

Perception and Attitude Change during Summer Study Abroad

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Abstract

A study was conducted to examine the effects of two English language summer study abroad programs on affective change among Japanese female university students. Pre-and posttests were administered, using questionnaires partially adopted from an instrument developed by Iwakiri (1993), to obtain data pertaining to (1) change in attitude toward English, Canada, and Canadians, (2) change in image of Canadians, and (3) change in perception of English skills level. The posttest questionnaire also contained open-ended questions to uncover (1) the participants' perception of the program's effectiveness on English learning, (2) what the participants' believed they learned most, (3) what they felt was best about the program, and (4) what they perceived as most difficult during their stay in Canada in 1995. Fourteen female university students participating in a three-week homestay program, and twenty-three in a twelve-week program, took part in the study. Statistical analysis was not applied and therefore statistically significant levels were not revealed. However, mean scores showed that there was little change in attitude toward English and in image of Canadians. The students' attitudes towards English and Canadians were, however, more or less positive. The students also felt the program helped improve their listening comprehension and speaking skills.

Key words : ESL, study abroad, attitude change

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Since 1989 Gifu University for Education and Languages (GUEL) has been sending students to Lakehead University (LU) in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada. The study abroad program started off as a two-credit, three-week summer program open to students in both English and Education faculties. In 1992, a twelve-week Canadian Studies Program was added for second-year English majors who could earn sixteen credits upon completion.

Participating in study abroad programs is an effective method to learn a foreign language and culture. Another favorable effect of such programs, however, may be positive affective change, such as development of positive attitudes toward the host country and people (Gudykunst, 1979; Gunther, 1974; Kauffman, Martin, & Weaver, 1992; Leonard, 1964). The purpose of this paper is to examine and compare responses from participants in the three-week summer program (Homestay Program) and the Canadian Studies Program of 1995. The responses pertain to the students' attitudinal change towards English, Canada, and Canadians, their image of Canadians, opinion of the program's

effectiveness on English learning, and perception of what they learned most and found most difficult during their stay abroad.

Despite an increasing number of Japanese students studying overseas, few studies on the effects of study abroad programs have been done. In the early nineties, however, Iwakiri (1993) investigated the effects of a study abroad program on 205 Japanese female junior college students. She found that after five weeks of language training and homestay, listening and reading skills improved significantly compared with a control group. Also, the students *felt* the program improved their listening skill, increased their interest in English, and helped them become less embarrassed in using English. In another 1993 study, Kitao investigated the effects of a five-week study abroad program in the U.S., finding that a group of thirty-four Japanese female university students believed their English improved, their motivation to study English increased, and their image of the U.S. and Americans became more positive.

In 1994, the writer conducted a questionnaire survey at GUEL to examine students' perceptions of the program's influence on their English and their images of Canada and Canadians (Ono, 1996). Twenty-three female participants answered that the program was effective in improving listening and speaking skills, increasing interest in English, and overcoming reticence to converse with Canadians. The students generally held positive attitudes toward Canada and Canadians, describing Canadians as especially "kind" and "friendly." Little attitudinal change toward English was found. Some of the results reported in this study will be discussed in this paper for comparison.

The Homestay Program

The Homestay Program provides an opportunity for second year non-English and English majors to experience homestay and sightseeing in Canada. In 1995, seventeen students applied for the program—two of these students were male (both English majors) and fifteen were female (ten English majors, four Japanese majors, and one Education major). The students were required to attend ten 90-minute orientation sessions during fifth period, after regular classes. They received general information on Canada, the living situation at LU, travel tips, English instruction, and directions on applying for insurance and obtaining travel documents. The sessions were taught by four full-time faculty members; three of the faculty were assigned as escorts, including the writer who escorted the students from July 30th to Sept. 8th.

The students arrived in Thunder Bay on July 30th and stayed at the LU dormitory for one week with an LU student monitor who had lived in Japan for several months and was familiar with Japanese students. Students were assigned rooms in pairs and could meet in a common living room. During that first week, students were taken on field trips to local sites of interest, including an amethyst mine, historical fort, and the city museum. Students were then placed in pairs and assigned host families to

homestay for the next two weeks. Some stayed with families outside of Thunder Bay, in small towns hundreds of kilometers away. The homestay was followed by a farewell party in Thunder Bay. Students then had the choice to leave for Japan or to join a ten-day sightseeing tour visiting Toronto, Niagara Falls, the Canadian Rockies, Victoria, and Vancouver. One student had returned to Japan earlier and two took the option to leave for Japan, so fourteen participated in the optional tour.

The Canadian Studies Program

The Canadian Studies Program is unique, offering content-based lectures on Canada, rather than English language instruction, to second year English majors. Twenty-six students (three male and twenty-three female) attended about twenty 90-minute orientation sessions in April and May. The orientation classes were taught by four full-time faculty members, of whom two were also escorts. Japanese lectures were given to familiarize students with Canadian history, geography, people, and culture. Students also received instruction for survival English - for example, learning useful phrases at immigration and customs. Several sessions were scheduled for insurance and travel arrangements. Two sessions were set aside for students to meet and talk with four Canadian LU exchange students who had just arrived from Canada in early May to attend a Japanese studies program at GUEL. Since students in the Canadian Studies Program were not required to attend regular classes that semester, frequent orientation sessions were scheduled so that the students met at least three times a week. Group projects were also assigned to encourage new connections within the group outside of class. It was deemed important for the students to get to know one another as well as possible in preparation for communal living lasting three months.

Arriving in Thunder Bay on May 21st, the students began their twelve-week Canadian Studies course, attending lectures given by LU faculty members. Topics included Canadian history, geography, politics, sociology, religion, literature, arts, the native people and culture, to name but a few. Most lectures were two hours in duration, with a one-hour session in the morning and another session following lunch. Professors had the option to assign reading materials, but no written assignments were given. Each hour of lecture was followed by a small-group review and discussion session led by LU student monitors. These sessions were particularly helpful to students who had difficulty comprehending the lectures. To check the students' comprehension, review quizzes prepared by the professors were completed and marks were recorded.

Students in the Canadian Studies Program lived in on-campus townhouses, each with four single rooms, a furnished kitchen, and cooking utensils. There were five LU monitors (one male and four female) living with the students, acting as tutors for study, explicators of Canadian culture, organizers of recreational activities, and comforting friends. Each monitor lived with three students in five townhouses, leaving three townhouses without a monitor. To ensure that all students had a chance to

live with a monitor, it was necessary to reassign townhouses during the mid-point of the program.

A few group field trips were organized to local sites, including a visit to the Thunder Bay City Hall for an audience with the Mayor. Most recreational activities were, however, arranged by monitors who took students to festivals, family gatherings, parties, the movies, and even some of the local bars. The monitors also organized many outdoor activities, such as canoeing, river rafting, camping, and hiking - activities that most students had never experienced in Japan before.

Two sightseeing trips were scheduled, the first being a mandatory five-day trip in the first week of July, and the second an optional eighteen-day trip after the studies ended in Thunder Bay. The trip in July was taken during a one-week break between the first and second parts of the Canadian Studies Program, and the group flew east to Toronto, Niagara Falls, and Ottawa. Twenty students joined the second trip and traveled to Calgary, the Canadian Rockies, Las Vegas, Bryce Canyon, the Grand Canyon, Vancouver, and Victoria, returning to Japan on September 8th.

The Surveys

Students in both programs were required to fill out two questionnaires, one shortly before departure on May 16th (pretest), and another on Oct. 12th, one month after returning to Japan (posttest). The students were not required to give their names to assure anonymity. Some parts of a questionnaire developed by Iwakiri (1993) were adopted. The main purposes of the questionnaire were to examine

1. how students' attitudes towards English, Canada, and Canadians changed
2. how students perceived the program to be effective for English learning
3. what students felt they learned most from the program.

To eliminate the gender difference variable, only the data given by female subjects were analyzed. The pretest data were collected from fourteen Homestay Program participants and twenty-two Canadian Studies Program participants. The posttest data represented responses from fourteen Homestay Program participants and twenty-three Canadian Studies Program participants. The only academic requirement, besides attendance, for the Canadian Studies participants was to pass certain compulsory courses so that lack of credits would not prevent the participant from graduating within four years.

Results and Discussion

Change in Attitude toward English

Table 1 shows the mean scores for both the Homestay group (H group) and the Canadian Studies group (CS group) responding to items measuring their attitude toward English. The items were rated

Table 1 Mean Scores of Attitude Toward English

Item	Group			
	Homestay ^a		Canadian Studies ^b	
	pretest	posttest	pretest	posttest
e. I think about English even after class.	3.4	4.1	3.6	4.3
f. I want to speak English even if my grammar is not correct.	4.1	3.5	3.8	4.4
g. I want to continue learning English even after graduation.	3.9	4.2	4.8	4.8
h. I enjoy speaking English with native speakers.	3.6	4.3	4.1	4.9
i. I am actually studying English hard.	2.6	2.6	2.6	3.3
j. I like to speak English with my Japanese classmates.	2.7	2.6	3.0	3.7
k. I want to speak English in various situations.	4.9	4.9	5.0	4.9
l. I feel like speaking English when the teacher is a native teacher.	3.9	3.9	4.0	4.6
m. I want to speak English like a native speaker.	4.8	4.9	5.0	5.0
n. It is important for me to earn my credits at Lakehead Univ.	N/A	N/A	4.7	4.8
o. Learning English is important to me.	4.6	4.1	4.9	4.9
p. I am not embarrassed to speak in English in class.	3.2	3.3	3.5	3.7
	$\bar{x}=3.8$	3.9	4.1	4.4

Note. Maximum score = 5.0 $a_n = 14$ for pre- and posttest. $b_n = 22$ for pretest and 23 for posttest.

on a 5-point scale on which 1 indicated “complete disapproval,” 3 denoted “undecided,” and 5 indicated “full approval.”

In comparing the difference between the pre- and posttest mean scores, those of the H group changed little, while those of the CS group increased by 0.3 point. There was also little change in attitude toward English during the program. This result coincides with the results found in the surveys given to the 1994 Canadian Studies group.

The mean scores for the pre- and posttest are both slightly higher for the CS group than the H group, the CS scores being 0.5 point higher in average. This implies that the CS group may have had a slightly more positive attitude toward English and possibly a stronger motivation to learn English. The largest difference in posttest scores between the two groups was found in items f (+0.9) and j (+1.1), the CS group’s scores being higher. This implies the CS group was less concerned about grammatical accuracy when speaking, and more willing to speak English with other Japanese participants, than the H group. This may appear natural considering that the CS group consisted only of English majors, attended lectures in English, and stayed in an English-speaking environment for a much longer period of time than did the H group.

Change in Attitude toward Canada and Canadians

Mean scores measuring attitude toward Canada and Canadians are shown in Table 2 with posttest scores exceeding 4.0. In comparison to the scores in the attitude toward English section, there was more increase in the posttest scores for both H and CS groups by about 0.6 point. The scores of both groups, however, were close, meaning that the two groups were at similar levels of “positiveness” before and after the program. The largest increase occurred in item a “I want to live in Canada in the future” for the H group and in item b “it would be useful to adopt some of Canadian ways of living” for the CS group.

Table 2 Mean Scores of Attitudes Toward Canada and Canadians

Item	Group			
	Homestay ^a		Canadian Studies ^b	
	pretest	posttest	pretest	posttest
a. I want to live in Canada.	2.7	4.2	2.6	3.5
b. It would be useful to adopt some of Canadian ways of living.	3.7	4.1	3.5	4.5
c. We can learn a lot from Canadians.	4.0	4.2	4.3	4.6
d. Canadians are interested in Japanese culture.	4.0	4.6	3.9	4.3
	$\bar{x}=3.6$	4.3	3.6	4.2

Note. Maximum score=5.0 $a_n=14$ for pre-and posttest. $b_n=22$ for pretest and 23 for posttest.

Pre- and posttest scores were highest for item d “Canadians are interested in Japanese culture” for the H group and for item c “we can learn a lot from Canadians” for the CS group. Item d may not appear to directly measure attitude toward Canadians. However, I feel that the host’s interest in the visitor’s home country and culture will most likely engender a favorable attitude toward the people of the host country.

Change in Image of Canadians

The semantic differential technique was used in the pre- and posttests to find change in students’ image of Canadians. Students were asked to mark a position on a 5-point scale between eight adjective pairs, such as prejudiced/unprejudiced, and friendly/unfriendly. The position of their responses was later converted into points from one to five, five points being given to the position at the positive adjective end and one point at the negative adjective end.

As displayed in Table 3, the students’ scores increased for most adjective pairs in both H and CS groups, but by no more than 0.4 point on average. The H group’s scores increased the most for the adjectives, “friendly,” “not prejudice,” and “kind.” The CS group’s scores increased most for “friendly” and “intelligent.” For both groups, the highest posttest scores were given for “friendly” and

Table 3 Mean Scores of Image of Canadians

Item	Group			
	Homestay ^a		Canadian Studies ^b	
	pretest	posttest	pretest	posttest
a. unprejudiced	3.8	4.6	4.0	4.0
b. friendly	4.1	5.0	4.3	4.9
c. intelligent	3.9	4.0	3.7	4.4
d. kind	4.1	4.9	4.3	4.8
e. polite	3.5	3.7	3.6	3.8
f. sincere	3.7	4.1	3.8	3.9
g. mature	3.5	3.9	3.8	3.6
h. diligent	4.0	3.6	3.8	4.3
	$\bar{x}=3.8$	4.2	3.9	4.2

Note. Maximum score = 5.0 a_n=14 for pre- and posttest. b_n=22 for pretest and 23 for posttest.

“kind.” The average posttest score exceeded 4.0 for both groups. In this section also, the average score of all items for both groups were close in the pre- and posttests, indicating that the two groups were at similar levels of “positiveness” in their image of Canadians before and after the program.

For certain items, however, a discrepancy between the two groups was found. While the H group’s score increased for item g “mature,” the CS group’s score hardly changed. For item h “diligent,” the H group’s score decreased while that of the CS group’s increased. Also, for item a “unprejudiced,” the H group’s posttest score increased while there was no change in the CS group’s score.

Parts of the above results of the CS group do not correspond to those of the previous year’s survey. While the 1995 CS group’s posttest score remained almost the same for “mature” and increased for “diligent,” the 1994 CS group’s score decreased for both of these items. This is a prime example of how difficult comparing studies on study abroad programs can be, as different groups in different situations yield various results.

Change in Perception of English Skills

On average, the posttest scores increased for the H group by 0.5 point and by 0.8 point for the CS group (Table 4). Most of the increase, however, occurred in the listening comprehension and speaking skill items by an average of +0.9 for the H group and +1.1 for the CS group. This increase corresponds to the results found in the previous year, in which the 1994 CS group showed an average

of 1.4 increase for the two items. Interestingly, the 1995 CS group showed a higher increase in scores for the writing skill item than the reading skill item, although the students were given reading assignments rather than writing assignments.

Table 4 Mean Scores of Perception of English Skills

Item	Group			
	Homestay ^a		Canadian Studies ^b	
	pretest	posttest	pretest	posttest
a. I can understand spoken English well.	1.5	2.4	2.4	3.6
b. I can speak English well.	1.4	2.3	1.9	3.0
c. I can read English well.	2.5	2.6	2.4	2.7
d. I can write English well.	2.1	2.4	2.1	2.8
	$\bar{x}=1.9$	2.4	2.2	3.0

Note. Maximum score=5.0 $a_n=14$ for pre-and posttest. $b_n=22$ for pretest and 23 for posttest.

When looking at the results of the posttest, H group scored close to 2.4 for all four items, with the reading skill score being the highest. The CS groups scores ranged more widely with a rather high score for the listening comprehension item-not an entirely unexpected result considering how frequently the students engaged in listening practice during the lectures.

Perception of Program's Effectiveness on English Learning

In the posttest questionnaire, students were asked to rate the program's effectiveness on their English learning. They circled a number on a 5-point scale that corresponded most closely with their opinions. -1 corresponded to "had a negative influence," 1 to "not useful," 2 to "a little useful," 3 to "quite useful," and 4 to "very effective."

As shown in Table 5, the CS group's scores were higher than those of the H group's on all items, which implies that the CS group felt more positively than the H group about the program's effectiveness on English learning. The gap is larger particularly for items a, b, c, d, and e. The H group scored item i "increased interest in English" the highest, while the CS group scored highly on item e "becoming less embarrassed in using English" and item j "becoming used to speaking with Canadians." Both groups gave lowest scores for item c "improving reading skill" and "improving writing skill."

Becoming "used to" and "less embarrassed in" speaking English with Canadians certainly must have helped boost the students' confidence in communicating with their hosts. Perhaps the Canadian

Table 5 Mean Scores of Perception of Program’s Effectiveness on English Learning

Item	Group	
	Homestay ^a	Canadian Studies ^b
a. Improving listening comprehension skill	2.8	3.6
b. Improving speaking skill	2.5	3.5
c. Improving reading skill	1.7	2.6
d. Improving writing skill	1.6	2.5
e. Becoming less embarrassed in using English.	2.6	3.9
f. Becoming less afraid of making mistakes in English.	3.2	3.7
g. Gaining self-confidence in using English	2.5	3.1
h. Increasing eagerness to ask questions and speak English.	2.5	3.2
i. Increasing interest in English.	3.6	3.7
j. Becoming used to speaking with Canadians.	3.1	3.8
	$\bar{x}=2.6$	3.4

Note. Maximum score = 4.0 $a_n = 14$. $b_n = 23$.

Studies Program enabled students to utilize their existing English language knowledge, by providing an environment more conducive to communicating, an environment the likes of which does not exist in the home country.

On the other hand, two students in the H group responded with “-1” for the “becoming less embarrassed” item. It is possible that during the short period in Canada, they experienced embarrassment when speaking in English and were not able to compensate for some loss of confidence.

Perception of How Much and What Was Learned

On another 5-point scale measure, students rated how much they learned in certain areas of the program. Students chose a response from numbers 1 to 5 with 1 corresponding to “learned nothing,” 2 to “did not learn much,” 3 to “learned a little,” 4 to “learned quite a lot,” and 5 to “learned a good deal.” Out of three items, “on field trips in Thunder Bay,” “living in a dorm with a monitor,” and “homestaying,” the H group felt they learned most from homestaying. The mean scores were 3.2, 3.8, and 4.7, respectively. The CS group felt they learned most from being with monitors (4.7), although the score was close to those of the other choices, “in classes” (4.5) and “in extra-curricular activities and events” (4.3).

When asked to describe what they learned, the H group of fourteen subjects gave thirty-nine

answers explaining what they learned from (or about) homestaying, including some of their impressions. The students wrote that they learned English (8 responses), Canadian customs (8), and about how Canadians disciplined children (2). Several felt that the Canadian families were kind/warm/loving (5), interested in Japan (2), and more relaxed than Japanese (1). Some students felt they were treated as the hosts' own daughters (3), and a few were surprised to observe how much time the families spent together (3). Certain students had not anticipated seeing the fathers doing housework and taking care of children (3), while one student noted that her host father was particularly attentive to his wife.

Twenty-three long program students gave twenty-six responses explaining what they learned from (or about) their monitors. The students felt Canadians were kind (5 responses), knew how to have fun (4), and were tolerant of different people (2). The students felt they learned about Canadians' differing views (5) and the English language (4). One student wrote that she learned more than words can express.

The most frequent answer for both groups was that the Canadians were kind, which corresponds to results reported previously in the "change in image of Canadians" section and in the 1994 study. Some students mentioned that Canadians were kind because they tried hard to understand the students' "poor" English skills and encouraged communication. Interestingly, some students in the H group expressed critical views of Japanese families, stating that Japanese should spend time together as family like Canadians do, or that Canadians are more relaxed and "rich in the heart" than Japanese. Since study abroad provides an opportunity to compare cultures, it is possible that less positive feelings toward the home country would accompany increased positive feelings toward the host country (Marion, 1980).

Additional Comments on the Programs

Additional questions were asked of the CS group in the posttest. In response to the open-ended question, "What do you feel was best about the program?", twenty-two students gave thirty-eight responses (One seemed to have missed the last page of the questionnaire entirely.). The most frequent answers were making Canadian friends (11 responses), improving English skills (7), and being more confident and used to speaking English (6). Other answers included making new Japanese friends, having time to reflect on oneself, and rediscovering things about Japan.

The CS group was also asked what they felt was most difficult about the program. Among twenty-nine responses, the most frequent was communal living and interpersonal relations (6 responses). Others included classes and assignments, communicating in English with either Canadians or Japanese, and being on a busy itinerary for the sightseeing tours.

Nineteen CS group students who participated in both the mandatory and optional tours were

asked to write down their favorite place visited. The most popular was Ottawa (8 responses) followed by Victoria(4), Banff/Rockies (4), Toronto (3), Las Vegas (3), Niagara Falls (1) and Bryce Canyon (1). Some commented that the length of stay in Banff (3 days and 4 nights) was too long and were disappointed to see many Japanese tourists and store clerks who spoke in Japanese. Perhaps seeing those other large groups of Japanese tourists had spoiled the students' "Canadian experience." Others wrote that long bus rides and differences in temperature between the U.S. and Canada made them feel exhausted during the optional trip.

Conclusion

The results of the questionnaires suggest that overall, little change in attitude toward English occurred during the study abroad programs for both the Homestay Program and Canadian Studies Program groups. The relatively high mean scores, however, implied that the students' attitudes were on the positive side. The students seemed to show a stronger desire to speak English "like a native speaker" and to speak English "in various situations." Attitude toward Canada and Canadians became more positive among both groups. There appeared to be little change in their image of Canadians, although the students perceived Canadians as particularly "friendly" and "kind." Also, the students in both groups felt their listening comprehension and speaking skills improved most among the four skills after the program. However, the CS group felt more positive about the program's effectiveness on English learning than the H group. The H group felt they learned most from their host families and the CS group felt they learned a good deal almost equally from the monitors, classes, and extra-curricular activities. Reflecting on what pleased them most about the program, the CS students listed "making Canadian friends" most frequently. As being most difficult to cope with, the CS students answered "communal living and personal relations."

Statistical analysis was not applied and thus, statistically significant levels were not revealed. In addition, with the absence of a control group, generalizations on the effects of the Homestay and Canadian Studies Programs must be avoided. It was noted earlier that few other studies on study abroad programs have been published, and further work needs to be done. In particular, empirical research is needed to investigate more factors influencing the affective effects of study abroad programs, such as length of stay, contents of the program, students' desire to learn the host country's language and culture, and degree of contact with people of the host country.

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