

The role of study abroad in English language acquisition

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This study investigates what contribution a short-term English study abroad program for Japanese health sciences doctoral students would bring to the improvement of their English skills. Our research questions are: a) as Nakayama and Yoshimura (2008, hereafter N&Y) recently reported that a short-term English study abroad program for Japanese undergraduate students does have a significant contribution to their English writing, can a similar result be observed among these graduate students? b) Since these students had not studied English for a while, their English levels were not expected as high as those of the participants in the N&Y study. Would those with lower level improve more than those with higher level? If yes, what skill would improve most?

We collected data from eighteen doctoral students in the Shizuoka Health Sciences Program (SHEP) held at The Ohio State University in 2007-2008. The program focused on improving students' oral presentation skills through integrated classroom activities in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Each participant prepared his/her own research presentation for the final day of the program and had tutorials for this purpose on Fridays. All students took the Institutional Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency (MTELP) and the Institutional Test of Written English (ITWE) both at the beginning and the end of each program. Eight participants in the 2008 SHEP took the modified SPEAK test for the assessment of their speaking skill.

Results show that (a) writing improved significantly with respect to the organization and the coherence of essay, the same finding as that in N&Y. (b) half of the eight students increased their SPEAK scores ($t(7) = -5.237, p < 0.001$). Their improvement in essay writing *per se* is noteworthy because the curriculum did not offer any specific curricula for writing. This shows the effectiveness of oral presentation training for coherent argumentation in the short-term study abroad program.

Nakayama, M. & N. Yoshimura. (to appear). Japanese EFL learners' improvement and the length of study abroad programs. *Ars Linguistica* 15.
Yoshimura, N. & M. Nakayama. (2008). Japanese health sciences doctoral students in a study abroad context. *Journal of International Relations and Comparative Culture* 7. University of Shizuoka, 151-161.