**Short-Term Study Abroad: Conditions for Intercultural Learning and ELF Understanding**

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1. **Introduction**

Universities in Japan are encouraged in higher education internationalisation policy to promote participation in study abroad (SA) programmes overseas (Yonezawa 2014). As a result, many universities now offer short SA options (JASSO 2018). However, in some universities and among some practitioners there are assumptions that SA participation leads automatically to intercultural learning (Jackson and Oguro 2018; Kubota 2016). Moreover, some universities maintain essentialist educational practices rather than attempting to support student development of transferrable knowledge, attitudes, and skills for intercultural communication contexts (Baker 2015). It is further problematic that few universities in Japan (and beyond) have established evaluation methods for the quality of intercultural learning on the programmes they offer (Koyanagi 2018), simply measuring success by numbers taking part. This lack of institutional examination of the quality of learning on SA programmes represents a “mismatch” between policy and practice (Castro et al. 2016: 432) with programme design and implementation based more on practical than educational considerations. Therefore, it is important to find ways to examine and understand intercultural learning outcomes otherwise common statements in SA practices about international study experiences as leading to transformative intercultural learning are unsubstantiated (Koyanagi 2018).

It may also be relevant to account for possible influences on intercultural learning from both English language teaching (ELT) and SA, in conventional handling of culture in learning as linked to fact-based differences at national levels. However, geographically-focused approaches to culture learning characterise individuals by their national setting, framing culture in terms of the national stereotypical characterisations (McConachy 2018). These simplistic essentialist approaches “lump” together all people who belong to one (national) culture and differences are viewed as the result of belonging to another (national) culture. Thus, they may fail to account for differences in cultural identities and references among individuals who belong to many communities from local, to national and global scales (Baker 2015). Baker’s (2011) model of intercultural awareness (ICA), on which this paper is based, accounts for these differences in its conceptualisation of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes for intercultural communication in diverse contexts and is thus potentially relevant for SA students (Humphreys and Baker 2021).

Simplistic educational approaches can also be seen in the common sole association of English language use with anglophone “standards” in codified models. Emphasis on native English standard norms, however, risks misleading learners, giving the impression that individuals in all contexts use English in the same way (Si 2018). This emphasis overlooks variability in individual language practices, especially in multilingual English as a lingua franca (ELF) settings in which this variation is often crucial to effective communication. Nonetheless, much SA research argues that language and culture learning is optimal when it takes place through interactions with local target language speakers (e.g., Anderson, Hubbard and Lawton 2015**;** Cadd 2012), and when students “really ‘experience’ the host culture by truly engaging with host country participants” (Heinzmann, Künzle, Schallhart and Müller 2015: 188).

Furthermore, such research approaches in SA do not account for connections made with other international students on international campuses as potentially more meaningful than connections with individuals from host settings (Schartner 2016). Indeed, students are frequently more drawn to make connections with other international students than local individuals (Csizer and Kontra 2012). Therefore, given the variety of potential communication partners on SA, as well as variability in English use in SA settings, it would be relevant to go beyond essentialist target culture and target language approaches in educational practices. Acknowledging the learning potential of experiences in multicultural and multilingual contexts of ELF use in communication may be more relevant for SA students, in which contexts of communication may be characterised by complexity and diversity both in English language use and among individuals, beyond solely national associations (Nogami 2020).

The research outlined in this paper aims to provide a qualitative account of intercultural learning on SA from an ELF perspective, particularly referring to Baker’s (2011) model of ICA, to address the following two research questions:

1. What kinds of experiences on short-term SA lead to intercultural learning and deeper understanding of ELF among Japanese university student participants?
2. What types of short-term SA programmes can provide these experiences?

By addressing these questions, the research aims to offer insight into the quality of learning which may occur among individuals and highlights how programmes of different approach may lead to more significant intercultural learning and awareness of the role of ELF. ICA development on SA has been investigated in a related paper by Humphreys and Baker (2021) in which the role of multicultural and multilingual diversity was highlighted as relevant for SA intercultural learning. This paper aims to complement that study by linking ICA development with the development of ELF perspectives towards the construction of a potentially useful schematic representation of learning on SA. Through the formulation of a schematic representation, the research aims to clarify how, based on this research, ICA and ELF perspectives may be integrated for SA learning. Outcomes, therefore, may be useful for practitioners at other institutions in Japan reflecting on learning on their existing SA programmes, or designing new SA experiences.

1. **Short-Term Study Abroad Practices in Japan**

For background to the study, this section provides an overview of short-term SA practices in Japan and highlights some potential risks in essentialist learning practices on short-term SA. While student mobility has recently been affected by the global pandemic, limiting numbers participating on SA programmes, participation rates had been increasing in recent years (Lassegard 2013). In 2016, the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO), associated with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, reported 96,853 students participated in overseas programmes (JASSO 2018). The majority among these students participated in programmes of less than one month, including trips of just three days provided the trip was for research, cultural exchange, or language study (McCrostie 2017). Given the rates of participation and the prominence of these programmes in university policies, building understandings of the quality of intercultural learning offered is critical. However, in building conceptual understandings linking short-term SA with intercultural learning, it is important to account for the diversity of programmes that constitute short-term SA, including language study, research-based, cultural tours, cultural exchanges, educational tours, field trips, and excursions. Programmes are often organised by home institutions and faculty-led and may involve students travelling together with other students from their institutions with teacher chaperones. On some programmes, study aspects may not clearly be seen or there may be few opportunities to interact with other individuals, particularly on educational tours, cultural tours, and excursions.

The intensive cultural schedules typifying these types of programmes often involve sharing national cultural aspects in presentations, lectures, trips, and organised exchanges with local students, and the resulting risk that only short and superficial relationships develop (Cubillos and Ilvento 2018). Moreover, such activities risk essentialist treatment of culture in ways easily consumable by visiting students (Burns 2001). As such, gaining insight into intercultural learning may be difficult on such programmes if they “only serve to reify and legitimize preconceived notions and stereotypes about the world” (Riggan et al. 2011: 237). It may be hypothesised that short-term SA programmes in multilingual and multicultural contexts of learning on campuses in both anglophone and non-anglophone settings offer more substantial intercultural learning opportunities.

1. **Baker’s (2011) Intercultural Awareness and ELF Perspectives**

In a non-essentialist framing in this research, we propose that intercultural learning is associated with developing transferrable knowledge, attitudes, and skills across intercultural communication contexts rather than learning specific knowledge about specific cultures (i.e., the national geographically-based approach). The knowledge, attitudes and skills for intercultural communication are conceptualised here through Baker’s (2011) model of ICA, which accounts for the complexity and diversity of intercultural communication through ELF and other languages, beyond solely location-based concepts of language and cultures. ICA is defined as, “a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices and frames of reference can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in communication” (Baker 2015: 163).

The model is organised around three levels and 12 elements (Figure 1) which delineate the knowledge, skills, and attitudes for successful intercultural communication.

**Level 1: basic cultural awareness**

An awareness of:

1. culture as a set of shared behaviours, beliefs, and values;
2. the role culture and context play in any interpretation of meaning;
3. our own culturally based behaviour, values, and beliefs and the ability to articulate this;
4. others’ culturally based behaviour, values, and beliefs and the ability to compare this with our own culturally based behaviour, values, and beliefs.

**Level 2: advanced cultural awareness**

An awareness of:

1. the relative nature of cultural norms;
2. cultural understanding as provisional and open to revision;
3. multiple voices or perspectives within any cultural grouping;
4. individuals as members of many social groupings including cultural ones;
5. common ground between specific cultures as well as an awareness of possibilities for mismatch and miscommunication between specific cultures.

**Level 3: intercultural awareness**

An awareness of:

1. culturally based frames of reference, forms, and communicative practices as being related both to specific cultures and also as emergent and hybrid in intercultural communication;
2. initial interaction in intercultural communication as possibly based on cultural stereotypes or generalizations but an ability to move beyond these through:
3. a capacity to negotiate and mediate between different emergent communicative practices and frames of reference based on the above understanding of culture in intercultural communication.

***Fig.1*** The twelve components of ICA (Baker 2015: 164)

Level 1 relates awareness to a general understanding of cultures. Individuals at this level may be aware of differences among cultures in general cultural comparisons, but specific cultural knowledge may not be present and culture may be characterised simplistically and stereotypically (Baker 2015: 165). Level 2 involves more complex understandings of cultures and moves away from essentialist perspectives towards “awareness of other linguacultures and cultures and a related awareness of the relativity of one’s own linguaculture and cultural practice” (Baker 2015: 166). At this level, individuals may be aware of cultures as comprising multiple and diverse social groupings and contexts, and not as homogenous, though there may still be national cultural associations. Finally, Level 3 represents awareness of the “emergent nature of the relationships between language, culture and communication in much intercultural communication including through ELF” (Baker 2015: 166). This goes beyond viewing cultures as nationally bounded towards recognition that cultural references and communicative practices in intercultural communication may or may not be related to specific cultures and can be created in-situ (Baker 2015).

While an abstraction, the model outlines components and levels next to which intercultural learning may be investigated (Baker 2015; Abdzadeh and Baker 2020). However, it is not designed as a linear model with students necessarily moving smoothly up the three levels (Baker 2015). Students may exhibit elements of Level 2 or 3 at one point and revert to simplistic Level 1 understandings at another. Furthermore, students may never progress beyond Level 2 (Abdzadeh and Baker 2020) or begin at a higher level if they already have extensive intercultural experiences. The knowledge, skills and attitudes for intercultural communication conceptualised in ICA are, therefore, changeable and used in different ways (Baker 2015). ICA has been explored in relation to ELT educational contexts in recent research demonstrating its relevance to documenting intercultural learning (Abdzadeh and Baker 2020; Baker 2012; Kusumaningputri and Widodo 2018; Yu and Maele 2018); however, it is somewhat limited in its application to both Japanese and particularly short-term SA educational contexts.

From an ELF perspective, ICA was selected for its potential significance for SA participants in its recognition of the complexity and diversity of intercultural communication experiences in SA contexts, shifting from national cultural orientations. ICA was not designed as based on particular cultural practices or normative guidelines for “correct” language use, recognising that there is “not one way of communicating that is more effective than others” (Baker 2015: 173). Traditional normative approaches can emphasise a monolithic “correctness” in linguistic features (Ishikawa 2018), with normative deviations from what is perceived as standard English viewed as mistakes or errors (Newman 1996). For individuals involved in intercultural communication on SA, it can be important to adapt, accommodate, and negotiate meaning in communication using English (e.g., Jenkins 2015). Developing awareness of both “language and language use” in discourses through ELF and how they may be differentiated from ELT representations of Anglophone standard norms, which Sifakis terms “ELF awareness” (2019: 291), may help students navigate communication on their programmes. ELF awareness, in relation to linguistic aspects of intercultural communication, and ICA in its focus on cultural aspects, may be seen to link theoretically in how developments in both potentially take place through interactions using ELF.

1. **Methodology**

Within this framing, a qualitative interview study among 15 Japanese students was conducted by the first-named author at a university in Kyushu, Japan. The university context was a non-language major university in southern Japan where students took two 90-minute weekly English communication classes. The university was active in its promotion of short-term SA participation as part of its internationalisation policy. However, SA programmes were handled by a non-teaching international department which, it was observed, offered basic introductory information and pre-departure checklists over a pedagogical approach to SA support. In the academic year 2016/2017, 148 students participated in the SA programmes.

Among these students, 15 were purposively sampled on their potential to provide insight through representations of different types of SA programme and different international SA locations, and differences in gender, age, and past international experiences[[1]](#footnote-2). Table 1 provides an overview of the student participants and their programmes.

***Table 1***The participants and their SA programmes

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Pseudonym** | **Sex** | **Age** | **Study programme** | **Length** | **Past study overseas?** | **Chaperone** |
| Nanami  Miho  Yuta  Naoto  Satomi  Ayano  Ryuma  Kojiro  Tatsuki  Maki  Ayaka  Kayo  Minori  Yuhi  Asei | F  F  M  M  F  F  M  M  M  F  F  F  F  M  M | 21  21  19  19  21  21  21  23  21  24  19  21  21  20  21 | Research-based, Germany  Research-based, Germany  Cultural & study tour, Malaysia  Cultural & study tour, Malaysia  Language study, Poland  Cultural tour, US  Cultural tour, US  Cultural tour, US  Cultural tour, US  Research-based, Hong Kong  Language study, US  Cultural tour, Taiwan  Cultural tour, Taiwan  Language study, UK  Language study, US | 1 month  1 month  10 days  10 days  3 weeks  10 days  10 days  10 days  10 days  1 month  3 weeks  7 days  7 days  3 weeks  1 month | N  Y  N  N  Y  N  N  Y  N  Y  N  Y  Y  N  Y | N  N  Y  Y  Y  Y  Y  Y  Y  N  N  Y  Y  N  N |

Semi-structured interviews with the 15 participants, conducted by Humphreys (a teacher in the setting), took place at three points: (1) shortly before SA; (2) within a month of returning; and (3) six months later (see Appendix for selected interview questions). The aim in using interviews was to elicit in-depth personal perspectives and capture complex individual experiences (Miles et al. 2014). Across the data collection, themes in relation to research areas were discussed in each interview. The interviews aimed to encourage students to talk broadly about their pre- and post-SA experiences, with topics explored further as they emerged in the interviews. The option to use Japanese was available, but most students selected to use English for English communication practice. The use of English may be seen as a limitation of the study since some students are likely to have expressed themselves differently using Japanese; however, participants were offered the opportunity to validate and elaborate their stories as their transcripts were shared with them to invite feedback and further thought, and these were incorporated within the analysis (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007).

Nineteen hours 45 minutes of recorded data were obtained from interviews ranging from 52.59 minutes to 16.47 minutes (average: 32.36 minutes). The interviews were transcribed and where required approximately translated from Japanese to English[[2]](#footnote-3). The data were analysed thematically, supported by the qualitative analysis software NVivo 11 (QSR International Pty Ltd. 2015). The research orientation relied on researcher evaluation in terms of where intercultural learning and ELF awareness were seen or not seen in individual discourses among the research participants at points in the data collection. The data were therefore approached with preconceived codes relating to the conceptual background of the study (Miles et al. 2014), with some coding as emergent to account for the individuality of SA learning experiences. Content in student discourses across the three interviews were looked for in relation to the ICA framework and coded according to Levels 1, 2, and 3 as they appear in Figure 1. In relation to linguistic aspects, student interviews were coded around interpretations of ELF awareness (Sifakis 2019). Later, thematic connections across the accounts were sought as to which contextual variables appeared relevant to the students, related to ELF and ICA.

In research such as this, analysis is, inevitably, influenced by subjectivity; however, we have aimed to be transparent and reflexive in how claims made from the data are theoretical over generalisable (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Claims are, though, strengthened by the insider access of one of the authors as a teacher on site, and the researchers’ conceptual awareness around intercultural learning and ELF. Moreover, the researchers’ interest in improving understanding around SA educational practices and experiences towards, ultimately, improving student experiences, should be evidence of integrity in the research approach.

**5.1. Findings**

The findings first present thematic connections from the students’ accounts around pre-SA educational experiences before focusing on their ICA and later ELF perspectives, linked to SA experiences.

**5.2. Pre-SA Educational Experiences around Language and Culture**

In the pre-SA interviews, across the accounts there were reports of past learning focus on grammar study over communication practice, as represented by Miho:

**Excerpt 1** Miho (interview 1)

In high school I didn't communicate I just studied about grammar and read the textbook

Such approaches may focus on English as a subject of study, limiting the extent that students use language in any practical way. In further characterisation of past learning, there were reports that exposure to plurality of English use had been limited (e.g., Yuhi):

**Excerpt 2** Yuhi (interview 1)

We learnt American English I don’t know about other English

Such educational experiences may not lead easily to skills or awareness among students around complex experiences of intercultural communication in SA contexts. Complexity also appeared overlooked in reports of focus in past learning on correctness as linked solely to native English speakers, as illustrated by Yuta:

**Excerpt 3** Yuta (interview 1, translation)

I tried to mimic the pronunciation of native speakers because they speak correctly

Though shadowing activities, as implied in Excerpt 3, are potentially useful, the perception among some students of native English speaker uses as providing the only correct model for English use may be problematic for developing awareness of variability.

When asked about past experiences of culture in learning, students tended to report on experiences of fact-based culture learning in national associations, as recalled by Kojiro about an English language class project:

**Excerpt 4** Kojiro (interview 1)

The teacher gave us a project to learn culture of an English-speaking culture and then make a report, for example about food

Such approaches may limit intercultural learning towards developing non-essentialist perspectives. Regarding pre-SA support at the university, students reported no training had been provided and input was limited to basic checklists and information about staying safe abroad, as illustrated by Miho and Yuta:

**Excerpt 5** Miho (interview 2)

We had introduction meeting … international centre they do they only the paperwork … they lecture me about security

**Excerpt 6** Yuta (interview 2, translation)

I don’t think there were support initiatives from them

There were also examples in reports of international department SA advice, of culture handled as knowledge in national scale cultural generalisations, represented by Satomi:

**Excerpt 7** Satomi (interview 1)

[SA admin] said it is important to learn about the country’s culture to be familiar with the country

While some research on SA destinations may be useful and interesting, such handlings of culture represented in the accounts may be seen as reductive and as overlooking cultural diversity in locations. Based on the accounts, therefore, pre-departure intercultural learning was not formally integrated in any pedagogical approach at the university.

**5.3. Short-Term Study Abroad and Intercultural Awareness**

On the programmes themselves, negativity was evident among some students towards organisational aspects on particular faculty-led programmes. A pattern emerged of frustration relating to limited opportunities to use English in communication, wide use of Japanese, and strict programme schedules, as expressed by Ryuma:

**Excerpt 8** Ryuma (interview 2)

I find it difficult to learn English among many Japanese people because we can't help but talk to each other in Japanese … this project is not recommend because schedule was too busy

Other complaints among students were related to staged cultural exchange events, represented by Tatsuki and Ryuma:

**Excerpt 9** Tatsuki (interview 2)

I gave a presentation about karaoke to American students but it is not interesting … I wanted to communicate with people

**Excerpt 10** Ryuma (interview 2)

We only have had little time to do presentation only thirty minutes … we did some demonstration for example educational snacks and origami … I didn't have any chances [to speak to other students]

Both Tatsuki and Ryuma, like others, reported motivation to communicate with others on SA but were ambivalent about the cultural exchange events. While these events may represent learning opportunities, their focus on factual cultural representations (“karaoke”, “educational snacks and origami”), as shared among “members” of a nation, appeared essentialist in approach. The approach, as interpreted from student descriptions, was related to Level 1: “awareness of culture as a set of shared behaviours, beliefs, and values” (Baker 2015) on the ICA model (see Fig. 1 in Section 3). They did not clearly represent the kind of activity that may lead to intercultural learning, as characterised by ICA Level 2. Moreover, in student accounts from those participating in these programmes there were more examples of stereotyping and generalising comments than in accounts on other programmes, in links between language, culture, and nation as largely bound up together (Ayano and Kayo):

**Excerpt 11** Ayano (interview 2)

I think Japanese people are very shy … but American people are active

**Excerpt 12** Kayo (interview 2)

[Taiwan people] are conscientious for foreign languages

Such comments may reflect the limited opportunities to interact with others on their programmes, i.e., there were few experiences of intercultural communication to draw on in the interviews. However, following SA experiences on longer language study and research-based programmes as well as some shorter tours involving time on international university campuses, students characterised their experiences as multicultural which they identified as representing developmental opportunities (Maki):

**Excerpt 13** Maki (interview 2)

I think [SA] is so many cultures and backgrounds so it will be good for me in the future

On these programmes, students also reported more intercultural communication and learning experiences from interactions with other international students, seen in descriptions of nationalities of other students on these campuses, represented by Asei:

**Excerpt 14** Asei (interview 2)

I spoke with many people China and Saudi Arabia and Panama. I learned lots from them and it was easy to talk … I was glad to learn with them

Experiences in these multicultural contexts also tended to include opportunities for student independence to socialise with other international students, which was also linked to personal developments in motivation and confidence. Following time on an international campus on a cultural and study tour in Malaysia, Yuta reflected on his SA experience:

**Excerpt 15** Yuta (interview 2, translation)

… a great opportunity for me to exercise my own thinking process, cooperate with other students and learn from mistakes … I could experience interacting with people from other countries. I think what made me grow was to actually go overseas and try communicating with people

Interpretations from these students’ accounts of short-term SA led to the formulation of two broad short-term SA groupings: firstly, multicultural and multilingual experiences on longer language study and research-based programmes and tours involving time on international university campuses; and secondly, SA cultural tours characterised by rigid schedules, limited intercultural communication opportunities, and essentialist cultural exchanges. Distinct from the cultural tours reported in Excerpts 8–10, students in this other grouping provided more descriptions of intercultural learning taking place through interaction linked to Level 2 of ICA “common ground between specific cultures” as well as “awareness of possibilities for mismatch and miscommunication between specific cultures” (Baker 2015; see Figure 1). Learning towards ICA Level 2 was also interpreted in Naoto’s (Excerpt 16) self-report of adapting to new ideas he encountered and changes in his perspective from his experience on SA:

**Excerpt 16** Naoto (interview 3, translation)

It became less frequent to feel like “Why they can't understand?” and I became able to embrace unexpected, new ideas from others … [before SA] I was just indifferent, already happy with the way things were, narrow-minded, ignorant and unconfident

There were other indications of movement towards positions associated with ICA Level 2, linked by Nanami (Excerpt 17) to “cultural understanding as provisional and open to revision” (Baker 2015). Nanami spent time on a research-based programme in Germany alongside other international students and reported new knowledge, implying a revised view of culture:

**Excerpt 17** Nanami (interview 2)

I can take in different ways of thinking … when I talk foreign people I can know new thing … it's strange sometimes but those knowledges give me new ideas and sometimes those knowledges break my obstacles

Some indication from students on these programmes was, therefore, seen towards accepting differences and identifying commonalities associated with ICA Level 2. There was also some indication of interpreting culture more deeply than fact-based cultural understandings, illustrated by Naoto in his discovery of, and reflection on, new ideas among individuals he met:

**Excerpt 18** Naoto (interview 2, translation)

I learned about their thoughts, incorporated them with my own, and discovered something new

Summarising interpretations from these students’ SA accounts, experiences in multicultural and multilingual contexts appeared to lead to more ICA development, contrasting with more limited intercultural learning opportunities on particular cultural tours. This distinction was also relevant to the development of ELF awareness, described in the next section.

**5.4. Developing ELF Awareness on Short-Term Study Abroad**

Expanding the findings to ELF perspectives, experiences on SA campuses with other international students exposed participants to diversity in English use. While diversity tended to be described around geographically-based differences, there were perceptions that diversity in English use in multilingual settings represented learning opportunities (e.g., Yuhi):

**Excerpt 19** Yuhi (interview 3)

I met people from Italy, Russia and Australia … Italy’s English is similar to Japanese English not to British or American English… It is interesting to learn these things

Students on intercultural campuses, on both longer and shorter programmes, appeared to accept variability in English use and perceived imperfections if communication could be successful, as demonstrated by Yuta:

**Excerpt 20** Yuta (interview 2, translation)

My English is not perfect … I also heard that most of those who speak English make mistakes. I believe we can still communicate if we have willingness to listen

Relatedly, Maki, who had not used English extensively outside the classroom before SA, reported gaining confidence in her own way of using English in reports of successful communication experiences:

**Excerpt 21** Maki (interview 2)

they could understand me OK so if we can be understand we should keep our accent … I could be confident in my English

ELF use was implied in other accounts among students in these multilingual contexts of SA, including Nanami who reported adapting her English use in communication:

**Excerpt 22** Nanami (interview 2)

sometimes I changed my explanation so if I say something difficult I change what I say and for example he don't know and some other difficult things I explain about it easier

Following SA, data from the accounts suggested that some students started to transition from learning English on fixed norms to using English in practical situations, from self-perceptions as learners to users of English, i.e., towards individuals who use ELF in real communication situations (e.g., Nogami 2020).

In linking ELF perspectives to ICA development, there appeared to be a relationship with changes in perspectives towards English language use seen among students who displayed more ICA development in the multilingual and multicultural SA contexts (e.g., Yuta):

**Excerpt 23** Yuta (interview 3, translation)

When I talked with other students I could find some information and I could find ideas from them. They enriched my life experience and helped me grow … I struggled with English but I think I actively tried to communicate … I realised it was OK to make mistakes

Yuta talked about learning new ideas from students and reported growth from his interactions on the international campus and a willingness to make mistakes in “active” use of English. There were also some reports in the accounts of preference for communication with other international students (e.g., Asei):

**Excerpt 24** Asei (interview 3)

when I talk with non-native speaker I feel more relaxed because English is not native language for them and it's same to me and they speak their English is not perfect it's me too so I feel relaxed

Given this communication preference and interpretations of ELF use, it was inferred that intercultural learning in such settings is supported through interactions using ELF. The research suggested that some students started to develop some awareness of the role of ELF in communication. Such outcomes were not clearly observed in the accounts of those on the cultural tours, however, where in descriptions of English use among students, notions of authenticity solely in native English uses remained largely evident in student discourses (e.g., Tatsuki):

**Excerpt 25** Tatsuki (interview 3)

it's better to speak native speaker because they use real English

Diversified perspectives towards English use in communication were not clearly seen among students on such SA programmes as organised cultural tours.

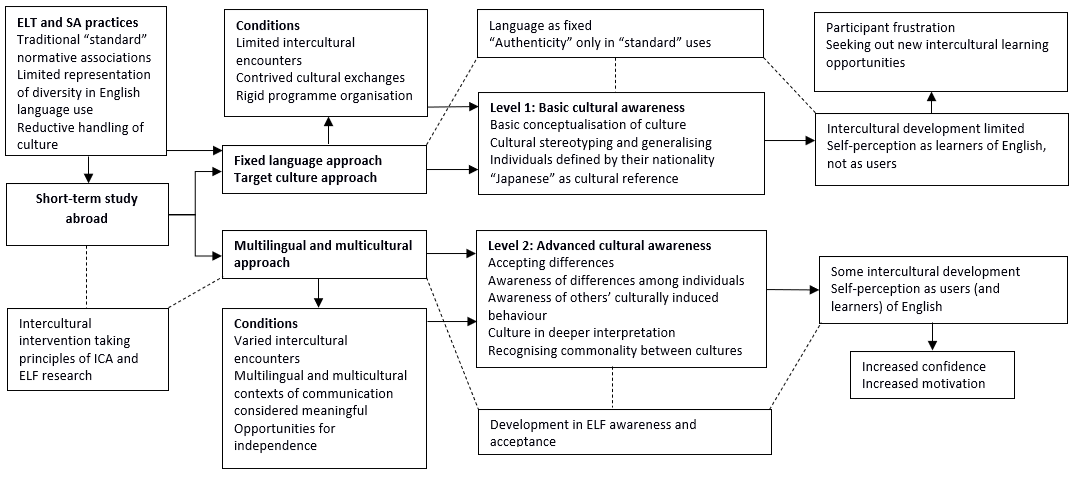
1. **Summary and Discussion**

The data suggested that pre-SA educational practices within the institution did not handle SA support in any pedagogical way. Moreover, there were reports of limited representation of diversity in English use (Excerpt 2) and that notions of correctness were fixed over accounting for variability in use (Excerpt 3). Moreover, culture learning appeared in reports as somewhat essentialist around national scales (Excerpts 4 and 7) (Baker 2015; McConachy 2018). On the programmes themselves, negativity was evident among some students towards organisational aspects and essentialist approaches on some programmes. In programmes involving few communication experiences in organised exchange events, ICA development and ELF awareness may be limited (Excerpts 11, 12, and 25). However, programmes with more substantial communication with individuals of different linguistic and cultural background may enhance awareness of diversity in English use, ELF awareness and willingness to engage in communication using ELF (Excerpts 19–24). Perceived links between language, culture, and nation remained largely bound up together although there was some evidence of ICA development among students on SA programmes interpreted as multicultural experiences (Excerpts 15–18), as uncovered in related research (Humphreys and Baker 2021). ELF perspectives were seen to develop among some students, reflecting awareness of how language and language use may be differentiated from conventional normative language handling (Sifakis 2019). An outcome of the research is that where developments in perspectives towards English language use were seen, there tended to be developments towards higher ICA Levels. However, it should be added that the role of other variables, including programme length and the impact of past international experiences is not represented in detail in this paper. The research focus was on finding commonalities within the student accounts of SA contexts and conditions, potentially relevant for ELF and intercultural learning.

Despite the limitations, the findings may be useful for SA practices in Japan given the volume of short-term participation in recent years as approaching 100,000 students (JASSO 2018). Through the examination into the quality of intercultural learning on particular individual short-term SA experiences, the findings offer a somewhat simplified, but useful, distinction between some programme types. On one hand, chaperoned cultural tours following rigid schedules and students staying in-group afforded few opportunities to use English and few intercultural learning opportunities beyond staged cultural exchange events, interpreted as essentialist. On the other hand, SA experiences on language study or research-based programmes, as well as tours in which students had free time on international multicultural university campuses were seen to offer more substantial learning around both ICA (Baker 2011) and ELF awareness (Sifakis 2019). Based on these findings, we argue that SA programmes characterised by range and quality of multilingual and multicultural communication experiences are more meaningful to intercultural learning outcomes and are likely to provide the conditions for more intercultural learning experiences aimed for in policies of internationalisation in Japanese universities (Yonezawa 2014).

1. **Schematic Representation of Developments from Short-Term SA**

An important objective in this paper was to illustrate in a schematic representation links between SA experiences, intercultural learning through ICA (Baker 2011), and ELF awareness (Sifakis 2019). As such, the display in Figure 2 was developed to capture how short-term SA may support meaningful intercultural learning and ELF awareness based on the present findings.



***Fig.2*** Schematic representation of learning on short-term SA based on Baker’s (2011) ICA model

The display represents journeys through SA, as informed by this research, with the arrows indicating movement from pre-SA to SA experiences, and on to post-SA. Pre-SA educational experiences are connected to target language and culture learning on SA, based on similar educational handling. Post-SA, the figure moves on to potential outcomes around both intercultural learning and perspectives towards using English. The dotted lines indicate theoretical links between items in the illustration.

Pre-SA educational experiences, including ELT experiences, as reported by the students, included a focus on anglophone norms and a lack of representation of diversity in English use and essentialist treatment of culture in learning. On programmes themselves, the illustration represents a broad distinction among programmes interpreted from the participants’ accounts in fixed language and target culture approaches, contrasting with multilingual and multicultural approaches. In this grouping of SA programmes, formed from the student accounts, the conditions refer to teacher-led SA with little flexibility and limited intercultural communication experiences, as well as the reductive handling of culture in cultural exchange events. The target language and culture approaches are theoretically linked to Level 1 on the ICA model (Baker 2011). These programmes tended to handle culture simplistically and promote stereotyping through national cultural perspectives, seen in participant descriptions of an educational focus on fact-based cultural differences and codings around ICA Level 1 from the student accounts.

The multilingual and multicultural SA approaches involved more substantial social and communication opportunities and more student independence. For these students, descriptions of diverse communication experiences added meaning to their experiences, and more intercultural learning was interpreted. As represented in Figure 2, multilingual and multicultural aspects of SA provide more meaningful intercultural learning opportunities from which more development is likely, towards ICA Level 2. The labels “Level 1: Basic cultural awareness” and “Level 2: Advanced cultural awareness” utilised on this illustration are derived from ICA model but slightly adapted to reflect the present data which came in relating to SA experiences and programmes in this research. These ICA-related categories may offer an application to other educational contexts as examples of non-essentialist aspects derived from Level 2, i.e., Level 2 as providing learning goals around which learning content may be designed.Following experiences in such settings there was indication of students accepting differences among individuals and recognising some commonality rather than focused solely on differences (Baker 2011). It indicated a deeper interpretation of culture beyond national cultural positions. ICA Level 3 is absent from this illustration since there were limited interpretations from student discourses linked to this level, supporting research that Level 3 is less relevant as a learning objective in educational contexts (Abdzadeh and Baker 2020; Baker 2012; Humphreys and Baker 2021; Kusumaningputri and Widodo 2018; Yu and Maele 2018).

There were also interpretations of changes in perspectives towards plurality and variability in English use and willingness to use ELF (Excerpts 19–24). Connected via dotted lines with Level 2 in Figure 2, it implies theoretical links between intercultural learning and changes in perspectives towards English use. Students moving through these contexts may, therefore, develop more ICA and begin to self-perceive as users of English, not only learners, as seen among some participants in this research (Excerpts 20–23). Outcomes associated with the multilingual and multicultural approaches may also be seen around increased confidence and motivation towards using English and intercultural communication, stemming from more interactions with other international students. However, students on group cultural tours reported few intercultural communication opportunities and extensive use of Japanese language. Thus, it may be hypothesised that such short-term SA experiences would be unlikely to result in students adapting their self-perceptions from learners to users of English based on these perceived SA limitations.

For some SA students, short forays to single destinations may not represent the start of a more international trajectory, particularly if an experience is perceived negatively. For others they may represent the beginning of a new outlook. However, intercultural learning from SA may provide a foundation for subsequent experiences, reflecting findings that these processes develop well beyond SA experiences themselves and that learning outcomes may be better viewed alongside empirical data into longer-term developments (Messelink et al. 2015).

While ICA development and development of ELF perspectives may not occur among all SA students along these lines, the display (Figure 2) may be useful for programme planning and for understanding the potential for intercultural learning on short-term SA. It illustrates the influence and limitations of standard normative and culturally essentialist understandings in ELT and SA practices. It also highlights the potential benefits of developing ICA and ELF-oriented pre-departure interventions as leading to different expectations in an enhanced characterisation of SA. The simplified schematic display offers an evidence-based hypothesis of intercultural learning, conceptualised through Baker’s (2011) ICA model. Nonetheless, it should not be treated as a universally applicable guide for all contexts; rather, it illustrates the elements and conditions which may lead to more development, as well as changes in views towards English use in communication.

In application to universities’ existing programmes, the illustration (Figure 2) may be a useful reference for how intercultural learning towards non-essentialist views may be seen on short-term SA, linked to ICA and ELF awareness (Sifakis 2019). It may offer resonance with readers in its presentation of possible implications of different approaches to SA. While short cultural tours may offer some students important intercultural learning opportunities and opportunities to use English, the article argues that chaperoned trips are less likely to lead to the kind of developments aimed for in internationalisation policies and that benefits are likely to be more in independent, multicultural and multilingual programmes, and that such trips should be encouraged over others for their intercultural learning potential. While there are practical considerations of relevance to group tours which make them attractive to some students, including security, ease of organisation, anxiety over English skills, on such programmes it would be useful for universities to adopt non-essentialist pedagogical approaches, rather than reinforcing essentialism among students. Indeed, it is important for SA practitioners to be aware of the importance of moving away from essentialist approaches in educational practices.

1. **Conclusion**

Based on qualitative data analysis of the SA participants’ interview responses, the research has investigated intercultural learning oriented towards ELF on short-term SA. As a finding, situated in the experiences recounted by the 15 students, the research identified two broad approaches to short-term SA. Firstly, target language and culture approaches associated English use solely with standard uses and essentialist handling of national cultures. Secondly, approaches in which intercultural learning and learning about variability in English use are more substantial and where multilingual and multicultural contexts of communication in English are recognised for their learning potential. The theoretical characterisation of experiences on these SA programmes, in relation to intercultural learning and ELF awareness, may have application to other contexts as SA practitioners reflect on their own SA programmes and the quality of learning which may occur.

However, limitations of the study include how interpretations from which the theoretical approach to SA has been made are based on self-reported and subjective data. The use of English among some students in the interviews may also have limited the insight which emerged given the complexity of the topic areas around culture and language perspectives. Insight is also limited by the few students who took part in this study, as well as the limited representation of SA programmes. A further limitation is the lack of specific focus on particular variables in SA programmes and students’ backgrounds (e.g., length, past international experiences). Expanding the focus on further variables would be impractical within the limits of a paper; however, we have aimed throughout to be explicit that outcomes from this research, while based on data, remain theoretical and it should not be assumed that individuals will develop in the ways represented in this paper. Other practitioners may find points of significance to consider from the illustration (i.e., Figure 2) as they reflect on or renew exchange programmes offered or established at their institutions. The illustration offers a guide for SA practitioners to consider how intercultural learning may be supported on their own programmes, incorporating ELF perspectives to reflect the realities of English use in SA contexts. However, it would be useful to build on this illustration in other contexts by drawing on the experiences of a wider range of students in other SA contexts for more understanding of the intercultural learning potential from an ELF perspective of short-term SA programmes.

**Acknowledgements**

Thanks to the 15 students for sharing their SA experiences in this research. We are also grateful to the editors and reviewers for their feedback on drafts of this paper.

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**Appendix: Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

**Pre-SA**

* Could you tell me in as much detail as possible why you decided to study abroad?
* What are your main reasons for studying English?
* How do you think studying abroad can help you achieve your future goals?
* What experience do you have using English outside the classroom?
* What experiences of intercultural communication in English have you had?
* Consider an intercultural experience you had; describe your feelings during the experience.
* Some people believe that English language students should try to sound like a native-speaker; other people believe that students should keep their own accent if they can be understood - What do you think about this?
* What have you done to prepare for study abroad?
* What training or support has the university provided?

**Post-SA**

* Why did you study abroad?
* Could you tell me in as much detail as possible what did you do on study abroad?
* Did you socialise with people of other countries? Please describe this in as much detail as possible.
* What did you accomplish or experience that you never expected to?
* What advice would you give the next group to get ready for their sojourn? How should they prepare for daily life in English?
* What experiences of intercultural communication in English did you have on study abroad?
* Consider an intercultural experience you had. Describe your feelings during the experience.
* What did you learn about English?
* How did the university support you while you were away?
* What impact do you think study abroad has had on your attitude to English language learning?
* How do you think studying abroad can help you achieve your future goals?

**Six Months Later**

* What did you enjoy most about study abroad?
* If you could do it again, what would you do differently? Why?
* Do you think study abroad met your expectations? Why / why not?
* Describe something positive about your experience.
* Describe something negative about your experience.
* How have you used your study abroad experience since you returned?
* Do you think you have changed in any way since study abroad? If so, how?
* What learning practices to prepare for study abroad would you recommend?
* What does “culture” mean to you?
* How is English used differently in different places?

1. Ethical clearance was obtained from the university and guidelines followed in all dealings with the students. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Translation work was carried out by a professional translator in the local community, with further checks that content matched the original student discourses made by the first-named author and a Japanese teacher at the institution. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)