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Reducing Study Abroad Anxiety through Smartphone Virtual Reality: An Investigative Pilot Study

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Chris Hastings
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Abstract

This paper documents a pilot study that tracked the anxiety levels of 32 private university Japanese students who used smartphone-based virtual reality (VR) tasks to prepare for an 8-week study abroad program. First, the paper discusses background information concerning study abroad anxiety, current VR technology, VR technology in language learning, and the role of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy as a theoretical basis for using VR in language learning. Second, the paper describes the methodology and analysis used. Last the findings and limitations and study are discussed and addressed. Overall, data in the form of quantitative surveys and qualitative comments suggest that VR-based tasks have the potential to reduce students’ feelings of anxiety towards studying abroad in a foreign country.

Keywords: Study Abroad, EFL, Virtual Reality, Google Cardboard

Internationalization and language development of university students can often be greatly benefited by participation in study abroad programs. However, considerable levels of anxiety can sometimes accompany preparation for this undertaking. Low-cost smartphone-based virtual reality (LCSVR), however, may be one method of preparing students for international study abroad programs by providing navigational training and language practice to reduce the anxiety of being in a foreign environment before departure. Therefore, this pilot study presents the findings of a VR task-based program designed to reduce Japanese university students’ pre-departure feelings of anxiety toward studying abroad in another country.

Study Abroad Anxiety

Anecdotally, all teachers and administrators involved with study abroad programs know students experience varying degrees of anxiety concerning the prospect of studying abroad. This anxiety is broadly related to language and cultural issues but can also include anxiety about finance, health, and future career development. It is important to point out that some anxiety is normal and can help promote adequate preparation. However, too much anxiety can hinder preparation and in extreme cases have health consequences (Mykletun et al., 2009). The researchers of this paper, for example, were surprised by the incidence of the extreme anxiety of some students prior to starting the program. With this established, many study abroad researchers agree that “without intervention to reduce anxiety, the success of study abroad programs will be unlikely to be optimized” (Riley & Shackleford, 2009, p.74).
What kind of intervention is optimal? In preparing to create the program and study, the researchers found two examples of studies pertaining to study abroad preparation programs in the specific context of Japanese universities. White's (2014) study looked at using a CALL tool, ‘English Central’, to give students access to more authentic input. The rationale being that since students would soon be in an environment where they would only be getting authentic input, the CALL tool would be a useful means of preparation. Riley and Shackleford’s (2009) study explicitly taught language learning strategies to students. For example, students were taught note taking techniques and then had to listen to lectures and take notes about their study abroad destination to practice the skill. These studies respectively address the anxiety that students might have about comprehending authentic input and studying at overseas institutions. Building upon the findings, the researchers aim of this study was to investigate how communicatively engaging in physical environments using LCSVR impacts students’ pre-departure anxiety levels for a study abroad program. For example, by virtually exploring a homestay neighborhood and completing an opinion-gap task, participants can learn the differences in the physical environment and how inhabitants interact with them between their home and host countries. The researchers also hypothesize that virtually exposing the participants to the environments they will visit in the future will reduce general anxiety, increase confidence and a willingness to explore the new environments actively.

**VR Technology Today**

Due to recent hardware and software innovations, virtual reality has now become a possible classroom tool. As discussed in Hastings and Brunotte (2017), affordability in VR headset designs along with the widespread distribution of smartphone technology has allowed for this to become a medium through which classroom tasks can be completed, potentially benefiting pre-departure study abroad students.

The type of virtual reality we will be describing is known as low-cost smartphone virtual reality or LCSVR, in which smartphones are used in conjunction with compatible headsets to create virtual experiences. One of the more well-known versions is Google Cardboard (herein referred to as “Cardboard”), although many other models exist. For the activities described in this article (and for the use of smartphone VR in the classroom in general), we often prefer the Cardboard set because of its affordability (around 10 US dollars/1000 yen per headset) and its simple design.

**VR in Language Learning**

While VR has not been used extensively in most language classrooms, there are a number of studies (Rose and Billinghamurst, 1995; Rose, 1996; O'Brien, Levy & Orich, 2009) which explore its potential uses. Several papers (Winn, 1993; Chee, 2001; Chen, 2009) that discuss how to incorporate VR into existing theories of language learning. As Chee (2001) states, what these papers agree upon is that VR affords learners a first-person form of immersive, experiential learning. Simply put, learners learn by doing. Another theory of learning that overlaps with the nature of VR is constructivist learning. The idea that humans construct knowledge by interacting with their environment. Chen (2009) points out that VR environments can be uniquely constructed to meet the needs of the learner and teachers can observe the learners interactions with the VR environment in real-time. Another key idea to take into account is the affective nature of immersive VR. Winn (1993) says that as immersive VR becomes indistinguishable from reality, the psychological processes that operate as people construct knowledge in VR are similar to those in the real world. To summarize, previous research suggests three points. Firstly,
program participants should be able to gain knowledge about their prospective study abroad destinations from virtual representations. Secondly, program coordinators should be able to select and verify the virtual locations. Finally, participants should have affective experiences that emulate to some degree experiences of the real world. This final point forms the central hypothesis of this study, namely, by visiting virtual representations of real-world study abroad locations, participants’ anxiety can be reduced.

With these points in mind, it was important to consider the type of framework that would best assist participants to interact with visual input so that they could increase their understanding of locations they would likely encounter when studying abroad. The researchers decided that a blended task-based learning and content-based learning approach would be most appropriate. This means that participants learn about how to use LCSVR and study abroad destinations by completing tasks. Also, all materials, instruction, and interaction are done in English. Task-based learning, or TBLT, is a communicative approach to language teaching that views language as a means to complete a task. In TBLT there are three main categories of tasks: information-gap, reasoning-gap, and opinion gap (Prabhu, 1987). The program included all of these tasks with the final task being an information-gap task in which one participant with a 2D map had to guide a participant using a Cardboard headset. The researchers judged these approaches appropriate because the goals of the program were not to explicitly teach formal language components, or even speaking skills, but to gain knowledge of the study abroad locations as well as build technical skills to allow the participants to research the locations.

*Methods for Anxiety Reduction*

One of the major goals of this pilot study was to reduce the anxiety of students preparing to study abroad, so learning about methods used by current mental health professionals for anxiety reduction was key. To do this, we used the working definition of anxiety by Kalisch, et al. (2005) as “a psychological, physiological, and behavioral response to anticipation of an aversive event” (p. 874). Pre-departure study abroad-related anxiety would seem to fit within this definition due to the number of unknown factors participants are forced to deal with and may worry about. We also discovered that on many mental-health survey instruments, the effects of anxiety and those of mental stress are often indistinguishable, indicating how these two issues are related and often manifest their symptoms similarly with those experiencing them (Lovibond, 1995). Clearly, anxiety is a complicated psychological state and is connected to many aspects of cognition and emotion. We hoped that through the survey data collected through this study, some aspects of study abroad anxiety for this population may become clearer.

*Cognitive Behavioral Therapy*

After reviewing the psychological literature, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and its approach to anxiety-reduction appeared to be the best fit for this project and therefore was used as a theoretical framework to intervene with pre-departure anxiety. Evidence for the potential usefulness of CBT came from analysis by Ergene (2016) on CBT-based programs related to reducing students’ test anxiety. Ergene found that 74% of students receiving CBT-style anxiety reduction treatments had successful outcomes.

CBT practitioners describe how “thought distortions” (illogical thinking or perceptions not based on objective reality) can lead to anxiety and often “create a powerful illusion of truth” that are often difficult to shake (Burns, 1999, p. 48). For example, students with anxiety about participating in a study...
abroad program may hold or express beliefs such as, “I will definitely get lost when I’m overseas” or “I’m bad at English so I’m probably going to have many problems.” Unfortunately, these students may be experiencing thought distortions because their way of thinking is hypothetically anticipated instead of based on an objective reality. CBT professionals have found that helping patients learn to regulate these thoughts and their corresponding emotions can make people more adaptable to change, and therefore may help our students with an undertaking as big as participating in a study abroad program (Kalisch, et al., 2005). Therefore, the hope of this study was that, by providing training with our program, students would change their way of thinking and anxiety level about participating in a study abroad program.

**Research Questions**

This study had two goals. The first goal was to probe if VR technology might reduce pre-departure anxiety for the study abroad students. The second goal was to investigate how useful and helpful students thought VR-based activities are for study abroad preparation. Therefore, the research questions concerning study abroad students using VR-technology were as follows:

1. Can VR-based tasks reduce pre-departure anxiety?
2. Can VR-based tasks reduce anxiety about getting lost overseas?
3. Can VR-based tasks reduce anxiety about asking and following directions in English?
4. What are students’ overall opinions for the usefulness of Google Cardboard technology for study abroad preparation?
5. What about the Google Cardboard activities do students find useful or not useful?

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to address the five research questions. The first three research questions were quantitative and used a Likert scale while the last two research questions were qualitative and asked students to provide their comments.

**Methodology**

**Participants**

Two cohorts consisting of 16 students from both the spring and autumn semesters (32 students total) who were English Literature majors from a mid-tier private Japanese university in central Japan participated in this study. The participant demographics are shown below in table 1. The cohorts consisted of a mixture of 1st to 4th-year students of varying levels of English language proficiency, with TOEIC scores ranging from 415 to 660 points across the two cohorts. The spring cohort was made up of 1st through 3rd-year students (five 1st and 2nd years; six 3rd years), and the fall cohort consisted of only 1st and 2nd-year students (eight each). No discernable problems were noticed by the researchers related to these differences in proficiency levels or year of study, although future studies will explore how to best match participants in these activities for optimal results. Data regarding the previous international experience of these participants were not gathered due to the brief amount of contact time available, however, the researchers hope to soon explore this issue in a follow-up study.
The researchers obtained permission to conduct the study from the university, their direct supervisor, and the professor in charge of student study abroad preparations. The instructor who organized the study abroad preparation class for the student cohort was also present during each of the activity sessions. In accordance with the practices of the university, the researchers obtained consent from all the students who participated in this study. In addition, students were provided with information in Japanese that assured their anonymity and discussed how the data from this study would be used. No participants opted out of this study.

**Table 1: Participant Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Year</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Year</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Year</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *N* = 32

**Program Overview**

The program was held twice a year. The program consisted of eight sessions over eight weeks during the university’s lunch period that lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes per session. Table 2 reveals the schedule for the study abroad pre-departure program.

**Table 2: Study Abroad Pre-departure Program Overview**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Contents of Session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Orientation &amp; Pre-treatment Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Introduction to Google Cardboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Campus Walk pt. 1 (undirected practice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Campus Walk pt. 2 (directed practice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Places to Visit in your New Town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Your Homestay House and Neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Finding your Way (information-gap navigation task)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Post-treatment Survey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the first week, participants were given an orientation explaining the goals and contents of the program, and then the researchers administered a pre-treatment survey (See Appendix C).

During the second week, participants were introduced to Cardboard and instructed to download and install Google Street View (herein Street View) to their smartphones. As the institution did not have Wi-Fi, participants were explicitly told to do this when they had access to a Wi-Fi network and to make sure they had Street View installed and ready for the week 3. The researchers made efforts to ensure participants did not need to download a large amount of data for the sessions to their smartphones, as participants might have had limited or expensive pay-as-you-go data plans. Next, the researchers demonstrated Cardboard by taking on student roles and demonstrated activities from the week 3 & 4 sessions of walking around the campuses. To further help students understand the nature of the technology, the demonstration screen was mirrored onto a projector display so that all participants could see. Students were also given printed instructions about Street View (see Appendix A) to refer to.

During the third week, with a clear understanding of the technology, the participants were shown how they could search for their study abroad institution using Street View, by selecting a location on campus, and then putting their device into the Cardboard to virtually explore the campus. During this session, the primary purpose was to observe how well the participants understood the demonstrations, whether they had downloaded the application as requested and to see what technical issues may arise. There was no required learning outcome for the session.

During the fourth week, the participants were asked to repeat what they had performed during week three, but with some opinion-gap speaking tasks based on their reactions to their virtual exploration of the campuses. For example, after virtually exploring the overseas campus, participants had to complete a speaking task in which they asked each other what they thought about the overseas campus and what they thought was different about it compared to their campus in Japan.

During the fifth week, we trained students to use Google Maps to locate points of interest to deepen their knowledge of the areas around campus environments and to provide practical training of how to navigate these locations through VR. Students were provided with a guide created for this activity, with some example spots listed for each of the overseas campuses (e.g., nearby theaters, supermarkets, coffee shops, etc. - Appendix B). Students were asked to find additional locations themselves using these methods, share them with other participants, and eventually practice navigating to these locations of interest using the Cardboard setting in Street View.

During the sixth week, we gave the participants hypothetical locations of homestay neighborhoods to virtually navigate using Cardboard. After the participants explored these locations, they completed opinion-gap speaking tasks based on their reactions to what they had seen.

During the seventh week, two dimensional maps were prepared with starting points placed at homestay family locations and finishing points placed on the study abroad campus. Students then worked in pairs, with one student guiding their partner using the 2D map and the other student navigating the roads virtually in Street View. Partners were given various versions of the map, allowing each student to practice both roles with different routes. The goals were to give students practical experience navigating the real host city environments, as well as to have students practice their English for navigation (both giving and receiving directions).

During the eighth and final week, the post-survey was administered to the participants and information regarding ethics was repeated. For example, the researchers explained again how the participants anonymity and data would be protected.
Data Collection

Data were collected from students twice during each eight-week study - once in the first session and once in the eighth session. Students completed Google Forms surveys (Appendices C and D) that featured a mixture of question types: four-point Likert scale quantitative questions regarding their anxiety levels toward their future study abroad (and various aspects of it), and open-ended qualitative questions that related to their anxiety and what they thought of the VR activities (the latter only on the final survey). The researchers also asked participants to identify their study abroad location to help with organizing their responses. Finally, data of written surveys from five study abroad returnee students who participated in our program were collected. These data provided information on the perceived usefulness of the VR training and how participants had used that knowledge while overseas.

Results

Students Responses Regarding VRs Effectiveness for Reducing Anxiety

The numerical data from both the spring and fall sessions are combined below. The results are color-coded with blue tones representing lower levels of anxiety and red tones representing higher levels. The results from the pre-treatment survey are shown next to “Before” and those from the post-treatment survey appear next to “After”. Numerals shown within each answer choice represent the number of participants who responded at that level (n=32).

Research Question 1: Can VR-based tasks reduce pre-departure anxiety?

Results from the pre and post surveys related to the first research question of being anxious about studying abroad are seen below (See Appendix C & D). All 32 students (16 students spring semester and 16 students autumn semester) responded to both the pre and post surveys both before and after engaging in VR-based tasks.
There are four findings pertaining to the research question addressing pre-departure anxiety before and after students engaged in VR-based tasks. For the purposes of reporting standard deviation ($SD = .62$), the responses were converted to a 4-point Likert scale (“not anxious at all” = 1 to “extremely anxious” = 4). First, the number of students who felt Not anxious at all decreased by 1 (-3.2%). Second, the number of students who felt A little anxious increased by 12 (+38%). Third, the number of students who felt Moderately anxious decreased by 10 (-31%). Fourth, the number of students who felt Extremely anxious decreased by 1 (-3.2%). Overall, these shifts in responses suggest that having students engaging in VR-based tasks can diminish the level of anxiety they might feel towards being in a foreign country.

Research Question 2: Can VR-based tasks reduce anxiety about getting lost overseas?

Results from the pre and post surveys related to the second research question of getting lost around a campus or city are seen below (See Appendix C & D). All 32 students (16 students spring semester and 16 students autumn semester) responded to both the pre and post surveys both before and after engaging in VR-based tasks.
There are three findings pertaining to the research question concerning students’ feelings about getting lost while overseas before and after students engaged in VR-based tasks. For the purposes of reporting standard deviation ($SD = 6.3$), the responses were converted to a 4-point Likert scale (“not anxious at all” = 1 to “extremely anxious” = 4). First, the number of students who responded as being Not anxious at all decreased by two (-6.25%). Second, the number of students who responded as being A little anxious increased by nine (+28%). Third, the number of students who responded as being Moderately anxious decrease by one (-3.2%). Finally, the number of participants who responded as being Extremely anxious decreased by six (-19%). Overall, the shift in the number of students who initially felt Moderately anxious and Extremely anxious and then later felt A little anxious suggests VR-based tasks might reduce students’ anxiety level of getting lost while traveling abroad.

Research Question 3: Can VR-based tasks reduce anxiety about asking and following directions in English?

Results from the pre and post surveys related to the third research of question asking and following directions in English are seen below (See Appendix C & D). All 32 students (16 students spring semester and 16 students autumn semester) responded to both the pre and post surveys both before and after engaging in VR-based tasks.
Figure 3: Responses to the pre and post survey question: How anxious are you about asking for and following directions in English?

There are three findings pertaining to the research question concerning the anxiety of using English for asking and following directions before and after students engaged in VR-based tasks. For the purposes of reporting standard deviation ($SD = .68$), the responses were converted to a 4-point Likert scale (“not anxious at all” = 1 to “extremely anxious” = 4). First, the number of students who responded as being *Not anxious at all* increased by one (+3.2%). Second, the number of students who responded as being *A little anxious* increased by seven (+22%). Third, the number of students who responded as being *Moderately anxious* decreased by four (-13%). Finally, the number of students who responded as being *Extremely anxious* decreased by four (-13%). This shift in students’ responses suggests VR-based tasks might reduce students’ anxiety level of communicating in English when navigating their whereabouts overseas.

**Student Feedback Regarding VR Usefulness for Overseas Preparation**

In addition to numerical feedback on study abroad-related anxiety, the post-treatment survey instrument asked participants to rate the usefulness of the VR activities using a 4-point Likert scale. Results are reported as numbers of participants who responded to each choice ($n=32$).

Research Question 4: What are students’ overall opinions for the usefulness of Google Cardboard technology for study abroad preparation?

Results from the post survey related to the fourth research question for the usefulness of Google Cardboard technology are seen below (See Appendix C & D). All 32 students (16 students spring semester and 16 students autumn semester) responded to the post survey.
There are two findings pertaining to the research question concerning the usefulness of Google Cardboard. First, seven students thought Google Cardboard was *Very Useful*, 16 students thought that it was *Useful*, and eight students thought it was *Somewhat useful*. Second, only one student thought Google Cardboard was *Not useful*. These results suggest the majority of students who participated found Google Cardboard to be beneficial as a means to prepare for functioning overseas.

Finally, along with the Likert scale questions, the post-treatment survey included the option for participants to give general feedback about the Cardboard activities. All 32 participants gave comments about the Cardboard activities and the comments were coded into the following seven categories (some comments contained more than one coding category):

1. Explicit mention of anxiety being reduced
2. Benefit of learning about study abroad locations through activities
3. Fun nature of Cardboard
4. Immersive nature of Cardboard
5. Could imagine life as a study abroad student after the activities
6. Useful and practical nature of activities
7. Technical issues
   a. Smartphone OS issues - iOS version of app functions missing in Android version
   b. Travel Sickness - can’t use for long periods of time
   c. Sometimes can’t move in Street View
   d. Wanted to use wi-fi

The instances of these categories within the comments were then tallied and put into a pie chart to show how the results broke down among the seven categories. The researchers used semantic thematic analysis as outlined by Clarke & Braun (2013) to arrive at the results. Initially, the data were
coded independently and then the researchers working collectively decided on the final results shown in Figure 5. From the seven categories, three themes emerged which were: knowledge gained through activities, affective nature of VR and technical difficulties.

Research Question 5: What about the Google Cardboard activities do students find useful or not useful?

Figure 5: Responses to the Post-treatment survey question: What are your general thoughts about the Google Cardboard activities?

There are two findings pertaining to the research question concerning how students found Cardboard activities to be helpful. First, of the seven categories, seven students commented that Google Cardboard was helpful in that it was Beneficial for learning about study abroad locations and that it helped to Imagine life as a study abroad student. Second, however, only four students commented that Google Cardboard was Useful and practical or noted problems regarding Technical Issues. In addition to the other responses, the results from students’ comments suggest that the main benefit they were able to gain from Google Cardboard activities was the orientation it provides to living overseas.

Discussion

Quantitative Data Implications

On the whole, survey results for the three anxiety-related questions showed participants’ anxiety levels decreased after they underwent VR-based training. Although each of the navigation-related survey items saw reductions in anxiety levels, perhaps the most compelling result is that the overall anxiety of these participants toward their study abroad seemed to fall dramatically (see Figure 1). This decrease of generalized anxiety toward the study abroad experience was one of our main goals that we hypothesize may promote a successful study abroad experience for these students (by reducing negative thought distortions or anxiety that might compromise their experience overseas). The reduction in
Anxiety levels related to navigating the study abroad environments is also an important finding, although in future studies we would hope for an even further drop in anxiety within the post-treatment results (see Figures 2 and 3). Further improvement in the navigation task design might help in this regard, as would more time spent with participants on each of these activities. Possible limitations with these anxiety-related results will be discussed below. Table 3 reveals the differences between the pre and post surveys for each of the three Anxiety-based research questions. For the purposes of reporting standard deviation, the responses were converted to a 4-point Likert scale ("not anxious at all" = 1 to "extremely anxious" = 4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Pre departure Anxiety</th>
<th>Getting Lost</th>
<th>Asking &amp; Following Directions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>- 01</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>+12</td>
<td>+.38</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately</td>
<td>- 11</td>
<td>-.31</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely</td>
<td>- 01</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Figures are approximate. n = number of students, % = corresponding percentage, SD = standard deviation.

A trend appears with the before and after data for each of these three research questions: a tendency toward a shift to the middle two anxiety level choices. For Research Questions 1 and 2 the number of students responding at the lowest and two highest anxiety levels decreased, while the ones describing “a little” anxiety increased. For Research Question 3, 25 students in total shifted from the top two anxiety levels to the bottom two. As a result, from an observation point of view, it appears that the anxiety levels of participants in regard to these three research questions decreased as a whole. Several caveats related to these observations will be discussed.

Qualitative Feedback Implications

The written feedback pertaining to technical issues, the six categories of positive comments and returnees’ remarks suggest that participants found VR valuable for study abroad preparation. First, the comments coded as technical issues give valuable information as to how to proceed with future studies and insight into the suitability of the technology for preparing students to study abroad. The mention of travel sickness, for example, means that teachers planning to implement this technology should be mindful that some students will not be able to use a VR headset or for only short periods without experiencing discomfort. The difference in smartphone operating systems and application functionality means that coordinators of a study abroad program such as this will need to be aware and prepare training materials for all types of smartphones. Ideally, a developer would create a study abroad exploration application with identical functionality across different operating systems.

Street View is freely available, but Google did not design it for the specific purpose of helping students prepare to study abroad. For example, one participant commented that it was sometimes difficult to move. This comment might be referring to the fact that either some areas are not mapped and hence unexploorable or the interface that allows users to navigate is unintuitive. If it is the former issue, the problem of unexploorable areas is not easily solved unless users independently add 360-degree photos to Street View of the missing areas. However, if it is the latter issue, the problem can be solved with the
use of the second iteration of Cardboard that has a button allowing easy navigation in applications can solve the problem. Finally, the comment about Wi-Fi implies that some program participants are unsatisfied with using their personal devices and data for school work. With this in mind, coordinators should be aware of this and make all efforts to ensure participants are not penalized in any way for having a particular data plan.

Second, there are some interesting findings with regard to the positive comments related to the six categories. The six categories concerning the explicit mention of anxiety reduction, learning about study abroad locations, the fun nature of Cardboard, imagining life as a study abroad student, and the useful and practical nature of activities were all items the researchers had in mind when creating the program. It is encouraging to see the goals and rationales of the program reflected in the participants' questionnaire answers so clearly. For instance, six comments from participants explicitly stated they felt less anxious about studying abroad. When taken into account with the numerical data this is a clear indication that the participants felt their anxiety had been reduced by the program’s activities, the program’s main goal. Seven comments mentioned they felt they had learned valuable knowledge about the locations. Again, this is encouraging because it was one of the program’s main goals. Another seven comments expressed that the activities could help them imagine life overseas, which is perhaps related to the reduction in anxiety in the sense that the study abroad was no longer an ‘unknown’ environment. Four comments expressed the opinion that the program’s activities were of a practical nature and helpful for preparation. This is encouraging because if the participants recognize the value of the training they are more likely to have attended the program diligently and tried to use the skills and knowledge they gained during the program. Six comments simply said the activities were fun. This may appear banal, but the novel and engaging nature of VR is a powerful attractor for learners which may result in more on-task behavior. Finally, five comments mentioned the immersive nature of Cardboard, which is the aspect of the technology responsible for making the participants ‘feel’ as if they are really there and hence reaping the psychological benefits of reduced anxiety and increased familiarity.

Generally, the responses of how participants found VR activities were positive and suggest that this technology may be beneficial to prepare students for studying abroad. For example, the fact that only one participant found the Cardboard activities “not useful” implies the majority of participants found them to be helpful with some aspect of their study abroad preparation or anxiety reduction. This is an important finding when considering whether similar programs using VR should be implemented in the future and this shows the potential of smartphone VR for furthering the aims of this study.

Finally, comments provided from the returnees were also informative. As previously stated, these comments were in answer to questions relating to the usefulness of the activities, whether they used the apps from this program while abroad and general comments as to how to improve the program. First, all five returnees mentioned the fact they were seeing things they had seen virtually was comforting or relieving to them. For instance, one participant said, “Having seen the inside of the university virtually, after arriving I could feel a sense of familiarity.” It is questionable whether this same sense of familiarity or comfort could be achieved by looking at photos or by watching videos, which makes VR especially appropriate for the purpose of study abroad preparation. In reference to whether returnees had used the apps while abroad, all returnees mentioned they had. This is evidence that at least the returnees who had answered the questionnaire had been able to independently use the skills that they practiced during the program. Last, several returnees mentioned that they thought the program activities could be improved if there was the opportunity to virtually explore more around the homestay neighborhoods. This is perhaps evidence that study abroad students spend a lot of time in close proximity to their homestay and hence it would be useful for them to learn more about the area before they depart.
Overall, the quantitative feedback from the Likert scale surveys proved favorable and the qualitative comments were positive in that participants seemed to appreciate the practical approach of the program to gain explicit knowledge and reduce anxiety about the new environment. Together these findings suggest students were, as Burns (1999) says, able to shake away “thought distortions” of a “powerful illusion of truth” because, like to Ergene’s (2016) study, they were able to reduce anxiety. In this way, by students regulating their thoughts through VR technology, they were able to make themselves more adaptable to change (Kalisch, et. al, 2005). As a result, the findings build upon previous studies examining the effectiveness of the use of CALL (Winn, 1993; Chee 2001; Chen, 2009) and its role for authentic input for studying abroad preparation (White, 2014).

Conclusion

The purpose of this pilot student was to document and observe the trends of using VR technology to reduce the anxiety students may have about studying abroad. Although this preliminary study did not conduct analyses to determine statistical significance, we believe its observational data demonstrates the potential usefulness of VR technology. Specifically, responses from this study show VR-based tasks have the potential to decrease students’ anxiety levels with regard to the anticipation of going overseas, getting lost overseas and communicating directions overseas. Furthermore, the majority of students who participated in this study felt the experience of using Google Cardboard technology was useful and expressed positive feedback with regard to how it is helpful for overseas preparation.

This study was an attempt by the researchers to investigate if VR technology was a viable means of preparing students for study abroad (and additionally reduce their anxiety toward that endeavor), however, it has a number of limitations that will be addressed in future studies.

The first limitation involved issues related to Internet connectivity. Both Wi-Fi availability and or smartphone data limitations were problematic for some participants. To remedy these issues, we encourage instructors to have students download applications for these VR tasks at home using Wi-Fi, or implement these programs in institutions that have internet available to students.

The second limitation involves issues related to the equipment and applications used. Problems with the input mechanism of some of the older models of Cardboard made some tasks difficult to implement, so we recommend the use of smartphone headsets with push-button type input (Cardboard version 2) in which a physical component of the headset touches the smartphone screen. Another improvement will be to use version two of Cardboard which allows for easy in-app navigation and will additionally make the experience more immersive.

A third limitation involves the survey instrument. Although the survey tool proved satisfactory for this pilot study, the researchers hope to confirm the validity and reliability of this instrument for future studies involving VR technology. We hope either to redesign the current survey tool or to implement a survey tool which has proven strong validity and reliability such as Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope’s (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS).

Last, this pilot study involved a small sample size of participants. Although the number of students in this pilot study was manageable, the results would be strengthened by a larger number of participants. By incorporating more participants and placing them into specific categories and control groups, the researchers hope to examine how VR-based tasks might impact the anxiety level of students with different English proficiency levels and compare how VR-based tasks might impact the anxiety level of students from different academic years such as first-year students vs. second-year, third-year or fourth-year students.
References


Appendix A. Google Street View Explanation Print

How to use Google Street View

1. Open Street View on your smartphone

2. Enter the name of your university into the search bar and then touch the correct result.
   a. University of Leeds
   b. University of Sheffield
   c. Central Queensland University - Rockhampton Campus
   d. Victoria University - City Flinders Campus

3. Touch the photo to enter Street View mode.

4. Touch the Cardboard icon to enter Cardboard mode and then place your smartphone into the headset to look around.

5. Go back from Cardboard mode to regular map mode and use two fingers to zoom out. The blue lines are places you can move the yellow man to and enter cardboard mode again, and the red circles are also places you can visit. Try moving to a different place near the campus and entering Cardboard mode again.
Appendix B. Google Maps Points of Interest Explanation Print

Exploring Local Areas with Google Maps

Before you study abroad, let’s find some locations you might like to visit around your new campus!

1. Enter your **campus name** into the Google Maps search bar and choose your location

2. Press “X” on the right of the search bar

Option 1: Click “Explore food & drinks near...” at the bottom of the screen
   - click the tab at the top for types of restaurants and meals
   - choose from the different categories below

Option 2: Click the search bar at the top again and click “More” under the first 4 options that appear
   - choose from the categories of locations such as “supermarkets”, “libraries”, “convenience stores”, etc.
   - choose a location from the options

Suggestions from Josh and Chris

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leeds University</th>
<th>University of Sheffield</th>
<th>Central Queensland University (Rockhampton)</th>
<th>Victoria University (Flinders)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Old Bar</td>
<td>Showroom</td>
<td>Hog’s Breath</td>
<td>Grill’d Degraves Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Packhorse Pub</td>
<td>Independent Movie</td>
<td>Steakhouse</td>
<td>Sea Salt Degraves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyde Park Picture House</td>
<td>Theater</td>
<td>Demedios</td>
<td>Chatime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tick Tock Unlock</td>
<td>Millennium Gallery</td>
<td>Leanne’s on Berserker</td>
<td>Vapiano Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be At One Leeds</td>
<td>Botanic Gardens</td>
<td>Event Cinemas</td>
<td>City Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakery 164</td>
<td>Weston Park Museum</td>
<td>Stockland Rockhampton</td>
<td>Village Cinemas Crown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pickards Pop-Up Tea Room</td>
<td>The University Arsm</td>
<td>Karshaw Botanical Gardens</td>
<td>Batman Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leeds City Museum</td>
<td>Twisted Burger Company</td>
<td></td>
<td>Royal Botanical Gardens</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C. Pre-treatment Survey

Study Abroad Anxiety Survey

Name (Name) *

Short answer text

Academic year (Academic year) *

- 1st year
- 2nd year
- 3rd year
- 4th year

Study abroad location - university name (Study abroad location - university name) *

Short answer text

Most recent English language proficiency test scores - e.g. TOEIC 800, Eiken pre-1st level, etc.

Short answer text

1. In general, how anxious are you about studying abroad? (不怎么焦虑) *

- Not anxious at all
- A little anxious
- Moderately anxious
- Extremely anxious
2. 留学先の大学のキャンパス内や、街の中を移動する際に道に迷うことにつれて、どれくらい不安に感じていますか？ (How anxious are you about getting lost when you travel around your new campus or city?)

- 全く不安に感じていない (Not anxious at all)
- 少し不安に感じている (A little anxious)
- 不安に感じている (Moderately anxious)
- とても不安に感じている (Extremely anxious)

3. 留学先の国で英語を使うことを、どれくらい不安に感じていますか？ (How anxious are you about speaking English in the country you will be studying in?)

- 全く不安に感じていない (Not anxious at all)
- 少し不安に感じている (A little anxious)
- 不安に感じている (Moderately anxious)
- とても不安に感じている (Extremely anxious)

4. 留学先で行き方を訪れたり、その指示通りどおり着けるかどうか、どれくらい不安に感じていますか？ (How anxious are you about asking for and following directions in English?)

- 全く不安に感じていない (Not anxious at all)
- 少し不安に感じている (A little anxious)
- 不安に感じている (Moderately anxious)
- とても不安に感じている (Extremely anxious)

5. 留学のためにどのような準備をしていますか？ (What are you doing to prepare for your study abroad?)

Long-answer text

6. 留学についてどんな不安がありますか？ (What are some concerns you have about studying abroad?)

Long-answer text
Appendix D. Post-treatment Survey

Study Abroad Anxiety: Follow-up Survey

Form description

名前 (Name) *

学年 (Academic year) *
- 一年生 (1st year)
- 二年生 (2nd year)
- 三年生 (3rd year)
- 四年生 (4th year)

留学先の大学名 (Study abroad location - university name) *

1. 全体的にどれくらい留学について不安に感じていますか？ (In general, how anxious are you about studying abroad?)
- 全く不安に感じていない (Not anxious at all)
- 少し不安に感じている (A little anxious)
- 不安に感じている (Moderately anxious)
- とても不安に感じている (Extremely anxious)
2. 留学先の大学のキャンパス内や、街の中を移動する際に道に迷うことについて、どれくらい不安に感じていますか？ (How anxious are you about getting lost when you travel around your new campus or city?)

○ 全く不安に感じていない (Not anxious at all)
○ 少し不安に感じている (A little anxious)
○ 不安に感じている (Moderately anxious)
○ とても不安に感じている (Extremely anxious)

3. 留学先の国で英語を使うことを、どれくらい不安に感じていますか？ (How anxious are you about speaking English in the country you will be studying in?)

○ 全く不安に感じていない (Not anxious at all)
○ 少し不安に感じている (A little anxious)
○ 不安に感じている (Moderately anxious)
○ とても不安に感じている (Extremely anxious)

4. 留学先で行き方を訪ねたり、その指示通りたどり着けるかどうか、どれくらい不安に感じていますか？ (How anxious are you about asking for and following directions in English?)

○ 全く不安に感じていない (Not anxious at all)
○ 少し不安に感じている (A little anxious)
○ 不安に感じている (Moderately anxious)
○ とても不安に感じている (Extremely anxious)
Google Cardboard

How useful was using the Google Cardboard for helping you prepare for your study abroad?

- Not useful
- Somewhat useful
- Useful
- Very useful

Please tell us your general thoughts about the Google Cardboard activities.

What else will you do from now to prepare for your study abroad?
Japanese University Students’ Views on and Interests in Studying Abroad

Nobue Inoue
(Niigata University of Management)

Abstract

This study was conducted to explore the ideal one-week English language program abroad that would attract Japanese college students. To identify possible ideal programs, a questionnaire survey was administered to first-year university students in Niigata, Japan (N = 62). Key findings include the following: (1) most students preferred to study in the Anglosphere nations; (2) students seemed to be interested in learning English through leisure activities; (3) students also seemed to be interested in sightseeing and interacting with locals; (4) dormitories are unlikely to be selected for their stay; and (5) even the programs that students found attractive did not greatly impact their current sentiments toward studying abroad. The results imply that students favor the touristic and cultural components, with the exception of accommodation. Overall, results suggest that programs which are held in the Anglosphere countries and provide touristic and cultural experiences would be regarded as ideal one-week SA programs.

Keywords: study abroad, study abroad program, short-term study abroad, short-duration study abroad programs, motivation to study abroad, Japanese students study abroad

As reported by Japan’s Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [MEXT] (2015), there was a steady decline in the number of Japanese people who studied abroad from 2004 (82,945) to 2011 (57,501), even though the number marginally increased to 60,138 in 2012. This trend might have had something to do with the so-called inward-looking nature of Japan’s young generation. For example, Tanikawa (2011) reported that Naoki Ogi, professor of education at Hosei University in Tokyo, said that young Japanese were increasingly becoming introverted and unwilling to take on the challenge of studying abroad. Similarly, Harden (2010) reported that when Harvard President Drew Gilpin Faust visited Japan, she heard from Japanese students and educators that Japanese young people were inward-looking and preferred the comfort of home to venturing overseas.

Nevertheless, Dessoff (2006) contended that shorter study abroad (SA) experiences help relieve the concerns of students who have never traveled abroad or who do not want to spend a long period abroad. Furthermore, it is said that students do not consider studying abroad because it can be much more expensive than studying in their home country (Lauman, Stubbs, Gliozzo, & Lee, 2006; Stubbs & Carpenter, 2014). Indeed, according to the British Council (2014), the prohibitive cost is one of the main reasons why Japanese students are not interested in studying abroad. As short-term SA programs are defined as one to eight week programs (Spencer & Tuma, 2002) or one week to a semester programs (Dessoff, 2006), it is reasonable that a one-week SA program, which might be the cheapest option, is more likely to attract students who are unwilling to study abroad or who cannot afford a longer SA program due to the prohibitive cost. Therefore, this study aims to explore the ideal components of a one-week SA program that might appeal to Japanese university students.
Literature Review

According to Allen (2010), the choice to study abroad could be seen as a critical step in achieving linguistic goals. This belief is supported by the British Council (2014), which surveyed Japanese students, who were 16 to 25 years-old, to understand their perceptions of studying abroad and found that the vast majority studied overseas to improve their language skills. In particular, both the British Council and the Japan Student Services Organization [JASSO] (2019) found that the Anglosphere countries, such as Australia, Canada, the U.K., and the U.S., are the most popular destinations for Japanese students. Considering that English language learners, including Japanese college students, would prefer native accents to non-native accents (Chiba, Matsuura, & Yamamoto, 1995; Scales, Wennerstrom, Richard, & Wu, 2006), it is reasonable that Japanese students might be motivated, at least in part, to study abroad in a country where English is spoken as a native language.

However, both touristic and cultural aspects may also be an important factor that attracts students to want to study abroad. For example, the study by the British Council (2014) mentioned previously, revealed that the second most important reason Japanese students have for studying abroad was to travel overseas. Additionally, Newfields and Groger (2013) suggested that Japanese tertiary students are initially motivated to study abroad by touristic motives rather than formal academic interests in foreign languages or cultures. Furthermore, while Newfields and Groger appeared to separate touristic motives from cultures, Uysal, Li, and Sirakaya-Turk (2008) regard cultural components as one of the factors that could motivate individuals to travel, and Allen (2010) argues that foreign travel is one of the key elements for cultural learning. In this regard, students might seem to be motivated by the non-academic touristic and cultural components of SA programs.

Therefore, taken together, the findings of previous studies lead to the hypothesis that students are probably attracted by touristic and cultural components of SA programs, which are held in the Anglosphere countries.

Methodology

To devise a suitable survey, several overseas institutions were contacted to investigate the type of components that could be incorporated into a one-week English study abroad program for Japanese students. Based on these components, a five-point Likert scale survey consisting of 15 questions was designed. The 15 survey questions were primarily divided into the three categories of language learning (LL), extra-curricular activities (EA), and accommodations (AC). One additional question that did not belong to the three categories was included and is listed as other (OT). In addition to the Likert scale questions, the survey also included two questions to investigate students’ interests in studying abroad before taking the survey and two questions to investigate students’ interests in studying abroad after taking the survey (Appendix A).

The participants involved in this study were 62 first-year students attending a private university in Niigata, Japan. During the spring semester of 2016, the students took the survey in three separate groups. The survey did not require students to complete personal information concerning their identity. The survey took approximately 10 minutes for students to complete and their answers were analyzed shortly thereafter to find the means and standard deviations of responses using Microsoft Excel software.
Results

In order to systematically analyze students’ responses, the survey was divided into three sections. The first section consisted of two study abroad interest questions before the survey, the second section consisted of the three separate category questions of language learning, extracurricular activities, and accommodation and other, and the third section consisted of two study abroad interest questions after the survey. First, with regard to the study abroad interest questions asked before the survey, 19 (30.65%) students responded that they were interested in one-week SA programs, 35 (56.45%) students responded that they had no interest in such programs, and eight (12.90%) students responded that they were not sure. Among the 19 students who were interested in studying abroad, 17 (89.47%) students selected the Anglosphere as their favorable SA destination. Although four (21.05%) students also selected non-western nations where English is officially or widely spoken, such as Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines, 13 (68.42%) students answered that they were interested in studying only in the Anglosphere nations.

Next, with regard to the second section, responses from the Likert scale survey questions related to language learning (LL) were analyzed. Table 1 reveals the means and standard deviations of the survey questions pertaining to language learning. 1

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Language Learning Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey item</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Learn English at a very prestigious university</td>
<td>LL</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Improve English skills in a short period</td>
<td>LL</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Learn how to give a presentation in English</td>
<td>LL</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Learn English through fun activities, such as sports</td>
<td>LL</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Learn not only English but also other languages</td>
<td>LL</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g., Chinese)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. LL = language learning.  

   a Test subjects rated the attractiveness of the features on a five-point Likert scale ranging from attractive to unattractive (1 = unattractive; 2 = somewhat unattractive; 3 = neither unattractive nor attractive; 4 = somewhat attractive; 5 = attractive).

Results among the five survey questions investigating students’ interests in language learning while studying abroad varied slightly. For instance, ‘Learn English through fun activities, such as sports’ (Item 4) had the highest mean (M = 4.05) while ‘Learn English at a very prestigious university’ (Item 1) had the lowest mean (M = 3.40). In addition, ‘Learn how to give a presentation in English’ (Item 3) had the second lowest mean (M = 3.44). These results suggest that students are likely to be interested in having fun and being active while learning English through leisure activities.

Responses from the Likert scale survey questions in the second section related to extra-curricular activities (EA) were analyzed. Table 2 reveals the means and standard deviations of the survey questions pertaining to extra-curricular activities.

---

1 The entire data are available in Appendix B.
Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations of Extra-curricular & Activity Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey item</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>M⁴</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Visit an overseas branch of a famous Japanese company (including Q&amp;A sessions)</td>
<td>EA</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Experience internships in a local company (tasks can be arranged depending on the participants’ language skills)</td>
<td>EA</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Visit a local factory (factory tour)</td>
<td>EA</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Visit World Heritage Sites or famous tourist attractions (sightseeing &amp; field trips)</td>
<td>EA</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Interact with local college students</td>
<td>EA</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Interact with local citizens (e.g., observe lifestyle and experience diversity)</td>
<td>EA</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. EA = extra-curricular activities. ⁴Test subjects rated the attractiveness of the features on a five-point Likert scale ranging from attractive to unattractive (1 = unattractive; 2 = somewhat unattractive; 3 = neither unattractive nor attractive; 4 = somewhat attractive; 5 = attractive).

Results among the six survey questions investigating students’ interests in extra-curricular activities while studying abroad varied slightly. For example, Item 9, ‘Visit World Heritage Sites or famous tourist attractions (sightseeing & field trips)’ had the highest mean (M = 4.34), followed by Item 11, ‘Interact with local citizens (e.g., observe their lifestyle and experience diversity)’ (M = 3.92), or Item 10, ‘Interact with local college students’ (M = 3.85). In contrast, Item 6, ‘Visit an overseas branch of a famous Japanese company (including Q&A sessions)’ had the lowest mean (M = 3.61), followed by Item 7, ‘Experience internships in a local company (tasks can be arranged depending on the participants’ language skills)’ (M = 3.65). These results suggest that students are interested in visiting tourist sites and interacting with students and citizens more than having experiences with companies in a foreign country.

Responses from the Likert scale survey questions in the second section related to accommodations (AC) and other (OT) were analyzed. Table 3 reveals the means and standard deviations of the survey questions pertaining to accommodations.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of Accommodation Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey item</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>M⁴</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12. Stay in a luxury hotel</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Stay with a local host family (homestay)</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Stay on campus (dormitory)</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Dress up and attend a formal certification ceremony</td>
<td>OT</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. AC = accommodations. OT = other. ⁴Test subjects rated the attractiveness of the features on a five-point Likert scale ranging from attractive to unattractive (1 = unattractive; 2 = somewhat unattractive; 3 = neither unattractive nor attractive; 4 = somewhat attractive; 5 = attractive).

Results among the four survey questions investigating students’ interests in accommodations and other while studying abroad varied slightly. The responses to Item 12 (M = 3.97), ‘Stay in a luxury hotel’ and Item 13 (M = 3.66) ‘Stay with a local host family (homestay)’ had the highest means. These responses were higher than Item 14 (M = 3.23) ‘Stay on campus (dormitory)’. Even Item 15 (M = 3.52) ‘Dress up and attend a formal
had a higher mean than Item 14. As a result, it appears that students were less likely to choose a dormitory for their stay while studying abroad.

Lastly, the two questions of the third section were analyzed. Of the 35 students who had no interest in studying abroad, 26 (74.29%) students responded that they still had no intention of pursuing overseas study even if the components that they found attractive/somewhat attractive were available. In addition, of the 13 students who chose to study only in the Anglosphere countries, five (38.46%) students showed interest in SA programs held in non-Anglosphere countries if they had access to attractive/somewhat attractive features, but eight (61.54%) students were still unsure or did not want to study in a non-Western country. These results imply that even attractive features might not have a great impact on students’ perceptions on studying abroad.

**Discussion**

The responses from this survey suggest three main findings that seem to be related to previous study abroad research. First, overall, ‘Visit World Heritage Sites or famous tourist attractions (sightseeing & field trips)’ (Item 9) had the highest mean score, followed by ‘Learn English through fun activities, such as sports’ (Item 4). Although the latter item was categorized as ‘language learning,’ considering that sports and activities are regarded as touristic components that would motivate people to travel (Goodall, 1988; Uysal et al., 2008), this might suggest that students were motivated by its touristic aspects. These findings are consistent with the previously mentioned notion that the non-academic tourism components would be appealing to students (British Council, 2014; Newfields & Groger, 2013).

Second, regarding cultural components, students favored cultural aspects, such as ‘Interact with local citizens (e.g., observe their lifestyle and experience diversity)’ (Item 11) and ‘Interact with local college students’ (Item 10). Thus, these responses seem to be in line with the earlier mentioned hypothesis that students might favor informal and non-academic cultural aspects of studying abroad (British Council, 2014; Uysal et al., 2008).

Third, regarding accommodations, the mean score of ‘Stay in a luxury hotel’ (Item 12) was rated higher than the two other housing options including ‘Stay with a local host family (homestay)’ (Item 13) and ‘Stay on campus (dormitory)’ (Item 14). Hussin and Kunjuraman (2014) postulated that a homestay experience gives tourists the chance to interact and experience the daily lives of locals through the host family’s culture. Similarly, dormitories might afford students the chance to enhance their cultural experience by interacting with new people and getting involved with campus activities (Center for Global Education., n.d.; Morgan, n.d.). Therefore, homestays and dormitories should have been more appealing to those who value cultural experiences. However, contrary to previous research, the responses from this study revealed that students would prefer to stay in a luxury hotel. Considering that the potential disadvantages of the homestay and dormitory options are the lack of freedom and privacy (Frost, n.d.; Lidstone & Rueckert, 2007; Morgan, n.d.), these results might imply that students value their privacy more than intercultural opportunities. Another possible explanation may be attributed to the wording of the question itself. The use of the ‘luxury’ in the question ‘Stay in a luxury hotel’ (Item 12), for example, may have led students to believe that the quality of such an accommodation would be superior and more comfortable than a residing at a homestay house or college dormitory.
Conclusion

This article investigated the type of components that might be ideal to include into a one-week English language study abroad program for Japanese university students. With regard to the host country, it was found that students would hope to study in a country where English is spoken as a native language (i.e., Anglosphere). The study also found that touristic aspects, such as sightseeing and leisure activities, could be the biggest motivating factor. These findings are in line with Newfields and Groger (2013) who suggested that SA organizers should recognize touristic motives for embarking on study abroad. Additionally, the results imply that students seem to favor cultural experiences that include the interaction with local citizens and students, even though they do not seem to appreciate the potential to enhance these interactions by residing in a homestay or dormitory. T. Toyokawa and N. Toyokawa (2002) maintained that even though it is often assumed that students spend much time on academic activities while studying abroad, they also have non-academic goals, motivations, and interests. Therefore, students would spend a great deal of time engaging in extra-curricular activities outside the classroom, including attending cultural events, participating in sports, and socializing with host nationals (T. Toyokawa & N. Toyokawa, 2002). Based on these findings, the results from this study seem to suggest that the ideal one-week SA program that might attract Japanese students would include a variety or informal and non-academic travel and cultural experiences that take place in Anglosphere countries.

Taking into account the findings from this survey, this study has three main limitations that should be considered. First, this study included 62 first-year students from the same university. Future research might consider including a larger number of students of varied academic years from a wider range of schools in order to help generalize findings to other student populations and other universities. Second, the wording of some of the questions may have been problematic or confusing to some students. As previously mentioned, the use of the word ‘luxury’ (Item 12) may have misled students. Therefore, future studies will refine the wording of survey questions in order to more precisely pin point the motivating or demotivating factors of a study abroad program. Third, this study was limited in that it focused on solely the components that might be attractive for a one-week SA program. As a result, not all the findings of this study may necessarily be applied to SA programs that are one month, one semester or one year in length. Future studies of this kind, however, might investigate what students would like to learn and experience depending on the duration of their stay abroad.
References


Appendix A. English Translation of the Questionnaire

Are you interested in one-week SA programs?
   □ Yes  □ No  □ Neither

For those who are interested in one-week SA programs, in which country do you want to study abroad? Please check all that apply.
   □ Anglosphere countries  □ non-Anglosphere countries where English is widely/officially spoken (e.g. Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines)

Please rate the following one-week SA program features ranging from attractive to unattractive.3
   (1) Language course curriculum
      - Learn English at a very prestigious university
      - Improve English skills in a short period
      - Learn how to make a presentation in English
      - Learn English through fun activities, such as sports
      - Learn not only English but also other languages (e.g., Chinese)
   (2) Extra-curricular components
      - Visit an overseas branch of a famous Japanese company (including Q&A sessions)
      - Experience internships in a local company (tasks can be arranged depending on the participants’ language skills)
      - Visit a local factory (factory tour)
      - Visit World Heritage Sites or famous tourist attractions (sightseeing & field trips)
      - Interact with local college students
      - Interact with local citizens (e.g., observe their lifestyle and experience diversity)
   (3) Accommodation options
      - Stay in a luxury hotel
      - Stay with a local host family (homestay)
      - Stay on campus (dormitory)
   (4) Other
      - Dress up and attend a formal certification ceremony

For those who are not interested in one-week SA programs, do you have any interest in one-week SA programs that include components you find attractive/somewhat attractive?
   □ No  □ Yes  □ Neither

For those who want to study only in the Anglosphere countries, do you have any interest in one-week SA programs held in non-Anglosphere nations if components you find attractive/somewhat attractive are available?
   □ No  □ Yes  □ Neither

2 The original questionnaire was written in Japanese. In addition, the original questionnaire is slightly different from the questionnaire shown in Appendix A because demographic questions and questions that would be beyond the focus of this study are omitted.
3 The students were asked to indicate their level of fondness on a five-point Likert-type scale.
## Appendix B. Means and Standard Deviations of Participants' Ratings of Program Features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey item</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Learn English at a very prestigious university</td>
<td>LL</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Improve English skills in a short period</td>
<td>LL</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Learn how to give a presentation in English</td>
<td>LL</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Learn English through fun activities, such as sports</td>
<td>LL</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Learn not only English but also other languages (e.g., Chinese)</td>
<td>LL</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Visit an overseas branch of a famous Japanese company (including Q&amp;A sessions)</td>
<td>EA</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Experience internships in a local company (tasks can be arranged depending on the participants’ language skills)</td>
<td>EA</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Visit a local factory (factory tour)</td>
<td>EA</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Visit World Heritage Sites or famous tourist attractions (sightseeing &amp; field trips)</td>
<td>EA</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Interact with local college students</td>
<td>EA</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Interact with local citizens (e.g., observe their lifestyle and experience diversity)</td>
<td>EA</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Stay in a luxury hotel</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Stay with a local host family (homestay)</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Stay on campus (dormitory)</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Dress up and attend a formal certification ceremony</td>
<td>OT</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** LL = language learning. EA = extra-curricular activities. AC = accommodations. OT = other. LL refers to the course content of language class; EA includes any activity other than language learning. 

* Test subjects rated the attractiveness of the features on a five-point Likert scale ranging from attractive to unattractive (1 = unattractive; 2 = somewhat unattractive; 3 = neither unattractive nor attractive; 4 = somewhat attractive; 5 = attractive).
Why Study Abroad in the USA: What to Expect and Prepare For!

by Mike Matsuno
GoGlobal.me (2017)
ISBN: (Paper): 9781521038499

Background

What book should students read if they are interested in learning about studying abroad in the United States? Is there a single resource that language instructors can use as part of a study abroad preparation course that addresses all the pertinent issues students should know before they consider studying abroad? This book addresses a variety of topics for students to consider both before and during a study abroad experience.

The author of the book has a strong and varied international background. In addition to his multicultural upbringing in Hawaii, he has earned master’s degrees from the United States and Japan, participated in seven study abroad programs in Central America, Japan, and Southeast Asia, taught at universities in both the United States and Japan, and has been involved with international education and study abroad programs in the United States, Japan, and Ireland. Based on these experiences, the author has written 50 short and easy to read chapters to help students learn and understand what to expect and what to prepare for when participating in a study abroad program in the United States. Although the chapters are not divided into particular categories, the main themes of this book can be basically broken down into eight major sections. These include topics such as types of study abroad programs, reasons to study abroad, study abroad benefits, applying to a study abroad
program, academic skills for studying abroad, social skills for studying abroad, student independence, and student motivation.

**Strengths and Weaknesses**

On one hand, this book has a few strengths. First, the chapters are short and relatively easy to read. While probably not meant for true beginners, ESL students who have an intermediate level of English, for example, should have the vocabulary to be able to read most of the chapters in this book. As a result, students could either read book chapters in class as a group or individually for homework.

A second strength of this book is that it addresses the cultural and educational differences between Asia and the United States. Using this as a foundation, the author emphasizes the importance of being active inside the classroom, in the form of participation and presentation skills, as well as the benefits of being independent and outgoing outside the classroom, especially when having new experiences and making friends. These approaches will assist students to be academically and socially successful.

A third and possibly unique strength of this sort of book is that a few of its chapters address the inevitable ups and downs that students will encounter when studying abroad. The author emphasizes the importance of navigating through the struggles, changes, and failures that are a part of the study abroad experience because, in doing so, they will eventually become more self-confident as a student and person, as well as more aware as a global citizen.

On the other hand, this book has a few shortcomings. First, with regard to the book’s content, there are a couple claims stated in the book which seem to promote American culture and education over Japanese culture and education. For example, culturally speaking, in the chapter discussing the role of risk taking and studying abroad, the author says that the Japanese tendency to be risk averse correlates with their low level of entrepreneurship (p. 103). As a second example, educationally speaking, in the chapter discussing creativity, the author mentions that some countries like Japan do not challenge people to think creatively and this is why companies such as Apple, Facebook, Twitter, Disneyland, and Universal Studios all developed in the United States (p. 105).

These are interesting claims, however, they may be topics of debate as there are several examples of entrepreneurship and creativity from Japan to counter these statements. For instance, although there are Internet articles that refer to Japanese as being risk averse (Knopp, 2012; Modak, 2017), this does not necessarily mean they do not have entrepreneur-type thinking. Recently, as many 400 Japanese entrepreneurs met at the Global Venture Forum in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, to discuss their reach into global markets around the world (Baird, 2018). In addition, although the Japanese educational style may be different from the United States, this does not necessarily mean it fosters less creativity. The karaoke machine (Frazen, 2014), the Sony Walkman and Discman portable media players (Nguyen, 2018), and the Nintendo Wii home video game console (Ewalt, 2006), are just some examples of creative and innovative products from Japan that have revolutionized the way people enjoy music and use computers. Therefore, although the
The author presents a variety of issues related to studying abroad, he neglects to cite specific resources throughout his book that might further lend support to his claims.

A second shortcoming of this book’s content is that some of the chapter topics may be challenging for language learners to fully embrace without the guidance of a language instructor who is familiar with American culture. For example, chapters discussing topics such as Sense of Humor, Spontaneity and Improvisation, and Sales and Persuasion are all cultural characteristics that may be too challenging for Asian students to understand on their own (Pringle, 2012; Rudlin, 2014). Although the mention of these cultural points may be informative, including exercises and activities to complement these topics would further aid readers in gaining a better understanding of these traits, and may also serve to avoid potentially embarrassing situations should they elect to study abroad in the United States.

Third, with regard to formatting, a significant limitation of this book is that it is written in a continuous stream of chapters that end and then begin in the middle of the same page. This type of formatting may unfortunately lead readers to continue onto the next chapter without really absorbing the key points that were mentioned. Or, if this book is used as a resource to be read as part of a study abroad course, the lack of division between chapters may potentially make it difficult for an instructor to systematically organize and discuss the major issues and topics associated with studying abroad. Therefore, it would be more helpful if the chapters of this book were organized according to its major themes. In addition, providing a few discussion questions would not only provide some separation, but also help readers to pause, reflect, and remember key points before continuing to the next chapter.

**The Bottom Line**

Overall, due to its wide variety of topics, this book has the potential to be a productive resource for those interested in learning more about studying abroad. To effectively use this book and overcome its shortcomings and limitations, ideally an instructor of a study abroad preparation course could choose pertinent chapters and create discussion questions for students to answer as homework. Then, in class, students could discuss and debate their answers with each other. Instructors could also provide interactive role-play activities and or audio-visual exercises from the Internet to further convey and support the key points for those topics that may be difficult for students to grasp. In this way, the content of the book can be reinforced in order for students to gain a fuller appreciation of what they should expect and what they need to prepare for when studying abroad in the United States.
References


Robert Dilenschneider (Jichi Medical University)