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https://sa-sig.weebly.com

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Message from the Editor

Greetings from the Study Abroad SIG editorial team! Despite the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, we are nevertheless delighted to announce the latest publication of our journal, now known as *The Journal of Worldwide Education*. Since we have decided to register the journal for an *International Standard Serial Number*, we feel this name change will be helpful in distinguishing us as a journal with ambition, and furthermore fulfil the more prosaic requirements of the registration process.

As work and education continue to embrace the online world in response to the pandemic, we believe it is necessary to adapt ourselves to the new technology to ensure our journal attains a higher profile. In recent years, the most popular means of accessing the Internet has been via tablets and smartphones. With this in mind, we have made improvements to the typeface and layout which we hope will improve legibility on digital screens.

In this current issue I would like to present three articles: a leading article by Andrew Nowlan who has investigated overseas student experiences in Southeast Asian countries. Much research has already been conducted with regards to inner-circle countries, so it is highly informative, not to mention interesting, to be informed about students who have bravely bucked the trend and chosen to study abroad in Asia. Our second author, Simon Park, has investigated the usability of Instagram as a tool to learning. For those of you who, like myself, regard social media with the suspicion of a farrier encountering a motor car for the first time, Simon’s efforts to embrace Instagram in the classroom are to be lauded. Our third author, Anthony Tobin, has contributed with an article founded in his considerable experience with Japanese sojourners at Dublin City University; and finally, our stalwart contributor, Nobue Inoue, has provided us with an invaluable tutorial for those looking to partake in qualitative research.

Finally, we at *The Journal of Worldwide Education* would like to take this opportunity to invite our members to contribute. The journal is an important resource for communication – not only as a repository for academic papers – but also as a platform for members to exchange their experiences and knowledge. In addition to articles, we accept interviews, classroom ideas, and an assortment of reviews ranging from book reviews to study abroad program reviews and experiences. Although we only have a limited space for contributions to the journal, we welcome those both in English and in Japanese. Enquiries can be communicated through our website contact form, and for authors who have already drafted manuscripts, these should be forwarded to studyabroadsig@gmail.com and Cced to sa_publications@outlook.com for consideration. The deadline for submissions for the upcoming summer volume is 1st March 2021.

– Paul Bird,

*Study Abroad SIG Publications Chair and Chief Editor*
Japanese University Student Experiences with Internships in Southeast Asia

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine the personal, academic, and professional experiences of five Japanese university students who did short-term academic internships in three southeast Asian nations. Since students in Japan often associate international opportunities with inner-circle English-speaking countries (e.g. the United States of America or the United Kingdom), this article highlights the perceived benefits of choosing Southeast Asia as an educational destination. In limited published studies, researchers have revealed that Japanese students may gravitate towards Southeast Asia for multilingual language learning opportunities, lower perceived discrimination, and reduced financial costs. This article provides additional insight into the discerned advantages and disadvantages. Data for this qualitative exploratory study include weekly written reflections from students who were in southeast Asian countries from late 2018 to early 2019, followed by a focus group and individual questionnaires in the months following the participants’ return to Japan. Based on thematic analysis of self-reporting, results suggest that the participants found value in their experiences due to the (a) proximity and costs involved, (b) comfort with using a non-native variety of English, and (c) development of
intercultural competences and soft skills. More specifically, participants felt that their experiences were less financially burdensome on parents, compared to similar experiences in inner-circle destinations. Also, participants reported feeling comfortable using English as a lingua franca, despite communicating in lower-context environments. This, in turn, contributed to the development of their adaptation, negotiation, and communicative skills. If higher education stakeholders and recruiters can better promote the educational experiences of Japanese university students in Southeast Asia, such as those featured in this article, then it is possible that access and participation may increase in the future.

Keywords: study abroad, overseas academic internships, English acquisition, intercultural competences

Japanese University Student Experiences with Internships in Southeast Asia

Research has indicated that educational experiences abroad often allow participants to expand worldviews while acquiring knowledge of a second language (L2) and culture (Kinginger, 2009; Kinginger, 2015, Nguyen, Jefferies, & Rojas, 2018; OECD,
In Japan, student mobility is a core feature of governmental initiatives which aim to (a) develop L2 skills, (b) build professional competences, and (c) gain exposure to international culture, thus building intercultural competences (MEXT, 2012; MEXT, 2017, Yonezawa & Yonezawa, 2016). The vast majority of Japanese students who opt into study abroad choose inner-circle English speaking countries (e.g. the United States of America or the United Kingdom), which has led to a belief that international experiences are expensive, anxiety-inducing, and that they require high proficiency with the English language (Nowlan & Wang, 2018). Currently in the literature, there is a dearth of sources that examine Japanese student perceptions of choosing more affordable destinations in the outer-circle (e.g. Cambodia or Malaysia) where English ability, intercultural competences, and “soft skills” can be assimilated (Kachru, 1985, 1992; Whitmore, 1972).

This article illustrates the study abroad experiences of five Japanese university students who participated in short-term internship and study programs in Southeast Asia, particularly regarding L2 acquisition, intercultural competences, and soft skills. While the countries of Southeast Asia represent a multitude of languages and cultures, I felt they shared enough common traits to be discussed as a whole, for the purposes of this investigation. For instance, the different ethnic groups within this region tend to utilize English as a lingua franca, and hence English often serves as a mode of communication between people who speak different first languages (Kirkpatrick, 2007). Also, southeast Asian countries are geographically closer to Japan than nations composing the inner-circle, meaning that they are often more accessible, temporally and financially. Finally, all countries in this region have growing economies involving various economic and reciprocal agreements with Japan, thus providing relevance and opportunities to develop practical soft skills needed to excel in various international career trajectories. In analyzing the data from this study, I will focus on these common traits while recognizing that overall cultural experiences will vary from country to country, institution to institution, and student to student.

Past studies on the topic of study abroad in Southeast Asia primarily explored the perceptions of member countries in the pre-departure and post-return phases (see Literature Review); however, I will focus on the overseas experiences and post-return reflections of five second-year Japanese undergraduates enrolled in internships across three different countries: Cambodia, Malaysia, and Vietnam. I will first introduce the government initiatives influencing outbound student mobility trends amongst Japanese students, as well as the limited research that has been done on students who chose Southeast Asia as a study abroad destination. After summarizing the methodology and the approach to thematic analysis, key themes and exemplars of the Japanese student experience in Southeast Asia will be shared. Finally, I will discuss the implications of the findings for various higher education stakeholders before concluding with limitations and future research directions.

Literature Review

This article examines the personal, academic, and professional experiences of Japanese university students who pursued educational opportunities in Southeast Asia. This literature review first connects student mobility to Japanese governmental initiatives before examining study abroad trends amongst Japanese students and the possible motivational forces behind the decision to study in Southeast Asia, which include opportunities for multilingualism, international friendship, and perceptions of discrimination. To build on this, this paper provides greater insight into the
development of intercultural competences and soft skills. In this context, intercultural competences refer to the ability to show appropriate and effective behavior in different cultural contexts (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2011), and soft skills are non-technical personal qualities “that enable people to effectively navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals” (Lippman, Ryberg, Carney, & Moore, 2015).

**Internationalization Initiatives in Japan**

The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) has enacted many initiatives over the last several decades aimed to internationalize university campuses and to develop global human resources. For example, the Project for Promotion of Global Human Resource Development was launched in 2013 and is intended to address the “inward-looking nature” of the younger Japanese generation by developing language and cross-cultural programs to help students succeed on the professional world stage (MEXT, 2012; Yamada & Yamada, 2014). Funding was given to 42 universities in the country, one of which is the home institution of the five participants featured in this study.

A current internationalization initiative, the Top Global University Project, was initiated in 2014 and will receive funding until its completion in 2023. Its main target is to carry out internationalization on campuses, thus “creating an environment infrastructure to foster capable and talented graduates” (MEXT, 2017). This questionable interpretation of internationalization, which is based on competitiveness instead of academic enrichment (Nowlan, 2019), is reflected in governmental targets of placing up to 13 chosen Top Type Japanese universities in the worldwide top 100 ranking. Also included in the initiative is 24 Global Traction Type universities, which will “lead the push of Japanese society toward globalization” (MEXT, 2017). The five participants featured in the current study are from the same Global Traction Type university.

Both initiatives have seemingly ambitious yet vague goals which have manifested in a robust network of university partnerships, where students can experience numerous international education opportunities, such as internships, volunteer activities, and study abroad. However, many of these relationships are in their infancy, resulting in a lack of information and student testimonials.

**Study Abroad Trends in Japan**

Based on data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2020), it is clear that Japanese students who participate in international opportunities are gravitating towards the inner circle (see Table 1). Almost half of all Japanese sojourners are choosing the United States, with four of the five most popular destinations constituting the inner circle. When examining the top 10 list, it is evident that Japanese students are dismissing southeast Asian outer-circle countries, as Malaysia is the only listed destination, at position number nine.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Destination Ranking</th>
<th>Mobile Japanese Students</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>31,732</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>14,787</td>
<td>46.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>2,846</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>2,244</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 1. Top 10 Sending Countries of Japanese Students, 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1,816</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1,665</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1,649</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Korea</td>
<td>1,455</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>1,111</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>693</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2,967</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Data retrieved from UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2020).*

With a vast majority of Japanese students choosing the inner circle for study abroad, prospective sojourners may simply equate international opportunities with native English-speaking countries. Such an outcome would align with the depiction of Japanese citizens as representing a "herd society" (Tsuneyoshi, 1992), being a society that rarely deviates from the norm and which is particularly uncertainty avoiding (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). If these societal features currently persist, then they may manifest to the detriment of participation numbers, due to an inner-circle-or bust mentality. With bias towards the inner circle in mind, research reveals that study abroad is perceived by Japanese students as too expensive and requiring high proficiency in English (Burden, 2020; Fukuzawa, 2016; Lassegard, 2013; Nowlan & Wang, 2018). A perceived lack of L2 ability can often be witnessed by English language educators in Japan, as students will claim, ad nauseum, that "my English, not so good," thus leading to self-disqualifying beliefs towards study abroad. Lack of ability in the L2 may also contribute to anxiety, resulting in adverse attitudes towards study abroad destinations (Burden, 2020). If the students involved in the aforementioned research have negative impressions of study abroad, due to associations with the inner circle, would similar attitudes prevail about educational opportunities in the outer circle, such as southeast Asian countries? The next section explores the limited research into this question.

### Southeast Asia as a Study Abroad Destination

A few studies have identified the reasons why some Japanese students choose to travel to Southeast Asia for educational experiences, such as internship and study abroad; however, this remains a fertile area for further research, based on a lack of literature and the increasing importance that Japanese universities place on student mobility and internationalization. Amongst study abroad participants of other nationalities, there is indication that short term study abroad in Southeast Asia can improve cultural intelligence and the fostering of “a global perception”. A 2017 quantitative study involving American students in Southeast Asia concluded that cultural intelligence was increased; however, this was in large part due to the extreme differences between American and Southeast Asian cultures (Rustambekov & Mohan, 2017). In contrast, research involving Japanese and Korean students’ interest in southeast Asian countries include the fact that such nations can offer multilingual learning opportunities (Bae, 2013; Kobayashi, 2018a, 2018b). For instance, one could learn both English and Khmer in Cambodia, or English and Mandarin Chinese in Singapore. While many Japanese students have motivation to only improve English language abilities, studies show mixed feelings towards Southeast Asia as a destination suitable for English acquisition. On one hand, some Japanese students still consider a native-like variety of English to be superior and most desirable to assimilate, while other
students simply want to communicate better, even if it involves speaking with a local accent (Kobayashi, 2020).

Next, Southeast Asia provides a more affordable, cost-effective region of the world to both travel to and live in (Kobayashi, 2018b; Lee, 2016). The emergence of low-cost carriers has drastically reduced airfares in the Asia Pacific region, and the cost of living (i.e. tuition, housing, transportation, meals) can be substantially lower. For instance, according to the cost of living in 133 global cities, Osaka, Japan ranked as the fifth most expensive, while Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia ranked 88th (The Economist, 2019). Southeast Asia is also considered as a vibrant region in the world, due to education, business, economic, and tourism developments.

In addition to the pursuit of a third language and cheaper costs, East Asian students may prefer Southeast Asia, as opposed to the inner circle, due to apprehensions about racial discrimination. Amongst Japanese and Korean students, hierarchical perceptions of race still exist, so there is a fear of being considered as second-class citizens in the inner circle, resulting in racial prejudice and discrimination (Kobayashi, 2018a, 2018b). Possibly connected to this, some studies suggest that Asian-looking teachers and classmates can help Japanese learners with high anxiety and low English proficiency to relax (Abelmann, Kwon, Lo, & Okazaki, 2015; Kobayashi, 2018b). Southeast Asian learning environments can be more conducive to building cross-cultural friendships, as students in such destinations often have an interest in and respect for Japanese culture, making for more engaged interlocution, based on common interests (Kobayashi, 2018a). To help Japanese students overcome their apprehension about “otherness,” there are indications that destinations in Southeast Asia can be seen as a stepping-stone towards understanding a larger world and eventual study in inner-circle countries (Abelmann, Kwon, Lo, & Okazaki, 2015; Kobayashi, 2018b).

Research Questions

While past studies primarily explore the perceptions of study abroad in Southeast Asia from pre-departure and post-return viewpoints, I will focus on the experiences and impressions of a small group of Japanese university students while on their internships, alongside their reflections in the post-return phase. To contribute to the previous literature, this article aims to address the following questions:

1. How did the five Japanese university students in this study perceive the value of their experiences—linguistically, professionally, and culturally—during and after their internships in three Southeast Asian countries, based on journaling, a focus group, and a questionnaire?

2. How can Southeast Asian destinations be better promoted at the five participants’ home institution to increase access and participation in international learning opportunities?

Method

Considering the small sample size and research objectives, this intervention is qualitative and exploratory in nature. Since the common phenomenon of choosing inner-circle destinations over outer-circle ones is not clearly defined, and with ambitions to expand on this study in the future, the current research aims to garner more understanding of the students’ experiences in three specific southeast Asian countries (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This section will first give an overview of the participants before describing the data sources and analytical procedures.
Participants

Data were collected from five second-year Japanese undergraduate university students who were enrolled in academic internships in three southeast Asian countries. The period of data collection spanned from October 2018 to June 2019. The sample constituted convenience and snowball sampling as one volunteering participant was a former student and he approached other willing participants to join the study. As seen in Table 2, two of the participants joined internships and study abroad at a university in Malaysia, and the three others completed internships for organizations in Cambodia and Vietnam.

Table 2
Research Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Destination / organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>M Malaysia – Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>F Malaysia – Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>M Vietnam – UNICEF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>F Vietnam – Vietnam Japan Institute for Human Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Development (VJCC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>F Cambodia – Cambodia Japan Cooperation Center (CJCC)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. P = participant, M = male, F = female.

Data Sources

This study involved three different sources of qualitative data. The first was weekly journals that were completed over the course of 16 weeks while the participants were in their respective countries, from October 2018 to February 2019. The journals were written as a digital document in Japanese, and later translated into English.

Elements of reflective journaling (Bassot, 2016) were adopted so that responses would be (a) written in the first person, (b) subjective, (c) self-supervised, and (d) involving experience, thoughts, feelings, and assumptions. As a journaling protocol that would reflect the exploratory nature of the research objectives, students were given the following prompts in their native language each week, designed to ensure the most freedom in responses:

1. Report on your educational/internship activities: an outline of the activities, problems you faced and how you handled them, and the results.
2. Report on your daily life outside of educational/internship activities.
3. Report on your goals for the following week.
4. Please describe your learning achievements, aside from the previously stated (e.g. communication with colleagues and local people; acquired skills and knowledge).

Written reflections were chosen since they (a) are asynchronous; (b) offer more privacy and confidentiality, thus easing anxiety; (c) allow the writer to establish undistracted rapport with self; and (d) are more likely to yield true feelings (Bassot, 2016).

Upon returning to Japan, participants also completed a reflective, bilingual online questionnaire in April 2019, which consisted of open-ended questions designed to acquire further understanding of the student experiences. Finally, all five participants agreed to meet for a semi-structured focus group lasting for 50 minutes in June 2019. The focus group, conducted in both English and Japanese, was conducted to clarify any
outstanding issues or discrepancies in the journaling and questionnaire data, thus completing the process of data triangulation.

**Analytical Procedures**

After the data were collected from all five participants over 16 weeks, the six phases of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis process were executed. In the process, codes were identified, followed by their categorization into themes. Since it is possible for bias to impact the coding process, I mitigated this by reaching an acceptable percentage of intercoder agreement (88%) with another researcher and cross-checking the findings with an open-ended questionnaire, after students returned to Japan (Creswell, 2016). As a final measure to ensure validity and reliability through data triangulation, I conducted a focus group with the five participants. This meeting was recorded, transcribed, and then coded in a similar fashion to the reflective journals.

**Results**

After thematic analysis was applied to all three data sources—the weekly reflective journals, questionnaire, and focus group—data were coded inductively and categorized into three themes: (1) costs and proximity, (2) language development and anxiety, and (3) intercultural and soft skills development. Across the data of all five participants, students reflected on reasons for choosing educational experiences in their respective southeast Asian countries, the benefits that were realized while there, and perceptions of the experiences in hindsight.

**Costs and Proximity**

The first theme that emerged was the factor of costs and proximity (see Table 3). Findings from this study corroborate those from the literature that identify costs as both a deterrent to study abroad, but also a benefit of Southeast Asia, compared with the inner circle (Nowlan & Wang, 2018; Kobayashi, 2018b). Undisclosed in prior studies is mention of geographic proximity in the decision to study in Southeast Asia, though it was mentioned by multiple participants as a benefit. Three of the participants specifically mentioned the “financial burden” that one’s international education has on parents, so the affordable costs of Southeast Asia played a significant role in student destination choice. Only one out of the five participants (P5) claimed that costs and proximity did not play a role in their destination choice or that cheaper costs of living made a positive impact on them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Example from Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Costs and Proximity</td>
<td>(P1) Costs were definitely a consideration since it would be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a burden on my family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(P2) Malaysia was very affordable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(P3) Costs were also a consideration since going far away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>would have been a burden to my family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(P4) Being close to Japan made it an easier choice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Language Development and Anxiety**

In regard to language expectations in their respective southeast Asian countries, all five participants started their internships under the assumption that they would be required to use English. However, it emerged in the data that participants did not have
a clear understanding of the varieties of English they would encounter, since prior English exposure was predominantly with native-speaking English teachers or other Japanese interlocutors. One participant (P3) stated “I had problems at first with the Vietnamese accent, but I got used to it gradually” (personal communication, 2019). All the interactions in the destination countries described participants adhering to an English as a lingua franca model. As seen in Table 4, this form of communication was novel to some of the participants, who were impressed by the English language abilities of their local colleagues and classmates.

Table 4
Language Development and Anxiety in Southeast Asia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Example from Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language Development and Anxiety</td>
<td>[P1] I was impressed that Malaysians know so much about Japanese culture!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(P2) I was in an environment where only English was used, so I improved my communication skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(P2) I was impressed with my own abilities to be understood, even when my English was limited. This gave me more confidence as a communicator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(P4) Even if language is not perfectly understood, there are enough commonalities between Japanese and Vietnamese, for example, smiling and body language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(P5) I used English every day so I think I made slight improvements to my ability. I was surprised that Cambodian people seemed equally shy as Japanese, which I felt comfortable with. They also hesitate to raise their hands to speak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(P5) I was surprised that all my colleagues spoke English well, though none of them spoke it as a first language. This motivated me!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Intercultural and Soft Skills Development

The data, as seen in Table 5, show an increase in intercultural understanding, which led to improved intercultural competences and development of soft skills. Participant (P3) was surprised at first by the direct nature in which Vietnamese people spoke to him, but he was able to adapt through cultural relativism and recognizing communication styles in Vietnam as being lower context than in Japan. As a result, he had success in “frankly discussing issues with Vietnamese colleagues” instead of perceiving direct communication through an ethnocentric lens.

When participant (P1) came to the realization that “most Japanese are resistant to the unknown,” his response reflected the literature that defines Japanese society as particularly uncertainty avoiding (Hofstede et al., 2010). This experience corroborates the notion that learning about other cultures and societies can make one more cognizant of their own culture and society (Deardorff, 2019; Kumaravadivelu, 2008). In summary, participants were able to learn about the cultures of their host countries, and it seems that this learning was reciprocated by the host country’s interlocutors.
Table 5
Intercultural and Soft Skill Developments in Southeast Asia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Example from Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural Development</td>
<td>(P1) I was really impressed by the Malaysian tolerance of new people, things, ideas, etc. I think most Japanese are resistant to the unknown, which is a barrier to understanding others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(P2) The key word during the whole internship was &quot;soft skills&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(P2) I was able to acquire many soft skills that will benefit me in my future role. Many people here like to defend their perspectives, which I felt was stubbornness at first. Now I know it’s just a different standard of communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(P3) I learned many international business skills, such as reading formal documents and frankly discussing issues with Vietnamese colleagues. They spoke directly, which took me a while to get used to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(P4) It was eye opening to see how in Vietnam, people value and prioritize celebrations over work. I was shocked at first that people often show up an hour late for meetings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data revealed that students were able to feel more at ease, for example, (P5) who recognized that "Cambodian people seemed equally shy as Japanese, which I felt comfortable with." The student experiences in this intervention echo certain benefits cited in the literature, particularly that southeast Asian students have a genuine interest in Japan and Japanese society and culture (Kobayashi, 2018a, 2018b). For instance, one participant (P1) exclaimed "I was impressed that Malaysians know so much about Japanese culture!". Overall, the exemplars do show comfort being built with using English as a lingua franca.

Discussion

The purpose of this section is to explicitly answer the two research questions while drawing on the literature and the results of the study. The two questions are once again presented below and addressed in two accompanying sub sections:

1. How did the five Japanese university students in this study perceive the value of their experiences–linguistically, professionally, and culturally–during and after their internships in three Southeast Asian countries, based on journaling, a focus group, and questionnaire?

2. How can Southeast Asian destinations be better promoted at the five participants’ home institution to increase access and participation in international learning opportunities?

Perception of Experiences in Southeast Asia

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the existing literature, instead of challenging it; however, there were instances where findings both confirmed and deviated from the literature. This section will concisely address the research questions in relation to the literature; however, further support for these conclusions can be found by referring to the previous results section.
In terms of perceived linguistic developments, the data indicate the value of expanding-circle students (e.g. from Japan) studying in the outer-circle, as participants often used words such as "improvements," and being "impressed" and "motivated" by the L2 aptitudes of their local interlocutors. Also, having positive interactions seemed to challenge the sense of "otherness," as exemplified through comments such as "there are enough commonalities" and "they are just like us." Having interactions with others who also do not speak English as a first language (i.e. English as a lingua franca) proved to be motivating for many of the five participants, as it enhances their future ideal L2 self, that is, the type of English speaker that the sojourner would like to be (Nowlan, 2019). There were no instances of participants bemoaning a lack of native English input, which supports Kobayashi's (2020) notion that the usual hierarchy of first studying language in the outer-circle in preparation for inner-circle experiences may not be as idealized as it once was. One conclusion from the literature that did not manifest in the data included race and ethnicity of the local interlocutors placing the Japanese students at ease. There was mention of a certain degree of "comfort" when communicating with locals, so perhaps this occurred unconsciously, or maybe the participants were not willing to admit the role this played, but it did not manifest explicitly in the data.

Professionally and culturally, the five participants of this study touted the cross-cultural soft skills that they developed during their experiences in Southeast Asia. These included some independent skills, such as time management and overcoming personal difficulties; however, most reported skills involved interactions with local classmates and colleagues. As seen in the findings, participants were able to adapt to more low-context communication styles while eventually identifying empathy for those who they initially considered as different. During the later stages of journaling, participants were able to identify more similarities than differences between Japan and the host country, thus building a bridge of understanding between cultures that, at first, seemed very different. In Byram's (2009) model of intercultural communicative competence, these manifestations could be classified as advanced "skills of interpreting and relating," which would be an impressive development over the course of only 16 weeks. Other cited soft skills that contained intercultural communicative elements include debate, negotiation, critical thinking, and cross-cultural problem solving.

Southeast Asian countries seem to be conducive for international learning opportunities, not just for low-level speakers of English, but also those who wish to develop their soft skills and intercultural communication abilities. Unfortunately, many students in Japan continue to disregard this region in favor of the inner-circle or domestic studies, so the next section will include ideas to promote the benefits of educational experiences in Southeast Asia.

**Promoting Southeast Asia for Study Abroad**

The second research question of this study asks how Southeast Asian countries can be better promoted at the participants' institution, and whether such promotion could increase access to and participation in study abroad. Being a society where it is taboo to break social norms and "where the nail that sticks out gets pounded down" (Hoshino, 1995), it may cause angst or stress to take action that has either not been done, or seldom done, before (Hofstede et al., 2010). Regardless of whether one subscribes to these generalizations, the literature highlights numerous factors that discourage Japanese students from studying abroad, most notably, perceived low ability with English, anxiety, and a lack of confidence. Being an ethnically homogenous population (Central Intelligence Agency Factbook, 2020), students are apprehensive about study
abroad because foreign culture represents the unknown, and as an uncertainty avoiding population, this ambiguity can contribute to non-participation. In order to better promote study abroad, a paradigm shift regarding study abroad destinations is needed for a critical mass of students to consider Southeast Asia over the much more popular options in the inner-circle.

Since the barriers to study abroad found in the literature are primarily associated with the inner circle, administrators and policy makers in Japan’s higher education sector are able to increase access and participation. For instance, the participants’ university can create exchange agreements with institutions in the outer-circle for students with lower English aptitudes, while facilitating domestic exchanges with non-native speakers of English from other countries, such as those in Southeast Asia. The participants’ institution has begun providing these options, but they continue to be largely disregarded as students continue gravitating towards the inner-circle. A more impactful way to introduce Southeast Asian countries as study abroad destinations would be to recruit returning students to share their experiences with prospective sojourners via information sessions where attendees can learn about the opportunity from peers instead of administrators. These approaches could be adopted not only at the university under investigation, but also at institutions across the country.

As seen in the findings of the current study, such interactions using English as a lingua franca have resulted in lower anxiety and a realization that one does not need to assimilate native-level English skills in order to communicate effectively in English. If higher education stakeholders, including instructors, can provide opportunities for Japanese university students to meet exchange students domestically, then this could dissolve one’s notion of otherness that is applied to non-Japanese people. The literature suggests that many local students in Southeast Asia have respect for and interest in Japanese culture, so to easily transition from the “inward looking nature” that governmental initiatives aim to reverse, Japanese students should have actual face-to-face contact with non-Japanese English speakers in Japan. This contact can be done via discussion circles (Wang & Nowlan, 2011) or other university-sanctioned social events, such as coffee hours. Alternatively, if face to face interaction is not possible, as we are seeing during the current COVID-19 pandemic, then virtual exchanges in collaboration with instructors and students around the world, are a viable option.

If administrators and instructors can better promote Southeast Asia by creating greater exposure to inbound students, then perhaps a critical mass of students venturing to this region for learning opportunities could materialize.

Limitations and Implications for Further Study

Since the data were only collected from a group of five Japanese students attending the same university in Japan, it could be difficult to generalize the findings to other international contexts. However, due to the demographics of Japanese society, I feel that the experiences of these students could resonate and be similar with students from other regions of Japan, as long as they share certain features, such as pre-existing proficiency in English and interest in international education. As an additional limitation, the identified codes and themes could be subject to personal bias, but attempts were made to mitigate this by collecting various types of qualitative data to ensure consistency, and to practice data collection techniques (e.g. thematic analysis, intercoder agreement) that were successfully done in similar studies. Finally, generalizing the findings of such a study can be difficult, considering the vast differences between Southeast Asian nations, which would undoubtedly influence one’s experience while
either working or studying there. Attempts were made to mitigate this by identifying themes (e.g. English as a lingua franca) that would potentially yield similar results across all countries in the region.

Due to the limited number of participants, this study has inspired the conception of a longitudinal mixed-methods project that will go into greater depth into the motivations and experiences of students who choose to study in Southeast Asia. More specifically, it will aim to differentiate between the destination push-pull motivations of students who intend to study in the inner circle, compared to Southeast Asia, followed by analysis of actual experiences. This insight could be valuable in helping manage the expectations of students who are destined for the region, especially if they are relatively uninitiated to life outside of Japan.

Conclusion

This article provides evidence of the positive experiences that Japanese students may have if they choose Southeast Asia for educational experiences abroad, as opposed to inner-circle English-speaking countries. Students can benefit from proximity and more affordable costs; practicing English as a lingua franca, where the primary goal is to communicate; developing soft skills and intercultural competences; and learning in a lower-anxiety environment where they may feel greater comfort in making mistakes and forging meaningful relationships. If more students can be exposed to these benefits through improved coordinated promotion, then we may see a paradigm shift where southeast Asian, and other outer-circle countries, are regarded as favorably as the most popular inner-circle destinations. Such a shift in destination attitudes could result in more Japanese students gaining access to international education opportunities, which could have the dual benefits of helping students have a richer higher education experience while allowing MEXT to meet student mobility targets.

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Using Instagram as a Preparation Tool for Study Abroad

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Abstract

This paper describes the usage of Instagram (the social networking platform) in sophomore English classes at a private Japanese university. Instagram was used to help students prepare for their study abroad semester. Students created private Instagram accounts and used this platform for group exercises with a mixed group of students and staff at potential study abroad sites in the United States of America. The participants posted images and video of their daily lives and routines at their schools, and created posts based on tasks set by the instructor. Group members were then encouraged to ask each other questions and communicate through Instagram. The study found that Instagram usage has the potential to help students prepare linguistically and culturally for study abroad semesters. The paper recommends follow-up studies that use Instagram and other social networking sites to help students prepare culturally and linguistically for study abroad semesters. This has implications for language teachers who are teaching prospective study abroad students or are interested in incorporating technology into their classes, as well as coordinators of study abroad programs interested in modernizing their study abroad orientation programs.

Keywords: CALL, Instagram, social media, social networking sites, study abroad

この論文では、日本の私立大学の2年生の英語クラスでのInstagram（SNS）の使用法について説明します。Instagramは、学生が留学の準備をするのを助けるために使用されました。学生はプライベートInstagramアカウントを作成し、このプラットフォームを使用して、米国の潜在的な留学サイトで学生とスタッフの混合グループとのグループ演習を行いました。参加者は、学校での日常生活の画像や動画を投稿し、講師が設定したタスクに基づいて投稿を作成しました。その後、グループのメンバーはお互いに質問し、Instagramを介してコミュニケーションすることが奨励されました。調査では、Instagramの使用により、学生が留学学期に向けて言語的および文化的に準備するのに役立つ可能性があることがわかりました。この論文では、Instagramやその他のSNSを使用して、学生が留学に向けて文化的および言語的に準備するのに役立つ追跡調査を推奨しています。これは、将来の留学学生を教えている、またはクラスにテクノロジーを組み込むことに関心のある語学教
Using Instagram as a Preparation Tool for Study Abroad

Prior to the ongoing (as of writing) COVID-19 pandemic, study abroad (SA) programs had grown increasingly popular among Japanese university students (Study International Staff, 2019) and continued to be supported by both the national government and universities (Lee, 2018). Although the pandemic has certainly changed the nature of SA programs, attention should still be paid to improving the pre-departure preparatory period for students. One suggestion is to enhance interaction with partner institutions. Humphrey (2016) stated the importance for teachers within institutions to help SA students develop an understanding of the role of English in facilitating intercultural communication. Other issues to consider are supplemental to academic reasons for studying abroad; many Japanese students are interested in touristic aspects and cultural experiences that include interaction with local citizens and students, as well as extra-curricular activities (Inoue, 2019). Horness (2018) stressed that study abroad programs should temper expectations for language gains but focus on the development of cultural awareness and personal growth. Social networking sites (SNS) may offer one potential avenue that addresses these inter-connected issues during the pre-departure period.

SNS have enjoyed a rapid rise in popularity and the literature reveals aspects of their usage that may facilitate English language education in general. SNS allow learners to create their own learning materials and environments, and can allow students to experiment with language (Bates, 2011; Chartrand, 2012). Research has also detailed the benefits of authentic language interaction and the development of socio-pragmatic awareness through SNS. (Dunn, 2013; Seaman & Tinti-Kane, 2013). Researchers demonstrated the usefulness of SNS in aiding student communicative and cultural competence (Maulina & Basri, 2019; Upadhyay, 2018). The positives of SNS usage in English language classrooms are primarily derived from the communicative potential that their social and interactive nature allows.

Vygotsky’s (1978) interrelated social constructivist and social cultural theories have been justifying the use of SNS (Inayati, 2015; Taskiran, Gamusoglu, & Aydin, 2018). According to Vygotsky (1978), language learning is a social activity in which language is learnt through constant interaction with other learners and native speakers. SNS, like Instagram, can be used as a source of extra input for language learners (Aloraini, 2018). This is useful in an EFL context where opportunities for language input and practice can be limited. Instagram can help improve student writing, motivate students to participate more, and boost student confidence in communicating in English through frequent communication with classmates and other users (Anggraeni, 2017; Mansor & Abd-Rahim, 2017). Instagram can also help students enhance their English skills, and the ability to understand opinions and specific information in authentic speech (Khalitova & Gimaletdinova, 2016).

SNS usage during Study Abroad

Much research has concluded that there are positive aspects of SNS usage regarding SA. Berger (2018) suggested that students wanting to improve their writing skills may wish to post entries on SNS in the target language. She also suggested that due to SNS’ ability to facilitate connections with people in the target community, program
administrators could harness this resource to support students when necessary. Kawasaki (2019) found SNS useful in making friends during her study abroad experience and recommended that institutions use SNS to provide information about local associations and groups that international students can join. Wooley (2013) similarly found that SNS usage while abroad positively impacted the SA experience because of the convenience it offers in communicating and finding information.

Ottoson (2014) researched how students use SNS technology to create a narrative of their experience during their stay and concluded that this information may be used to improve the experience of students, administrators, and host families during the SA experience. Woychick (2016) stated that SNS usage of Instagram was representative of cross-cultural adaptation and identity orientation, and that participants documented their experiences and themselves in moments of new cultural context adaptation. Given the various linguistic, social, personal, and cultural benefits that SNS usage during SA may yield, perhaps incorporating its usage in the pre-departure period could be useful for reaping similar benefits.

Although there are many instances of SNS being observed during SA, the literature is less complete concerning SNS usage in the pre-departure period. However, the concept of digitally connecting with individuals from other cultures has been researched. Lie and Yunus’ (2018) students were not university students preparing for SA, however they found that after their students engaged in online activities with students from another culture, their students improved their writing and enjoyed communicating and learning with native speakers and peers from around the world. Maples, Groenke and Durlap (2005) similarly found a Web Pen Pals program helped their middle school students establish friendships between the students themselves and with their international partners. Goldoni (2015) recommended that prospective SA students should research their host country as anthropologists conducting various ethnographic inquiries and that students should contact locals at their sites to identify an interest they can cultivate abroad, such as becoming part of a local community. The nature of SNS lends itself to accomplishing this.

Purpose of Study

Previous research by the author at a private Japanese university which incorporated Instagram into English classes yielded favorable results. Student reception was positive, and most students agreed that the lessons were closer to real life communication patterns (Thomas & Park, 2020). Research also showed the potential for increasing student motivation toward learning English and positive sentiments on using SNS for English language communication (Park, 2020), as well as the potential to improve long-term English proficiency (Park & Wu, 2020). After research on Facebook, Back (2013) stated that Facebook usage offers a potentially rich source of classroom-applicable interaction in the target language, and that instructors and study abroad directors could encourage the use of SNS to connect with host families, native-speaking peers, and other interlocutors in order to prepare for the SA experience. Back (2013) concluded that the inclusion of structured social media activities into English language courses could be beneficial for both students going abroad and those that are not.

Given the potential benefits that SNS usage may provide for prospective SA students, the effects of using Instagram to assist in the pre-departure period, both culturally and linguistically, was examined and analyzed. The following research questions will be addressed:
1. Can Instagram be an effective language learning tool for future study abroad students at a Japanese university?
2. Can Instagram be an effective cultural learning tool for future study abroad students at a Japanese university?

**Method**

**Participants**

The participants of this study consisted of 33 individuals divided into two groups. One group consisted of 19 students from a mandatory sophomore English class. The students were all from the International Relations faculty. There were eleven female and eight male students with an age range of 19-20 years. All the students were Japanese nationals. The class was composed of B1 independent user (CEFR scale) students. The students met with the author once a week for a 90-minute class. Of this group, ten would study abroad at various American universities the following semester. Although their nine classmates were involved in this study, these ten students are the primary focus of this study. These students would participate in the Asia University American Program (AUAP) study abroad program which is a partnership between the students’ university and seven partner universities in the U.S. The AUAP is a five-month study abroad program with a large support staff at the American campuses, and features regular activities and field trips, ESL classes, and both dormitory and homestay experiences. Although the experience varies from campus to campus, the students are all generally entering an established and structured study abroad program. This study, informally called the “Instagram Project,” is a result of a partnership between the author, and directors at three of the AUAP SA sites, with potential plans of further incorporating Instagram usage into pre-departure orientation in the future.

The second group of this study were 13 individuals at three of the target American campuses. This group consisted of various American AUAP staff members, ranging from program directors to residence staff. The group also contained American students at those universities. The students, some of whom were soon going to Japan for their own study abroad experiences, were by far the most responsive participants from the American group of participants. Due to the global nature of their major, this class conducted Instagram activities with a focus on cultural exchange and authentic communication.

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Schedule</th>
<th>Pre-Spring 2019</th>
<th>Post-Spring 2019</th>
<th>Fall 2019 Study Abroad Semester, Week 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consent Forms</td>
<td>Consent Forms</td>
<td>Consent Forms</td>
<td>AUAP Study Abroad Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of Instagram group</td>
<td>Creation of Instagram group</td>
<td>Creation of Instagram group</td>
<td>AUAP Survey for American Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Abroad Attitudes Survey</td>
<td>Study Abroad Attitudes Survey</td>
<td>Study Abroad Attitudes Survey</td>
<td>AUAP Study Abroad Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-week curriculum supplemented with Instagram activities</td>
<td>15-week curriculum supplemented with Instagram activities</td>
<td>15-week curriculum supplemented with Instagram activities</td>
<td>15-week curriculum supplemented with Instagram activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram Survey</td>
<td>Instagram Survey</td>
<td>Instagram Survey</td>
<td>AUAP Survey for American Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUAP Study Abroad Survey</td>
<td>AUAP Study Abroad Survey</td>
<td>AUAP Study Abroad Survey</td>
<td>AUAP Study Abroad Survey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Design and Schedule

Each student created a private Instagram account. The students then connected with each member of the class and the instructor, and the group of students and staff at the American SA programs. The two groups never entirely met each other in a classroom setting, however two of the American group staff members visited the class during the semester and one American student met members of the Japanese class during her study abroad experience in Japan. The 10 future study abroad students then completed a survey on various issues concerning their attitudes concerning their future study abroad semester (see appendix B1). The class then followed their prescribed curriculum with Instagram-based activities performed in class and for homework throughout the semester.

The Instagram activities incorporated themes and concepts from the textbook lessons and were based on tasks set by the instructor. These tasks were based around cross-cultural exchange, conceptions about American life and student curiosity towards America. These tasks were never exclusively about study abroad experience so as not to alienate those students who would not study abroad. Students were also encouraged to comment on other posts and provide feedback. Posts that the students voluntarily created in their free time were given no parameters but enthusiastically encouraged by the instructor.

At the end of the spring 2019 semester, the 10 future study abroad students completed the study abroad survey again, as well as a survey on their thoughts concerning the Instagram activities and their effect on student attitudes towards their future study abroad (see appendix B2). Additionally, the American participants were given a survey asking their thoughts on the project and suggestions for improvement (see appendix B3).

During the autumn 2019 SA semester, an additional AUAP SA survey (see appendix B4) was given twice, once in week three of the semester and later in week nine, to measure student attitudes towards their SA and Instagram preparatory experience at the one-fourth and three-fourths mark of their semester abroad. Originally interviews were planned to follow the students’ return to their Japanese university, however due to the COVID-19 and resultant school closure, these interviews were cancelled. All Japanese student survey question items were written in Japanese to ensure maximum comprehension. Students were given the option of answering in either Japanese or English. Student answers in Japanese were first translated, and then these answers and answers in English were coded and analyzed. Any errors in the English answers were not corrected for the sake of accurately representing the students’ opinions. An English language survey (see appendix B5) was given to the American participants after the study for the purpose of improving the Instagram project in the future.

Results

Attitudes towards Study Abroad

In the Japanese sophomore class, 10 students completed a survey on their attitudes toward study abroad before and after the study. This survey consisted of 10 questions on a scale of one to six. The rate of “1” represents “highly agree,” and the rate of “6” represents “highly disagree.” The lower the rating, the more positive the attitude
towards study abroad is. The means and other descriptive statistics of the total rate of each of the questions, pre-study and post-study, are presented below.

**Table 2**  
*Descriptive Statistics of the Pre and Post Study Abroad Surveys*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.500</td>
<td>0.972</td>
<td>0.307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1 Post</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.600</td>
<td>0.699</td>
<td>0.221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.900</td>
<td>0.568</td>
<td>0.180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2 Post</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.400</td>
<td>1.075</td>
<td>0.340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.500</td>
<td>1.080</td>
<td>0.342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3 Post</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.800</td>
<td>1.317</td>
<td>0.416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.600</td>
<td>1.174</td>
<td>0.371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4 Post</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.000</td>
<td>1.155</td>
<td>0.365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.200</td>
<td>1.229</td>
<td>0.389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5 Post</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.000</td>
<td>2.867</td>
<td>0.907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.500</td>
<td>0.972</td>
<td>0.307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6 Post</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.600</td>
<td>0.699</td>
<td>0.221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.100</td>
<td>1.101</td>
<td>0.348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7 Post</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.700</td>
<td>1.059</td>
<td>0.335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.300</td>
<td>0.949</td>
<td>0.300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8 Post</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.700</td>
<td>0.949</td>
<td>0.300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.200</td>
<td>1.398</td>
<td>0.442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9 Post</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.000</td>
<td>1.247</td>
<td>0.394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.300</td>
<td>1.337</td>
<td>0.423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q10 Post</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.500</td>
<td>1.080</td>
<td>0.342</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A paired sample T-test was run for the mean rates of all questions. The results showed that of the 4 questions whose means decreased, only the means of question 3 (p < .025) and question 8 (p <.024) decreased significantly. The means for six of the questions increased, but none significantly. Overall, the results suggest that participants’ attitudes towards study abroad did not conclusively become more positive or negative after learning with Instagram.

**Table 3**  
*Results of Paired Samples T-Test for Pre- and Post-Survey Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>-0.361</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>1.627</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>2.689</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>-0.937</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5</td>
<td>-0.784</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6</td>
<td>-0.287</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7</td>
<td>-1.406</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8</td>
<td>2.714</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.343</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additionally, students were asked about what they were excited and worried about concerning their study abroad experience. Prior to the study, students commented that they were excited about culture, conversation with other students, homestays, making friends, lifestyle, and some students wrote that they were excited by "nothing." After the study, students reported that they were excited about homestays, dorm life, host families, spending time with foreigners, and culture. Prior to the study, students indicated that they were worried about English ability, adjusting to student life, making foreign friends, and food. After the study, students were worried about conversation in English, classes, crime, improving English, food, money, illness, security, and money. Additionally, there were far more responses in English in the post-study survey.

**Instagram Survey**

The 10 students completed a final survey during or after the final class of the term. Six question items, covering a range of topics related to the students Instagram usage in class were asked. The questions and their results are listed in Table 4.

**Table 4: Results of the Instagram survey questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1. Did using Instagram in class help you prepare for study abroad?</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2. Did using Instagram increase your excitement for study abroad?</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3. Did communicating with Americans make you more confident using English?</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4. Did communicating with Americans in English frustrate you?</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5. Did you enjoy seeing images from America and AUAP?</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6. Did seeing images from America make your nervous?</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7. Did communicating with Americans help you think about America in new ways?</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**AUAP Surveys**

A 10-question survey was distributed to the 10 study abroad students twice, at the three week and nine-week mark of their semester abroad. The survey questions were written in Japanese, but students were given the option of replying in English, which many did. The questions concerned their study abroad experience and the impact that the Instagram activities had on their experience. Six students responded to the survey at the three-week mark and of these six, one student responded to the survey at the nine-week mark. The results were largely positive about both study abroad and the impact of the Instagram activities. Interviews following the study abroad semester were planned, however due to the indefinite closure of the campus because of COVID-19, these
interviews were cancelled. Finally, a survey was given to the 13 American participants asking their thoughts on the Instagram project and suggestions for the future. Most participants were positive on the experience and willing to participate again in the future.

**Discussion**

Analysis of the data concerning students’ attitudes toward study abroad and positive attitudes towards Instagram usage indicate that SNS may have the potential to be an effective learning and acculturation tool in English language learning for future study abroad students. The results of the study abroad survey were mixed with the means decreasing (implying a positive effect) for only four questions, (question two “I am prepared for my study abroad semester,” question three “I am confident in my English level,” question eight “I am confident in my money management skills,” and question nine “I am confident about making non-Japanese friends”). The means increased for the other questions (question one “I am excited for my study abroad semester,” question four “I am not worried about crime and safety,” question five “I am interested in American culture,” question six “I am excited about my dormitory/homestay experience,” question seven “I am not worried about the food / drink / medicine in America,” and question 10 “I will not often be surprised while abroad”). Although these results were not conclusively positive or negative, analysis of the other surveys indicate overall positive attitudes towards Instagram usage to prepare students linguistically and culturally for future study abroad students.

Moreover, upon reflection, students becoming more worried about crime, safety, food, drink, medicine, or expecting to be surprised, may not be entirely negative results. Mattison (2019) found that many Japanese SA students were unprepared for their stay, and that they were surprised by many facets of life abroad, such as weather, food, transportation, safety, costs, and socializing. She recommended students develop a plan about goals prior to departure, do individual research instead of relying on others, and overestimate costs. Considering this, perhaps some student attitudes growing negative can be regarded as a positive development in terms of preparation.

The results of the Instagram survey were more positive. Analysis showed that most question items trended positively and imply positive student attitudes. The largely positive results of response 1 (R1) “Did using Instagram in class help you prepare for study abroad?” (80% chose “Yes”) and response 3 “Did communicating with Americans make you more confident in using English?” (70% chose “Yes”) mirror the results from response two “I am prepared for my study abroad semester”, and response three “I am confident in my English level” on the study abroad survey. These results support the notion that SNS usage can be useful in the SA preparatory period (Back, 2013) for improving student English ability and their sense of preparedness. Furthermore, results from the AUAP surveys support these findings.

In regard to response six on the AUAP study abroad survey “Do you think the Instagram activities helped you adjust to America?”, the students were positive. Student A highlighted grammar in their response, “A lot, I feel like I learned grammar.” Student B focused on writing, “I think it was useful writing in English.” These remarks support the literature concerning SNS’ potential of improving writing an English ability through frequent communication (Anggraeni, 2017; Khalitova & Gimaletdinova, 2016; Mansor & Abd-Rahim, 2017). Student C mentioned the input of the American participants, “I think it was very useful communicating with native speakers.” This sentiment supports findings about positive effects that SNS usage can have on communicative and cultural
competence (Maulina & Basri, 2019; Park, 2020; Upadhyay, 2018). The overall positive comments from the students for this question while they were at their SA sites may support the notion that Instagram usage has the potential to aid student preparation for study abroad experiences, both linguistically and culturally. Student D very simply stated that because of the Instagram activities they could “understand a little,” about SA.

The positive results of Instagram survey response five “Did you enjoy seeing images from America and AUAP?” (90% chose “Yes”) and response seven “Did communicating with Americans help you think about America in new ways?” (80% chose “Yes”) conflict with the negative results of some of the SA survey questions. However, they may support the positive result from response nine “I am confident about making non-Japanese friends.” from the SA survey. Seeing images of life abroad and the community of Japanese and American students at the AUAP campuses, and regular communication with Americans, may have increased student confidence in adjusting to life in American and making American friends. Student D commented, “It [Instagram usage] was very helpful because I could imagine the life and situation of America.” Student F at the three-week mark added, “I think it [Instagram usage] was useful because I was able to communicate with people [in the US] which I knew in Instagram.” This lends support to the concept that SNS may aid SA students in making friends while abroad (Kawasaki, 2019).

Overall, it may be inferred that the regular contact and exposure to images of America and communication with American students and staff helped students feel more confident about their study abroad experience from a social and cultural perspective. This supports conclusions from the literature concerning student preparation for SA via SNS (Back, 2013), as well as the idea of ethnographically researching future SA life before departure (Goldoni, 2015). However, the negative results from the other study abroad survey questions may cast doubt on this conclusion.

Although the mean for response one on the SA survey “I am excited for my study abroad semester,” trended negatively and implies that Instagram usage had a negative effect on student excitement, 90% of students answered that using Instagram increased their excitement for response two of the Instagram survey. Although 50% of students said that they felt frustration when communicating with Americans via Instagram (response four on the Instagram survey), only 30% of students felt nervous after Instagram usage (response six on the Instagram survey). The often-contradictory results of the different survey questions highlight a need for more studies with larger sample sizes and more rigorous data collection.

The overall results of the AUAP Surveys are not surprisingly, very positive. The students generally were enjoying themselves at their SA sites and mentioned their surprise at how outgoing and social Americans were and expressed pleasure at making American friends, with very few negative opinions. Students all felt their English was generally improving. Although no student continued to post to the class Instagram group after they arrived at their SA sites, all of them posted on their personal Japanese accounts from a frequency of every day to a few times a week. Almost all of them replied that they felt comfortable posting in English, however. Student F at the nine-week mark opined, “I think using Instagram in the class is useful for AUAP, so it is better to continue it.”

The results of the AUAP survey given to the American participants were also positive. Participant A stated, “I enjoyed giving advice and feedback on the things that they [the students] posted.” Participant B commented “I felt that it was a fun way to be involved with students while also integrating modern social technology.” Participant C replied, “I enjoyed seeing your students’ growth, seeing the interactions...and I think it
was great for your students to get to see the U.S. campuses and culture before actually getting here.” These sentiments along with interest in expanding the Instagram project in the future support the literature concerning the potential benefits for the directors and staff of SA programs (Berger, 2018; Ottoson, 2014).

This study adds to the literature concerning SNS and Instagram usage among study abroad students, particularly during the pre-departure period. It attempted to increase interaction with a partner organization ("Factors that keep," n.d.) in a way that students may have found useful, via a popular SNS. It also adds to the literature concerning SNS usage for Japanese students and Japanese study abroad students in particular. As study abroad remains very popular among Japanese university students, educators and administrators must continue to seek new ways to better prepare prospective study abroad students in order to maximize their study abroad experience, linguistically and culturally. SNS usage may provide one possible path due to its existing popularity and familiarity among students, and its ability to easily connect prospective study abroad students with native English users who may be valuable cultural, linguistic, and social resources. In addition, those interested in incorporating technology into their classes, for study abroad or non-study abroad students, may find SNS usage useful as it offers a very reliable and effective form of communicative technology for which students will not need much instruction. This study has several limitations. The total number of students involved is very small (10), and the duration of the Instagram activities (15 weeks) is short. As a result, study results cannot be considered very conclusive. Future studies involving larger sample sizes over longer periods of time are recommended. In addition, survey questions concerning improved attitudes and confidence toward English could have been impacted by several non-Instagram related factors such as the standard textbook-based curriculum, the relationships between class members, the effect of the instructor, etc. Some survey answers were also contradictory. More frequent and more in-depth surveys are recommended.

The collection of more robust qualitative data in the form of interviews (as was originally planned) or more detailed surveys is also recommended to better determine the effect that Instagram usage specifically had on English and study abroad attitudes. Another suggestion would be to interview students prior to the study to establish baselines of student goals and prior cultural knowledge concerning America more definitively. As many of the activities were predicated on understanding American culture, knowing the depth of student knowledge would be useful in informing future studies. The author was sometimes surprised at misconceptions that the students had. For example, one student believed that Americans eat hamburgers every day and no students were aware of the popularity of Mexican food in America. Additionally, this study relied solely on convenience samples which introduces issues of selection bias and sampling error. Consequently, the conclusions of this study cannot be applied to the general English language learning population. The scope of this study is very limited to 10 future study abroad students at a private Japanese university. More research on all aspects of this study are greatly recommended.

Conclusion

The use of SNS in classrooms has the potential to facilitate learning by incorporating positive aspects like authentic communication and cultural exploration. The results of this study suggest the use of Instagram for preparing SA students linguistically and culturally may be beneficial. However, due to SNS’ now universal popularity worldwide, similar positive outcomes are not unthinkable for a range of
learning environments. Although this study used Instagram, any platform that offers the positive aspects of SNS could provide similar effects. Students in all countries bring mobile devices with them to school every day and spend significant time on SNS. There are a myriad of ways in which English language educators can take advantage of this situation, not limited to study abroad students. Addressing the limitations of this study may lead to positive results for future study abroad students or English language learners in general. For educators or administrators seeking new ways to prepare prospective study abroad students, increase interaction between partner institutions, incorporate technology into their classrooms or add cultural exploration or authentic communication elements to their classes, SNS usage is recommended.

References


Kawasaki, F. (2019, September). How to make close friends using SNSs in NZ. Poster presented at the meeting of the JALT Study Abroad SIG, Yokohama, Japan.


Appendix A

Sample Japanese Students’ Instagram Posts

Figure A1
Japanese University Student Posts to Writing Prompts Concerning American Places and Food.

Figure A2
Japanese and American Participant Communication Through Comments Sections on Instagram Posts.
Figure A3
*American Group Members’ Instagram Posts Concerning AUAP Activities.*

Figure A4
*American Group Members’ Instagram Posts Concerning AUAP Activities.*
Appendix B

English Translation of the Student Surveys and Feedback

B1 Study Abroad Survey

Name ____________ Gender ___Male / Female__ Date ____________

1=very true 2=mostly true 3=somewhat true 4=somewhat untrue 5=mostly untrue 6=very untrue

Please check the number that best fits the statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 I am excited for my study abroad semester.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 I am prepared for my study abroad semester.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 I am confident in my English level.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 I am not worried about crime and safety.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 I am interested in American culture.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 I am excited about my dormitory/homestay experience.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 I am not worried about the food/drink/medicine in America.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 I am confident in my money management skills.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 I am confident about making non-Japanese friends.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 I will not often be surprised while abroad.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What are you most excited about?

What are you most worried about?

Please write any other thoughts and questions you have here.
Appendix C

Instagram Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1. Did using Instagram in class help you prepare for study abroad?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2. Did using Instagram increase your excitement for study abroad?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3. Did communicating with Americans make you more confident using English?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4. Did communicating with Americans in English frustrate you?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5. Did you enjoy seeing images from America and AUAP?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6. Did seeing images from America make you nervous?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7. Did communicating with Americans help you think about America in new ways?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix D

AUAP Survey for American Participants

Q1. How would you describe your experience with the AUAP Instagram project?

Q2. What were some of the positive and negative points?

Q3. How do you think we can improve it?

Q4. Would you like to participate again next year?

Q5. Please write your name, Instagram ID from the project, campus (WWU, EWU or CWU) and position (director, student, IPA etc.).
Appendix E

AUAP Study Abroad Survey

Q1. What do you think about your experience so far?

Q2. What has surprised you about America?

Q3. What are some good points of America?

Q4. What are some things that worry you about America?

Q5. How do you feel about your English ability?

Q6. Do you think the Instagram activities were useful in preparing you for your study abroad experience in America? Please explain.

Q7. Are you comfortable posting in English?

Q8. Do you use Instagram (English or Japanese) in the US? If so, how often do you post?

Q9. Do you post on the class Instagram in the US? If yes, how often?

Q10. Please write any additional comments here.
Japanese English Majors’ Experiences and Attitudes to Study Abroad:
A Case Study of Students at a Private University in Tokyo

Anthony Tobin
Faculty of Letters, Toyo University
Gakushuin University
https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTSIG.SA.JOWE13.2-3

Abstract
This study investigates both the benefits of and recent trends in studying abroad for Japanese students and examines the results of a survey on study abroad taken by students majoring in English at a private university in Tokyo. Statistics from JASSO showed that the trend in study abroad before 2020 was for an increasing number of Japanese university students to spend a period of time studying abroad, though most of the increase was in short-term study. The English language questionnaire sought to discover what proportion of a group of seventy-two students had already studied abroad, or planned to do so, and to establish whether those who had gained experience had benefitted from it, as well as detailing student anxieties which may have deterred students from studying abroad. The survey on study abroad, taken in January 2018, had a 100% response rate. Twenty-three (32%) of the students answered that they had already studied abroad, mostly for short durations in English-speaking countries. Most of the students who studied abroad had a positive experience, reputedly improved their English skills and recommended that other students study abroad. Twenty-six (53%) of the students without study abroad experience were planning to study abroad, even though they had some issues which concerned them, such as their ability to communicate in English, personal safety, and financial matters. The main reason for not electing to study abroad for this particular sample was found to be related to the overall costs of overseas travel, accommodation, and tuition.

Keywords: Japanese study abroad, overseas study motivations, university-level study abroad trends in Japan

この研究では日本人学生に対する留学の利点および最近の留学の傾向を調べ、さらに東京の私立大学で英語を専攻している学生に対して実施した留学についての調査の結果を検討している。JASSOの統計によると、2020年までは留学する日本人大学生の数は増加傾向であったが、そのほとんどは短期留学であった。英語で行われたアンケート調査の目的は、著者の三つのクラスの72名の学生のうちの何割が
Japanese English Majors’ Experiences and Attitudes to Study Abroad: A Case Study of Students at a Private University in Tokyo

From 2012 to 2018 the number of Japanese students who chose to study abroad increased each year (JASSO, 2020), though as of writing, the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 has arrested this trend. In my role as the Japan representative for a national university in Ireland, I have been assisting Japanese partner universities and students since 2011. In that time, I have witnessed a large increase in the number of students choosing to study at Dublin City University, from less than 100 students from Japan in 2011 to over 1,000 in 2019. In this paper, I will examine the recent statistics from the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) to reveal the trends in the numbers of university students studying abroad and discuss the results of a questionnaire survey on study abroad taken by my students at the Faculty of Letters, Toyo University. The principal aim of the study is to ascertain how many of the students had studied abroad, and of those who had, to find out which destinations they had chosen, whether they had improved their English skills and had a positive experience, whether they planned to study abroad again, and whether they would recommend studying abroad to other students. An additional objective is to discover how many of the students who had no study abroad experience were planning to study abroad and what concerns they had, as well as to find out why some students chose not to study abroad.

With the immersive opportunities offered by a period of study abroad, from a language learning perspective, it seems entirely obvious that a period of study overseas would be beneficial to any motivated student. Students are presented with the opportunity not only to immerse themselves in their target language in the classroom setting, but also have innumerable chances to use their target language in a functional manner with fellow students, host family members, and the various other people one encounters in daily life. Though perhaps not all students might agree with the claim that “the only way that students ever acquire functional language ability, at least at advanced levels, is during study abroad” (Miller and Ginsberg, 1995), researchers in the area of second language acquisition (SLA) such as Churchill and DuFon agreed that “concentrated time enjoyed by learners in the host context would appear to facilitate significant linguistic gains” (Churchill and DuFon, 2006).

Kinginger (2013) stated that her research painted an encouraging picture of study abroad on the whole as overseas study offered students the opportunity to enhance their language ability in every domain, though sometimes those gains have
been modest. In addition, study abroad seems especially useful to the development of abilities related to social interaction, which are exactly the type of skills that may be most difficult to acquire in the classroom. In her research into negotiation and second language acquisition, Abigail McMeekin stated that “in a study abroad setting in particular, where many opportunities exist to interact with native speakers, negotiation is not only a part of successful communication but also plays an important role in facilitating SLA” (McMeekin, 2006). McMeekin’s research focused on second language learners of Japanese and how their negotiation skills develop within classroom and host family settings and concluded that “a combination of in- and out-of-class interaction with native speakers in a study abroad environment provides students with maximum opportunities for exposure to comprehensible input, modification of output and focus on form” (McMeekin, 2006).

However, it should not be assumed that all students who study abroad will make considerable progress in their target language. Some students may become frustrated due to a lack of progress or from difficulties understanding local people and consequently lose motivation. Indeed, students may not have nearly as much interaction with local people as they might expect. According to Tim Hassal, there is an assumption that students will encounter a “rich environment for interaction with native speakers of the target language” but in reality, students often do not interact nearly as much with locals as they intended before departing for social, cultural, and psychological reasons (Hassal, 2006).

At Meiji University’s Faculty of Business Administration, Bradford (2015) conducted a survey of students who had enrolled in internationally orientated courses delivered in English. Most students (87%) who had not previously studied abroad said they would like to. Only 11% of students who had not studied abroad had no interest in doing so. Bradford found that students’ main reasons for studying abroad were to improve their language skills and to learn about another culture.

Nowlan and Wang (2018) surveyed 763 students across various majors at a Japanese university and found that financial considerations were the main obstacle to studying abroad. They found that the types of students who were most likely to study abroad included those with prior international experience, students who had attained higher scores in English proficiency testing, and those who were more willing to delay job-hunting activities. Likewise, in a survey of over 500 students at Asia University, Cavcic (2017) also found that the high costs involved were the main hurdle for students in considering a period of study abroad.

**Overseas Study by Japanese University Students**

According to data cited by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), throughout the 1980s and until the early years of the new millennium there had been an almost continual rise in the number of Japanese students studying abroad. This reached a peak of 82,945 students in 2004 and then went into a steady decline until the number reached a low of 57,501 students in 2011 (MEXT, 2015). It has been said that a trend towards being inward-looking and not being interested in overseas study amongst Japanese students led to this decline (Too many inward-looking students, 2013), but the development of internationally focussed curricula and courses taught through English in Japan may be more relevant in explaining the decline in students finding the need to study overseas for long term courses (Bradford, 2015b).

Whatever the reasons for this decline, it finally halted in 2012 when 60,138 university students went abroad to study (MEXT, 2015). This growth has continued
since, and in the academic year 2018/2019, the most recent year for which figures are currently available, the number of university students who studied abroad, either at their Japanese university’s partner institution or independently, was 115,146 (JASSO, 2020). Naturally, this is a remarkable increase in quite a short period of time, though the Japan Times has been skeptical of JASSO’s figures in recent years and stated that “a close look at the data reveals that looser definitions are inflating the numbers” because short-term language programmes at foreign universities are also included (McCrostie, 2017).

Shimmi and Ota (2018) identified three reasons why short programmes have become so popular. Firstly, taking part in short programmes is less likely to interfere with activities such as job-hunting, preparation for national qualification examinations, and club activities. Secondly, the fees for short programmes tend to be lower than medium and long-term programmes. Thirdly, short-term language programmes suit Japanese students with a lower level in the target language who may not have sufficient language skills to take part in longer exchange programmes at universities where it is necessary to take classes with local students.

A close look at the JASSO statistics reveals that the majority of the 115,146 students studied abroad for a brief period. In fact, 76,545 (66.5%) students studied abroad for one month or less; only 13,237 (11.5%) students studied abroad for between six months and one year, and a mere 2,034 (1.8%) students studied abroad for more than one year.

Predominantly English-speaking countries, or those described by Kachru (1996) as those in the “inner-circle,” are popular amongst Japanese students and 40.4% of the students who studied abroad in 2018/19 chose either Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, or the United States as their destination (JASSO, 2020). As can be seen in Table 1, the United States was by far the most popular destination with 17.3% of students studying there. Canada and Australia had an equal share of 8.7% each, and 5.7% of students chose the United Kingdom. Other predominantly English-speaking countries such as New Zealand and Ireland did not enter the top ten most popular destinations. Most of the other popular destinations were located in East Asia, with 7.1% of students choosing the Republic of Korea, 6.9% went to China, and 5.2% to Taiwan. The Philippines was in the top 10 most popular countries with 3.9% of students who studied abroad in 2018/19 choosing to study there. The Philippines is a country in Kachru’s (1996) “outer-circle” of English-speaking countries which has been gaining in popularity as a destination to study English as a result of comparatively cheaper tuition fees and the relative proximity to Japan when compared to more traditional destinations such as the United States and the United Kingdom (Tokuda, 2016).

**Table 1**
Destinations for Japanese Students Studying Abroad in 2018/19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country or Region</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Percentage of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>10,038</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>10,035</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>7,980</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>3,387</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>4,502</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Korea</td>
<td>8,143</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan (ROC)</td>
<td>5,932</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>5,479</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>6,538</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States of America</td>
<td>19,891</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of the 115,146 students who studied abroad in 2018/19, 59.7% were female and 40.3% were male (JASSO, 2020). The main field of study for students who studied abroad was humanities, and such students comprised 50.6% of students who studied abroad in 2018/19. That humanities students are the most likely students to study abroad should not come as a surprise, as they are the type of students most likely to major in a foreign language. Their numbers are in contrast, however, to the 2,172 (1.9%) science students who studied abroad in the same period. According to Professor Kaoru Yamanouchi (2017) of the University of Tokyo’s School of Science, “it is imperative that Japanese scientists become accustomed to a global environment and have a stronger command of English in order to contribute as members of the international science community.”

Japanese governmental concern about the low number of students studying abroad prompted the launch of the “Tobitate! (Leap for Tomorrow) Study Abroad Initiative” in 2014. The main aim of the initiative was to double the number of university students studying abroad from 60,000 to 120,000 by 2020. As part of the initiative, scholarships were made available to students selected as “Young Ambassadors” with the help of private sector contributions, and it is envisioned that 10,000 students will have taken advantage of this funding by 2020 (Tobitate, 2020). In addition to Tobitate scholarships, the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) also provides scholarship grants and loans to Japanese students who wish to study abroad. In 2019 JASSO had a budget of ¥14 billion for scholarship grants and ¥1,062.7 billion for scholarship loans (JASSO, 2020b). One criteria that the data does not articulate is whether students are language majors, so in this study I will examine one particular cohort of English majors to establish how common study abroad experience and plans to study abroad are amongst a group of undergraduate students.

This study seeks to find out what percentage of this cohort of students had already studied abroad, which countries they chose, and for how long. In addition, the study aims to find out whether those students felt they had improved their English skills and had an overall positive experience which would lead to them encouraging other students to study abroad. A further purpose of the study is to establish how many of the students who had yet to study abroad were planning to do so and to find out what issues concerning study abroad worried them. Finally, the study aims to ascertain why some language majors do not study abroad. I was drawn to researching these questions due to my background working in the area of study abroad for Dublin City University. I felt that gaining insight into Japanese students’ experiences and concerns in particular would be helpful in advising prospective students in the future.

The previously mentioned studies on Japanese students by Bradford, Cavic, and Nowlan and Wang focused mainly on students who had yet to study abroad, while this study poses a different set of questions to students depending on whether they had study abroad experience or not. It is hoped that the data from both sets of students can provide a fuller picture of the study abroad situation regarding Japanese university students majoring in English.

Method

The participants of this survey were students in the Faculty of Letters in Toyo University who were majoring in English language. English majors were selected as it was thought they were more likely to be interested in studying abroad than other students. There were 72 participants in total who were students from three different
classes. The students were mostly second years, though there was also a small number of students in their third or fourth year of study. With regards to English levels, two of the three classes were mainly in the CEFR B1 range and one of the classes was in the B2 to C1 range. The composition of the three classes was 73% female to 27% male. All students were either Japanese or long-term Japan residents. Though more classes and a larger number of students may have been desirable, it was decided to limit the study to the researcher’s own classes.

I designed an English language paper-based questionnaire survey, seen in Appendix A, which could be taken during class time. This was chosen over an internet-based survey as students would be able to ask questions in real-time during class, and students may have been less likely to participate outside of class time. The survey had an initial closed yes/no question asking whether students had study abroad experience or not, and based on students’ answers they were instructed to answer the questions in either section A for students with experience, or section B for students with no study abroad experience. Section A of the questionnaire consisted of six open-ended questions. Section B had one yes/no question which led students to further questions which differed depending on their answer. As the students were English majors, and the questions were quite straightforward, it was not thought necessary to provide Japanese translations of the questions. Although sometimes discouraged as a form of data collection, open-ended questions “can offer graphic examples, illustrative quotes, and also lead us to identify issues not previously anticipated” (Dörnyei, 2007). This method was selected because a purely quantitative survey may not have garnered as much information on individual experiences, and a purely qualitative method such as interviews would not have been feasible given the number of students and time constraints. The results were anonymous, and students did not need to indicate any personal information such as age, sex, or test scores. In section A students who had study abroad experience were asked whether they had improved their English by studying abroad, though it was not felt necessary to establish this with proof in terms of test scores.

Towards the end of the academic year in January 2018, the three classes involved in the study were provided with the questionnaire in the final 30 minutes of the 90-minute classes. I explained that I was carrying out research in the area of study abroad and requested that they take part in the survey so that I could establish their experience and opinions towards study abroad. I read the instructions aloud and told the students that they could feel free to ask me questions if they were unsure of anything within the questionnaire. The students were given a total of 20 minutes to fill in the questionnaire. Once the 20 minutes had elapsed, I collected the questionnaires from the students. All students had completed the questionnaire without difficulties apart from two instances where a question remained partially unanswered.

The data were analysed and collated in an Excel spreadsheet, with responses to open-ended questions categorised. For example, the responses to the question, “How long did you study abroad for?”, were categorised as follows:

- Less than one month
- One to three months
- Three to six months
- Six months to one year
- More than one year

The results of the questionnaire are outlined in the next section.
Results

Of the seventy-two participants, twenty-three, or 32%, had study abroad experience and forty-nine, or 68%, had not yet had any study abroad experience. In the survey, the students who had study abroad experience were asked the following questions in section A:

1. Which country or countries did you study in?
2. How long did you study abroad for?
3. Did you improve your English by studying abroad? Please write details.
4. Overall was your study abroad experience positive or negative? Please write details.
5. Do you plan to study abroad again in the future? Yes/No
   If yes, which country would you like to go to?
6. Do you recommend other students to study abroad? Yes/No
   a. If yes, why?
   b. If no, why not?

In response to the first question, the twenty-three students who had study abroad experience were asked in which country or countries they had studied, and their answers ranged across nine different countries (Figure 1). Most of the students had studied in just one country, but two students had studied in two countries each. The most popular country was the United States with eight students having studied there, Australia was second with five students, and four students had studied in Canada. Three of the twenty-three students had studied in the Philippines. One student had studied in each of the following countries: France, Ireland, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, and Thailand.

Figure 1
Countries Where the Toyo University Students Studied

In the second question, the students were asked how long they had studied abroad for. As can be seen in Figure 2, most of the study abroad experiences were very
short, with 19 of the stays having been for just one month or less. One student had studied abroad for between one and three months, one for between three and six months, and four students had studied abroad for one year or longer. Of the students who had studied abroad for one year or longer, one student had studied in the United States for four years, one had studied in Canada for three years, one student had studied in Thailand for five years, and a further student had spent a year studying in the United States.

**Figure 2**
*Duration of the Toyo University Students’ Study Abroad*

In the third question, students were asked whether they felt they had improved their English by studying abroad. They were free to interpret this question how they wished and therefore students may have answered subjectively rather than based on the results of an exam. Twenty-one of the twenty-three students answered positively to this question, leaving only two students who said they had not improved their English. Several students wrote of an improvement in their speaking and listening skills in particular, and one student succeeded in improving their TOEIC score by 100 points despite having only studied abroad for four weeks. One of the students who said they had not really improved their English only studied abroad for one week, but even so wrote of enjoying the experience of talking with their host family and being able to buy things at a local shop. The other student who felt they had not improved their English studied in the United States for three weeks and felt the high number of Japanese in their class had held them back from making improvements in their English.

Asked whether their overall study abroad experience had been positive or negative, twenty-one students answered that it had been a positive experience, one student felt it had been a mixed experience and one student did not answer the question. None of the students answered that the overall experience had been negative. In explaining how their experience had been positive, students wrote comments such as “communicating with foreigners was interesting,” “it was a good chance to see another country,” “it was good to learn about another culture,” “I had a good experience with my
host family”, “I increased my TOEIC score”, “I became more interested in studying English”, “I made friends from various countries.”

When asked whether they planned to study abroad in the future, seventeen of the students answered “yes”, four students answered “no” and two students left the answer blank. Four students were planning to study in the United States, four in the United Kingdom, three in Ireland, two in Australia, two in the Netherlands, one in Sweden, one in Canada, one in France and two other students were unsure about their destination. Some students wrote more than one country. When asked whether they recommended other students to study abroad, twenty-one of the twenty-three students answered positively, one answered negatively, and one did not respond. In explaining why they recommended studying abroad, several students emphasised that it was a chance to not only improve their English skills, but also a chance to learn about another culture, to meet new friends from around the world, to broaden their horizons, etc.

Students Without Study Abroad Experience

The forty-nine students who had not yet studied abroad were asked the following questions in Section B:

1. Do you plan to study abroad in the future?
   a. Yes - where and for how long?
      i. Are you worried about any issues while studying abroad? Yes/No
      ii. If yes, please write some details:
   b. No – why not:
      i. Too expensive
      ii. Too busy
      iii. Not interested in studying abroad
      iv. Parents are against studying abroad
      v. Other reason: Please write some details:

   Twenty-six of the forty-nine students (53%) who had not yet studied abroad answered that they planned to study abroad in the future. Only twenty-three, or 32% of all the students, had neither experience nor plans to study abroad.

   The most popular destination for the students who had yet to study abroad was Australia with nine students planning to study there, next was the United States with six students, and Ireland was next with five students planning to attend a program there (Figure 3). One student each planned to study in the following countries or regions: the European Union, India, Germany, and the United Kingdom. It can be assumed that in most cases students were planning to study at one of Toyo University’s overseas partner institutions, as Toyo University has overseas partner institutions in all the countries listed (Toyo University, 2020).
Most of the students without study abroad experience were planning to spend quite a long period abroad, with nine students planning to stay for between three and six months and eleven students planning to stay for between six months and twelve months. Only four students were planning to study abroad for one month or less, and two students were planning to study abroad for between one and three months.

Asked whether they were worried about any issues concerning study abroad, twenty-two of the twenty-six students who were planning to study abroad for the first time answered positively. Some students worried about issues such as being able to communicate in English, whether their English skills would improve, and the accent of the local people. Several students were concerned about safety and one student who was planning to go the United States was concerned about the political situation. Other concerns included issues such as the ability to make friends, staying with a host family, adapting to new circumstances, climate, preparing documents for visas, money, and food. Another issue was the negative impact studying abroad might have on job hunting.

The twenty-three students who had no experience or no plans to study abroad were for the most part deterred from study abroad by the expense involved. Nineteen of the students had offered “too expensive” as one of their reasons for choosing not to study abroad. Two students felt that they were “too busy,” three students chose “not interested in studying abroad” and two students stated that they had “parents who are against studying abroad”. Other reasons for not studying abroad included health considerations, club activities, and wanting to travel abroad but not to study abroad.

Discussion

The findings showed that almost a third, 32%, of this cohort of mostly second year English majors at Toyo University had already gained study abroad experience. According to JASSO’s statistics (JASSO, 2020), students of Toyo University study abroad in relatively large numbers, and Toyo University has consistently been in the top 15 universities in terms of students studying abroad in the last five years for which
statistics are available. In 2018, 2,223 Toyo University students studied abroad, placing Toyo University at number three in these rankings, out of an enrolment of approximately 30,000 students. Therefore, it seems likely that this cohort of English majors may have been more likely to study abroad than the typical student in Japan. The students had mostly studied in popular destinations such as Australia, Canada, and the United States, which are all part of Kachru’s (1996) “inner-circle” as well as the Philippines, which as previously mentioned has become popular due to the low tuition fees and short flight times from Japan. This shows that some students are conscious of the costs associated with studying abroad, and also that they are open minded and willing to forego more traditional destinations.

As can be seen, four of the students had studied abroad for a year or longer. It is supposed that in most of these long-term cases, students lived abroad due to family circumstances when they were children or teenagers. That most of the students had only studied abroad for very short periods of time is not surprising as most of the students were coming to the end of their second year, and for students at Toyo University it is common to study abroad for longer durations either in the second semester of their second year and thus studying abroad at the time of this survey, or during their third year of university.

With the exception of only two students, all of the twenty-three students with study abroad experience had felt an improvement in their English skills. This is encouraging given that the study abroad experience for most of the students amounted to less than one month. Bearing in mind that the JASSO statistics showed that 66.5% of Japanese students who studied abroad in 2018/19 did so for one month or less, it is noteworthy that even such a short spell of overseas study brought about an improvement, albeit self-reported. Though only one student wrote about a very significant improvement in their TOEIC score, these self-reported improvements show that students gained confidence in their English skills. The number of students who reported a positive study abroad experience was equally impressive, and this along with the figure for improvements in English skills shows us that perhaps we need not be overly concerned about the issues raised by Tim Hassal (2006) regarding a lack of interaction with locals while studying abroad. Twenty-one of the students also recommended their peers to study abroad, and as has been seen, some mentioned that English was not the only factor and students could also expect to learn about another culture, meet new friends and broaden their horizons. These are like the results of Bradford’s survey (2015) which found that learning about another culture, as well as improving language skills, were the main motivations for students who wanted to study abroad.

In the findings we saw that most of the students who had not yet studied abroad planned to do so and that their favoured destinations were Australia and the United States. The majority of these students were planning study abroad trips of longer than one month, meaning that they would be spending a significant amount of time abroad during their third or fourth year of study. However, we also saw that among the concerns of students was the negative impact that studying abroad might have on their job-hunting activities. I suspect this concern derived from a fear of missed job-hunting opportunities, but one would hope that the experience and improved language skills from studying abroad would more than compensate for this. As Nowlan and Wang (2018) found, those students who are willing to delay job-hunting activities are more likely to study abroad. Perhaps creating more opportunities for students to study abroad
in their first and second years of study might mitigate this perceived negative affect of study abroad on job-hunting.

Students were also concerned about issues such as practical considerations such as visa acquisition, money, and preparing documents, and had anxieties concerning their ability to communicate and improve their English. Personal safety was also regarded as an issue. This shows the importance of briefing sessions by university international offices and study abroad agents on visa applications, preparing documents and security. In my role as Dublin City University’s representative in Japan, I often advise groups of departing students on many of these issues, including safety and security in Ireland. Although we do not want to make students overly paranoid, inevitably a small number of foreign students do fall victim to petty crime each year.

We saw that twenty-three of the students stated that they had no plans to study abroad in the future, and in nineteen of those cases it was the financial burden which discouraged them from doing so and this is similar to the findings of Nowlan and Wang (2018) and Cavcic (2017). Although scholarships and funding may not be available to all students, universities need to make students aware of such possibilities. I am aware that Toyo University does give a significant amount of guidance on scholarships from information presented to students before I held an orientation on study abroad opportunities at Dublin City University previously. Given the chance, it seems that many more Japanese university students would study abroad as uncovered by Bradford (2015).

Although this study uncovered significant findings, especially on the boost in confidence in English ability from even short-term study abroad, there were some limitations and areas that could have been improved. The survey was limited to just 72 students in three classes majoring in English. Expanding the survey to a broader range of students across a variety of faculties, and perhaps universities, would have garnered a larger data set and would have made it possible to compare data from language majors and non-language majors. Rather than a paper-based survey, an internet-based survey would have made it feasible to survey a larger range of students, and it would have shown whether students in the cohort surveyed were sufficiently motivated to respond even if the survey had been outside of class time. In addition, it may have been desirable to translate the questionnaire into Japanese. Although the level of English required to comprehend and respond to the survey was not beyond the ability of the cohort surveyed, students may have been less motivated to answer in more detail in their native language. Finally, although students were asked in the questionnaire about the duration of their study abroad experiences and plans in the case of students who had not yet studied abroad, students who had experience were not asked about the duration of their planned study abroad trips. This data may have been important, as some of those students may have been planning longer spells abroad in their third year of study.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine Japanese English majors’ experience and attitudes towards study abroad. It was limited in its scope in that only three classes of English majors at one university were asked to complete a paper-based survey and though the results presented here may not be representative of the typical university student in Japan, it is intended that the results will be of use in future research into Japanese students’ attitudes to studying abroad and may be helpful in guiding students on issues concerned with study abroad.
Overall, in this cohort of students at Toyo University, it was apparent that more than two-thirds, either had already studied abroad or were planning to do so. This seems quite a high proportion even, for English majors. The most popular destinations were inner circle English speaking countries at partner universities of Toyo University.

The feedback from students who had already had some experience of studying abroad was overwhelmingly positive. Despite most students only having studied abroad for quite short durations at the time of the survey, most felt that they had improved their English to some extent and had had a positive experience. In addition, most of these students were planning to study abroad again.

As we have seen, most of the students who had not yet studied abroad were planning to do so in the future. For the most part, these students were planning to stay overseas for between three and twelve months and as such could expect to make substantial improvements in their English skills. Most of these students were worried about some issues concerning studying abroad which shows that the decision to go overseas may not necessarily be an easy one to make.

Approximately one third of this cohort of English students at Toyo University had no plans to study abroad and the main reason for this were the expenses involved. While it certainly seems that there is quite a lot of funding available for scholarships through bodies such as JASSO, it is disheartening to see that some students majoring in a foreign language may never have the opportunity to study abroad. It should also be noted that although many students who took part in the survey were planning to study abroad, there is no certainty that all those students did or will in fact do so.

References


Appendix A

Study Abroad Questionnaire

Instructions: Please answer the below question and then go to Section A or Section B. Have you studied abroad before?

a. Yes – please go to Section A
b. No – please go to Section B

Section A

1. Which country or countries did you study in?

2. How long did you study abroad for?

3. Did you improve your English by studying abroad? Please write details.

4. Overall was your study abroad experience positive or negative? Please write details.

5. Do you plan to study abroad again in the future? Yes/No
   If yes – which country would you like to go to?

6. Do you recommend other students to study abroad? Yes/No
   If yes, why? If no, why not?

Section B

1. Do you plan to study abroad in the future?
   a. Yes - where and for how long?
      i. Are you worried about any issues while studying abroad? Yes/No
      ii. If yes, please write some details:

   b. No – why not:
      i. Too expensive
      ii. Too busy
      iii. Not interested in studying abroad
      iv. Parents are against studying abroad
      v. Other reason: Please write some details:
Step by Step Guide to Content Analysis for Study Abroad Research

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Abstract
This paper intends to show four practical steps for content analysis; one of the most common data reduction approaches in qualitative analysis for applied linguistics. Although content analysis can help to draw conclusions from textual data by interpreting them effectively, the available literature lacks detail on how to conduct content analyses, especially in the context of study abroad research. In this paper, each of the four steps of content analysis (segmenting data, formulating codes, developing categories, and identifying main themes) is explained by utilizing actual sample data related to studying abroad; the sample study investigated a single participant’s perceptions of a general English language course in the United Kingdom.

Keywords: content analysis, study abroad, qualitative analysis, applied linguistics

Step by Step Guide to Content Analysis for Study Abroad Research
Study abroad researchers often have difficulty conducting their research due to the small number of participants, which makes the research inappropriate for numerical analysis. A minimum sample size of 30 is required to conduct a statistical data analysis (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). More recently, Japanese students tend to avoid long-term studies abroad because, among other considerations, they are concerned about safety, expenses, and potential adverse impact on their schoolwork (Burgess, 2013; Kobayashi, 2018; McCrostie, 2017). Therefore, investigating long-term study abroad programs seems to be especially challenging.
While quantitative research is based on an experimental investigation using statistical procedures, qualitative research is a holistic approach that makes use of non-numerical data to understand and explore an individual’s or group’s perceptions and experiences (J. W. Creswell & J. D. Creswell, 2017; Moule & Goodman, 2009; Richards & Schmidt, 2013). Specifically, case studies are a widely used qualitative method in applied linguistics to enhance the understanding and exploration of perceptions and experiences in a single case, which can consist of an individual or a group of people; for instance, a single language learner in a particular context or teachers of a particular course (Kumar, 2014; Moule & Goodman, 2009; Riazi, 2016). Therefore, case studies have the potential to assist researchers conduct in-depth investigations from a limited number of individuals or groups and draw broadly applicable implications (Moule & Goodman, 2009; Polit & Beck, 2004). In this regard, it is believed that case studies are an effective method to investigate study abroad programs with a small number of subjects.

However, unlike quantitative data, often presented in tabular or graphical form, the presentation of narrative data can be challenging due to the vast quantities of textual information (Moule & Goodman, 2009). In particular, to enhance the credibility of research findings, the triangulation of a variety of data sources is recommended for case studies (Moule & Goodman, 2009; Yin, 2012). For instance, interviews are known as the most frequently used data collection method for a case study to explore personal experiences and perceptions in a natural and socially acceptable way (Dörnyei, 2007; Hancock & Algozzine, 2017; Moule & Goodman, 2009). However, case studies often involve investigating behavior in the past, and participants may forget or reconstruct their interpretation (Newby, 2013); thus, researchers may not get at the truth solely by interviews. By contrast, having participants keep diaries during an investigation is thought to offer greater accuracy than interviews because recall is likely to be more precise at the time of the event than some time after it (Merriam, 2009; Moule & Goodman, 2009). This indicates that those conducting case study research need to manage a large amount of textual data from a variety of sources to enhance the credibility of their findings.

For these reasons, it is necessary to go through a process of content analysis to reduce copious amounts of written data to manageable and comprehensible proportions (Cohen et al., 2007). Data analysis fundamentally refers to reducing the large corpus of collected information to make sense of the data (Bryman, 2012). Content analysis is one of the most common approaches to data reduction in qualitative analysis for applied linguistics (Cohen et al., 2007; Dörnyei, 2007). It is a systematic procedure for analyzing any written materials, including interview transcripts to identify the main themes that emerge from the responses given by the participants (Cohen et al., 2007; Kumar, 2014; Merriam, 2009). By organizing narrative information according to emerging themes, content analysis allows researchers to probe into content in a manner different from the ordinary way of reading a text, and is often used in exploratory research seeking to interpret what meaning is presented in the texts (Polit & Beck, 2004; Riazi, 2016).

As Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017) pointed out, however, researchers often struggle to understand how to identify themes from raw data by content analysis due to a lack of relevant literature that details each process of the method. In particular, the current literature does not sufficiently explain how to conduct content analysis in the context of study abroad.
Research Question

The purpose of this paper is to provide a practical step-by-step guide to content analysis for study abroad researchers planning to conduct qualitative case studies. Thus, the following research question is posed: How would the specific method of content analysis described in this paper help analyze narrative data for study abroad research? In order to gain insight into how exactly to conduct content analysis, actual data collected from a sample case study is first presented, and then, each process of content analysis is described. This should aid researchers understanding of how to conduct content analysis for study abroad research.

Method

This sample case study investigated the perceptions of a Japanese student regarding a general English course provided by a sixth form college located in the United Kingdom. The participant was a third-year female student enrolled at a private university in Japan who attended the general English course for about four months from the end of November 2019 to late March 2020.

The participant shared her perceptions of the course in Japanese through two research instruments: reflective journals (written twice) and a 20-minute semi-structured interview (conducted once). The first reflective journal was written while she was studying in the United Kingdom in February 2020, and the second reflective journal was written in Japan in April 2020; finally, the semi-structured interview was conducted in May 2020. The interview was audio-recorded and transcribed, and the reflective journals and the interview transcript were translated from Japanese to English.

Additionally, as the focus of this sample study was on the general English course, the data concerning other study abroad experiences, such as the participant’s homestay and traveling experiences, were omitted from the analysis. The excerpts from the first reflective journal (RJ-1), the second reflective journal (RJ-2), and the semi-structured interview (SSI) are shown in tables 1, 2, and 3 respectively.

Table 1
Translated Excerpt from the First Reflective Journal Entry (RJ-1)

The first week was really challenging because I was overwhelmed by the new classroom environment, which was quite different from Japan. Nevertheless, I’ve come to enjoy attending class very much and really feel that I’ve been improving my English. My class is multinational, consisting of international students from a variety of countries, and provides me with an opportunity to speak English all day. Even during break time, we talk and learn about each other’s countries.

Table 2
Translated Excerpt from the Second Reflective Journal Entry (RJ-2)

I had a great experience in class. We were always asked to express ourselves and engaged in a lot of pair and group discussion. I was overwhelmed by the new classroom atmosphere at first, but I came out of my shell with my classmates and soon became able to express myself in class actively. Also, we were told to pair with students of different nationalities, so I was able to improve my ability to talk about Japan in English well. Also, many of my classmates were from a variety of European countries, so I came to understand their accents, which Asians normally would be unfamiliar with.
Table 3

Translated Excerpt from the Semi-Structured Interview Transcript Entry (SSI)

| Interviewer: | What did you think of the general English course you attended in the U.K.? |
| Participant: | The class I attended in the U.K. was very different from Japan. |
| Interviewer: | How was it different from a class in Japan? |
| Participant: | One-third of the class was focused on writing and the rest of the class focused on speaking. Actually, we spent most of our time speaking. |
| Interviewer: | You explained that the class focused mostly on productive skills. Did the class teach other English skills too? |
| Participant: | The class also dealt with other areas, such as reading, listening, grammar, and vocabulary, but they were mostly intended to check our progress of speaking and just used for quizzes, for example. |
| Interviewer: | What did you think of your decision to participate in this general English language course? |
| Participant: | I think that it was a really good decision to attend the course. In addition to the fact that I was able to improve my English, I was able to learn about opinions from many other countries. It was really great to be able to learn about perspectives different from Japanese. |

Results and Discussion

Although researchers may approach content analysis in different ways (Moule & Goodman, 2009), the method generally involves (1) segmenting data, (2) formulating codes, (3) developing categories, and (4) identifying main themes, that is, drawing conclusions (Cohen et al., 2007; Dörnyei, 2007; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017; Moule & Goodman, 2009). This section details each process of content analysis by utilizing the data collected from the sample case study.

Step 1: Segmenting Data

The overall process usually starts by dissecting the whole text into smaller segments called meaning units, that are related to the research aims and questions of the study (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017; Merriam, 2009; Riazi, 2016). Meaning units that are too large and include different meanings are shortened further to condensed meaning units, which should still convey the basic meaning of the original text (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Tables 4, 5, and 6 show how the data collected from this sample case study might be divided into meaning units and shortened into condensed meaning units.

Table 4

Segmenting Data Collected from the First Reflective Journal (RJ-1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning Units</th>
<th>Condensed Meaning Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The first week was really challenging because I was overwhelmed by the new classroom environment, which was quite different from Japan. Nevertheless, I've come to enjoy attending class very much</td>
<td>First week was really challenging Was overwhelmed New classroom environment was quite different from Japan Come to enjoy class very much</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and really feel that I’ve been improving my English. My class is multinational, consisting of international students from a variety of countries, and provides me with an opportunity to speak English all day. Even during break time, we talk and learn about each other’s countries.

Table 5

Segmenting Data Collected from the Second Reflective Journal (RJ-2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning Units</th>
<th>Condensed Meaning Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I had a great experience.</td>
<td>Had a great experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We were always asked to express ourselves in class and engaged in a lot of pair and group discussion.</td>
<td>Always asked to express ourselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was overwhelmed by the new classroom atmosphere at first, but I came out of my shell with my classmates and soon became able to express myself in the class actively.</td>
<td>Was overwhelmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New classroom atmosphere</td>
<td>New classroom atmosphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Also, we were told to pair with students of different nationalities, so I was able to improve my ability to talk about Japan in English well.</td>
<td>Pair with students of different nationalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many of my classmates were from a variety of European countries, so I came to understand their accents, which Asians normally would be unfamiliar with.</td>
<td>Many were from a variety of European countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other areas, such as reading, listening, grammar, and vocabulary, but they were mostly intended to check our progress of</td>
<td>Other areas, such as reading, listening, grammar, and vocabulary, were mostly intended to check progress of speaking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6

Segmenting Data Collected from the Semi-Structured Interview (SSI)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning Units</th>
<th>Condensed Meaning Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The class I attended in the U.K. was very different from Japan. One-third of the class was focused on writing and the rest of the class focused on speaking.</td>
<td>Class was very different from Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actually, we spent most of our time speaking.</td>
<td>One-third was focused on writing and the rest focused on speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The class also dealt with other areas, such as reading, listening, grammar, and vocabulary, but they were mostly intended to check our progress of</td>
<td>Spent most of time speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other areas, such as reading, listening, grammar, and vocabulary, were mostly intended to check progress of speaking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
speaking and just used for quizzes, for example. I think that it was a really good decision to attend the course. In addition to the fact that I was able to improve my English, I was able to learn about opinions from many other countries. It was really great to be able to learn about perspectives different from Japanese.

**Step 2: Formulating Codes**

After segmenting data, codes are developed and applied to each condensed meaning unit to identify connections between each other (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017; Newby, 2013). Codes act as tags or labels that summarize and clarify the content of each meaning unit in a word or short phrase (Cohen et al., 2007; Dörnyei, 2007; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017; Newby, 2013; Saldaña, 2015). Table 7 provides an example of how the condensed meaning units from the previous tables 4, 5, and 6 can be coded.

**Table 7**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Condensed Meaning Units</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RJ-1</td>
<td>First week was really challenging</td>
<td>Challenging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-1</td>
<td>Was overwhelmed</td>
<td>Overwhelmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-1</td>
<td>New classroom environment was quite different from Japan</td>
<td>New learning environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-1</td>
<td>Come to enjoy class very much</td>
<td>Pleased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-1</td>
<td>I’ve been improving English</td>
<td>Improved English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-1</td>
<td>Class is multinational</td>
<td>Multinational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-1</td>
<td>Opportunity to speak English all day</td>
<td>Productive skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-1</td>
<td>Talk and learn about each other’s countries</td>
<td>Broadened horizons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-2</td>
<td>Had a great experience.</td>
<td>Pleased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-2</td>
<td>Always asked to express ourselves</td>
<td>Productive skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-2</td>
<td>Engaged in a lot of pair and group discussion</td>
<td>Productive skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-2</td>
<td>Was overwhelmed</td>
<td>Overwhelmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-2</td>
<td>New classroom atmosphere</td>
<td>New learning environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-2</td>
<td>Came out of my shell with my classmates</td>
<td>Broadened horizons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-2</td>
<td>Became able to express myself in the class actively</td>
<td>Improved English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-2</td>
<td>Pair with students of different nationalities</td>
<td>Multinational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-2</td>
<td>Was able to improve ability to talk about Japan in English well</td>
<td>Improved English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-2</td>
<td>Many were from a variety of European countries</td>
<td>Multinational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-2</td>
<td>Came to understand unfamiliar accents</td>
<td>Improved English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 3: Developing Categories

Identified codes are organized into categories based on the similarities and differences (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017; Moule & Goodman, 2009). Categories are more general than codes and make connections between coded segments and concepts to capture commonalities that emerge across the codes (Cohen et al., 2007; Dörnyei, 2007). Table 8 shows an example of how the coded data shown in Table 7 could be categorized.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RJ-1, RJ-2</td>
<td>Multinational</td>
<td>Characteristics of class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-1, RJ-2, SSI</td>
<td>New learning environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-1, RJ-2, SSI</td>
<td>Productive skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-1, RJ-2, SSI</td>
<td>Broadened horizons</td>
<td>Benefits of class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-1, RJ-2, SSI</td>
<td>Improved English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-1</td>
<td>Challenging</td>
<td>Perceptions of class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-1, RJ-2</td>
<td>Overwhelmed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ-1, RJ-2, SSI</td>
<td>Pleased</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. a RJ-1 = first reflective journal; RJ-2 = second reflective journal; SSI = semi-structured interview

Step 4: Identifying Main Themes

Lastly, themes are identified by grouping two or more categories to draw conclusions from the data (Dörnyei, 2007; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Themes represent the highest level of abstraction to express the latent content found in multiple categories considering the research questions (Dörnyei, 2007; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017; Newby, 2013; Riazi, 2016). For instance, it can be suggested that the following theme will emerge from the previously mentioned case study based on the identified categories shown in Table 8:

Although the participant was initially overwhelmed by the new multinational learning environment that focused on productive skills, she was satisfied with

SSI

Class was very different from Japan

SSI

One-third was focused on writing and the rest focused on speaking

SSI

Spent most of time speaking

SSI

Other areas, such as reading, listening, grammar, and vocabulary, were mostly intended to check progress of speaking

SSI

Really good to attend the course

SSI

Was able to improve English

SSI

Was able to learn about opinions from many other countries

SSI

Really great to be able to learn about perspectives different from Japanese

Note. a RJ-1 = first reflective journal; RJ-2 = second reflective journal; SSI = semi-structured interview
the general English language course because it helped her improve her English and broaden her horizons.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to demonstrate how narrative data can be analyzed by one widely used approach to content analysis. Although qualitative case studies can help study abroad researchers conduct their research from a limited number of participants, analyzing data could be challenging due to a large volume of narrative data. Content analysis is believed to help researchers draw conclusions by organizing and interpreting narrative data effectively. In order to show a step-by-step guide to each process of content analysis, actual data from a sample case study were presented in this paper; that case study was intended to investigate a single participant’s perceptions of the general English language course offered by a sixth-form college in the United Kingdom.

Content analysis generally involves four steps: segmenting data, formulating codes, developing categories, and identifying main themes. First, the whole text collected from the sample case study was divided into meaning units, which were further shortened to condensed meaning units. Second, codes were applied to label each condensed meaning unit. Third, codes were grouped into categories based on their similarities. Lastly, categories were clustered together to identify main themes in order to draw conclusions from the data. Consequently, the content analysis of the data suggested that overall, the participant seemed to be pleased with the general English language course because it helped her improve her English and broaden her horizons.

Considering the lack of literature that details content analysis for study abroad research, this paper aims to help researchers gain insight into how to utilize content analysis for their investigation of study abroad programs.

Last but not least, however, several disadvantages of content analysis should be pointed out. First, findings cannot be extrapolated from the sample to the whole because content analysis involves purposive sampling (White & Marsh, 2006). In purposive sampling, researchers make their own judgments about the sample composition to address the research questions (J. W. Creswell & J. D. Creswell, 2017; Kumar, 2014; Moule & Goodman, 2009; White & Marsh, 2006). Therefore, researchers should keep in mind that the purpose of the analysis is not generalizability, but transferability to judge whether findings from one context apply to another (White & Marsh, 2006).

To begin with, content analysis is an interpretive process and thus subjective (Julien, 2018). This indicates that the same data can be open to different interpretations by different researchers (Julien, 2018). Indeed, the data shown in this paper might be coded, categorized, and/or interpreted differently from the content analysis conducted here. Therefore, it is imperative to maintain a vigilance of non-bias during analysis so that one’s own assumptions do not influence results (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Additionally, the trustworthiness of the results can be established by such strategy as an audit trail in which researchers keep a log of their reflections on the research process to reconstruct the steps of the study and provide justification for any changes that took place (Riazi, 2016; Rodgers, 2008).

Furthermore, content analysis can be quite time-consuming, and it is not something that can be done over a weekend (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Content analysis is a reflective process of working and re-working the data to reveal connections and relationships (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). This indicates that researchers
should code and recode, and then, revisit the raw data several times to review and reflect on their own initial analysis (Dörnyei, 2007; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017).

References


Website Review

Flipgrid (Website)
https://www.info.flipgrid.com
Microsoft Corporation (2020)

The ongoing global pandemic of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, has resulted in many higher education courses being conducted online, either partially or wholly. This has, understandably, presented both students and teaching staff alike with numerous challenges. These include the pedagogical questions: "How can I make my online classes communicative?" or "How can I ensure learning outcomes?" in conjunction with the practical concerns of: "How do I grade my students?" and "How can I account for attendances?".

Distance learning, however, is not a new concept: in 1969 the Open University, which focused primarily on off-campus study, was formed; in 1998 Blackboard Inc. released several educational products which blended online hosting with pre-installed Windows software; more recently, in 2014 Google released its Classroom suite wholly online; and in 2018 Microsoft acquired Flipgrid, an interactive repository for user-generated audio-visual material. Accompanying technological advancement, each iteration and implementation of software has become ever more versatile and – most importantly – accessible to a wider audience.

Before using Flipgrid, it is necessary for instructors to ensure universal access to the appropriate computer hardware. Flipgrid is platform agnostic but does nevertheless require a device with a web camera and a microphone. Of course, the ubiquitous smartphone lends itself perfectly for this purpose, though participants could potentially incur high cellular packet charges if they do not first ensure wireless connectivity. Flipgrid can be used in a web browser either as a stand-alone platform, a mobile app, or be used in conjunction with other online accounts. For example, it is possible to link to a Google account, and, having been integrated, educators can then stipulate that Flipgrid activities appear jointly in Google Classroom as assignments: this is the method I personally recommend. Having logged into Flipgrid, the next step is to nominate and create classes (see Figure 1), known as groups, and add members. This latter step can be achieved conveniently by attaching and uploading CSV files containing lists of student email addresses. Once the students have been enrolled in their
respective groups, it then becomes possible for educators to add topics which can be commented upon (see Figure 2). The educator can stipulate any topic, that said, if the account is linked to Google Classroom, I suggest choosing a title which will be easily identifiable. Beneath the aforementioned topic tile, there is a text prompt box in which the question for discussion may be posed. Students will respond to this question in the form of a video that can either be recorded directly or uploaded as a pre-recorded MP4 file. Providing the MP4 rule is strictly observed, Flipgrid can be used in conjunction with other applications including Microsoft PowerPoint, for presentation captures and narration, or for screen captures and live streaming recorded by, for example, OBS Studio.

Below the prompt box there are several advanced options including topic status, features, feedback, and recording time. Beware of the necessity of selecting an appropriate duration for student responses (the default setting is one minute and thirty seconds); if too short the students’ videos may be truncated (which may or may not be desirable), and if too long, some students may regard this as a challenge to speak for as long as possible. In the status box will be able to schedule the deadline, dates for activity, and whether students are free to edit, are locked out, or excluded under the Active, Frozen, or Hidden toggle box. Finally, under feedback, educators are encouraged to enter the criteria by which the students’ responses will be assessed.

Once the topic has been set, educators must wait while the students submit their individual responses. Note that these responses are listed in the descending order of submission, meaning that the students who submitted their responses promptly will be listed at the top of the webpage whereas the slower students will be listed further down. Because of this, the order of the students’ listing is likely to change on a topic by topic basis, something which can be confusing when transferring students’ final grades into Google Classroom manually.

In terms of addressing student feedback, there are two main ways educators may communicate with the students. One is by writing comments – in private – beneath the submissions, and secondly, for educators with the time and inclination, you may record a video response of your own providing you observe the time limitation you stipulated when assigning the topic. Educator videos may be either left in private for particular students, or if you wish to record a video for the benefit of the whole group, this may be added under the topic along with the students’ contributions.

Despite being pitched as an educational resource, Flipgrid is, in essence, a slightly novel variation of the common-or-garden social networking media website or app, with TikTok being particularly analogous. It can be expected that students will therefore be familiar with the underlying technology, perhaps even more so than the educators themselves. For this reason, Flipgrid has the undeniable utility in that since many students will already be familiar with video hosting networking services, educators should not need to devote a considerable amount of their time explaining how
to use the website. While student responses are pre-recorded, they are nevertheless communicative inasmuch as they function as a conduit for individual students to express themselves equally within the group. To further pursue communicative goals, students may also respond to each other’s videos; however, in my experience while they enjoy watching their classmates’ videos, most are reluctant to produce any additional videos in direct response to their peers. There are several possible explanations for this: some students may be disinclined to respond because preparing responses is time consuming; others dislike appearing on video, occasionally there are (claimed) technical problems relating to Internet connectivity or broken hardware, thus preventing additional responses.

Overall, educators may find Flipgrid an effective tool for assessing their students’ oral communication through online means. With a permanent record of their submissions, it is possible for both students and teachers to revisit and assess material. However, despite being possible, inter-student communication is rarely embraced and most students favor hit-and-run contributions.

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