

The effects of a short-term study abroad program on developing students' intercultural competence and oral proficiency*

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Song, Jayoung. 2020. The effects of a short-term study abroad program on developing students' intercultural competence and oral proficiency. *Linguistic Research* 37(Special Edition): 1-29. The purpose of the study was to investigate the effects of a short-term study abroad program on developing students' intercultural competence, oral proficiency, and the relationship between the two. Participants consisted of 33 American college students studying Korean as a foreign language. Data was drawn from an intercultural competence questionnaire, role play oral assessment, reflective writings, and interviews. The results showed that students made significant improvement in the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of perceived intercultural competence. As for the oral proficiency gains, students showed significant improvement in language use but failed to show significant improvement in fluency and pragmatic competence. The results also revealed that an increase in students' intercultural competence did not predict oral proficiency gains. The study provides pedagogical implications regarding programmatic consideration and specific activity design to improve intercultural competence. (Pennsylvania State University)

Keywords study abroad, Korean as a foreign language, intercultural competence, oral proficiency, pragmatic competence

1. Introduction

With the rapid emergence of multilingualism and multiculturalism in the U.S. and the world, many regard one of the most important skills to be intercultural competence (Jackson 2015; Root and Ngampornchai 2013). The development of intercultural communication is critical not only for students whose careers require communication with people from other cultural and linguistic

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backgrounds, but also for those who would need to function effectively in the contemporary world. Therefore, educational institutions recognize the need to develop curricula that could enable their graduates to become competitive professionals in today's linguistically, ethnically, and culturally diverse world (Guo 2015). One of the key elements of intercultural competence is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations. Given this, universities ought to provide students with opportunities to interact with people from different cultures through in-person interactions. Study abroad programs can provide a significant advantage in terms of social and cultural awareness and openness to diversity of thinking, acting and learning, and have thus been widely adopted in higher education (Freed et al. 2004).

Scholars have tended to conduct research on study abroad and intercultural gains in the context of long-term study abroad (i.e., a semester or a year) rather than short-term programs (i.e., 1 to 8 weeks; Engle and Engle 2003). In fact, the number of students participating short-term study abroad programs is rapidly growing, consisting of up to 56% of all study abroad students; those embarking on semester- or year-long programs make up only 4% of students (Mapp 2012). Considering this growth in short-term study abroad programs, researchers should have some grasp on the effect of short-term study abroad programs on students' intercultural gains. More importantly, whether these intercultural gains result in actual linguistic outcomes represents a gap in the literature (Taguchi et al. 2016). By investigating the effects of a short-term study abroad program on students' intercultural competence and oral proficiency, the current study attempts to fill this gap in the literature.

2. Literature review

2.1 Intercultural competence¹

What is intercultural competence? A range of definitions and theoretical

1 There are a variety of labels describing intercultural competence, including intercultural communicative competence, intercultural sensitivity, and intercultural adroitness (Chen and Starosta 1996; Taguchi et al. 2016). In this paper, the term, intercultural competence, will be used synonymously with other related terms.

models have been proposed by researchers from such diverse fields as communication, psychology, international education, and second language acquisition (Byram 1997; Deardorff 2006; Fantini and Fellini 2012; Spitzberg and Changnon 2009). Although the definitions might vary, intercultural competence is generally defined as the knowledge, skills, and beliefs that enable people to behave appropriately with informed understanding of different perspectives in cross-cultural settings (Walinski 2013). Some models of intercultural competence take a developmental view of competence whereas others assume a componential approach. An example of the developmental model is Bennett's (1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). The DMIS demonstrates how individuals respond to cultural differences and how, over time, their reactions, attitudes, and beliefs change. The model holds that intercultural adaptation is a process of wherein one evolves from an ethnocentric person to an ethnorelative one (Taguchi et al. 2016). On the other hand, the componential approach highlights individual components that are attributed to successful intercultural communication. One of the most exhaustive and influential is provided by Byram (1997), whose model incorporates holistic linguistic and intercultural competence and has clear, practical, and ethical objectives. According to Byram, intercultural communicative competence is a skill needed to decrease conflicts in cross-cultural communication through negotiation of meaning. For Byram, intercultural communicative competence consists of five dimensions—attitudes, knowledge of the self and others, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery, and critical cultural awareness. On a related note, Fantini (2012) saw in intercultural communication three essential components—personal traits (e.g., flexibility and empathy), language proficiency, and abilities in different domains (e.g., cultural knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness).

Whether the developmental view or componential view is taken, intercultural competence has the following aspects: the cognitive, affective, and behavioral (Chen and Starosta 1996; Deardorff 2006). The cognitive component refers to knowledge of cultural differences between a home culture and other cultures and an understanding of the target culture (Hill 2006). Following the definition of culture (The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages), cultural knowledge includes three elements: 1) products (i.e., tangible and intangible

creations such as painting, books, music, etc.), 2) practices (i.e., social behaviors such as holiday traditions, table manners, gestures, etc.), and 3) perspectives (i.e., values, ideas, attitudes, and beliefs).

The affective domain can be defined as intercultural sensitivity, which is an individual's "active desire to motivate themselves to understand, appreciate, and accept differences among cultures" (Chen et al. 1998: 231). According to Chen and Starosta (2000), intercultural sensitivity consists of five elements—interactional engagement (the feeling of participation in communication), respect (understanding, accepting, and respecting cultural differences), interaction confidence (the feeling of confidence in intercultural communication), interaction attentiveness (the ability to respond observantly in intercultural situations), and interaction engagement (the level of enjoyment individuals feel during intercultural communication).

The third aspect—the behavioral domain—is more ambiguous and thus studied less than the cognitive and affective aspects. Kelley and Meyers (1995) considered behavioral competence as cross-cultural adaptability, the ability to adapt oneself in intercultural settings. Chen and Starosta (1996) defined it as intercultural adroitness, which means "the ability to get the job done and attain communication goals in intercultural interactions" (Chen and Starosta 1996: 367). Combining these two definitions and drawing on a definition from previous research (Lee and Song 2019), I define the behavioral aspect as the learners' willingness to learn the target culture or directed effort to carry out behavior for intercultural understanding. How students make gains in these three aspects of intercultural competence (i.e., the cognitive, affective, and behavioral) is the focus of the current study.

2.2 Study abroad and intercultural competence

Study abroad programs (SAPs) are defined as "all educational programs that take place outside the geographical boundaries of the country of origin" (Kitsantas 2004). SAPs provide a number of contexts in which learners engage in naturalistic L2 interactions through talking with a host family, local friends, volunteering in the community, communication in the service encounter, and so

forth (Shively 2013). This sort of active learning in a socially situated setting can lead students to understand the deep interactional and intercultural meaning of language use. Students thus have access to a deeper level of understanding of the complex dynamics of intercultural interaction. Therefore, the study abroad context that offers ample cultural contacts and practices seems to be an ideal environment for intercultural development.

Previous studies largely showed that study abroad experiences contribute to intercultural development (Czerwionka et al. 2015; Engle and Engle 2003; Medina–López–Portillo 2004). As for the cognitive aspect of intercultural competence, studies have demonstrated that study abroad participants developed deeper understandings of the target country through formal instruction in the curriculum and informal daily exposures to social interactions with speakers of the target culture (Czerwionka et al. 2015; Root and Ngampornchai 2013).

Several studies have shown gains in affective aspects, intercultural sensitivity among students who study abroad for over a semester or a year. Learning through on-site experiences in study abroad programs can provide significant advantages in terms of social and cultural awareness, and openness to diversity of thinking, acting, and earning. These experiences enabled students to become more open to cultural diversity, ethnocentrism, intercultural communication and a high level of global mindedness (Clarke III et al. 2009; Engle and Engle 2003).

Some studies have referred to the behavioral aspect of intercultural competence using such terms as adaptability and global development view (Anderson and Lawton 2011) and adaptability and sensitivity (Williams 2005). In spite of the variations, these studies have shown that sociolinguistic and sociocultural environment in a study abroad setting helped students develop the type of adaptive skills required to manage interactive discourse activities in a second language. Williams (2005) compared changes in students' intercultural competence in two contexts—study abroad and on-campus study during the course of a semester. The results showed that the study abroad group showed greater improvement in terms of adaptability and sensitivity than the on-campus group. Still, being exposed to various cultures through friends and classes can also contribute to significant changes.

2.3 Study abroad and oral proficiency gains

Studies have consistently reported on the effects of study abroad programs on learners' intercultural competence. However, when it comes to the relationship between intercultural gains and language development, the research is very limited (Taguchi et al. 2016). As most of the intercultural studies use self-reported measures of intercultural competence (e.g., questionnaire, reflective writings), these studies are limited to the reports of "perceived" intercultural competence or "perceived language proficiency" as part of intercultural competence (Fantini 2012). What is still lacking is research on how language learners' gains in intercultural competence contribute to their actual language gains.

Studies that have investigated the effects of SAPs on linguistic gains indicate that the contextual and individual variables are crucial. In a study of the interaction of learning setting between a classroom in the U.S. and study abroad in Spain, Segalowitz and Freed (2004) found advantages to study abroad, where participants in that setting showed significant gains in oral proficiency. However, the most important interaction was between the learning setting and the readiness of the learner at the beginning of the program, with readiness defined in terms of proficiency level and L2-related cognitive ability. That is, learners' oral proficiency gains might be due not only to the study abroad (SA) context but also to their readiness and initial proficiency level. Tschirner (2007) examined gains in oral proficiency for L2 learners of German in a four-week SAP. The results showed that by the end of the program 80% of the highly motivated participants moved up at least one ACTFL level.

Other studies have investigated specific pragmatic gains in study abroad settings. Bataller (2010) found that students significantly increased their pragmatically appropriate use of syntactic devices in making a request after one semester of an SA experience. Based on naturalistic data collected during service encounter interactions, Shiverly (2011) also found that, over the course of a semester in Spain, SA students developed natural openings and requests. Given that pragmatic norms in service encounters differ between English and Spanish, these studies indicate that SAs can enable students to adopt the practices of

expert speakers over time in a particular speech community. Some studies have found, however, that extended social interactions during SA do not necessarily lead to linguistic gains.

In the SA context, successful communication can empower students, but the difficulty in communication and different cultural norms for interaction can be frustrating and may actually result in L2 avoidance (Shively and Cohen 2008). For example, Levin (2002) found that SA students in France avoided eating in the cafeteria as they were unfamiliar with the system for purchasing food there and were reluctant to interact in French with the staff. Instead, they chose to buy instant food at a local supermarket, which involved minimal interaction. Similarly, studies have revealed that students' oral proficiency development may be limited by some aspects of host family interaction. One Japanese host family thought its SA student incapable of carrying out conversation (Iino 2006) and French host families would do teacher talk with SA students (Wilkinson 2002). These studies indicate that SA learners' access to and participation in social interaction can greatly vary. Crucial to successful SA experiences then is a well-designed SA program that includes host-family orientation and pre-departure orientation.

Most SA studies center on the benefits of long-term SA programs in developing intercultural competence. We know little about the effects of short-term SA programs, which recently have been more widely adopted than long-term SA programs (Mapp 2012). Additionally, most existing studies have investigated separately the intercultural gains and language gains. Such separation makes it hard to come up with a holistic picture of learning experiences during SA programs. Therefore, the current study, which attempts to fill this gap in the literature, is guided by the following two research questions: 1) What is the effect of a short-term study abroad program on developing students' intercultural competence? 2) What is the relative contribution of increased intercultural competence on SA students' oral proficiency gains?

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

Participants consisted of 33 university students enrolled in Korean classes at a private university in the States. There were 8 males and 25 females ranging in age from 17 to 27 years ($M = 18.9$, $SD = 1.76$). The participants were mostly undergraduates ($n = 32$) pursuing degrees in Asian studies, international studies, economics, and biology; one graduate student was majoring in humanities. The data was collected on a six-week study abroad program and was drawn from over three years (i.e., 2017, $n = 9$; 2018, $n = 8$; 2019, $n = 16$). Over the three years, the syllabus, learning context, and instructor of the study abroad program remained the same. All the participants joined the study abroad program after completing an on-campus, one-year course of introductory Korean. Hence, the groups' proficiency level was relatively homogeneous.

3.2 The short-term study abroad program in Korea

In study abroad programs, the process of learning a second language through on-site experiences can provide a significant advantage in terms of extended social interactions in the host community. These programs, however, need to be properly designed and implemented to meet their objectives. The current program was developed in order to maximize students' access to and participation in the target community through a guided home stay experience, a one-on-one language partner, and service learning experiences. The short-term study abroad program was six weeks long and conducted at a partner university in Korea. Four steps were taken to facilitate the educational experience. First, access to language use and learning in the natural social setting was aided by the expert support and guidance of home institution faculty. They were mindful of the rich opportunities afforded by such environments and capable of leveraging the experience. This faculty-led instructor as well as local teachers were in charge of daily language instruction (a total of 84 contact hours for 6 weeks). Daily schedule consisted of 4 hours of language instruction (grammar, reading, listening, and speaking) followed by either 2 hours of writing class, culture class, or community volunteer in the afternoon. Integrated Beginning Korean (i.e., KLEAR textbooks) and Kyung Hee University Korean textbook were used for language instruction. Second, homestay arrangements were completed based on students' and host families' preferences (e.g., hobbies, pets, and diets)

so that both parties could bond and spend time together more comfortably. In order for students to feel comfortable in homestay, two students stayed with one host family. The criteria for the selection of homestay were prior experience with homestay, positive feedback from previous students, condition of the house (i.e., furniture for students' use, separate bathroom for students, etc.), and distance to school. Selected host families underwent orientation on how to engage in conversation with the SA students, provide language feedback, and help students get adjusted in the new country. Third, students were paired up with native speakers of the target language (i.e., university students of partner institutions in each country) and met them at least twice a week (3 hours/week) to practice speaking and to complete tasks. Given that in many cases language textbooks do not represent culture-related contents in details (Kim and Paek 2015), the weekly cultural and conversational tasks were designed to fill the gaps in the classroom instruction to help students develop intercultural and pragmatic competence. The language partners were paid for their time and received volunteer certificate issues by the host university. Fourth, there was a weekly service learning opportunity (2 hours/week). This occasion, also referred to as a community engagement opportunity, permitted students to interact with local elementary students. Lastly, there were three cultural field trips in which students visited historically renowned sites, watched cultural performances, and participated in activities that Korean people enjoy doing. Appendix 1 provides specific examples of tasks students needed to complete with their host family, language partner, and service learning institution.

3.3 Data

Data was drawn from the following sources: (a) pre- and post-role play oral assessment, (b) pre- and post-intercultural competence questionnaire, (c) students' reflective writing, and (d) semi-structure interviews.

3.3.1 Role-play oral assessment

The current study chose an open role-play to measure students' oral proficiency, including pragmatic competence. Role-play is a commonly used

method to measure oral proficiency, as it enables the examination of speech-act behavior in its full discourse context while controlling the interlocutors' roles and relationships as well as the context itself (Félix-Brasdefer 2010; Kasper and Rose 2002). Four tasks were designed following the steps to design an oral assessment (Jianda 2007). These tasks were as follows: accept a friend's invitation to (1) a movie, (2) dinner, (3) study together, (4) a party. The first two topics were used for pre test and the last two were used for post test. In order to avoid practice effects, the topics of the test tasks were counterbalanced; half of the participants received one combination of topics (Topic 1 and Topic 3) while the other half received the other topic combination (Topic 2 and Topic 4).

The target speech acts of the four tasks are greetings (receptive and productive), invitations (receptive), suggestions (productive), and closing (receptive and productive). To elicit more elaborate responses, contextual information regarding a conflict in schedule is provided in the task's prompt, which is written in English. Randomly paired with their SA program classmates, students performed the role-play before and after the SA program. An analytic rubric, developed based on a previous study (Youn 2015), provided ratings on a 6-point scale for each of the following four subscales: delivery, language use, sensitivity to situation, and engaging with conversation (Appendix 2).

3.3.2 Intercultural competence questionnaire

The study used an intercultural competence questionnaire developed and validated in previous research (Lee and Song 2019). For the cognitive domain, there were four items—asking students' specific knowledge of cultural products, practices, and perspectives, and the ability to understand differences between cultures. For the affective domain, 16 items posed questions to participants about their "active desire to motivate themselves to understand, appreciate, and accept differences among cultures" (Chen and Starosta 1998: 231). Finally, for the behavioral aspect, three items measured the likelihood of individuals engaging in certain behaviors, such as seeking opportunities or sources to learn about the target culture. Given that the questionnaire was validated with Confirmatory Factor Analysis, in this study no further Confirmatory or Exploratory Factor Analysis was conducted; rather, a reliability test was conducted to check if the

scale was relevant to the current population and had internal consistency. The Cronbach's alpha for cognitive was .825, for affective .810, and for behavioral .791, all of which demonstrated good internal consistency. Students completed the survey before the SA program started and again on the last day of the SA program. The sample survey is in Appendix 3.

3.3.3 Weekly reflective writings

For six weeks, the SA groups discussed three free topics and completed three teacher-assigned tasks that dealt with such things as college life, current trends in U.S. and Korea, and others. After weekly interactions with their language partners, all students submitted reflective essays in their target language that synthesized their reactions to discussion topics and newly learned knowledge. Given that the aim of the writing is for students to reflect on their cultural understanding and awareness, both target language and English was allowed for those who had difficulty writing in the target language.

3.3.4 Interviews and exit essays

At the end of the program, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted with those who agreed to participate ($n = 10$). Interviews, conducted in their native language, lasted for approximately 30 minutes. Students were asked about their overall evaluation of the SA program, their learning experience through homestay, their language partner, the service learning, and the cultural field trips. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Those who did not participate in an interview wrote an exit essay that conveyed their ideas and feelings about the study-abroad experience, their evaluation of the program, and their impressions of Korea.

3.4 Data collection and analyses

Completing questionnaires, reflective writings, and an exit essay were part of the course assignments. Hence, all the students completed the assignments. However, data was collected from only those who signified their consent, thus

allowing their class projects to be disseminated. Once the researcher confirmed that the correct data had been associated with proper participant, all reference to the participant's identity was deleted.

A mixed-method approach was used. The data collected through different types of sources was triangulated. The intercultural competence questionnaire was analyzed using SPSS v. 21.0. Preliminary statistical analyses were performed to check whether a set of assumptions were violated, including normal distribution of the data. After satisfying the assumptions, a paired samples t-test for each domain (i.e., cognitive, affective, and behavioral) was conducted for each time point (i.e., pre and post). For all pairwise comparisons, the Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .0166 (.05/3) was used by dividing an alpha level of .05 by the number of the tests. For role-play oral assessment, students' speech samples were video-recorded and graded by two raters. After the rater training, two examiners with M.A.s in Korean language education graded, based on the analytic rubric, all the test takers' scores independently. The interrater reliability was .90, which shows high reliability. After confirming interrater reliability, the scores from the two raters were averaged and analyzed using a paired samples t-test for each domain (i.e., delivery, language use, sensitivity to situation, and engaging with conversation) for each time point (i.e., pre and post). Bonferroni adjusted alpha level of .0125 (.05/4) was set for the comparisons. To examine the relative contribution of increase in students' perceived intercultural competence on oral proficiency gains, multiple regression analyses were used with the increase in intercultural competence as predictor variables and the increase in oral proficiency as a dependent variable.

Content analysis was also applied to students' reflective writings, interviews, and exit essays to gain in-depth information regarding the SA program. The categories emerging from the data were carefully coded and classified (Miles and Huberman 1984).

4. Results and discussion

4.1 RQ1: What is the effect of a short-term SA program on students' perceived intercultural gains?

Table 1 shows pairwise comparisons between students' pre and post intercultural competence questionnaire. The paired samples t-test revealed that the difference between the pre- and post-questionnaire was significant for perceived intercultural knowledge ($t(32) = -5.85, p = .000$), intercultural sensitivity ($t(32) = -3.00, p = .005$), and behavioral intention ($t(32) = -3.75, p = .001$), over the course of six weeks. These results indicate that, through short-term SA experiences, students were able to improve in all aspects of perceived intercultural competence.

Table1. Pairwise comparisons of perceived intercultural competence between the pre and post test

Intercultural competence	Time	Mean	SD	t (df)	Sig.	Cohen's d
Cognitive	Pre	16.03	3.53	-5.85* (32)	.00	.81
	Post	20.00	2.59			
Affective	Pre	80.39	8.47	-3.00* (32)	.00	.69
	Post	85.24	9.56			
Behavioral	Pre	14.36	2.27	-3.75* (32)	.00	.85
	Post	15.78	1.63			

As for how students perceived their improvement in intercultural competence, qualitative data gathered from students' interviews and essays produced three themes. First, the development of intercultural competence seemed to be facilitated by informal contacts with the target language in a range of communicative settings through homestay, language partner, and service learning. In the reflective writings, students commented about how this multi-layered opportunity to learn about the target culture helped. One student commented:

My host dad read a newspaper to me every day. Everyone in the family liked to watch movies on TV. So we sat closely to each other and watched TV every day and talked about the movies afterwards. I could not understand everything, but I thought it is a good way to learn the language and culture. Although the homestay was far from school, I really like staying with my host family. I think the most important memory I had in Korea is with my host family. I want to meet them again.

Another student spoke about how much she enjoyed interacting with her host family. "My host family plan things I like and this helped me spend a

good time in Korea. They also helped me learn colloquial language, differences between American and Korean culture, and read Korean books. I definitely think host family made my time in Korea memorable.”

Some students acknowledged the benefits of service learning in terms of building intimate relationships and engaging in natural interactions with local people. One student said,

I introduced my culture to the grandparents in the senior center and they carefully listened to it. As I prepared for the presentation, I got to know better about the similarities and differences between Vietnamese and Korean culture. Other students might have not picked service learning as the most valuable thing during the SA program, but I truly think this was the best experience. Thanks to the kindness they showed me, I got to love Korean people more.

These excerpts show that students cultural awareness was raised not only about the target culture, but also about their own culture, which is one of the critical components in intercultural competence (Byram 1997). Additionally, positive informal interactions outside the classroom setting enabled SA students to build positive attitude, respect, engagement with the target culture and people, which is part of the affective domain of intercultural competence (Chen et al. 1998).

The literature on social interaction during SA suggests that the opportunities for informal contact exists, but there is a considerable variation in the extent to which student learning is supported (Shively 2013). That is, depending on how much the program and students are prepared, students might benefit from large social networks with expert speakers of the target language or they might be isolated from all but the most essential interactions (Shively 2013). In the SA program under study, organizers carefully designed and prepared informal contacts. They organized a homestay orientation to shed light on what it means to host a foreign student, on how to interact with him or her, and on how to facilitate his or her language learning at home. Organizers also addressed how to deal with cultural differences, how to maintain constant communication with the service learning institutions, and offered language partner orientation. The program provided multiple sources for social interaction, enabling students to easily expand their social networks with experts of the target language and to interact within a variety of topics through multiple interactions. Even if a host

family was rather reticent and less interactive than some of its counterparts, students still had opportunity to engage with the local community through language partner and service learning.

A second theme emerged regarding how students perceived their improvement in intercultural competence. Frequent interactions with a host family and language partners were conducive to friendship. In turn, SA students were able to build interaction engagement, confidence, enjoyment as well as behavioral intention about intercultural communication.

Students' reflective writings showed signs of close friendship. One wrote the following:

My language partner is very smart and patient. It was awkward at first, but we did a lot of things together and became very comfortable with each other. We did a lot of cultural experiences together. We ate pajeon when it rained, we went to a karaoke although we both are not good singers, we studied at a café together. These are very memorable, which makes our friendship special. I will practice Korean with him even if I go back to the states.

Another student mentioned,

I talked a lot with my language partner. I got to know a lot of things about her such as how she thinks of America, what is her dream, where she wants to travel. We went shopping, various cafes, Myeonggong, which made me feel that I became a Korean university student. I was afraid to talk in Korean at first, but now I am not afraid of talking with strangers.

Another student also commented about how her perspectives about learning culture has changed over time. She wrote,

Before joining the program, I wasn't interested in Korean culture except food and I didn't want to know more. However, when I met with my language partner every week, I got to know a lot about Korean culture. It was interesting to find out similarities and differences between the two cultures. If there is something I want to experience, she took me there like cartoon café, which I still deeply appreciate. I am looking forward to visiting Korea again to teach English in 3 years.

These excerpts attest to the importance of building close relationship with an expert in the target language. Doing so appears to produce changes in students' attitudes, perspectives, and behaviors on intercultural interactions. Students

expressed anticipation of future opportunities to experience more of the target culture and maintain relationships with the local people, which is aligned with findings in previous research (Lee and Song 2019). Similar to students who learn Korean as a foreign language feel a high level of anxiety (Jee 2018), the SA students felt anxiety about communicating with partners in the early stage of the interaction. However, the more they interacted with each other, the more comfortable they became with the partner and the target culture, lowering their anxiety and boosting their interactional confidence. This is consistent with the studies that showed frequent interactions that reduce negative feelings such as anxiety and bring positive feelings such as confidence and comfort (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006).

The third and final theme to emerge regarding how students perceived their improvement in intercultural competence concerned their direct exposure to the target culture. The program distinguishes itself from regular college classroom experience by offering field trips or out-of-class experiences in the target culture (Shively 2013). As one student remarked,

I really enjoyed the field trips. We visited pottery village and folk village. We learned how to make a traditional pottery and also watched traditional wedding in the folk village. The wedding was really beautiful. We also visited Kyungju historical site and saw famous pagoda, which was stunning. These trips were memorable and helped me understand Korean history.

Another student wrote of how he spent his free time in Korea to experience what he had only seen through Korean dramas.

I walked a long the Han river myself whenever I had time. I saw young people go to Han river and deliver fried chicken there in the Korean drama and this is the first thing I did on the first week. Han river was pretty and safe to walk around. I could understand why young people like to go there. ... One of the most significant things about this program is that I was able to experience life and culture myself. Learning Korean in Korea and in America is completely different. I knew very little about Korean culture when studying in the states, but all these experiences in Korea made me learn more and I appreciate this opportunity.

Profound cultural knowledge includes a holistic, contextual understanding of the culture. Attaining such knowledge requires of course a more immersive and

multi-faceted exposure to the target culture (Deardorff 2009). Although it was a short-term program, various field trips and students' willingness to experience as many things as possible seemed to cultivate a deeper and wider cultural knowledge.

RQ2: What is the relative contribution of increased intercultural competence on SA students' oral proficiency gains?

To answer RQ2, the researcher first compared students' pre- and post-oral assessment scores with a paired samples t-test. Then, a multiple regression was conducted to examine the relative contribution of increased intercultural competence to students' oral proficiency gains. Table 2 shows pairwise comparisons between students' pre and post oral proficiency scores. The paired samples t-test revealed that the difference between the pre- and post-test was significant for language useuse ($t(32) = -13.38, p = .000$). However, the difference was not significant for delivery ($t(32) = -2.40, p = .023$), sensitivity to situation ($t(32) = -2.24, p = .032$), and engaging in conversation ($t(32) = -1.43, p = .160$). The results indicated that over the course of a six-week SA program students were able to make significant improvements in language use (i.e., good control of grammar and vocabulary), but failed to make significant improvement in the other categories—delivery (i.e., clear, concise and fluent delivery), sensitivity to situation (i.e., appropriate use of speech acts), and engaging with conversation (i.e., turn management and active listenership).

Table 2. Pairwise comparisons of oral proficiency between pre and post test

Items	Time	Mean	SD	t (df)	Sig.	Cohen's d
Delivery	Pre	4.00	.76	-2.39 (32)	.02	.81
	Post	4.15	.67			
Language use	Pre	3.18	.78	-14.73* (32)	.00	.69
	Post	4.06	.71			
Sensitivity to situation	Pre	3.93	.78	-2.24 (32)	.03	.85
	Post	4.12	.73			
Engaging with the conversation	Pre	4.87	.42	-1.43(32)	1.60	
	Post	4.93	.24			

Table3. Relative contribution of increased intercultural competence to oral proficiency gains

Dependent variable	Predictor variable	B (beta)	T	Total R2	Total F
Oral proficiency	Cognitive change	-.012	-.524	.030	.301

Affective change	-.002	-.133
Behavioral change	-.020	-.388

Table 3 shows how increased intercultural competence contributed to oral proficiency gains. When the increase in each domain of intercultural competence was entered, simultaneously, as a predictor variable in multiple regression analyses, none of the variables was a significant predictor ($B = -.101$ for cognitive, $B = -.031$ for affective, and $B = -.092$ for behavioral). The results indicate that an increase in perceived intercultural competence was not a contributor to oral proficiency gains, explaining only 3% of the total variance of oral proficiency gains.

The results show that students were still able to improve their language use, which is operationalized in this study as an ability to manage grammar and vocabulary. The areas in which students showed negligible gains are related to pragmatic ability. It was initially assumed that in the SA context, students would have ample opportunity to engage in social interaction through interaction with host family, local friends, service learning, and service encounters. These informal contacts with the target language in a variety of communicative settings can help L2 learners understand cultural norms and conventions for interactions, thus making improvements in all areas of oral proficiency including pragmatic competence (Shively 2013). Six weeks, though, appears to be an insufficient duration for students to make measurable changes in pragmatic competence. Reflective writings suggest that some students were frustrated with the pace of learning. The current program was designed, in terms of the content covered, to be equivalent to a two-semester term of study at the home institution. One student wrote, "We learned so many things within one day. There are so many things to cover every day so it was difficult to remember everything. I had to memorize lots of vocabulary but I don't think I fully understand how they are used." Another student wrote, "It was really challenging to learn everything within six weeks, which should be usually covered in one year. I had to memorize new vocabulary and grammar and do homework every day, and take exams every week." These comments indicated that the intense nature of the curriculum, in which new vocabulary and grammar was presented every day, did not provide students with enough time to internalize the contents and use

them appropriately for given contexts.

These results lend support to the view that, for L2 learners, learning pragmatics is challenging; it might require more time to grasp the knowledge of appropriateness, the meaning of interlocutor and situational factors, and social conventions (Leech 1983). Previous studies that have shown a positive link between intercultural competence and pragmatic competence were done in a semester-long SA program (Shively and Cohen 2008; Taguchi 2015).

The results may also be explained by what is known as the “threshold effect” (Spada 1986; Spada 1985). This means that more advanced or high-intermediate students are far more likely to benefit from informal contacts and improve their oral proficiency during SA than beginner or intermediate students. The current students joined the SA program after studying Korean for two semesters, thus making their level upper beginner. It seems that the informal contexts provided by studying in Korea helped them understand more about Korean culture, change their attitudes towards intercultural interaction, and to take immediate action to learn more. What kept students from making measurable changes in oral performance was their limited language proficiency. It is plausible that students failed to notice the plethora of input they were exposed to during their interaction with the native speakers or that they did notice but could not absorb it all in a short period of time. (Lyster and Ranta 1997).

Another explanation may be found in individual variables. Previous studies found that SA students do not necessarily achieve greater linguistic gains due to various contextual and individual variables (Collentine 2009). Students who made improvements during the course of an SA program were either highly motivated ones (Tschirner 2007) or had high cognitive abilities such as language aptitude (Segalowitz and Freed 2004). Without examining these individual variables, it is hard to know how these variables mediated, hindered, or facilitated students’ linguistic gains.

4. Conclusion

This study has attempted to contribute to the current SA literature by

investigating students' intercultural and actual oral proficiency gains. It has gone beyond previous studies by providing empirical data on a short-term SA program and exploring whether increased intercultural competence results in actual linguistic gains.

The study, however, has several limitations. First, the study looked only at student groups that were homogeneous in their level of language proficiency. As previous studies have indicated, initial language proficiency seems to be an important variable in predicting changes in performances. Intermediate or advanced level of students might have provided a different picture in terms of their intercultural competence and linguistic gains. Future studies should explore students at varying levels of language proficiency and examine how each group benefits similarly and differently from its SA experience. Second, to measure students' oral proficiency, the study used one task—role play. Researchers could elicit various language functions and speech acts by implementing discourse completion tasks or various types of role plays that reflect various social situations, relative power, social distance, and degree of imposition. A single role play might not be sufficiently refined to capture growth in oral skills, particularly in a six-week period. Using a variety of measures might accurately tap into small gains in oral proficiency. Third, the study did not take into account individual variables, many of which have been found to be important to linguistic achievement during SA experiences. Students' inclination to actively engage in conversation during SA would have been influenced by cognitive variables such as language aptitude and by affective variables such as personality, motivation, or willingness to communicate. Lastly, the data from 33 students were collected for three years. Although the syllabus, learning contexts and instructors of the program remained the same, there might be some (or big) differences in terms of students' learning experiences. This, in turn, would have affected their intercultural and oral proficiency gains. Without looking at these variables, it is hard to examine the complete picture of the link between intercultural competence and linguistic gains.

This study provides several pedagogical implications in terms of programmatic considerations. First, pre-study abroad proficiency determines to some extent both the amount and type of out-of-class interactions students pursue and the amount of input they can internalize from those interactions.

These two amount ultimately affect students' intercultural and linguistic gains. When designing an SA program, one needs to take into account what proficiency level can benefit most from the program. Second, the current study has shown that students greatly benefit from well-organized, out-of-class activities such as homestay, language partner, service learning, and field trips. If conditions permit, the design makers should consider homestays rather than putting students of the same L1 background into a dormitory, and other opportunities where students can get involved in local communities and build positive relationships with them.

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Appendix 1

Sample activity with a language partner and host family

Conversation with a stranger

Preparation stage: 30m

With your language partner

1. Choose a business such as but not limited to a bank, a coffee shop, a bookstore, a grocery store, a bakery, information desk, etc.
2. Focus on a daily real-life interaction such as asking for directions, getting information (for example what is 카페가 어디에 있어요?, searching for a book of interest, etc.
3. Discuss and make a list of the possible language and expressions you can use in order to complete your task.

Main stage: 30m – 1 hour

1. Once you are ready, you go to the location WITH your partner and complete the task (you are the only one speaking. He/she will only be an observer). Audio-record your interaction.
2. Once completed, listen to the recorded audio file, discuss with your partner about how the conversation went, how prepared you were, whether you could have handled the conversation differently, the choice of expressions used, misunderstandings, etc.
3. Complete the table with incorrect forms that you used in the interaction and correct forms that the language partner taught.

Poststage:

1. Write a short reflection (1pg) about the completion of the task as well as your discussion with the language partner.
2. Submit the language correction table.
3. Submit the audio file of your interaction with a stranger.

Example of the language correction table

Incorrect form used	Correct form learned

Weekly discussion topic with a language partner

Week 1: Interview your partner

1. Interview your partner: Video record a conversation between you and your language partner and get to know each other.
2. Homework: Watch the video alone and write a short paragraph about your partner.
3. In Class: Briefly talk about your partner in class.

Week 2: Culture shock

1. With your partner: Talk about the culture shock that you experience in Korea. Ask your partner about why Korean people behave that way/ why things work that way in Korea.
2. Homework: Write a short paragraph about the culture shock you experienced.
3. In Class: Share culture shocks that you experienced and discuss similarities and differences between American and Korean culture

Week 3: Recommending food from each country

1. With your partner: Give each other food recommendation and try the food (e.g., Rice students recommend food that they like either Korean or food from their culture, and Korean students recommend their favorite Korean dish to Rice student. They can try the food together or separately and share their reactions. While eating, film reaction video.
2. Homework: Write a reaction paper about the experience of trying food with the language partner, filming the reaction video, etc.
3. In Class: Share food recommendation and restaurant experience.

Conversation with host family

1. Video record two conversations with your host family, one in the beginning and one at the end of the program. (Dinner or breakfast setting) (20 mins)
2. Once completed, watch the recorded video file, discuss with your language partner, how the conversation went, how prepared you were, whether you could have handled the conversation differently, the choice of expressions used, misunderstandings, etc.
3. Write a short reflection paper (1pg) about your interaction with your host family as well as the language correction table.

Appendix 2

Rating criteria for role play

Score	Content delivery	Language use	Sensitivity to situation	Engaging with interaction
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Clear, concise, fluent · Smooth topic initiation with appropriate transitional markers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · A variety of linguistic expressions · Good control of grammar and vocabulary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Consistent evidence of awareness and sensitivity to situations exists in contents or tone · Use of appropriate speech acts with politeness (e.g., refusal with explanations about schedule conflicts, apology, suggestion of alternatives, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · A next turn shows understanding of a previous turn throughout the interaction (i.e., shared understanding) · Evidence of engaging with conversation exists (i.e., clarification questions, back channel, acknowledgement tokens, etc.)
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Generally smooth, but occasionally unclear, or unnecessarily worthy · Unclear transitional cues (e.g., unclear intonation and stress) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Inconsistent use of complex structures · Linguistic expressions are occasionally inaccurate and a bit limited 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Inconsistent evidence of awareness and sensitivity to situation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Some evidence of engaging with the conversation, but not consistent · A next turn sometimes doesn't show understandings of a previous turn
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Delivery is choppy, fragmented, and minimal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Linguistic expressions are inaccurate, and limited, which obscure meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Little evidence of situational sensitivity (e.g., expressions sound abrupt, direct, or not polite) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Noticeable absence of discourse markers · Evidence of not achieving a shared understanding

Appendix 3

Sample of intercultural competence survey

Statements
F1: Cognitive-knowledge
1. I know a lot about the cultural products of the target culture (tangible & intangible products) such as literature, architecture, art, paintings, song, dance, a system of education, etc.
2. I know a lot about the cultural perspectives (ideas and attitudes) of the target culture such as values and beliefs.
3. I am well aware of the differences between my own culture and the target culture.
4. I know a lot about the cultural practices of the target culture (patterns of behavior accepted by a society) such as turn-taking in conversation, the use of gestures, table-manners, and socially appropriate behaviors for dating or weddings.
F2: Affective
5. I enjoy interacting with people from the target culture.
6. I am open-minded to people from the target culture.
7. I feel confident that I will interact well with people from the target culture.
8. I respect the values of people from the target culture.
9. I would not accept the opinions of people from the target culture. (reverse-coded)
10. I think my culture is better than the target culture. (reverse-coded)
F3: Conative-Behavior
11. I try to find time to be familiar with the target culture.
12. I try to seek an opportunity to improve my understanding of the target culture.
13. I use various sources to learn about the target culture.

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