International
Journal of Society, Culture & Language
IJSCL

Journal homepage: www.ijscl.net
ISSN 2329-2210 (online)

Karaoke in Costa Rica: A Multidimensional Approach to Study Abroad

Danielle Geary[1a]

ARTICLE HISTORY:

Received January 2015
Received in revised form April 2015
Accepted April 2015
Available online April 2015

KEYWORDS:

Study abroad
Language and culture
Intercultural communication
Community service
Language and identity

Abstract

This case study was conducted to determine the benefits of a multi-dimensional study abroad program that included a community service component. It encompassed the following aspects of the study abroad experience: motivation for travel, language learning research, the role of autonomy in language learning, and cultural awareness, behaviors, and attitudes. The researcher acted as a participant and an observer through ongoing ethnographical observations as the program took place. The researcher also implemented an oral assessment to determine the subjects' language skills, and conducted one-on-one interviews with participants about the culture of Costa Rica and the comprehensive impact of the study abroad experience. To assess what aspects of the program facilitated and impeded target language fluency, the researcher collected information on student participation in the everyday lives of the natives, their living accommodations, the number of hours per week of formal second language (L2) instruction, and the opportunities for consistent, daily conversation in the target language.

© 2015 IJSCL. All rights reserved.

[1] Lecturer, Email: danielle.geary@modlangs.gatech.edu
Tel: +1-404-894-7327
[a] Georgia Institute of Technology, USA

1. Introduction

Study abroad is not new to the college experience. As far back as 1640, higher education students studied in other countries as a degree requirement throughout Europe (Landis, Bennett, & Bennett, 2004). Every year, study abroad provides international, intercultural, and even life-changing experiences for students across the globe. It enhances their knowledge of the world, improves their communication and life skills, and fosters greater maturity (Hulstrand, 2006; Ingram, 2005). For many years now, researchers have agreed that there seems to be within the human psyche an intrinsic motivation to travel in that it cultivates self-actualization and personal growth (Alderfer, 1972). People travel in search of novelty, to gain knowledge, to interact socially with others, and to escape from their routine (Iso-Ahola, 1982). They take part in particular recreational activities in order to satisfy desired physical and psychological outcomes. Educational tourism is a way for human beings to accomplish a variety of these outcomes in a single experience (Manfredo, Driver, & Tarrant, 1996). As St. Augustine (as quoted in Esar, 1995) stated so eloquently, "The world is a book and those who do not travel read only a page" (p. 822).

Although academic study abroad programs take place for a variety of purposes in an array of contexts, they are especially promoted in university foreign language departments to improve target language skills outside the classroom setting (Gray, Murdock, & Stebbins, 2002; Wilkinson, 2002). The idea is to "live" the language in meaningful and authentic ways through the interaction and building of relationships with native speakers (Gray et al., 2002; Rivers, 1998; Wilkinson, 2002). As more colleges and universities incorporate and encourage study abroad as part of their curriculum, more research and evaluation methods are necessary in order to assess program effects and to design and implement better study abroad programs. The purpose of this study was to evaluate a study abroad program and its success in achieving foreign language acquisition and intercultural understanding.

2. Theoretical Framework

In 1899, Mark Twain (as quoted in "Travelling Well", 2011) proposed that "broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime" (Quotes on Travel section, para. 9). For years, studies have shown that study abroad experiences provide for the multiple benefits of academic development, cultural awareness, appreciation of differences, and a heightened sense of independence and adventure (Talburt & Stewart, 1999). Moreover, Black and Duhon (2006) contended that students who study abroad acquire substantially higher levels of tolerance, self-confidence, independence, and openness as a result of travel.

In terms of foreign language acquisition, data overwhelmingly reveal that confining foreign language study to a classroom adversely affects the potential for fluency. In Rifkin's (2005) research, for example, he described a kind of "ceiling effect" (p. 3) in the traditional foreign language class, suggesting that there is only so much one can learn in a school setting. Approximately 10,000 hours of practice are required to become an expert in an L2. Although children accomplish this task in their native language by the time they are 5 years old, the typical classroom-based learner receives only 600 hours of foreign language instruction (Ericsson & Charness, 1994). Such time restraints and limited practice, researchers argue, make the outcome of fluency from a strictly classroom-based program all but impossible due to the lack of the natural element of language learning.

Correspondingly, homestay living arrangements and positive relationships with natives in the target country are essential to L2 acquisition. Homestay and social events, for instance, expedite intercultural exposure (Cluett, 2002) for obvious reasons. Students form relationships with local friends and host family members through spontaneous, authentic discourse with native speakers. Furthermore, students believe that they make progress in speaking and listening when they take part in these informal occasions for conversation (Cluett, 2002). Steinberg (2002) supported this belief and maintained that "learning takes place outside the study abroad classroom in

the student's living situation, associations with peers, and participation in extracurricular activities" (p. 211).

Additionally, study abroad programs provide an opportunity to link theory and reality, thereby facilitating experiential learning or the opportunity to construct one's own knowledge via firsthand experience (Ritchie, 2003). Studying abroad is an ideal example of experiential learning in that students learn from their firsthand experiences during travel and ultimately apply their educational experiences into their lives. Due to its natural connection to travel, researchers often apply experiential learning theory not only to study abroad programs but also to field trips and international curricula. Laubscher (1994) suggested that study abroad programs transformed abstract concepts into concrete experiences that validated the learning experience. In other research, Sutton and Rubin (2001) substantiated marked academic gains as a result of study abroad when they compared an at-home student group to a sojourn abroad student group in which the study abroad group had increased success in world geography, global interdependence, and cultural relativism. Furthermore, because language, culture and social conventions are interwoven (Naji Meidani, 2013), study abroad creates the unique environment in which to experience them organically for an extended period of time.

This particular study abroad was unique in several ways. First, it included community service whereby each student lived in a different town. Secluded from tourist areas and big cities, students lived in host family homes in separate towns, where they served as language assistants and cultural ambassadors in the local elementary schools, teaching English speakers of other languages (ESOL) during regular school hours, Monday through Friday. Additionally, students had to have at least a high intermediate level of Spanish, write an essay, and make it through a rigorous interview process in order to participate in the program, which took place in rural Costa Rica. This comprehensive, cultural characteristic, combined with academics, was what set this program apart from the typical sojourn abroad. The academic aspect included a special topics course and internship that included journaling, workshops, and a project portfolio at the end of the 7 weeks as well as the work students do in the schools. Most formal language instruction was provided through their journal writing corrections. Most of their L2 speaking was with Costa Rican natives in natural, spontaneous conversations in an environment where they had no choice but to use their L2 daily in order to communicate.

This evaluation incorporated a case study approach to address the expectations, experiences, and foreign language acquisition of a specific, adult, short-term study abroad program in Costa Rica. The study used quantitative and qualitative data-collection techniques.

The researcher was a participant and an observer of the program. This evaluation study was guided by the following four research questions:

1. What effect does this short-term study abroad program have on the acquisition of target language skills?
2. What knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes related to Costa Rica resulted from the program?
3. How does the program meet the expectations of adult foreign language students?
4. What aspects of the program facilitate target language fluency and what aspects impede target language fluency?

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

This assessment of the short-term study abroad program used the Scriven (1999) model of goal-free evaluation, using four research questions as a guide to determining what objectives were achieved. A discrepancy model allowed for recommendations on potential improvements for the program, if necessary.

3.2. Participants

Subjects for this study consisted of nine students from a private liberal arts college in North Georgia who participated in a 7-week Costa Rica Summer 2012 study abroad program. They were young men and women

between the ages of 19 and 22 who were studying foreign language as a part of their bachelor's degree. They had at least an intermediate level of proficiency in Spanish and represented a diverse group of undergraduate students. For many, this was their first trip abroad. This specific program combined the aspects of sociology and foreign language into a unique bicultural program design that worked as a language exchange program. The procedure for selecting participants was based on time and location of the college's Costa Rica study abroad schedule. Study participants were volunteers from that group.

3.3. Procedure

In order to determine the subjects' initial target language skills, an Oral Assessment Spanish Reading Running Record (RRR) was administered and recorded before the students left for Costa Rica (see Appendix A). An RRR is a reading assessment tool that determines an individual's reading level and what kinds of errors are being made (Cooper & Kiger, 2011; Shanker & Cockrum, 2010). During the RRR, a student reads benchmark passages out loud to the instructor who has a copy of the same text printed on a separate form for grading. The instructor checks off each word read correctly. Incorrect words are circled. The form also allows for notations.

To assess the knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes resulting from the program, the researcher conducted one-on-one phone interviews with nine participants pertaining to what they learned about the culture of Costa Rica as well as their initial attitudes toward the country and how they changed during the study abroad experience. This was done approximately 1 month after the students returned home upon completion of the program, giving them a period of time to assimilate what they learned during their stay in Costa Rica before participating in the interview.

To assess how the program met the expectations of adult foreign language students, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with nine subjects on their expectations of the program before the experience and if these expectations were met or exceeded during the study abroad.

To determine what aspects of the program facilitated target language fluency and what aspects impeded target language fluency, the researcher traveled to Costa Rica in order to collect information on the students' contact and participation in the everyday lives of the natives; their living accommodations; the number of hours per week of formal L2 instruction; and the opportunities for consistent, daily conversation in the target language. The researcher participated in the study by spending time with the students on a daily basis, including sitting in on Spanish classes, observing the program's service work component, and visiting with the host families when possible.

4. Results

4.1. Research Question 1

This research question asked, what effect does this short-term study abroad program have on the acquisition of target language skills? In order to answer this research question, the researcher compared and assessed the scores of the Oral Assessment Spanish RRR (see Appendix A) of four paragraphs of text that became increasingly more difficult to read from Paragraph 1 to Paragraph 4.

This RRR was administered twice, once before the trip and again on the last night of the trip. The researcher also asked a specific question related to language acquisition in the student interview protocol, finding recurring themes among the interviewees' answers.

Results of the Oral Assessment Spanish RRR

Participants repeatedly struggled with vowel sounds. The Spanish letter *i* was the vowel most circled as an error. Students also struggled with the Spanish letter *z* and the accented letter *e* in *Bartolomé*. The Number 79 in the text was confused with the Number 69 (69 and 79 are almost exactly alike in the Spanish language) as were cognates or words that look similar in Spanish and English such as *identical* and *idéntica* and *international* and *internacional*. The word *internacional* was the word most circled as an error both times the RRR was administered. Statistically, the recurrent errors were as follows:

1. Eight of nine participants mispronounced

the word *internacional*.

2. Four mispronounced the Spanish letter *z*.
3. Four missed the accent in *Bartolomé*.
4. Five confused 79 with 69.

Of nine participants, five scored significantly higher on their second Oral Assessment Spanish RRR, whereas three more made modest gains. Only one made more mistakes on the second reading. The results of the findings are presented in Figure 1.

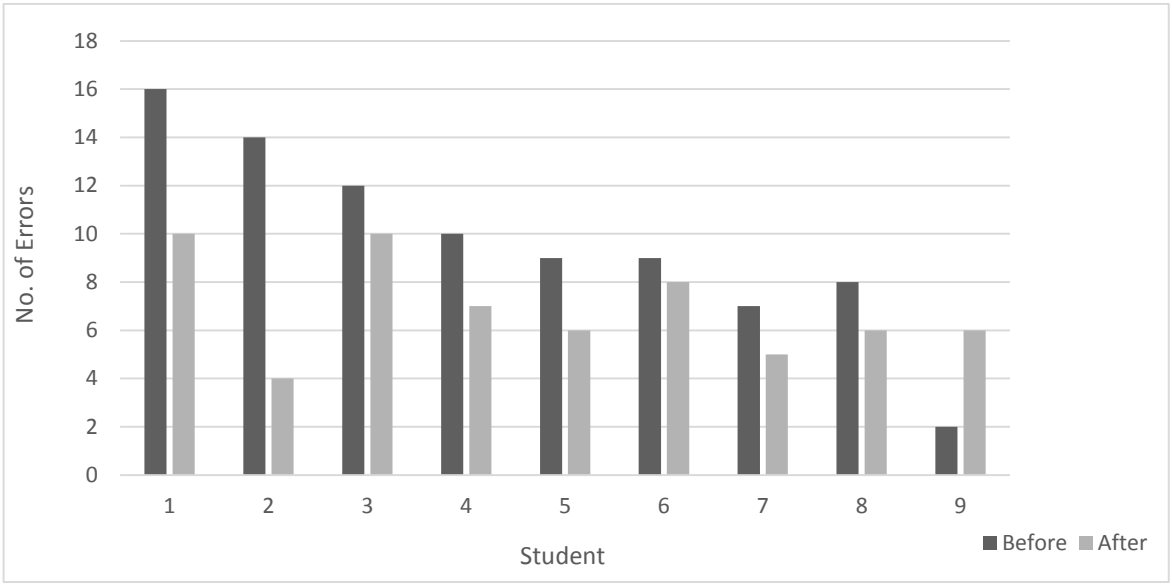


Figure 1
Oral Assessment Spanish Reading Running Record Results Before Study Abroad and After Study Abroad

Results of the interview protocol question related to language skills: How do you feel about your level of language acquisition?

Eight of nine participants stated that their language proficiency improved in a variety of ways during their 7 weeks in Costa Rica. They mentioned increases in confidence, fluidity, vocabulary, and expressions. One student said,

> *I was able to meet someone, introduce myself and have a conversation in Spanish without me having to stay on a dictionary and question all the words. Originally, if I didn't know a word, I would kind of close down ... and I'd lose my train of thought. By the end of the time, I would say that I had learned how to describe the word if I didn't know it and just, kind of, move on. I'm definitely more confident now speaking Spanish.*

Another student stated,

> *I was definitely one of the lowest [language levels] in the group, and now ... I notice myself I'd just be in a conversation with somebody and it'd just like flow out and I was like "Whoa. Where are these words coming from?" Before ... I had to think about every verb ... but then I started to get emotional about things talking to the kids ... or my family, the verbs would just conjugate themselves and come out like they needed to be.*

Two participants articulated gains in writing in Spanish. One believed that she had improved when writing about personal expression and opinion and stated,

> *I think [my language acquisition] definitely improved a lot. The first weeks that I was there I could pick up a word or two when people were talking to me and kind of get an idea, but by the end, I was going to my "sisters'" houses and having hour-long conversations and not really having to ask any questions except for vocab that I didn't know ... I think my writing ... got a little better at expressing myself, like my opinions.*

Seven students mentioned the impact of hearing native speakers on a daily basis and how it affected their Spanish acquisition. They also expressed their opinions that daily immersion far exceeded classroom language learning. One student said,

> *Sometimes when you're trying to say new things in Spanish, you kind of take English and then translate it, and that's not always grammatically correct, and then I'm hearing all these native speakers say things, and I'd be like, "Oh! That is how you word that." And plus there's vocabulary because you have to know how to say a lot of things that you don't say in the classroom ever.*

Another student asserted,

> *I mean, I've had 5 years of Spanish classes, but it's not the same when you always have the option of using English because if you don't know how to say something in Spanish you can just switch over to English for as long as you need to and that wasn't an option here, so ... I feel I made really good progress in just how much I'm able to go up to someone and start a conversation or react to what they're saying to me, like ... I guess, too, working the colloquialisms in there ... when you say "here and there," I've always learned it in class as "aquí y allí," right? Coming back from Costa Rica, I now say "acá and allá" which doesn't ... I mean, five years of aquí vs. two months of acá, but those two months of acá were intense, you know the immersion that everyone always talks about!*

Still another student said,

> *People (Costa Rican natives) would constantly, in a good way, constantly correct me ... and I learned a lot of things that they would say that they didn't realize they were using the past, preterit or whatever, but I picked up on that, so it was cool to see the application of the grammar, and my vocabulary grew exponentially.*

The findings of Research Question 1 support the work of Segalowitz et al. (2004), who compared two different learning environments (one study abroad program and one home program) to assess gains in oral communication in the target language. In comparison, study abroad participants were significantly more successful than were the home learners in the improvement of oral proficiency and communication skills. Likewise, when Freed (1995) compared the language proficiency gains of 15 students of French in a sojourn abroad against 15 learners who did not study abroad in order to measure how living in the target country may influence language fluency or rate of speech, the Oral Proficiency Interview showed that the rate of speech of the study abroad group was substantially higher than that of the students who did not participate.

4.2. Research Question 2

This research question asked, what knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes related to Costa Rica resulted from the program?

1. What new insights do you have concerning the culture of Costa Rica?
2. What did you learn about people and their circumstances and environment?
3. How has this experience changed you as a person?

The following themes emerged as a result of the study:

1. Appreciation of cultural differences. This was the first theme to emerge. All nine participants mentioned a new or heightened appreciation of cultural differences as a result of their stay in Costa Rica. One student said that she missed the comforts of home such as hot showers and air conditioning but that the Costa Rican people made good use of what they had and believed that "they're happier people and they have a lot less ... They just live abundantly in different ways." She shared the following distinct memory:

> *My family invited me to go to Karaoke with them and ... the whole family went and, we were probably there for about three hours, and I just remember thinking, like, "Wow. I'm really here right now. I am in Costa Rica. I'm sitting in this huge bar and I have, like, a dirt floor, there's karaoke going on and people are just enjoying themselves".*

Another student was surprised at how much culture there was in a small area. She said that it was interesting to have read about the

culture in class and then be there experiencing it in person:

> *The more time I spent learning it, the more I realized I didn't know anything about it. And that's something I'm finding about language and culture in general. The more time I spend in it, I just know more and more about how little I know.*

They all also mentioned the strong family ties and closeness of the Costa Rican families. One student said, "Oh, you always hear that. They're really, like, family oriented. They're even more than I thought they were." Another stated that she wanted

> *to get to know the life of a Costa Rican, to eat as they do, to drink as they do, to live as they do, um, and to see an up close and personal lifestyle, the way that they live, and I was able to live with the family and interact.*

2. A marked difference between tourism and studying abroad. Nine participants overwhelmingly agreed that they did not know much about Costa Rica before the trip and that vacation spots and beaches were what came to mind when they thought of Costa Rica. They agreed that there was a significant disparity between tourist areas and true Costa Rican neighborhoods. They made the distinction between being a tourist and being a study abroad student living with the locals and seemed to appreciate the difference in a way they had not done so before. They also seemed surprised to learn that there was such a vast distinction between tourist areas and local neighborhoods. Four participants called their towns and families the real Costa Rica. One stated that tourist areas are simply "nice hotels in another country". Another said that she had a different idea about what it means to travel the world and the experiences you'll have if you choose to stay in popular, tourist areas. She said, "What's the point of going the whole way to a foreign country if you're just going to stay in big resort on the beach? I can stay in my own country and go to Florida for that".

One student learned a lot from her experience teaching in a local elementary school, which was the service component of the study abroad program:

> *A lot of the kids would tell me that they would farm with the family ... all the little kids would go behind [the adults] ... if they were working in tobacco farms, they would go and, like, plant the seed and go behind the older person and cover up the hole, or if they were picking up the little red seeds from the coffee beans ... so they could receive more profit, because they pay them according to how full the basket is ... first and second grade and they're telling me this. Wow.*

3. A sense of independence and adaptability. Six students believed that they had acquired a sense of independence and the realization that they are adaptable to different circumstances. Two, specifically, talked about the 1st day and 1st week and how hard they were. They talked about an adjustment period and getting through it, and they shared a new sense of independence as a result of that difficult time. One said that, after this 7-week study abroad in Costa Rica, he looks at smaller trips such as long weekends to other places as easy and something he could definitely do by himself. Another student said the experience taught her "how to fit in comfortably in whatever circumstance ... being flexible ... being gracious" and that it taught her understanding that sometimes things are not going to be perfect but that one can still adjust and make the best of a situation and learn from it. After you accomplish something outside your comfort zone, she said, "You feel like, 'Oh, yeah. I can do this'".

4. The meaning of necessity and being grateful for what you have. Five students mentioned a new respect for the difference between need and want and being grateful for what you have. They said that they learned how to be thankful and how to recognize when something is not a necessity. One used the example of a new car, stating, "If I have something that works, why does it need to be really fancy or why does it need to be over the top? If it works, why can it not just be enough?" They talked about the fact that they were grateful to have their material things but understood that they did not really need them. Several used the word *excess* to describe their lives in the United States. They found new ways to prioritize what is important and what is not so important. "Learning what things

truly bring you happiness and what do not ... that has been a way I've changed", stated one student. Another student who had traveled to other developing countries said, "No matter what you have in a lot of different countries, there's still the opportunity to enjoy happiness". He went on to mention a common theme he had found among families in developing countries, proposing that they think in the following way: "We have what we have and we're lucky to have that". All participants appeared to have a fresh perspective on being spoiled and what things they really need. Another said, "[There, families] are living in the size of my room, and I'm living in a house that's 10 times that size. It's changed my perspective".

5. Career considerations. Three students cited that this experience helped them with career development, personal identity, and what they want to do with their lives. One student said,

> *[Since I've been home] I'll be talking to someone about silly stuff, like, everyday stuff, and I'm like 'this really doesn't matter ... There's much more important things I could be talking about right now." ... It's really made me think about how I live my life ... and what I wanna do for a living ... I decided that I definitely want to be a teacher.*

Another student who was majoring in Spanish and Education already knew she wanted to teach, but, from her experience teaching in the local elementary school as the service component of the program, she was able to determine which grades, specifically, that she would prefer. She discovered that she related better to younger students. Another participant, a psychology major who also taught at a local elementary school, found that, although she was not interested in teaching, she wanted to become a psychologist and work with children. "Definitely children", she said excitedly, "I know now that I want to work with kids. I love it!"

6. The magnitude of student autonomy. Two students made references to the importance of student autonomy in L2 acquisition. One said, "You have to put yourself out there. You have to talk, and you have to be willing to make mistakes". She said that, when there were opportunities to converse with the locals, she made a point to begin the conversation in Spanish right away, without hesitation, to let them know she wanted and expected to speak in Spanish. Another student mentioned a concerted effort made every day in order to advance her fluidity. She said that "people think you just go to a country and learn the language, but that is not the case". She emphasized that "you have to work for it, study, review your mistakes, learn what's correct, and go over it again and again until you really know it". She also stated,

> *It's not easy. My grammar's really good, and it's still hard. … Like, I always thought that my Spanish was really good because I know all the grammar and verbs and stuff, but I got here and I thought, "Oh, my Spanish's not that good".*

7. The idea of different selves. One participant described her time in Costa Rica with the phrase "different selves", saying she played so many different roles in 1 day that it was as if she had different selves. In the morning, for example, she was a teacher at the local elementary school; in the afternoons, she was a daughter and sister to her Costa Rican host family; on Wednesday afternoons, she was a student studying Spanish with her American classmates; a couple of evenings a week, she was a college girl going out to dance in a nearby town; on the weekends, she was a tourist traveling to visit other cities and natural attractions; and a few times a week, she was the daughter of her biological parents in the U.S., skyping over the Internet to stay in touch.

The findings on knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes in Research Question 2 highlight the idea that "the most powerful learning comes from direct experience" (Nonaka & Takiuchi, 1995, p. 10). Some years later, Steinberg (2002) linked this concept to study abroad, stating that the classroom alone limits learning and that "learning is not isolated in a classroom, but involves a total experience" (p. 211). Thus, there is a strong belief among educators that the total experience of cross-cultural study abroad has positive implications on students' personal growth, cultural awareness, and naturally guiding students in the direction of a major or profession (Shames & Alden, 2005).

4.3. Research Question 3

This research question asked, how does the program meet the expectations of adult foreign language students? To what extent were they met or exceeded?

All nine students unanimously agreed that most of their expectations of this study abroad experience were exceeded. Participants cited the following nine reasons for studying abroad:

1. Improve Spanish language skills. Six of nine participants stated that improving their Spanish was one of the reasons they wanted to study abroad and one of their expectations of the program, and all six said that it was exceeded. They all concurred that immersion in a Latin American country had made an enormous, definite improvement in their Spanish fluidity and that they no longer had to think so much about grammar and exactly what to say as they spoke.

2. Influence ESOL's English. According to four participants, the following expectation was not met: the service aspect of the program. All four thought that they would have more influence on the school and teaching English to their students. They expected a more structured classroom experience with more opportunities to carry out their lesson plans and a more serious focus on the teaching and learning of English.

3. Become a part of the host family. Three students expressed the expectation to form close relationships with their host families and now feel almost as if they had a second family in a foreign country. One was very sad to have to say good-bye to her Costa Rican family; she felt torn when she had to go and said that she was going to try to hold onto the experience for as long as she could.

4. No specific expectations. Two students said they did not really have expectations, that they simply wanted a different experience, and that they definitely accomplished this goal over the 7 weeks. One student said, "I didn't really know what to expect ... I just wanted to have the experience ... and I loved it".

5. Cultural understanding. Two students cited cultural understanding as a reason to study abroad. Their main goal was to see firsthand what they had been studying for years. One said, "It isn't just something that you read about; it's real".

6. Opportunities to speak Spanish. One student noted, particularly, the opportunity to be more secluded with locals in this program as a reason for studying abroad. She wanted to improve her Spanish and expected to make considerable gains in her language skills as a result of two unique program features: one American student per household and teaching in a local elementary school.

7. Build relationships with their ESOL students. One participant expected to build relationships and become close to her students, an expectation she said was far exceeded. She became friends with school faculty and staff as well, including the school cook, which really surprised her. "I became close to everyone", she said.

8. Establish teaching as a career path. One student wanted to determine whether or not she really wanted to be a teacher and considered student teaching in a foreign country a unique way to make the discovery.

9. Impact on self. One student said that she expected the experience to have a great impact on her person as a whole because of the combined elements of living with a host family and teaching at a local school. She stated that the program, comprehensive in scope, was what gave her a significant cultural perspective she would not have experienced otherwise. Living in another country, she said, is its own education and that "it changes you". Figure 2 shows the frequency of each expectation of the study abroad program.

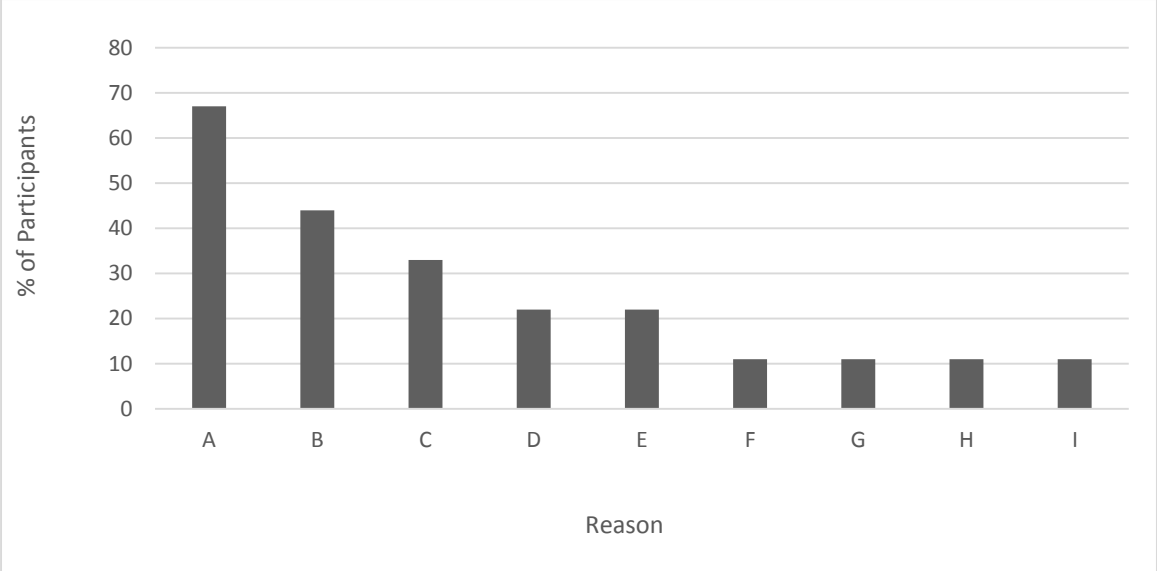


Figure 2

Students' reasons for participating in the Costa Rica study abroad program.

**A=Improve Spanish language skills; B=Influence of teaching English; C=Become part of host family; D=No specific expectations; E=Cultural understanding; F=Opportunities to speak Spanish; G=Build relationships with English speakers of other languages; H=Establish teaching as a career path; I=Impact on self.

It is clear that study abroad enhances students' understanding and empathy for several reasons. Lewis and Niesenbaum (2005) found that linking together an academic course and community changed a student's worldview, which is precisely what happens during study abroad. Their research was two-fold in that it also demonstrated that a student's worldview and a heightened sense of globalization are intertwined and built upon each other (Chieffo & Griffiths, 2003). Results indicated an overall improvement in cross-cultural, global understanding, which is similar to the experiences of the members of this case study.

4.4. Research Question 4

This research question asked, what aspects of the program facilitate target language fluency and what aspects impede target language fluency?

1. Results of home activities. Home activities usually included eating dinner together as a family; talking about the day and business in natural, everyday conversations; and, occasionally, doing things as a family on the weekends. The L2 interaction level was very high and very beneficial, especially because, in all but one circumstance, each student was placed not only in a different home but also in a different town, which was one of the unique characteristics of this study abroad program. Participants stated that they conversed daily about a variety of topics, some of which included the family business, work, school, food, and the differences between Costa Rica and the United States. Such close living quarters over a span of several weeks also allowed participants to witness spontaneous L2 conversation topics that included financial difficulties, disciplining children, and disagreements between family members.

2. Results of class activities. While in Costa Rica, participants took a special topics course that counted toward study abroad credit hours. The course met once a week for 3 hours and was taught mainly in Spanish, depending on activity content. L2 interaction level was high and beneficial, especially because it was an opportunity for students to ask questions about colloquial expressions, grammar, and vocabulary they were hearing in homes and schools and discuss aspects of the culture as well as the occurrences of the week. Additionally, students read and discussed a Costa Rican novel throughout the course, wrote four weekly journal entries in Spanish, and completed a project portfolio of their experiences in Costa Rica. Students were active, enthusiastic participants in the class

discussions, contributing to the conversation with a level of Spanish that was natural, conversational, and fluid.

3. Results of service component activities. All students taught English to the elementary school students in their respective towns Monday through Friday as the service aspect of the program. Throughout each day, they spoke Spanish to the children, faculty, and staff of the school, which resulted in a high level of L2 interaction and quality of interaction. They formed relationships with the faculty and staff. They ate lunch with their colleagues and discussed lesson plans with the head teachers. They attended school parties and soccer games. They tutored and corrected their students on a daily basis and also asked them how to say certain things in Spanish.

4. Results of excursion activities. On most weekends, the students went on excursions to a variety of places as a group, during which time L2 interaction and quality of interaction were low. While traveling with their peers, they normally spoke English.

5. Results of leisure activities. Leisure activities included going to the beach, spending time with their host families, visiting local cities, visiting with locals, visiting each other in their respective host families' homes, skyping with their families in the United States to keep in touch, and completing course work. In all, the level of L2 interaction and quality of interaction varied considerably according to activity.

Overall, the opportunities for significant L2 language interaction in this study abroad program were plentiful. Language interaction and quality were significantly high over the 7-week period, which was another way this particular program was unique. In a week's time, students agreed that they spoke much more Spanish than English and that, on some days, they did not speak any English at all. The following table shows the program aspects and their corresponding degrees of L2 interaction and quality.

Table 1
Program Aspects and Second Language Interaction Quality

Aspects of program	**Second language interaction and quality**
Host family home activities	Very high
Class activities	High
Service component activities	Very high
Excursion activities	Low
Leisure activities	Varied
Overall interaction	High

The findings of Research Question 4 support previous studies that emphasize optimal living arrangements and positive relationships with natives in the target country, as they greatly impact the rate and degree of foreign language acquisition. Homestay and social events, for instance, expedite intercultural exposure (Cluett, 2002) for obvious reasons. Students form relationships with local friends and host family members through spontaneous, authentic discourse with native speakers. Homestay "parents," along with providing food and shelter, are also informal linguistic and cultural teachers (Law, 2003). Studies conducted by Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight (2004) indicated that dormitories and other nonresidential living arrangements simply cannot compete with homestay interactions of daily family life, such as family meals at the dinner table and religious observances. In fact, the study abroad members in this study overwhelmingly credited their homestay families for their significant L2 improvement.

5. Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this study was to examine the comprehensive study abroad experience on adult students at a private college in the southern United States. The study determined the comprehensive impact of short-term study abroad on adults and which aspects of the program most benefitted the participants, taking into account culture, travel, L2 acquisition, community service, circumstances and environment, academic pursuits, and impact on self.

Overall, the outcomes of this study suggested that the community service component, especially, should be an integral part of a

comprehensive study abroad program. As postulated by Toews and Cerny (2005), the infusion of service and academics promotes knowledge acquisition, learning outcomes, and enhanced behaviors and attitudes toward other cultures. Furthermore, general academic learning is considered to be a benefit of engaging in service learning (Kendrick, 1996). In one study, service-learning students boasted higher exam scores when compared to non-service-learning individuals (Strage, 2000). Service-learning participants also appear to have better interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills and leadership skills with self-reported greater tolerance and reduction in prejudice (Moely, McFarland, Miron, Mercer, & Ilustre, 2002).

This study also contributed to literature on the comprehensive impact of adult study abroad. The results provided information on the experiences of college-aged, intermediate to advanced L2 learners in a multifaceted study abroad program. Study abroad programs that include various dimensions such as strong intermediate L2 learners as participants, homestay, course work, and a community service component may create the ideal environment for cultural understanding, L2 acquisition, and personal growth. It is important to note that students with an L2 foundation who are able at least to communicate with the locals, with their host families, and at work as soon as they arrive can take full advantage of the program dimensions. Also, findings supported existing research that none of these characteristics alone has the same implications as they do together. It is the layering of all these elements in a single program that provides hours and hours of cultural and L2 interaction, that would not exist otherwise, and that are exceedingly beneficial to participants.

The results of the Oral Assessment Spanish RRR suggested that L2 immersion facilitates fluidity in the smooth transition from the last letter of the last word to the first letter of the next word, which is notable because this transition is often a struggle for L2 learners. The tendency to "trip over" sounds and syllables may be markedly reduced after an immersion experience. Additionally, results may also promote more emphasis on the importance of L2 pronunciation in the teaching of foreign language. The use of the Oral Assessment Spanish RRR in beginning courses may help students to become aware of which sounds they mispronounce so that they can make adjustments.

Another implication is the support of existing research on the relationship between language learning and foreign interaction. Study participants described their L2 immersion experience in Costa Rica with the following words and phrases: *intense*, *constant*, *consistent*, *forced to speak Spanish*, *surrounded by Spanish*, *extreme*, *all the time*, *dreaming in Spanish*, *thinking in Spanish*, and *This is why everyone talks about immersion*. This study showed that classroom learning pales in comparison to the L2 immersion experience, perhaps, most notably because, even for excellent students who are interested in foreign language and being bilingual, years of book learning had not been conducive to L2 fluency.

Findings also highlighted the relationship between cultural understanding and foreign interaction when participants have an L2 foundation. Because intermediate L2 learners are able to converse about a variety of topics with their homestay family and the locals, the interaction is more valuable than it would be otherwise and broader in scope. A major implication of this study is that deep conversations that affect feelings, beliefs, and attitudes may be what truly impacts sojourn abroad participants in life-changing ways. The capacity to share life experiences over a cup of coffee should not be overlooked. Not surprisingly, these social outcomes further emphasize Naji Meidani's (2013) idea that language, culture and social conventions are not separate, but interlaced, and the impact on self that results from exchanges such as these may be the most lasting result of study abroad for the majority of participants.

Finally, the goal-free case study evaluation model chosen for this study allowed for unanticipated outcomes, as projected (Scriven, 1991). Short-term, adult study abroad programs do have merit and can result in a life-changing transformation of self for young adults. Beyond L2 acquisition and cultural awareness, the personal growth acquired from study abroad is one of the most comprehensive

effects of living in a foreign country and adapting to a different set of circumstances.

The first and most obvious limitation in this study was the population size. The study consisted of just nine participants who represented only one private, southern, U.S. college. It is difficult to determine to what extent the results and findings might be generalized to include a larger group or a different region. Another limitation, although useful for the data collected, was the intermediate to advanced language level of all participants. The fact that all of the students had a strong L2 base upon entering the program may have affected the findings in all research questions because much of the data collected were dependent upon L2 conversation skills. The third limitation was the reading of the Oral Assessment Spanish RRR. There are several factors that influence successful reading aloud: confidence, nervousness, distraction, timidity, speech problems, and so forth. From the first reading to the second, these factors may have been better, worse, different, or the same. Many variables may have affected the perceived language gains in the readings. A fourth limitation was the chosen L2 for the study. Spanish is widely studied to some degree by most American students and shares a common alphabet with English. Thus, a different foreign language may yield different results under the same circumstances and study instruments. A fifth limitation was the students' age. All of the subjects in this study were college-aged young people; this may have affected their overall perception of their sojourn abroad, especially in terms of cultural implications, due to their limited life experience. Notwithstanding the limitations, however, this case study supports the hypothesis that a structured, multidimensional study abroad program that includes community service may be the best option for a comprehensive learning experience.

References

Alderfer, C. P. (1972) *Existence, relatedness, and growth; Human needs in organizational settings*. New York, NY: Then Free Press.

Black, H. T., & Duhon, D. L. (2006). Assessing the impact of business study abroad programs on cultural awareness and personal development. *Journal of Education for Business, 81*, 140-144.

Chieffo, L., & Griffiths, L. (2003). What's a month worth? Student perceptions of what they learned abroad. *International Educator, 12*(4), 26-31.

Cluett, R. (2002). From Cicero to Mohammed Atta: People, politics, and study abroad. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad, 8*, 17-39.

Cooper, J., & Kiger, N. (2011). *Literacy assessment*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

Ericsson, K., & Charness, N. (1994). Expert performance: Its structure and acquisition. *American Psychologist, 49*, 709-724.

Esar, E. (1995). *20,000 quips and quotes*. USA, Barnes & Noble.

Freed, B. F. (1995). *Second language acquisition in a study abroad context*. Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.

Gray, K., Murdock, G., & Stebbins, C. (2002, May). Assessing study abroad's effect on an international mission. *Change, 34*, 44-51.

Hulstrand, J. (2006). Beyond anecdote: Education abroad comes of age. *International Educator, 15*(1), 52-55.

Ingram, M. (2005). Recasting the foreign language requirement through study abroad: A cultural immersion program in Avignon. *Foreign Language Annals, 38*, 211-222.

Iso-Ahola, S. E. (1982). Toward a social psychological theory of tourism motivation: A rejoinder. *Annals of Tourism Research, 9*, 256-262.

Kendrick, J. (1996). Outcomes of service-learning in an introduction to sociology course. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 3*, 72-81.

Landis, D., Bennett, J., & Bennett, M. (Ed.). (2004). *Handbook of intercultural training* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Laubscher, M. R. (1994). *Encounters with difference: Student perceptions of the role of out-of-class experiences in educational abroad*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Law, M. E. (2003). *A case study of study abroad: University students learning Spanish in context*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of South Alabama, Alabama.

Lewis, T., & Niesenbaum, R. (2005). Extending the stay: Using community-based research and service learning to enhance short-term study abroad. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 9*, 251-264.

Manfredo, M. J., Driver, B. L., & Tarrant, M. A. (1996). Measuring leisure motivation: A meta-analysis of the recreation experience preference scales. *Journal of Leisure Research, 28*, 188-213.

Martinez-Lage, A., Gutierrez, J., & Rosser, H. (2007). *¡Tú Dirás!* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.

Moely, B. E., McFarland, M., Miron, D., Mercer, S., & Ilustre, V. (2002). Changes in college students' attitudes and intentions for civic involvement as a function of service-learning experiences. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 9*, 18-26.

Naji Meidani, E. (2013). Review of the book Living Language: An Introduction to Linguistic Anthropology, by L. M. Ahearn. *International Journal of Society, Culture & Language, 1*(2), 145-149.

Nonaka, I., & Takeuchi, H. (1995). *The knowledge-creating company*. New York, NY: The Oxford University Press.

Rifkin, B. (2005). A ceiling effect in traditional classroom foreign language instruction. *The Modern Language Journal, 89*, 3-18.

Ritchie, B. W. (2003). Conclusions and reflections: The future of educational tourism. In B. W. Ritchie, N. Carr, & C. Cooper (Eds.), *Managing educational tourism* (pp. 252-259). Clevedon, United Kingdom: Channel View.

Rivers, W. (1998). Is being there enough? The effect of homestay placements on language gain during study abroad. *Foreign Language Annals, 31*, 492-500.

Schmidt-Rinehart, B., & Knight, S. (2004). The homestay component of study abroad: Three perspectives. *Foreign Language Annals, 37*, 254-262.

Scriven, M. (1991). *Evaluation thesaurus*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Segalowitz, N., Freed, B., Collentine, J., Lafford, B., Lazar, N., & Diaz-Campos, M. (2004). A comparison of Spanish second language acquisition in two different learning contexts: Study abroad and the domestic classroom. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad, 10*, 1-18.

Shames, W., & Alden, P. (2005). The impact of short-term study abroad on the identity development of college students with learning disabilities and/or ad/hd. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad, 9*, 1-31.

Shanker, J., & Cockrum, W. (2010). *Ekwall/Shanker reading inventory*. New York, NY: Pearson Education.

Steinberg, M. (2002). Involve me and I will understand: Academic quality in experiential programs abroad. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad, 8*, 207-227.

Strage, A. A. (2000). Service-learning: Enhancing student learning outcomes in a college-level lecture course. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 7*, 5-13.

Sutton, R. C., & Rubin, D. L. (2001). The GLOSSARI project: Initial findings from a system wide research initiative on study abroad learning outcomes. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad, 8*, 65-82.

Talburt, S., & Stewart, M. (1999). What's the subject of study abroad? Race, gender, and living culture. *The Modern Language Journal, 83*, 163-175.

Toews, M. L., & Cerny, J. M. (2005). The impact of service-learning on student development: Students' reflections in a family diversity course. *Marriage and Family Review, 38*(4), 79-96.

Travelling Well. (2011). *Quotes on travel*. Retrieved from http://www.travellingwell.com .au/quotes.html

Wilkinson, S. (2002). The omnipresent classroom during summer study abroad: American students in conversation with their French hosts. *The Modern Language Journal, 86*, 157-173.

Appendix A

Oral Assessment Spanish Reading Running Record

1. Mi Familia

Susana y Sara son las hijas gemelas de Roberto y Alicia. Físicamente son idénticas, pero tienen personalidades muy diferentes.

Ellas son las primas de Daniel y Mercedes y las sobrinas de Marta.

2. Un Viaje por Argentina

Nuestro viaje comenzó en la ciudad de Buenos Aires, conocida como "la Reina de Plata." Llegamos al mediodía y después de dejar las cosas en el hotel, dimos un paseo por muchas partes de la ciudad.

3. El Eclipse

Cuando fray Bartolomé Arrazola se sintió perdido, aceptó que ya nada podría ayudarlo. La selva poderosa de Guatemala lo había apresado, implacable, y definitiva. Ante su ignorancia topográfica, se sentó con tranquilidad a esperar la muerte.

4. Festival Internacional del Cine

El primer Festival Internacional del Nuevo Cine Latinoamericano de la Habana se celebró el 3 al 10 de diciembre de 1979. El festival fue creado como plataforma de lanzamiento de las cinematografías latinoamericanas que sufrían a tener que competir con las grandes producciones de Hollywood.

Errors _____

From ¡Tú Dirás! (4th ed.), by A. Martinez-Lage, J. Gutierrez, & H. Rosser, 2007. Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.