

A Case Study on a Holistic Short-Term English Abroad Program for College Students

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to describe, document and understand a short-term English abroad program as a model of a holistic language program for college students. The study was further aimed at discovering the cases surrounding the lived experiences of my eleven participants as a college language learners during their 1-month stay in a foreign country where English was a medium for communication. This qualitative research used a blend of narrative and case study methodologies. It included multiple data sources such as classroom observation, students' journals, follow-up interview, and other related documents for a period of 5 months from January to May 2018. Data analysis was conducted according to the following procedures: a) preparation and organization of the data; b) reduction of data into themes; c) coding and condensing of the codes; d) final representation of data. Particular attention was paid to the holistic nature of this educational program where interconnections and relationships are focused. Students' experience of 'interconnectedness' and 'relationships' found on the interviews and journals was categorized, and from which interconnecting themes were emerged. The students felt a deep sense of connectedness on all the phases of their experiences including with their peers, teachers, Philippine buddy students, and the people they met through community outreach, which naturally led them to find identity, meaning, and purpose in their lives. In addition, they met a real world where they experienced a sense of joy and happiness surrounding the foreign people, foreign language and foreign situations.

Keywords

English abroad program/Holistic Language Learning/Global Volunteer Program/Character

Forming Education/College English Program

Introduction

Second or foreign language (L2) learners are often reluctant to communicate in L2s. They think they cannot demonstrate and express themselves as much as they want, and as a result they reduce or avoid their interactions in an L2 in order to protect their self-image (Aveni, 2005). L2 learners may feel that they are disadvantaged in constructing their social self when they interact in an L2. In this context, a study abroad program was planned and created for the students to overcome their reducing attitude when interacting in an L2. In addition, the heightened interests of the university in global citizenship, character, or humanistic core abilities building also made it possible to expand the nature of a language program to including holistic educational goals.

I wanted the English abroad program to play an extended role from the previous general English abroad programs for my students to fully focus on their interactions in an L2 without inhibition by their emotional blocking. How we can maximize the occurrence of genuine intercultural communication during the program was considered a key to the success of the program development and implementing. The notion of the genuine intercultural communication may be connected to the notion of holistic engagement in an L2 since it can help the students to enhance their social self and spirit of inclusiveness.

The aim of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the process of an English abroad program in order to make it a holistic educational program. How the holistic features were represented in each phase of the curriculum for the one-month English abroad program was investigated with the background theory in this study. Furthermore, students' perceptions during and after the program were sought to be analyzed to understand the program comprehensively.

The research questions that the present study aims to answer are as follows.

- (1) How was the short-term English abroad program holistically operationalized in its design and process?
- (2) In retrospect, what are students' perceptions of their engagement with their local college partner students and other community members during their study and service in immersion sites?
- (3) What evidence exists in the data to suggest that students have been genuinely involved in holistic learning?

1 Research Design

1.1 Case Study and Narrative Inquiry

This study has been designed to focus on the following two key elements: (1) the program procedures conducted in the short-term study abroad context; (2) narrative inquiries into the students' perceptions on their experiences.

In order to describe, identify and understand the students' holistic L2 learning experiences, students' narratives were delved into in relation to various forms of connectedness to the learning processes in the study abroad context through interviews and reflective journals. This supports the notion that connectedness to the processes that surround the students' learning context including the target community is the key to understanding successful language learning (Gardner, 1985; Norton, 2000). L2 learning is "a highly complex activity in which human cognition and human agency develop and multiple identities are co-constructed through interaction with others, the self, and the cultural artifacts of our environments" (Swain & Deters, 2007, p.831).

1.2 Research Sites and Participants

To achieve the goal of this research, a short-term study abroad program designed at K University in South Korea in collaboration with a partner university in the Philippines was studied and described. The program mainly proceeded in a university in the Philippines for a one month period in January 2018 during the vacation, and 4 different community outreach programs were conducted in the communities around the university in the Philippines within the English program period.

The study abroad program emerged largely out of my interest and passion for holistic language education that transforms and animates the

students' learning process. So, the researcher actively involved in the program as a curriculum designer, facilitator, and coordinator, frequently being in and out of the site and communicating with the English instructor, community outreach program teachers and the participating students.

1.3 Data Collection & Analysis

The data used in this study includes the following: (1) pre-sojourn plans of the students written before they left for the Philippines; (2) students' reflective journals which they wrote about twice a week during the month-long program; (3) interview data conducted 2~3 months after they returned to Korea. The data collection was pre-planned and obtained to maximize the study-abroad program effect by the program coordinator, and students' prior consent was obtained in advance on the use of data for this study.

The data collected and scrutinized from the various sources were analyzed for identifying the characteristics of holistic education, particularly focusing on the notions of connection, inclusion and balance. In terms of the narratives, analysis was done through the thematic exploration of the data. The researcher did lots of reflection on the students' words, expressions and actions by reading their journals and transcribed interview data repeatedly and creating Microsoft Excel files and tables.

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