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Practice and Research on Chinese Language Learning in Study Abroad Context

Li Jin

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Practice and Research on Chinese Language Learning in Study Abroad Contexts

Li Jin

Abstract This chapter provides an overview of the field of Chinese language learning in study abroad contexts. It consists of three sections. The first section presents the major models and features of American university-run study abroad (SA) programs in mainland China. The major models hinge on the program’s length and content. The features are reflected in curriculum requirements, location, extracurricular activities, and program accommodations. Section two shares a review of theories and empirical studies that investigate the learning process and outcomes in Chinese SA contexts. Gaps between existing research studies and future research are identified. Section three discusses salient issues in curriculum design and pedagogy faced by various types of SA programs and provides practical guidance based on theories and empirical research results for administrators and educators to launch and ameliorate short or long-term SA programs. Both researchers and practitioners in the field of teaching Chinese as a foreign language in the U.S. can gain insights from this chapter.

Keywords Study abroad • Study abroad program models • Summer program • Year-long program • Semester-long program • Curriculum design • Language contact • Negotiation of identity • Program length • Accommodations

1 Introduction

Recent years have witnessed a surge in the number of learners of Mandarin Chinese choosing to study abroad in mainland China. According to a survey conducted by the Institute of International Education in 2013 (IIE 2013), China is now the No. 5 destination country for U.S. study abroad (SA) students. It is reported that there were over 290,000 international students studying Mandarin Chinese in China in 2013 (China Scholarship Council 2014). In particular, SA in China has gained strong support from both the American and Chinese governments. In 2009, President

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© Springer International Publishing Switzerland 2016
J. Ruan et al. (eds.), Chinese Language Education in the United States,
Multilingual Education 14, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-21308-8_10
Barack Obama announced the 100,000 Strong Initiative, which aimed to send 100,000 American students to study in China by the end of 2014. Echoing the call, the Chinese government announced 20,000 scholarships from 2010 to 2012 to support American students to study in China. In January 2013, the 100,000 Strong Foundation was officially launched by then Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. This non-profit organization engages governmental, business, and academic communities in both countries to expand the number and diversity of American students studying Mandarin and other subjects in China. In other words, the efforts to encourage and support SA in China are historically unprecedented. Apparently, students, educators, and administrators have great hopes that students can improve their language proficiency through their immersion experience in China.

Despite the enthusiasm, little is known as to whether these efforts are as fruitful as expected and how to provide appropriate support and guidance for students to navigate and take advantage of the complex SA contexts in China. This chapter starts with a brief review of the major models and features of existing SA programs in China. It is followed with a detailed review of research on language learning in SA contexts in general, particularly those in China. Future directions for research on Chinese language in SA contexts will be suggested. Drawing on research findings, suggestions for Chinese SA curriculum design and pedagogy will be shared.

2 Major Models and Program Features

According to a private document released in May 2014 by the China Association of Program Executive Directors (CAPED), there are over 60 American higher education institution-run SA programs in China that focus on Mandarin language instruction. All these programs on the list are hosted on the campus of a major local Chinese university. Based on the length of a program, there are four types of models: (1) academic year plus summer program, (2) year-long program, (3) semester-long program, and (4) summer only program. In addition, the length of summer programs spans from 4 to 11 weeks, depending on each program’s credit offerings. The number of summer programs surpasses those of other program models. The year-long and semester-long programs hold classes following regular academic schedules. The vast majority of the summer programs hold formal language instruction on weekday mornings, one-on-one tutor sessions in the afternoons, and extracurricular activities and excursions on weekends. According to a program’s curriculum focus, there are three types of models: (1) basic to advanced-level language instruction plus excursions/social study, (2) business language instruction plus internship, and (3) classical Chinese and linguistics plus excursions. Table 1 shows four major features of SA programs.

The characteristics of curriculum design are reflected in program prerequisites, program duration, course offerings, teacher selection, and assessment instruments adopted in each program. The vast majority of the programs have a prerequisite

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prerequisites</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Extracurricular activities</th>
<th>Program accommodations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>Excursions</td>
<td>International student dorms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal beginning-level proficiency</td>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>Daily one-on-one tutoring sessions</td>
<td>Hotel rooms as a group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic year + summer</td>
<td>Nanjing</td>
<td>Social studies project</td>
<td>Homestay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic year</td>
<td>Chengdu</td>
<td>Study tour to live with villagers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester-long</td>
<td>Hainan</td>
<td>Community service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>Hangzhou</td>
<td>Internships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kunning</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Major features of SA programs in China

Program Objectives

- Beginning, intermediate and advanced-level language courses
- Content courses in English or Chinese
- Business Chinese + internship course
- Classical Chinese, Chinese linguistics
- Kunshan

Teacher selection

- Own instructors
- Local instructors

Placement and Assessment

- In-house oral and written exams
- Pre- and post-program standardized tests: OPI-c, ACTFL reading and listening tests, Chinese Proficiency Test (CPT), Chinese Speaking Test (CST)
- Portfolio writing

of minimally one year of beginning-level Chinese language learning. Only a few programs have no prerequisite, which means they offer beginning-level language classes onsite. In terms of course offerings, year-long and semester-long programs have slightly different offerings than summer programs. Besides beginning to advanced-level language courses, students enrolled in a year-long or semester-long program are allowed to take content courses taught in English if they are taking intermediate-level language courses, or content courses taught in Chinese if they are taking advanced-level language courses. Summer programs’ course offerings are much more specific. The majority of the programs focus on beginning to
advanced-level language instruction. A few programs focus on business Chinese instruction and internships, and a few offer more specified courses, such as linguistics and classical Chinese, in addition to regular language courses. Many programs employ language instructors from the host institution's faculty. Only a select number of programs bring their own language instructors for various reasons. A small fraction of programs adopt a Chinese language pledge, which mandates students to solely use Chinese language throughout the program. Various assessment instruments are adopted or created for different programs. Many programs utilize oral and written tests designed by their own faculty for a placement assessment, weekly tests, and post-program assessments. Standardized test instruments, such as OPI-c, ACTFL reading and listening tests, the Chinese Proficiency Test (CPT), and the Chinese Speaking Test (CST) are also widely adopted for pre- and post-program assessments. A number of programs also adopt portfolio writing to document learners' writing progress throughout the program.

The second feature of the programs is location. The vast majority of the programs are hosted at a major university in a Tier 1 city, such as Beijing and Shanghai. A growing number of programs are located in inner cities with less of an international spotlight, such as Hainan and Kunming. As mentioned earlier, most summer programs adopt the model that includes classroom-based formal instruction on weekday mornings and extracurricular activities in the afternoons and on weekends. Many programs hire local tutors to offer daily one-on-one language tutoring sessions. Extracurricular activities are carried out in various forms to deepen students' understanding of the larger Chinese society and engage them with local residents. In addition to short excursions within China, some summer programs dedicate a few days or one entire week for students to conduct a social studies project, participate in community service, or even live with villagers in the local community. The last feature is related to accommodations for students in SA programs. Students enrolled in year-long and semester-long programs usually live in designated international student dorms and usually share an apartment unit with another international or Chinese domestic student. The summer programs' accommodations are more diverse. Most U.S. institution-run programs place students in an on-campus hotel, whereas only a few programs arrange homestays for students to stay with a local host family. Students staying in an on-campus hotel have their own room but share the unit with a group member.

In sum, there are clear trends identifiable among the existing SA programs in China. For year- or semester-long programs, there may or may not be any prerequisite, various Chinese culture courses in addition to language courses are offered, excursions and certain community service activities are organized, and students usually stay at an international student dorm. As for summer programs, the majority of the programs mandate a prerequisite of beginning-level language proficiency; focus on language instruction; employ local instructors; cluster in major cities; offer similar extracurricular activities, such as one-on-one tutoring sessions, cultural experiences, and short excursions; and place students in an on-campus hotel.

3 Research on Chinese Language Learning in SA Contexts

SA provides a learning environment distinct from foreign language classrooms on a domestic campus and from real-life communication situations most immigrants experience. Most language-focused SA programs offer both classroom instruction and naturalistic learning. Hence, language learning in SA contexts is much more complicated. In the past two decades, a plethora of books and articles have been published on language learning abroad (e.g. Barron 2003; DuFon and Churchill 2006; Freed 1995; Kinginger 2009, 2013a, b). Foreign Language Annuals dedicated a special issue in 2010 to the topic of SA. The vast majority of research in this area has been conducted with European languages due to various reasons. This section will first review major research studies on language learning in non-China SA contexts, then will focus on particular research on SA in China.

Despite widespread dissent among scholars regarding the definition of language proficiency and appropriate measures of language proficiency, research since as early as the 1960s has provided concrete and convincing evidence for linguistic gains in almost every dimension, as well as change of attitude towards the target culture in an SA context (e.g. Carroll 1967; Davidson 2010; DeKeyser 2010; Dewey 2004; Freed 1995; Freed et al. 2004; Kinginger 2008; Schumann and Schumann 1977). This line of research has shown that longer sojourn time and better pre-program grammar control are positively correlated with linguistic gains. Drawing on an input-output-based cognitive view of second language acquisition, the researchers tend to attribute linguistic gains to the unparalleled amount of language input in an SA context. The findings of this line of research have largely validated the existence of SA programs.

However, numerous studies have also documented disappointing or controversial SA results, as well as striking individual differences (e.g. Kinginger 2009; Wilkinson 1998). Wilkinson (1998) called for a shift of SA research from the "product" or outcome of SA programs to the "process," such as what is going on before, during, and after an SA program. Recent research has focused on the relationship between language development and SA experience, in particular, the quantity and quality of language contact in an SA context. In terms of quantity of language contact with native speakers, study findings have demonstrated statistically significant correlations between the frequency of language contact and language development in oral fluency, formulaic production, reading, writing, listening, grammar, vocabulary, and pragmatics (e.g. Dewey 2004; Kinginger 2008; Segalowitz and Freed 2004; Taguchi 2008, 2011a, b; Taguchi et al. 2013). As reviewed by Kinginger (2009), the most frequently adopted language proficiency measurement instruments in these studies include the Modern Language Association Proficiency Test, the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), the C-Test, and the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) in various language versions.

Another line of research has focused on the quality of language contact in SA contexts. A large body of evidence supports the finding that language learners’ success in SA “depends upon how the students are received in the contexts where they
Table 2: Research on Chinese language learning in SA contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Research focus</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>SA context</th>
<th>Data collection methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Du (2013)</td>
<td>Fluency development and the effect of time on task on fluency development</td>
<td>28 college-level American students and 1 New Zealand student</td>
<td>A semester-long program offering courses on business Chinese, classical Chinese, newspaper reading, discussion and debate, and modern Chinese literature at a university in Eastern China</td>
<td>Pre- and post-program questionnaires, non-participant observations, computer adaptive reading test, monthly oral recording</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jin (2014)</td>
<td>Group interaction patterns</td>
<td>11 college-level American students</td>
<td>7-week summer intensive language program in Beijing</td>
<td>Interviews, observations, students’ reflective journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taguchi et al. (2013)</td>
<td>(1) Gain in formulaic competence during study abroad; and (2) the effect of frequency of language encounter on formulaic competence</td>
<td>31 college-level American students</td>
<td>14-week summer language program in Beijing</td>
<td>Pretest and posttest (computerized oral discourse test)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li (2014)</td>
<td>The effect of language proficiency level on the development of Chinese request production</td>
<td>31 college-level American students</td>
<td>15-week language program in Beijing</td>
<td>Pretest and posttest (computerized oral discourse test)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jin (2012)</td>
<td>Developmental process of Chinese compliment responding</td>
<td>4 college-level American students</td>
<td>7-week summer intensive language program on a university campus in Shanghai</td>
<td>Interviews, observations, students’ reflective journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tan and Kinginger (2013)</td>
<td>Learners’ perception of local engagement during a homestay program</td>
<td>60 American high-school students</td>
<td>Summer homestay program</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winke and Teng (2010)</td>
<td>The effect of Chinese pragmatics tatorial on pragmatic development in study abroad</td>
<td>19 American college-level students in a study abroad program and 19 non-SA students on campus</td>
<td>8-week summer intensive language program on a university campus in Tianjin</td>
<td>Pretest and posttest (Test of Chinese pragmatics, DCT format); language and cultural learning reflective journals; end-of-the-program survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duff et al. (2013)</td>
<td>Oral proficiency, literacy, identity development in Chinese learning</td>
<td>5 Caucasian adult English-speaking Canadians</td>
<td>3 years of Chinese language development in various contexts</td>
<td>Yearly standardized tests, personal written narratives, oral interviews, transcription work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
learners who spend time speaking Chinese both inside and outside of the classroom, can have positive effects on learners’ fluency development. Taguchi et al. (2013) examined American college students’ development of formulaic production during a 10-week SA program. The findings showed that students’ appropriateness of formulaic production improved by the end of the SA program. However, there was no correlation between the frequency of language encounter and linguistic development. The correlation was only observed in learners with lower pretest scores. In other words, lower-level learners’ development of formulaic production benefited from more frequent encounters with target language forms in an SA context. Thus, the frequency of encounter and learners’ initial proficiency jointly influenced their language gains abroad. Jin’s (2014) study investigated the language learning process of 11 college-level students in a 7-week intensive language program. Based on data from interviews and field observations, the study findings show that language learners, particularly those at a lower level, prefer to work with their English-speaking peers, including higher-level learners in the group, for language help to ease into the study abroad context. It is suggested that meaningful peer collaboration, even in an SA program, can provide a buffer zone for lower-level or less confident students and be beneficial for language development. Li’s (2014) study focused on college students’ development of the request strategy. Using a pretest-posttest design, the study was conducted with one intermediate-level group and one advanced-level group in a 15-week language-focused SA program. The study findings revealed that (1) learners at both levels had gains in appropriateness and fluency of their request production at the end of the program; (2) learners’ linguistic proficiency did not have a statistically significant effect on the appropriateness of their performance; and (3) the advanced-level learners showed more gains in speech rate, compared to intermediate-level learners. The author suggests that the optimal time for learners to study abroad is after four semesters of formal instruction in order to develop request skills in L2 Chinese. Winke and Teng’s (2010) study discovered that the experimental group benefited from explicit instruction about Chinese speech acts in a summer intensive language study abroad program. Their knowledge about various Chinese pragmatic skills showed statistically significant improvement at the end of the SA program, and their attitude toward the explicit pragmatics tutorial was very positive. The authors suggest that explicit pragmatic instruction be provided during an SA program, or on the domestic campus before learners embark on their SA journey, by recruiting native speakers to provide one-on-one tutoring.

Adopting qualitative methodology, Jin’s study (2012) investigated four American college students’ developmental process of learning compliment responding in a 7-week summer intensive language program in China. The findings revealed each of the four students went through a heterogeneous process and developed distinct understandings about how to appropriately respond to compliments in a Chinese-speaking setting. From the SCT perspective, Jin argued that the surprising heterogeneity reflected in the learning process and outcome can be attributed to how each learner was received in the local community, as well as how each learner took initiative (e.g. agency) to develop pragmatic knowledge. It is suggested that explicit instruction about the Chinese complimenting speech act, as well as the concept of foreigner treatment, be provided before students start their study abroad trip.

Different from the other five studies investigating college-level language learners, Tan and Kinginger’s study (2013) focused on high school students’ perceptions about their local engagement in a homestay setting. Based on qualitative data collected from questionnaires, the study uncovered unique benefits of early study abroad: learners enjoyed deeper and easier engagement with host families, which greatly contributed to their language learning and cultural understanding. This can be largely attributed to the fact that younger study abroad students are more open-minded and less risk-averse. The study results also revealed that early study abroad has long-lasting positive effects on learners’ motivation for language learning, as well as on forging intercultural relationships at an earlier age.

The study by Duff et al. (2013) is one of the most comprehensive empirical studies of Chinese language development. From multiple theoretical perspectives the researchers analyzed the Chinese language development of five English-speaking adult Caucasian Canadians over a period of 3 years during which all participants sojourned in a Chinese-speaking community. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to document and analyze each learner’s oral proficiency, literacy, and identity construction. Based on their meticulous analysis, the researchers suggested that assessment instruments for Chinese as an additional language (CAL) are still evolving and inconsistent, which renders measuring learners’ development a very challenging task. Research on CAL literacy should take a perspective distinct from traditional SLA approaches, which give prestige to oral proficiency. In addition, the researchers pinpointed from a sociocultural theoretical perspective that the link between agency, positionality, and identity is particularly relevant to understanding the complexity of CAL learners’ encounter with local communities. Future directions for research and pedagogical and policy implications were provided in the study as well.

4 Suggestions for Research on Chinese Study Abroad

As shown in Table 2, research on Chinese study abroad is still a largely uncharted territory. There is an urgent need for more studies adopting both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to present a fuller picture of what is happening in study abroad programs. Five out of the eight reviewed studies were conducted during a summer intensive language study abroad program. More research should be conducted to investigate language learning in semester- or year-long study abroad programs in China, which attract an increasing number of Chinese language learners each year. Homestay is another popular language learning setting incorporated into various SA programs for college-level students. Whether and how learners of various backgrounds engage in a homestay setting and achieve language development merits more research. Since language learning abroad is highly heterogeneous, more longitudinal studies are needed for a more accurate account of language learning in a particular context.
Extensive research on language learning abroad shows that both the quantity and quality of language contact learners have in a local community shape their language development. Thus, both the learning outcomes and learning processes during a Chinese SA program need to be systematically investigated. Many SA curriculum models and pedagogical strategies, such as the language tutor system, and the amount of target language use required for beginning-level learners need to be examined empirically to provide appropriate guidance. More research on the development of pragmatics needs to continue in this direction, given the high-context nature of Chinese language use, as well as the uniquely beneficial but complex learning environment offered in SA. In particular, more studies are needed to investigate learners’ linguistic and pragmatic development simultaneously during an SA program, in other words, how learners connect the form and meaning of the Chinese language.

Identity and language learning, particularly in an SA setting, is an emerging subfield of second language acquisition that has attracted great attention in recent years. Researchers (e.g. Block 2007; Duff et al. 2013; Kinginger 2013b) call for more research from a poststructuralist perspective that looks at various identity-related variables in language learning, such as nationality, gender, race, age, social class, and sexuality. Many more SA learners are coming from a region or country that shares very little with China in terms of social and cultural structures, customs, and perspectives. Despite the standardized use of Mandarin Chinese across China, China itself is a vast country with historically, culturally, and geographically very diverse regions. Imprinted with their unique social, cultural, and personal backgrounds, learners of Chinese language traveling from other countries will certainly experience a complex learning journey when studying abroad in China. The treatments they receive from a local community, their dispositions toward the local community, and how they make personal choices when using the Chinese language should be taken into serious consideration when researchers interpret language learning outcomes and processes. Thus, more research on Chinese development in SA contexts should adopt a poststructuralist perspective for a more accurate understanding of this context.

5 Suggestions for Chinese SA Curriculum Design and Pedagogy

A review of existing SA program models and features and relevant empirical studies (e.g. Du 2013; Duff et al. 2013; Jin 2012, 2014; Li 2014; Winke and Teng 2010), as well as the theoretical perspectives adopted in these studies, has yielded insight into designing curriculum and developing teaching methods that would be appropriate for study abroad experiences. This line of research shows that language learning abroad is a complex, dynamic, and even chaotic process, shaped not only by how learners are received by the local community but also by how learners perceive and act on the resources accessible to them. During this process, learners do not merely absorb target linguistic codes. They simultaneously battle various identity-related issues, which greatly shape what and how they learn. Thus, providing appropriate support and guidance for Chinese language learners in an SA context merits very careful work. This section will provide practical suggestions for Chinese SA programs in both program model design and pedagogical strategies, particularly based on findings of research with a focus on the social and cultural aspects of SA programs.

5.1 Suggestions for SA Program Design

Research on SA in China (e.g. Du 2013; Duff et al. 2013) offers insightful suggestions in four areas of program design: program length, accommodations, extracurricular activities, and assessments. Research has shown that meaningful and longer interactions with the target language have positive effects on learners’ language development. Currently, summer programs predominate as an SA program model. American universities should consider developing more long-term SA programs with their Chinese counterparts. More students should be encouraged to enroll in semester- and year-long programs. Relevant to this suggestion, more homestays should be arranged for students, especially those in summer programs. If this is impossible, students should stay with a Chinese-speaking roommate rather than a peer coming from the same linguistic background. Students with higher-level proficiency should also be encouraged to make a language pledge to amplify opportunities to speak Chinese. All SA programs should integrate diverse extracurricular activities to engage students in more meaningful social interactions with local Chinese-speaking communities, such as providing a week of community service or living with villagers. In terms of assessments, as suggested by Duff et al. (2013), many standardized proficiency tests (e.g. the revised HSK, OPI-c) can be adopted as pre- and post-program tests to measure students’ linguistic development.

5.2 Three-Pronged Approach to SA Pedagogy in China

As reviewed earlier, the SCT perspective on second language acquisition offers unique insight into how a learner develops a second language in a complex and dynamic SA context and what support is needed for the desirable development. Adopting this perspective, many SA researchers (e.g. Allen 2010; Kinginger 2009, 2013a, b) have suggested that SA programs should provide support and guidance before, during, and after the program in order to provide the most learning-conducive experiences for learners. Hence, suggestions regarding pedagogical strategies in a language-focused SA program follow.
5.2.1 Pre-program Preparation

Research has shown that students with higher levels of language proficiency are more likely to benefit from SA experiences. Thus, learners should be equipped with some linguistic communicative skills to be able to more effectively access the resources in an SA setting. It is suggested that students receive both language training and explicit instruction in Chinese pragmatics before embarking on an SA trip. The length of pre-trip language training may vary, depending on the type and specific goals of the SA program. An academic credit-granting SA program may require students to take minimally one semester or one year of on-campus courses to have some foundational knowledge and skills in Chinese. Regarding pragmatics training, explicit instruction should be provided to explain what speech act strategies are commonly used in the modern Chinese society and in what situations different strategies should be employed. Most importantly, the philosophical thinking and cultural customs behind language use, for instance, why Chinese people give direct compliments in one situation but not in another, should be discussed. This information, which usually stays invisible to both language learners and even many unreflective native speakers, can help learners develop a deeper understanding of Chinese language use and culture. In addition, learners should be alerted to their peripheral participant identity and be instructed to hold appropriate expectations for treatment they may receive in the local community.

5.2.2 During-Program Instruction

From the SCT perspective, building meaningful relationships with the local community while studying abroad can optimize the quantity and quality of learning resources accessible to learners, as well as stimulate learners' interest in engagement with the community. Homestays and language tutors have been incorporated in many study abroad programs and have proven to be effective practices. However, a few issues remain. First, homestays may not work for all learners. The younger the learners are, the more beneficial the experience may be. For a homestay program enrolling college-level students, students' personal interests, personality, and background should be taken into serious consideration when matching them with a particular host family. A pre-trip workshop should be given to explicitly address frustrating social and cultural issues that may emerge during homestays. As for language tutors, one issue that may emerge is the language tutor and the language learner may not get along or have no interest in developing a friendship beyond the SA program, which deprives the language learner of opportunities for exposure to the local community through the tutor. Some native Chinese tutors may be too direct and sound overly critical when giving feedback, which is a normal pedagogical practice in China. Some may be over accommodating and avoid giving any negative feedback out of politeness to a foreign student. Neither tutoring practice benefits language learners' development. To optimize the language tutoring practice, two steps can be taken. First, a background questionnaire can be administered to both tutors and language learners to gain information about their backgrounds and personal preferences. Each tutor should be paired with a learner with similar interests or aspirations. Second, tutors should receive formal training on how to provide constructive and contingent feedback that is tailored to their respective tutee’s current language proficiency level. They should be alerted to potential communication breakdowns due to intercultural differences and be trained to identify appropriate solutions to the issues.

Study abroad provides an excellent opportunity for language learners to be exposed to rich sociolinguistic information, which is hardly accessible on a domestic campus. Research shows that both the quantity and quality of language contact a learner has in a local community can affect language development. Thus, it is imperative that language learners seek active participation in the local community for rich learning resources, e.g. spending time outside of class with their tutors and other local friends. However, some learners due to their language proficiency level, self-confidence, or personality may not be ready for independent conversations with native speakers at the beginning phase of their SA trip. In this situation, the “sink or swim” strategy that forbids language learners from hanging out with peers and speaking their home language in an SA program may be detrimental. Thus, lower-level learners should be allowed to learn from their higher-level peers in and outside of language classrooms.

Besides regular classroom-based language instruction, study abroad programs should require students to actively reflect on their language use experiences outside the classroom and build connections between the forms and meanings of the language. They can keep blogs to share reflections with their peers and even their new friends in the host community. Experiences can be shared and discussed in formal or informal group meetings to highlight salient learning occasions. On the other hand, this helps turn implicit learning into explicit and conscious learning. On the other hand, learners further their awareness of differentiated learning opportunities and diverse language use in a target-language community. This helps deepen learners' understanding not only of Chinese language and society but also of their own identities in the local community.

5.2.3 Post-Program Reflection

SCT stresses the active roles learners play in a learning process in which learners continuously discover their own voice and place in the world. Research (e.g. Duff et al. 2013; Kinginger 2008) shows learning lingers even after students finish their study abroad trip. In other words, some attitudinal changes and linguistic and cultural gains may not be noticed by learners themselves until long after they complete their SA. Conducting post-program reflections helps learners analyze their study abroad experience in a more productive manner when learners usually are free of the exhaustion, excitement, or frustration they may have experienced during a study abroad program. At this time they can more objectively examine what they have gained and how that experience has changed them. The post-program reflection can
be conducted one week, one month, or one year after the completion of the trip. Instructors or program directors can give specific guidance for what to reflect on, depending on the program objectives. This practice can also help learners become more self-reflective and sustain what they have learned through the SA experience.

6 Conclusion

China is poised to become a superpower competing against the U.S. in multiple areas. It has gradually become one of the top SA destination countries, attracting an increasing number of international students, particularly from the U.S. The myth that language learning automatically takes place in an SA setting has long been debunked. How to design effective language curriculum and provide best teaching practices to help learners succeed is an urgent task facing all SA educators and administrators.

This chapter reviews literature on the major models and related features of SA programs in China. It also examines research studies and theories on language learning abroad in the larger foreign language education field, as well as studies specifically on Chinese language learning in a China-based SA context. Based on the existing literature on language learning abroad, suggestions for both research and practice related to Chinese SA programs are provided. In terms of research, there is an urgent need for more research to present a better understanding of both the learning outcomes and learning processes in a Chinese SA program. More studies need to be conducted with semester- or year-long SA programs. It is also suggested that a poststructural perspective be taken to interpret SA learning processes. Regarding SA practices, suggestions for both curriculum design and pedagogical strategies are provided. Pragmatics should be incorporated into the SA curriculum. Differentiated grouping, tutor training, and learners’ active reflection are also suggested to enhance learning during and after an SA program. The field of Chinese language learning in SA contexts is still at its incipient stage. It is hoped that the review and suggestions offered in this chapter provide insights that stimulate further interest and thoughts by both researchers and practitioners working in this area.

References


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