

Projecting Better Learning Outcomes While Abroad

One of the fundamental questions guiding study abroad research is how to develop programs and environments that promote learning, both linguistic and pragmatic, that will benefit learners long after they graduate. To that end, the current study observes the various linguistic and pragmatic gains in students participating in a 16-week faculty-led study abroad semester in Berlin, Germany, as well as the factors that contribute to these gains.

As such, this study consists of 11 participants (N = 11) from a small liberal arts college in the Southeast. These participants studied at the Freie-Universität Berlin and took one course with the on-site program director from the home-university as well as stayed with host families throughout the greater Berlin metro-area. The study examined the role environment and involvement in extra-curricular activities, e.g., church attendance, casual meetups with locals, sports participation, interaction with guest families, etc., has on linguistic and pragmatic gains within second language acquisition. There has been much literature comparing linguistic and pragmatic gains in students in the abroad context versus the home-university, but to date there has been no comparative study regarding German Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; Schauer, 2006; Taguchi, 2008; Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998). The data analyzed for this study is qualitative and quantitative and consist of a combination of pre- and post-surveys testing cultural sensitivity and interviews conducted on-site by the program director. The research questions for this study are:

1. What are the linguistic and pragmatic gains of students taking the same theatre course abroad?
2. What factors, e.g., environmental, contribute to the success of study abroad students?
3. How can FL programs, abroad and at the home university, produce more positive and parallel gains across learners?

This study divided the participants into an experimental and control group, as study abroad literature has recommended this to collect the most accurate data as opposed to comparing students who study abroad with those who do not. As the study is ongoing and will reach its completion at the end of May 2023, no definitive results can be shared at this time, however, current data and field notes indicate that students who were involved in more extracurricular activities and attended church services regularly while abroad reported more positive experiences than those who did not.

References

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