

International Exchange I

— A Pre- and Post-Analysis of the Participants' Perceptions —

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A Memorandum of Agreement was mutually signed by Jin-ai University (JU) and California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) in 2005 to seek the promotion of further international understanding between the two respective campuses. Every academic year since the establishment of JU in 2001, small groups of students have studied at the American Language Program of CSUF for eight weeks of intensive English instruction while experiencing home stays with American families. In the summer of 2005 a group of 20 JU students visited CSUF for ten days on a private trip, taking 21 hours of English classes and participating in academic and cultural exchange activities. This short program was the archetype for the establishment of a new course at JU; International Exchange I. Obviously, just by its length, one can surmise that participants in the eight-week program would experience changes in attitudes in several aspects of their characters. However, in the interest of evaluating the new course from its outset, the authors wished to measure whether any changes would take place in such a short program. How did their experiences affect the participants? This paper is a brief investigation of the degree of possible changes in the participants' attitudes in several aspects of their characters.

Keywords: attitude toward foreign language and culture, and communication

1. Introduction

This is the first year that this intensive course titled 'International Exchange I' was officially offered to students of Jin-ai University. Two credits are granted to the students who plan, participate in, and subsequently report on their activities during an approximate two-week stay in America for the purpose of promoting grassroots and academic exchange at Jin-ai University's sister-university, California State University, Fullerton.

Seven planning meetings were held before the participants' departure from Komatsu International Airport on September 15th. The meetings were ninety minutes in length and were held at a mutually convenient time on Tuesdays during the fourth or fifth periods so as to accommodate the varied schedules of the 13 participants; eight from the Department of Psychology (seven third-year students and one second-year student) and five from the Department of Communication (one third-year student and four second-year students). Maurice Splichal, teacher-organizer of the group, led the meetings. Harumi Yamada participated in four of the planning meetings and also traveled with the students as part of her research activities.

All of the participants returned to Japan on September 29th, having successfully participated in all of their planned activities, and have presented oral reports and have submitted individual written reports on their observations during their stay.

2. Purpose

Upon her return Yamada reflected that there were some differences in the students' understanding of the purposes of the program. Some students were quite keen on getting the most out of every activity that was planned and others reacted negatively to participation in some activities. This is to be expected, as there will always be differences of opinions among any group of travelers.

However, Splichal and Yamada are interested in what, if any, changes there are in the participants' attitudes toward 1) foreign language, 2) foreign culture, 3) communication, 4) new challenges, 5) life in general, 6) independence, and 7) the host country during such a short two-week stay overseas. What were the participants' preconceived notions? What are their sensibilities after participation?

3. Method

There is relatively little published research on this subject, and all that was discovered deals with long-term stays in foreign countries. Based on that research an original questionnaire was made and administered to the participants approximately one week before their departure and again only a few days after their return. The same questionnaire was used in order to gauge any changes in the participants' attitudes toward the topics listed above in Purpose.

4. Questionnaire

The questionnaire (See Appendix.) was administered in Japanese and only the statements in B. and C. have been translated into English and renumbered for the purpose of writing this analysis. Splichal and Yamada were careful in their translations to ensure that there aren't any discrepancies in the nuances of each statement.

The participants were given as much time as necessary to judge their attitude concerning each statement and answered by drawing a circle in one of five designated boxes: "Strongly Agree," "Somewhat Agree," "Unsure," "Somewhat Disagree," and "Strongly Disagree." A numerical value of '5' was given to "Strongly Agree," scaling down to '1' for an answer of "Strongly Disagree." The mean of their responses both 'Before' and 'After' participation in the course is given below (Results & Analysis) followed by the t-value. Significant differences are denoted with an asterisk or asterisks. One asterisk has been assigned when $p < .05$, and two asterisks when $p < .01$. All 13 participants responded to every statement on both occasions the questionnaire was administered.

5. Results & Analysis

1) Attitude toward Foreign Language:			
Statements	Before /After	Mean	t-value
A – I am comfortable with being in a situation where a language I don't know is being spoken.	Before	2.62	-2.650 *
	After	3.54	
B – I feel uncomfortable when making mistakes in English.	Before	3.54	1.199
	After	2.92	
C – When necessary I try to communicate in English using whatever English I can.	Before	4.08	-2.007
	After	4.62	
D – I have confidence in my English ability.	Before	1.69	-0.617
	After	1.85	
E – I enjoy my English classes.	Before	3.23	-1.849
	After	3.77	
F – I like studying foreign languages.	Before	3.38	-1.162
	After	3.77	
G – I ask questions if I have difficulty understanding when studying foreign languages.	Before	3.15	-0.640
	After	3.38	

N=13 * $p < .05$

In the above section an improvement can be seen in each aspect questioned concerning the participants' 'Attitude toward Foreign Language'. There is a significant difference in "A – I am comfortable with being in a situation where a language I don't know is being spoken." In "E – I enjoy my English classes." it is hard to judge whether they currently 'enjoy' their English classes or whether they 'enjoyed' their 15 hours of English conversation classes in America, due to the second administration of the questionnaire soon after their arrival back in Japan. However, their responses to all other statements clearly demonstrate improved positive attitudes toward speaking and learning a foreign language.

2) Attitude toward Foreign Culture:			
Statements	Before /After	Mean	t-value
A – I feel nervous when speaking to foreigners.	Before	3.92	2.125
	After	3.30	
B – I feel nervous when foreigners speak to me.	Before	3.77	2.997 *
	After	2.54	
C – It is pleasant to speak to foreigners.	Before	3.92	-3.825 **
	After	4.69	
D – I believe people can communicate even when there is a difference in values.	Before	4.15	-0.674
	After	4.38	
E – I believe people can communicate even when cultural differences exist.	Before	4.31	-1.806
	After	4.69	

N=13 * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

As for 'Attitude toward Foreign Culture', again there are improvements in each aspect. There is a significant difference in "B – I feel nervous when foreigners speak to me." and in "C – It is pleasant to speak to foreigners."

3) Attitude toward Communication:			
Statements	Before /After	Mean	t-value
A – I can communicate well with people.	Before	3.15	-0.898
	After	3.38	
B – I like talking with people.	Before	4.23	-0.693
	After	4.38	
C – I am not good at speaking with people.	Before	2.08	-0.249
	After	2.15	
D – I feel nervous when speaking with people.	Before	2.85	2.214 *
	After	2.31	
E – I can accurately express my opinions to others.	Before	3.08	0.433
	After	3.15	
F – I like telling jokes.	Before	3.53	-1.148
	After	3.77	
G – I feel that I have a sense of humor.	Before	2.77	-0.898
	After	3.00	
H – I feel that I am a shy person.	Before	3.92	2.144
	After	3.46	

N=13 *p<.05

In 'Attitude toward Communication' there is a slight drop in their feelings as being good conversationalists as shown in "C – I am not good at speaking with people." However, this is offset by the significant difference in their response to "D – I feel nervous when speaking with people."

4) Attitude toward New Challenges:			
Statements	Before /After	Mean	t-value
A – Up to now I have faced new challenges.	Before	3.38	-0.898
	After	3.62	
B – I plan my actions and prepare myself when I face new challenges.	Before	2.61	-1.477
	After	2.92	
C – I need courage to face new challenges.	Before	3.53	-1.000
	After	3.84	
D – I am willing to tackle new challenges.	Before	4.23	-1.760
	After	4.54	

N=13

From the results in ‘Attitude toward New Challenges’, the participants faced new challenges and feel that it takes courage to do so. They plan their actions and prepare themselves, and are willing to face new challenges.

5) Attitude toward Life in General:			
Statements	Before /After	Mean	t-value
A – I enjoy my campus life.	Before	3.69	-1.477
	After	4.00	
B – I actively participate in my college classes.	Before	3.53	-1.298
	After	3.85	
C – I often participate in volunteer activities.	Before	2.46	1.594
	After	2.08	
D – I enthusiastically participate in my club activities.	Before	3.62	-0.562
	After	3.69	

N=13

The data in the ‘After’ responses in ‘Attitude toward Life in General’ is awkward, again due to the timing of the administration of the questionnaire soon after the participants’ return. However, aside from their participation in volunteer activities, improved positive attitudes can be seen in their outlook on campus life.

6) Attitude toward Independence:			
Statements	Before /After	Mean	t-value
A – I feel that I am spiritually independent.	Before	3.15	-1.389
	After	3.38	
B – I feel that I am spiritually dependent on my parents.	Before	3.38	-0.562
	After	3.54	
C – I feel thankful toward my family.	Before	4.46	0.000
	After	4.46	
D – I feel that I have self-control.	Before	3.08	-0.617
	After	3.23	

N=13

Though there is no change in “C – I feel thankful toward my family.” in ‘Attitude toward Independence’, the mean is already quite high. More improved positive attitudes can be seen in feelings of independence and self-control.

7) Attitude toward Host Country:			
Statements	Before /After	Mean	t-value
A – America is large-scaled.	Before	4.54	-1.760
	After	4.85	
B – America forces its resolve on other countries.	Before	4.00	0.562
	After	3.85	
C – America favors war.	Before	2.92	1.897
	After	2.46	
D – There is racial discrimination in America.	Before	3.46	3.811 *
	After	2.62	
E – There is much danger in America.	Before	4.15	2.132
	After	3.77	
F – Americans are large and tall.	Before	3.38	-2.125
	After	4.00	
G – Americans eat a lot.	Before	3.77	-2.110
	After	4.46	
H – Americans eat a lot of hamburgers and American food is oily.	Before	3.92	-0.898
	After	4.15	
I – Americans are assertive.	Before	4.17	-0.804
	After	4.33	
J – Americans like telling jokes.	Before	3.92	-1.389
	After	4.15	
K – Americans are cheerful.	Before	4.00	-1.477
	After	4.15	
L – Americans are friendly.	Before	4.00	-4.382 **
	After	4.62	

N=13 * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Lastly, in ‘Attitude toward Host Country’ there are significant differences in “D – There is racial discrimination in America.” and “L – Americans are friendly.” Though they may have had some problems with the food, amiable views of the host country are predominate in their responses.

5. Conclusion

Overall the self-perceived changes in the participants’ attitudes toward speaking and studying a foreign language and interacting in a foreign culture, and their communication styles, acceptance of new challenges, and feelings of independence are overwhelmingly more positive. Furthermore, they have a generally more favorable outlook on their host country.

Though the number of participants was quite low, statistically significant positive changes can be seen in the participants’ responses to six of the statements in the questionnaire. This was not expected. Granted all of the positive responses may be due to the participants being

in the first stage of culture shock throughout their stay, when they are sensing a feeling of euphoria in experiencing new surroundings. However, the considerable number of improved positive attitudes cannot be overlooked in assessing the success of the program.

Yamada also had the opportunity to interview the participants' English teachers at the American Language Program near the completion of their English instruction. The teachers commented that the participants opened up and became more active toward the end. Handshakes became firmer, there was more willingness to speak out, and less stress was noticed when making mistakes.

As this was only the first year for students to participate in International Exchange I, more research of this type in subsequent years is necessary to reinforce or dispute this year's results. Furthermore, a comparison of participants in this two-week program and the already well-established eight-week program is warranted to investigate how the length of an overseas stay affects changes in personal attitudes such as was discussed here.

Sources Consulted:

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- Wake Forest University "Beyond Boundaries: Preparing Students to Become Global Citizens" Feb. 2006. Available at <http://www.wfu.edu/qep/documents/QEP011906_SACSReport.pdf> last accessed Nov/20/06

Appendix

海外研修プログラム参加者への帰国後のアンケート

この調査は、海外研修プログラムに参加する大学生が、どのような成長をするか研究するものです。回答の結果は、統計的に処理され、個人のプライバシーが表に出ることはありません。回答内容について皆さんに迷惑がかかることはありませんから、あなたが日頃、行動したり、考えていること、事実をそのまま答えてください。

- A. あなたの学籍番号と名前を書いてください。(これは、研修プログラムの前後での比較をするために必要な情報ですが、統計処理の時には、匿名性は保障されます。)

学籍番号：

名前

B. 次の項目は、研修プログラム参加前にも答えてもらったものですが、現在のあなたについて、もう一度、答えてください。「全くその通り」・「大体その通り」・「どちらとも言えない」・「やや違う」・「全く違う」のうち、もっとも近いものに○をつけてください。

		全くその通り	大体その通り	どちらとも言えない	やや違う	全く違う
1	全くわからない言葉話を話している人たちの中にも平気だ。					
2	英語を話すとき、まちがいが気になる。					
3	必要であれば、とにかくどんな英語でもいいからコミュニケーションをとる。					
4	自分の英語に自信がある。					
5	英語の授業が楽しい。					
6	外国語の勉強が好きだ。					
7	外国語の勉強をする際、わからないことがあったら質問をする。					
8	外国の人に話しかけると、緊張する。					
9	外国の人に話しかけられると、緊張する。					
10	外国の人と話すのが楽しい。					
11	価値観が違って、必ず心は通じると思う。					
12	文化が違って、必ず心は通じると思う。					
13	人とうまくコミュニケーションをとることが出来る。					
14	人と話をするのは好きだ。					
15	人と話すのは苦手だ。					
16	人と話をする緊張する。					
17	自分の意見をきちんと人に伝えることが出来る。					
18	冗談を言うのが好きだ。					
19	自分にはユーモアのセンスがある。					
20	今まで、なんでも新しいことに挑戦してきた。					
21	新しいことに挑戦するとき、よく考え、準備する。					
22	新しいことに挑戦するには勇気がいる。					
23	どんどん新しいことに挑戦していきたい。					
24	大学生活が楽しい。					
25	大学の授業に一所懸命参加している。					
26	ボランティア活動によく参加する。					
27	サークル活動に熱心である。					
28	精神的に自立した生活を送っている。					
29	自分は恥ずかしがり屋だと思う。					
30	精神的に親に甘えていると思う。					
31	家族に対して感謝の気持ちがある。					
32	自律（自分で自分の行為を規制すること）が出来ていると思う。					

