

Impact of Informal language acquisition through Study Abroad Experience

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Abstract

Recently the Japanese government has supported the continued globalization of Japan by recommending study abroad for college age students. I conducted a survey to investigate the following questions: In what ways does study abroad help reduce speaking anxiety; and, what social activities contribute to attaining higher language proficiency and why? The survey also explores how out-of-classroom activities can be useful to improve language proficiency among students that have studied abroad. The investigation showed that speaking anxiety during class is high for both Japanese and American students. Moreover, for outside of class social activities, like clubs, shopping and group parties, Japanese students report continued high levels of anxiety, while American student language proficiency improves and speaking anxiety decreases during social activities.

Introduction

Within studying a foreign language there is studying inside a classroom, studying outside of a classroom, and studying abroad. There are many outside of class activities that help improve language learning. However, when learning a foreign language there is also a possibility of language learning anxiety. Here, I study outside of class activities, especially studying abroad and how language anxiety is affected.

1. Importance of Study

I became interested in studying second language acquisition after auditing a course in second language acquisition during my studying abroad experience. By looking at language not as tool to communicate, but in a scientific manner, I found myself becoming more and more interested in studying language. I then became interested in looking at informal language learning through social contexts. Because of these reasons I wanted to perform a study on language acquisition.

2. Research Questions

- 1. In what ways does studying abroad help to reduce speaking anxiety?**
- 2. What social activities contribute to attaining higher language proficiency and why?**

3. Background Research

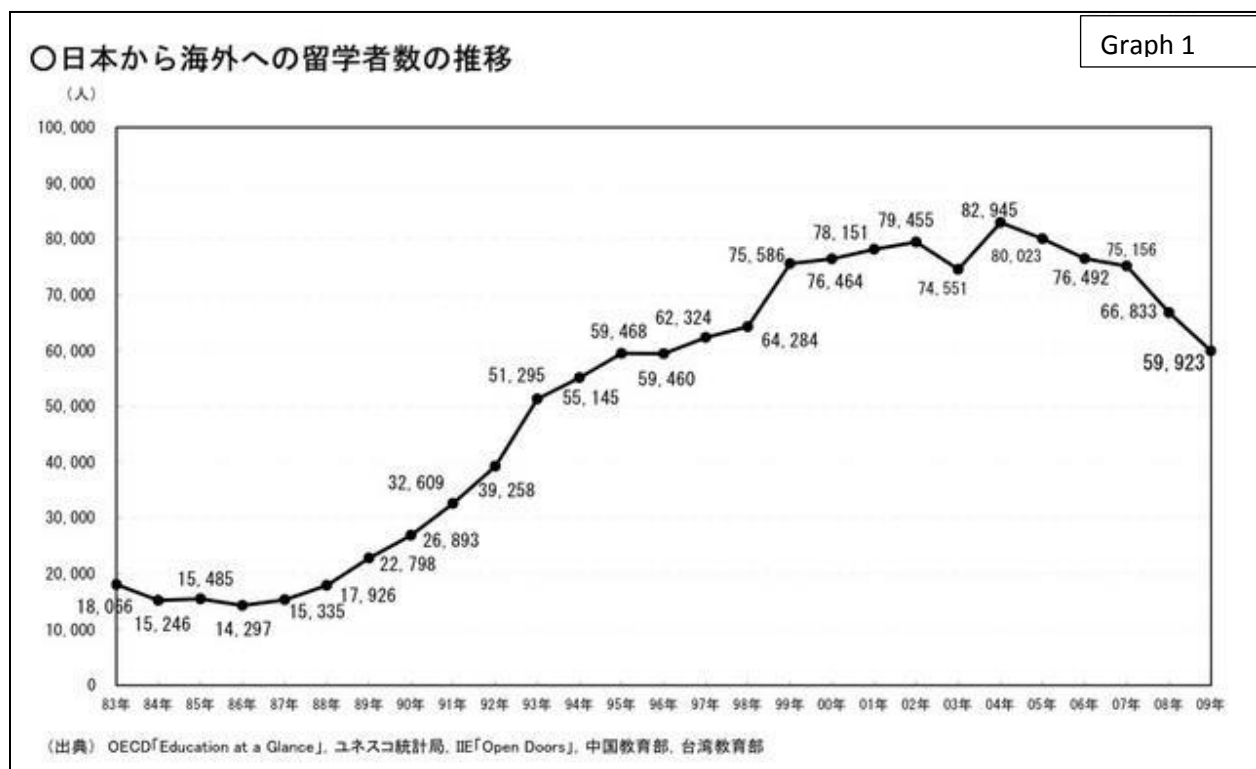
3.1. Why did Japan Globalize?

After America's occupation of Japan, and Japan's Dependency on America for security, the term "Americanization" of Japan can also be used for Japan's Globalization attempts as both Countries' economies became dependent on each other. Furthermore, for a continuously growing economy, Japan needed to become more stability internationally.

3.2. The Center for global partnership

For Japan's globalization advancement, the Center for Global partnership was established in New York and Los Angeles, which supports non-profit organizations that produce dialog between America and Japan.

3.3. Trends of Japanese students studying abroad

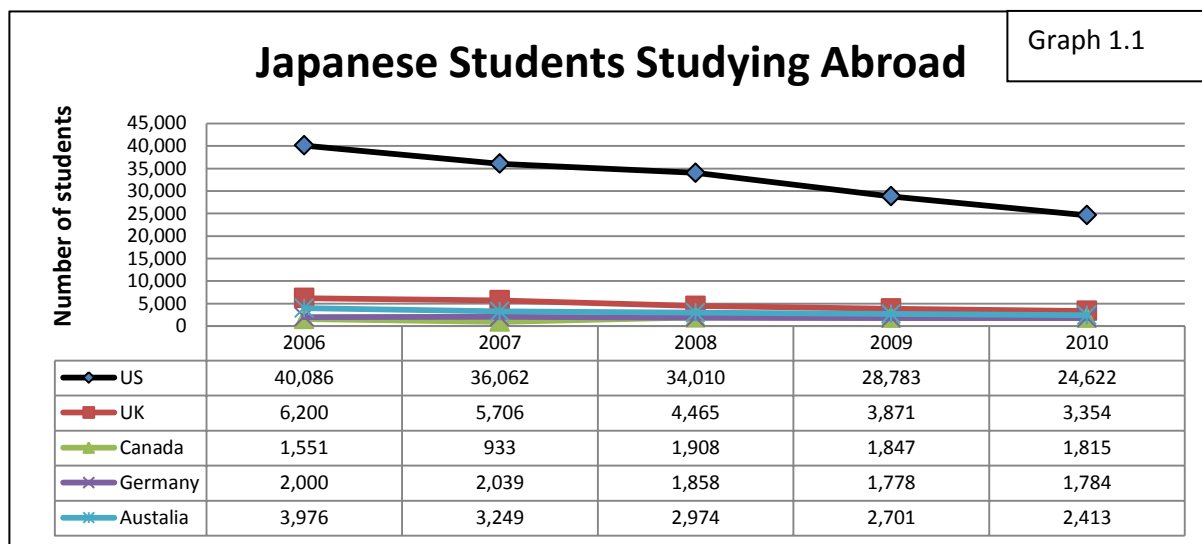


As Graph 1 shows, from 1983 to 2004 the number of Japanese students studying abroad was increasing continuously, but from 2004 to 2009 the started to decrease.

3.4. Globalization of Universities

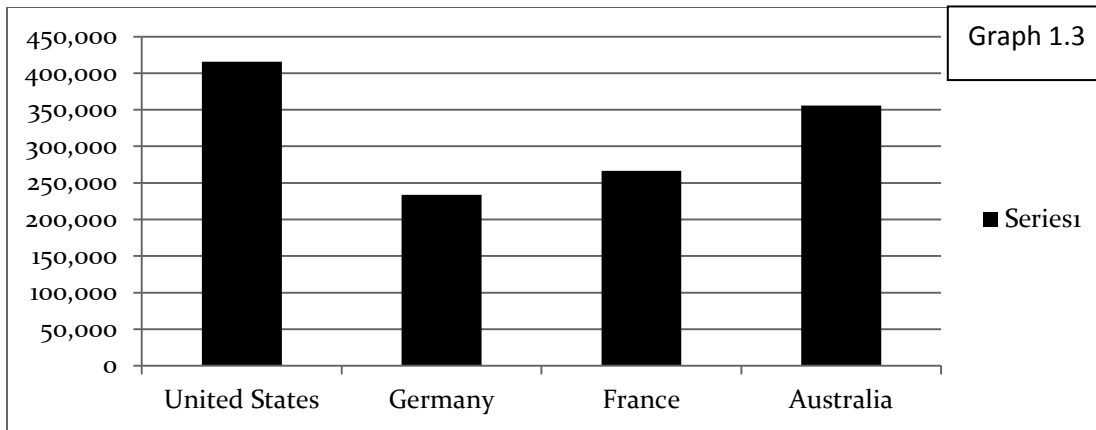
In order to continue the globalization of Japan, the Japanese government decided to perform education reforms in 2004. The project was called the, “MEXT Global 30 project” and looks to reform 30 universities to make them more appealing to foreign students. According to this project, in order to make universities global, one question needs to be asked to university, and that is, “What makes a university Global?” In order to make universities global universities need to, teach college students what it means to be a global citizen, teach Japanese students to live and work in other cultures, and Global universities should be about systemic reform not statistical quotas. In order to do this, Two projects have been established to show the appeal of Japan to foreign students, and to show the appeal of America to Japanese nationals. One is the Kizuna Project which was started in 2011, and the second is the Kakahashi Project; which was started in May 2013.

3.5. Japanese students that have studied abroad



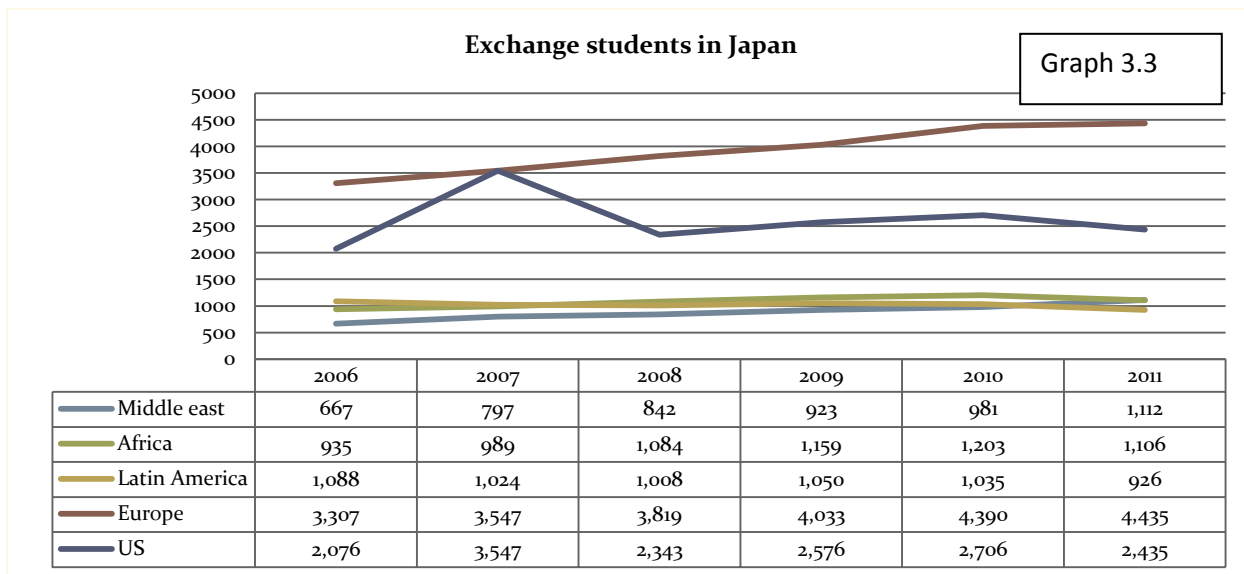
Graph 1.1 shows the Japanese studying abroad is declining.

3.6 International students in Japan Nation wide



As Graph 1.2 shows, by looking at the countries that send exchange students to Japan separately, we see that America has the highest amount of Students studying in Japan.

3.7. Foreign students in Japan

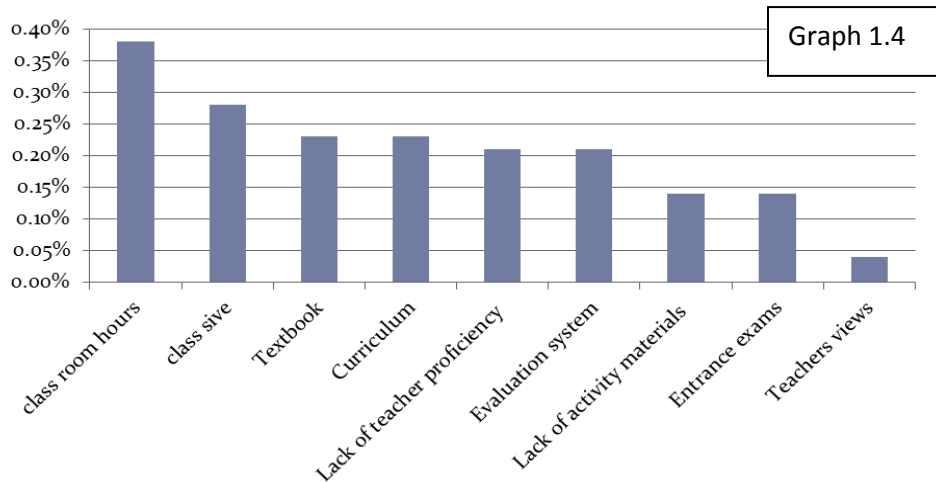


As Graph 3.3 shows, thanks to scholarships, the number of foreign exchange students coming to Japan is rising.

3.8. English education in Japanese elementary schools

In order to foster students' ability to communicate in foreign language, the Japanese government made English education compulsory in Japanese elementary schools in 2011. Also, three goals were developed in order to teach Japanese students English. There first: Develop an understanding and being aware of interesting of language. The second: Foster a positive attitude toward communicating with others, and finally the familiarization with sounds and basic expressions. You can

say that this style of teaching language is impossible but, looking at it through English teaching history, it's a profound thought. The Japanese system still puts most of their focus on direct grammar translations, so students don't have chances to vocalize Japanese within class. Furthermore, one main problem still remains within the Japanese English teach in system; that problem is that Japanese teachers that are teaching English in Japan lack necessary training to teach English.



In Graph 1.4 the reason why teachers felt they are not capable of teach English during class. Those reasons are; they don't have enough time in class to teach, the class size is too big, there's a problem the textbooks and curriculum, they lack proficiency in English, and they have to prepare students for entrance exams.

3.9. Foreign Language teaching in America

In order to teach foreign language in America three main guidelines have been established. The first is the ACTFL Guidelines. Developed in 1986, the ACTFL teach students how to speak, write, read, and listen in real world, spontaneous situations; Secondly, National standards which were developed in 1996, finally, recently the 21 Century Skills Map was developed.

3.10. ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines

The ACTFL Guidelines 5 main sections for evaluating a student's proficiency level; they are: Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. These guidelines teach students how to

speak, read, write, and listen in real world situations. Furthermore, language education is not just about teaching communication; the guidelines are look to developing well-rounded students.

3.11. 21 Century Skills Map

The 21 Century Skills Map is as follows: Communication, Collaboration, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Creative and Innovation, Information Literacy, Media Literacy, Technology Literacy, Flexibility and Adaptability, Initiative and Self-Direction, Social and Cross-cultural Skills, Productivity and Accountability, Leadership and responsibility. The 21 century skills map was developed in order to further develop the necessary abilities a student needs to be able to perform when studying a foreign language.

3.12. Ways to improve language competency.

In order to improve language proficiency there are three main ways; those are: studying inside a classroom, studying outside a classroom, and studying abroad. Also, when studying a foreign language, there's one certain aspect of studying that is also acknowledged, and that is Language learning Anxiety. Language learning anxiety is defined as, "A distinct complex of self-perception, beliefs, and behaviors related to classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning arising process" (Horwitz 1986). Foreign language anxiety highly effects language learning. For example, the more anxious student tends to avoid attempting difficult or personal messages in the target language. Test anxiety refers to a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure, and Because of higher levels of anxiety, Students that expected high grades usually receives lower marks.

3.13. Communication activities outside of class.

Language learning activities outside of class also highly effect language learning. For example, Joining Clubs, Public places, Language Café's, Hiking, Sporting events, School events or classes, All you can eat buffet, Public Baths, Language Forums; when using a language the more it's used the faster it's learned. Thinking of that, studying abroad would also highly affect language acquisition.

3.14. Social Network formation

According to Dewey's research, within social network formations, joining a club was seen as the best way of language acquisition, the next was outside of school events, schools events, and talking with

friends at school were all seen as great ways to improve language. Basically, this research says that social networks help improve language learning.

4. Research methods

An online survey with 60 University Students, 26 Japanese studying English in America, 18 American students that have studied Japanese in Japan and 2 other students that are currently studying Japanese in Japan.

Survey results: Question 1

Please see PowerPoint graphs for survey results.

4.1 Findings Research Question 1:

As seen on page 30 of the power point, American's Show higher speaking anxiety when meeting native speakers for the first time. Speaking anxiety drops after studying abroad. As seen on pages 32 and 33 of the power point, Both Japanese and American show constant levels of high Anxiety for public speaking; however, both show low levels of anxiety caused by negative evaluations. Japanese Students show constant levels of anxiety in all fields. As shown on pages 31 and 34 of the power point, public speaking and speaking with native speakers are the highest producers of speaking anxiety. Shown on page 33 of the power point, while Japanese students become anxious when they think peers are evaluating them negatively, American students show little anxiety. As shown on page 34 of the power point, before studying abroad, American students said they felt anxious when meeting a native speaker, after studying abroad, the students that felt anxious was less than half. Most Japanese speakers said they still felt anxious when meeting native speakers after studying abroad. As shown on page 35 of the power point, a fear of making mistakes after studying abroad is the lowest cause of anxiety between both nations.

Survey results: Question 2

Please see PowerPoint graphs for survey results.

4.2. Findings Research Question 2

As shown on pages 42 and 43 of the power point, American and Japanese students agree that, Attending classes together, Group traveling, Group Parties and living in an International Dorm are the

best ways to improve language proficiency. Over half of the participants thought group traveling helped their proficiency. Over half also said attending classes with native speakers was the best way to improve. Nearly all Japanese participants said living in an international dorm was effective; although, under half of Americans said it was effective.

5. Conclusion

American students have higher language anxiety before studying abroad; their language anxiety becomes lower after studying abroad. Due to Americans Language teaching system, American students are better equipped to solve language anxiety. Japanese students' language anxiety levels remain constant even after studying abroad. Living in international dorms, and going to class with native speakers are the best social activities to help language improvement. The social activities that are the most effective have common characteristics: Their out of class, thus they have informal situations, and they're group oriented. Due to America's education setup, American students would thrive, and improve easier in informal settings. Japanese students show to value group activities, so improving in Social activities rather than class room, or individual activities would be why Japanese students value social over individuality.

6. Limitations of the Study

A lack of survey Japanese survey participants planning to study abroad showed to affect the data a lot. By only randomly sending to students, a good amount of participants from both sides was difficult to reach. For a future study, I would like to perform more of a long term study where I survey students, prior, during, and after to see how the numbers change. Also, I'd like to study how language anxiety is affected by diet; whether it is abroad or in the students own country.

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