

Individual differences in learner engagement during study abroad

From research into the affordances of study abroad programmes we know that linguistic immersion during SA in languages other than English has become a matter of choice rather than a natural occurrence as a result of the widespread use of English as a lingua franca and the global personal access to communication technologies. In recent years, initiatives have been developed to support students in benefiting as much as possible from their international experiences in terms of personal growth and intercultural awareness. However, the role of learner agency in making the most of study abroad experiences has been relatively unexplored. In this presentation I will describe the results of a study in which we investigate the differences in learner engagement with reference to the intensity and the variation of their interaction in the target language. Particular focus is given to students' self-reflections with regard to the factors that enabled or impeded a persistent effort to engage with the host community. A computer application called SALSA (Study Abroad Language Support App) was used to support 85 students' engagement with the target language during their residence abroad. The students rated their learner engagement and the intensity and variation in their contact with proponents of the host country on likert scales. They also recorded themselves while reflecting on the initiatives they had taken and the obstacles they had encountered during their time abroad. Preliminary results point to a marked difference in learner engagement between students who studied abroad for the first time and those who had already experienced a residence abroad in the past.