

Ryūgaku:

Explorations in Study Abroad

Vol. 12 No. 2 December 2019

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This journal is published twice a year by the Study Abroad SIG of the Japan Association for Language Teaching

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A Case Study of a Japanese Student in the Six Month English as a Foreign Language Programme at Hertford College

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify whether the Six Month English as a Foreign Language Programme provided by Hertford College, University of Oxford, would be verifiably beneficial for Japanese students. A qualitative case study was conducted on a single participant who attended the programme during the 2017-18 academic year. The data were collected through multiple instruments (a semi-structured interview and three reflective journals) for triangulation purposes and analyzed through content analysis. The five main themes identified from the programme were (1) language instruction that focused on grammar and vocabulary; (2) content-based instruction that focused on productive speaking and writing skills; (3) academic modules that taught British culture and business; (4) the dynamic of the programme that fostered cross-cultural interaction; and (5) the dynamic of the Oxford University Japan Society's that established social networks and promoted cross-cultural awareness. Overall, these results suggest that the programme would be beneficial for Japanese students wishing to improve their English language skills and learn about British culture.

Keywords: study abroad, Hertford College, University of Oxford, Hertford College International Programmes, Six Month English as a Foreign Language Programme, Six-Month Programme

Introduction

Hertford College, known by its famous landmark, the Bridge of Sighs in the city of Oxford, is one of the 38 colleges forming the University of Oxford (International Programmes Department [IPD], n.d.-c). The college prides itself on being one of Oxford's friendliest and most approachable colleges (IPD, n.d.-a), and it offers a variety of programs designed to improve students' English language skills (Hertford College, n.d.-a). In particular, the Six Month English as a Foreign Language Programme (Hertford College, 2019), which aims to help students excel academically, understand social and cultural differences between the U.K. and their home country, and live a rich and independent life, is a unique program at the university (Hertford College, n.d.-e).

To date, no study has investigated what the programme offers and whether it is beneficial for Japanese university students. In order to help educators decide whether the programme is right for their students, more studies should be conducted to gain insight into the programme. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to investigate whether the programme is verifiably beneficial for Japanese university students. In order to fulfill the research objective, this paper 1) reviews the programme to understand its context and identify research questions, 2) describes the methodology and results of the examination of the programme, and 3) briefly identifies whether the programme is beneficial for Japanese students.

Review of the Programme

Curriculum

The programme is intended for international students and is not included in Oxford's undergraduate and graduate studies programs (Hertford College, n.d.-d). It originally began and is still mainly comprised of Japanese students (Hertford College, n.d.-e), even though it is open to all international students (IPD, personal communication, November 29, 2016). Enrollees study with their peers and are housed as a group in the same accommodation (Hertford College, n.d.-c). This kind of learning environment is called 'island,' where students live and study together as a cohort from the same program (Pedersen, 2010; Rexeisen & Al-Khatib, 2009). In this regard, the programme can be characterized as an island program for Japanese students.

Woolf (2007) suggested that unlike the host institutions' regular courses, which are designed to serve the interests of local students, the curriculum of an island program can be designed in such a way as to meet international students' needs. According to the British Council (2014), the primary purpose of studying abroad for Japanese students is to improve their language skills and, therefore, they select a particular study abroad destination mainly to experience that culture (British Council, 2014).

The programme runs from October to March and consists of two ten-week terms (Hertford College, n.d.-b). Although the programme did not officially separate each module, its main modules can principally be categorized as either academic-based or language-based according to the classification system used in this study. Table 1 reveals the two academic and language modules and their content focus.

Table 1. *Academic and Language Modules and Content Focus*

Types	Modules	Content Focus
Academic	British Culture	Lectures – British history and culture
		Fieldtrips – famous sights in the U.K. (e.g., National Gallery)
	Business	Lectures – education, Brexit, global growth, Japan’s in the business world, etc.
		Pre-lecture activities – preparation for lectures (vocabulary, discussion)
	Fieldtrips – factory tour, school visit	
Language	Academic Writing	writing structure, appropriate language, paraphrasing
	Current Affairs	research on British political and social systems
	Exam Focus	TOEIC and IELTS training
	Idiomatic Language	idiomatic language and expressions, loan words, neologisms, phrasal words
	Language Focus	communicative grammar
	Phonology	phonological study
	Social and Functional English	English outside of the classroom

Note. Based on the available sample schedule from the 2016-17 academic year. The data were gathered from Hertford College, (n.d.-e), IPD (n.d.-b), and IPD (n.d.-d).

The per-term teaching hours of each module type help explain the programme’s structure. Data compiled from IPD (n.d.-b), for example, reveals the number of hours participants studied in both the academic and language models in the first and second terms.

Table 2. *Teaching Hours in the Programme’s Academic and Language Modules*

Types	Modules	First term	Second term
Academic	British Culture (lecture)	6	0
	British Culture (fieldtrips)	10.5	1.5
	Business (lecture)	0	31.5
	Business (pre-lecture activities)	0	9
	Business (fieldtrips)	0	9
	Total	16.5	51
Language	Academic Writing	12	15
	Current Affairs	10.5	10.5
	Exam Focus	10.5	13.5
	Idiomatic Language	10.5	4.5
	Language Focus	46.5	3
	Phonology, Social and Functional English	13.5	6
	Total	103.5	52.5

Note. Based on the available sample schedule from the 2016-17 academic year. The data were compiled from IPD (n.d.-b).

As shown in Table 2, more class time is spent in the first term on language modules than in the second term. However, although the second term also spends quite a few hours on language modules (see Table 2), its language classes focus on more business related vocabulary than the first term (Hertford College, n.d.-e) and the academic modules focus more on business components rather than on culture components (Hertford College, n.d.-e).

Content-based instruction is a method of teaching that integrates language instruction with subject-matter instruction in the target language (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). According to Peachey (n.d.), content-based instruction, which makes learning a language more interesting and motivating, is a natural way to develop students' language ability. In this regard, the second term appears to adopt content-based instruction by covering business topics in order to help students effectively improve their English.

Overall, the progression of the modules suggest that the emphasis of the first term is to improve students' English communicative skills whereas the emphasis of the second term is to enhance students' English abilities by learning about British business and culture. Therefore, it appears that the programme's curriculum takes full advantage of its characterization as an island program in order to meet the needs of Japanese students who wish to improve their English language skills and learn about British culture.

Social Life

Previous research suggests that the more contact students have with host nationals rather than with compatriots, the higher the satisfaction level they are likely to show (Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011; Ward & Masgoret, 2004). Therefore, the fact that the programme is only comprised of Japanese students might negatively affect enrollees' perceptions of it. For example, Edwards (2000) suggested that students attending island programs might find themselves socially isolated from the local community.

Nevertheless, Woolf (2007) speculated that, while those who are immersed in the host institution tend to draw their insights on studying abroad solely from a classroom-based experience, students attending island programs are likely to have their study abroad experience outside the classroom to gain a better understanding of the host culture. In addition, Edwards (2000) argued that island programs that allow students to get out of their peer group are advantageous for students studying abroad. In particular, engaging in an extra-curricular activity can also serve as a valuable opportunity to help students develop social networks to meet and interact with host nationals who share similar interests (T. Toyokawa & N. Toyokawa, 2002; Weiss, 1973, cited in Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008).

Students enrolled in the programme are encouraged to engage in extra-curricular activities by joining clubs and societies at Hertford (Hertford College, n.d.-e). For example, enrollees often become key members in supporting the Oxford University Japan Society (OUJS) (Hertford College, n.d.-e), a student-led society that holds events related to aspects of Japanese culture (OUJS, n.d.). OUJS runs a Japanese language evening class each week and gives Japanese students a chance to teach their language to locals (Hertford College, n.d.-e). In addition, there is often a visit to a local pub after Japanese class that provides a good opportunity for students to practice their English and make friends outside the classroom (Hertford College, n.d.-e).

As reported by Ngow (2013), most British university students are unwilling to mix with international students because of cultural differences. In the past, previous studies have shown that Japanese students wishing to meet native speakers in the host country have experienced difficulty going out to meet locals (Ellis, 1993) because they tend to be shy and to keep their distance (Kudo & Simkin, 2003). Based on these considerations, engaging in OUIJ can help Japanese students interact with British students who already have an interest in Japanese language and culture. Additionally, activities that help establish social networks can help students learn the social customs and values of the host culture (T. Toyokawa & N. Toyokawa, 2002) and can become the main source of language use outside the classroom (Ellis, 1993). For example, T. Toyokawa and N. Toyokawa (2002) found that Japanese students who engaged in extra-curricular activities had a tendency to show satisfaction with their study abroad experiences. Therefore, students who participate in the programme may show positive perceptions of their social lives abroad when they take full advantage of extra-curricular activities, such as OUIJ.

To summarize, even though students might have negative perceptions of the programme's island characteristics, they might gain some positive perceptions of their social lives by making the most of extra-curricular activities.

Research Questions

To investigate the programme's academic and social aspects, the research questions are as follows:

- (1) Does the curriculum of the programme meet the academic needs of a Japanese student who wishes to improve their English language skills and understand British culture?
- (2) What is a Japanese student's perceptions of the programme's social aspects?

Methods

Participant

This case-study is of a single participant who was a second-year female undergraduate at a private university in Japan. The participant took part in the programme from October 2017 to March 2018. Her TOEIC score before departure was 620 (the programme did not require English language). Based on the results of the placement tests given on her arrival, the participant was placed in the lower-level class of two learner groups.

The participant was selected for this study because her reason for attending the programme as well as her previous study abroad experience met the objectives of this research. The participant decided to participate in the programme in order to improve her English language skills and to interact with local British students. During high school, the participant attended a 10-month exchange program in a European country (non-Anglosphere) and, although she was immersed in the host environment, she felt that she was not able to interact well with local students. The purpose of the study was explained to the participant (as shown in Appendix A), and she voluntarily agreed to take part in the research, signing her written consent accordingly (see Appendix B).

Study Design

A qualitative case study was adopted for this research in order to enhance the exploration and understanding of perceptions and experiences in a single case (i.e., a single language learner in a particular context) and to help draw implications that are broadly applicable (Kumar, 2014; Moule & Goodman, 2009; Riazi, 2016).

Procedure

This study used two primary data collection methods: a semi-structured interview (SSI) and the participant's reflective journals (RJ). The former method was adopted to investigate information from an individual's perspective and it is well-suited for case studies (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016). The latter method was used to supplement the interview data for triangulation purposes (J. W. Creswell & J. D. Creswell, 2017; Polit & Beck, 2004; Riazi, 2016). This method was used with the recognition that getting at the truth through interviews may hinder case studies because it often involves investigating past behavior and participants may forget or reconstruct their interpretations (Newby, 2013).

The 90-minute interview (see Appendix C) was conducted in Japanese when the participant returned from the U.K. in March 2018. The interview was audio recorded and subsequently transcribed to ensure that the data reflected the verbatim responses of the participant (Polit & Beck, 2004). The reflective journals, written in Japanese, were recorded a total of three times; the first time focused on the first term in December 2017, the second focused on the second term in March 2018, and the third, written in April 2018, focused on the programme as a whole. The interview transcript and reflective journals were translated from Japanese to English before analysis.

Analysis

The aforementioned data were analyzed by content analysis in order to identify key themes emerging from the participant's responses (Kumar, 2014; Moule & Goodman, 2009). Content analysis was conducted in a three-step process according to the procedures set forth in Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017). First, the text data were divided into smaller meaning units which were condensed further into condensed meaning units (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Second, each condensed meaning unit was coded, and then grouped into categories (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Third and finally, common themes were identified from the latent content found within the multiple categories (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Figure 1 reveals the three steps of how the data was systematically analyzed.

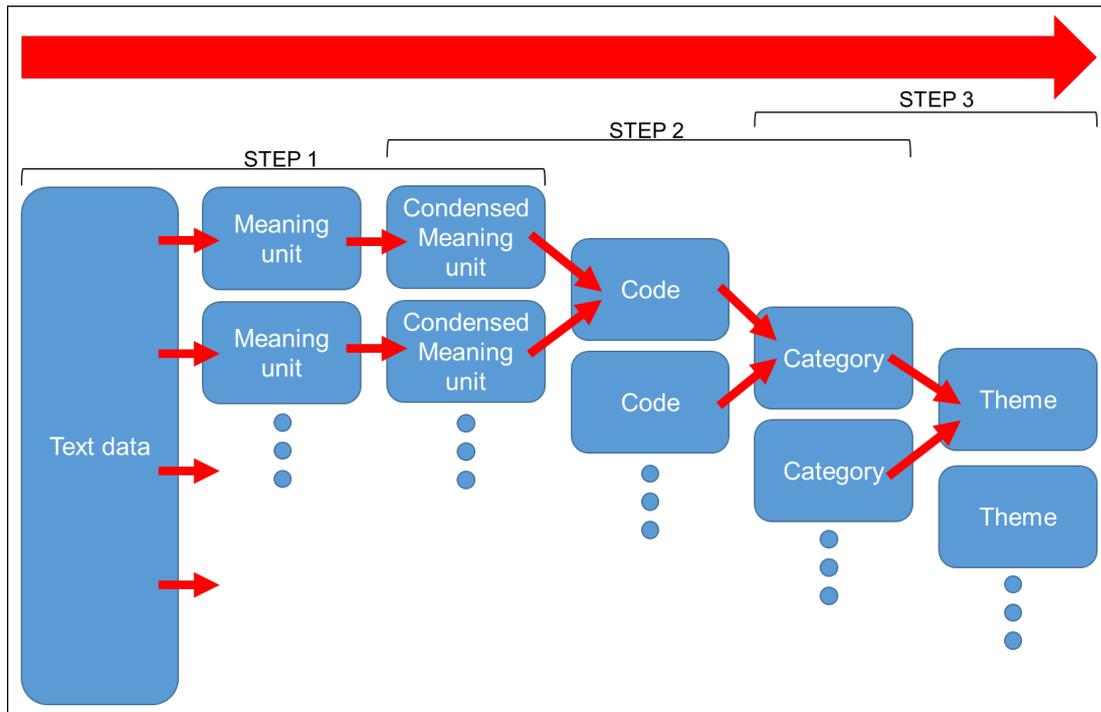


Figure 1. Coding process of this study (see Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017).

Results

Research Question 1: Does the curriculum of the programme meet the academic needs of a Japanese student who wishes to improve their English language skills and understand British culture?

The three fundamental themes that emerged from the ten categories were related to language instruction, content-based instruction, and culture and business learning. Table 3 reveals the categories and themes that were identified to answer the first research question.

Table 3. *Categories and Themes for Research Question (1)*

Categories	Themes
Participant's characteristics	1. First term helped increase lexical range and improve speaking skills through language modules focused on grammar and vocabulary
Characteristics of the first term	
Perceptions of the first term	
Benefits of the first term	
Participant's characteristics	2. Second term was more favorable than first term because it helped improve speaking and writing skills due to content-based instruction focused on productive skills
Characteristics of the second term	
Perceptions of the second term	
Benefits of the second term	
Perceptions of academic modules	3. Academic modules that taught British culture and developed business skills were beneficial
Benefits of academic modules	

Note. Data sources, coding, categories, and themes in Appendix D.

Theme 1: Language Instruction

The results of two sources from the reflective journal (RJ1) and semi-structured interview (SSI) suggest that the first term helped the participant increase her lexical range and improve her English speaking skills through language modules that focused on grammar and vocabulary. For example, according to the participant, her weak grammar and vocabulary skills had negatively affected her English proficiency prior to her studies at Hertford:

I originally didn't know the difference in usage between, for example, boring and bored, and modal verbs, such as should, must, and can...I originally didn't have a wide range of vocabulary and, because of this, I used the same words a lot when I spoke and wrote. (SSI)

However, the participant explained that the first three months of the first term was comprised of language modules that focused on vocabulary and grammar. Although the participant expressed that, "many of the modules during the first term were difficult (RJ1)" she reported that she was able to improve her English speaking skills stating, "When I go shopping or have conversations, I feel that my English is improving little by little compared to prior to attending the programme" (RJ1). In addition, the participant stated, "Thanks to the fact that I increased the amount of vocabulary I'm familiar with, I increased the number of expressions to use. I believe that the first term language modules helped break barriers to speaking in English a little" (SSI). As a result, it appears the participant benefited from the language instruction because she was able to improve her communication skills.

Theme 2: Content-Based Instruction

The results from three sources (RJ2, SSI) suggest that the second term content-based instruction was able to build upon communication skills established from the first-term language instruction. For example, the participant reported that the second term was new and challenging because the business modules provided her with more opportunities to express herself than the first term:

There were a wide variety of essay topics ranging from education, leadership, and marketing to environmental issues. I had difficulty writing an essay due to my lack of vocabulary about various business topics...It was quite new for me to learn business in English...I had many opportunities to express myself through discussion and writing. (RJ2)

Also:

Most of the things we learned during the second term were new to me...I had more opportunities to express my opinions than the first term. One day, we discussed what kind of elements one should have to become a good leader. We had a variety of discussion opportunities...as I expected, I couldn't express myself well in English. We discussed as much as we could. (SSI)

The participant felt that, “the second term was more rewarding and advanced than the first term” (RJ2). In particular, she reported that it helped to improve her speaking and writing skills when she reported, “I guess that my English discussion skills improved the most during the second term” (SSI) and, “I improved my writing little by little by writing an academic essay many times, and I was able to enjoy writing an essay compared with before” (RJ2). Due to these comments, it seems the participant benefited even more from the second term content-based instruction because it challenged her to express herself on topics beyond basic communication.

Theme 3: Culture and Business Learning

The results from three sources (RJ1, RJ2, SSI) describe the Culture and Business Learning activities that took place outside the classroom setting. For example, the participant’s perceptions of the British Culture academic modules, which helped her learn about British culture, were positive when she expressed, “There was a class to learn about the history of Oxford University and nice pubs while exploring the city of Oxford. We also had a class to visit London’s National Gallery with teachers and classmates” (RJ1). The participant also stated:

The field trips, such as visiting London, London’s National Gallery, Oxford including Jericho areas, and so on, were great experiences. I also learned that Oxford students themselves learn about their university’s history when they start their program. So, a lecture about the history of Oxford University including its college system was interesting. (SSI)

As for the business academic modules, the participant reported that they helped her develop her business skills and expressed, “I was able to learn about a wide variety of business topics, such as management, leadership, marketing, Brexit, and human rights” (RJ2). In particular, the participant seemed to value the experience of a field trip to a BMW factory and stated, “Visiting BMW’s Oxford MINI Plant was beneficial, which gave me an opportunity to think about how to corroborate with artificial intelligence in this digital age” (RJ2). In addition, the participant expressed, “Visiting a BMW MINI factory was amazing. It was wonderful to see the whole car-making process, including assembly and welding for the first time. It was interesting to see how automobiles were manufactured” (SSI). Based on these comments, it appears the Culture and Business module was beneficial for the participant because it afforded her an opportunity to experience the business culture in Britain.

Research Question 2: What is a Japanese student’s perceptions of the programme’s social aspects?

The two fundamental themes that emerged from the six categories were related to the overall perceptions of the programme dynamic and the OUJS dynamic. Table 4 reveals the categories and themes identified to answer the second research question.

Table 4. *Categories and Themes for Research Question (2)*

Categories	Themes
Perceptions of island programs	4. Not fully satisfied with island feature from language and cultural perspectives, but acknowledged benefits of positive peer pressure to promote cross-cultural interaction
Disadvantages of island programs	
Participant’s personality	
Benefits of island programs	
Benefits of OUJS	5. OUJS helped build social networks with those who have common interests, which helped use English, develop cultural sensitivity, and increase cross-cultural awareness
Benefits of social networks	

Note. Data sources, coding, categories, and themes in Appendix E.

Theme 4: Program Dynamic

The results from two sources (RJ3, SSI) suggest that, even though the participant was not fully satisfied with language and cultural characteristics of the programme, she nevertheless acknowledged the benefits of positive peer pressure from this environment to promote cross-cultural interaction. For instance, on the one hand, the participant explained that she had previous concerns about the programme due to its island feature:

In the beginning, I was wondering if the programme would be the right program for me because it was intended for Japanese students. I was worried about whether I would be able to improve my English and make friends with local students by studying with only Japanese students. (RJ3)

The participant also pointed out the disadvantages of the island characteristics from language and cultural perspectives:

Unfortunately, as I expected, we used Japanese in class instead of English because all of us were from Japan...I shared a house with other Japanese classmates, so I might have had fewer opportunities to learn about British culture compared to those experiencing homestays. (SSI)

As a result of these disadvantages, it appears the participant wished that she had been able to live and study with British and other international students.

I wish I had been able to live with not only Japanese students, but also British and other international students. It might have been different, if I could have done this. I think it would have been nice if we had British and other international students in class too. (SSI)

On the other hand, the participant acknowledged the benefits of the island program because enrolling directly in regular university courses might not necessarily afford students the opportunity to interact with host nationals:

I heard from Japanese exchange students studying in the U.K. that they hung out with only Japanese as they were enrolled in regular courses suddenly. So, I also think it might be easier to make friends when we are only with Japanese students because all of them are in the same situation, putting effort into making friends. (SSI)

Furthermore, the participant recognized that some of her classmates succeeded in making local friends:

Those who spoke English well were able to make friends easily. That's what I actually thought seeing my classmates. Making friends might be also related to individual personality. I think that chatty and social people were able to have a good start. (SSI)

Therefore, the participant reported that she tried her best to make the most of cross-cultural opportunities:

My goals of studying abroad were to stop being shy and make friends with many people. At first, it was very hard for me, but after seeing my classmates enjoying interacting with many local friends in the first two months, I put a lot of effort into interacting with people by taking part in Japanese lessons every Thursday, attending events organized by Oxford, keeping in touch with people I met, conversing with people at parties, and so on. (RJ3)

Despite have mixed feelings about the program, the participant expressed, "Thanks to the efforts, my last month was wonderful, interacting with so many friends" (RJ3). Additionally, the participant concluded that she was not sure about "which is better, study with British or other international students or with only Japanese students" (SSI). Therefore, although it appears the participant was skeptical about the dynamic of the program, overall, she found value from her social interactions.

Theme 5: OUJS Dynamic

The results from three sources (RJ2, RJ3, SSI) suggest that engaging in OUJS helped the participant build social networks with those who had common interests and enabled her to use English, develop her cultural sensitivity, and raise her cultural awareness. In particular, the participant responded that OUJS provided her with an opportunity to interact with host nationals who were interested in Japan:

Thanks to OUJS, I had opportunities to meet host nationals including locals, local students, and alumni...I had a chance to teach Japanese every week as a volunteering assistant...I was very happy that so many people were interested in Japan. (RJ2)

In addition, the participant stated, "I also attended a party organized by OUJS, where we drank and chatted with each other. There, I met a lot of host nationals including local students" (SSI).

The participant also reported that the OUJS helped her build social networks and expressed, "My local friends I met at OUJS invited me to various events organized by Oxford's other colleges" (SSI). She also reported that going to a pub with OUJS friends provided her with an opportunity to use English and learn about culture outside the classroom when she stated, "We always went to a pub after the Japanese lesson, and we taught Japanese and British culture to each other in English" (RJ2). For example, she shared one of the experiences that helped her develop cultural sensitivity when she stated, "One of my British students' questions about the Japanese concept of a small face was intriguing. My local friends didn't understand the meaning of a big or small face" (RJ2). The participant also stated:

We talked about society's idea of beauty in Japan, whereby pressure is placed on women to be slim and have a small face, and our local friends regarded this Japanese concept of beauty as discrimination...in the U.K., the face size is not related to beauty. (SSI)

The discussion of society's idea of beauty was surprising but also a cultural learning experience for the participant. At first, she thought that, "this question was shocking because [she] believed that women having a small face were beautiful" (RJ2). However, the participant eventually embraced cultural differences when she stated, "They wondered what would be the ideal face size, which made sense to me in the end" (SSI). Consequently, the participant seemed to have raised her cultural awareness when she stated, "In this way, I was able to learn about both the pros and cons of Japanese culture from the outside" (RJ2). Through this type of cultural perspective, the participant gained an appreciation for how the social dynamic of the OUJS complemented her education when she expressed, "I've learned that not only studying but also establishing international friendships is important for studying abroad" (RJ3).

Discussion

The five themes identified from the qualitative case study provide insight into how the participant benefited from the programme. The first three themes of language instruction, content-based instruction, and culture and business learning suggest that the participant's perceptions of the programme's curriculum were generally positive because they helped her improve her English language skills and learn about British culture. Therefore, it seems that the programme takes full advantage of its characteristics as an island program in order to provide a curriculum that meets the needs (Woolf, 2007) of Japanese students who wish to improve their language skills and experience the target culture (British Council, 2014). In particular, the comments related to Theme 2 indicate that the participant preferred the second term to the first term because content-based instruction motivated her to improve her English (Peachey, n.d.). Additionally, the comments related to Theme 3 suggest that the participant valued the business components because she was able to gain a contextual understanding of the business culture in Britain. According to the British Council (2014), those who are interested in studying abroad are likely to believe that studying abroad is the beginning of their international career, while students not interested in studying abroad want their careers exclusively in Japan. Therefore, in this regard, because the participant was both motivated by the content-based instruction and valued the business components of the programme, compared to her counterparts, she might have more interest in working in a global environment.

Comments related to Theme 4 suggest that the participant had both positive and negative perceptions of the programme's social aspects. For example, on the one hand, the participant did not seem to be happy with the fact that the programme comprised only Japanese students. This finding proves the aforementioned hypothesis that having more contact with host nationals than with compatriots would affect students' satisfaction with studying abroad (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Ward & Masgoret, 2004). On the other hand, the participant was motivated by her Japanese classmates to make the most of cross-cultural opportunities outside the classroom. This seems to be consistent with the previously mentioned theory that students attending island programs can actively create cultural opportunities beyond the classroom (Woolf, 2007).

Comments related to Theme 5 indicate that OUJS provided the participant with an opportunity to build social networks with British students who had an interest in Japanese language and culture. As a result, she was able to use English, develop her cultural sensitivity, and raise her cultural awareness through these social networks. These findings reinforce the notion that engaging in an extra-curricular activity helps to develop social networks to interact with host nationals who share similar interests (T. Toyokawa & N. Toyokawa, 2002; Weiss, 1973, cited in Sawir et al., 2008) and demonstrate that social networks help students to use language outside the classroom (Ellis, 1993) and to learn the target culture's social customs and values (T. Toyokawa & N. Toyokawa, 2002).

Overall, the identified themes suggest that, although Japanese students might have negative perceptions about studying solely with their Japanese peers, the programme may nonetheless be beneficial because, within the classroom setting, the curriculum is designed to help students improve their English language skills, learn about British culture, and develop their business skills. Moreover, the extra-curricular OUJS activity may also be beneficial because it provides language and cultural benefits outside the classroom.

Conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to identify whether the Six Month English as a Foreign Language Programme provided by Hertford College, University of Oxford, would be verifiably beneficial for Japanese students. In order to fulfill the research objective, this study used a qualitative case study to investigate the perceptions of a single participant who attended the programme during the 2017-18 academic year. The five themes identified suggest that the curriculum helped the participant improve her English language skills, learn about British culture, and develop business skills. Although the participant showed negative perceptions of the programme's island program characteristics, she was motivated by her peers to make the most of her social life, where she was able to use English, develop her cultural sensitivity, and raise her cultural awareness.

While this study's findings can provide faculty with some insight into whether or not the programme would be beneficial for their students, this paper has four main limitations that should be addressed. First, the data were collected from a single participant. Future studies might include a large array of respondents from multiple institutions in order to help generalize the findings of this study (Brewer, Shively, Gozik, Doyle, & Savicki, 2012). Second, this study relied only on the reports provided by the participant, which were based on her own personal experiences. Therefore, because the data might contain biases, future studies should consider collecting other types of data, such as peer reports, teacher observations, and classroom records (Newfields, 2012). Third, content analysis is subjective and thus the data could potentially be interpreted differently by other researchers. Therefore, additional studies could involve having other researchers analyze the same data to gain new perspectives (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Lastly, in order to assess the benefits on a continual basis, future studies might consider collecting information in the years to come.

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Appendix A. Participation Information Letter

Dear Student,

This is to inform you that I would like to invite you to take part in my research study. The project title is ‘An Investigation into the Six-Month Programme, Hertford College, University of Oxford.’

Before you decide whether or not to take part, I would like you to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. This research project seeks to investigate students’ perception toward the Six-Month Programme. Hertford College provides a variety of study abroad program, yet there is insufficient information available about it. In order to gain in-depth understanding of your experiences, feelings, and opinions about the programme, I would like to conduct an interview.¹ Please note that joining the study is entirely optional and you can withdraw your participation at any time without prejudice.

If you agree to take part in the study, you will answer a series of questions and talk freely on a subject. Your interview will be audio recorded, and the recording will be transcribed, analyzed, and disseminated for the purposes of the research. In addition, the data you have contributed will be retained and used for any relevant future research if you agree. Please rest assured that your privacy will be protected at all times.

I believe that sharing your opinions about the programme will help English teachers decide whether it is the right program for their students.

If you do agree to participate in this research, please see the accompanying consent form. You will then be given a copy of your signed consent form to keep. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions regarding this research.

Sincerely yours,
Nobue Inoue

¹ This letter does not include the information about reflective journals because I intended to collect data solely from a semi-structured interview at that time. I later found that the participant’s reflective journals would be valuable for triangulation purposes and thus I asked her in person to use them as another instrument.

Appendix B. Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Investigation into the Six-Month Programme, Hertford College, University of Oxford

Name of Researcher: Nobue INOUE

Please initial box.

1. I have read and understood the letter for the above study.
2. I understand that my participation in the study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw my participation at any time without prejudice.
3. I consent for my interview to be audio recorded and analyzed for the research.
4. I give my permission for my anonymous data, which does not identify me, to be disseminated.
5. I agree to take part in the above study.
6. I agree to the data I contribute being retained and used for any other relevant research.

Participant's Name

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Name

Researcher's Signature

Date

Appendix C. Interview Schedule

1. What is your general impression about the programme?
 - Was it a positive experience for you?
 - Do you think that your English improved in a significant way?
2. What is your general impression about the first term?
 - In your opinion, what is the area in which your English improved the most during the first term? (i.e. pronunciation, expressions, fluency, etc.)
3. What is your general impression about the second term?
 - In your opinion, what is the area in which your English improved the most during the English language module? (i.e. business vocabulary, cultural understanding, fluency, etc.)
4. What did you learn from each module? Was it helpful?
5. All of your classmates were also students from Japan, correct? What did you think about this?
6. How was your social life in Oxford?
 - Did you attend any social events organized by Oxford?
 - Did you have any opportunities to interact with British students?
7. Do you think the programme helped you enhance cultural learning?
 - Do you understand more about British culture now?
 - Did your understanding of Japanese culture change in any way?
8. Is there anything about the programme that could be improved?
9. Do you have anything else you would like to say?

Appendix D. Data Sources, Codes, Categories, and Themes for Research Question (1)

DS ^a	Codes (DS: ID) ^b	Categories	Themes
RJ1, SSI	Weak grammar (SSI: C28), Weak vocabulary (SSI: C30)	Participant's characteristics	1. First term helped increase lexical range and improve speaking skills through language modules focused on grammar and vocabulary
	Focus on grammar (SSI: C27), Focus on language modules (RJ1: C01), Focus on vocabulary (SSI: C26, C29)	Characteristics of the first term	
	Difficulty in the first term (RJ1: C04)	Perceptions of the first term	
	Improved speaking skills (RJ1: C05, SSI: C33), Increased vocabulary (SSI: C31, C32, C34)	Benefits of the first term	
RJ2, RJ3, SSI	Interest in content-based instruction (RJ2: C19, RJ3: C47), Unfamiliarity with business context (RJ2: C15, C20, SSI: C35), Weak speaking skills (SSI: C46), Weak writing skills (RJ2: C12, C14)	Participant's characteristics	2. Second term was more favorable than first term because it helped improve speaking and writing skills due to content-based instruction focused on productive skills
	Content-based instruction (RJ2: C13, SSI: C36, C42), Focus on productive skills (RJ2: C11, C17, C22, C23, SSI: C40, C43, C44)	Characteristics of the second term	
	Difficulty in the second term (RJ2: C10), Favor of the second term (RJ2: C06, C07), Interest in productive skills (RJ2: C21, SSI: C45)	Perceptions of the second term	
	Improved speaking skills (SSI: C39), Improved writing skills (RJ2: C16, C18)	Benefits of the second term	
RJ1, RJ2, SSI	Interest in British Culture academic modules (SSI: C24, C25), Interest in Business academic modules (SSI: C37, C38)	Perceptions of academic modules	3. Academic modules that taught British culture and developed Benefits of academic modules business skills were beneficial
	Developed business skills (RJ2: C08, C09, SSI: C41), Learned about British culture and history (RJ1: C02, C03)	Benefits of academic modules	

Note. This table shows the data related to the programme's curriculum. The data for its social aspects are shown in Appendix E.

^a DS=data sources; RJ = reflective journal; SSI = semi-structured interview

^b ID = identification number; each meaning unit was assigned ID (Curriculum01 to Curriculum47) based on the data collection in chronological order. C01 to C05 derived from reflective journal 1 (December 2017), C06 to C23 derived from reflective journal 2 (March 2018), C24 to C46 derived from a semi-structured interview (March 2018), and C47 derived from reflective journal 3 (April 2018).

Appendix E. Data Sources, Codes, Categories, and Themes for Research Question (2)

DS ^a	Codes (DS: ID) ^b	Categories	Themes
RJ3, SSI	Concerns about island programs (RJ3: S29, S30), Satisfaction with cross-cultural interaction (RJ3: S35), Uncertainty about island programs (SSI: S26), Wish for multicultural environments (SSI: S23, S24)	Perceptions of island programs	4. Not fully satisfied with island feature from language and cultural perspectives, but acknowledged benefits of positive peer pressure to promote cross-cultural interaction
	Few cross-cultural opportunities (SSI: S18), Use of Japanese (SSI: S12)	Disadvantages of island programs	
	Shyness (SSI: S14, RJ3: S32)	Participant's personality	
	Enhanced efforts (SSI: S15, S25, RJ3: S34), Peer pressure (SSI: S27, S28, RJ3: S33)	Benefits of island programs	
RJ2, RJ3, SSI	Building social networks (RJ2: S06, SSI: S13, S16), Common interests (RJ2: S01, S03, S04, S05, SSI: S19, RJ3: S31), Meeting host nationals (RJ2: S02, SSI: S17)	Benefits of OUJS	5. OUJS helped build social networks with those who have common interests, which helped use English, develop cultural sensitivity, and increase cross-cultural awareness
	Developed cultural sensitivity (RJ2: S07, S08, S10, SSI: S20, S21, S22), Raised cultural awareness (RJ2: S11, RJ3: S36), Use of English (RJ2: S09)	Benefits of social networks	

Note. This table shows the data related to the programme's social aspects. The data for its curriculum are shown in Appendix D.

^a DS=data sources; RJ = reflective journal; SSI = semi-structured interview

^b ID = identification number; each meaning unit was assigned ID (SocialLife01 to SocialLife36) based on the data collection in chronological order. S01 to S11 derived from reflective journal 2 (March 2018), S12 to S28 derived from a semi-structured interview (March 2018), and S29 to S36 derived from reflective journal 3 (April 2018).



Study Abroad Perspectives: An Interview with Jiani Zhu

by Ivan Botev

Jiani Zhu is an Assistant Professor in the Graduate School of Education at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China, where her research interests include academic adjustment of international Chinese students and scholars. She earned her doctoral degree from Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

How did you first become interested in study abroad?

My original research interest was based on my personal experience as a master's student at a research institute in Germany, as I got an internship position there. There I met some other Chinese students studying in Europe, which sparked my interest in how those students adapted to life overseas. I observed that many Chinese students were unfamiliar with the university system in Germany. Moreover, their German proficiency was often inadequate for their university courses, despite passing a basic German proficiency exam prior to admission. What is more important, they had little knowledge about how the approaches to university education differed in China and Germany. For example, they were often unsure whether to refrain from openly questioning their teachers and expressing their opinions or not.

As a consequence, collectively this led to pronounced difficulties for most Chinese at universities in Germany, at least during the initial phases of their study. These difficulties could be described as a “hard landing” and it often takes several semesters before most Chinese students in Germany feel comfortable about their lives overseas. I am keenly interested in ways to reduce the stress levels of students venturing overseas and help more of them enjoy fulfilling experiences.

How have your ideas about study abroad changed over the years?

Historically, a lot of the research on study abroad has been based on European or North American students. However, in recent decades, we have seen a rapid increase in the number of Chinese students overseas. It would be naive to assume that Chinese students experience the same adjustment problems as Western students, although some similarities are likely shared. Many articles and books have been published on how Chinese students adapt to life abroad, and more and more scholars are realizing that this population is by no means a monolithic entity: Chinese students are so heterogeneous that simple stereotypes tend to break down on close examination. We must remember that nearly 20% of the world's population is Chinese and Chinese citizens vary widely in terms of their previous overseas experience, knowledge of other countries, academic backgrounds, and goals.

The entire notion of “Chinese”—especially in the eyes of many western scholars—merits deconstruction. Perhaps we need to remember Alonso's (1995) remarks that identity is multifaceted and nationality is just one facet of who we are. If you prefer a more post-modern wording, we could say that identity is just one of many types of social enactments. I am pleased to notice how more and more scholars are interpreting “identity” from broader perspectives and recognizing that identity is seldom simplistic.

Moreover, I have come to realize that we need to examine study abroad both in terms of micro-analytical perspectives of individual participants as well as macro-analytical perspectives in terms of broader historical and social trends. For example, Chinese students venturing abroad these days tend to differ in some ways from Chinese students who went abroad a generation ago. Younger, more recent Chinese students tend to be more critical and active in class, and brave enough to sometimes actively challenge lecturers in class. By contrast, a generation ago most Chinese students tended to defer to teachers, and they were taught to respect them as authority figures. For this reason, the experience of many Chinese students currently studying abroad is quite different from those who went abroad during the 1980s or 1990s. Since the implementation of the reform and opening-up policy, the younger generation has better access to different cultures via various opportunities of culture exchanges. Thus, the new generation of Chinese students have achieved some basic intercultural knowledge and experience before studying abroad.

What advice would you give to educational institutions that are setting up study abroad programs?

I strongly encourage all educational institutions to establish pre-departure training courses to prepare students for their overseas experiences. Not only do they need to enhance their academic skills in the target language and target discipline, they also need to enhance their intercultural communication skills. For instance, students in many Asian countries do not realize that raising questions in class is actually encouraged at western universities, while it is often regarded as an offensive gesture by many lecturers in Asia. Many Asian countries still have a strong Confucian influence, and it is not uncommon for students from China, Korea, and Japan to appear shy, obedient, and uncritical during class.

Although many overseas students report having "successful" study abroad experiences, it is not uncommon for some to also have great frustration, disappointment, or shock. In your view, what ingredients are crucial for study abroad "success"?

That's absolutely a great question! It is REALLY difficult to judge whether a student is "successful" by simplistic yardsticks. There are a thousand definitions of "success" in studying abroad contexts. Based both on my research findings and personal experience, I suggest the following four factors as having a key impact in determining overseas "success."

First, the importance of target language capacity can never be overemphasized. Though fluent foreign language skills alone cannot fully guarantee study abroad success, it offers international students more possibilities to fully engage in both academic and cultural activities in the host country.

Second, it seems a good strategy for doing well in international learning environments is to adopt what Durkin describes as a "middle-way" (2008). This implies a reflective awareness of how a new learning environment differs from a former learning environment, and making strategic changes to accommodate to the new environment while maintaining some desired characteristics of the former environment. For example, what is regarded as "correct" in a Chinese university context might be judged as "wrong" in a European environment. As a consequence, international students are likely to become confused about how to react appropriately in their host countries. That is, many are unsure whether to stick to their original learning customs (which may be challenged in a new learning environment) or try

new ways to adapt to the host country (which often takes international students out of their comfort-zones).

Third, a strong willingness to make strategic changes, which often means leaving one's comfort-zone, is important in intercultural learning environments. Study abroad can be very challenging and frustrating, especially in the beginning. However, by putting effort into improving foreign language skills, and making progress in academic performance, one can gradually increase his or her self-confidence while studying in a foreign country.

Lastly, it is necessary for international students to find "resource" people in their host countries. Such persons can be a host student attending the same courses, a language-partner, or even a roommate, who can provide international students with first-hand, academic or cultural information.

What trends have you noticed concerning study abroad in China in recent years?

First, more study abroad programmes are available to Chinese students recently, including both short-term exchanges as well as long-term degree programmes.

With the internationalization of higher education among Chinese universities, a large number have established joint programmes with universities abroad. Especially at the top-tier Chinese universities, the percentage of undergraduate students spending a semester abroad as exchange students is relatively high. For instance, the percentage of students having a short-term overseas learning experience is around 50% at both Shanghai Jiao Tong University and Fudan University.

Second, it seems that increasing numbers of Chinese university students are gaining more intercultural experiences prior to their overseas studies. With China's growing middle class, more and more Chinese parents are able to send their children to bilingual kindergartens and later international schools in China. Moreover, study abroad is growing in popularity among Chinese teenagers. It is now possible for many families to send their children abroad for short-term studies. Accordingly, many young Chinese students are more familiar with the western-style school/university system and speak foreign languages (in most cases, English) more fluently than the previous generation. Moreover, some parents who have received their degrees overseas can offer ample advice useful for their children. Compared with Chinese students who went abroad in the 1980s, most young Chinese students appear to be more knowledgeable about study abroad, and they are in a better position to make more of overseas experiences.

What issues concerning study abroad do you feel are significantly under-researched? Also, what are your personal future research goals?

The entire pre-departure preparation process is under-researched. Most studies focus on students' experiences overseas or upon immediate return. However, I regard the phase of pre-departure as crucial. As we say in Chinese, "*Hǎo de kāiduān shì chénggōng de yībàn.*" (好的开端是成功的一半), which is very similar to the adage, "Well begun is half done."

Currently I am exploring Chinese returnees' readjustment to the social, academic and cultural environment in China. I am curious about what kind of adjustment issues they face when returning to China. As Edward T. Hall has pointed out, reverse culture shock (which is

sometimes called “re-entry shock”) is a common experience and although some people return from overseas experiences with few clearly observable changes, others significantly change the trajectory of their lives.

Implications of the Interview

There are at least three educational implications that can be learned from Professor Zhu’s experience with Chinese students for Japanese coordinators to consider when implementing study abroad programs. First, before going abroad, to reduce the stressful “hard landing” that many overseas students experience, an extended pre-departure program going beyond a superficial introduction of a tour itinerary is needed. In particular, linguistically speaking, study abroad programs should make sure the language proficiency of Japanese students is adequate for university courses held overseas. Also, culturally speaking, Japanese students should be educated of how to interact with other students and teachers in the classroom setting of their host country.

Second, during their stay overseas, study abroad programs should make sure students are well-informed of the functions and opportunities available at the host institution that will promote intercultural learning environments and challenge students to go outside their comfort-zone. In addition, because school information via the Internet may not always be up-to-date, accurate or conflicting, study abroad programs could consider having a “resource person” such as a teacher or language-partner who is available for students to immediately refer to whenever they need to find out or confirm information during their stay overseas.

Third, after students return to Japan, to reduce reverse culture shock or re-entry shock Japanese study abroad programs might also want to consider establishing a post-return component to help students readjust socially, academically and culturally back into Japan. The degree to which students participate in post-return program may depend largely on the length of their stay overseas. Nevertheless, in addition to helping students settle in, such a program would also serve to help students to reflect on the key takeaways they learned from their time abroad so that it can be a memorable and productive experience.

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A Study Abroad Experience from Russia to the United States

Durova Iana

(Soka University Graduate Student from Russia)

Personal Background

I received my bachelor's degree from the branch campus of Far Eastern Federal University in the Russian city of Ussuriysk where I lived with my family for my whole life. Due to the city's location, there is a strong connection with Asian countries, mostly Korea, China and Japan. This fact served as a base for my decision to enter the Japanese education studies program. However, in order to join the Japanese program, an English exam was required, so I focused my efforts on learning English before my enrolment, but not after it. There are two characteristics of the Russian education system. First, there are a series of exams every student is required to pass after graduating from school in order to enter a university or a professional college. These exams are called the Unified State Exam, and they are developed by the Ministry of Education, but they are not internationally acknowledged like IELTS or TOEFL. Second, the programs in Russia consist of a concrete set of subjects, provided by a university. As a result, students typically are not able to take courses that they are interested in.

Rationale for Choosing the Study Abroad Program

Although I managed to enroll in the Japanese program, which only included a general one-year English course with unclear goals, I still was interested in studying both English and Japanese. However, I felt annoyance about the significant amount of effort and time that was wasted on learning the English language even though I did not have a chance to use it. Moreover, due to the location of my hometown, and the high cost of the flight tickets, I have never had the opportunity to travel to Moscow or to Western countries. Instead, my family and I traveled a lot to Asian countries such as Thailand, Cambodia, South Korea and different Chinese regions. In addition, young people like me had and still have an image of Western culture as being "superior" because it strongly influences modern Russian trends in music, fashion, cinematography and etc. Therefore, I was strongly interested in the USA study abroad program that was offered at my university by a private company. Unfortunately, with increasing political tension the last few years between Russia and the USA, the company closed, and so I do not recall its name.

Description of the Program

The program was called Work and Travel, so the purpose of the program was for the students to both travel and work in the United States during their summer vacation. Work and Travel is a very popular program in Russia and students of various ages and educational backgrounds were able to enroll. However, because of the high cost and complicated visa application process, I was the only student from my university who enrolled in the program. The US visa officers are very cautious about providing visas to fourth-year university students for fear that they will attempt to immigrate illegally. However, no English classes are provided, only the full immersion to the cultural experience and a part-time job. Nevertheless, after my work placement was arranged and I received my work visa, I flew to New-York on May 15th, 2013

and spent three months working and one month travelling, which is slightly longer than a usual summer vacation in Russia. After few days, I started to work as “sandwich artist” at the Subway fast-food chain in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania for \$7.20 per hour for eight hours a day. My employer provided me with a room in a house which cost me \$300 per month. However, the food was free because I was worked in a café.

Program Benefits

One of my expectations for the program was overall language improvement. As was mentioned, the program did not provide students with specific language and cultural classes. Therefore, the main actual improvement for me was my ability to use spoken English on the spot in a variety of situations. As I recall, I interacted with a variety of different accents and world Englishes. In addition, the deep immersion into the culture brought several insights for me. First, I learned that there is a wide number of non-native speakers and immigrants who, just like me, worked at a low-paying job. This experience with immigrants made me realize that “American culture” is not so American after all and this made me respect my country even more than I did before my trip. Second, I realized that US citizens are not “superior” to me in any way. They are just like Russians: they want to live happy lives. When I told people about my nationality, I was met with no aggression or cruel jokes. Instead, the only jokes were about Russian stereotypes, which were positive and gave me an idea of what other nationalities think of my origin. Third, one more benefit is that I first experienced living an “adult life” on my own, which taught me how to use money efficiently and responsibly. After returning to Russia, my friends and university cohorts treated me with respect because I had been “there,” on the other side of the globe, the country that everyone dreams about.

Program Drawbacks

Some of the conditions were very strict because it is established by the United States government. For example, although students can change their place of employment, they are prohibited from quitting their work. In terms of a job itself, to receive a better paycheck, students need to work the maximum number of available hours. This was often tiring and frustrating, because it can be very expensive especially if a student is eager to explore the city. This vicious circle can turn the program into a disenchanting experience. In addition, as was mentioned previously, the program did not have any structure after the enrollment, and so the level of students’ freedom was high. On one hand, all the information that students were provided with during the orientation was useful. On the other hand, the volume of information and the preparation timeline was stressful. As a result, I felt lonely throughout the preparation process and because I did not know any other exchange students, I didn’t have anyone to talk with about the stress I was under. So, students had to solve their own problems by themselves. Furthermore, I was surrounded by exchange students and immigrants most of the time and it was hard to find a way to interact with native speakers, especially because I was under the drinking age back then and could not participate in most of the parties. Looking back, I wish there had been language courses available for me to improve my grammar and writing skills instead of them staying at the same level.

Conclusion

Generally speaking, I was satisfied by the end of the program. I traveled to the place I was eager to go and became able to use spoken English. I would recommend this program to other students with a few precautions. First, this program is not for someone who wants to actively study and improve their language skills. Of course, the immersion into the language environment was beneficial mostly for practical knowledge. However, for instance, I would like to have had

more theoretical knowledge behind the language because I sometimes spoke English inappropriately. Nevertheless, the program provided its participants with a number of new cultural experiences to learn about the United States and other cultures. Second, every first, second and third-year student should remember that even though living on his/her own might seem fun, it might also be dangerous. As I reflect back on my experience, I think that it was a crazy trip for an eighteen-year-old teenager like me to have so much freedom and responsibility living in another country.



A Study Abroad Experience from France to Japan

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Personal Background

I am currently enrolled in a TESOL program at Soka University, in Tokyo. However, I was exposed to English at an early age, mostly because I accompanied my mother to Oxfordshire and London, England, from five years-old onwards. I was also exposed to English when my mother's British friends visited our home a few times in France. When I was about seven-years old, I started studying English in elementary school. After that, I attended European and International (CBI) classes in the French educational system, and specialised in English and German translation until I finished my first master's degree. Based on this background, I have studied English continuously for 18 years.

The Rationale for Choosing the Study Abroad Program

I chose this study abroad program for several reasons. First, despite studying languages and translation, there were no opportunities for me to study abroad before I completed my first master's degree. I benefited greatly from the outcomes of the French competitive system, but it did mean that I had to move on to graduate school right after my undergraduate graduation, lest I lose my seat. I did not come to improve on my English, but I did need to legitimise my career choices, in case clients questioned my proficiency. I also hoped to improve my Japanese, and perhaps add it to my working languages. The second reason I chose the study abroad program was personal. Presently I am 25 years-old and I still have many questions about my future. One of my challenges is that I experienced strong culture shock when I visited Japan in 2013. I tried to find a way to come and live there in a structure that was familiar to me in order to overcome that problem. Being in the EMI program made for a smoother immersion in Japan.

Description of the Program

As stated above, I am enrolled in the TESOL graduate program at Soka University, in Hachioji, Tokyo. I am now in the second year, along with five other students from the Fall 2018 cohort. New students enter the program every semester, so cohorts are limited to six students on average. The students in my cohort came from different countries such as Delaware (USA), Russia, Bulgaria, Singapore, Jamaica, and France. Other cohorts also include students from India, Nepal, China, Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Kenya. After receiving my acceptance letter, the International Affairs Office helped me arrange my stay in Japan. I live in an apartment provided by the university, and receive a monthly scholarship of 60,000 yen that covers my rent and part of my living expenses. I was also exempt from paying tuition. If all goes according to plan, I will stay two years in the program.

Classroom activities of the TESOL graduate program range from theoretical lectures about second language acquisition theory to practical courses on syllabus design or

assessment techniques. This program is not an exchange program: Students are not treated as foreigners who need to be exposed to language and culture. However, some professors do take advantage of our multicultural background to enrich class discussions, particularly in the culture, philosophy, and sociolinguistics classes. The curriculum is designed according to American course models that include core and elective courses. We have midterms and final exams that are usually in the form of papers of varying lengths. Course preparation entails extensive reading, and each subject has its own textbook.

Outside the classroom, I tried to attend Japanese lessons in the first semester, but I chose to drop out mostly because the workload was pretty intense in the TESOL program. I was also fluent enough in Japanese that I didn't need additional language skills to get by in everyday life. However, I did participate in cultural events organised by the university, and travelled to Hokkaido last winter.

Program Benefits

There are several benefits to this study abroad experience, but a few elements particularly stand out. First, I gained exposure to a new academic culture. World Englishes are well represented in the program and cohorts, which further enriches this immersive experience. The teaching philosophy is definitely different from that of the French system. In terms of linguistic goals, I obtained full satisfaction. The experience is actually doubly immersive, with an American academic program in a Japanese environment.

Secondly, despite leaving my country, I met many like-minded young adults at the university who all shared similar beliefs about education, and adopted the university's philosophy about humanism. The daily enactment of humanistic values is strongly encouraged by university founders and personnel, which makes the atmosphere decidedly different from that of French universities. I remember thinking to myself that coming to Japan felt like coming back to a family I didn't know existed before. Although most study abroad programs can report similar experiences, I formed deep bonds of friendship with other international students in Japan, and gained a sense of identity and social self-efficacy through these interactions. In a sense, I feel like a living paradox: I tend to underline more often how being French makes me different, yet I learnt to see beyond stereotypes and grew curious of other cultures.

Third, the most important part of my experience is the kindness I received from my host institution. For example, I felt welcomed in an environment that recognised and understood how challenging it is to move abroad. The university undertook every possible action to facilitate my transfer. In addition, I was offered a stipend that covers my entire rent, my bills, and part of my monthly expenses. From my experience, I do not think that the same support would be afforded to international students attending a French university. Japanese students also display gentle acceptance of their foreign peers, and include them as much as possible into every aspect of their culture. This open-mindedness and genuine kindness was totally beyond any pre-departure expectation.

Program Drawbacks

I do not have many negative things to say about the program, but I will just mention how easy it is to avoid immersion. I made friends with fellow international students, and spend a lot of time in class or preparing for lessons, which means that I mostly speak English and French every day. If I don't actively seek out opportunities to speak Japanese, I am never forced to use it. I can also rely on my friends to communicate in Japanese when the situation

calls for it. Since my primary focus is not to improve my Japanese, I notice that I tend to take the easy way out.

Conclusion

Overall my experience in Japan has been extremely positive. Initially, I wanted to discover if Japan was a country where I could settle. While Japan may not be the place for me in the long term, the fact that I was able to find an answer to my question is a deep source of satisfaction. I grew confident in my ability to perform in foreign contexts by relying on nonverbal cues, which I also found to be incredibly empowering. In addition, although the program is not so different from the work I did for my master's degree, studying in a foreign academic culture challenged my studying habits. Aside from my studies, however, the main takeaway of this experience is the human side of the exchange. Despite my introverted personality, I definitely expanded my social horizon, network and skill set. I feel like I made true progress towards autonomy and self-exploration.

I would recommend the program to a student who might be in a similar situation as myself. That is, someone who needs experience in an English-speaking context, is interested in Japan, and is considering settling here. Students who want to experience complete immersion might want to look for less sheltered programs within the university. Nevertheless, for students wanting to experience Japan and its culture, the EMI dimension at the university helps cushion a lot of the culture shock that can occur when moving to Asia and provides an incredibly supportive environment for all international students.