

Case Study: A student's impressions of studying abroad for English language learning

Jon-Patrick Garcia Fajardo

Abstract

This paper is a case study of a Japanese student who participated in a study abroad program at the University of Hawaii for one semester. This paper looked to identify the participant's perceived second language (L2) English skills before, during and after the completion of her three-month stay. The study attempted to identify if studying abroad changed the student's opinions about her own English proficiency as a result. The research did not investigate actual levels of improvement because of studying abroad, but rather focused on one student's feelings towards her own language skill. Lastly, any of the student's opinions about the study abroad program were gathered.

Key Words: Study abroad, L2 English

Introduction

The motivation for this study was to research how a Japanese university student feels towards their second language (L2) English growth after studying at an American university. In doing this, I hoped to see how studying abroad could positively or negatively affect a student's feelings towards their own English skill. The home university at which potential participants studied had held a study abroad program with the University of Hawaii for several years. Twice each year (spring semester and fall semester), groups of second year English language and literature majors would travel to Hawaii to study English abroad. However, it has never been clear how this program and its curriculum affects the students who go there. Although studying actual L2 English gains would be ideal, before doing so, I wanted to research if a student believed they improved or not. I was also interested in what the student was learning as she studied and how her motivation was increasing or decreasing while she lived abroad. Additionally, I wanted to see if there were any other changes in the student's attitude towards using English after completion of the program. Finally, I wanted to see how a student felt about the

program after completing it. To find this information, I decided to use pre- and post-questionnaires, correspond with the participant through messaging while she lived in America, and hold an interview when she returned to Japan.

Literature Review

There have been several studies of Japanese students studying abroad in the past. Bradford (2015) summarizes the main reasons for Japanese students studying abroad in English-speaking countries from previous studies (Asaoka & Yano, 2009; Bradford & Fujimoto, 2014; Lassegard, 2013) as including a wish to improve English proficiency, engage in intercultural experiences, and broaden their global perspectives. Sponseller (2022) similarly references research from Kistantas (2014) and Wiers-Jensen (2013) which shows common motivational factors as being academics, careers, a desire to know more about family heritage, and cross-cultural experiences (p. 258). A desire to improve one's English proficiency is not surprising. Hirai (2018) investigated the growth of L2 English proficiency of Japanese students studying abroad. This study revealed several key points. One of these findings was that students participating in long-term study abroad programs (6 to 12 months) experienced L2 English gains considered to be four times greater than those of students who participated in short-term programs (1 month or less) and double those of mid-term program (1 month to less than 6 months) students. Additionally, Hirai found that pre-departure English proficiency was not an indicator for how much a student would improve when studying abroad. Several studies attempted to identify which L2 English skills improve when studying abroad. Iwakiri (1993) researched the effects of a five-week study abroad program in Australia to those who did not study abroad. When looking at TOEFL scores, the research showed listening to be significantly higher than those who didn't study abroad, although reading comprehension appeared to be similar between the groups. Iwakiri (1993) also found that their oral production improved as participants spoke faster and with fewer pauses. Regarding listening, Hirai (2018) stated that significant L2 listening gains over skills such as reading can be observed in mid-term study abroad programs. Some studies, however, have found it difficult to get clear information on students' L2 English improvements. Previously, Geis and Fukushima (1997) also looked to see pre- and post-proficiency language gains when investigating students studying abroad, but results were also inconclusive. However, the researchers were able to observe increases in motivation towards language learning resulting from studying abroad. This suggests that studying abroad could further motivate students to continue learning their target language as a result. Van Benthuysen (2012) studied two Japanese university students participating in a short-term study abroad program by conducting interviews before and after the students studied abroad and having them write essays upon returning to Japan. This study showed the differences experienced between two learners. One student actively interacted with native speakers, while the other student was shy and more anxious while studying abroad. Furthermore, the students experienced changes in their attitudes towards learning English, where one student claimed that studying abroad around native speakers was more effective than studying from textbooks. In terms of perceived improvements, the two students mentioned increases in listening, vocabulary, and grammar. Finally, one student mentioned that studying abroad was important for learning about American culture and American values. This shows that some students are

interested not only in language growth, but also in the society of native speakers who use their target language. In fact, topics such as intercultural sensitivity in study abroad research have received much attention in the past (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006; Jackson, 2005). Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman (2003 as cited in Schnickel, Martin, & Maruyama, 2010) define intercultural sensitivity as "the ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences," (p. 105). Schnickel, Martin, & Maruyama (2010) argue this to be an important aspect of studying abroad since it's possible to improve in a target language in one's home country, but cultural understanding is difficult to obtain without traveling to a foreign country.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research is to study a Japanese student's experiences of studying English abroad in an American university by using pre- and post-questionnaires, weekly journals, and a follow-up interview. Similar to Van Benthuysen (2012), this study takes an approach of focusing on a small number of participants; for this study only one student was selected. Unlike previous studies (Geis & Fukushima, 1997, Hirai, 2018) this study does not attempt to focus on observable L2 English gains, but rather looks at the students' perceived feelings of her own English proficiency before and after studying abroad to get a better understanding of the impact of studying abroad for learning a second language from the view of a student. Furthermore, the study attempts to monitor the student's feelings about her English proficiency improvement and motivation to study while she is living in America as well to see if there are any changes during her time abroad. Finally, this research attempts to identify any key points (i.e. merits and demerits of the program, interactions with native speakers) through looking at all of her responses.

About the study abroad program

The study abroad program for this research was a 10-week English only program which is held several times a year at the University of Hawaii at Manoa on the island of Oahu. Following Hirai (2018), this would categorize the program as a mid-term program in terms of length of study. Students who enter this program take several 50-minute classes per week. The names of classes the participant for this research took were Grammar, Listening, Oral Production (speaking / conversation class), Integrated Skills (a class that targets multiple skills: i.e. writing, discussion, reading), TOEIC prep, Service Learning (volunteer work), and Intro to Hawaii. The curriculum taken is mostly the same for every student who enters this program, however, some classes like TOEIC and Service Learning are optional to some students from different universities. Unlike the participant's home university where students are placed into one level, students attending this program are placed into different levels for each class upon arrival using a placement test. For example, a student could be placed into the intermediate level for Grammar class, but still be placed into the high basic level for Listening. Many of the students attending this program come with peers from their home universities. In some cases, students are not university students; the program welcomes anyone who is studying English as a second language.

The participant

The participant for this research was a second-year student studying English at a university in Japan. During her stay in Hawaii, she participated in the study abroad program from September to December 2022 with the length of stay including the 10-week program and other activities, such as volunteer work, to account for other weeks when class wasn't being held. During her first year in university, she was in the second to lowest level of English classes but improved to one level higher for her second year. She completed one semester of her second year at her home university before arriving in Hawaii. Upon arrival in Hawaii, the study abroad program placed her into classes based on her English proficiency level after taking a placement exam. Her placement into the program doesn't account for any of her level placement at her home university. The study abroad program placed her into intermediate for Grammar, high basic for Listening, intermediate for Oral Production, and high basic for Integrated Skills.

Data Collection

Instrument

To get an understanding of the participant's perceived English proficiency a questionnaire was administered before the student left for Hawaii, and after arriving back in Japan. The questionnaire was given online in both cases. It was made in a 4-point likert where the student read the statement and selected the number that most corresponded to her feelings towards the statement (1=Strongly disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Agree; 4= Strongly agree). The questionnaire was given in Japanese, but the English translations can be seen below.

Pre-study abroad and post-study abroad likert scale questions

1. I am confident in speaking in English.
2. I am confident in reading in English.
3. I am confident in listening in English.
4. I am confident in writing in English.
5. I can have a conversation using only English with native English speakers.
6. During class, if there is pair work or group work, I should speak in English even if my peers speak Japanese.
7. To improve in English, it's important to become friends with exchange students from other countries.
8. Your English ability should improve considerably if you study abroad.

Additionally, two open ended questions were given in both the pre- and post-questionnaires with slight changes between the two questionnaires. The following two questions are for the pre-questionnaire:

9. How do you think studying abroad will help you improve your English? Please give a detailed answer.
10. If someone wants to study English, do you think it is important to study abroad? Why do you think so?

In the post-questionnaire, item 10 remained the same, but item 9 was modified. Below is item 9 as it was written in the post-questionnaire to ask how she felt studying abroad did help her after completion

of the program.

9. How do you think studying abroad helped you improve your English? Please give a detailed answer.

The items were made after looking at the curriculums of both the home university's English language courses and the study abroad program's courses. As both targeted the four skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing, the first four items were made to measure to see how the participant felt about her English skills before and after studying abroad. Items 6-10 were made after conducting an interview with a student who studied in 2019 several months after she completed the studying abroad program. Originally, this project was meant to take place in 2020, but study abroad programs were canceled as a result of the COVID pandemic up until 2022. Item 6 identifies participants' feelings towards group and pair work entirely in English. Both the home university's English department and study abroad program include all English group work. The previously interviewed student mentioned she found it unnecessary and unnatural while in Japan because her partners were always Japanese students. Many of her classmates in Hawaii were Japanese, sometimes there were classmates from other countries, and she stated because of that, she felt more compelled to speak entirely English. Item 7 was made as the student claimed many students tend to associate with exchange students who speak the same native language; in other words, Japanese students tended to associate with other Japanese students, and Korean students tended to associate with other Korean students. While she admits she was one of those students, she expressed that she thinks she would have improved more if she tried to be friends with students from different countries because she would be forced into a situation where she had to use English. The student also felt that she didn't actually improve to the level she anticipated, so item 8 was created to see if the participant would feel the same way. Items 9 and 10 are open-ended questions with item 9 seeing if the participant improved like she thought she would while studying abroad, and item 10 was made to measure the importance of studying abroad for learning English according to the participant.

To monitor the participant's feelings towards her English while studying abroad, the participant was asked to respond to questions weekly through LINE, a Japanese messaging application. Every week she would answer the questions: (1) "How do you feel about your English skill right now?", and (2) "How is your motivation to study English right now?" The student was allowed to answer in either Japanese or English. The first question was made to see if she was perceiving any improvement as she studied weekly. The second was made to check if she was still maintaining motivation to study. She was also allowed to quit in the middle if she was busy with schoolwork or anything else.

Finally, an interview was held after gathering information from the questionnaire and LINE journals were checked. The purpose of this interview was to gather more information that may have been missed from the questionnaires and LINE journals, as well as get clarification on some responses. Additionally, it was used to get first-hand information on the study abroad program from a student's perspective. The interview was intended to be done in person, however, the student requested that it be done through e-mail.

Results

Questionnaire results

The tables below show the findings of the questionnaire and will be further explained in the discussion section. The questionnaire was delivered in Japanese and students were allowed to answer all questions in Japanese or English. Table 1 shows the results of the questionnaire's pre- and post-results. Table 2 shows the written answers to items 9 and 10 from the questionnaire. The participant chose to write her answers in English. Any mistakes or confusion in her words were checked for intended meaning and re-written.

Table 1: pre- and post-questionnaire comparisons

Q: Choose the number that best corresponds to your feeling towards the statements.		
Item	Pre	Post
1. I am confident in speaking in English.	2	3
2. I am confident in reading in English.	3	3
3. I am confident in listening in English.	3	3
4. I am confident in writing in English.	1	2
5. I can have a conversation using only English with native English speakers.	2	3
6. During class, if there is pair work or group work, I should speak in English even if my peers speak Japanese.	4	4
7. To improve in English, it's important to become friends with exchange students from other countries.	4	4
8. Your English ability should improve considerably if you study abroad.	3	3

Note: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree

Table 2: Item 9 and 10 pre- and post-questionnaire answers

Pre-questionnaire item 9 response	
9. How do you think studying abroad will help you improve your English? Please give a detailed answer.	"I think that my listening ability will gradually increase and will improve most out of the four English skills. I also think my vocabulary and knowledge of idioms will increase."
Post-questionnaire item 9 response	
9. How do you think studying abroad helped you improve your English? Please give a detailed answer.	"Actually, I heard more authentic English for the first time and I also heard the dialects used in Hawaii. I also felt that local people made an effort to understand us more. It's still ideal to speak grammatical English, but for having a conversation, it's more important to just be understandable. That's why I started to focus on reviewing English that was not so complicated, but easy to understand. I listened and used English many times to increase my vocabulary and I gradually improved."
Pre-questionnaire item 10 response	
10. If someone wants to study English, do you think it is important to study abroad? Why do you think so?	"I think it's important because you will know more about the social background of a country."
Post-questionnaire item 10 responses	
10. If someone wants to study English, do you think it is important to study abroad? Why do you think so?	"It's important because I think I can understand other countries' peoples' thoughts and opinions, and as a result I have become more flexible in my thoughts while also improving in speaking English."

LINE Journals

Table 3 shows the responses sent by the participant weekly during the 10-week program. As previously mentioned, the participant was told she could stop if she wanted to. It's important to note that she arrived in September, but classes didn't begin immediately. As a result, the responses came in October during the second week of class after she had settled into it. She wrote back a total of 7 times and chose to stop as the program's graduation and final exams started to approach. Below shows her responses to the questions. She chose to entirely write in English, which had several grammatical errors, but were later corrected and confirmed to be her intended meaning.

Table 3: LINE journals while studying abroad

	1. How do you feel about your English skill right now?	2. How is your motivation to study English right now?
October 15	"The class is comfortable, and the level is just right for me. I don't know how to improve, but I think I'm speaking more positively and maybe I will become more confident."	"I'm more interested because I hear native speakers say words I've never heard of before. I also want to try practicing speaking by talking to myself more."
October 23	"I'm becoming more self-conscious about grammar mistakes. Most people understand what I'm saying, but I sometimes feel I can't speak enough."	"Sometimes my English is not clear, so I'm often searching for words in my free time. I think I will improve this way."
October 30	"My English skill hasn't improved since last week. But I made a friend who is a native English speaker during language exchange. So, I'll make an effort to speak understandable English."	"Since I made a native English speaking friend, I have to try harder."
November 7	"My vocabulary is increasing, but I still can't entirely understand the sentences I hear or read."	"I make an effort to go to the local side because there are too many Japanese people in the tourist areas. I don't need to use English in these places."
November 14	"There are opportunities where I can listen to English during volunteer work, so it's a good chance for me and probably my listening skill is gradually getting better."	"I have a listening class and I have the scripts, so I try to study them in my free time. It's a little hard though."
November 21	"I'm not going to do well on the speaking test, because I'm really confused about "adjective" and "adverb." Probably, I can't review them well. Actually, my speaking in English hasn't really changed."	"I'm doing my best to catch up with my classes. Grammar class is especially hard for me. We have speaking tests and writing tests in this class. I'm not really good at speaking tests, so I'm losing motivation, but I feel the other classes are not bad."
November 28	"When I talk with interchangers, I guess I almost understand the meaning of what they say. But even there are a lot of words I can't understand. They speak so fast and there are not many pauses so I often miss important words."	"Recently, I went out and tried to use English with someone. There are things I'm not sure about though. I get most excited when I go out and talk English with native English speakers."

Table 4 shows the responses to some of the interview questions asked to the student. There were more questions asked, however, some were not considered useful and thus removed from this report. Some responses will not be discussed further but are included as they provide more information about the participant and the program. Although the interview was meant to be done in person as it would allow for real-time follow up questions, the participant wanted to answer everything in email and in English. Like previously, the sentences were checked and rewritten for their intended meaning.

Table 4: Post-interview responses

1. Please explain your reasons and expectations for studying abroad.	“I wanted to go abroad and learn about a point of view and culture lifestyle that is different from Japan. Also, Hawaii is a safe place and I felt the weather would be comfortable for me so I thought there wouldn’t be anything to worry about.”
2. Please explain the program schedule (10 week program).	“I had four 50-minute classes. I had classes to practice making presentations, to study grammar and vocabulary, to develop listening skills and to know English expressions for daily use. The program also had TOEIC, but it was just a class where you answer TOEIC questions during class hours, and afterwards we reviewed what we didn’t understand as homework. Once a week, I did volunteer work in a local place, and I liked this program’s contents, but in my opinion, it had subtle issues where we worked mostly with Japanese people we already knew. It’s good to know Hawaiian culture, but I feel it’s not a program where we can relate with local people and there was not so much time to talk English. The class format is almost the same as my university in Japan, like teachers giving us some assignments. But the difference is we didn’t just write simple answers. We had to talk about our opinions more.
3. What were the merits of the program? What are the demerits of the program?	“Our teachers were able to make an atmosphere where it was easy to talk. That’s one of the merits. So, I could often talk actively in the class. For instance, we had group work many times and students had to give opinions. One of the demerits is that class time was too short, and there were mostly Japanese students in the class.”
4. Your questionnaire says you are more confident in speaking, writing, and speaking with foreigners. Can you please explain?	“I didn’t have to speak completely correct English when I was there, so I often spoke English that was grammatically incorrect. I felt that the environment and atmosphere was just right for improving my English, which I suppose is the most important difference from Japan.”
5. What do you think students should do before studying English abroad?	“I wasn’t able to do it, but I wish I had learned more vocabulary and simple phrases. I also think you should practice simple grammar structures more so you can use them quickly and confidently. It’s also good to listen more to native English through things like dramas, movies, and radio to train listening.”
6. What do you think you should have done differently when studying abroad?	“I should have joined various activities, but I didn’t have confidence in my English skill. I didn’t have the courage to join activities because there were people only speaking English.”
7. What do you think is the most important thing people should do while studying English abroad?”	“I suppose it’s important to study or talk with foreign people every day and to enjoy learning English. I think you need to be more active when searching for things you can’t understand. Like vocabulary.”
8. Questions regarding item 9 on the questionnaire	
8-1 Did you improve in vocabulary and idioms as much as you thought?	“I learned a lot of vocabulary in the program, but I forgot them quickly if I didn’t use them. Actually, I haven’t used English recently, so I have to find a situation where I can use them here.”
8-2 How important do you think grammar is in conversation? (10 – very important; 1 -not important at all)	“6 - Because I experienced feeling worried about whether the listener would understand my English when I spoke. I didn’t know if it’s correct or not. In addition, listeners seem to get irritated when we can’t speak English clearly or when we have long pauses.”
8-3 Are there any other differences in your first response to your second response?	“I don’t have any idea, but listening is passive, so I don’t feel it’s really studying. For me, I also noticed when I listened to English, I didn’t focus on the grammar, but the only words I knew when hearing them. It improved my skill to know the situation and how to use the words.”
9. Questions regarding item 10 on the questionnaire	
9-1 Why is it helpful to know the social background of that country?	“Because if you know the social background, you can understand the features of the people. I can understand why there are differences between Japan and Hawaii and because of that I can avoid hurting local people’s feelings unintentionally.”

9-2 And how have you become more "flexible in your thought"?	"The people who I met were very cheerful and they think it's ok to fail and try again and again. My way of thinking has changed a little to be more like that."
9-3 Are there any other differences from your first response to your second response?	"No, understanding the background foreign countries is important to respect local people and the place they live in."

Change in feelings towards English proficiency

Several pieces of information can be seen from the questionnaire (table 1 and 2) and follow-up interview (table 4). The participant reported in the pre-questionnaire having confidence in reading and listening but lacked confidence in speaking and especially in writing. Additionally, she was not confident in her ability to have conversations entirely in English with native speakers. Her post-questionnaire, however, had little change to her perceived skill in listening and reading, as she reported having the same score in both. In the post-questionnaire, she now claims she is confident in speaking, and is confident having conversations entirely in English. Her confidence in writing also increased, but still shows that she lacks confidence as prior to leaving she reported the lowest score possible (1) and upon returning she answered a little higher (2). Comparing the participant's responses to the student who studied abroad several years ago, it's likely that she also did not improve as much as she expected. Regardless, when looking at item 8, you can see that she feels that her L2 English should increase considerably from study abroad and her opinion on that doesn't change. Additionally, in item 9 of the pre-questionnaire you can see that the participant believed she would improve her four skills, but specifically notes listening, and also mentions her vocabulary and knowledge of idioms would improve which would have been consistent with Hirai (2018). Looking at her post-questionnaire, her response was a bit different. While she confirms her improvement in vocabulary, she doesn't mention improvement in her four skills. However, a key point is that she feels her mindset towards using simple, more understandable English was important. In other words, studying abroad changed what she viewed as important for English communication. This will be discussed in the final section of the discussion.

Feelings towards English while studying abroad

To view the participant's feelings towards English while studying abroad, refer to table 3's LINE journal results. Although she wasn't able to complete it ten times for the 10-week program, there were still some interesting comments from seven of her replies. The student wrote once a week from October 15 to November 28. When looking at the first question (How do you feel about your English skill right now?), she began by saying that she would be more active when speaking in English, but you can see that the student has many negative thoughts towards her L2 English growth while studying. Mostly she had concerns over her grammar, vocabulary, and speaking. You can see several instances where the student claimed that she does not improve as can be seen on her responses on October 30 and November 28. She also reports that her listening is improving at points (November 14), but also that she is struggling to understand what native English speakers say due to their speaking speed.

It can be seen from the second question on her motivation towards learning English, that the participant does a lot throughout the weeks to study, so despite not having many positive feelings towards her English improvement while studying, her motivation to continue studying doesn't appear to

drop during her studies. She mentioned that she continues to review to understand things more, makes more of an effort with native speaker friends, and tries to visit places where Japanese people aren't always around so she has to use English more. However, it's important to note that she says she will do these things, and it's unclear whether or not she actually did them while she was abroad.

Views on the study abroad program

First, it's important to discuss what the participant's motivations for studying abroad were. Referring to table 4, interview item 1, the participant was asked about her motivations, and didn't mention L2 English improvement specifically, but a desire to know more about the cultural background of local people. This is similar to her pre- and post-questionnaire responses which state that she felt that studying abroad was important for learning more about the background of a country and after returning from studying abroad, she claims that studying abroad is important for learning more about the native speakers' thoughts and opinions which are different from her own. These motivations for wanting to study abroad are consistent with previous research (Asaoka & Yano, 2009; Kitsantas, 2004) and likely show that the participant also values intercultural sensitivity (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006; Jackson, 2005).

The interview responses in table 4 gave more information on her opinions about the study abroad program. In interview item 2, she describes the program as being good for practicing conversation, whereas her home university focused more on simple answers. She felt the program's use of volunteer work could have been beneficial but felt that its implementation had issues in that there was actually no reason to use English as she was mostly with Japanese students she knew. If this part of the curriculum had more interactions with local people, this could have been an opportunity for her to use English more. When asked about the overall merits and demerits of the program (interview item 3), she responds that the teachers were able to make a class atmosphere that made it easy to speak English actively. On the other hand, she feels the class time was too short. In her home university a single class is 105 minutes, but in the program, classes were 50 minutes long. However, it's important to note that a single class in the study abroad program is every day, whereas they are only once a week in her home university. She also says that the environment in Hawaii was also good for improving one's English (interview item 4). This was mentioned earlier, but in the questionnaires you can see that the participant still feels that studying abroad is important for improving one's English in item 8.

Interview items 8 and 9 were follow-up questions to her post-questionnaire open-ended responses. When asked specifically about her expectations of learning more vocabulary, she says that she did learn a lot, but feels that she is forgetting it now that she has returned to Japan. Additionally, she adds that while studying abroad she perceived native English speakers as being irritated with her English ability, which can be viewed as a demerit of studying abroad. Although she also adds that her listening improved after hearing the context and usage of English words in actual speech. In interview item 9, again she further explains the benefits of learning about foreign people's social backgrounds which is perhaps something she believes she couldn't do while in her home country.

Another key point was seen in how she felt about studying abroad preparation and what students should do while studying abroad. These responses can be seen in table 4. Interview item 5 states that

she should have studied more vocabulary before studying abroad. This was anticipated as she mentions problems with limited vocabulary. She also states that practicing simple grammar for more confident and fluent conversations. This is similar to her post-questionnaire responses as well. Finally, she states that watching more dramas before studying abroad could have improved her listening skills more. In interview items 6 and 7 she is asked what she thinks she should have done differently while studying abroad and similarly, what she thinks students who study abroad should do. First, she expresses regret for not having the confidence to join activities where she needed to speak English more. She then follows up in interview item 7 by saying students need to be more active in using English every day, as well as constantly trying to learn what they don't understand. These are all interesting points that could be useful in the future. As the program often sends students abroad, this information could act as advice for future students.

Change in approach towards English use

This was mentioned earlier but needs to be emphasized more. You can see that her thoughts on English use have changed a bit and can be seen throughout her interview (table 4) after comparing it with her questionnaire responses. Previously, she often mentioned grammar, vocabulary, and listening as points she emphasizes for herself. Her thoughts on grammar have shifted a little through interactions with native speakers, opting to speak in more simple English for the sake of clear communication. Still, her thoughts are still that grammatically correct English is ideal as she senses native speakers become annoyed if she doesn't speak correctly. Her thoughts towards grammar are an interesting point of this study. On one hand she makes comments that a focus on grammar is not so important, but on the other hand she recognizes her need to study it more as it's difficult for her.

Another point she makes on English use is her feelings towards listening. In interview item 8-2, she says that listening is useful for understanding the context of words, but generally, is not really "studying", but more of a passive skill.

In general, we can see that she still holds grammar and listening as important for her English learning, but her approach to them has changed after studying abroad.

Limitations

The study was meant to look only at one student's study abroad experiences while focusing on her perceived improvement and feelings while studying abroad, and thus is naturally limited in nature. Still, the study could have been done more to get more detailed information. First, the study was done entirely electronically, making it difficult to get confirmation of meaning or further details. As a result, some of the participant's responses can be perceived as vague and left to the interpretation of the researcher. The follow-up interview was intended to get in-person responses to clarify any information provided in the questionnaire and journals as well as get follow-up information in real time. Because this was also done electronically via e-mail the information provided does lack specific details that could have been important. Additionally, it would have been better to have at least one more participant from her peers. This could have helped confirm some of the information provided by the participant as well as show any differences in experiences between multiple participants. Lastly, the research failed to follow

up on several points of information. For example, questionnaire items 6 and 7 were never followed up on during interviews. More questions regarding her interactions with other exchange students and her interactions with other Japanese students should have been addressed. Finally, she sometimes mentions her interactions with native speakers, and the research missed an opportunity to get more information on this.

Conclusion

The participant provides several important pieces of information about her perceived skills in English before and after studying abroad. In general, she either maintains a similar level in certain skills, or improved slightly after her time in America. Although she expected to improve in listening which would be consistent with research by Hirai (2018) and Van Benthuisen (2012), she doesn't mention any significant improvement in this after returning based on her questionnaire results. While studying, it can be seen that she has doubts about her English improvement but continued studying regardless and her motivation for learning English remained consistent throughout. Finally, the participant provides some insight on the study abroad program. She feels that it helped her gain an understanding of English speakers and their thoughts which is something that she valued. More studies on students studying abroad could help programs adjust their curriculum for potential students' language needs.

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