

EXPLORING LANGUAGE GROWTH IN FULBRIGHT FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING ASSISTANTS: A CORRELATIONAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

An increase in language development is an expected outcome of international exchange programs. However, research studies on linguistic outcomes of international exchange programs are limited. This study explores the influence of participating in the Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant program on the English language development of the program sojourners. The study examines the impact of internal or external factors, participants' characteristics, and the program's social affordances on the participants' English language learning outcomes. Through an explanatory sequential mixed methods research design, the study gathers quantitative data from a convenience sample of 164 participants and qualitative data from a purposive sample of 10 participants. It uses thematic analysis through MAXQDA and correlation and multiple linear regression through SPSS to analyse the data. The study found that the Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant program positively influences the program participants' English language development. The study also found that competence in using English and intercultural communicative competence are the most prominent direct outcomes of participating in the program. The study concludes that the Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant program provides a culturally and linguistically rich environment for the language development of the program participants. The study suggests host institutions integrating culture and language-enriching pre- and in-program activities and orientations to support English language development of the Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant program participants.

Keywords: Fulbright FLTA; Language development; Intercultural communicative competence; Mixed method research.

Introduction

The Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA) program is a one-year United States (U.S.) Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs-sponsored program, applied by the Institute of International Education since 1968 and awarded to teachers of English (TESOL). The program provides English language teachers an opportunity to utilize their instructional skills in a U.S. post-secondary institution and increase their English language proficiency in a native -English speaking culture (Goodman Research Group, 2016). Research studies indicate that international exchange programs positively influence the program participants' second language development and result in linguistic and cultural gains (Cubillos & Ilvento, 2018; Hernández, 2016; Öz & Gök, 2022; Terzuolo, 2018). There are studies indicating that sojourners' linguistic ability in English has increased due to the exchange programs (Cubillos & Ilvento, 2018; Hernández, 2016; Terzuolo, 2018). On the other hand, studies report that the relevant coefficient of determination between the exchange programs and awardees' language proficiency is insignificant, suggesting that exchange programs do not systematically lead to the linguistic gains as expected (Duperron & Overstreet, 2009; Tullock & Ortega, 2017). Moreover, research studies indicating that the influence of Fulbright FLTA program on sojourners' linguistic, professional, and intercultural development is limited (Kirkgoz, 2017; Mathews-Aydinli, 2017; Terzuolo, 2018). This study examines the influence of participating in the Fulbright FLTA program on the program participants' English language proficiency and explores the impact of the factors, characteristics of the participants, and the social affordances of the program on the

program participants' linguistic outcomes. The study, therefore, aims to contribute to the academic discussion regarding the linguistic outcomes induced by participation in the Fulbright FLTA program by answering:

1. To what extent does participation in the Fulbright FLTA program influence participants' language development?
2. What are the internal and external variables that explain Fulbright FLTA program participants' perceived language development?

Factors Influencing Language Proficiency during the International Exchange Programs

Language proficiency is the ability to use a language efficiently in real-life situations, participating in spontaneous conversations and unprepared contexts in a manner deemed appropriate and acceptable by native speakers (Armea et al., 2022). Language proficiency is assumed to be guaranteed by immersing people in the target language and culture through international exchange programs (Cubillos & Ilvento, 2018, Mroz & Thrasher, 2022; Terzuolo, 2018). The Fulbright FLTA is a year-long program that allows participants to engage in social interactions with people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and gain communicative skills and strategies in the U.S. The program also contributes to the participants' knowledge of the world and intercultural awareness (Mitchell, 2023). Studies argue that culturally rich learning opportunities, genuine contact with the speakers of English, and exposure to English in its authentic context that the Fulbright FLTA program offers contribute to the program participants' language development (Hernández, 2016; Mitchell, 2023). Research studies have found a positive relation between the participants' professional, linguistic, academic, and personal development and studying abroad experiences (Hernández, 2016; Nolan et al., 2024). Therefore, the Fulbright FLTA program results in professional and career advancement,

personal and intercultural competence development, and language development (Mitchell, 2023; Terzuolo, 2018). International exchange programs, including the Fulbright FLTA program, constitute a meaningful learning opportunity for sojourners to improve their language proficiency by engaging in genuine conversations with the members of the target language (Cubillos & Ilvento, 2018). Research studies on international exchange programs have found that exchange programs often result in enhanced language proficiency, intercultural communication skills, and language production (Mathews-Aydinli, 2017; Mroz & Gorham, 2024). International travel through exchange programs is also associated with sojourners' increased linguistic ability (Cubillos, Ilvento, 2018; Hernández, 2016). All in all, language increase is an expected outcome of study abroad programs. However, the literature regarding the linguistic outcomes of international exchange programs is contradictory. There are studies claiming that sojourners' linguistic ability increases due to the exchange programs (Cubillos & Ilvento, 2018; Hernández, 2016). On the other hand, studies report that the relevant coefficient of determination between the exchange programs and participants' language proficiency is insignificant, suggesting that international exchange programs have a negligible influence on participants' language development (Mroz & Gorham, 2024; Terzuolo, 2018). However, there are factors influencing language proficiency during exchange programs. These factors are gender (Gaugler & Matheus, 2019), motivation and willingness to take full advantage of the social and institutional affordances of the exchange program (Isabelli-García et al., 2018), duration of the program (Marijuan & Sanz, 2017), target language use (Mroz & Thrasher, 2022; Mroz & Gorham, 2024), and social network (Mitchell, 2023). Social context and opportunities provided by the institution, such as cultural and social support at the school also contribute to the language development of the program participants (Kyndt, et al., 2016; Mitchell, 2023; Wilson, 2017).

In addition, participants' academic and personal goals and purposes, the input they seek, the frequency of using the target language, the type of social interactions they engage in, and their agency to take full advantage of the social affordance of the program during their residence abroad are other factors fostering linguistic outcomes (Gautier, 2019, Mroz & Gorham, 2024; Mitchell, 2023). Cultural immersion and the extent to which the exchange participants are immersed in the host culture and feel a sense of community or cultural isolation also influence program participants' language development (Deardorff, 2018). Thus, understanding the influence of participation in the Fulbright FLTA program on participants' English language development requires an in-depth understanding of the variables and the context where the participants gain international exchange experience.

Method

Previous studies have indicated that research on the influence that the Fulbright FLTA program has on the participants' linguistic, professional, and intercultural development is limited and often qualitative and that there is a need to quantify the influence of the Fulbright FLTA program on exchange participants' language development (Kirkgoz, 2017; Mathews-Aydinli, 2017; Metzgar, 2017). The current study, therefore, examines the transformative impacts of participation in the Fulbright FLTA program on participants' English language development. The study employs an explanatory sequential mixed methods research design to investigate the correlation between participation in the Fulbright FLTA program and the program participants' language development. Quantitative data were obtained through a questionnaire consisting of closed-ended and open-ended questions, while qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews.

Participants

This study applied a convenience sample and recruited 164 Fulbright FLTA program participants (see Table 1). The participants all participated in the Fulbright FLTA program and spent at least one academic year in a university in the U.S., where they taught their native or local languages, introduced their local cultures, and in each semester, studied two courses, one of which had to be related to American culture, history, and education.

Table 1. *Participants' Demographics*

Demographic Information	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	61	37.2
Female	103	62.8
Age		
20-30	78	47.6
31-41	70	42.7
42-52	16	9.7
Continent of Origin		
Africa	82	50
Asia	34	20.7
Europe	13	7.9
South America	35	21.3
Countries of Origin		
Algeria	9	5.5
Argentina	3	1.8
Austria	1	0.6
Bolivia	2	1.2

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Colombia	4	2.4
Egypt	16	9.8
France	9	5.5
Germany	9	5.5
India	1	0.6
Iran	1	0.6
Israel	2	1.2
Jordan	2	1.2
Kuwait	2	1.2
Lebanon	5	3.0
Libya	2	1.2
Mexico	2	1.2
Morocco	42	25.6
Pakistan	3	1.8
Peru	2	1.2
Russia	9	3.7
Spain	9	5.5
Taiwan	3	1.8
Tunisia	13	7.9
Turkey	8	4.9
UAE	3	1.8
Uzbekistan	3	1.8
Yemen	2	1.2
Educational Level		
Bachelor	89	54.3
Master's	63	38.4
Ph.D. (level completed)	12	7.3
Total	164	100.0

In addition, a purposive sample was applied, and 10 participants were selected to conduct semi-structured interviews (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Interviewees' Demographics*

Gender	Identification	Country of origin	Continent of origin	Age	Host University	Year of Exchange
Female		France	Europe	24	HWSC	2022/2023
Male		France	Europe	27	AC	2022/2023
Female		Kuwait	Asia	42	US	2022/2023
Female		Russia	Europe	27	BU	2022/2023
Male		Tunisia	Africa	32	UNCW	2022/2023
Female		Jordan	Asia	33	GMU	2022/2023
Male		Morocco	Africa	32	BSU	2022/2023
Female		Bolivia	America	34	CU	2022/2023
Female		Morocco	Africa	27	HWSC	2022/2023
Female		Egypt	Africa	27	DU	2022/2023

Data Collection Tools

Quantitative data collection tools. Three five-point Likert scale questionnaires ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree” were used to gather information about the Fulbright FLTA participants’ self-efficacy, personality traits, social integration, satisfaction with workplace conditions and classes taught or taken, social affordances, and individual-related factors. *Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES)* was used to examine program participants’ self-image, the judgment of their abilities and capabilities to bring about the desired outcome, perseverance and persistence in difficult situations, their desire to experiment and learn new things, and their emotional and psychological stability (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). *The Big Five Model* was applied

to accumulate data about the Fulbright FLTA participants' personality traits (Barrick & Mount, 1991). The model helped measure the participants' openness, extraversion, readiness, and willingness to participate in learning activities and elicit insights regarding the influence of the Fulbright FLTA program on the participants' personality traits and their language learning and development. The researchers developed a questionnaire and piloted it with randomly selected 15 Fulbright FLTA program participants to measure the Fulbright FLTA program participants' satisfaction with the classes taught or taken, social integration, and workplace conditions. The pilot study provided valuable insights regarding the questionnaire's content validity. Internal reliability was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha. The results of the Fulbright FLTA program participants' satisfaction with classes taken or taught scale with six items ($\alpha = .768$) and the participants' social integration scale with nine items ($\alpha = .627$) were found reliable. The participants' satisfaction with workplace conditions scale with five items ($\alpha = .835$) and their language development scale with six items ($\alpha = .757$) were also found reliable. *Qualitative data collection tools.* Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews from a purposive sampling of 10 participants. The participants were purposefully selected based on genders, ages, and continents to ensure the criterion of representativeness (see Table 2). Inter-rater reliability and member checking were used to increase the transferability of the qualitative data. One of the researchers analysed and interpreted the data and then shared it with the other researcher who read the transcription and the emerging themes. The researchers agreed that the themes developed reflect the interviewees' transcribed texts. Moreover, qualitative results (verbatim transcription, themes developed, and their interpretation) were returned to purposefully selected interviewees via their emails to check for accuracy and see if data resonated with their actual experiences, which they all confirmed.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were downloaded into an Excel spreadsheet, coded, and analysed through SPSS software (version 26), which provides both descriptive and inferential statistics. The data were cleaned of missing values and outliers and treated as continuous/ratio. Continuous data were tested for normality using parametric tests and standard deviations to refer to a dispersion of data from the central point. The mean was also used in descriptive statistics. The rationale behind treating scale data as continuous is to show that the study is correlational and investigates the existence of the association between different variables using correlation and multiple linear regression. The statistical tests (e.g., multiple linear regression and correlation) helped investigating the relationship between participation in the Fulbright FLTA exchange program and exchange participants' language development. Statistically, a *p-Value* <0.05 was considered significant. Multiple regression was carried out to predict the value of the outcome variable (e.g., Exchange participants' language development) from many predictor variables (e.g., their satisfaction with workplace conditions, colleagues-related factors, social integration, self-efficacy, and personality traits). Correlation was used to examine whether there is any statistically significant association between two interval variables (e.g., teachers' satisfaction with contextual factors and their language development). Qualitative data was analysed through thematic analysis by using MAXQDA (Braun & Clarke, 2021). One of the researchers engaged in an iterative process of thorough reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts to immerse in the data. This immersion facilitated the generation of initial codes. Subsequently, the data underwent coding, with relevant phrases and sentences highlighted to address the research questions. These codes were then iteratively organized into coherent categories, forming initial thematic constructs. Then, the themes were integrated, refined, or discarded to ensure logical coherence and

robustness. The researcher proceeded to delineate and label each theme, followed by the organization of all codes and relevant excerpts under finalized themes. Finally, the language-rich environment and authentic contexts provided by the Fulbright FLTA program provides were identified as themes that positively contributed to the participants' language development. In analysis, the study used Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory, based on the assumption that learning goes beyond knowledge acquisition to constructing a new identity. Mezirow (2000) notes that transformational learning takes place in three specific stages; a *disorienting dilemma* in which individuals perceive a behaviour, attitude, or practice that contradicts their pre-existing patterns, *critical reflection* that constitutes thoughtful questioning of their prior knowledge and assumptions, and *reintegration of new frames of reference* which involves shifting old patterns and practices. The transformative learning theory emphasizes that experiences and interpretations of experiences result in personal, ideological, and cultural changes (McGregor, 2008). In the case of this study, the Fulbright FLTA participants gain new sociocultural and sociolinguistic experiences, resulting in changes in their pre-established discourses. Thus, based on the transformative learning theory, the study argues that the mobility of the Fulbright FLTA participants provides new experiences, influencing the participants' target language learning and development.

Results

Correlation between Participation in The Fulbright FLTA Program and Participants' Language Development

A major expected benefit of study abroad and exchange programs is enhanced language development. As a dependent variable, Fulbright FLTA program participants' language

development was regressed on the following predictor variables: participants' personality traits, self-efficacy level, social integration, satisfaction with classes taught or taken, and institution-related factors. The regression model, when taken as a set, predicted the participants' language development ($F(5, 8.189) = 18.222, p = 0.001$), indicating that the factors that the study considers may have a significant impact on sojourners' language development (see Table 3).

Table 3. Correlation between the Fulbright FLTA Experience and Participants' Language Development

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	40.943	5	8.189	18.222	.001
	Residual	71.003	158	.449		
	Total	111.946	163			

a. Dependent Variable: Fulbright FLTA Participants' Linguistic Development

b. Predictors: (Constant), Participants' personality traits, Social integration, Classes taught or taken, Self-efficacy level, and Satisfaction with workplace-related factors

The findings in Table 4 show the *adjusted R square* as .346. The model, when taken as a set, explains 34.6% of the variance in Fulbright FLTA participants' language development. The results reveal that the Fulbright FLTA program participation moderately contributes to the participants' language development.

Table 4. *Total Variability in Fulbright FLTA Alumni Language Proficiency and the Predictor Variables*

Model Summary ^b					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.605 ^a	.366	.346	.67036	2.074

a. Predictors: (Constant), Participants' personality traits, Social integration, Classes taught or taken, Self-efficacy level, Satisfaction with workplace-related factors

b. Dependent Variable: Fulbright FLTA Participants' Linguistic Development

Correlation, which is a statistical test used to “relate only two variables at a time” (Lomax & Hahs-Vaughn, 2013, p. 925) and “measure the size and direction of the linear relationship between two variables” (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013, p. 57) was used to investigate the relationship between classes taken or taught, participants' social integration and their language development (see Table 5 and Table 6). The classes taken or taught and the program participants' social integration are found significantly associated with the participants' language development. The classes taught or taken, and the participants' social integration level were the only valid predictors of Fulbright FLTA sojourners' language development.

Table 5. *Contribution of Classes Taught or Taken to Fulbright FLTA Program Participants' English Language Development*

Correlations				Fulbright FLTA Participants' Classes taught/ Linguistic Development taken
Fulbright Linguistic Development	FLTA	Participants'	Pearson Correlation	1
			Sig. (2-tailed)	.570**
			N	164
Classes taught/ taken			Pearson Correlation	.570**
			Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
			N	164

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results show that there is a statistically positive significant correlation (i.e., $r = .570$, $p = .001$.) between the classes taken or taught and sojourners' language development. The classes taken or taught explain 57% variance in sojourners' language development. The results also show that there is a statistically significant positive association between the program participants' social integration level and their language development ($r = .329$, $p = .001$). The participants' social integration level accounts for a 32,9% variance in their language development (see Table 6).

Table 6 *Contribution of Sojourners' Social Integration to Fulbright FLTA Program Participants' Language Development*

Correlations

		Fulbright FLTA Participants' Linguistic Development	Participants' Social Integration
Fulbright FLTA Participants' Linguistic Development	Pearson Correlation	1	.329**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	164	164
Participants' Social Integration	Pearson Correlation	.329**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	164	164

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Internal and External Predictors Influencing Fulbright FLTA Participants' English Language Development

Multiple linear regression demonstrates that two independent variables (classes taught or taken and the program participants' social integration) significantly contribute to the participants' language development. Multiple regression reports significant and non-significant findings regarding relationships between the independent variables, participants' personality traits, self-efficacy level, social integration, classes taught or taken, satisfaction with workplace-related factors, and alumni language development. Classes taken or taught ($B = 7.26, p = .001$) and social integration ($B = 2.63, p = .003$) significantly predicted sojourners' language development. Sojourners' satisfaction with the classes taken or taught increases the participants' language development by 7.26%. Similarly, their social integration positively influences their language proficiency by 2.63%. The two predictors account for 34.6% of alumni's language development variance. However, program participants' satisfaction with workplace conditions ($B = -.036,$

$p = .546$), their self-efficacy ($B = -.014$, $p = .891$), and personality traits ($B = .098$, $p = .323$) are found non-significant predictors of Fulbright FLTA program participants' English language development (see Table 7).

Table 7 *Distribution of Variance among Predictor Variables*

Coefficients ^a							
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1 (Constant)	-.377	.570		-.661	.509	-1.504	.750
Fulbright FLTA participants' satisfaction with workplace-related factors	-.036	.059	-.043	-.606	.546	-.153	.081
Participants' Self-efficacy Level	-.014	.099	-.009	-.137	.891	-.210	.182
Classes taught or taken	.726	.093	.521	7.780	.001*	.542	.910
Participants' Social Integration	.263	.087	.202	3.025	.003*	.091	.435
Participants' personality traits	.098	.099	.073	.992	.323	-.097	.293

a. Dependent Variable: Fulbright FLTA Participants' Linguistic Development

Influence of the Fulbright FLTA Experience on the Participants' English Language Proficiency, Lexicon and Pronunciation, and Intercultural Communication Competence

Participants agree (34.1%) and strongly agree (26.8%) that the Fulbright FLTA experience has enhanced their English language proficiency and fluency. Participants also agree (48.2%) and strongly agree (32.9%) that they have become more confident English language users. The study's results show that the Fulbright FLTA experience positively influences the participants' English pronunciation and lexicon because 37.2% of the participants agree and strongly agree (29.3%) that the Fulbright FLTA experience has improved their English language pronunciation and fluency. Participants also agree (30.5%) and strongly agree (34.1%) that their English lexicon and vocabulary repertoire has increased, confirming the assumption that the Fulbright FLTA experience constitutes a prosperous environment for language development. Similarly, participants agree (36%) and strongly agree (33.5%) that the Fulbright FLTA experience has enhanced their intercultural communicative competence and ability to communicate in multicultural contexts:

Being immersed in an English-speaking country allowed me to pick up colloquial expressions and idioms that I might have yet to learn through traditional language instruction. I also became more confident in my speaking abilities, which helped me engage in conversations and presentations more effectively. As for my intercultural communicative competence, the Fulbright experience allowed me to interact with people from different cultures and backgrounds. It helped me develop a greater awareness of cultural differences and similarities. (Participant 7)

Qualitative Insights on the Influence of the Fulbright FLTA Program Experience on the Participants' Language Development

The open-ended questions in the interviews provided qualitative insights into the influence of the Fulbright FLTA experience on program participants' language development. The study found that the program experience constitutes a rich learning environment for sojourners. The participants indicated that their participation in the Fulbright FLTA program has equipped them with practical strategies, fostered their intercultural communicative competence, and improved their English lexicon and pronunciation:

The Fulbright FLTA program promoted my English proficiency by providing me with the opportunity for immersive language practice in an English-speaking environment, exposure to academic language, and technical vocabulary. As for intercultural communicative competence, I was exposed to different cultural perspectives, practices, and norms, which enhanced my ability to communicate effectively with people from diverse cultures. The experience was intercultural training, which helped me develop several skills and strategies to navigate cultural differences and promote intercultural understanding. (Participant 10)

Participants also confirmed that the Fulbright FLTA experience contributed to their English language development by asserting that the exchange experience and the time spent abroad were enriching, authentic, accurate, and meaningful, allowing them to experience using English in its authentic context:

My proficiency in English got better. My accent and my English, in general, got better. I also improved my intercultural communicative competence by learning to communicate efficiently and appropriately in various contexts. (Participant 8)

Similarly, Participant 1 stated that “the Fulbright FLTA program has been a dream that came true. As an English teacher, I have always sought opportunities to develop my

English language skills and teaching methods and techniques, which I improved through this program.”

Discussion

The study’s findings confirmed a positive relation between the Fulbright FLTA exchange program and the participants’ English language development (Deardorff, 2018; Di Pietro, 2015; Mathews-Aydinli, 2017). The study found that the Fulbright FLTA program provides a linguistically and culturally rich environment, which the study found contributing to the program participants’ English language proficiency, fluency, and pronunciation, their confidence in English language use, English lexicon, and intercultural communicative competence (Carrillo, 2014; Deardorff, 2018; Di Pietro, 2015; Goodman Research Group, 2016; Mathews-Aydinli, 2017; Mroz & Gorham, 2024; Mitchell, 2023). Moreover, the study found that the Fulbright FLTA program experience improved the program participants’ intercultural communicative competence and communication skills (e.g., Deardorff, 2018; Mathews-Aydinli, 2017; Mroz & Gorham, 2024; Mitchell, 2023). The participants engaged in meaningful interactions with culturally and linguistically diverse English language users, which was found to enable the participants to become effective intercultural communicators (Cubillos & Ilvento, 2018; Mroz & Gorham, 2024; Öz & Gök, 2022). Therefore, the study concludes that the Fulbright FLTA program experience enhances the program participants’ ability to communicate in multicultural contexts with different interlocutors coming from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (e.g., Carrillo, 2014; Deardorff, 2018; Di Pietro, 2015; Mathews-Aydinli, 2017). In addition, the study found that the classes taken or taught are among the sources of authentic input for sojourners and the factors positively influencing the participants’ English language development. The finding is helpful for

the implementation managers of the Fulbright FLTA program and the U.S. universities hosting international Fulbright FLTAs to take proactive actions by increasing the number of classes the program participants can participate in. Social interaction with others also increases the participants' language development. The participants have been the agents to benefit from the social and institutional affordances of the program during their residence abroad (Mitchell, 2023; Mroz & Gorham, 2024; Wilson, 2017). The correlation between the participants' social integration level and English language proficiency suggests that social interactions and social time spent with other English speakers in authentic contexts positively influence English language development. Social learning theory helps to examine the association between sojourners' English language development and social interaction during the Fulbright FLTA program because human learning is fundamentally a social phenomenon, and learning is community-oriented, society-supported, and never occurs in isolation from the society we live in (Wenger, 1998). Moreover, intensity factors such as *cultural immersion*, or the extent to which the program participants are immersed in the host culture and feel a sense of community, and *cultural isolation*, or the extent to which the participants feel connected or disconnected in their U.S. community is found to influence their learning and language development (Deardorff, 2018).

Conclusion

This study argues that international exchange programs constitute an ideal and rich learning opportunity for language learning and development and that increased language development is an expected outcome of these programs. The study, therefore, analysed the influence of participating in the Fulbright FLTA program on the program participants' English language proficiency, considering the factors and characteristics of the

participants, as well as the social affordances that the program provides. The results showed that considering factors such as the classes taken or taught during the program, social integration, and participants' personality traits, the Fulbright FLTA program positively influenced the participants' English language and intercultural development. Thus, the study suggests integrating more culturally responsive and authentic orientations and activities during the pre- and in-program to support the English language development of the program participants.

Limitations

This study reveals interesting insights regarding the association between the Fulbright FLTA experience and the program participants' English language development. However, the study is limited as it lacks a control group and is based on self-perceived changes. Therefore, no causality can be established between the participation in the Fulbright FLTA program and the participants' language development. Further longitudinal experimental research is needed to measure the actual language change over time accurately. Moreover, the study is limited because, given the variables considered in the analysis, it may not provide a comprehensive frame to understand the influence of the Fulbright FLTA program on the program participants' English language development. For example, English language development associated with and explained by the Fulbright FLTA experience can be associated with the length of time abroad. The Fulbright FLTA program is a one-year-long program, which may not be sufficient to fully immerse in a new culture and society in a way that could influence the program participants' English language development. Moreover, social isolation and cultural shock can be among the factors that negatively influence the English language development of the program participants, to explore which more research studies should be conducted.

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