The Influences of Studying Abroad on Language Proficiency and the Use of Language Learning Strategies: In the Case of a Three-Week English Program

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Abstract

This study was conducted to examine whether participation in a three-week English study program in an English-speaking country results in any progress for Japanese university students in improving their English language proficiency and developing their range of appropriate language learning strategies. For this purpose, a group of students participating in a language program in New Zealand for approximately three weeks and a group who stayed in Japan over the same period of time took part in this study as an experimental group and a control group respectively. An English test and the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) by Oxford (1990) were given to both groups twice, before and after the implementation of the program. In regard to the students' English proficiency, the experimental group showed a significant gain in the total score in the English test after the program both in comparison to the control group and within the group. When the result of each section was examined, no significant differences were observed in the scores of grammar, writing, or reading between the groups and within each group, but in the listening section, a significant increase was noted after the program when comparing the data between the two groups and within the experimental group. In regard to the language learning strategy use, the program participants showed significantly higher strategy use after the program when compared to the non-participants and also compared to their use before the program. This tendency of participants was confirmed to continue even seven weeks after the New Zealand home-stay program.

Key Words: Language Learning Strategies  Strategy Inventory for Language Learning  Studying Abroad

1. Introduction

Many people seem to have a conviction that studying abroad is a good experience for students and can lead them to have a more open attitude toward cultural differences and develop a broader vision of the world. However, they often say at the same time that language acquisition cannot be expected if students have only a short-term stay, for example, less than a month. However, is it true that language improvement is not likely to occur with short-term program participants, even though changes in participants' English proficiency and their attitude toward studying English have always been subjectively sensed after such programs have been implemented?

Coleman (1997) refers to researches into language gain during residence abroad, saying "current practice is imperfect in part because it is uninformed" (p.13). As he mentions, the number of studies that deal with the effects of staying abroad on language acquisition may still be insufficient to allow proper understanding of this subject. However, studies on longer-term programs are not so difficult to find. Some examples are as follows. The research performed by Milton and Meara (1995) reported that 53 European EFL students who visited the UK to study for six months learned vocabulary nearly five times faster on average during their exchange than when they were taking classes at home. Freed (1995b) found through an interview style study that 15 students from
English-speaking countries, after studying in France for a semester, acquired greater “fluency” in their French than 15 students who had lessons in their home country. Freed (1998) quotes that the research done by Lafford (1995) using role-plays indicated that students’ groups from the U. S. who went to study in Mexico and Spain both demonstrated a much wider range of communication strategy use in Spanish, compared to those who had ordinary Spanish lessons in the U. S. for the same period of time. Tanaka and Ellis (2003) used a questionnaire and TOEFL to study 166 Japanese university students who participated in a language program abroad, focusing on changes in their language learning beliefs and English proficiency. They found a significant improvement in their English proficiency, especially in the grammar section. Chiba (2008) examined the influence of a two-month home-stay program on 46 junior college students, focusing on their listening ability and their learning attitude, and found that their listening ability improved and their willingness to study the language strengthened more than those who did not participate in the program. As reported above, studies on longer programs lasting more than two months report many positive effects on acquisition of vocabulary, grammar, fluency, listening proficiency, and so on.

However, it is very difficult to find research dealing with shorter-term programs of less than a month or so, despite the fact that actual studying abroad programs implemented by Japanese institutions are much more likely to be a few weeks in length. One of the few studies of this area is that of Otsuka (2008), which examined the changes in English communication skills and anxiety of 36 Japanese students of age between 16 and 18 who participated in a two-week program in Sydney, but unexpectedly, this study found no significant change in their communication skills although their reduced anxiety was confirmed.

As there did not seem to be many studies that examined the effects of staying abroad programs shorter than a month, it was decided that the present study would objectively investigate if a three-week English program for university students held in an English-speaking country makes any difference in the participants’ English proficiency and their attitude toward English study, compared with students staying in Japan. For these purposes, a four-section English test and a questionnaire called SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning), which asked about learners’ use of language learning strategies, were employed in this study (see Appendix).

The reason why SILL was chosen in the current study to assess the changes of participants’ learning behavior was that “strategies are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement” and “appropriate language learning strategies result in improved proficiency” (Oxford, 1990, p. 1). The usefulness of language learning strategies in ESL or EFL has also been emphasized by many other researchers including Ellis (1994), O’Malley and Chamot (1990), Wenden (1991), Griffith (2003) and so on. Griffiths (2003) summarizes six categories of language learning strategies classified by Oxford (1990) as follows: memory strategies (which relate to how students remember language), cognitive strategies (which relate to how students think about their learning), compensation strategies (which enable students to make up for limited knowledge), metacognitive strategies (relating to how students manage their own learning), affective strategies (relating to students’ feelings), and social strategies (which involve learning by interaction with others). The first three strategies above are direct strategies and the latter three are indirect strategies. Ellis (1994) refers to these categories as “perhaps the most comprehensive classification of learning strategies to date” (p. 539). SILL was created based upon this categorization. Griffiths (2003) found in her study with 348 EFL learners using SILL to investigate the relationship between language strategy use and course level that “higher level students made highly frequent use of a large number of language learning strategies” (p. 381). Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) researched the language learning strategy use of 55 ESL students from 10 countries and found that “more strategic language learners advance along the proficiency continuum faster than less strategic ones” (p. 391). This
may mean if the program participants of this study could acquire better use of strategies, they would have more chance of improving their English proficiency in the future. Therefore, this study tried to examine whether the participants could progress in their language strategy use as well as in their English proficiency through a three-week English program in an English-speaking country. The present study further examined if the participants’ tendency of language learning strategy use continued seven weeks after completion of the English program abroad.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Questions

In order to investigate any difference in English proficiency and their language strategy use that might occur with the participants in a three-week English program held in New Zealand, two studies were implemented. The research questions were as follows;

(1) Can any change be observed in the learners’ English proficiency after staying in an English-speaking country for three weeks? (Study 1)

(2) Does the learners’ use of language learning strategies increase after experiencing a three-week stay in an English-speaking country, and does the tendency of learners’ use of language learning strategies continue? (Study 2)

2.2 Participants

2.2.1 Experimental Group

Nine university students who took part in a three-week language program in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2005 and ten university students who participated in an equivalent program in the following year were combined together to form one experimental group of 19 in both Studies 1 and 2. These students were chosen because for both groups, the training institution, the periods and the contents of the programs were all common. This experimental group (10 males and nine females) consisted of nine freshmen, six sophomores, and one junior. None of their majors in university was English.

Each of the 19 students was assigned to a local family with whom they stayed during the whole program. An important principle was that no other Japanese was expected to stay with each family. The students attended EFL international classes in the English Department of a Polytechnic Institute of Technology five days a week. The English lesson lasted three hours a day. Each class had 15 to 18 students, and approximately 30 to 40 percent of them were Japanese. The others were mostly Koreans and Chinese. The students were allocated to classes according to the results of a placement test. The lessons were all conducted in English by native EFL teachers. The program participants took part in various activities such as sight-seeing, volunteer work, or field trips two to three afternoons a week.

2.2.2 Control Group

In Study 1, 41 Japanese students (26 males and 15 females) who were taking English classes in their university in 2005 and 2006 were designated to be a control group. They took the same English test twice at about the same times as the experimental students did. All of them were freshmen when they took the pre-test in the end of January and became sophomores at the time they took the post-test about nine weeks later. None of them were majoring in English.

In Study 2, 24 Japanese students (17 males and 7 females) who were enrolled in an English class in 2006
served as a control group. Seventeen who were taking an English class in 2005 were omitted in Study 2 as the test to measure their language strategy use was not given to them in the first year of the study.

At the same time, any student from whom all the necessary data could not be collected was omitted from the experiment. Also non-Japanese students were excluded from the control group because this study was focused on observing changes affecting Japanese students.

2.3 Materials

2.3.1 Materials of Study 1 (To measure English proficiency)

In order to investigate the change in students' English proficiency, 52 questions extracted from a pre-second grade of the Eiken STEP (Society for Testing English Proficiency) test (Obunsha, 2004) were selected. This excerpted test comprised 10 grammar questions, 5 writing questions, 7 reading questions and 30 listening questions. The reason the full test was not used was that there was a limitation on the time available to conduct this experiment in class. However, all 30 listening questions were used because listening proficiency was thought to be where program participants' progress was most likely to occur. The students were given 50 minutes to answer these 52 questions both in the pre- and post-tests.

2.3.2 Materials of Study 2 (To access learning behavior)

In order to examine students' change of behavior in regard to English acquisition, a translated Japanese version of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning or SILL in Version 7.0 was used. This is a questionnaire devised by Oxford (1990) to measure language learners' use of language learning strategies, and Version 7.0 is "geared to students of English as a second or foreign language" (Oxford, 1990, p. 199). SILL comprises 50 questions, and students of both the experimental and the control groups were asked to choose a response 1 (Never or almost never true of me) through 5 (Always or almost always true of me) for each question (see Appendix). Students were given about 20 minutes to answer the questions. According to Oxford (1990), "learners who are more aware and more advanced seem to use better strategies" (p. 13). Oxford further asserts that "more highly motivated learners use a significantly greater range of appropriate strategies than do less motivated learners" (p. 13) and explains that the higher average score of SILL indicates more frequent use of language learning strategies.

SILL is usually used to assess students' learning strategies and provide training on how to improve their use of strategies (Oxford, 1990). However, the purpose in using SILL in this study was not to instruct the participants in how to use the strategies; instead it was used as a method of measuring whether the three-week English program participants used more strategies through their experiences of staying in an English-speaking country, compared to the non-participants in the program.

2.4 Procedures and Data Analyses

For Studies 1 and 2, an excerpted version of the STEP test and SILL were given to both the experimental group and the control group twice; approximately three weeks before the start of the language program in New Zealand and about three weeks after the completion of the program. The tests given as pre-tests and post-tests were the same. However, the subjects did not know the same tests would be given twice and no feedback was given to them after the pre-test. SPSS was applied for the data analyses; a 2-wayANOVA for Study 1 and a 3-way ANOVA for Study 2, in order to examine the effects of staying in an English-speaking country for three weeks on the participants' English proficiency and their language learning strategy use.
3. Results

3.1 Result of Study 1 (English Proficiency)

The descriptive statistics of the results of STEP test are summarized in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of STEP Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section</strong> (MPS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading (7)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening (30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Post-test**

| **Section** (MPS) | **Group** | **N** | **Mean** | **SD** | **Max** | **Min** |
| Grammar (10) | Experimental | 19 | 5.53 | 1.93 | 8 | 1 |
| | Control | 41 | 4.85 | 2.31 | 9 | 0 |
| Writing (5) | Experimental | 19 | 2.32 | 1.45 | 5 | 0 |
| | Control | 41 | 1.71 | 2.31 | 5 | 0 |
| Reading (7) | Experimental | 19 | 4.05 | 2.48 | 5 | 0 |
| | Control | 41 | 3.63 | 1.92 | 7 | 0 |
| Listening (30) | Experimental | 19 | 19.47 | 5.37 | 26 | 11 |
| | Control | 41 | 15.29 | 4.31 | 27 | 7 |
| Total (52) | Experimental | 19 | 31.37 | 9.01 | 45 | 13 |
| | Control | 41 | 25.49 | 7.93 | 45 | 10 |

*Note. MPS = Maximum possible score.*

The average total score of the experimental group increased by 3.37 points while that of the control group decreased by 0.31 points. When the data was analyzed by a 2-way ANOVA, interactions were shown between time (pre-test × post-test) and group (experimental group × control group), $F(1, 60) = 6.33$, $p < .05$, and the main effect existed in time, $F(1, 58) = 5.80$, $p < .05$. However, the main effect was not revealed in group, $F(1, 58) = 3.83$, $p > .05$. As the interaction was confirmed between time and group, $t$ tests were performed between the experimental and control groups, and between the pre- and post-tests. The results are shown in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2 t Test Results of Total Scores of STEP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>df</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experimental Pretest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Post-test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test Experimental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test Control</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *$p < .05$.

**Figure 1. Changes of total STEP scores.**

As indicated in Table 2, there were no significant differences in English total scores between the experimental and the control groups in the pre-test, but the average test score of the experimental group was significantly higher than that of the control group in post-test. Also, the average total score of the experimental
group was significantly higher in the post-test compared to that of the pre-test while no significant difference was observed in the control group between the pre-test and the post-test. Figure 1 shows the changes of total STEP scores in the two groups.

As a significant change was revealed in total STEP test scores, interest focused on which section mainly contributed to the change. When each part of the STEP test scores was examined by a 2-way ANOVA, the interactions were not seen in the grammar section, $F(1, 60) = .21, p > .05$, in the writing section, $F(1, 60) = 2.34, p > .05$, and in the reading section, $F(1, 69) = .38, p > .05$. However, in the listening section, the interaction was observed, $F(1, 60) = 7.88, p < .01$. Because the interaction existed in the listening section, $t$ tests were performed on the scores of the listening section between the experimental and control groups, and also between the pre- and post-tests. The results are shown in Table 3.

### Table 3 t Test Results of Listening Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$t$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental Pre-test</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Post-test</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>3.23**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test Experimental</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>-2.57*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test Control</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *$p < .05$ **$p < .01$.*

The result in Table 3 revealed that before the program was practiced, there was no significant difference in listening proficiencies between the two groups, but after the program the experimental group's listening proficiency became significantly superior to that of the control group. It was also indicated that the listening scores of the experimental group rose significantly after the three-week program compared to their scores before the program. Figure 2 shows the changes of listening scores in the two groups.

### 3.2 Result of Study 2 (Language Strategy Use)

In order to examine the change in the participants' use of language strategies, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) was employed. Table 4 shows the mean score and SD of each strategy type in SILL before and after the program. In this table, memory strategies are expressed as “Strategy A,” cognitive strategies as “Strategy B,” compensation strategies as “Strategy C,” metacognitive strategies as “Strategy D,” affective strategies as “Strategy E,” and social strategies as “Strategy F,” for convenience.

The average scores increased in both groups and no strategy showed a decrease in the post-test. The strategy item which demonstrated the biggest increase in the experimental group was metacognitive strategy (Strategy D) and the difference was 0.67 points, followed by social strategy (Strategy F) for which the difference was 0.63 points. On the other hand, the strategy for which the control group showed the biggest increase was memory strategy, but the difference was only 0.31.

When the 3-way ANOVA was performed, time×group×strategy type interaction was not observed, $F(5, 310) = .84, p > .05$. However, time×group interaction was confirmed, $F(5, 43) = 6.42, p < .05$, although no other interactions were revealed: strategy type×group, $F(5, 211) = .82, p > .05$, and time×strategy type, $F(5, 211) = 1.239, p > .05$. Regarding the main effect of each factor, that of time was observed, $F(1, 414) = 29.35, p < .05$, but...
the main effects of group and strategy were not confirmed, \(F(1, 41) = 7.00, p < .05, F(5,41) = 8.16, p < .05\), respectively.

### Table 4 Descriptive Statistics of Language Learning Strategy Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Strategy</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>(N)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategy A</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy B</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy C</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy D</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy E</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy F</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In short, interaction was confirmed only between time and group, but not between strategy type and group, or time and strategy type. Therefore, \(t\) tests were performed between the experimental and control groups, as well as between pre- and post-tests of both groups. The results are shown in Table 5.

### Table 5 \(t\) Test Results Regarding SILL Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(df)</th>
<th>(t)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental -</td>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test -</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: \(*p < .05\)  **\(p < .01\).*

![Figure 3. Changes of average scores in strategy use.](image)

These results of the \(t\) tests show that both the experimental and control groups used significantly more language strategies after the program. However, although there was not a significant difference between the two groups in their use of language strategies before the program, the experimental group’s use of language strategies was significantly higher than that of the control group after the program. In other words, although both groups increased their use of strategies, the increase was much bigger in the experimental group after the program, so the difference between the two groups’ strategy use became consequently significant. Figure 3 shows the increase in strategy use of each of the two groups.
3.3 Result of Further Research on Strategy Use of the Experimental Group

The next issue of interest was whether the program participants' more frequent use of strategies was just a temporary phenomenon or whether it was an acquired tendency that would remain with them. In order to find the answer to this question, the students of the experimental group were asked to answer the same SILL questionnaire four weeks after the post-test, which was seven weeks after the completion of the program. The mean scores and SDs are shown in Table 6.

Table 6 Experimental Group's SILL Scores at Three Times (N = 19)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Weeks After the Program</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. SILL score changes in experimental group.

A one-way ANOVA was performed taking three different times as factors. As a result, the main effect was confirmed, $F(2, 36) = 16.22, p < .01$. Therefore, Bonferroni's multiple comparison test was also conducted. Consequently, the differences between the average SILL scores of the pre-test and post-test ($p < .01$) as well as between the scores of the post-test and the test seven-weeks after the program were observed ($p < .01$). However, a significant difference was not revealed between the scores of the latter ($p > .05$). This result confirmed that the experimental group members were still using language learning strategies seven weeks after they returned home, and using them at the same level as three weeks after the completion of the program as shown in Figure 4.

4. Discussion

Coleman (1997) quotes Freed (1995a) as noting “the shortcomings of a number of studies dealing with the linguistic effects of staying abroad: absence of control groups, inadequate sample size or duration, unsatisfactory testing procedures, and an over-reliance on self-report rather than objective measurement” (p. 13). The current study made efforts to overcome these shortcomings. Although the number of students in the experimental group in this study, 19, may not be considered an adequate sample size, the data over two years were accumulated in an effort to increase the number of subjects in the experimental group of this study just as mentioned in the previous literatures (Kimura, 2006, 2007a).

From the result of Study 1, it was found that the group of students who participated in the three-week English program in New Zealand obtained a significantly higher score in an English test than the group who stayed in Japan although the test scores of the two groups were statistically equivalent to each other before the program was implemented. It was also found that while non-participants in the program did not show progress in the English test, participants showed a significant gain in the same test after they experienced the three-week program. In particular, the participants' listening score after the program showed a significant difference compared to that of the non-participants although they were statistically equivalent before the program. At the same time, the listening test score of the participants was significantly higher after the program although such a difference was not observed in the group of non-participants.

The post-test was not given right after the completion of the program because the students were still on their spring
holidays when they came home. The fact that participants' listening scores showed a significant improvement three weeks after they left New Zealand may show that their progress in listening proficiency was not a temporary phenomenon. Ellis (1994) mentions that "there is support for the claim that formal instruction helps learners (both foreign and second) to develop greater L2 proficiency, particularly if it is linked with opportunities for natural exposure" (p. 616). The improvement in the participants' listening proficiency may be because both formal lessons and natural exposure to the target language occurred in this English program just as Ellis suggests, even though the program lasted only for three weeks.

However, no statistically significant difference was observed in the grammar, writing, or reading sections in the comparisons between and within the groups before and after the program. This may be partly because the participants did not have enough time to study grammar, writing and reading in the limited period of three weeks, but it may also be true that there were too few questions in those three sections of the given English test to produce significant differences in the scores of those sections. It was regrettable that standardized tests with more questions such as TOEIC or TOEFL could not be used because of time and budget limitations. Considering that the participants' scores in those three sections all rose at least slightly even though the difference was not big enough to be significant, it might be possible that significant progress can be shown in some other section than the listening part if an appropriate number of questions are given in those sections.

In this study, the same English test was given to the same subjects of both groups twice with a nine-week interval, before and after the program, so there may be concern that they remembered the contents of the test. However, this can be discounted since the test results of non-participants decreased in the post-test, although the difference was not significant.

The result of Study 2 indicated that the average SILL score increased for both participants and non-participants after the three-week English program. However, although the two groups' average SILL scores were statistically equivalent before the program, the participants' score was significantly higher than that of the non-participants after the program. This means that although the average scores increased in both groups, the rise in the participants' score was greater than that of the non-participants, and the difference was large enough to show significance.

An unexpected result was that the average SILL score of the non-participants also rose significantly in the post-test. This is especially interesting considering that their English test score did not change. One possible reason is that because the pre-test was conducted at the end of the fall semester and the post-test in the beginning of the spring semester, the students' fresh enthusiasm for the new semester might have been reflected in the figure. If so, the efforts from teachers appear especially important to ensure students maintain their enthusiasm until the end of the semester. Another possible reason might be related to the fact that the same SILL test was given to the subjects twice. Unlike the test to measure language proficiency, it cannot be denied that examinees had a tendency to get higher scores the second time they completed the same questionnaire, which may be to do with psychological dimension. Regarding this point, further investigation will be necessary to confirm the effect of giving the same questionnaire twice to the same examinees.

Interestingly enough, when SILL was practiced on the participants the third time, seven weeks after the completion of the English program, a significant difference was revealed in the comparison with the pre-test result, but no difference was observed when compared to the post-test result. This fact indicates that their tendency to use more language learning strategies after they experienced the New Zealand program was maintained even seven weeks after the completion of the program. This suggests that the tendency had become fixed. If so, it is a sign that the participants English proficiency can keep improving even though they remain in Japan. Takeuchi (1996) suggests that foreign language learning strategies are a means of empowerment for learners, in other words, they can change from heteronomous learners, who always depend on teachers, to autonomous learners, who can engage in their own study by themselves.

Regarding the difference in the kinds of strategies that participants and non-participants in the English program tended to use, no difference between the two groups was manifested, and this aspect cannot be discussed here.
However, to see which strategy tended to be employed more among students, a multiple comparison using the Tukey method was administered. As a result, it was found that both groups of subjects in this study had a tendency to use compensation strategies significantly more than memory strategies. It was also found that they had a tendency to use compensation strategies significantly more than affective strategies. When LoCastro (1994) used SILL to examine 28 advanced English learners in a Japanese University, she found that they used memory strategies the most. Unlike LoCastro's study, the English level of the subjects of this study cannot be called advanced or even intermediate. Therefore the tendency of the subjects in this study to use more compensation strategies may be attributable to their unconscious inclination to try to compensate for their lack of linguistic knowledge by using inference.

After the two studies were done, an attempt was made to examine the correlation between the program participants' English proficiency and language strategy use. However, only a weak correlation was observed, although fairly strong correlations were found between the use of cognitive strategies and the total score of the English test, the use of compensation strategies and the reading test score after the program, and the increase in use of memory strategies and the increase in the writing test score as mentioned in the previous literature (Kimura, 2007b). Nevertheless, these correlations cannot be considered strong as a whole, contrary to expectations. One possible reason for this is that the increase in the participants' strategy use was very large compared to their gain in English proficiency. If so, it may mean that through the stimulating experience of living abroad, the participants' enthusiasm for English study grew more than their actual English progress. In short, if they keep making use of the language strategies they acquired through the three-week English program in New Zealand, their English proficiency can continue to improve in the future.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the effects of a three-week English program for Japanese university students in New Zealand on the participants' English proficiency and language learning strategy use. The results of the analyses revealed that English proficiency, especially listening proficiency, had improved after the program while the students who did not participate in the program remained at the same level. The reason why the participants in the English program did not show progress in other sections of grammar, writing and reading may be the insufficient number of questions in those sections of the test, mainly due to the limitation of time available for implementing the tests. In future studies, some standardized tests with more questions in each section should be used. However, it is clear that staying in a country where the target language is spoken, even for a short duration of only three weeks, contributes to progress in language proficiency, especially in the area of listening.

With regard to the participants' language strategy use, they used more strategies after the three-week stay in New Zealand, compared to their own strategy use before the program and also compared to those who did not take part in the program. The strategy use also increased significantly in those who did not join the English program. This may reflect their enthusiasm at starting a new semester or it may be because they had the same SILL test for the second time. Further investigation is necessary to confirm the reason. The tendency of the students who experienced life in New Zealand to use more language learning strategies was maintained even seven weeks after the program was completed. Hopefully the tendency will be retained in them in this way so that further language acquisition in the future may be expected.

It is interesting to note that in Otsuka's (2008) study on a two-week English program held in Australia, students did not show improved scores in a listening section of CASEC, contrary to the result of the present study where the participants' progress in listening ability was confirmed. In a future study, it may be meaningful to research the different levels of language acquisition that may be caused by lengths of stay in the country where the target language is spoken, so that the most effective period for a short-term program for language learners may be deduced.
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Appendix

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

1. Never or almost never true of me
2. Usually not true of me
3. Somewhat true of me
4. Usually true of me
5. Always or almost always true of me

Part A (Memory Strategies)
1. I think of relationship between what I already know and new things I learn in English.
2. I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.
3. I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.
4. I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.
5. I use rhymes to remember new English words.
6. I use flashcards to remember new English words.
7. I physically act out new English words.
8. I review English lessons often.
9. I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board.

Part B (Cognitive Strategies)
10. I say or write new English words several times.
11. I try to talk like native English speakers.
12. I practice the sounds of English.
13. I use the English words I know in different ways.
15. I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English.
16. I read for pleasure in English.
17. I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.
18. I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.
19. I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.
20. I try to find patterns in English.
21. I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.
22. I try not to translate word-for-word.
23. I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.

Part C (Compensation Strategies)
24. To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.
25. When I can’t think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.
26. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.
27. I read English without looking up every new word.
28. I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.
29. If I can’t think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.

Part D (Metacognitive Strategies)
30. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.
31. I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.
32. I pay attention when someone is speaking English.
33. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.
34. I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.
35. I look for people I can talk to in English.
36. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.
37. I have clear goals for improving my English skills.
38. I think about my progress in learning English.

Part E (Affective Strategies)
39. I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.
40. I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.
41. I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.
42. I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.
43. I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.
44. I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.

Part F (Social Strategies)
45. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.
46. I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.
47. I practice English with other students.
48. I ask for help from English speakers.
49. I ask questions in English.
50. I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.