УДК 378.4

КРОССКУЛЬТУРНОЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ ВЛИЯНИЯ КРАТКОСРОЧНЫХ ЯЗЫКОВЫХ КУРСОВ ЗА РУБЕЖОМ НА ОВЛАДЕНИЕ ИНОСТРАННЫМ ЯЗЫКОМ

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В статье представлены результаты исследования, проведенного во время реализации на базе ФГБОУ ВО «Новосибирский государственный педагогический университет» международной программы обменов, в которой участвовали студенты трех высших учебных заведений из разных стран. Исследование, выполненное в кросскультурной парадигме знания, раскрывает отношение студентов России, Франции и Германии к краткосрочным языковым курсам за рубежом и представляет результаты сравнительного анализа оценки студентами с разной этнокультурной спецификой влияния краткосрочных курсов на овладение иностранным языком и культурой изучаемой страны. В исследовательском проекте приняли участие 64 студента из трех стран. Методы исследования включали наблюдение и анкетирование. Оценка значимости различий в результатах ответов на вопросы анкеты трех групп студентов проводилась с использованием критерия хи-квадрат Пирсона. Проведенное нами исследование показало, что большинство респондентов, независимо от их национальной принадлежности, заинтересованы в получении опыта обучения на краткосрочных языковых курсах за рубежом в будущем, и дают высокую оценку влиянию таких образовательных программ на большинство компонентов языковой иноязычной компетенции, а также на кросскультурную компетенцию. Разница в утвердительных ответах среди испытуемых групп признана статистически значимой только в отношении важности правильного произношения, грамматики и орфографии. Выявленные различия в оценках респондентов из России, Франции и Германии, на наш взгляд, могут быть объяснены как индивидуальными, так и профессиональными интересами студентов, принявших участие в исследовании, а не их национально-культурными особенностями.

Ключевые слова: академическая мобильность, краткосрочные курсы, кросскультурное исследование, языковая компетенция

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8. **Scott P.** Dynamics of Academic Mobility: Hegemonic Internationalisation or Fluid Globalisation // European Review. – 2015. – № 23. – P. S55–S69. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1062798714000775
CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF SHORT-TERM LANGUAGE COURSES ABROAD ON LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Abstract

The paper presents the results of a survey, conducted during the realization of an exchange program in which three higher education institutions from Russia, France, and Germany participated. The aim of the cross-cultural survey was to discover the students’ attitudes towards short-term academic stays abroad and to compare their evaluations of the impact of short-term language courses on the acquisition of the target language as well as the target culture. The total number of the survey participants from three participating countries was 64. The methods employed in the current research combined observation and a questionnaire study. The evaluation of the significance of differences in the survey results of the three groups was done using chi-square analysis. Our study has shown that most respondents irrespective of their nationality are interested in having more experience with short-term language courses abroad in the future and give positive ranking to the impact of such programs on most components of language competence, as well as language- and culture-related issues. The difference in the affirmative answers among the subjects’ groups was statistically significant only regarding the importance of pronunciation, the importance of grammar, grammar control and orthography, which can be explained by students’ individual as well as professional preferences.

Keywords

Academic mobility, short-term courses, cross-cultural study, language competences.

1. Introduction

The roots of an increasingly convincing argument in favour of internationalization of higher education and the development of academic mobility programs in particular lie in the undeniable realities of globalization of today’s society. According to Salisbury (2011)¹, at present tertiary-level students graduate into

¹ Salisbury M. H. (2011). The effect of study abroad on intercultural competence among undergraduate college students, (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), University of Iowa, USA.
economically and technologically interconnected, socio-culturally interdependent global village. At the same time, taking into account alarming increases in the costs of higher education, greater accountability is demanded from higher education institutions in demonstrating their educational value. Moreover, high rank education administrators, responsible for policy-making decisions, have highlighted the need to resort to thorough and strict analytic methods before making their funding decisions [1]. In these circumstances, international education administrators have recognized that ardent arguments can no longer ensure the funding required to increase participation in academic mobility programs abroad. In modern society the educational value of tertiary-level institutions cannot be evaluated without rigorous analysis of the outcomes of academic mobility programs implemented at the education institution, including undergraduate as well as post-graduate degree programs [4].

The research background

As Scott P. [8] points out, academic mobility nowadays is becoming a more pronounced feature of modern higher education systems worldwide. According to the Bologna Declaration students’ academic mobility is one of the key criteria of the quality of higher education system in the country. Modern institutions of higher education are encouraged to conclude agreements with various foreign organizations which develop and support academic mobility programs and offer immersion in foreign language environment [14]. These efforts seem to have produced increase in study abroad participation rates. According to the data, provided by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 2, the students’ academic mobility has considerably increased in the past four decades, from 250,000 in 1965 to approximately 3.7 million in 2011. Nevertheless, one should admit that the ambitious goals set forth by education policy makers are still far from being achieved due to some obstacles of economic, as well as psychological nature. It’s noteworthy that nowadays short-term courses seem to be more attractive to students than longer-term programs abroad. According to Chieffo L. & Griffiths L. [2], the increasing popularity of short-term courses can be explained by the economic situation in the country. In Russia, for example, students and their parents are usually responsible for paying all expenses of the study abroad programs. The costs of short-term courses are generally much more affordable than the costs of the traditional longer-term programs abroad. Psychological obstacles are more subtle and more deeply rooted. One of them is the participants’ willingness and readiness to take part in academic stays abroad programs, their needs and beliefs about such programs, as well as their thoughts about the impact of short-term courses abroad on the development of their target language and cross-cultural competences.

The current research is the first to document the attitudes of students’ towards the impact of short-term language courses abroad on their linguistic and cross-cultural competences from cross-cultural perspective. As higher education continues to diversify in the face of culturally diverse reality, it is crucial for educational researchers to expand on the preceding research findings to come to better understanding of the potentially important educational experiences. Our paper looks at the current tendencies in academic mobility across the countries, namely it investigates the increasing rise of short-term

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language courses abroad. It focuses on short-term language courses abroad in the framework of the academic mobility program, which was designed and carried out during the realization of an educational three national exchange program in which three higher educational institutions from Russia, France, and Germany participated. The present research draws on our preliminary survey [15], which aimed to evaluate the attitudes of Russian university students’ towards short-term language courses abroad. According to the survey results the university level students from Russia believed that their study on a short-term language course abroad during their participation in academic mobility program, changed their thoughts about the target foreign language and culture, making them more positive, and had a favourable result on their language competence.

The current investigation, cross-cultural by nature, investigates the respondents’ attitudes towards short-term courses abroad, expressed by students of different nationalities, namely Russian, French and German. The authors of the study made an attempt at revealing cross-cultural differences and similarities in students’ attitudes to short-term language courses abroad. Modern processes of globalization and internationalization in the context of the new worldwide experience turn the interaction of all nations into the state of dialogue of cultures. Cross-cultural phenomenon demonstrates the urgent need to overcome extreme ethnocentrism to avoid the danger of the collapse of the world civilization. At the same time, cross-cultural approach undoubtedly contributes to a deeper understanding of the cultural identity of a specific nation [13]. This identity is viewed as a result of the development of the historical processes of cross-cultural interaction and mutual enrichment of the nations on the planet [11, 16]. Cross-cultural dimension of the current research ensures deeper understanding of the nature of short-term academic stays abroad, their advantages, and disadvantages, viewed from the perspective of students of different nationalities and can shed light on some potential pitfalls which can arise during the implementation of short-term programs on the global scale.

The literature overview

With the growing popularity of study abroad programs, the number of which has substantially risen and diversified, involving more academic disciplines, researchers from a wide range of academic fields have persistently tried to demonstrate the educational benefits of studying abroad. According to Hadis B. [3], students with the experience of an academic stay abroad become better students when they return back to their home universities to continue their study. International education researchers, such as Sutton R. & Rubin D. [10], Williams T. [12], Freed B. [8], Magnan S. & Back M. [5], Savage B. & Hughes H. [7], have connected involvement in study abroad programs with specific markers of students’ successful academic performance. Graduation rates (Sutton & Rubin, 2004), and grade point average (Williams, 2005) were believed to be the most reliable indicators of students’ academic progress. Researchers, who specialized in foreign language acquisition, have increasingly found study abroad programs to positively affect the development of foreign language competence of the participants (Freed, 1995; Magnan & Back, 2007). Research studies attempted to investigate the differences between language learning at home and abroad for different student groups. These projects examined specific linguistic features and language usage elements that could show differences between the students who study only in their home university and those with the experience in a foreign language immersion program (Savage & Hughes, 2014). However, according to Poole D. & Davis T. [6], the projects that aimed to assess the impact
of academic stays abroad on language acquisition took into consideration the learning outcomes of extended academic mobility programs. At the same time, to the best of our knowledge we can state that the issue connected with the analysis of productivity of short-term study abroad programs lasting two or three weeks has not been sufficiently investigated, yet. There is always a certain amount of doubt coming from international education policy makers concerning the benefits of two or three week study abroad programs. There are claims that such programs do not ensure enough time and contact hours for the participants to demonstrate measurable improvement of the target language as well as their cross-cultural competence.

Objectives, methodology and experimental design

The research questions were: 1) to investigate the students’ experience with short-term language courses abroad, lasting two or three weeks; 2) to ascertain the impact of such short-term language courses abroad on language acquisition as it is perceived by language learners of Russian, French, and German nationality; 3) to conduct a cross-cultural analysis of the impact of short-term language courses abroad on language-related and culture-related issues perceived by language learners of different nationalities.

The research reports the results of the research study, conducted at Novosibirsk State Pedagogical University during the realization of an educational three national exchange program in June 2015. The method employed in the current research combined observation and a questionnaire study. The questionnaire was compiled by drawing on our previous experience, some of the questions were adapted to meet the objectives of the current survey from our research published earlier [15]. To get a better understanding of the dynamics of short-term language courses, direct (reactive) observation was chosen as the second research method. Both continuous monitoring and time allocation were used for different kinds of activities during the project. The respondents were the students from RWTH Aachen University (Germany), Novosibirsk State Pedagogical University (Russia) and the University of Caen (France). The total number of the survey participants from three participating countries was 64, with 20 French students, 18 German students, and 26 Russian students. The gender proportion of the survey participants was the following: female students (52 %) and male students (48 %). The average age range was 20.7 years. All the participants used English as a means of communication with each other during the realization of the project. Some of them had attended short-term language courses in the UK and other English-speaking countries in the past. All of the subjects were to attend daily English language classes, specifically organized for the project participants by the receiving university administration. The participants spent one week in each of the three participating countries. Upon the completion of the Russian part of the program the students were invited to fill in the questionnaire. The students were not limited in time to fill in the form and could do that in their free time. The whole procedure of collecting the data took about 3 days. The evaluation of the significance of differences in the survey results of the three groups was done using chi-square analysis. The questionnaire included demographic questions (gender, age, year in the university, the native language(s), languages learnt in the university, foreign languages, occupation, etc.) and the research questions. The research questions included Yes/No questions, multiple choice questions, and open-ended questions. These questions addressed the respondents’ experience with short-term language courses abroad and their attitudes to such courses.
Results from Yes/No and multiple choice questions were processed with descriptive statistics tools. Open-ended questions were analyzed using key word analysis and key word frequencies. A five-point Likert scale was used to evaluate the perceived impact of short-term language courses abroad on students’ language acquisition as well as language-related issues and culture-related issues.

Discussion of the research outcomes

Four questions addressed the subjects’ participation in short-term language courses abroad: ‘Have you ever done a short-term language course abroad? If you have, state the number of times’, ‘Would you like to attend a short-term language course abroad in the future?’, ‘Would you like to attend the same short-term language course abroad more than once?’, ‘Would you recommend other students to attend short-term language courses abroad?’ Our study presupposed that all the respondents (100 %) attended short-term language courses abroad at least once in 2015. 28 participants out of 64 (43.7 %) had attended short-term language courses abroad in the UK and in some other English-speaking countries before the year 2015, of which 1 subject (2.8 %) had attended the same course twice and 5 subjects (17.8 %) had attended different short-term language courses abroad regularly. According to the students’ responses to the question ‘Would you like to attend a short-term language course abroad in the future?’, the vast majority of all the respondents (96 %) expressed great interest in participation in short-term language courses abroad in the future and all of them (100 %) would recommend other students to attend such courses abroad. As for the question ‘Would you like to attend the same short-term language course abroad more than once?’, only 46 % of affirmative answers were calculated. Subjects’ responses to questions about participation in short-term language courses abroad (% affirmative answers) are summarized in table 1.

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>% affirmative answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever done a short-term language course abroad?</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you like to attend a short-term language course abroad in the future?</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you recommend other students to attend such courses?</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would like to attend the same short-term language course abroad more than once?</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To evaluate the impact of short-term language courses abroad on students’ language acquisition we chose the following six communicative language competences according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: phonological, lexical, grammatical, semantic, orthographic and orthoepic competence. By orthoepic competence the ability to produce a correct pronunciation from the written form is meant, whereas by phonological control correct sounds and intonation in speaking and listening is implied. A five-point Likert scale was used to evaluate the impact of short-term language courses abroad on
language acquisition (where 1 = “strongly disagree”; 5 = “strongly agree”). The four response categories (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree) were combined into two nominal categories, such as agree/disagree. Then the data were presented as percentage of affirmative answers on each of the descriptors of the language competence. To evaluate the statistically significant difference in the answers among the three groups the chi-square test was used. According to the collected research data the subjects from Russia, France, and Germany unanimously gave the highest ranking to the impact of short-term language courses abroad on their phonological control (90 %, 92 %, 86 % respectively) and their lexical competence (86 %, 88 %, 84 % respectively). The difference in affirmative answers among the groups is statistically insignificant at $\chi^2 = 1.96$ for phonological control and at $\chi^2 = 1.24$ for lexical control. The impact of the attended courses on grammar (47 %, 68 %, 62 % respectively) and orthography (30 %, 48 %, 67 % respectively), expressed by Russian, French, and German participants can be characterized as less significant from learners’ perspective. It’s noteworthy that the difference in affirmative answers among the three groups is statistically significant at $\chi^2 = 9.67$ for grammar control and at $\chi^2 = 22.6$ for orthography. The evaluated impact of short-term language courses abroad on students’ linguistic competences is presented in table 2.

### Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of linguistic competences</th>
<th>Affirmative answers %</th>
<th>Russian</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>German</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>phonological control</td>
<td></td>
<td>90</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>orthoepic competence</td>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>semantic competence</td>
<td></td>
<td>83</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lexical competence</td>
<td></td>
<td>86</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grammar</td>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>orthography</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The detailed analysis of the impact of short-term language courses abroad on student’s attitude to language-related issues comprised the following descriptors: communicative skills, the role of English as the target language, the importance of pronunciation, the importance of extensive vocabulary, and the importance of grammar, and revealed that the respondents from the three subjects’ groups admitted equally high impact of such courses on language-related issues. The total results for each group (Russian, French, and German) were 80 %, 85 %, 79 % respectively. The difference between the results is statistically insignificant at $\chi^2 = 1.36$. The importance of communicative skills, the role of English as the target language, and the importance of pronunciation received the highest ratings from all three groups. The importance of extensive vocabulary as well as the importance of grammar received lower ratings from all three groups. The difference in the affirmative answers among the subjects’ groups is statistically significant only regarding the importance of pronunciation ($\chi^2 = 9.67$) and the importance of grammar ($\chi^2 = 8.75$). The evaluated impact of short-term language courses abroad on language-related issues is presented in table 3.
The evaluated impact of short-term language courses abroad on language-related issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude to language-related issues</th>
<th>Affirmative answers (%)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communicative skills</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as the target language</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>importance of pronunciation</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>importance of extensive vocabulary</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>importance of grammar</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To assess the students’ attitudes towards the culture-related issues we chose the following descriptors: attitude to the people of the country, traditions and ceremonies, norms and values, public organizations, and social institutions of the country. The subjects from Russian, French, and German groups marked rather high the impact of short-term language courses abroad on their attitude towards the culture-related issues. The total results for each group were 76 %, 81 %, 75 % respectively. The difference between the results is statistically insignificant at $\chi^2 = 2.75$. The respondents admitted equally high impact of short-term language courses abroad on their attitude to the people of the country, traditions and ceremonies, as well as norms and values, while the impact on the respondents’ attitudes towards public organizations and social institutions of the country was marked as the lowest in all groups. The evaluated impact of short-term language courses abroad on culture-related issues is summed up in table 4.

Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude to culture-related issues</th>
<th>Affirmative answers (%)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>people of the country</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>traditions and ceremonies</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>norms and values</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>public organizations</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social institutions of the country</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research results clearly demonstrated the significance of short-term language courses abroad evaluated from students’ perspective. All the participants, irrespective of their nationality, would recommend other students to attend such courses abroad and 96 % expressed great interest in their own participation in short-term language courses abroad in the future. Moreover, 46 % of the respondents are ready to attend the same short-term language course abroad more than once. Overall, we can conclude that the research participants confirm that short-term language courses abroad have high impact on their linguistic competence, in particular on its phonological and lexical components. Such language courses meet their
expectations and satisfy their needs in the field of foreign language acquisition, and professional as well as individual growth. The survey documented a greater impact of short-term language courses abroad on students’ attitudes towards the language-related issues than towards the target culture. The analysis of the students’ needs and short-term language course programs, available on the university websites, can give us an explanation to such results. The focus of short-term academic stays abroad is mainly on language immersion and practice. Acquaintance with the target culture is mainly viewed by university administration and the students themselves as a supplementary instrument of developing language competence. Moreover culture-related issues are more subtle and less tangible to produce explicit results within two/three week time frame. To answer the last question of our research concerning any differences in the evaluation of the impact of such courses expressed by the subjects of different nationalities we compared the results of the three subjects’ groups (Russian, French and German). On the whole, we found no statistically significant differences in students’ evaluations of the impact of short-term language courses abroad dependent on the ethno-cultural paradigm. The difference in the affirmative answers among the subjects’ groups was statistically significant only regarding the importance of pronunciation, the importance of grammar, grammar control and orthography, which can be explained by students’ individual as well as professional preferences, as Russian and French participants were students, majoring in foreign languages, whereas German students were majoring in technology.

**Conclusion**

During the last decades higher education organizations have substantially increased efforts to promote study abroad participation. Currently short-term language courses abroad are becoming more popular all over the world mainly due to the economic reasons. Our study has shown that most respondents are interested in having more experience with short-term language courses abroad in the future and give positive rating to the impact of such programs on most components of language competence. The research results proved our hypothesis that short-term language courses as a part of university students’ academic mobility program have a positive impact on the development of language and cross-cultural competences from students’ perspective and thus should be integrated into academic process of higher education system. In general, the research data demonstrated no statistically significant cross-cultural differences in the evaluations of short-term language courses abroad collected from Russian, French and German subjects’ groups. From the theoretical and applied perspectives, the research highlights the urgent need to develop students’ academic mobility via short-term language courses abroad to intensify and diversify the foreign language learning process at the university level and to enable personal as well as professional growth of the students to meet international standards in education.

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