

The Impact of Study Abroad Experience on EFL Learners' Self-Efficacy

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Studying abroad has usually been recommended to be the layman's key suggestion to develop a mastery of the target language. In line with this suggested popularity, the fascination with studying abroad needs to be validated on scientific grounds. This study therefore examined the role of study abroad experience on English major students' self-efficacy across different language skills. For this purpose, data were collected from the students of KTU DELL (2nd, 3rd, and 4th grades) in order to determine students' perceived self-efficacy. The participants were asked to complete a questionnaire of 30 questions documenting their self-efficacy perceptions as well as the degree of their cultural interaction. The data were analyzed using the SPSS 16.0. The study revealed that participation in a study abroad program regardless of its length had a significant impact on students' self-efficacy in many sub-skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) of language learning. The level of self-efficacy gains was found to be related to the level and type of interactions. Further implications of these findings are discussed along with the suggestions on how to improve the motivational benefits of study abroad programs.

Keywords: Study abroad, self-efficacy, motivation, cultural engagement.

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Introduction

“They are able who think they are able”

Virgil

In an excessively globalizing world in which the English language is not specific to English speaking countries any longer, increased opportunities of travel, political and economic needs, and the necessity of cultural interaction make study abroad a viable alternative to acquire a language. In a parallel fashion, there is a growing interest in study abroad programmes, and this makes it more compelling to better understand the outcomes of study abroad experiences. Even though Evans's (1988) vehement call for going to the country where the target language is spoken still echoes in many circles, whether learners' sojourn in the target language environment helps improve their language proficiency is yet to be adequately resolved. In this study, the lens will zoom in the self-efficacy beliefs of study abroad (SA) learners and non-SA learners.

Much ink has been spilled on the role of self-efficacy in language development, and findings suggest that a satisfactory level of self-efficacy is usually correlated with positive results. Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory posits that self-reflection individuals—those who can mediate between knowledge and action—evaluate their own thought processes. As Pajares (1996, p. 543) put it, "Knowledge, skill, and prior attainments are often poor predictors of subsequent attainments because the beliefs that individuals hold about their abilities and about the outcome of their efforts powerfully influence the ways they will behave". Thus, helping learners self-regulate their own learning through enhancing their self-efficacy is essential.

Even though self-efficacy is correlated with many variables, the role of the context of learning where the first or the second language is productive in promoting learners' self-efficacy beliefs needs to be crystallized in order to see whether a certain context yields more fruitful for developing certain language skills. This study aims to point out the relationship between study abroad and self-efficacy perceptions of learners and its effects on all language skills.

Impact of Study Abroad on Students' Motivation

Motivational research on foreign languages dates back to the 1960s, when a basic distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation for language study (see Gardner & Lambert, 1959) was the case. Accordingly, instrumental motivation refers to learners' desire to learn a

foreign language in order to achieve a specific purpose (e.g. pass a test, get a job), while integrative motivation stands for the desire of learning a language for communicative purposes and becoming a part of target community (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). In line with this, the study abroad participants, who are usually integratively motivated, tend to become better achievers (see Koul, Roy, Kaewkuekool, & Ploisawaschai, 2009; Kouritzin, Piquemal, & Renaud, 2009). However, the instrumental and integrative distinction is not clear-cut in recent studies (Dörnyei, 1994). Therefore, individual variables such as self-efficacy, inner and outer motivation, self-confidence, need for achievement, and other specific factors need exploration.

For a clearer understanding of the impact of study abroad on students' self-efficacy among language learners, this study poses the following questions:

1. Does study abroad experience have any impact on students' self-efficacy?

1. a) Does study abroad experience have an impact on the self-efficacy of learners in all language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking)?

2. Does the length of study abroad experience affect the degree of learners' self-efficacy?

3. Do males and females differ in self-efficacy beliefs?

There have been numerous studies conducted on study abroad, but little evidence has been gathered on the impact of study abroad on students' self-efficacy beliefs. Due to the increased partnership of the study abroad programs in universities in Turkey during the last few decades, it may be useful to identify the effects of participation in these programs on students' self-efficacy beliefs in all language skills and motivation. Moreover, only a few studies were conducted with the aim of finding out the impact of study abroad on learners' self-efficacy in all language skills (Cubillos & Ilvento, 2012; Jeter, 2013). The available studies generally focus on sojourners' perceptions before and after their study abroad experience. Although pre- and post-experience of the participants might be enriching, drawing such a comparison without considering the perceptions of other participants who have had no study abroad experience may not give a clear picture; therefore, comparing the self-efficacy belief of those who had study abroad experience with those who had not might be a worthwhile attempt.

Literature Review

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is grounded within social cognitive theory, which posits that individuals possess a system of self-belief that provides them with the ability of controlling their feeling, actions, and thoughts (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1989) defines self-efficacy as people's beliefs of their own capabilities in order to fulfil a particular assignment successfully. People's behaviour is affected by what they think, what they believe, and what they feel (Bandura, 1986). The work of Graham and Weiner (1996) on motivational research suggests that self-efficacy is more consistent at predicting academic performance over any other motivational constructs. Therefore, self-efficacy is considered a better predictor of success than actual abilities. In another study, Bandura (1997) explicitly explained what sort of influences self-efficacy has on learners, whether it influences emotional states and feelings of the learners, how much effort learners expend when doing a particular task, the level of resistance,

endurance, and patience to difficulties when facing an obstacle, pursued courses of actions and decisions, and the degree of success perceived.

A high level of self-efficacy might mean much for language learners. Accordingly, students with higher academic self-efficacy levels readily take challenging assignments upon themselves, exert further effort in the fulfilment of those assignments, and show escalated determination when encountered a problem (Vuong, Brown-Welty, & Tracz, 2010). Similarly, learners with a solid sense of self-efficacy show greater perseverance against any kind of obstacles, higher performance, and more effective use of learning strategies (Matthews, 2010). Considering the importance of self-efficacy in academic achievement, it is convenient to analyze the elements that designate its substantiality and persistence.

According to Bandura (1989), there are four main overarching sources of self-efficacy; (1) mastery experiences (previous achievements create positive self-perception of capacity), (2) vicarious experiences (exemplification and indirect experience exert influence), (3) emotional states (self-perceptions are improved with support and heartening), (4) social/verbal persuasions (interpreting others' emotional states can influence perceived self-efficacy of an individual).

Mastery experience has a great share in the development of self-efficacy (Siegle & McCoach, 2007). It is necessary for learners to observe their freshly obtained skills in action in order to evaluate the level of their proficiency. The performance does not have to be impeccable for self-efficacy development unlike the expectations; in fact, failures and inadequacies in ability might be a turning point, if the learner can address those deficiencies to inadequacies in practicing (Wachholz & Etheridge, 1996).

Vicarious experience, which is witnessing others carrying out an assignment, is another essential step of self-efficacy. For foreign language learners, it can be observing native speakers, classmates, or other language learners fulfilling a similar assignment about language successfully. Observing the success of others is vital in self-efficacy development, but the observed experience of success must be something that the learner can elaborate on (Usher, 2009). If the model's attributes are similar to their own, the influence of the vicarious experience is strong. Emotions and feelings are motions of a learner when doing a particular task. Negative thoughts and fears while doing a particular task are often linked to first lower self-efficacy level and then ensure inadequate performances; therefore, the correlation between anxiety and low self-efficacy and low performance can make greater sense.

Another crucial step of this process is verbal motivation. However, this motivation does not have to be from positive feedbacks of an educator because any kind of sincere heartening would be enough (Wang & Pape, 2007). Verbal persuasion is feedback from others, typically teachers and mentors, and they play a very critical role in terms of enhancing self-efficacy. Positive persuasions encourage and empower self-efficacy while negative persuasions defeat and weaken self-efficacy beliefs of learners. However, it should be noted that learners should not be constantly provided with positive persuasions when they do not warrant it (Bandura, 1997).

According to Mills (2007), assessing self-efficacy in foreign language classrooms has many advantages: evaluating students' perceived competence in the course objectives, the influence of a new pedagogical approach on students' self-efficacy (pre vs. post), the influence of pedagogical interventions (ex: workshops, etc.) on students' or teachers' self-efficacy, the influence of teaching learning strategy techniques (ex: reading strategies, etc.) on

students' self-efficacy, and longitudinal evaluation of self-efficacy beliefs. Whether learning context has a bearing on learners' self-efficacy beliefs represents an important avenue of research.

Study Abroad

Study abroad experience is indeed a unique opportunity for students to practice and improve their language skills. The historical roots of study abroad research go back to the 60s and 70s to Carroll's (1967) and Schumann and Schumann's (1977) work, which are the pioneers about the role of study abroad on language development. Carroll's (1967) study focused on proficiency attained to thousands of students in the U.S. who major in various foreign languages such as French, Italian, German, and Spanish. Even though the study was not directly related to study abroad, the results she got from the study were very informative with reference to the key effect of such an experience on students' proficiency. It revealed that those with study abroad experience, compared to those who had not, were more proficient in foreign languages. Another study conducted by Schumann and Schumann (1977) was an adoption of process-focused learning. Learners' stories of language learning experience were focused, and the study revealed that the social, cognitive, and personal states are as effective as age, aptitude, and personal variables in study abroad settings.

There have been plenty of studies confirming the positive influence of study abroad experience in terms of proficiency (Allen & Heron, 2003), grammatical competence (Howard, 2005), fluency (Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; Wood, 2007), intercultural communicative competence (Kural, 2015), and reading and writing (Dewey, 2004; Kinginger, 2008), even though the potential merits of study abroad experience do not always translate into language gains (Shievely, 2007). Moreover, in another study, Turkish Erasmus students exhibited lingering perspectives shifting from native-speaker norms to intelligibility (Kaypak & Ortaçtepe, 2014).

Impact of Study abroad on Motivation

In the past two decades, motivational theories have increased considerably, paving the way for new perspectives. Schumann's "sustained deep learning" (SDL) is one of them, and it highly supports the analysis of the provisional variables which supports second language acquisition (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005). According to Schumann, SDL is a kind of learning that requires a long time in order to gain expertise and proficiency. In his theory, motivation depends on the biological understanding of value of learners. When faced with complex tasks such as learning a foreign language, the best motivation is the one that sustains learners until achieving expertise and proficiency in the target language (Schumann, 1997).

Dörnyei has brought out an alternative model to Gardner and Lambert's motivational model, and it is called "Process Model of Foreign Language Motivation" (Dörnyei, 2003). This model involves factors beyond Gardner and Lambert's focus, which is intention, and extending it by including analysis of both evaluation and execution. The desire of learning a language begins with intention formation, but it rapidly moves on to the execution level in which learning environments are prior, and, finally, the evaluation level occurs in which learners evaluate the success or failure of their task, and then they use it in developing new intentions; therefore, this is a cycle (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998). In cases of SDL, especially in

language learning, the importance of post-action stage is essential. In such contexts, the most predictive factor of further learning is self-efficacy beliefs. If the learner is convinced that his or her performance is a successful one, he or she will exhibit higher level of persistence and engagement in future tasks (Dörnyei, 2003).

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of study abroad on students' self-efficacy. The study was conducted in the department of English Language and Literature at KTU, Trabzon. A convenient sampling procedure was employed, and 181 students from 2nd, 3rd, and 4th graders participated voluntarily. The participants' age ranged from 19 to 36 with a mean of 22.6. With respect to gender distribution, females (136) outnumbered males (45), and the participants were administered with a survey to see the demographic information as well as their beliefs of self-efficacy in different language skills. Only the students from the second grade on were accepted as they are the ones who start benefitting from exchange programmes in accordance with the regulations of Erasmus office. Of the students who had study abroad experience, Erasmus was the chief opportunity through which these learners had such experience. Table 1 indicates the distribution of participants in terms of gender, their study abroad experience, and the length of their stay.

Table 1

Demographics

	Experimental Groups
Total number of participants	181
N. of participants with SA experience	44
N. of participants/Short-term SA	16
N. of participants/Medium-term SA	15
N. of participants/Long-term SA	12
Females	136
Males	45
Prior language experience/short-term	1 or >1 semester
Prior language experience/medium-term	2 – 4 semesters
Prior language experience/long-term	<4 semesters

SA: Study abroad experience

Instruments

To measure the impact of study abroad on self-efficacy, a 20-item multiple-choice questionnaire was administered to 181 students. The questionnaire was adapted from Cubillos

and Ilvento (2012). It was divided into four sections for each sub-language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), and was found to be reliable for all skills ($\alpha > .70$). Along with these questions, also a 9-item “Cultural Engagement Survey” was administered to the students. The consistency of the items for the current study is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2

The Reliability of Self-efficacy Questionnaire

Scale	α	Number of items
Reading	.933	5
Writing	.838	5
Listening	.832	5
Speaking	.876	5
Cultural engagement	.753	9

Note: This table shows the Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient and the number of items for each sublanguage skills. The Cronbach’s Alpha of a reliable questionnaire should be higher than .70.

The self-efficacy and cultural engagement of learners who had study abroad experience and who had no abroad experience was compared following some steps in the data analysis. The first step of the analysis was to determine the validity and reliability of the self-efficacy questionnaire. There were five questions designed for each language skill (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) to measure the self-efficacy perceptions of the subjects on a Likert-type scale varying from “not sure” to “completely sure”. Next, in order to explore the self-efficacy belief differences between students with study exchange program experience and those without language sub-skills, a 20-item multiple-choice questionnaire was run through the SPSS 16.0 to calculate the means and standard deviations.

Findings and Discussions

The discussions will be elaborated based on the relationship between self-efficacy and gender differences, sojourn experience, the length of stay and cultural engagement.

The impact of gender in self-efficacy perceptions

With reference to gender distribution, the female participants outnumbered males with a ration of 3:1, that is 136 to 45. Thus, 75% of the subjects were females. When the self-efficacy beliefs of learners are compared with reference to gender (see Table 3), it could be argued that males, except for culture, had a higher level of self-efficacy beliefs in all aspects. However, this difference is not statistically significant ($p > .05$). One explanation to account for the females' lower level of self-efficacy beliefs could be interpreted as a gender difference in the sense that boys have a tendency to be self-congratulatory, whereas girls are inclined to be modest (Wigfield, Eccles, & Pintrich, 1996). Moreover, the discrepancy in orientations might be rooted to female learners' use of a distinct "metric" which might mask or accentuate their actual ideas or feelings (Noddings, 1996). That is, males and females tend to differ in

their measurement of self-efficacy efficacy beliefs. A recent study in a Turkish context also exhibited similar findings (see KIRMIZI & KIRMIZI, 2015). However, when it comes to the self-efficacy of learners in terms of their cultural engagement, it is seen that girls have a higher level of self-efficacy. Cultural issues, compared to technical issues such as mathematics are sciences, could deemed to be more “female-friendly”.

Table 3

The self-efficacy mean scores of males and females across different language skills

Group Statistics					
	gender	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>
readingmean	Male	45	4.15	.68	.10
	Female	136	4.02	.67	.05
Writingmean	Male	45	4.13	.59	.08
	Female	136	4.10	.64	.05
listeningmean	Male	45	3.75	.69	.10
	Female	136	3.66	.77	.06
speakingmean	Male	45	4.11	.62	.09
	Female	136	3.88	.70	.06
Culturemean	Male	12	3.53	.63	.18
	Female	32	3.86	.73	.12

Considering the overall mean scores, the learners had the highest self-efficacy scores in writing and reading. Speaking followed the two skills and it was followed by culture and listening. When interpreting the scores, caution should be exercised to understand the contextual factors as these factors might affect the interpretation of results. Even though culture is not considered a basic language skill in the conventional categorization, with the international role of the English language and excessive speed of globalization, the call for the inclusion of the culture as a separate language skill is more relevant now than ever before. Therefore, as Kramesh (1993, p.1) highlighted, “Culture in language learning is not an expandable fifth skill, tacked on, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. It is always in the background, right from day on...” That is, culture does not necessarily take the last seat in a hierarchy of language skills. However, that a great many learners do not feel themselves equipped with a proper degree of cultural awareness indicates that this skill is not given due attention in formal or informal settings.



Self-efficacy beliefs across language skills

Table 4 demonstrates the differences in students’ self-efficacy perceptions across different language skills.

Table 4

Self-efficacy Differences by Language Skills

	SA	N	M	SD
Reading	SA students	44	4.32	.57
	Non-SA students	137	3.97	.68
Writing	SA students	44	4.51	.45
	Non-SA students	137	3.98	.62
Listening	SA students	44	4.09	.69
	Non-SA students	137	3.55	.72
Speaking	SA students	44	4.47	.52
	Non-SA students	137	3.77	.65
Culture	SA students	44	3.77	.71

SA: Study abroad, N: Number of participants, M: Mean, SD: Standard deviation

Mann-Whitney test was administered to see if the difference between the two groups is significant or not. As table 5 suggests, there is a significant difference ($p < .05$) between study abroad participants and non-participants in each sub-language skill.

Table 5

A comparison of learners who had/not study abroad experience

	readingmean	writingmean	listeningmean	Speakingmean
Mann-Whitney U	2135.000	1534.000	1801.000	1241.00
Wilcoxon W	11588.000	10987.000	11254.000	10694.00
Z	-2.92	-4.92	-4.02	-5.89
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.000	.000	.000

A fine-grained analysis of the differences in the self-efficacy beliefs of learners who have and have not study abroad experience indicates that the participants seem to have a high level of self-efficacy in reading skill irrespective of their participation in a study abroad programme. This could be related to the Turkish education system which triggers students to become parts of an exam-driven system (Karabulut, 2007). Therefore, it seems that the participants have done enough reading practice to reach sufficient levels of self-efficacy. With the same line of thinking, the participating students were expected to demonstrate a low level of self-efficacy. However, both the SA students and non-SA students had the highest means in writing skill. As the study did not include a qualitative aspect, it is difficult to provide a clear explanation for this. The gap between the self-efficacy means of SA students and non-SA students is the highest in speaking skill. It seems that context helps learners become armed with a reflexive process of change and adjustment with reference to their perceptions of speaking ability. Part of the reason could be attributed to the lingua franca status of English through which speakers of different nationalities communicate in English. Thanks to this socialization in a different language, learners get exposed to a variety of Englishes, which could make them feel more secure given the potential diversity of language varieties. Such an “inner comparison” might demystify the once hold standard English norms. That is, learners become aware that their own variety is likely to become yet another acceptable variety and it inherently equips the learners with a sense of achievement. Cultural engagement items were asked only to SA students. Therefore, a comparison is not the case for the cultural aspect.

The impact on self-efficacy of learners in all language skills

Tables 6-10 present the differences in self-efficacy beliefs of students for each language skill. These tables were developed through the SPSS16.0 in order to answer the research question that reads “does study abroad experience have an impact on the self-efficacy of learners in all language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking)?”

Table 6

Self-efficacy Differences in Reading

You could read a text in English and...	SA	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>
1. ...figure out the main topic or gist.	Yes	44	4.58
	No	137	4.28
2. ...answer questions about very specific information.	Yes	44	4.13
	No	137	3.81
3. ...figure out the meaning of words or phrases you do not know.	Yes	44	4.15
	No	137	3.70
4. ...retell in Turkish what you read.	Yes	44	4.45
	No	137	4.16
5. ...use a English text to accomplish a task in real life.	Yes	44	4.29
	No	137	3.89

As table 6 suggests, there is not a significant difference between students' self-efficacy perceptions in reading. In every single question, the results have almost the same difference. An item-based analysis reveals that the students' confidence is highest in understanding the main topic or the gist when they read an English text. The ones without study abroad experience suffer the most when figuring out the meaning of words or phrases they do not know. This problem is not a serious concern for study abroad participants, and the difference in self-efficacy beliefs in this matter seems to be the highest one.

Table 7

Self-efficacy Differences in Writing

You could write in English and...	SA	N	M
1. ...communicate the main point(s) of what you want to express.	Yes	44	4.59
	No	137	4.08
2. ...give supporting details and explanations.	Yes	44	4.40
	No	137	3.85
3. ...use correct spelling and grammar.	Yes	44	4.40
	No	137	3,87
4. ...present your ideas in a clear and concise manner.	Yes	44	4.47
	No	137	3.92
5. ...accomplish a task in real life.	Yes	44	4.68
	No	137	4.18

Table 7 clearly shows that with reference to writing skill, there is a remarkable difference in self-efficacy beliefs of those with and without study abroad experience. Greatest differences are seen in the questions 3-5. Study abroad participants tend to have higher self-efficacy at using correct spelling and grammar when writing than non-study abroad participants. These results are backed with the study of Howard (2005), who highlighted the effect of study abroad in promoting grammatical competence. The last two questions are the ones with the highest difference. The questions represent the importance in daily usage of English language, and the results are for the SA participants as expected from the nature of SA experience which encourages people to communicate more often. These results are in line with Dewey (2004) and Kinginger (2008) because their studies were on the impact of study abroad on reading and writing, and the results were similar to ours.

Listening and speaking skills require a considerable amount of practice. It is clear from learners' responses that study abroad experience provided students with substantial practicing opportunities in the target language. A remarkable number of Turkish students find it difficult to practice the language they learn in classrooms. Therefore, their self-efficacy levels are relatively lower in listening and speaking skills. Table 8 revealed that the level of self-efficacy differences was notable between SA participants and non-SA participants. The biggest difference was seen in the second item that reads as follows: "you could listen to English and understand details". The most important aspect of study abroad is communication

Table 8

Self-efficacy Differences in Listening

You could listen to English and...	SA	N	M
1. ...understand the gist of what you hear.	Yes	44	4.27
	No	137	3.71
2. ...understand details.	Yes	44	3.93
	No	137	3.28
3. ...figure out the meaning of words or phrases you do not know.	Yes	44	3.81
	No	137	3.28
4. ...retell in Turkish what you heard.	Yes	44	4.18
	No	137	3.64
5. ...use the information heard in English to accomplish a task in real life.	Yes	44	4.25
	No	137	3.74

because it gives students the opportunity to use the language daily. Therefore, not surprisingly, the improvements in these skills are the most notable as well as the self-response of the students. In item 3, the difference is the highest after item 2. This item is related with the one in reading questionnaire in which the highest difference was in this question even though the differences were not as significant in the rest. This could be interpreted as the strong position of SA experience in figuring out the meaning of words of phrases learners do not know. The findings are in line with those of Willis et al (1977). Willis and his colleagues did a similar research, and the strongest gains were observed in speaking and listening while gains in reading skills were less as was the case in this study.

The highest differences are seen in oral skills (speaking and listening) in this study. As Table 9 suggests, there is an explicit difference in self-efficacy perceptions of students between SA participants and non-participants. Similar results were detected in the study of Cubillos & Ilvento (2012). They conducted a study on the impact of study abroad on self-efficacy with pre- and post- perceptions of students, and at the end of the study, highest gains were seen in the oral skills, which is in line with our findings. As it is mentioned in the analysis of table 8, speaking skill is the most benefitted one in terms of self-efficacy. Matsumura (2001) and Shardakova's (2005) works revealed that study abroad experience helps enhance the use of speech acts. Given the context of the study, it could be argued that Turkish students face serious problems when practicing speaking. As the city where the research is undertaken is located in a place where learners are offered limited opportunities to practice their speaking in the foreign language outside the classroom context, it is not surprising that a considerable number of students feel themselves underequipped. This study, therefore, backs the idea that study abroad has an impact at enhancing speaking skills and speaking self-efficacy.



Table 9

Self-efficacy Differences in Speaking

You could speak in English and...	SA	N	M
1. ...communicate the main point(s) of what you want to say.	Yes	44	4.56
	No	137	3.90
2. ...give supporting details and explanations at a listener's request.	Yes	44	4.47
	No	137	3.63
3. ...solve communication problems when you do not know how to say something or when the listener does not understand.	Yes	44	4.34
	No	137	3.59
4. ...know whether the listener is understanding you correctly.	Yes	44	4.27
	No	137	3.73
5. ...accomplish a task in real life.	Yes	44	4.70
	No	137	4.01

The impact of the length of the program

Table 10 points to the self-efficacy gains by the length of study abroad programs. In order to address to the second research question that reads “Does the length of study abroad experience affect the degree of learners’ self-efficacy?”, an examination of the stay abroad period and self-efficacy mean scores was carried out. The length of the program was divided into three in order to get more detailed information about the gains. Accordingly, short term program stood for 2-5 months, medium term referred to 5-10 months, and long term was considered to be over 10 months.

Table 10

Self-efficacy Gains by the Length of Study Abroad Programs

	M(Short term) N: 16	M(Medium term) N: 15	M(Long term) N: 12
Reading	4.1	4.4	4.3
Writing	4.3	4.6	4.6
Listening	3.9	4.0	4.2
Speaking	4.1	4.5	4.7
Culture	3.5	3.6	4.3

As the table indicates, the length of study abroad is directly proportional with self-efficacy gains. There exists a gradual improvement in every language skill, except for reading. The participants showed significant increase in self-efficacy beliefs; however, the increase is more evident in longer stays. These results are in line with Cubillos and Ilvento (2012). With longer stays, speaking self-efficacy gets stronger, and cultural engagement level improves. Reading and writing self-efficacies do not show much increase, while listening self-efficacy improved gradually.

The role of cultural engagement on learners' self-efficacy beliefs were explored through nine cultural engagement activities (see Table 11). These items aimed at eliciting information about the frequency of learners' involvement in the activities, if any. In line with Cubillos and Ilvento (2012), it was assumed that the participants who have a higher degree of exposure to the following activities had a higher level of self-efficacy. Therefore, only the SA students responded to the following questions.

Table 11
Frequency of Cultural Engagement Activities

	N	M	Std. Deviation
Shopping/visiting local markets	44	4.88	.32
Movies/entertainment catering to locals	44	4.52	.79
Restaurants/pubs/cafes catering to locals	44	4.68	.63
Visiting local families/friends in their homes	44	3.40	1.48
Participating in worship services	44	2.97	1.30
On campus informal conversations	44	3.38	1.48
Events sponsored by the study abroad program	44	3.97	1.43
Extracurricular activities (student clubs, intramurals, etc.)	44	3.59	1.48
Volunteering, service learning, internships, shadowing	44	2.54	1.50

It is seen that shopping and visiting local markets were the most frequently practiced cultural activities. It was followed by going to restaurants/pubs/cafes catering to locals and movies/entertainment catering to locals. Events sponsored by the study abroad program, extracurricular activities, and visiting local families/friends had a high frequency. The least frequently practices activities were volunteering, service learning, internships, shadowing and participating in worship services. As the number of the participants is limited, a regression analysis was not carried out.

Conclusions

Based on the previous analysis, the study offers the following conclusions:

1. Study abroad experience does influence the self-efficacy beliefs of students. The statistical analysis of student responses showed a significant difference between students with and without study abroad experience. It follows that helping learners benefit from contextual aids

might empower them so that they will develop a sense of interculturality through which they enjoy the lenses of host and home countries.

2. Self-efficacy differences occur with significance in all sub-language skills. The difference was greatest in oral skills (speaking and listening). It is highly likely that the exam-driven education system in Turkey makes some skills privileged, if not easily acquired. Since the examination system is reading-oriented, students feel comfortable with their reading skills. Therefore, students know that they can do well in reading. However, arming students with a strong sense of self-efficacy will help promote self-regulating learning, and a conducive environment for it could be the country where the target language is spoken more than the home country. Even if the amount and density of exposure is not guaranteed, Englishes one could get exposed to will facilitate acculturation, which in turn will promote learners' self-efficacy. Thus, helping learners get exposed to English varieties might result in demystifying the language acquisition process.

3. The longer was the program, the higher was the self-efficacy means. Therefore, the high mean scores are associated with longer stays. As previously mentioned, the difference in self-efficacy beliefs between those with and without study abroad experience is significant for students with study abroad experience. However, those students with longer stays had even greater means of self-efficacy beliefs.

4. For all sub-components (reading, writing, speaking, listening) there was not a statistically significant difference between males and females. Therefore, this study suggests that self-efficacy beliefs of students are not affected by their gender. However, that males had higher scores of self-efficacy in all skills except for culture should be treated with caution.

5. Interaction with the target community is associated with self-efficacy gains. However, since the number of participants who had study abroad experience is limited, it might be relatively early to draw a firm conclusion.

Limitations of the Study

This study relies on the self reports of the participants. Their perception of their abilities is taken into consideration to reach a conclusion. It may not apply to all learners as it was administered on English major students studying at the department of English Language and Literature at KTU. Moreover, we do not have pre- and post-perceptions of the participants. Therefore, the net gain in every individual is not known but only a comparison is core to the study.

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