations for the visiting students. Host families are carefully selected and their roles are clearly defined; that is, to devote time with students through conversational exchanges, and provide adequate room and board.

Free time is built into the program so that participants have opportunities for expanding their friendship circles. On weekends, students are free to participate in out-of-town excursions, escorted by extension center staff. These include field trips, city tours and an overnight trip to a lake resort. In addition, many families and their members “volunteer” to take their international guests on cultural and recreational outings. Students, who prefer to arrange their own leisure plans have a variety of options as a result of the relative closeness of the host community.

The participants

Implemented for the 2005 academic year, the first group of EC students consisted of 23 freshmen registrants for the

summer session at the Extension Center. The remaining 38 students, unlike for the first group, completed both first-year's spring and fall semesters at Keisen and subsequently enrolled in the Extension Center's winter term.

Methodology

The relationship between learner motivation and participation in extra-curricular activities was examined and analyzed from data collected in a student questionnaire and interviews.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was sent out to all students who participated in the study abroad program in either summer or winter (see Appendix). There are two parts of the questionnaire, part one with a question to find out whether or not there was a change in students' motivation to study English before and after the study abroad program, and part two with several questions to investigate contributing factors which raised participants' motivation to learn English. The investigated factors were the ones that were compatible with aspects in the students' life during the study abroad program. They were (a) classes at the Extension Center, (b) out-of-class assignments, (c) extra-curricular activities, (d) Japanese class, (e) homestay, and (f) trouble during the stay. Each question in parts one and two of the questionnaire was followed by a five-point scale, one indicating strong disagreement and five indicating strong agreement. The students were asked to circle the number in the five-point scale that was the closest to their feeling. In part two, after each question, students could write reasons for their assessment and additional comments.

Interview

Interviews were arranged with four students who actively participated in the Japanese language class in which American undergraduate students were enrolled. They engaged in lively exchanges and study meetings with their American partners and were provided assistance on class and homework assignments. The researchers chose to further investigate Japanese class as a factor because it is one aspect of the study abroad program that they have some control over for modification. This will be discussed in greater detail later.

The Japanese class met five days a week, and the four students who we decided to interview volunteered as conversation partners two or three times a week. In addition, they met several Japanese language students after class in a university cafeteria once a week. In both the classroom and university cafeteria, Japanese and English were spoken so both American and Japanese students benefited from participating in more clear and accurate exchanges.

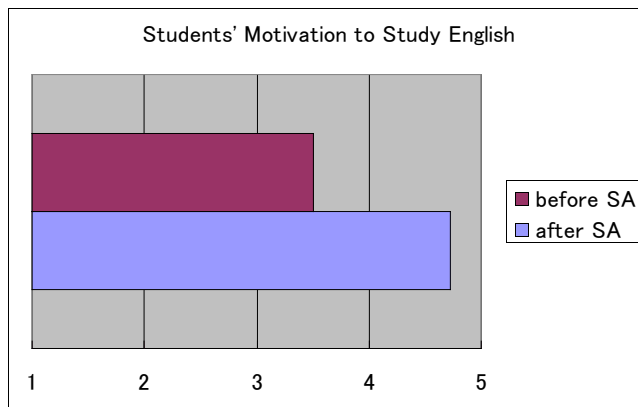
The main purpose of the interview was to probe what particular event(s), if any, influenced the students' motivation to learn English. Each of the four interviewees met with one of the researchers and each interview took approximately 30 minutes. The interviews were conducted in their L1 (i.e., Japanese) so that they could fully express their opinions and feelings.

Results and discussion

Questionnaire

The results of Part 1 of the questionnaire are shown in figure 1.

Figure 1. Students' Motivation to Study English



N=61

Note: The results of t-test indicated that the mean scores before and after the study abroad are significantly different ($p < .05$).

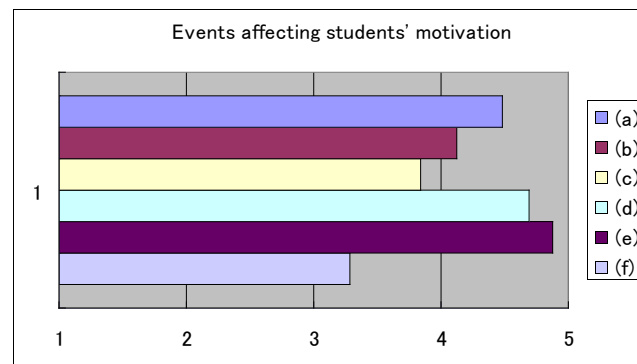
The mean score of the students' motivation to study English was 3.50 before participating in the study abroad program. Since a score of 3 means that one does not agree or disagree with the statement and 5 indicates high motivation to study English, it can be said that, generally speaking, the students were slightly motivated to study English before their participation in the study abroad program.

After the study abroad program the mean score shows their motivation increased by 1.20 points to 4.72. The t-test indicated that the participants' motivation to study English

significantly improved ($p < .05$) because of the study abroad program.

As for part two of the questionnaire, we found four salient factors that positively affected the students' motivation to study English. As shown in Figure 2, they are (a) classes at the Extension Center, (b) out-of-class assignments, (d) Japanese class, and (e) homestay. The most outstanding factor is homestay ($M = 4.88$). The second notable factor is Japanese class ($M = 4.69$). Classes at the Extension Center and out-of-class assignments received mean scores of 4.48 and 4.12 respectively.

Figure 2 Events Affecting Students' Motivation



N=61

Note: Investigated factors were (a) classes at the Extension Center, (b) out-of-class assignments, (c) extra-curricular activities, (d) Japanese class, (e) homestay, and (f) trouble during the stay.

Students' Comments

In part two of the questionnaire, there was space provided after each question to provide reasons for the respondents' assessment and comments. All but two students wrote reasons/comments after at least some questions.

Homestay was the factor most strongly affecting students' motivation. According to 16 students' comments, homestay made them desire to communicate in English. One said, "I wanted to talk with the child in the family, so I read an English conversation book thoroughly." 14 students explained that their motivation to learn English increased as they realized their limited ability of English. For example, one student wrote, "Because there were a few times when I could not express what I wanted to say."

It made us wonder how assisting L2 learners in Japanese class caused change in their attitude towards English learning. Several students' comments shed light on this matter. Five people indicated that the students' attitude in Japanese class inspired them to be better students. One of them wrote "Seeing how hard the Japanese language students study, I felt ashamed of how I hadn't cared about my studies." Three said that making friends with American students motivated them to study English so that they could communicate more. Three other respondents expressed that they felt like teaching Japanese language, customs, and culture better through English. Another student wrote, "Both Japanese and American students were foreign language learners and that had me empathize with my attitude, which in turn raised my motivation."

It seems many students enjoyed classes at the Extension Center. According to 11 students' comments, their increased

motivation to study English is "because of the enjoyable lessons." The same number of students indicated that they felt they should study English harder when they realized how difficult it was to express their opinions in English. One student wrote, "I could not explain my opinion (in English) well, and I felt regrettable, which made me want to improve my English ability."

Out-of-class assignments in which students were told to interview local people were novel for Keisen students. Some students expressed that the novelty itself positively influenced their attitude towards English learning. More commonly, though, students stated that the activities and assignments contributed to raising their desire to communicate more with local people. One student's comment illustrates it well, "Interviewing local people made me wish I had been able to communicate more naturally and ask for more detailed information." On the other hand, approximately the same number of students wrote that they felt encouraged because they could get their message across in English.

Extra-curricular activities scored relatively low, perhaps because the vast majority of participants in such activities were Japanese and they tended to speak Japanese. Comments by seven students revealed that they did not try hard enough to speak English in after-class activities and on excursions. For example, one student wrote "I should have tried harder to communicate with local people on excursions." Another wrote, "I spoke Japanese in extra-curricular activities."

Even though homestay was the factor most affecting students' motivation, there were limitations on what can be investigated because, as mentioned above, host family

selection and homestay placement are exclusively handled by a separate and independent entity. Of course, our students can be better prepared for the stay, which will be discussed below. The same applies to the classes at the Extension Center; we were not in a position to negotiate curricular revisions there.

On the other hand, volunteering in Japanese class allowed us some autonomy for planning and modification. This Japanese language volunteer project was conceived by a university professor and initiated by the researchers and therefore, did not strictly enter into the Extension Center's program structure. Guided by the university's Japanese language instructor, Keisen students volunteered their assistance by facilitating conversations in Japanese, particularly with pronunciation and grammar support.

Because of the situations and reasons shown above, we decided to focus on the Japanese class and further investigate what aspect(s) of it influenced students' motivation to learn English.

Interviews

In order to further investigate the connection between teaching Japanese and studying English, four participants were asked what particular events regarding Japanese class influenced their motivation to study English.

All four participants interviewed commented that American learners of Japanese spoke Japanese very well, and that inspired them to aim for better English speaking ability. Since the American and Japanese students spoke both English and Japanese, they sometimes felt chagrined at

not being able to fully explain something, such as their L1 grammar items, in a foreign language. Two of the students in the interviews said that they started to think they would like to study English more so that they could teach Japanese better through English.

Getting to know American students and making friends with them influenced the participants' attitude towards studying in general. All of the participants in the interviews expressed their feeling of delight about making "real" friends by helping their colleagues in Japanese class. By their definition, "real" means close and equal. The relationship is special in at least two ways. First, the participants made American friends of their own age. Unfortunately, if international students in the EFL program stay in the Extension Center area, it is not very likely that they would have had an opportunity to meet and make friends with Americans who are of the same age. Second, they feel they are equal. It is said that L2 learners in a dominant language setting, such as English learners in the United States, are often stigmatized (Siegel, 2003). However, since the American and Japanese students in this case are language learners learning their respective native languages, they could feel somewhat equal, thus it was possible for them to make "real" friends. It is not at all hard to imagine how much influence one can get from people of the same age, particularly those who are perceived as "real" friends.

In the interviews, all four participants commented that the students who were in the Japanese class were very keen and that made them think they should study harder. It seems that the participants were particularly impressed by the way the American students made an effort to learn Japanese, even

outside of class time, such as when they get together in a cafeteria. Also common to all the participants was that they were impressed by their American friends because they have a concrete goal toward which they are striving.

Moreover, three of the students said that, to a certain extent, the experience even changed who they were. One said she became much more independent. For example, she didn't feel she always had to be with someone to get something done. She said, "If I want to do something, I'll do it myself. For example, I don't have to have a friend who can join a club with me anymore." Another participant said that she is more ambitious now. After coming back to Japan, she has been thinking about what she would like to do after graduation from university. Now she thinks she has found what she would like to do; she would like to have a job related to international exchanges and she has been studying harder, including English, to attain that goal. The other student said that the opportunity to get to know American university students and make friends with them broadened her horizons.

As shown above, the implementation of the study abroad program raised the participants' level of motivation to study English. There were four salient factors to which the changes can be attributed: Japanese class, out-of-class assignments, homestay, and classes at the Extension Center. Of those factors, the Japanese class seems to have had a transforming effect on students' motivation. It seems that the experience provided participants with an opportunity to reflect on themselves as a student, teacher, and friend.

Implications for future programs

Volunteering in Japanese class allows us some autonomy for modification. Thus, it is worth discussing how we, in cooperation with the Japanese language instructor, can improve the Japanese class structure, which in turn may raise Keisen students' motivation to study English. One way to make Japanese class a more efficient and powerful factor is to offer more opportunities for face-to-face and group-to-group interaction. For example, we can hold a party at the beginning of the Keisen students' stay so that Japanese and American students will quickly become acquainted with each other. Given only four weeks in the United States, it is especially important for Keisen students to get to know American students at the earliest possible stage of their stay.

Designing a joint class activity with Japanese and American students may be another way to improve the Japanese class structure (Shimazaki, Suzuki, & Nicosia, 1995). One example of such activities is an exchange of presentations. In the project, American students give presentations in Japanese and Japanese students give presentations in English. After listening to each other's presentations, they exchange their comments and discuss them. It may provide them with a rich opportunity to learn each other's language and culture.

Implications for further research

This preliminary study examined various factors within the structure of a study abroad program which served to raise English learners' level of motivation. In summary, students who adjusted well with host families, participated in both

in- and out-of-class activities in a positive manner, and volunteered actively as facilitators in Japanese class were most likely to experience a change in L2 motivation. Thus, many study abroad programs stress that when learners are actively involved in the host environment they will get the most out of their overseas experience. This is supported by Churchill and Dufon's (2006) assertion that "the relationship between learners' engagement with the host context on the one hand, and increased motivation and proficiency and lower levels of anxiety on the other is not unidirectional, but rather mutually constituted" (p. 18).

In retrospect, a number of points within the research process necessitate reflection and require further discussion and investigation:

1. Reflecting on this study, we believe there could have been a larger sample of interviewees who volunteered their services in Japanese class. In this case, the number of respondents to the questionnaire exceeded the number of interviewees. In addition, the study used only interviewees who were actively involved in Japanese classes. Perhaps this study could be conducted by enrolling a larger sample of Japanese volunteers who possess attitudes that are more diverse regarding their volunteering experiences.
2. In addition to end-of- program questionnaire and post interviews, other means to verify students' change in motivation could be investigated. For example, learner motivation can be verified by students utilizing real time data from their journals or diary entries (Dewey, 2004), then followed up with interviews. Possessing interviewees' written diaries may activate deeper

discussions, help interviewers detect multi-changes in students' levels of motivation, and therefore, prompt learners to reflect further on their academic, cultural, and behavioral development.

3. Another part of the study abroad program that should be investigated further is the interactions taking place in a host family environment. In light of the positive ratings assessed for student motivation in the study, it is clear that further studies examining dynamics in the homestay experience are necessary, specifically with Japanese students.
4. The pre-departure orientation, a vital component of a study abroad program, should be carefully designed in order to facilitate cultural adjustment and integration and thus foster learner motivation. Many researchers have implemented strategies to equip visiting students: coping strategies, communication competence (Ruben, in Sell, 1983), individual goal setting (Gardner, in Kissau, 2006; Irie, 2003), cultural awareness activities (Martin, 1989). These are all essential building blocks to the design of the orientation and their effectiveness underline the necessity for such sessions. A study which analyzes whether a pre-departure preparation is most effectively presented as a structured course, (Brauer, 2005; Kitao, 1993; Martin 1989), or in brief sessions, (Geis & Fukushima, 1997; Yashima, 1999) would be most beneficial for future overseas programs.

Toyokawa and Toyokawa (2002) state that "the goals and needs of those students have become more diverse" (p. 376). In other words, the kinds of overseas study programs

have also become more diverse, that is, short and long-term, small and large group homestays, non-homestays, English study, university study, graduate study and so on. Study abroad programs are no longer a “once-in-a-lifetime” opportunity, and inevitably, there will be students participating in additional overseas study experiences. As these program opportunities continue to develop, individuals will have to evolve themselves by seeking ways to sustain their motivation while studying overseas. By learning through their previous experiences, particularly regarding the importance of establishing peer relationships in and out of classroom contexts, engaging in social activities, teaching others about their culture, and developing learner competence, students will be better suited to maximize the benefits of studying abroad.

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Appendix

Excerpt from the Questionnaire

Davisでの研修に参加する前と後での、英語の勉強への意欲の変化についてお尋ねします。回答の仕方は5段階で、1が「全くそうではない」、5が「全くその通り」です。最もあてはまる数字に○をつけてください。

1. 自分の英語を勉強する意欲は非常に高い(または、高かった)。

Davis前					帰国直後				
1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
全くそう ではない		どちらでもない		全くその通り	全くそう ではない		どちらでもない		全くその通り

Davisでの研修後に「英語をもっと頑張ろう」という気持ちが高まった人にお尋ねします。英語への意欲の変化は、Davisで体験した何が影響したと思いますか? 5段階でおこたえください。また、どうしてそのことがやる気アップにつながったか、理由を教えてください。(その他コメントもあったらどうぞ!)

2. Davisで体験した以下のことが、自分の英語学習への意欲向上に影響を与えた。

a. Extension Centerで受けた授業

1	2	3	4	5	理由・コメント
全くそう ではない		どちら でもない		全くその通り	

b. Extensionの授業の一環(宿題など)で街の人にインタビューするなど、交流したこと

1	2	3	4	5	理由・コメント
全くそう ではない		どちら でもない		全くその通り	

この項目は、自分には当てはまらない