

The Effectiveness of Studying Abroad Programs for L2 Students -How the Students' Minds Changed after Being Exposed to English Only Environment for 2 Weeks-

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Abstract: Study abroad programs are known to be effective to learn English for L2 students in Japan. Since 2010, our college has been offering our students a Summer Intensive English Program (SIEP) in our affiliate school, University of Pittsburgh at Bradford (UPB) in the United States. Though it is a short term to study English abroad, one of the authors on this study, as a leader of this program in 2018, observed a big impact upon the students during and after the program. Until today, in our college, little research had been conducted on the students' changes after coming back to Japan. In this study, we collected the students' feedback after SIEP by conducting questionnaires and interview research. After that, we compared the scores before and after SIEP. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between their minds and English competency and what is needed to improve the SIEP program next year.

Keywords: Study abroad programs, Interview, Motivation, Summer intensive English program, VELC test

Introduction

Japanese students have been strongly encouraged to study English hard under the government's firm policy, and English proficiency is becoming one of the key factors for the success in the society. However, Japan is not a multilingual country and some of our students simply do not see the necessities of acquiring English. It is hard for them to picture themselves using English in the future. Some students even have strong allergies for English after 6-year-mandatory English programs at high schools and junior high schools and they have hard time finding the reasons to have to take another mandatory English classes when they get enrolled in the university.

Under these circumstances, the authors, as English educators at university, have been trying hard to find the way to motivate students. One of our school's attempts is the Summer Intensive English Program (SIEP) at our affiliate school, University of Pittsburgh at Bradford in the United States. The program is an accredited 2-week-on campus course at UPB following 15 weekly preparatory English classes at our school in spring semester.

One of the authors was in charge of this program this year. She had the 15 preparation classes in Japan and also took the group of 14 students to UPB. The participants were selected by GPA score (over 2 points) and screened by interview test. Being with the students every day for the whole program period made it visible that all the students have obviously become more outgoing, more cheerful and more sociable compared with them before they took this course in Japan. The students' language abilities were varied, but the same symptom was seen with all students. To investigate the effectiveness of the program and to grope for better contents and criteria for the future program are our aims.

Previous Studies and Research Question

Tomoto(2015) has made research on how bilingual Japanese speakers change their ways of talking or how they show their emotions or sometimes what they say depending on the language they use. She collected data from 241 bilingual speakers by the questionnaire, and also the in-depth interviews were conducted with 16 students who were randomly extracted.

The results show that 80 % of the subjects feel difference depending on the language they use and 31% of all the subjects have been told by their family or friends that their impression, behavior or voice pitch changes depending on the language they use. Out of this 31%, about 80% of them think or have been told that they become more extrovert when they speak English and about 15% of them become more introvert when they speak English.

As I was taking a group of students, SIEP seemed to largely impact their motivation. One of the remarkable phenomenon was that an introvert student who had been quiet and unsociable in SIEP's preparatory classes or regular classes turned out to be very sociable and outgoing once he arrived in U.S.A and communicated in English.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how the increase of motivation affected their English competency especially in VELC test. Also we aim to make a criterion to select the SIEP participants for the next fiscal year.

Questionnaire and Interview

Procedure

First, we collected feedback from 7 students that answered to our questionnaire on SIEP. After that we tried to investigate more by hearing the students face to face in a relaxing and warm atmosphere. We randomly extracted 4 participants (2 females and 2 males) out of all the 14 participants in SIEP and interviewed them for about 90 minutes.

The questions asked in the questionnaires in advance were as follows.

Q1 Do you think it good to attend SIEP?

Q2 Do you want to recommend your friends to attend SIEP?

Q3 What was good about the classes at UPB?

Q4 What was bad about the classes at UPB?

Q5 What was good about the activities (excursion, sports) in UPB?

Q6 What was good about the preparation classes in Japan?

Q7 What should be changed about the preparation classes in Japan next year?

Q8 Did SIEP cause you any differences before and after the program?

Result

Generally, the questionnaires showed their satisfaction and eagerness to learn more. In Q1 and Q2, almost all the students gave overwhelmingly positive answers (Table 1 and 2).

Table 1

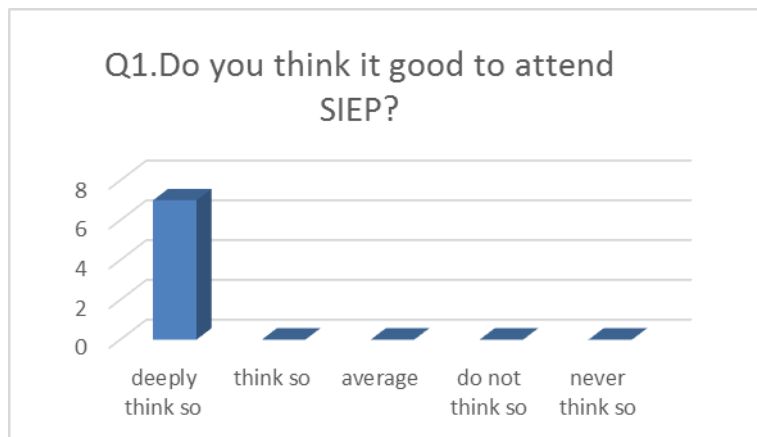
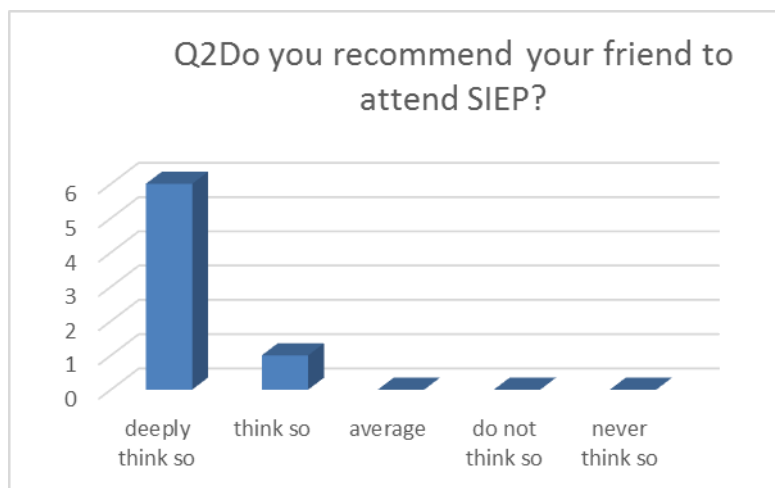


Table 2



Q3 revealed that they were satisfied with their opportunities to communicate with the local people, using English and learning American culture (Table 3).

Table 3

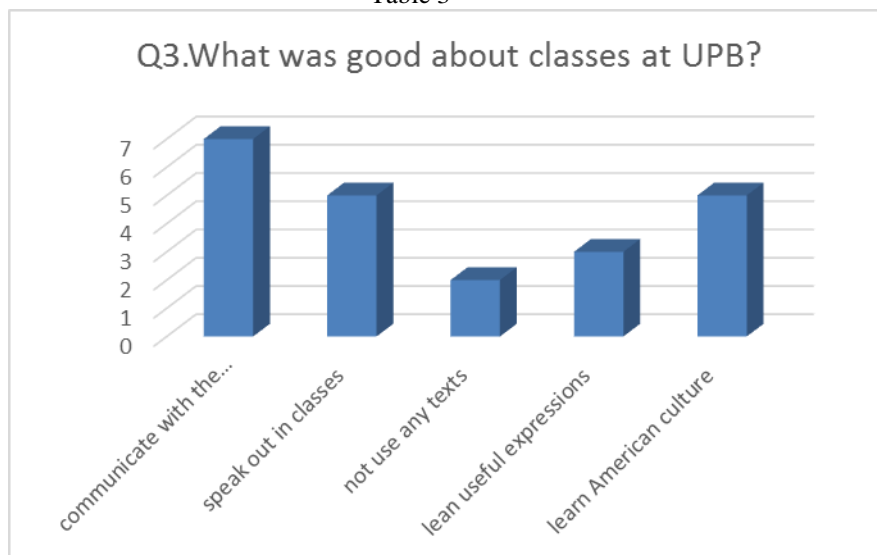
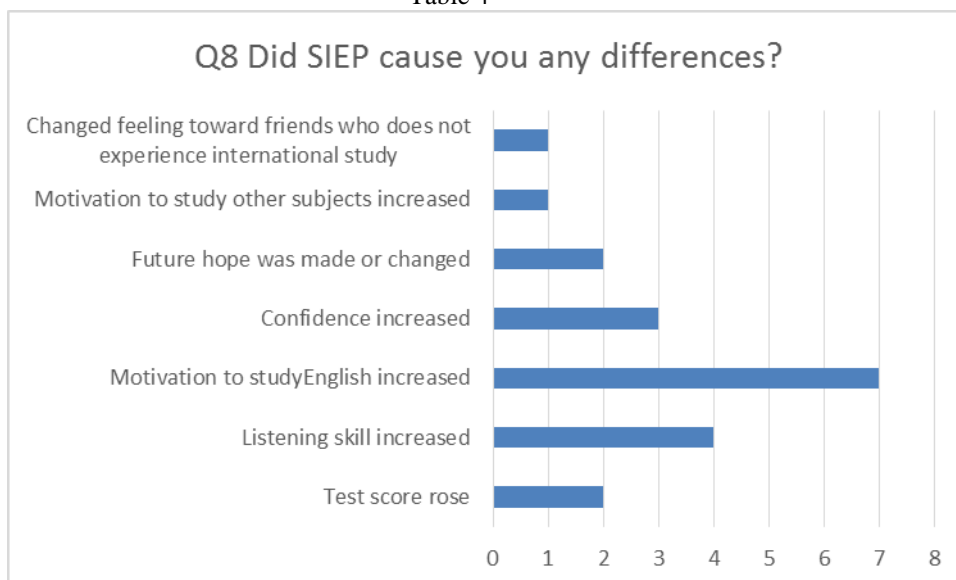


Table 4



Q8 showed that the students' motivation to further study English and their future hopes had increased (Table 4). The rest of the questions (Q4–Q7) are directly asked in the follow-up interview and the students' feedback is categorized along four elements:

(1) Positive feedback

To communicate with native speakers was so attractive.

They can play basketball with local students and become friends using SNS.

It was fun to communicate with local people such as college staffs and a bus driver. Even Japanese participants get so intimate rather than they used to be in Japan.

(2) Negative feedback

They wanted to study more difficult English.

They thought they should have corrected their English pronunciation.

The teacher in UPB taught Ferdinando Magellan who was so popular topic in the USA, but the Japanese students did not know well him. It was the culture gap.

(3) The students' change affected by SIEP

Two students want to apply for a long-term study abroad program. And other two students want to apply for another short-term study program next year.

(4) Future hope

Two students want to work abroad in the future.

One student wants to marry an American.

VELC Test

Procedure

There are eight (n=8) participants in this study including two first-year students, one second-year student, and five third-year students. They spoke Japanese as their first language and lacked any experience in international education. Their ability to speak English as a second language was classified by the VELC test (Visualizing English Language Competency Test. Kinseido). VELC test is a simple and reliable English proficiency test developed by Japanese experts for testing the English education of Japanese college students.

The students in our college are required to take the VELC Test when they enter college and are classified by their scores. In December, they will take the VELC test to check how their competency varies. The data discussed below were collected in the following manner. Students A and B are first-year students, and their scores before engaging with the SIEP program were derived from earlier scores in April 2018. Student C is a second-year student, and D to H are third-year students. Their scores were derived from December 2017. All the scores after the SIEP were collected in December 2018. We do not account for students who did not take both tests before and after the SIEP.

Results

We collected the scores of 8 students as follows (Table 5).

A glance at table 1 will reveal that mean of the scores increased from 427.5 to 446.87. The students except C and D increased their scores. It is reasonable to suppose that their English competency was improved. And we conduct t-test and P value turned out to be 0.065. It is appropriated to say the results approached the borderline of significance.

Table 5

	BEFORE SIEP			AFTER SIEP		
student	TOTAL	LISTENING	READING	TOTAL	LISTENING	READING
A	373	401	399	422	451	389
B	449	506	397	469	415	369
C	472	466	468	472	451	481
D	368	340	376	399	441	354
E	532	610	468	577	618	539
F	421	413	417	444	459	422
G	428	431	417	444	476	409
H	377	394	354	348	366	322
MEAN	427.5	445.13	412	446.87	459.63	410.63
SD	52.99	82.95	40.31	62	72.31	70.53
P value :0.065 The results approached the borderline of significance						

Figures 1 and 2 are the radar charts of their total scores and listening and reading scores.

As for the listening skills, we can say these things as follows. The student A and E whose total scores were around 300 got significant change especially in their listening skills after SIEP. The student E who had the lowest score in his/her listening score increased the most after SIEP. The students with around 600 in his/her listening score did not change their scores after SIEP.

As for the reading skills, the scores of those except F did not change a lot or even decrease. It is estimated the program at UPB did not use any text books and did not deal with English grammar. Their grammatical English competency can be said not to be changed a lot.

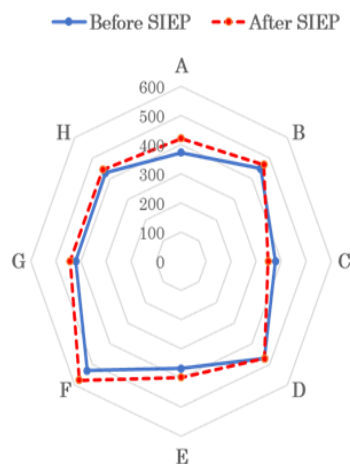


Figure 1. Total score

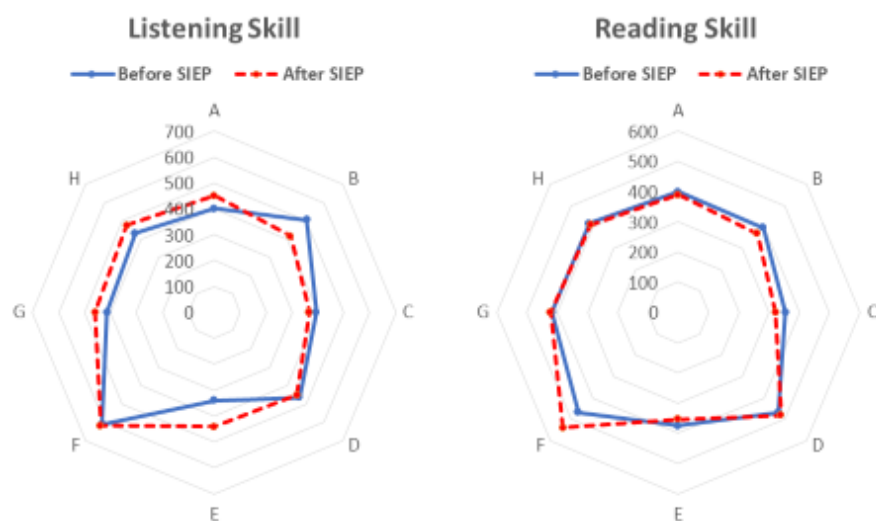


Figure2. Listening score and reading score

Discussion and Further Study

Questionnaires and interviews revealed that studying abroad for 2 weeks had a positive impact on L2 learners. The students were strongly interested in getting in touch with local people including local college students there. It seems that there has been an influence on the communication ability of human relations. Also, motivation of some students has greatly increased for the next study abroad or work abroad occasion in their future. But according to the VELC test, the students' scores did not change so remarkably. This may be due to the fact that the SIEP did not have a grammatical study content.

It should be emphasized that there was a big change in the score also for the students who had a low GPA score but had a positive motivation to attend the SIEP in advance. This may be a major criterion for the next fiscal year.

This time it was a limited investigation among 14 people; among 4 interviewees and 8 people in the Velc test comparison for one year. We would like to continuously measure it from the next fiscal year onwards.

Acknowledgement

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Appendix

Consent to Participate in Research

インタビュー調査への協力のお断り。

この度は、私たちのインタビュー調査にご協力くださり、誠にありがとうございます。このインタビューは、2018年度に共同研究（細江、白須、東本、清水）として横浜商科大学にて行われる「英語に対する意識調査」のために行われるものです。

このインタビューには40分程度の時間がかかります。インタビューへのご協力は任意です。このインタビューを通じてご提供いただいた情報に、上記教員以外の第三者が触れることはありません。また、インタビュー成果の報告は、複数の協力者から収集したデータを統合した形で扱いますので、個人名が出ることはありません。

なお、インタビューの内容につきましては、会話などの様子を動画記録させていただきます。この記録は研究用のデータとして慎重に扱い、参加者の許可無くネット等で不特定多数に公開することはありません。

質問内容のなかで、答えたくないものがある場合には、お答えにならなくても結構です。また、インタビュー調査への協力を中断したい場合には、その旨お申し出があればいつでも中断します。

私は、上記の条件を確認した上で、インタビュー調査について協力することに同意いたします。

平成 年 月 日

協力者（回答者）

お名前 _____

御所属 _____

ご連絡先 _____